Crisis in Africa

Battleground of East and West

Arthur Gavshon

ROUTLEDGE

Crisis in Africa

About the Book and Author

Crisis in Africa: Battleground of East and West
Arthur Gavshon

The great power rivalry surging across Africa today is a heritage of those European statesmen who a century ago in Berlin ruled straight lines on school atlases to carve up a continent—and whole nations with it—into tidy colonial compartments. With African states searching for a political identity in the post-colonial era, the superpowers are now jostling for influence. For the United States and its allies, the goal is to preserve political, economic, and strategic dominance over much of a continent known to possess still unmeasured mineral and other resources on which many key Western industries rely. For the Soviet Union, the goal is to challenge that dominance, perhaps by implanting seeds of socialism in soil left fallow over a century of political neglect, or by seeking to deny the West access to Africa's economic resources and strategic facilities.

Drawing upon his experience as a diplomatic correspondent and his access to world leaders on both sides of the Iron Curtain, Mr. Gavshon sets out here the declared and covert aims of the leading contestants in the contemporary struggle for presence, position, and power in Africa.

Arthur Gavshon has been writing about international affairs since serving with South Africa's volunteer army during World War II. As a diplomatic correspondent, he has attended most post-war summit conferences, built up a wide network of diplomatic and political friends and sources, and interviewed and talked informally with successive heads of government in Europe, the United States, Africa, and Asia.

For Laura, Helena and Evelyn
who accepted everything with patience

Crisis in Africa
Battleground of East and West

Arthur Gavshon

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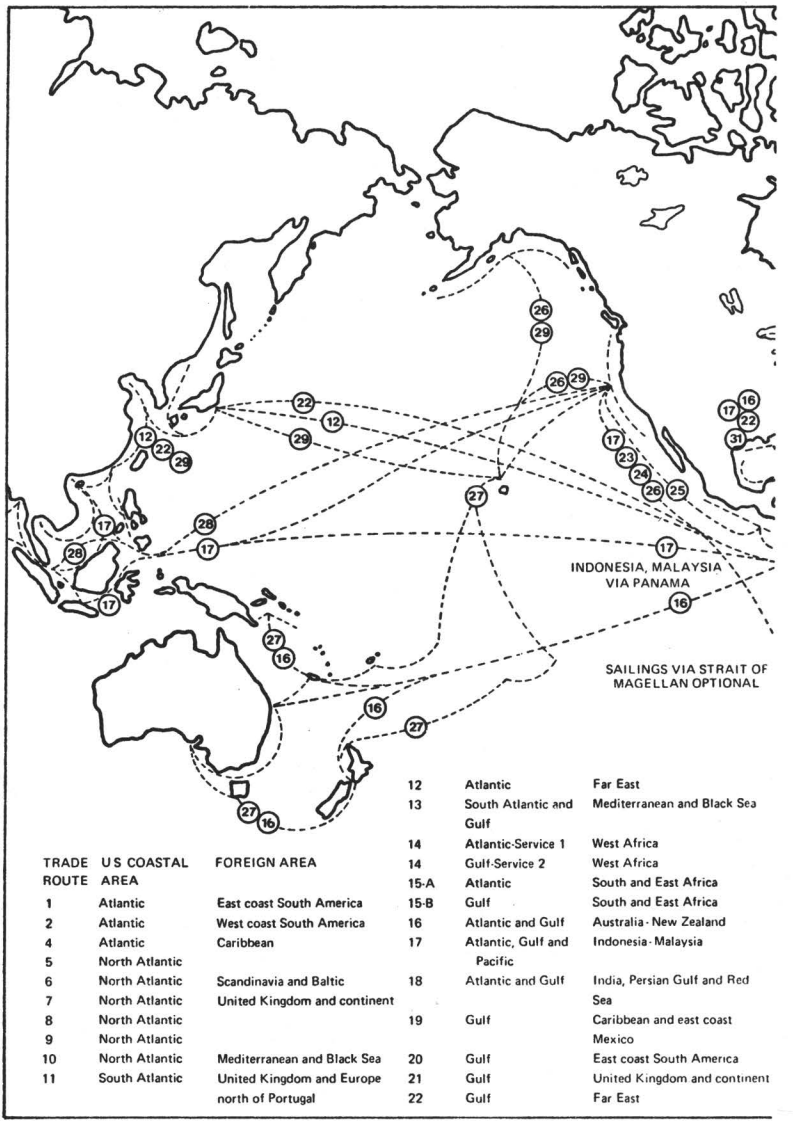
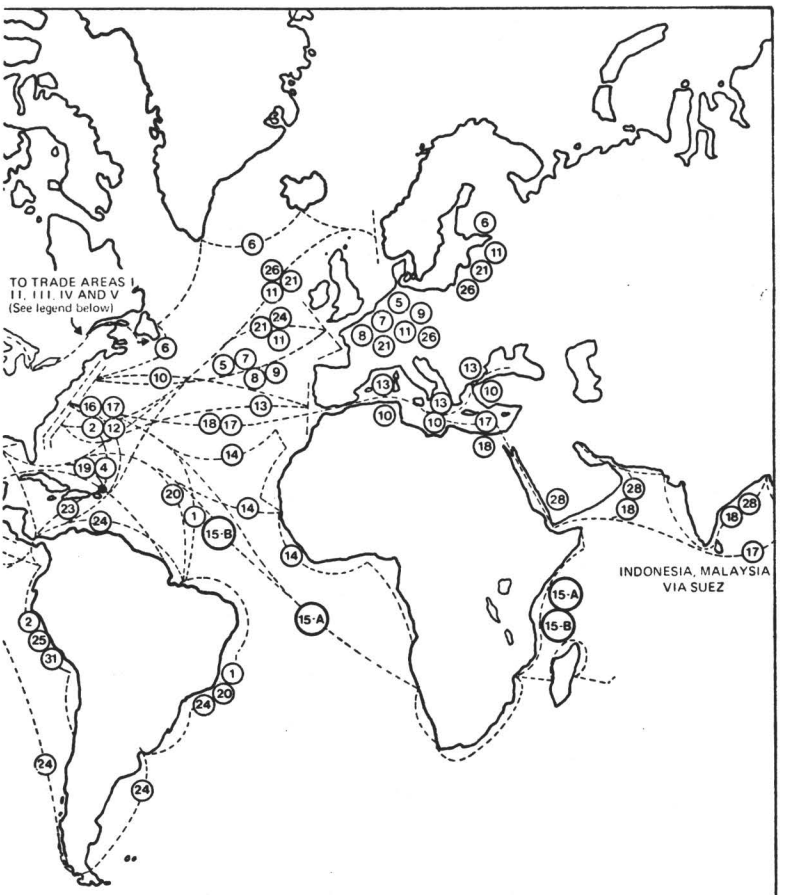


TRADE ROUTE	US COASTAL AREA	FOREIGN AREA
1	Atlantic	East coast South America
2	Atlantic	West coast South America
4	Atlantic	Caribbean
5	North Atlantic	
6	North Atlantic	Scandinavia and Baltic
7	North Atlantic	United Kingdom and continent
8	North Atlantic	
9	North Atlantic	
10	North Atlantic	Mediterranean and Black Sea
11	South Atlantic	United Kingdom and Europe north of Portugal
12	Atlantic	Far East
13	South Atlantic and Gulf	Mediterranean and Black Sea
14	Atlantic-Service 1	West Africa
14	Gulf-Service 2	West Africa
15-A	Atlantic	South and East Africa
15-B	Gulf	South and East Africa
16	Atlantic and Gulf	Australia - New Zealand
17	Atlantic, Gulf and Pacific	Indonesia - Malaysia
18	Atlantic and Gulf	India, Persian Gulf and Red Sea
19	Gulf	Caribbean and east coast Mexico
20	Gulf	East coast South America
21	Gulf	United Kingdom and continent
22	Gulf	Far East

Fig. 1: Essential United States foreign trade routes



			TRADE AREA		
23	Pacific	Caribbean and east coast Mexico			
24	Pacific	East coast South America			
25	Pacific	West coast Mexico, Central and South America	I	Great Lakes	Western Europe
26	Pacific	Western Europe	II	Great Lakes	West, South and East Africa
27	Pacific	Australia · New Zealand	III	Great Lakes	Caribbean, east and west coasts South America
28	Pacific	South-west Asia, Red Sea and Gulf of Aden	IV	Great Lakes	Mediterranean, Red Sea, India and Pakistan
29	Pacific	Far East	V	Great Lakes	Far East, Indonesia Malaysia, Australia and New Zealand
31	Gulf	West coast South America			

SOURCE: *The Soviet Union and the Third World: A Watershed in Great Power Policy?*, a report to the Committee on International Relations, US House of Representatives, by the Senior Specialists' Division of the Congressional Research Service, 8 May 1977.

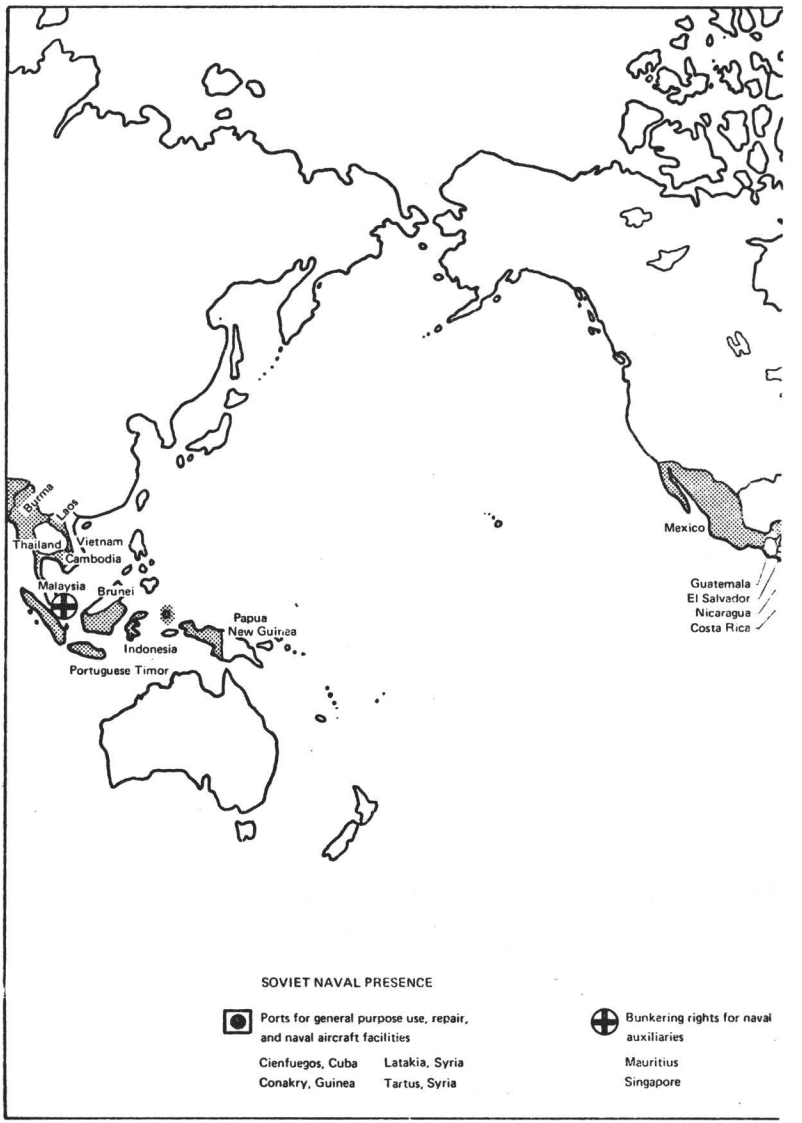


Fig. 2: Soviet involvement in the Third World: economic and military aid (shaded area – see also Table 1, page 14) and naval presence

SOURCE: *The Soviet Union and the Third World: A Watershed in Great Power Policy?*, a report to the Committee on International Relations, US House of Representatives, by the Senior Specialists' Division of the Congressional Research Service, 8 May 1977.

Table 1: Soviet military aid (1955–74) and economic aid (1954–76) to the Third World (in million $)

Recipient Countries		Military Aid, 1955–74	Economic Aid, 1954–76	Total Military and Economic Aid
Asia	Afghanistan	490	1,251	1,741
	Bangladesh	35	300	335
	Burma	negl.	16	16
	Cambodia	10	25	35
	Cyprus	25	—	25
	India	1,400	1,943	3,343
	Indonesia	1,095	114	1,209
	Iran	850	750	1,600
	Iraq	1,600	699	2,299
	Laos	5	1	6
	Lebanon	3	—	3
	Maldives	negl.	-	negl.
	Nepal	—	20	20
	Pakistan	60	652	712
	Sri Lanka	10	95	105
	Syria	2,100	417	2,517
	Turkey	—	1,180	1,180
	Yemen (Aden)	80	39	119
	Yemen (Sana)	80	98	178
Africa	Algeria	350	715	1,065
	Angola	—	10[a]	10[a]
	Benin	—	5	5
	Cameroon	—	8	8
	Cape Verde	—	b	b
	Central African Republic	—	2	2
	Chad	—	10	10
	Congo	15	14	29
	Egypt	3,450	1,300	4,750
	Equatorial Guinea	2	1	3
	Ethiopia	—	105	105
	Ghana	10	93	103
	Guinea	35	201	236
	Guinea-Bissau	—	14	14
	Kenya	—	48	48
	Mali	10	86	96
	Mauritania	—	5	5
	Morocco	45	98	143
	Mozambique	—	2	2
	Niger	—	2	2
	Nigeria	10	7	17
	Rwanda	—	1	1
	São Tomé and Principe	—	b	b
	Senegal	—	9	9
	Sierra Leone	negl.	28	28
	Somalia	115	154	269
	Sudan	65	64	129
	Tanzania	5	20	25
	Tunisia	—	82	82
	Uganda	20	16	36
	Upper Volta	—	1	1
	Zambia	—	6	6
Latin America	Argentina	—	245	245
	Bolivia	—	31	31
	Brazil	—	83	83
	Chile	—	238	238
	Colombia	—	10	10
	Mexico	—	b	b
	Peru	35	28	63
	Uruguay	—	20	20
Total Aid		12,010	11,362	23,372

[a]estimate [b]agreement signed, but information on amount of aid extended not available.

SOURCES: *Military aid 1955–74*: US Department of State, *Communist Aid to Less Developed Countries in 1974. Economic aid, 1954–76:* Material provided by the US Central Intelligence Agency.

Preface

Great-power rivalry in Africa is among the legacies left by European statesmen who, a century ago in Berlin, carved up the continent and whole nations within it into tidy colonial compartments, several with frontiers still in dispute. Russians and Americans attended that inglorious conference but stayed out of the scramble for territories that followed. It is one of history's ironies that Moscow and Washington emerged, with proxies to help them, as leading contestants in the contemporary struggle for position, presence and power in Africa.

This book deals with some of the causes and effects of the east–west confrontation in lands and among people deprived too long of their resources and rights. The process of study has resembled a safari in search of realities through the jungles and swamps of deceptive rhetoric. The search has gone far beyond libraries and files. It has involved visits to key African capitals where national leaders have been interviewed; it incorporates personal reporting of many conferences on African affairs, as well as discussions with politicians, diplomats and academics in Washington, London, Paris, Brussels, Moscow, Peking, Pretoria and elsewhere, over a period of years; it includes on-record and off-record correspondence and conversation with some of the principal players in the drama of east–west tussling in Africa's zones of conflict.

In a situation concerning the two great power blocs and their proclivities in a continent embracing more than fifty states, the ideal of a comprehensive, country-by-country study has proved impossible for reasons of time, space and constant change. Documented vignettes describing historic turning-points have supplanted statistical data on occasions when mood and personalities seemed to reveal more than the dry accounts of bureaucrats. Policies of major world powers in the African setting have been analysed for their geopolitical content; the high price of western associations with the *apartheid* (racial separation) Republic of South Africa has been assessed; and events in Angola and Ethiopia have been detailed for the light they shed on the misconceptions of Washington and its partners and for the way those misconceptions provided the socialist bloc with opportunities they were quick to

exploit. Omissions, simplifications or superficialities have, where possible, been balanced by extensive references for readers wanting to know more about specific episodes. The focus, overall, has been less on the state of African countries than on the tactics and techniques used by east and west to advance their competing economic, ideological and strategic interests. The work is offered, therefore, as an introduction to a subject which seems certain to preoccupy powers, pundits and scholars for an indefinite time to come.

Two realities central to the evolving east–west contest have emerged – one with continental, the other with global, implications. In the continental context, the reality is that Africans will ultimately find their own solutions for the daunting problems inherited from their former colonial rulers and for those imposed upon them by their contemporary economic masters in a divided, recessionary world clouded by dangers of war. In the global context, the truth seems to be that a catalogue of western misjudgements, beginning with the American–British refusal to finance the Aswan High Dam in Egypt in 1955, gave the Russians chances to establish an impressive presence throughout Africa.

'African solutions for African problems' may possess the ring of a slogan but the logic of the concept, if fulfilled, could have profound implications. Leaders of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) were aware of the issues when (in Lagos, Nigeria, 28–29 April 1980) they adopted their own plan of action for the economic development of the continent by the year 2000; and committed themselves to set up an 'African Economic Community'. The idea of 'Africa for the Africans' would, again, cast doubt on European–American assumptions that the continent, particularly in the light of past bitterness and present discontents, could be preserved as a primarily western sphere of influence. It would, equally, foreshadow Africa's rejection of capitalist as well as communist intervention in future conflict.

It follows, therefore, that east and west will need to reappraise their approaches to the troubled continent, particularly if turbulence persists and spreads. The Russians will risk losing all credibility if they continue denouncing what they call western 'imperialism' without doing more to help its suffering victims. Tanks, missiles and Kalashnikovs have been, and still are, welcome to liberation movements and beleaguered governments but they hardly raise living standards. The Americans have provided more economic aid but when that support resembles rewards for often-corrupt regimes assuming pro-western stances, the net effect can be counter-productive. Furthermore, if assistance is seen to be related either to the strategic interests or mineral needs of the United States, it can generate jealousies and resentment

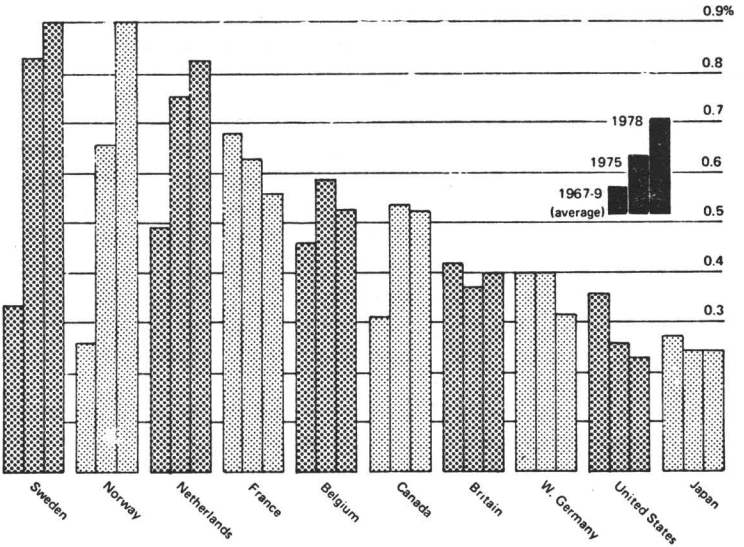


Fig. 3: Who gives what in foreign aid (percentage of donor's gross national product, 1980)

SOURCE: Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, Paris, 1980.

among non-recipients as has happened, for instance, in the case of President Sese Seko Mobutu's Zaire.

For a majority of African countries the decade of the 1980s began with growing mistrust of all the great powers; with deepening disenchantment over failure by Arab and other oil producers to make more of their huge petrodollar earnings available to the near-bankrupt economies of their continental neighbours; and with brooding bitterness towards the International Monetary Fund (IMF) for imposing harsh, austere terms on borrowers and for what Tanzanian President Julius Nyerere termed its 'meddling' in the affairs of Third World countries generally. Ten of the world's wealthiest non-communist countries control 56 per cent of the IMF vote, which means that directors representing developing countries find themselves consistently outvoted and outmanoeuvred on lending policies; and in 1980 IMF assets exceeded $60 thousand million.* For 1981 alone, the petrodollar surplus of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) was estimated at around $87 thousand million, most of it earning high rates of interest in the western banking system. It was bad enough for Africa's needy, non-oil-producing nations which were receiving few, if

*All money totals, for the sake of convenience, are given in dollars with reminders that the pound sterling was devalued by about 30 per cent to $2·80 in 1949, by a further 14 per cent to $2·40 in 1967, and since then has fluctuated between $1·55 and about $2·45.

any, direct OPEC loans or grants; it was worse having virtually to plead with western banks to borrow recycled petrodollars at interest rates higher than those paid to OPEC whose total external assets were expected by the IMF to exceed $400 thousand million.

The consequence was that each post-independence year, especially since the 1973–4 oil crisis, brought a widening of the gap between the standards of most African states and those of America, Europe and the Middle East. The Africans could not – and never tried to – conceal their reliance on non-African countries for aid to develop, to modernize, to establish their own national identities and a distinctive continental destiny. But by the end of the 1970s most of their export earnings were being used to service debts, mounting steadily because of the ever-rising costs of fuel.

It was a vicious circle. Help that reached the Africans enhanced, rather than reduced, their reliance on outsiders. Among other reasons this was because the aid was usually qualified by hidden political conditions which did not merely divert African inclinations from preferred non-alignment; they also thwarted African yearnings for true economic and political independence. Out of these circumstances flowed new frustrations, aborting high expectations of better times, complicating the business of government in a swiftly changing world. Except for some carefully chosen elitist groups, most leaders of Africa's former colonies were as ill-prepared for the rigours of sovereign independence as the development of their countries had been stunted. It should have come as no surprise when constitutions, nicely drafted in the corridors of West European power, went through window after window. One-party political systems arose. Adventurous soldiers from generals to master-sergeants ousted civilian leaders, at times with the help of still-influential metropolitan conspirators.

The period of transition was one of violence and pain for the fledgeling nations, and southern protagonists of white supremacy enjoyed a golden summer of propaganda asserting that blacks were not yet fit to govern. Yet troubles attend most processes of political transition and by the 1980s there were several signs that Africans were collecting themselves together for a long march along the winding, rocky trail towards stability.

It was one thing for Africans unsophisticated in the arts of government to make their mistakes. It was quite another thing for the experienced, well-travelled politicians and diplomats of west and east to display as much ignorance as they did about a continent that was not so much dark as darkened. Most of the major powers – and the South Africans who claimed to know their continent best – blundered in their concern to outmanoeuvre one another.

American involvements wavered between benign neglect and romantic embrace – corresponding with the range of Soviet inaction or action. A major Washington misjudgement was for years to arm and fund Portugal, fellow-member of the North Atlantic Alliance (NATO), during the wars of liberation in the Lusitanian empire in Africa. This left the resistance movements with little option but to lean more and more on the east for help. Until Lisbon's authority collapsed, the Kissinger thesis that 'the whites are here to stay' in southern Africa remained accepted wisdom in Washington. It was a basic blunder that contributed to the transformation of the political map of sub-Saharan Africa.

The French invariably marched to their own drums in Africa and elsewhere. For years military actions in francophone countries kept pace with sales of arms and nuclear equipment to South Africa in defiance of United Nations resolutions. By 1981 interventions in and around countries like Tunisia, Chad and the dismantled Central African Empire had become subjects of international controversy, with Paris assailed for maintaining military and civilian personnel in Africa far in excess of the Russians, Cubans and East Germans combined. Between 10,000 and 15,000 French troops were garrisoned in countries sprawling from East to West Africa and more than 320,000 French civilians, settled in the continent, were spreading French culture, commerce, language and tied aid.

British interests, implicitly and often explicitly, were identified with stability in the white supremacist south. Publicly professing abhorrence for *apartheid*, the British nevertheless effectively supported the *status quo* through business dealings, massive investment and a protective diplomacy that staved off extreme international action envisaging trade boycotts and oil embargoes. Britain, with its allies, argued for a non-violent resolution of the black–white struggle in which the blacks vowed to settle for no less than political equality. However, Africans regarded the British position as specious, if not hypocritical, because they said it ignored the violence and force used by South Africa's own troops and police against blacks for the purpose of safeguarding the structure and philosophy of white privilege.

South Africa's white tribe went into an April 1981 election politically traumatized by the pace of change in neighbouring lands which had long cushioned the Republic against pressures from the black North. 'We must adapt or die!' Prime Minister P. W. Botha exhorted his countrymen. But then Ronald Reagan swept into office, vowing to confront the Soviet Union almost everywhere and signalling friendship to the South Africans. For Botha's government this was more of a stimulant than a tranquillizer, and so there were more black deaths than white adaptation as his well-oiled war machine thrust deeply into

Angola (via Namibia), into Mozambique and, covertly, into Zimbabwe. Internally, despite official talk about constitutional change, the screws of *apartheid* tightened on black lives and hopes in order to consolidate the quasi-military regime's grip on power. Botha's National Party won the election, yet not without yielding ground to opponents on the far right and, in white South African terms, the liberal left.

Moscow's miscalculations included failure to persuade Africans to assume socialist forms remotely resembling the Soviet brand. Russians shared some of the economic deficiencies experienced by Africans, yet displayed impatience when their protégés encountered difficulties in advancing from traditional social structures and cultural values towards late-twentieth-century systems of scientific, technical, industrial and political organization. Consequently some of their most important relationships turned out to be alliances of convenience, transient, costly, unfulfilled and disintegrating finally into mutual hostility as in the cases of Egypt, President Sékou Touré's Guinea, and Somalia.

China's obsessive concern with what it termed Soviet efforts to establish its own 'social imperial system' in Africa and other Third World regions led Peking into strange company. The ideological dispute between the giant communist neighbours brought China into working relations with the Americans, Botswanans, Zaireans and Zimbabweans. There were other occasions when Peking, before and after the Angolan episode, collaborated with groups and movements backed by Pretoria. Many African governments, resenting the transplantation of the Sino–Soviet conflict into their backyards, found this hard to accept.

As this book went to press, Ronald Reagan took over from Jimmy Carter as American president with an electoral commitment radically to revise what he had earlier described as the 'incoherence' of his predecessor's foreign policy. In the African context, specifically, Reagan and his advisers, before and during the campaign for the presidency, criticized Carter's responses to Soviet and Cuban activities, calling them 'confused and misguided'. 'I don't know about you, but I'm concerned – scared is the proper word – about what is going on in Africa,' Reagan told a radio audience soon after Carter's 1976 election. 'Many Americans have interpreted our interest in Africa as an extension of our own desire to achieve racial equality and elimination of injustice based on race. I'm afraid that is a naive over-simplification of what really is at issue.' As he saw it, the basic issue was the power struggle between the United States and the Soviet Union. He suggested that the Russians had the advantage because democracy was rare in most African countries where the people believed in 'one man, one vote, *once*'. He added: 'Whoever gets in power cancels out the opposition.' That led him to the

conclusion that 'the African problem is a Russian weapon aimed at us'.

The rhetoric of candidates in American and most other western electoral contests is rarely matched by their performance in office. Therefore in Africa, and elsewhere, governments adopted a wait-and-see attitude before pronouncing any judgements on what they believed might lie ahead for them if a Reagan administration were to give global geopolitical considerations priority over regional realities or if the Americans were to seek somehow to unify both approaches. Nevertheless, few in African and other world capitals doubted that Reagan would be driven by the desire to limit the spread of Moscow's influence through the continent; and that this desire would result in a softer, friendlier stance in relation to South Africa's white minority rulers, committed as they were to the anti-communist crusade.

Reagan himself had helped to spread that impression, notably when he observed during the campaign that South Africans 'certainly don't need us to tell them how to solve their race problems'. And although he maintained he was against the *apartheid* system, he and his aides frequently stressed the importance of South Africa's strategic position and its mineral resources. The new president, at the same time, had to recognize that certain constraints on his administration's freedom of action were implied by, for example, Nigeria's emergence as the second biggest supplier of oil to the United States. Little of all this, however, had the immediate effect of tempering the gleeful expectations of South African leaders who perceived that the rise of Ronald Reagan heralded for them an era of greater comprehension and collaboration with the nations of the west. White South Africa's wish for an alliance was understandable in a continent committed to destroy racism. Yet for the west even economic links with the *apartheid* state posed political and moral problems. Influential African leaders, including Nigerian President Alhaji Shehu Shagari and Zimbabwean Prime Minister Robert Mugabe, sombrely warned outsiders to choose between friendship with black Africa and white South Africa.

In the final two decades of the century, whoever occupies the White House or the Kremlin, it seems certain that a new phase of interdependence faces the nations. Pressures are building up on east and west alike to contribute substantially towards evolving a new international economic order that would make that concept of interdependence a reality. East and west have the choice between controlling, if not abandoning, their rivalries in Africa and elsewhere or risking the breakdown of national and international systems.

Acknowledgements

Secrets are the currency of modern diplomatic exchange. Confidence is its goodwill. Representatives of many nations have helped in the writing of this book. They include presidents, premiers and foreign ministers, past and present, together with ambassadors and high commissioners and their aides in Washington, London and key African capitals. Most asked not to be identified. Their cooperation can be acknowledged but to name them would be to debase both the currency and the goodwill.

My thanks go out, nevertheless, to others whose advice or writings have been enlightening. In alphabetical order: Dr Gordon Adams, assistant professor of political science, Rutgers University, Newark; Alcides Albertiris Pérez, Cuban Embassy, London; Dr Pauline H. Baker, professional staff member, U S Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, Washington; Professor Jerry Bender, Center for International and Strategic Affairs, University of California; Ambassador Nathaniel Davis, formerly assistant secretary of state for African affairs in the State Department; Michael Goldsmith, Paris-based correspondent of the Associated Press who specializes in African affairs; Lewis Gulick, senior staff consultant, House Foreign Affairs Committee; Ambassador Fred C. Hadsel, director of the George C. Marshall Research Foundation in Lexington, Virginia; General Alexander Haig, U S secretary of state, formerly supreme commander, allied forces, Europe; Herbert E. Hetu, director of Public Affairs, Central Intelligence Agency; Colin Legum, editor of *Africa Contemporary Record*; Bernard Rivers who, with Martin Bailey, helped expose the breach of sanctions against Rhodesia by major British and other oil companies; Raul Roa-Kouri, Cuban ambassador to the United Nations; George Ivan Smith, former director of the United Nations Centre in London; Senator John Sparkman, chairman of the U S Senate Committee on Foreign Relations; Cyrus R. Vance, former U S secretary of state; and Andrew Young, former U S ambassador to the United Nations. Talks and correspondence with most of the foregoing, as well as studies of their writings and speeches, were invaluable.

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I have made use both of original research and of many U S congressional reports, especially hearings of Senate and House Committees on African Affairs. The personal accounts and memoirs of administration officials relating to specific African episodes have also been used. Background, non-attributable talks with senior American, British, French and African officials have been drawn upon. Explanations of Soviet, Cuban and South African policies have come from officials of those countries on the understanding that their names would not be disclosed.

Ruth Vaughan, whose research, indexing and general secretarial help turned near-chaos into calm order, earned my special gratitude. Her political grasp and knowledge of Africa matched her splendid typing.

Most of all I thank my wife, Audrey, whose perceptive comments and criticisms were never welcome but always valid. Without her understanding, command of language and involvement, the project might never have seen the light of day.

London, May 1981 Arthur Gavshon

Part One

East–West Confrontation in Africa

1. Overview

The grass grows tall from May to October in much of Africa south of the Sahara. And this is the time when tribesmen feed the sour soil as their fathers used to do, by burning the grass. So huge fires race across the savannas and turn whole forests into walls of flame. Then the game runs free and good hunting follows and fine feeding, too.

There were other fires in black Africa beginning in the 1960s and smouldering or blazing on into the 1980s. They swept from Nigeria in the west to Ethiopia in the east, from Sharpeville and Soweto in South Africa to the Mountains of the Moon in Uganda, northwards. But the hunters searched for different prey. Insurrections, wars of independence and black–white conflict scorched the earth and threatened new dangers as the great outside powers intervened, bringing their ideologies and high-grade weaponry with them.

Beyond the ravages of war, famine, poverty and disease racked whole nations. There were numerous inherited border conflicts to be settled. Profound social injustices, some with political or racial origins, split black- as well as white-ruled societies. East and west had long since been competing for facilities and raw materials, not for Africa's sake but in their own global interests. The problems bequeathed by colonialism, which for centuries had darkened the continent and dispossessed its millions, remained to be resolved.

The Soviet Union and the United States, trailed by China and ambitious Islamic countries, led the quest for influence among young states still searching for stability and security. Europe's former colonizing powers, with their huge investments intact even after the dismantling of their imperial systems, went on making and breaking governments. If certain African countries happened to benefit, that was something for the outsiders to shout about. But if Africans were hurt as a result of some foreign squeeze-play, it was usual for either protagonist to blame the other.

Turbulence attended most of Africa's fifty-two countries from the time they achieved an independence that was – and for years remained – more shadowy than substantial. Until the downfall of Portugal's

Fig. 4: Black-ruled African nations

dictatorship in 1974 and, with it, Portugal's empire in Africa, American– and West European – policy had rested on the Henry Kissinger thesis for southern Africa that 'white rule is here to stay'. White rule not only collapsed in Mozambique and Angola, pulling down with it the structure of a European state system in Portugal, but it also hurried Rhodesia's reincarnation as Zimbabwe, shook the *apartheid* Republic of South Africa, and transformed the entire continent into a theatre of superpower competition. Ever since, Soviet–American rivalries in Africa have intensified, either directly or indirectly, via 'surrogates' – modern diplomacy's new catch-all phrase for the other side. An ally of the Soviet Union was invariably branded a 'surrogate'. An ally or friend of the United States was invariably described as 'ally' or 'friend'.

Since the break-up of the Portuguese empire in Africa, the world has watched direct French, Moroccan, South African, Cuban,

Somalian, Ugandan and Libyan intervention across borders. The Russians and Americans also have intervened, overtly or covertly, in areas of conflict. French and Cubans alike maintained and used thousands of well-armed air and land strike-forces in support of countries willing to be their hosts. In the northern half of the continent there were wars in the Western Sahara, Chad and, of course, in the Horn itself.

There were also clashes between Arab states; Islamic penetration into black Africa; invasion and counter-invasion by African neighbours; and South African air and land assaults on Angola and Mozambique. The conflict in Western Sahara, suspected depository for a trove of strategic minerals, at times brought Algeria near to war with Morocco, which sought to annex the former Spanish territory. Libya intervened, mostly without success, in Egypt, Sudan, Niger, Uganda, Tunisia, the Central African Republic and the Western Sahara before announcing a 'fusion' with Chad – a conquest that took resurgent Islamic teachings and Soviet and French weapons towards equatorial Africa. Ethiopia, backed by Cuba and the Soviet Union, struggled to suppress Eritrean and Somalian separatism that had the support of anti-communist powers. Uganda under Idi Amin invaded its Tanzanian neighbour, to be met with a counter-offensive that led to the downfall of the dictator. White-ruled South Africa, possessing the most sophisticated war machine on the continent, devastated the military installations of Angola and sent a land force into the Mozambican capital of Maputo to blow up the supposed hide-outs of anti-*apartheid* guerrillas. From the Cape to Cairo, from the Atlantic to the Indian Ocean, years of civil and transborder strife took a countless toll of lives. In most situations an east–west element was discernible.

But the main focus of danger had begun moving inexorably southwards, where the white minority rulers of South Africa vowed to preserve their system of *apartheid* to the bitter end. They sought to reinforce themselves through informal, sometimes secret, alliances with protégés in Namibia, Zimbabwe, Angola and other lands to the north.

It took a British master-politician with a sense of history – and a Conservative one at that – to warn the white South Africans against themselves. Sir Harold Macmillan, prime minister in 1960 which has been designated the 'Year of Africa', travelled through the continent and, in a famous speech to the South African parliament in Cape Town, urged his listeners to reappraise their supremacist racial philosophy: 'The wind of change is blowing through this continent and whether we like it or not this growth of national consciousness is a political fact.' Unless the force of black nationalism was recognized, he went on, the

precarious east–west balance might be imperilled, with Africa's emerging new states drawn into the communist camp. As if to emphasize his own country's readiness to practise what it preached, Britain the same year began hurrying the process of decolonization throughout Africa.[1]

White South African lawmakers, led at the time by Prime Minister Hendrik Verwoerd, heard Macmillan out in silence but then proceeded along their own chosen course; rather than come to terms with black nationalism they resolved to resist it. And so began South Africa's programme of massive armament which, by the 1980s, had given the country the immediate capacity to build nuclear weapons, if not the actual weapons themselves.

After Verwoerd, South Africa's incumbent prime minister, B. J. Vorster, since disgraced, borrowed from Macmillan's imagery to tell his *volk* (nation) in a 1977 New Year's Day broadcast: 'The storm has not struck yet. We are only experiencing the whirlwinds that go before it.'

His judgement appeared to be confirmed in the report of a specialist study group to the Committee on International Relations of the U S House of Representatives. One of its major conclusions said in part that southern Africa 'seems to be the new troublespot of the world . . . the Angolan civil war may well have opened up an era of acute instability that could threaten regional peace and produce superpower confrontation'.[2]

Here then were some of the objective conditions making for a new-style power scramble in Africa. A century earlier the rape of Africa had been formalized when Europe's imperial powers divided the continent into 'spheres of influence', so creating an international framework for the systematic exploitation of the continent and its people. The map-makers ruled straight lines on school atlases, carving up huge chunks of Africa into neat colonial compartments. In effect, this division set the illogical frontiers that now demarcate the states of post-colonial Africa. There were no defined boundaries in pre-colonial Africa. But today approximately one-third of the continent's frontiers are the straight lines drawn arbitrarily at the Berlin Conference of 1884–5.

The Conference of Berlin was historic not only for the cynicism displayed by its participants but also for their lack of foresight. Repeatedly, decisions taken at Berlin brought the great powers of Europe to gunpoint. Germany's drive for colonies formed part of the chain of circumstances that led to the outbreak of the First World War. Britain and France – old rivals who were to become close friends – nearly found themselves in a shooting match over the Fashoda incident.[3] And Britain lost friends around the world because of what was taken to be its perfidy in going to war against the Boers of South Africa from 1899 to 1902.

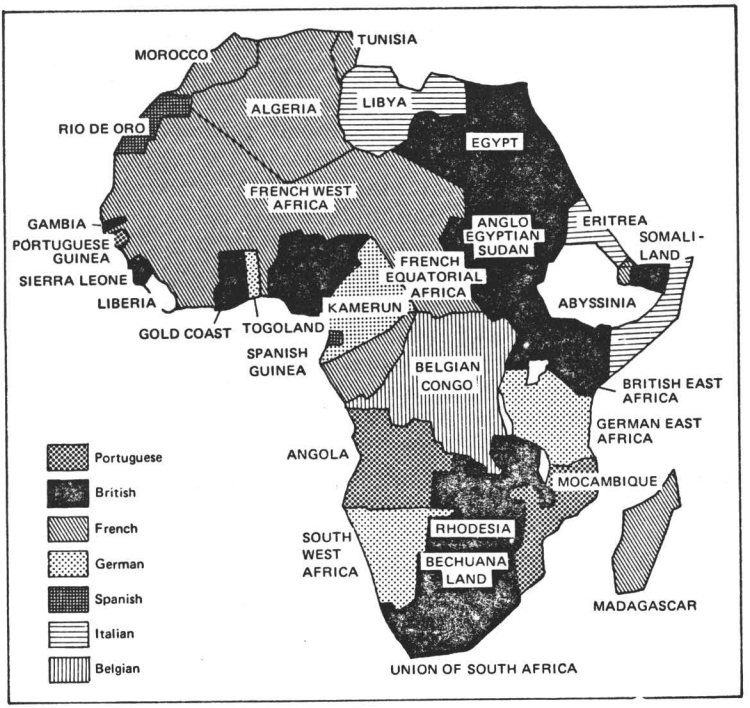

Fig. 5: European conquest of Africa (Berlin Conference, 1884–5)

The Superpowers Move In

There were essential differences between the manipulating and manoeuvring by the great powers over Africa before and after decolonization. Since the break-up of the European empires in Asia and Africa – initiated by the British in the early days of the east–west cold war – stronger players arrived on the African scene. In a nuclear world grown politically more complex, the newly liberated countries drew gradually together to form a power centre in their own right, aligned neither to east nor west. This did not prevent Moscow or Washington from making the countries of the Third World targets of their attentions. Some of these fledgeling states had debts to repay to the Russians, for instance, because in their independence struggles they had been helped with arms and money by Moscow. Other Third World countries felt that they had scores to settle with their old imperialist masters who, before yielding independence, believed that they could count on American backing through the 1970s.

Thus dangers of confrontation intensified, especially when the Russians moved to fill the vacuum left behind by the departing colonizers. Interventionism, too, assumed forms more sophisticated than the vulgar land-grabbing solemnly sanctified in Berlin.

Foreign forces, for example, determined the outcome of several African civil and transnational conflicts at the 'invitation' of forces they recognized. The Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) of the United States estimated that more than 40,000 Cuban combatants served in Angola and Ethiopia using arms supplied by the Russians. Fidel Castro would later say that the CIA figure was an underestimate. Authorities in Paris reported that between 15,000 and 20,000 French troops were deployed at times through twenty-two states of francophone Africa, some in a combatant role. The situation in Chad provided another ironic pointer to the changing pattern of intervention. When that desert insurrection first began in 1965, rebels of the Chad National Liberation Front fought on camels. Later, with up-to-date Soviet equipment placed at their disposal by Libya, they controlled three-quarters of the country; and in 1978 the French ordered Jaguar fighter-bombers into action to prevent the total victory of guerrillas who, by then, were using tanks, missiles and other modern military paraphernalia. By mid–1980 France withdrew, leaving its parastatal, Elf-Aquitaine, to acquire extensive oil exploration rights in Libya; and the Libyans to announce a 'merger' with a now-compliant Chad leadership on 6 January 1981.

Whereas the nineteenth-century Europeans had been motivated by greed, now there was a scarcely concealed need for their successors to expand their neo-imperial interests. Africa possessed in immeasurable quantities about all of the thirteen basic industrial raw materials needed by a modern economy. No jet airplane, for instance, can be built without cobalt. The United States produces no cobalt but Zaire and Zambia do. The Americans are 88 per cent dependent on imported bauxite, 95 per cent on imported manganese ore, 90 per cent on nickel, 100 per cent on tin – and the relative figures for West Europe show an even greater dependency. The reliance of the west on Africa's strategic materials extends also to aluminium, zinc, chromium, iron, lead and tungsten.[4] These illustrations, of course, leave such energy-yielding commodities as oil and uranium out of account. Africa has deposits of both.

Moscow and Washington consistently acted as though successive crises in Africa were simple extensions of their global geopolitical struggle. Both tended to regard the contest in zero-sum terms with a gain for one perceived automatically as a loss for the other. Captives of their ideologies, each perpetrated a series of resounding blunders in their efforts to win the support of the 440 million Africans.