

UCLA

Ufahamu: A Journal of African Studies

Title

The Imperialist Game is Lost

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/2nq4f8rx>

Journal

Ufahamu: A Journal of African Studies, 11(3)

ISSN

0041-5715

Author

Makatini, John

Publication Date

1982

DOI

10.5070/F7113017201

Copyright Information

Copyright 1982 by the author(s). All rights reserved unless otherwise indicated. Contact the author(s) for any necessary permissions. Learn more at <https://escholarship.org/terms>

Peer reviewed

THE IMPERIALIST GAME IS LOST

Text of address by John Makatini, Permanent Representative to the United Nations from the African National Congress (ANC) to the Third Annual African Activist Association Conference, May 1981

Comrade chairman, friends, as has been stated I am here again for the third time sharing our problems with you and I would like to thank once more the African Activist Association for inviting us this year again, particularly because it is a period that coincides with momentous events in southern Africa.

Perhaps we should begin our discussion of the topic for this conference with a few observations regarding the visit of Pik Botha, the foreign minister of the apartheid regime to the United States. Why had this visit triggered so much indignation, condemnation, and protest demonstrations in the United States and the world over, including the holding of a press conference today at the United Nations by the fifty African member states through the Tanzanian ambassador?

It is because it came in the wake of a series of statements on the position taken by the Reagan administration's open support of Pretoria's terrorist racist regime and against the aspirations of the oppressed peoples of Namibia and South Africa--aspirations which are shared by the overwhelming majority of mankind. The twelve vetoes casted by the United States, Britain, and France against the four resolutions presented to the Security Council and other non-aligned countries and calling for comprehensive and mandatory sanctions against South Africa because of its continued illegal occupation of Namibia, the assurance is given by Ronald Reagan that the United States cannot abandon apartheid South Africa. The recent secret talks between the Pentagon officials and the top military intelligence officers of the South African racist army, the current moves to repeal the Clark Amendment aimed at facilitating South Africa's policy of destabilizing and even disrupting the legal governments of Angola and other frontline states and have them replaced by puppet regimes in order to perpetuate the illegal occupation of Namibia and the enslavement of Blacks in South Africa; the recently announced US-backed creation of the South Atlantic Alliance which will include the navies of Chile, Argentina, Brazil, and South Africa, whose purported objective is to combat the alleged spread of the so-called communist influence in Africa and the rest of the southern hemisphere. Numerous statements by the Reagan aides expressing the new administration's determination to recognize the Bantustans, unilaterally lift the arms embargo against South Africa, remove the question of Namibia from the framework of the

United Nations and its plan for UN-supervised free and fair elections; the establishment of military alliance between Pretoria and Washington; the visit of the racist South African spokesman who is reported due to meet the secretary of state today and possibly the president himself for the consolidation of bilateral relations between the two countries, and the interpolation of a projected state visit by P.W. Botha sometime in August also comes in the wake of the all-White so-called general elections and spectacular successes of the military wing of the ANC which is waging an armed struggle for the overthrow of the apartheid regime and the establishment of a democratic state in South Africa.

The history of the ANC, which is over sixty years following its foundation on the eve of January 1912 pursuing non-violent methods of struggle, is well-known and needs no detailed explanations. Suffice it to say that the turning point appeared in 1961 shortly after the Sharpeville massacre which triggered a world wide condemnation of the South African regime and its subsequent forced withdrawal from the commonwealth of nations. It will be recalled that the proclamation of the fascist republic was on its 20th anniversary on May 31st this year--which will no doubt be marked by some action in South Africa--was vigorously opposed by Nelson Mandela on behalf of the ANC. The mobilisation of the entire military and police force by the apartheid regime to crush the strike meant the decisive closure of the long chapter of non-violence. December 16, 1964, saw the formation of the military wing of the ANC. Its campaign of sabotage was seriously crippled, however, in 1964 when members of the high command were captured. Today, however, its spectacular successes in armed action such as the attack of police stations and other strategic installations have definitely brought victory to the struggle in South Africa under the leadership of the ANC within the country. One of the most well-known of these attacks was the blowing up of the South African top strategic installation. It came after our forces fought bitter battles with the South African racist forces in the Transvaal border. They have also in broad daylight attacked the police station right in the heart of an exclusive White residential area. Then of course there was the bank incident in Pretoria. Parallel to this there was the unbroken chain of industrial strikes as well as the nation wide campaign for the release of Nelson Mandela and all political prisoners.

It is in this context that we must understand the panic of the imperialist forces and the South African fascist regime. Indeed as a national and class struggle sharpens in South Africa and as it approaches the decisive moment, it is quite obvious that all the liberal illusions have been set aside. The apartheid regime and its imperialist allies are now frantically preparing for a last stand. This policy itself is not new. What we have is a rearticulation of the Nixon-Kissinger notorious

Memorandum 39 with its Option Two. At that period it was said that the oppressive White minority regimes of southern Africa were invisible. But those of us who have always been directly involved in the struggle were not deceived. The formulation of S.M. 39 took place after the patriotic forces in Angola and in Mozambique had made major breakthroughs in their struggle against the NATO-supported Portuguese colonialism. In Zimbabwe, ZANU, following the successes of FRELIMO, was successfully engaged in battles with Ian Smith and South African forces in the east of Zimbabwe. In the summer 1967 ANC and ZAPU had also joined forces and were engaging the racist forces of South Africa in the western region of Zimbabwe; SWAPO in Namibia was at the same time dealing telling blows on the fascist South African forces. South Africa and its imperialist supporters were alarmed at the prospect of a military defeat of the racist minority regimes and the consequent socio-economic changes that this would bring about in the subcontinent. The Kennedy-Johnson strategy of ideological distancing from South Africa was seen to be working against the United States interests, it was said. Therefore it became necessary to reassure the White settlers that they were not alone. But at the same time it was also necessary to wage a psychological struggle against the liberation movements and the African countries by suggesting that the minority regimes were too powerful and that whatever changes were desired could only come out of them; the oppressed must patiently await their liberation from the oppressor. But the events took on a historic leap in 1971 when the migrant workers in Namibia downed their tools sending a halt to the blast furnaces in the uranium mines of Namibia. Before the minority regime could recover its breath, the unthinkable had happened in South Africa: when the workers in Natal, Durban in particular, brought the province to a standstill. In the meantime, in South Africa, a number of organizations had come into being in 1966, in 1968 to 1969. Here I am referring to the Black Consciousness Movement and the South African Students' Organization. This movement brought various sections of the oppressed peoples--Africans, Indians, and the so-called coloureds --into common solidarity.

All these developments in the Portuguese colonies, in Namibia in Zimbabwe, and South Africa itself, necessitated the unprecedented meeting between Nixon and Caetano in the Azores. In this meeting the American administration gave the entire sum of 445 million dollars that they were annually spending in pursuit of the acts of genocide against the African people. Imperialism and its allies stood naked. Then came the inevitable. In 1974 the American adventure in Vietnam collapsed ignominiously. The fascist colonial dictatorship in Portugal also collapsed the same year. America and its allies were caught off unawares, and began to scramble for new tactics. Vorster began his so-called outward look strategy, secretly visiting some African capitals to promote what he called peaceful co-existence with the apartheid

system as the only viable option for independent Africa since the alternative, as he put it, was too costly to contemplate. Kissinger at the same time started his shuttle diplomacy in Africa in a vain attempt to rescue in conference rooms what had been lost in the battlefield. Large sums of money were spent in Africa and abroad to buy newspapers, editors, and influential politicians as part of the campaign to isolate the ANC, promote a third force, and project the apartheid system as undergoing a process of liberalization to be encouraged by friendly persuasion and not confrontation and armed struggle. But the collapse of the Portuguese colonial empire started. There was nothing that could be done either by South Africa or its allies to save Mozambique. The game was lost. However, hope was that they could contain the equally irrepressible revolutionary upsurge in Angola under the leadership of MPLA and install a puppet regime. We recall the naked invasion of Angola and the most humiliating defeat inflicted upon the apartheid armed forces; so the myth of White supremacy and the invincibility of the South African racist army was buried in Angola--developments which together with the FRELIMO victory in Mozambique raised the militancy of the oppressed people of South Africa to an unprecedented height.

Then came the Soweto uprising. To the alarm of the Pretoria regime and its kith and kin imperialist allies in an attempt to prevent the inevitable, that is the joining of the ANC and its military wing, the youth and the students who threw their selfless revolt have demonstrated their capacity to constitute part of the cutting edge of the revolution being led by the ANC. A highly orchestrated campaign unfolded in South Africa and abroad. There was talk of generation gap and the suggestion that the youth and students have replaced the ANC which have become irrelevant. All these, plus the Kissinger-Vorster shuttle diplomacies, failed. And it has become also clear that the Pretoria regime had been assured of full American support in the Angolan adventure, which in the terms of Kissinger it just had to spearhead and then later joined by a full-scale military backing from Washington, it had become clear that South Africa felt betrayed by the United States. It was under this situation that the Carter administration took office. And faced with a moral crisis stemming from Vietnam, it opted for the advancing of human rights, projecting itself with the aid of Andrew Young as a friend of the African people while castigating the natural allies of the liberation movements as interfering with the shuttle diplomacy engaged in by the gang of five.* It is now crystal clear to all objective observers that those who had in fact intended to promote a negotiated neo-colonial "settlement" in Zimbabwe and Namibia intended to derail the struggle at a point in time.

* Canada, U.S.A, France, West Germany, and Britain.

The resounding victory of the Patriotic Front again took South Africa by surprise. The large sums of money, unequalled propaganda coupled with logistics, and supply that had been given to Muzorewa had failed to deceive the politically aware masses of Zimbabwe. And again we saw the Pretoria regime and its imperialist allies change course and begin to scramble for new "solutions" on the question of Namibia once it became clear that SWAPO would win any fair and free elections held. They have now abandoned their only solemn undertaking towards a UN-supervised election. SWAPO is expected to accept the so-called new plan that would be acceptable to South Africa. But 1981 is not 1977. The SWAPO and ANC patriotic forces are daily and through the ever-escalating armed struggle undoing all the well-thought schemes of the imperialists. The regime in South Africa is faced, according to one of its main spokesmen, Malan, the regime's minister of defense, with an impossible situation. How does it keep quiet while trying to destroy SWAPO? Here I am referring to a recent article published by the *Christian Science Monitor* in which General Malan says that no nation can successfully fight insurgency at its border while fighting insurgency at home. It is quite obvious to South Africa's military strategists that they cannot win the war in Namibia. It is in this context that we must understand the open embrace of South Africa by the Reagan administration as well as the attempt to integrate it under the NATO umbrella.

We are alarmed by recent developments including the recent meeting between Pik Botha and the secretary-general of NATO as well as a widely publicized interview by General Malan expressing satisfaction at the fact that the United States and some western European countries have begun to be realistic over the situation in South Africa and are receptive to the idea of having integrated South Africa into the NATO military structure. We are equally alarmed at the reported meeting due to take place pretty soon sometime next month in Latin America towards the creation of a South Atlantic Treaty Alliance. In this regard we want to underscore the fact that the secret talks that took place between officers of the Pentagon and the top officials of the South African military intelligence coincided with visits by leading generals from Chile and Argentina.

So the regime in South Africa is faced, according to Malan, with that impossible situation and they have become desperate now in trying to internationalize the problem, pull the problem of Namibia out of the hands of the United Nations and place it within the context of NATO. What we face in South Africa, in southern Africa, and in Namibia is an unholy racist alliance between imperialism and South Africa aimed at destroying the newly-independent states of Angola and Zimbabwe.

Before concluding we wish to highlight another aspect of

the regime's desperation to build up a national bourgeoisie, which, it is hoped, could help the vested interest in the perpetuation of the system while at the same time accelerating the process of fragmenting the country into tribal creations, setting up tribal armies that are to be targeted against the liberation movements. This is also coupled with the highly orchestrated campaign to project the liberation movements, both in South Africa and in Namibia--that is, SWAPO and ANC--as Soviet proxies, or Cuban proxies, or terrorists--a campaign that had been echoed in Washington by none less than the secretary of state and others.

Before concluding I would like to assure you, comrade chairman, that the irreversible tide that is mounting in southern Africa has reached the point of no return. The desperate action by the South African regime which has resorted to unprecedented forms of state terrorism such as the recent raid of Matola, the abduction of freedom fighters, the merciless killings of refugees who had sought and obtained asylum and protection in neighboring states in keeping with numerous resolutions of the United Nations calls for world wide condemnation. But it is also a sign of desperation on the part of the regime that it is alarmed by the dramatic upsurge or the dramatic resurgence of the African National Congress inside the country, the resurgence that manifested itself not only in the form of stepped up military activities, but also the open identification by thousands and thousands of our people with the ANC. This is to be seen in various forms; cases where, for example, in the wake of the Matola raid, people openly referred to those who fell in Mozambique as heroes instead of terrorists. It is also manifesting itself in the form of growing movement of solidarity across the colour line. Readings of some statements during the recent election campaign, we came across a case where, for example, people like Gunof, one of the most publicized so-called liberals within the apartheid regime, could hardly address or finish his address before the crowded University of the Witwatersrand when the whole crowd heckled him and climaxed their heckling by singing the national anthem of the African National Congress.

Thanks again for giving us the opportunity of sharing this occasion with you.