

# **From confrontation to pragmatic cooperation: United States of America–Namibia relations**

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## **Introduction**

The United States of America (USA) and the territory and people of present-day Namibia have been in contact for centuries, but not always in a balanced or cooperative fashion. Early contact involved American<sup>1</sup> businesses exploiting the natural resources off the Namibian coast, while the 20th Century was dominated by the global interplay of colonial and mandatory business activities and Cold War politics on the one hand, and resistance diplomacy on the other. America was seen by Namibian leaders as the reviled imperialist superpower somehow pulling strings from behind the scenes. Only after Namibia's independence from South Africa in 1990 did the relationship change to a more balanced one emphasising development, democracy, and sovereign equality. This chapter focuses primarily on the US's contributions to the relationship.

## **Early history of relations**

The US has interacted with the territory and population of Namibia for centuries – indeed, since the time of the American Revolution.<sup>2</sup> Even before the beginning of the German colonial occupation of German South West Africa, American whaling ships were sailing the waters off Walvis Bay and trading with people at the coast. Later, major US companies were active investors in the fishing (Del Monte and Starkist in pilchards at Walvis Bay) and mining industries (e.g. AMAX and Newmont Mining at Tsumeb Copper, the largest copper mine in Africa at the time).

The US was a minor trading and investment partner during German colonial times,<sup>3</sup> accounting for perhaps 7% of exports. After the Union of South Africa assumed control of Namibia under the Class C mandate of Article 22 of the League of Nations Statute, trade increased. The US economy had become the world's largest after the turn of the 20th Century, and British imperial majesty began to wane. Britain declined as both the global hegemon and the dominant economic interest in South Africa, opening new

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1 Reference to *America* and the United States (US) herein implies the USA.

2 1770s and after (Cooper 1988).

3 1884–1915.

opportunities in finance, trade and investment for other countries. American economic interests became more important in South Africa and Namibia, but never the dominant interests.

## The mandate period

American imports to Namibia over the decades following 1919 grew in capital equipment for mining and fish processing, and in consumer goods, which became widely available in the transport and other sectors for those who could afford them. Trade was direct to Namibia in part with shipping lines between New York and Walvis Bay, but mostly trade and investments took place through the South African market, as they do to this day. US diplomatic and economic interests were coordinated through the Consular Office in Cape Town. Even so, the US was never a major economic partner with the colony, nor was the colony vital to the US economy in any way. Deference to the Commonwealth influenced much of America's relations with anglophone Africa and, particularly, the Commonwealth countries.

Similarly, in the early stages of diplomatic activity, America was not an important player in the international issues involving Namibia. Although the US was instrumental and inspirational at the Versailles Peace Treaty Meetings ending World War I and in the setting up of the League of Nations and its mandate system, under which the then South West Africa was governed, a minority of the US Senate (the so-called Isolationists) blocked the ratification of the League of Nations Treaty and America's membership in the international body. The desire of that group of senators and their supporters was to settle in behind the protective oceans and not become embroiled in other countries' conflicts. Thus, despite President Woodrow Wilson's being the originator of the 'right to self-determination' vision during the Versailles Peace Conference in 1919, America had a muted global role, especially in the legal and political disputes over the next decades under the League of Nations.

Bryan O'Linn,<sup>4</sup> an important Namibian jurist, quotes Wilson on the mandate system:

The whole theory of mandates is not the theory of permanent subordination. It is the theory of development, of putting upon the mandatory the duty of assisting in the development of the country under mandate, in order that it may be brought to a capacity for self-government and self-dependence, which for the time being it has not reached and that therefore the countries under mandate are candidates, so to speak, for full members in the family of nations.

It was clearly not the understanding that Jan Smuts and other South African leaders held. For them, the Class C mandate giving the Union of South Africa supervision of the former German territory was all but the formal annexation of the South West as a fifth

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4 O'Linn ([n.d.]:2).

province. White party politics in Namibia was greatly vexed by this issue over the next several decades.<sup>5</sup> The scene was set for prolonged conflict locally and internationally.

For the most part, the early years of the South African mandate were conducted in relative isolation. After extending control into the north-central *Oshiwambo*-speaking areas in 1919, South African leaders tried to incorporate South West Africa as a fifth province in the then Union of South Africa. This was done, in part, through extending various laws and policies, including pass requirements and the contract labour system. US companies in South West Africa cooperated and benefited from the South African schemes. Also, some limited local control by the white settler community was granted in the 1920s.

International interactions were constrained on a global basis during the Great Depression of the 1930s and World War II (WWII) in the 1940s. A lack of infrastructure, markets and regular trade isolated Namibia further from the outside world, particularly from her neighbours, reinforcing the dependence on South Africa for nearly everything (over 80% of imports).

At this time, the most significant linkage with US interests was the Wall Street financing connection for Ernest Oppenheimer's takeover of the German-owned Namibian diamond claims, incorporating the Consolidated Diamond Mines of South West Africa Ltd (CDM) in Namibia as part of the dominant mining conglomerate Anglo American Corporation. Other mining interests were also owned or financed by US companies.

After WWII, the US became the leading international force as a hegemonic power in the West. The United Nations (UN) was established to provide for international peace, stability and prosperity. The legal status of the South African mandate over Namibia – now a trusteeship under the UN – was continuously explored and debated in that international body and its subsidiaries such as the International Court of Justice. However, the centre of diplomatic activity was in New York, at the UN, rather than in Washington, DC: it was an international, not an American issue. For the most part, America treated the Namibia case within the context of South Africa and the Cold War, although some concern for the legal and humanitarian issues was expressed at times.

Over the next few decades, a consistency emerged in the general relations of the US with Africa, with slight variations depending on the political party in power. America, in part, deferred most issues on the African continent to the former colonial powers – France, Portugal and the United Kingdom. Occasionally, the US Government was seen as a welcomed alternative to the former colonial powers, who continued neo-mercantilist policies which favoured the former colonial metropole. Then-dominant US multinational corporations sought entrance to the continent's riches and markets, when and where they could. American companies were sometimes seen as alternative competitors to those of

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5 Du Pisani (1985); Henrichsen et al. (2010).

the former colonial masters, and they gained access to markets and commodities in the new countries.<sup>6</sup>

President John F Kennedy (1961–1963) was more knowledgeable and interested in Africa and developing world issues and battlegrounds than his predecessors. He briefly led the US to see Namibia in a different light. Legal issues became more important around the mandate/trusteeship and international responsibilities toward Namibia. In 1966, the US supported UN General Assembly Resolution 2145 to strip South Africa of the mandate over Namibia. The US also gave overt support to the UN voluntary arms embargo against South Africa, at least in general.<sup>7</sup>

In 1967, during the height of America's Civil Rights Movement, a US warship docking in Simonstown, South Africa, refused to comply with apartheid rules in a dramatic showdown regarding its multiracial crew being allowed to go ashore.<sup>8</sup> That confrontation ended South Africa's role in protecting the southern sea lanes for Western powers after more than 160 years. However, the Cold War confrontational issues surrounding the Vietnam War soon overshadowed any positive sentiment from American leaders toward nationalist movements in Africa.

## Cold War dominance

During the 1970s, under the influence of Henry Kissinger, the Cold War and superpower politics dominated the thinking around African policy. Access to strategic minerals in a zero-sum conflict with the Soviet Union linked economic, political and military concerns in the US. The deployment of tens of thousands of Cuban troops to Angola and Ethiopia toward the middle of the decade sharpened the focus on regional conflict zones in Africa. Increasingly, America supported the settler governments and remaining colonies in southern Africa, especially under National Security Study Memorandum 39 (NSSM 39), the famous Kissinger Memorandum linking future policy indefinitely to the continuing rule of white minorities in that subregion.

Overall, after the early independence movements' successes, Africa, for the most part, settled into a backburner position in the Cold War concerns that dominated international relations. The emergence of Afro-Marxist regimes in the mid-1970s and the deployment of Cuban military forces sharpened the issue for the next decade. From 1975 until the Soviet Union reforms under Mikhail Gorbachev in the late 1980s, these and other subregional conflicts occupied the superpowers' peripheral attention.

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6 As still happens occasionally today.

7 Unlike with France and Japan

8 Baines & Vale (2008:27).

Indeed, Afro-pessimism, debt crises, and the Western withdrawal of economic engagement markedly characterised the next decades. Africa was in the doldrums both economically (with negative gross domestic product growth) and politically (with presidents-for-life and coups dominating the landscape). Southern Africa featured armed struggles in several countries; this, and the formation of the Frontline States and the Southern African Development Coordination Conference,<sup>9</sup> positioned the subregion for an increasing focus on directly confronting apartheid.

US relations with southern Africa in particular were dominated by security issues, with economic concerns in second place. America had just over 1% of foreign investments and bank loans in South Africa and another US\$7.6 billion in share ownership – not a great amount by global measures.<sup>10</sup> Africa's resources, however, were seen as important strategic materials during the Cold War, especially chromium, cobalt, titanium and uranium. The two superpowers – the US and the Soviet Union – struggled for advantage and leverage in military and political dimensions in the subregion. The Soviet Union could easily side with national liberation movements, even those without Marxist-Leninist ideologies or policies. America befriended an assortment of dictators, such as Mobutu Sese Seko of the then Zaire,<sup>11</sup> while at the same time it saw the anti-colonial nationalists as threats, and defended the settler regimes at the southern tip of the continent.

Henry Kissinger and, later, President Ronald Reagan (1981–1988) cemented the defence of minority rule in the subregion as a bulwark against Soviet expansion – or 'total onslaught', from the apartheid regime's perspective. Economic interests in mining and petroleum were also vital concerns in Africa which coexisted with security ones, sometimes in complex ways such as in Angola.<sup>12</sup> The arrival of Cuban troops in Angola in 1975 solidified the ties between the US Government and the apartheid regime, especially after rebels launched an attack from Angola a few years later on Shaba Province, a mining centre in Zaire.

A brief interlude during the Jimmy Carter Administration (1977–1980) negotiations was sandwiched between hard-line Cold War policies toward the subregion. Portugal had been permitted to bypass its North Atlantic Treaty Organization commitments by diverting military spending in its attempts to hold on to its African colonies – until the shocking coup in Lisbon in April 1974. President Carter's African policy team of Andrew Young and Donald McHenry helped to create a brief period of international negotiation and progress both at the UN and through the creation in April 1977 of the

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9 SADCC, now the Southern African Development Community (SADC).

10 Rich (1990:311).

11 Now the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

12 American oil companies had active economic interests in the north of the country, while tens of thousands of Cuban troops defended in the south against South African incursions aimed against the *Movimento Popular para la Libertação de Angola* (Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola) Government and their allies, the South West Africa People's Organisation (SWAPO).

Western Contact Group<sup>13</sup> that undertook leadership toward a solution to the subregion's conflicts with the apartheid regime.<sup>14</sup> International pressure from public protests and diplomatic efforts culminated in UN Security Council Resolutions 432 and 435 as a framework for Namibian independence.<sup>15</sup> For once, the US did not veto the Resolutions – as had so often happened on southern African issues. In 1977, the UN Security Council passed a mandatory arms embargo on South Africa. By the end of the Carter years, a negotiated solution seemed near for Namibian independence and for some other international trouble spots.

## Constructive engagement during the Reagan Administration

The election of Ronald Reagan scuppered the hoped-for Namibian solution as South Africa hardened its position, bolstered by the US Republican Party's insertion of a second issue: the prior removal of the Cuban troops from Angola as a prerequisite to a Namibian settlement – known as *linkage*. By 1980, conflict had escalated in a number of regional theatres from Central America to Afghanistan and Indochina. The old notion of rolling back Soviet influence was now a multifaceted policy priority of the new administration in Washington. Low-intensity counter-insurgency warfare restored the Central Intelligence Agency to a more active presence around the globe, including its support for Jonas Savimbi's União Nacional para a Independência Total de Angola (UNITA)<sup>16</sup> rebel forces in Angola. The South African troops invading Angola were ignored in the grander scheme of the Cold War. Development agendas declined and negotiations were set back.

A remarkable convergence of long-lasting conservative governments among developed countries dominated economic and international policy in the 1980s in Britain, Canada, Germany and the US. Other countries were also caught up in this neoliberal policy convergence sometimes referred to as the *Washington Consensus* – as much for the Bretton Woods institutions headquartered there as for the American Government policies. Southern African issues were not always subject to the grand consensus, as different interests and public pressures interfered with a single-minded approach, such as the October 1983 UN Security Council rejection of linkage, which saw other Western Contact Group countries agree and the US abstain.<sup>17</sup>

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13 Or *Group of Five*, namely Canada, France, Germany, the United Kingdom and the US.

14 Weiland & Braham (1994:20).

15 An earlier UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR 385), which had given the UN agencies direct control over the election process, was not acceptable to South Africa. UNSCR 435 (and 432) gave the UN a supervision role, while the internal South African Administration in Namibia under the Pretoria-appointed Administrator-General conducted the election in 1989; the Electoral Commission of Namibia conducted the Special Election in Walvis Bay in 1994).

16 National Union for the Total Independence of Angola.

17 Singham & Hune (1986:13).

On the US side, Chester Crocker became the new Under Secretary of State for African Affairs. He introduced the concept of *constructive engagement* with the apartheid regime. For the next eight years, this was the dominant theme toward South Africa. The Reagan Administration did its best to assist the white minority regime internationally on diplomatic, economic and military fronts.<sup>18</sup> Of course, they were not alone, as the other conservative governments shared, to a greater or lesser extent, the overall policy direction. South Africa facilitated an internal political process in Namibia through the Democratic Turnhalle Alliance (DTA), essentially relaxing (slightly) the notion of *separate development*, which later became the core of an Interim Government.<sup>19</sup> In many ways Namibia served as a trial case for alternative apartheid scenarios.

Under these new circumstances, discussions did take place with various stakeholders, including the South West Africa People's Organisation (SWAPO). These culminated in the first place with 'proximity talks' and the *Constitutional Principles* document offered by SWAPO in 1982, which became the basis for the Constituent Assembly's Constitution-writing efforts in 1989–1990. To his credit, Crocker engaged multiple parties in shuttle diplomacy across multiple global locations. For the most part, however, Namibian participants were left on the outside of this global power negotiation. The Reagan Administration kept further pressure on negotiations by giving UNITA assistance through the Central Intelligence Agency. The main issue was agreement on the removal of Cuban troops from Angola and South African troops from Namibia and Angola. The Namibian solution, in the Reagan Administration's view, could follow easily under the international consensus and support for UNSCR 435.

Earlier near-agreements had been undermined by the massacre of Namibians by the South African Defence Force at Cassinga, Angola; the incursion into Shaba Province in then Zaire by Congolese rebel forces based in Angola; the unilateral internal election in so-called SWA/Namibia in 1978 to form an internal government; and the election of Ronald Reagan in the US. However, Namibia's allies and friends, through UN diplomatic circles, kept negotiations alive, and unrelenting pressure from the UN General Assembly pushed the process further.

An additional issue for South Africa that was pressed by the US and others was the idea of the *impartiality* of the UN. South Africa argued that the UN was too biased toward SWAPO<sup>20</sup> and required agreement on the UN distancing itself from the process,

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18 For example, the Reagan Administration opposed 33 of 39 UN Resolutions between 1981 and 1983, and abstained from others (Chan 1990:324).

19 Wallace (2011:287).

20 For example, through the adoption of the name *Namibia*, the recognition of SWAPO, and the declaration of SWAPO as the "sole and authentic representative of the Namibian people" in 1973. South African officials did not remain neutral when it came to their preferred party, pouring over a R100 million into the campaign and other disinformation projects (Dobell 1998:90; Tonchi et al. 2012:37).

before they would agree on a settlement.<sup>21</sup> Crocker engaged in multiple rounds of shuttle diplomacy in New York and elsewhere with the priority of solving the linkage problem first. Other major contributions to a convergence of positions were soon to fall into place.

Robert Rotberg<sup>22</sup> summed up the impact of the new Reagan Administration's approach to South Africa as follows:

The United States eased its commercial embargo, reaffirmed intelligence links, moderated public criticism at home and abroad, and affirmed closer relations with South Africa. But the biggest carrot of all was the Cuban issue. To have made the Cubans hostage for Namibia reversed the entire drift of negotiations, permitted South Africa to relax, and has delayed Namibian independence indefinitely.

South Africa, in Rotberg's view,<sup>23</sup> saw no impending pressure from inside the US or South Africa, and no external pressure that would accelerate negotiations over the medium term at mid-decade (around 1985). This view would be proven completely wrong less than a year later: not only did protest heat up in the US and South Africa, but the battlefield also quickly reached an untenable impasse.

## Turning points

Mass protest and solidarity movements were gaining strength in opposition to apartheid across the globe as well as at home in Namibia. After Zimbabwe attained independence in the first half of 1980, South Africa in particular came under attack for domestic racial policies and cross-border attacks that were deemed unacceptable by international standards. Namibia and South Africa became the prime focal point of global attention. Political pressure intensified in legislatures and at the ballot box. The US Congress, led by the Congressional Black Caucus, forced sanctions on a very reluctant Reagan Administration in 1986 by overturning a presidential veto of the Comprehensive Anti-Apartheid Act.<sup>24</sup>

In corporate America and elsewhere, the divestment movement brought pressure to bear on major public entities beginning with the City of Wisconsin and spreading to university endowments, government pension funds, and churches to act against business as usual. Bank loans and other business contracts with the apartheid regime put business with these other larger economic entities at risk (e.g. with California or New York state governments) leading to accelerating divestment. Citibank was the last American bank

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21 Weiland & Braham (1994:23–24, 49–50).

22 Rotberg (1985:107).

23 (ibid.).

24 Wallace (2011:299).



to pull out of South Africa in the 1980s. Thus, public pressure played an important part in the official turnaround in American and other countries' official actions.

The Solidarity with Namibia movement in America was relatively small, being subsumed under the overall anti-apartheid movement, although it is mentioned as early as the Tanga SWAPO Congress in 1970.<sup>25</sup> It also had to compete for attention and active followers with the opposition to Euromissiles as well as Central American policies and conflicts. Nonetheless, some church and other groups did draw attention and add support to the divestment movement that kept pressure on the South African regime. Most of the focus in the US centred on the UN agencies and the international diplomacy taking place there. Most of the key SWAPO leadership, such as Sam Nujoma, Hage Geingob, Theo-Ben Gurirab, and Hidipo Hamutenya, spent years in New York promoting Namibia's cause at the international agency and in its diplomatic milieu.

Senator Edward Kennedy, Rev. Jesse Jackson and the Congressional Black Caucus, among other prominent political figures and groups, championed the cause of Namibia's independence at this crucial time in the 1980s. Church groups and activists such as the TransAfrica Forum, the Lawyers' Committee for Human Rights under Law, musicians, and university communities – all mobilised around the struggle against apartheid. The shift from President Reagan to President George W Bush signalled a relative weakening in the ability of the US Government to assist the South African regime to resist change. Moreover, the then South African President PW Botha's 'Rubicon' speech did little to assist the apartheid cause in global sentiment.

At the same time, a dramatic turnaround took place in the Soviet Union. Domestic reforms and what was known as *New Thinking* in foreign policy under the new Soviet leader, Mikhail Gorbachev, brought additional pressure on his allies to negotiate regional, Cold-War-related conflicts to an end. Gorbachev's vision was to reduce regional confrontations leading to a reduced superpower confrontation and arms race. This would be followed by reductions in nuclear arms and military expenditure, which would free up resources to modernise the Soviet economy. A settlement of the Namibian issue, as well as others, became more feasible after this change in Soviet foreign policy.<sup>26</sup>

The prolonged conflict at Cuito Cuanavale, Angola, the largest conventional battle up to that time in Africa, similarly impacted the direct participants and opened settlement possibilities. South African leaders faced a higher cost<sup>27</sup> stalemate far from their borders, increasing dissent in the townships at home, and accelerated economic divestment by

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25 Dobell (1998:40).

26 Landsberg (1994:279–280). Afghanistan, Central America, and Cambodia were other regional conflicts impacted.

27 Estimates from the mid-1980s placed the overall expenditure at around US\$2 billion (Dobell 1998; Rotberg 1985).

the rest of the world. Apartheid became the mass-culture target, depicted as the new film 'enemy' in Hollywood. The moment was ripe for a deal under the UNSCR 435 terms.

Active diplomacy for the settlement included multiple players from the Western Contact Group, other American officials, South African leaders, the Frontline States and Nigeria, Cuban leaders, and their Soviet counterparts as observers. SWAPO leaders and other African allies were also active in meeting with internal, Namibian role players and the various solidarity movements that could influence home governments and the UN, but were not party to the settlement. Beginning in July 1988, talks among Angola, Cuba and South Africa eventually produced an agreement on 20 December 1988. This led to the end of fighting in Angola and the beginning of the UNSCR 435 process on 1 April 1989, and to the accompanying demobilisation of Cuban and South African armed forces and their scheduled, phased withdrawal from Angola and, in South Africa's case, from Namibia as well. These so-called New York Accords ended decades of armed conflict over Namibia.

Despite the decades of armed conflict and Cold War hostilities, the UNSCR 435 process and the withdrawal of Cuban and South African troops proceeded with remarkable smoothness and international cooperation. The Namibian domestic transition also proved notably smooth and conflict-free.<sup>28</sup>

## Independence and after

SWAPO's victory in the 1989 elections, and its adherence to the spirit of democracy, a mixed economy, and reconciliation during the early independence period, continued to receive strong support from old allies and assisted in gaining new ones. Customers of Rössing Uranium, such as Japan and the US, went from being considered outlaws in defiance of Decree No. 1 (banning mineral exports) to being encouraged to buy more by Namibia's Founding President, Sam Nujoma. Diplomatic and commercial contacts were actively sought across the political and geographical spectrums. Former imperialist exploiters were now desirable foreign direct investors in the transformed rhetorical universe of independence. Opposition parties were invited into Cabinet and shared the international stage with government in ongoing gestures of national reconciliation.

High-level contacts were established around the Independence Day events for the transfer of sovereignty on 21 March 1990. This event offered the world an important opportunity for international diplomatic exchanges with Namibian and South African players under the new conditions of emerging majority rule. American Secretary of State James Baker III

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28 The events of 1 April 1989 and the assassination of Anton Lubowski just before elections that year did not prove fatal to the overall process.

attended Namibia's Independence celebrations, and opened a new US Embassy in the capital, Windhoek.

On 2 February 1990, at the opening of the South African Parliament in Cape Town, the new President, FW de Klerk, announced the unbanning of the African National Congress and the imminent release of its leader, Nelson Mandela, and others, opening a new chapter in that country's history. Just as Namibia's UNSCR 435 elections were overshadowed by the fall of the Berlin Wall and the end of Soviet domination of Eastern and Central Europe, the Independence events were more important in terms of international diplomacy around South African developments than for Namibian sovereignty – at least for the international community and media. Namibia, however, began its formal statehood with over 100 diplomatic recognition agreements amid its own joyous celebrations.

The US responded to the openness and reconciliation process of the new Namibian Constitution and Namibian Government along with others. Positive responses were seen from Freedom House evaluations of Namibia's governance and freedom, the successful 1990 New York Donors' Conference fundraising meeting, and the Houston, Texas, G7 meeting in 1992.<sup>29</sup> Sanctions and other restrictions were gradually removed in the context of establishing good relations with the new SWAPO Government and leading toward the end of apartheid in South Africa.

Early efforts included no-strings-attached funding for primary education, and bringing an average of around 100 Peace Corps volunteers to the country each year. American companies continued to supply goods to the Namibian economy as the boycotts were lifted and the expectations for majority rule in South Africa brightened. Of course, America was also a major final destination for many of the gem-quality diamonds produced by Namibia. Around 60% of Namibia's diamond exports eventually go to the Japanese and US markets.

The George HW Bush Administration (1989–1992) was generous toward the National Party transition process in South Africa by easing restrictions and sanctions before actual changes had taken place, rather than keeping the pressure on for rapid change. The easing of restrictions benefited Namibia in any case. Some degree of suspicion continued in the official bilateral and multilateral relationships, particularly among certain Cabinet members, older cadres of the ruling party,<sup>30</sup> and the remnant struggle ideology

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29 Du Pisani (2000:305). The G7, or *Group of Seven*, was a forum which brought together the heads of the richest industrialised countries at the time, namely Canada, France, West Germany, Italy, Japan, the UK, the US, and the President of the European Commission to discuss global economic issues and coordinate policy; see [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/16th\\_G7\\_summit](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/16th_G7_summit), last accessed 19 November 2013.

30 Renamed *SWAPO Party of Namibia* for the 1989 election.

adherents.<sup>31</sup> America continued to be the superpower that everyone loved to hate, and generic attacks on ‘imperialism’ continued to be an important part of the ruling party’s political discourse. However, generally good and pragmatic relations have characterised both the bilateral and multilateral experiences between the US and Namibia.

American support for Namibian democracy centred especially on election assistance and parliamentary assistance through the National Democratic Institute and US Agency for International Development (USAID) offices. Other domestic assistance for Namibia was mostly channelled through USAID and the Ambassador’s Office. Additionally, America supported Namibia’s efforts to join multiple international organisations as a full member of the global community.

Namibia pursued the same strategy of ‘active non-alignment’ inspired by Kwame Nkrumah and rooted in the Namibian Constitution<sup>32</sup> by joining dozens of international organisations, hosting dozens of foreign embassies, and ratifying a large number of international agreements. Indeed, Namibia pursued an aggressive and widely inclusive diplomacy after Independence, which included previously distrusted players such as the US. As a country with a small population, Namibia punched well above its weight in international relations for nearly two decades after Independence. Having good bilateral relations with so many countries, including the remaining superpower, the US, was an important part of that success. Namibia became a sought-after international partner for many countries within and beyond the subregion.

Notwithstanding the good relations that have been developing since the beginning of Namibia’s independence, there is also recognition that Namibia has interests and principles that are not likely to be compromised through routine diplomacy. This was seen in the period of Namibia’s serving as a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council in 1999–2000 and in its continuing support for former allies in its struggle for independence, such as China, Cuba, Libya, North Korea and Palestine.

Perhaps Namibia’s support for Zimbabwean President Robert Mugabe from around 2000 since his confrontation with Western powers has embodied the triumph of first principles of solidarity over subsequent commitments to democracy, lawfulness, and non-violent policies. America may not like these continuing commitments, but it respects the authenticity of the differences.

Official relations between the two countries started off well in the early 1990s, and continue on a high plane. Both President Nujoma and President Pohamba have accepted

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31 The liberation struggle discourse of anti-colonial nationalism has largely been displaced with a discourse of national unity, reconciliation and development (Du Pisani 2010), occasional outbursts and “wannabe” youthful revolutionaries notwithstanding.

32 Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2004).

invitations to visit the White House as part of African delegations. Vice-President Dan Quayle came to Namibia as a private visitor during the George W Bush Administration, and Vice-President Al Gore visited Namibia during the Clinton period. Congressional delegations were frequent visitors as were certain business personalities – from Michael Jackson to Brad Pitt and Angelina Jolie. Several Hollywood production companies have made use of Namibia's landscape for filming, and Namibia enlisted Hollywood figures for the Nujoma biographical film of the liberation struggle.

The US was also home to over 100 Namibian students before and after Independence. Many of Namibia's top political leaders in SWAPO and the opposition parties hold degrees from American universities. At Independence, a list of bursaries for Namibian and South African university students ran over eight single-spaced pages. Some of the awards were UN-based, while others originated with government programmes, civil society organisations and churches, especially the Lutheran ones. After Independence, a number of US Government bursaries and training programmes were still available to Namibian students in priority fields. Also, a number of universities have given honorary degrees to Namibian leaders over the years, especially to Founding President Sam Nujoma.

Over the years, the US has created a number of investment policies to encourage American firms to engage with Africa. Except for mining and petroleum extraction industries, these programmes were always undersubscribed. Afro-pessimism and the emerging debt crisis informally banished African investments for the most part. Sub-Saharan Africa became a case fit only for high-risk adventurers and multilateral agencies acting as charities. A few islands of investment did exist on the continent, including in South Africa, but the divestment movement started gaining steam in the mid-1970s to constrain that market, too.

Only after 1990 did the continent begin to see renewed business interest and governments' increasing democratic and economic reforms swept the continent, creating better governance structures and policies. From this stronger base, African countries were able to take advantage of the boom in commodity prices and to weather the storm of the global financial crisis to achieve high economic growth rates. African optimism became infectious.

Namibia continued to attract US products and investment, primarily through South African subsidiaries. In July 2008, the Southern African Customs Union signed a Trade, Investment and Development Cooperation Agreement with the US. The recent case of Wal-Mart's buying a majority share in Massmart South Africa is a prime example. In this case, both Namibia and South Africa sought to negotiate a better deal for their national economies than the private sector arrangement would have created. Half of Namibia's imports derive from South Africa, and more than half the rest transit through South Africa. America has provided about 10% or less of the country's imports for over a century.

Private American investments in debt instruments, stock shares, and other assets in Namibia and South Africa are conducted outside the official relations and, thus, are not well known. The largest single private investment was in Tsumeb Copper in the 1970s and 1980s, until it was sold to Gold Fields' South African interests prior to Independence.

## Development assistance

America's support for Namibia has been multifaceted, highlighting security support, economic support, democracy support, and social support. The lead development work over the years since Independence (1990–2013) has been conducted through USAID.<sup>33</sup> This organisation began with several sub-programmes: democracy and governance, basic education, environment and conservation, employment creation and small enterprise development, and support for tuberculosis, and HIV and AIDS. Together with funds from the Ambassador's Office, these efforts constitute the main ongoing developmental support by the US to Namibia.

The US has been one of the top few bilateral donor partners for Namibia since Independence, along with the European Union and Germany. Both direct service delivery and technical assistance are included from the US efforts. Assistance is also provided through the operations of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) in water, food, and sanitation. Routine development assistance has been in decline in the past few years – as it has from other Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development countries. The biggest grant programmes – the US President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) and the Millennium Challenge Account (MCA) – will wind down in the years ahead as well.

The democracy and governance initiatives from 1995 to 2009 were primarily directed toward electoral and parliamentary support to both houses, in terms of community outreach through the donation of a large mobile vehicle to bring parliament to the people during inter-sessions. Additional parliamentary assistance was focused on computer training for staff and members. Excellent relations were maintained with the early parliamentary leaders, Mosé Tjitendero (National Assembly Speaker) and Kandinima Nehova (National Assembly Chairman), providing strong institutional leadership. Additional aid to the anti-corruption efforts and to civil society constitutes further valued efforts. By the 20th anniversary of Independence in 2010, USAID's separate Democracy and Governance Section was closed down, after having been extended for a few extra years early in the 21st Century.

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33 See [www.usaid.gov/namibia](http://www.usaid.gov/namibia), last accessed 19 September 2013. The following paragraphs draw heavily from this summary and its details.

US assistance to small-scale businesses has paralleled the efforts of other donors and organisations. Many of the returning SWAPO exiles had their training and experience in the Eastern Bloc or other countries lacking a strong business culture. With Namibia's commitment to maintaining a mixed economy and uplifting the previously disadvantaged, bringing capacity to smaller participants in the economy has received a lot of attention in the efforts inside and outside government to expand the informal and small-scale business sector after Independence. Various US programmes have assisted many businesses to begin or expand operations, and have featured cooperation with the Namibia Chamber of Commerce and Industry as well as other business groups. American efforts also seek to link Namibian partners with US markets and investors as an important extension of the general African policy and the activities of the Import-Export Bank. The recent establishment of a small business bank and other government efforts in the sector illustrate the continuing need for expansion in this part of the economy.

Another focus that resonates with planned successes from the Namibian side are nature conservation and biodiversity programmes such as the Living in a Finite Environment (LIFE) Project, which was active from 1992 to 2008. Community-based natural resource management (CBNRM) organisations in Namibia have implemented award-winning projects to link tourism, conservation of natural resources, and local empowerment. Early and continuing USAID support over 15 years has been helpful in creating and expanding the network to over 80 conservancies at present. This support aligns well with the rural development, poverty reduction, and anti-poaching agendas of Namibia's five-year National Development Plans. Conservancies have been rather successful, and now generate tens of millions of dollars in revenue for the participating communities to distribute.

Gender empowerment is another sector that resonates with Namibian Government priorities. US assistance was given to gender-based non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and to other sectors to support legal and institutional efforts to redress past imbalances and outdated laws. These efforts were both in line with official policy and in support of private initiatives. Other donor countries and NGOs are also active in these areas, so coordination efforts have been made to complement rather than duplicate activities in this area, as in other assistance dimensions.

The bulk of America's assistance has gone to the Basic Education Systems Project since 1991. This aid has been offered in line with government priorities, as indicated in the annual budget allocations to this sector, and with World Bank thinking on the contribution of basic education to economic and social development. Support to the formal education sector, orphans and vulnerable children, out-of-school youth (through the Katutura Youth Enterprise Centre, and higher education bursaries have been particular success stories for American assistance. This is a sector with many cooperating partners through the Education and Training Sector Improvement Programme and other government programmes.

The HIV and AIDS health sector grew suddenly in Namibia after the first case of HIV was identified in 1986. Behaviour patterns as well as population vulnerabilities associated with poverty and rapid societal transformation catapulted Namibia into the very top international ranks of the pandemic's infection rate. A variety of programmes, from promoting abstinence to supporting anti-retroviral and mother-to-child protection roll-outs, have been assisted by USAID and others. The long-term net effect has been to stall the disease near its plateau at sentinel sites at around a 19% infection rate (an estimated 13% for the population at large) and reverse the death rate and life expectancy declines due to the disease. A more comprehensive approach with much greater funding came from President George W Bush's (2001–2008) US\$15 billion global PEPFAR initiative, discussed below.

## African Growth and Opportunity Act

The African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) was initiated by the Administration of President Bill Clinton (1993–2000), but only implemented in 2002. The policy links into the ideas of Aid for Trade and the New Partnership for African Development, and became important at around the same time. AGOA was an outgrowth of older policies such as the Caribbean Basin Initiative and the North American Free Trade Area, which had, in part, the motivation of shifting some trade and investment from a successful Asia to a less-developed part of the world (Central America, the Caribbean Islands, and Mexico). Over 4,000 items became exempt from customs restrictions if they had been imported to America from African countries.

As with other US–Africa programmes in the past, AGOA has had some limited benefits for a few countries and product lines, but it has failed to dramatically alter the lack of development in Africa. The vast majority of imports under the programme (86% by 2012) are oil- and gas- related, and impact on only a handful of countries. Except for South Africa, little manufacturing development has taken place under AGOA terms. The major benefit initially for Africa and for Namibia (Ramatex) was in textiles and garments, where tens of thousands of jobs were created. Unfortunately, the expiration of the Multi-Fibre Arrangement<sup>34</sup> in 2004 displaced many of these jobs and factories to China and India, where 60–80% of such global production is now expected to take place. Some smaller factories still produce garments for export in Namibia, and an American–Namibian replacement firm to Ramatex is readying its launch.

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34 This agreement held sway outside the World Trade Organisation/GATT rules from 1974 to 2004, by allowing the restriction of imports of yarn, fabric, and garments into North America and Europe from developing countries in order to protect domestic manufacturers from lower-cost competitors. Due to the economies of scale and low wages, China and India are set to be the main beneficiaries of the expiration of the agreement. Thousands of workers in several African countries have lost employment as companies closed down or relocated – as with Ramatex.



However, Namibian trade to the US market under AGOA is only about US\$8 million at last count, after growing to over US\$200 million in 2004.<sup>35</sup> Much of the benefit of AGOA for Namibia is the growth it affords to neighbouring countries and the potential use of Walvis Bay for transport logistics in line with national development plans, rather than the opportunities for direct investment or trade. In early 2013, the US fell below the top ten trading partners with Namibia – its lowest point in over a century. A restart to the textile and garment facilities at the former Ramatex factories would restore the objective and impact of AGOA as well as general trade for Namibia.

Nonetheless, AGOA will be extended again before its 2015 expiration date and does offer some additional opportunities for investment, growth, employment and diversification to Namibia and other qualified countries.<sup>36</sup> Because American customs duties are relatively low to begin with, the gains from participation require targeted efforts from both sides of the Atlantic. Namibia is still an attractive investment destination and AGOA skirts the problem of a small market, although the US may be too large a market to serve in some cases, as was discovered in the now defunct ostrich industry.<sup>37</sup>

## PEPFAR, and HIV and AIDS

If AGOA was the main contribution to Africa and Namibia by the Clinton Administration,<sup>38</sup> the second Bush Administration under George W Bush featured an important contribution to southern Africa and especially to Namibia in the form of PEPFAR: a multi-billion US Dollar, multi-year, multifaceted expenditure to halt and reverse the spread of HIV and AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis. Namibia was a major recipient of this programme and other sources.

In fact, Namibia receives 1% of the total global assistance for HIV and AIDS.<sup>39</sup> In recent years, the US has provided sub-Saharan Africa with over 60% of the international funding for HIV and AIDS, 26% for malaria, and 21% for tuberculosis. Together, the US and the Global Fund – one third of which is funded by the US – have supplied over 80% of the donations toward HIV and AIDS funding in recent years, with over 100 countries

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35 Jauch (2006:218).

36 Negotiations to launch a free trade agreement between the US and the five members of the Southern African Customs Union (Botswana, Lesotho, Namibia, South Africa, and Swaziland) began on 3 June 2003. In April 2006, the parties suspended the negotiations, launching a new work programme on intensifying the trade and investment relationship instead, with the free trade agreement now a long-term goal.

37 Some Namibian business people arranged to supply ostrich feathers for polishing new cars for an American manufacturer, only to find that they could not supply sufficient quantities. Eventually, the budding ostrich industry in Namibia failed, along with its specialised abattoir.

38 By some calculations, his family outing to Africa cost more than the official development assistance programmes.

39 Kaiser Family Foundation (2013).

receiving some assistance from the two.<sup>40</sup> The US has supported Namibia from 2006, and up to 2010 the latter had received US\$456.6 million (N\$3 billion) for preventive health care in the domain of HIV and AIDS, malaria, and tuberculosis.<sup>41</sup>

Education, treatment, and institutional support featured strongly in the expenditures. As such, PEPFAR allowed much greater coverage and service delivery than the Namibian Government was prepared to deliver at that time. Namibia has been a leader in meeting international standards for anti-retroviral roll-outs and other success measures. Since the World Bank's designation of Namibia as an upper-middle-income country, however, donor partners have begun a slow withdrawal of support funds. Nonetheless, the extensive efforts under PEPFAR and others have created an awareness of what works in Namibia and what helps the government to sharpen the focus of its own efforts.<sup>42</sup>

## Security sector cooperation

Despite the long history of antagonism and suspicion between SWAPO leaders and the US Government before Namibia's independence, bilateral and multilateral cooperation has included the security sector. Several of the SADC military exercises, such as "Blue Hungwe" and "Blue Eagle", have included US military assistance, most recently involving harmonising communication technologies across the multiple-origin equipment that different countries have purchased. The 'interoperability' dimension of these SADC/African Union/UN forces is a very complex challenge, and requires external assistance for the forces to be effective. Although the US is not the most important partner in this policy space, it has been active in ways that are well received by local governments and militaries, including Namibia's.

Beyond the multilateral dimension, America and Namibia have also developed bilateral assistance in two important areas. The extremely important HIV and AIDS issue threatens 'force readiness' in ways that can undermine their availability and effectiveness for both peacekeeping and defence purposes. American policymakers want African forces to have the major role in African peacekeeping to help maintain continental stability. Thus, assistance in training and preparedness has been an important part of regional and subregional cooperation.

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40 To his credit, President Thabo Mbeki of South Africa, among others, pushed donors to include malaria and tuberculosis in the Global Fund. From 2002 to 2010, funding for these two diseases increased 15-fold, while HIV and AIDS funding doubled.

41 Interview with Ms Wanda Nesbitt, current US Ambassador to Namibia, *Die Republikein*, 8 June 2011, p 9.

42 For example, the University of Namibia only had one health counsellor for its thousands of students – clearly under-servicing an important demographic group with a very high infection rate.

Namibian Defence Force deployments often leave them separated from their families for long periods of time, and, as with other militaries, this makes them vulnerable to infection from casual sexual activity. The US cooperated with both the Defence Ministry and the Health and Social Services Ministry in Namibia to address this risk with policy, education and action. The results of these efforts were shared with the International HIV/AIDS Conference in Canada in 2006.

Additionally, the US military provided important training for Namibian forces before they were deployed for UN peacekeeping duties. Since these deployments are usually into multinational force arrangements, it is helpful to share experiences and successful practices. Although most training for the Namibian Defence Force has been conducted by Commonwealth countries, beginning with the Kenyan detachment remaining from the United Nations Transition Assistance Group (UNTAG) deployment and the British Military Assistance Training Team (BMATT) in 1990, peacekeeping duties have become an increasingly important part of Namibian Defence Force activities, and US assistance has been valuable for their professional development.

Furthermore, Namibia's Windhoeke Maschinenfabrik, the nation's only military manufacturing business, has participated (by invitation) in US military technical shows with their mine protection vehicle and armoured personnel carrier. Cooperation, thus, takes place both at high political level and at technical levels in the security sector. Over the past five years of the Barack Obama Administration (2009–2013), security assistance to Namibia has averaged between US\$100,000 and US\$200,000 per year – a modest amount.<sup>43</sup>

## Millennium Challenge Account

Another major development programme from the George W Bush Administration, and continued under President Obama, was the Millennium Challenge Act of 2003, which established a new format for development assistance. It created a Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) to administer grants to eligible countries. The first round of grants focused on lower-income countries, but Namibia was eligible in the second round, and the National Planning Commission (NPC) negotiated a major, multi-year grant. This assistance was only available to countries that were deemed to meet certain governance criteria such as the following:<sup>44</sup>

- ... demonstrated a commitment to –
- (1) just and democratic governance, including a demonstrated commitment to –
  - (A) promote political pluralism, equality, and the rule of law;

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43 See [www.usaid.gov/namibia](http://www.usaid.gov/namibia), last accessed 19 September 2013.

44 See <http://www.cfr.org/poverty/millennium-challenge-act-2003/p16232> accessed 10 September 2013)

- (B) respect human and civil rights, including the rights of people with disabilities;
- (C) protect private property rights;
- (D) encourage transparency and accountability of government; and
- (E) combat corruption;
- (2) economic freedom, including a demonstrated commitment to economic policies that –
  - (A) encourage citizens and firms to participate in global trade and international capital markets;
  - (B) promote private sector growth and the sustainable management of natural resources;
  - (C) strengthen market forces in the economy; and
  - (D) respect worker rights, including the right to form labor unions; and
- (3) investments in the people of such country, particularly women and children, including programs that –
  - (A) promote broad-based primary education; and
  - (B) strengthen and build capacity to provide quality public health and reduce child mortality.

After prolonged negotiations, an agreement was signed between the two countries on 28 July 2008 for a five-year programme, entailing a sum of US\$304.5 million (approximately N\$2.5–3 billion). An administrative unit known as the Millennium Challenge Account – Namibia Compact (MCA-N) was set up in the NPC to oversee and administer contracts and spending in three key areas:<sup>45</sup>

The Compact aims to reduce poverty through economic growth and funds development projects in the sectors of education, tourism and agriculture.

NPC Director General Helmut Angula negotiated the agreement with Namibia's American counterparts at the Millennium Challenge Corporation. A brief, immature intervention by members of the SWAPO Party Youth League nearly put at risk the largest single development funding in the country's history. Senior officials in the SWAPO Party and the Namibian Government succeeded in smoothing over the intra-party skirmish and the programme launched in 2009 with the first contracts.

Among the major accomplishments thus far are the donation and distribution of thousands of school textbooks across the country, meeting a significant shortfall in the education process over recent years. Additional classrooms and schools have also been constructed in different Regions of the country, especially in poorer rural areas. Staff housing, libraries, school laboratories, and other infrastructure have been constructed in the education sector.

CBNRM training and assistance under MCA-N have extended earlier US contributions in that field, and tourism development and training also have benefited. Just as the CBNRM contributions have helped rural populations, agricultural inputs have benefited

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45 MCA-N (2013:1).

communal farmers with livestock breeding projects, among others. By December 2012, MCA-N claimed that most of the projects would be completed on time by the September 2014 deadline – an optimistic assessment for implementation in Namibia. Although the total expenditure will probably not be completed by the negotiated deadline, prospects are good that most items will be completed and reasonable extensions can be expected.

## Namibia's relations with the US

Overall, Namibian leaders have not engaged much in direct bilateral relations with the US. America was always the imperialist superpower that supported South Africa's oppressive apartheid system. Rather, Namibians were engaging through multilateral channels such as the UN, the Non-aligned Movement, the Organisation of African Unity (OAU), and the Frontline States. As a small country, these larger bodies amplified the diplomatic impact of Namibian efforts. The OAU's Liberation Support Committee was particularly helpful after the oil price increases of the 1970s boosted Nigeria's importance on the world stage.

SWAPO leaders in particular had multiple discourses depending on the audience. A Marxist-Leninist one for the Eastern Bloc assisted in securing their material aid (estimated to be around 90% of military supplies);<sup>46</sup> the Scandinavian socialist one assisted with humanitarian aid from more moderate audiences; and a democratic moderate one for Western audiences were all utilised during the 1970s and 1980s. For example, SWAPO leader Sam Nujoma launched the reconciliation policy in May 1988 from Washington, DC, for maximum effect with the Western powers.<sup>47</sup>

In the words of Lauren Dobell's dissertation:<sup>48</sup>

The only constant in the documents and statements produced during this period [1970s] is the demand for independence – all else was negotiable, it seems, and the language employed depended mostly on the intended audience.

Although New York was the centre of attention from the early days of independence diplomacy, the attention and diplomacy was clearly directed toward the UN rather than a domestic US audience – whether governmental or popular. Many of the political elite of Namibian independence activists gave testimony at the UN in the early days of the 1950s and 1960s, along with religious leaders who spoke on behalf of Namibians.<sup>49</sup> Such figures as Mburumba Kerina, Fanuel Kozonguizi, Michael Scott, Bishop Colin Winter and, later, Sam Nujoma were among the early presenters speaking for Namibians, including Chief

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46 Dobell (1998:64).

47 Dierks (2002:296).

48 Dobell (1998:22).

49 Wallace (2011:247).

Hosea Kutako and Andimba Toivo ya Toivo. Over 120 separate petitions had been filed in 1960.<sup>50</sup> These same elites often attended university in the US on bursaries either through the UN, the African American Institute in New York, or churches. Their interaction was often through UN diplomatic contacts rather than Washington-based officials.

However, the formal and informal interactions over the years included Henry Kissinger, Cyrus Vance, Donald McHenry, Andrew Young, Chester Crocker, and Herman Cohen – all the Africa policy heavyweights of American Administrations. Significant negotiations included the *Constitutional Principles* of 1982, which became the basis for the Namibian Constitution and other important steps toward independence. The ultimate negotiations over the 1988 settlement (the New York Accords) excluded the Namibian participants, but also took place in New York.

In the grand overview of of pre-Independence SWAPO's relations with the US, as well as the now governing SWAPO Party of Namibia's post-Independence relations with the US, nothing quite covers the topic as does a quote from founding Foreign Affairs Minister Theo-Ben Gurirab at a 1992 conference looking back at the UNSCR 435 process:<sup>51</sup>

SWAPO did not really trust anybody in the 435 framework – the Contact Group, the UN, the Frontline States, Nigeria, South Africa or the internal parties.

Twenty years later, an African analyst could still make the same claim with respect to all of the liberation movements that had come to power in the region.<sup>52</sup>

An aspect of US relations with southern Africa that is often ignored is the effect of historical memory on the way that the region views the USA. Given the historical nature of US involvement, the suspicion with which the region constantly views the USA should come as no surprise.

This aspect of the relationship between Namibia and the US recurs during the past decade and more since 2000 in the tensions over the Mugabe regime in Zimbabwe. Namibia established its official position to support President Mugabe regardless of Zimbabwean or Western opposition, as declared by Founding President Sam Nujoma, and no official has dared to deviate from the steadfast defence of Mugabe, even if they wished to. This supportive stance is a given in the relationship, regardless of conditions or actions taken in that country.

In other forums, such as the UN, the Namibian position supporting pre-Independence allies such as Cuba, Libya, the Palestinian cause, and others has been understood and respected. The US has attempted to find common ground in what the Namibian

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50 Ruth First (1963, quoted in Dobell 1998:27n).

51 Gurirab (2010:109ff); Weiland & Braham (1994:45).

52 Ngwenya (2012:264).

leadership called “the second liberation struggle”, that is, economic development. Indeed “economic diplomacy” was the most important aspect of Namibia’s foreign policy from the beginning of independence.<sup>53</sup> In that respect, the prior approach of SWAPO’s leadership to a policy of ‘proactive positive non-alignment’ in global affairs continued in the economic diplomacy sphere, and that included actively engaging with the US Government on many different levels.

To quote Founding President Nujoma at the first SWAPO Party Congress after Independence:

The policies of SWAPO in this regard [foreign policy] have always been aimed at securing friends who sympathise with and support our objectives of democracy and social justice ... The central approach in SWAPO’s foreign policy in post-independent Namibia is to promote economic democracy. This means attracting investment, diversifying trade opportunities and promoting joint-ventures both with foreign governments and companies as well as with the local private sector.

In 1995, Namibia enacted an Investment Protection Agreement with the US in order to attract investment.<sup>54</sup> Similarly, Namibia signed on to the Multilateral Investment Guarantee Agreement with the World Bank to improve assurances for investor certainty.

Some of the older Namibian leadership has continued to be suspicious of the US and, as Cabinet members, have distanced themselves from cooperation. Periodically, anti-imperialist rhetoric is uttered against some usually vague and abstract threat.<sup>55</sup> Cabinet continues to show some distrust in its steadfast refusal to borrow money from the Bretton Woods institutions such as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. However, the official Namibian Government stance has been cooperation, and several ministries and institutions actively engage their American counterparts, who have always been among the top bilateral donor partners.

## Public opinion concerning the US

In 2008, the 4th Round of the Afrobarometer Public Opinion Survey<sup>56</sup> sought popular attitudes of Namibians toward a number of countries, including the US. The survey was conducted in Namibia just after the first election of President Barack Obama, the first African-American to hold this position. Therefore, there could be a bit of an ‘Obama bounce’ to the results. Nonetheless, America ranks highly in the opinion of ordinary Namibians, as shown in Figure 1.

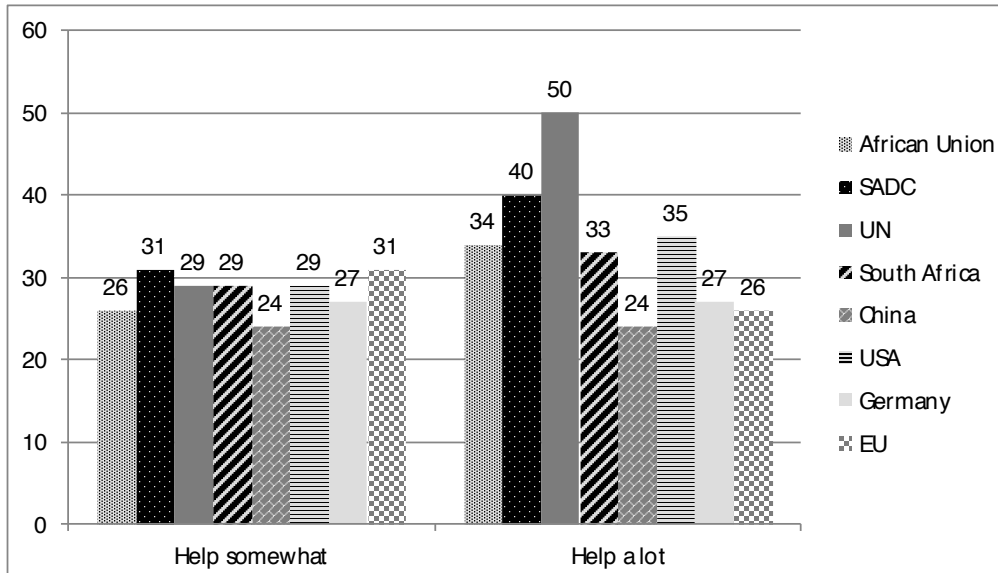
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53 Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2004).

54 Du Pisani (2000:308).

55 For example, around Libya and UNSCR 1974.

56 IPPR (2009).



Q98I. How much does each of the following do to help your country: the United States? [etc.]

**Figure 1: How much does the United States help Namibia?**

The US ranks third, at 64% positive, behind the UN (79%) and SADC (71%). This is quite a contrast from the pre-independence official attitude toward America. Urban respondents were somewhat more positive (67%) than were rural ones (61%), yet there was no difference along gender lines. Caprivians were the least supportive of American efforts, while *Oshiwambo*-speakers showed slightly above-average support. Those with no or little formal education (less than 10%) were the lowest positives, whereas those respondents with at least primary education completed and more were above average in their positive responses. The age group 30–64 years had the highest positive opinions in respect of US help for Namibia.

Round 5 of the Afrobarometer Survey in 2012<sup>57</sup> showed Namibians giving the US the highest marks (28%) for being a complete democracy out of the six countries with which it was compared.<sup>58</sup> Urban respondents were again more positive (by 3%) than their rural counterparts.

Negative attitudes toward the US seem to be mostly among a minority of believers in the pre-independence, anti-colonial nationalist ideology, mostly within the ruling party, but

<sup>57</sup> IPPR (2013).

<sup>58</sup> Also considered were China, Germany, Namibia, South Africa and Zimbabwe.



not necessarily at the grass roots.<sup>59</sup> The 2012 Libya crisis and intervention illustrated the hold of such sentiments within government, but Namibia was separated from its African peers in not recognising the new Libyan Government and in its strong condemnation of the US's role in the international intervention. The SWAPO Party of Namibia faction taking the hardest ideological stance on this and similar issues did not prevail at the party's Congress in November 2012. The more technocratic and pragmatic leadership won strong endorsement at the Congress. This is not to say that other leaders are not critical of American policies on the world stage; but a more realistic and pragmatic policy approach has always prevailed within the government since independence.

## Conclusion

America bounced up against the Namibia Question over the past century in several different ways. First, private economic interests continued to seek opportunities through the German and South African colonial periods. These were not the dominant economic players of the time, however. Similarly, American ideals influenced the League of Nations mandate system and the intricacies involved, yet they were not the major players in those diplomatic dramas. Finally, the US did play a decisive part in the Cold War strategic issues that kept Namibia captive to the will and interests of others. Yet the US was also instrumental in the negotiations through the Western Contact Group that finally led to Namibia's independence.

Namibian leaders, especially those in SWAPO, saw America as the great imperial force behind the scenes on both a global and a local scale, frustrating the country's liberation. Nonetheless, the main enemy – and the direct conflict – was with apartheid South Africa. This direct conflict overshadowed all others. In the end, Namibian leaders inside and outside the country acquiesced in the UNSCR 435 negotiations that finally ended the external control over Namibia.

Since Independence in 1990, the policies of Namibia and the US have largely converged on the shared values of democracy and development cooperation between the two countries. The US has been a large donor partner since Independence in education, health care (especially HIV and AIDS), and conservation among others. Major programmes from the US such as PEPFAR, AGOA, and the MCA-N have made a significant direct and indirect impact.

Political and diplomatic relations have been generally favourable and friendly, with a few notable exceptions carried over from earlier differences. A pragmatic convergence of cooperation has emerged as the dominant post-Independence interaction.

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<sup>59</sup> Although American churches were not important in Namibia over the past 150 years, music, fashion and culture have been popular with the general public.

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