COHP Transcript Mr RF 'Pik' Botha: APPENDIX ONE

Content:

Interview with Mr RF 'Pik' Botha conducted by Dr Sue Onslow in Akasia, Pretoria, South Africa on 15th July 2008. Collected as part of research for the Africa International Affairs Programme at the London School of Economics Centre for International Affairs, Diplomacy and Strategy (LSE IDEAS).

Key:
SO: Sue Onslow (Interviewer)
RB: Mr RF 'Pik' Botha (Respondent)

SO: How far did South Africa find itself isolated and beleaguered in the international community because of SA intervention in Angola in 1975?

RB: Under the Alvor Agreement, the three signatories – MPLA, FNLA and UNITA – were to govern Angola together until 11 November 1975. This meant that virtually every ministry and department would have had 3 officials for every post. However, the Portuguese governor gave in – he was pro-communist and favoured the MPLA. This caused disruption inside Angola and brought Cuban intervention, as the MPLA position in the central part of the country was strengthened by large numbers of Cuban troops. Against that background, UNITA requested South African assistance.

In the case of Mozambique, the Portuguese handed over power to FRELIMO, the only nationalist movement, in accordance with international law. Hence South Africa immediately recognised the new government and power was transferred regularly. However, we never recognised the new government in Angola because the MPLA had seized power.

I was then Ambassador in Washington. The South African view was a fear: where would the Cubans stop? Would they cross into Ovamboland, in northern South West Africa/Namibia? Then there would be a war there, too. Therefore it was a question of assisting UNITA in repulsing an obvious MPLA/Cuban strategy to go south. Our troops had tremendous success. That landed the South African SADF in the position that it had moved so far and so

fast that SA troops almost landed in Luanda. PW Botha, the Defence Minister, solicited the cooperation of the media not to publish anything because our activity there was considered sensitive. On the US side, in December 1975, the Senate passed the Clark Amendment. This cut all funds for assistance to the FNLA and UNITA.

I remember that I could see on US television pictures of the battles in Angola, which South Africans could not see. But people back home had their suspicions. Parents knew where their sons had gone because of messages sent back home. I then phoned Hilgard Muller, the Minister for Foreign Affairs to ask Pretoria what they were doing! I congratulated him on the success of the South African forces, but warned that it was not going to achieve its political objective. Firstly, because we were totally isolated in the world – we had to face the UNO and hundreds of anti-apartheid organisations all over the world. It was clear to me that there would never be sufficient support for this kind of activity. Secondly, because of my knowledge of the US scene. I was very doubtful – I knew US sentiment – whether US Congress at that stage would allow US assistance to the FNLA and UNITA to continue (I was in touch with several US Congressmen and Senators). Remember, Ford had succeeded Nixon, and the Vietnam nightmare had not lost its haunting power. Muller asked me to phone Vorster, which I did. He was surprised that I could harbour doubts. His words were, 'He was assured at the highest level ['*op die hoogste vlak*'] that American assistance in this action would be assured, and would continue.' When I doubted that, he told me, 'Pik, you'd better do some homework. Why don't you take 2-3 days, concentrate on this issue and let me know?'

At that stage, it was known that the motion would soon be debated in the US Senate. I went to see Barry Goldwater, Jesse Helmes and Strom Thurmond, and a host of other senators. They confirmed my fears. Barry Goldwater said, 'This goddamn government declare war everywhere in the world, our sons are sent there to die, and we never win anything!' Although they would not vote against the Democratic Party motion, they would absent themselves.

The Clark Amendment was then carried. I phoned BJ Vorster on 19 December 1975. He was shaken by what I had to say, and could hardly believe it. A week later, shortly before 31 December 1975, Hilgard Muller phoned me for a meeting with the Prime Minister at Oubos, his holiday home on the East Cape Coast. On the flight home, I prepared notes of the argument to withdraw immediately from Angola. From Johannesburg, I flew to Port Elizabeth, then a helicopter took me to this meeting where Hilgard Muller was also present, as were PW Botha, General Magnus Malan and Brand Fourie, Secretary for Foreign Affairs. I remember we were sitting in the lounge, over-looking the sea and its waves. To my pleasant surprise, PW Botha indicated that the military was prepared to withdraw. It was a memorable moment because a huge burden fell from me immediately. His basic reasoning was that a soldier should not be kept on a fixed line for too long: Either the SA forces should advance, or withdraw. They should not stay put. It was then my turn to speak. I welcomed this reasoning, and added a warning that, if we did not get out fast enough, the UNSC would pass a condemnatory resolution against South Africa's action. (I was of course also SA's representative at the UN in New York, as well as the Ambassador to America, and had consequently spent much of my time in New York between October and

December.) PW Botha and Malan warned that withdrawal could not be done overnight. Hundreds of kilometres had to be crossed, with no roads, ruined bridges, etc. I repeated my warning to the meeting. I cautioned that the UNSC could pass a resolution demanding SA troop withdrawal before a stipulated date.

I then went back to Washington on 2 January 1976. Soon thereafter, the State Department called me in…Henry Kissinger, or Brent Scowcroft. There was an approaching OAU meeting to be held in Addis Ababa, with Idi Amin in the chair, and the votes were likely to be divided: approximately 21/21 or 22/22. The Americans were asking me: don't pull out, at least until after the Addis Ababa meeting. It was considering two draft resolutions. The first read, 'all foreign troops should be withdrawn'. The second 'South African troops should be withdrawn'.

We supported the first, as did the Americans and the British. So, we were virtually asked, 'Don't move until Addis Ababa'. In that period, an agent from the Nigerian government also came to South Africa [to Pretoria] secretly to discuss with the South African government the same request. Similarly, Kenneth Kaunda, who referred to the Cuban troops as 'the cubs of the Soviet Union', supported us. Quite a number of other African leaders were also against us leaving, fearing this kind of intervention (ie. Cuban) would eventually spread to their countries. I remember sending secret telegrams warning my government that we must be ready to withdraw if the second resolution was passed, demanding South African troop withdrawal. Because, if we did not do so, a follow-up UNSC resolution could be expected invoking economic sanctions and other enforcement measures.

The OAU meeting was divided 50:50. In the end, from 'reliable sources' we were later told that Nigeria had been bribed $50m by the Soviet Union to vote against us for the removal of South African troops. Simultaneously, the UNSC meeting demanded our withdrawal within 2 or 3 weeks. My fear was the imposition of sanctions if we didn't withdraw within the time limit. When it came to the UNSC resolution on SA action, the US voted for the motion demanding SA withdrawal – having asked us in private two weeks before not to do so! But I think the Soviets played a role in calming things down behind the scenes. I felt good that we got out of it without a more severe resolution.

When I became Foreign Minister in April 1977, a substantial part of my work revolved around Namibia: that is, once Rhodesia was resolved in 1980. Luckily, Ronald Reagan was elected in November 1980. The Democratic candidate [Jimmy Carter] had made clear in public statements his views on the South African situation. It was clear that, if he won the election, the South African government would be one of his prime targets.

When I received news of my appointment to succeed Hilgard Muller in January 1977, I was visiting a revolver factory. I was given a commemorative replica of an antique American revolver, engraved to commemorate the 200th anniversary of American Independence with the words, 'If I cannot reform equitably, I will not reform at all' (Edmund Burke). While I was there, I received a telephone call from Brand Fourie, the Secretary in the Department of Foreign Affairs, telling me to stay put. I had to take my hosts into my confidence. When the call came through from the Prime Minister, Vorster said

– very elliptically – that, ‘If you get a request in the next 6 months to become a candidate in one of our constituencies, I think you should say yes.’ And that was it! End of call! That meant that an MP was going to leave politics/resign and I would then be approached by the Nationalist Party Executive of that constituency. The government was not supposed to interfere with the selection process, hence the ‘if’ preface in Vorster’s telephone call. My hosts then gave me lunch – about an hour and a half late – and I returned to New York. I told my late wife about the call. She was more practical and wiser than me, and said, ‘You know? You are going to be promoted to a Cabinet position. Why would you be demoted from Ambassador to an ordinary Member of Parliament?’

The next morning Bernardi Wessels, the correspondent for the SA Daily Mail woke me up at about 5.30 am, saying ‘Congratulations! You have been appointed Minister of Foreign Affairs. Didn’t you know?!’ Bernardi and I knew each other very well. He went on ‘I’ve just come from a meeting with your Foreign Minister and Prime Minister, and the whole press knows it. I only want to know your reaction.’ A little whisper in my head warned me. I replied cautiously: ‘Bernardi, it is a delicate matter.’ ‘What do you mean? How do you feel?’ I said again, ‘I must first officially receive this. I don’t doubt you, but please phone in an hour.’ Shortly afterwards, Brand Fourie phoned, saying ‘This is it.’ So Mr Vorster never formally told me I was appointed!

By now, Jimmy Carter had been elected [November 1976]. Cyrus Vance was appointed Secretary of State, with Walter Mondale as VP and Zbigniew Brzezinski as National Security Adviser. It is an interesting thing. I believe I had the honour of being one of the first of Jimmy Carter’s Foreign Minister visitors. I was an ambassador to the USA and, when appointed as foreign minister, the Americans apparently thought it would be appropriate to have such a high-level meeting before my departure to SA.

The meeting was in the White House with Zbigniew Brzezinski, Walter Mondale, Vance and Carter. Jeremy Shearer – my second in charge – and I were received in a very friendly way. Carter invited me to give them an overview of South Africa: how I saw it, and the situation there. It was a very difficult request, but on target. In those days, I used to wear a wrist watch. I took 35 minutes to give them an overview of our history: the struggle of the Afrikaner to govern himself. It included the Anglo-Boer war: ‘You beat the British – we didn’t’. I had the feeling they understood our point of view from the shared historical experience. I concluded: ‘We will have to change, Mr President, there is no doubt about that. Our problem is how to do so without landing in a major internal conflict. Change was inevitable, and apartheid would have to be eradicated. But how to do it without creating civil war, which would be disastrous for the country as a whole?’

Immediately, ZB spoke. He was very complimentary. ‘We welcome your sentiments. We are impressed. You give us hope. But, Ambassador, there is such a thing as the locomotive of history and we fear – we agree we are impressed – the locomotive of history will not give you the time. It will crush you.’ My response was to disagree with him. I compared his analogy of the locomotive of history to other natural phenomenon. ‘We cannot, of course, prevent a tornado and the devastation caused by such acts of God. But all man-made activity can be halted, stopped and turned around.’ They smiled

gently. It was the end of the meeting and, soon afterwards, I flew back to South Africa and was sworn into office as Minister of Foreign Affairs on 1 April 1977.

For four years while Carter was President, I became quite good colleagues and friends with Don McHenry, Andrew Young, and Cyrus Vance. There was only once a serious threat of severe sanctions.

Dirk Mudge, a leader of the NP in Namibia, broke away from the NP completely, and included in his party a number of moderate blacks who were not from the Ovambo tribes in the North of Namibia. Mudge succeeded in forming a new multi-racial party: the Democratic Turnhalle Alliance (DTA). They included leaders of the Herero, Nama, Damara and Rehoboth Basters. By this time, we had spent millions on infrastructure development in Namibia.

[Regarding] the ICJ hearings in the Hague – our case ran to thousands of pages. The ICJ ruling in 1966 had been a historical turning point [cf. 'South West Africa survey, 1967', a South African government publication summarizing the entire ICJ court case]. P.49, last paragraph: 'The peoples themselves will ultimately decide.' In 1963-64, this had not been NP party policy – and had important implications for apartheid. In my opinion, this was a historical turning point which is not yet fully recognised. The proceedings of the ICJ were not secret, but they were also not on wide distribution. The papers were a bulky load, too; therefore, the implications of this paragraph were not realised until much later on. By that stage, the concept of granting independence to black states to escape from apartheid was emerging in SA. Chief Matanzima of Transkei, a relative of Mandela, told me, 'To escape apartheid I had to take independence.' There was no apartheid system within the black homelands. Verwoerd had this dream of making a sufficient number of black states independent in the hope that sufficient development would take place in these states, and to stop migration to the white areas. Hence the policies of border economic development: ie., on the borders of the homelands, and spilling over into them. However, this did not happen because of the forces of the free market system, connected with [problems of] infrastructure, power provision, etc. The idea was that the White fear of being overwhelmed in their country would only disappear if they were numerically dominant within the state. But the dream became a nightmare.

So, the seeds of the concept of change were sown in the ICJ case. It had been a severe sword hanging over this country. If we had lost in 1966 – when the South African economy was growing at approximately 6% per annum – we would have faced worldwide enforcement measures, including sanctions. There would have been severe economic measures and we would not have had the strength to build up our economic and military power base of the 1970s. It must be remembered that, in the 1950s, only 15% of Afrikaners shared in the modern economy. The decade of the 1960s gave the Afrikaner a push. Incomes and involvement in the professions grew substantially. Unfortunately the injustices of apartheid were not removed. In 1961, when South Africa had become a Republic, there had been a massive surge of Afrikaner nostalgia, accompanied by a profound feeling that, at last, we are independent from Britain. The celebrations were immense and lasted quite a while. In 1966, at the first 5-year mark, there was another outburst of celebrations. So, the 1960s were a decade of turmoil, but they laid the basis

for economic prosperity. And it was a decade of aggressive Soviet stunts in various parts of the world.

Following the unanimous adoption by the Security Council of the United Nations Resolution 385 (1976) demanding free and fair elections in Namibia, five Western members of the Security Council [France, the United Kingdom and the United States of America – as permanent members – and Canada and the Federal Republic of Germany – elected for a two-year term] approached the South African government with the view to developing a settlement proposal which could lead to free and fair elections and independence for the territory.

The South African government agreed that it would participate in such a process on the clear understanding that the people of the territory should be allowed to decide their own future, without intimidation from whatever quarter.

Over the following two years, serious and protracted discussions between the Western five and South Africa, on the one hand, and the South African government and the leaders of Namibia, on the other, took place. This culminated in the settlement proposal which the Western five presented to the South African government on 10 April 1978. The objective of the settlement proposal was to bring about a transition to independence for Namibia, acceptable to all the parties. It was formally endorsed by United Nations Security Council Resolution 435 on 29 September 1978.

The key elements of the proposal related to the holding of free and fair elections in the territory, with an appropriate United Nations role. It was foreseen that the Secretary-General of the United Nations would appoint a Special Representative whose central task would be to see that conditions were established which would allow free and fair elections and an impartial electoral process. The Special Representative would be assisted by a United Nations Transition Assistance Group (UNTAG).

The purpose of the envisaged elections would be to elect representatives to a Constituent Assembly which would draw up and adopt, by a two-thirds majority, a constitution for an independent and sovereign Namibia. In carrying out his responsibilities, the Special Representative would work together with the Administrator-General as the representative of the South African Government.

SO: Please, may I follow up on your earlier comment regarding "a decade of aggressive Soviet stunts in various parts of the world." How important was the Cold War to South African thinking in the 1960s?

RB: Russia drew support from anti-imperialist forces and anti-colonial movements. There had been growing condemnation of SA from Smuts' time. I remember well the sea of green lights in the General Assembly, showing votes condemning SA. For officials with world affairs experience and a view of how international currents work, how power forms the basis of international law, we had a clear view of the growing political stampede against SA. The DFA, particularly, could see how easily the UN was affected [by] power blocs and the Cold War, how easily governments can change their position. The DFA were viewed as the 'lavender boys' – in suits and ties, warning the

government. For the rest of the Cabinet, the Russian threat had to be opposed at all costs. In fact, by the end of the 1980s, Gorbachev could not continue, just as we came to see that we could not continue. But the DFA had a fundamentally different outlook to other departments within the NP bureaucracy. I became an MP first in 1970, after I had spent 18 years in the DFA. I had been part of the World Court team, and had also had postings in Sweden and Germany. In 1969, I had also served as Under Secretary of DFA. With our exposure to the wider world, we, in the DFA, could see the dangers with our knowledge of international currents. We had already experienced how world politics worked, and the forces at play.

SO: What did you make of Rhodesia's UDI when it happened?

RB: UDI was declared in 1965 while we were at the World Court. We were flabbergasted. In 1966, Carl de Wet – a cabinet minister who became Ambassador to London – voiced the idea of a Commonwealth of minority regimes in southern Africa, to act as a redoubt against communism and black majority rule. He must have noticed my face which betrayed my feelings. He interjected: 'This young man does not agree with me! Why not?' I said bluntly, 'You are dealing with movements wanting to throw off the colonial yoke. Ian Smith won't last.' That was almost blasphemous talk. De Wet was most put out. 'Do you want to tell me that this is a pipe dream?' 'Ja. It is a pipe dream.'

SO: What did you think of Zimbabwean nationalist movements?

RB: Ndabaningi Sithole was much more important than Muzorewa or Mugabe. He was really the pioneer for Zimbabwean nationalism, much more so than Joshua Nkomo. He was more senior and more well-regarded than Mugabe and Nkomo. We had looked to him because he enjoyed the respect of many African leaders. My standard answer to journalists – whenever I came back from Rhodesia and a meeting with Ian Smith – was to say, 'We pointed out the alternatives.'

During the Lancaster House conference in 1979, I telephoned [then-Prime Minister] PW Botha from London about the Rhodesian delegation's request to SA for R1000 million for the ensuing year to continue the war. He arranged a special Cabinet meeting in South Africa. The Cabinet followed my lead and decided that the answer would be 'No'. This refusal to continue to fund a Muzorewa/Smith government, irrespective of the outcome of negotiations at Lancaster House, assisted in the final decision to sign the Lancaster House agreement. We honoured and respected Muzorewa, but in our opinion we did not think he could win. He was not a struggle figure, like Nkomo. Sithole was such a man, but he collapsed – or maybe Mugabe planned his demise, just as he did with Nkomo. However there was a difference of opinion within South African national intelligence. Muzorewa and Smith believed they would win the 1980 elections. We had a meeting with the Rhodesians in December 1979, nut the DFA differed in their view of the likely outcome from NIA. The DFA initiated contacts with the various Zimbabwean nationalist parties in January 1980. This included contact with Mugabe's party. We intimated to them that we would welcome peaceful relations with the new Government of Zimbabwe, irrespective of who the winners would be.

As far as nationalism in Angola and SWA/Namibia was concerned, when the SA Cabinet authorised the Cassinga attack in 1977 we had already accepted Resolution 435. PW Botha, then-South African Minister of Defence, was vehemently opposed to this. In my submission to Cabinet, I argued that the draft resolution will have to be accepted, even if we accept that SWAPO will win the election. In other words, the South African Cabinet must accept Resolution 435, even if SWAPO win. Resolution 435 was, of course, only passed by the UNSC in 1978, but the 5 Western members of the UNSC submitted the draft to us in 1977.

A week or so later PW Botha came up with the Cassinga attack plan in 1977. My response was: 'We have just approved 435. The UNSC will eat us up – because 435 implies we have accepted the transition process.' Vorster, the PM, said the Cabinet had to break for lunch. When we reconvened, the Cabinet was divided in two on whether to endorse the Cassinga plan. PWB told Vorster, 'I want to make your task easier. If Cassinga goes well, you can take the credit. If it goes badly, I will take the blame.' Vorster lost his temper, and told PW Botha, 'I am Prime Minister of South Africa. Whatever happens is my responsibility.' I said there could be adverse decisions against us after Cassinga. In fact, an arms embargo was imposed, but not financial sanctions.

SO: On the final Angolan/Namibia settlement in 1988?

RB: Jorge Risquet of Cuba helped me get the turning point in Cairo on 25 June 1988. When we had already started negotiations, I saw Chester Crocker in February/March in Switzerland. It was a US presidential election year, and George Bush was elected to office later that year. Crocker told me, 'This is our last chance while Reagan is still president. I don't know who will succeed.' We discussed the Soviets in Africa. I said, 'Can you give me some idea if the Russians will withdraw from Afghanistan? This would impact upon the Cuban role in Africa, because it will show that Russian attempts to interfere do not pay. This will strengthen our hand in negotiations.' We saw the Cubans as Russian surrogates because of their support for the Cuban presence in Angola, in terms of advisers, technicians, weapons, ammunition, and logistics. If, by October-November, our assumption is not correct, we can reconsider our strategy without waiving our insistence that Cuban troop withdrawal is a precondition for implementing UNSC resolution 435, in respect of Namibian independence.

This led to meetings & negotiations with the Cubans. The Cairo meeting started with an aggressive attack by Risquet on South Africa, along the lines of, 'You colonialists! Imperialists! You have robbed Africa and its poor, etc., etc.' I had disciplined myself beforehand not to lose my temper, and responded, 'Ask the Institute on Human Rights in New York to investigate the abuse of human rights and freedoms in South Africa, Angola and Cuba.' During the lunch break, we were in the pub in the hotel; [we] were all there, having a drink. Risquet continued, 'I am telling you, we are going to introduce 15,000 more Cuban troops.' I replied, 'OK, we will introduce 1000 more SA troops'. He took this amiss – by the inadvertent implication that 1 SA soldier was worth 15 Cuban troops – and lost his temper. I said, 'No, no, no. We can both be winners in this war.' He was struck by this remark. I went on: 'Your leader, Fidel, cannot withdraw unless he can claim something to honour and respect your thousands of fallen and wounded soldiers. We undertake

Namibian independence. Castro can then claim to have succeeded in his purpose, and I can tell white voters in South Africa that we have got rid of the Cubans from Angola.'

This was the turning point. Later that afternoon we met informally in the hotel. I suggested each side draw up 10 points, setting out the steps each side considers to be essential in order to end the war and implementing troop withdrawal. They immediately undertook to do this. Three hours later we met again. To my amazement, on 5 out of the 10 points we were broadly speaking in agreement with each other. The five outstanding points formed the basis of subsequent meetings. Altogether, eight meetings in Brazzaville, New York and Geneva [were held] from August to December, 1988. The Cubans and Angolans loved to meet in New York and Europe. We insisted on African venues. Eventually we concluded the agreement which was signed on 22 December 1988 in the UN Security Council Chamber. This immediately reduced the tension all over Southern Africa, paving the way for Namibia's independence, [as well as] the subsequent release of Mandela from prison and negotiations with the ANC on a new South African constitution.

SO: What was the influence of the winding down of the Cold War and super-power détente on this outcome?

RB: 1988 was Ronald Reagan's last year in office as President. Britain supported the settlement, along with the other Western powers. It was clear to us that the war had to end if we were to enter into negotiations with the ANC. But it was not, 'We'd better get rid of Namibia.' It was not simply the question of the military budget for Namibia. It had become clear to the DFA that the burden of Namibia had to be removed – like Rhodesia before it – to enable us to tackle the problems within this country. The War had to end and the Cubans [had] to withdraw [in order] to open the way for discussions with the ANC. There had been huge Soviet logistical support for the Angolan war. As things happened, circumstances came together which created the correct atmosphere. It was a cumulative process. But we signed the trilateral agreement with Cuba and Angola almost a year before the Berlin Wall collapsed.

SO: What about the importance of Cuito Cuanavale? This is presented in very different ways by different sides.

RB: There was no battle at Cuito Cuanavale. By the mid 1980s, the Cubans needed a victory desperately. Castro reached a stage of emotional anguish. The Jamba headquarters of UNITA in the south-East of Angola became the target. The MPLA and Cubans organised their strongest assault ever for their offensive against Jamba. They had to destroy Savimbi. The starting point was the confluence of the Cuito and Carnavale rivers in the south-central part of Angola. They had to cross the Lomba river to get to Mavinga and then to Jamba. They were confronted by a formidable UNITA force – mainly infantry, with South Africa providing artillery and armoured support. The combined FAPLA/Cuban force supported by Russian military staff and modern Russian weaponry, including MIGs, endeavoured to cross the Lomba river twice and suffered heavy losses: the heaviest ever. Their losses include *inter alia* 4785 dead, 94 tanks, 100 armoured vehicles and 9 MIG combat aircraft. South African losses: 31 killed, 3 tanks, 1 Mirage and 5 infantry fighting vehicles.

General Ochoa Sanchez – who was earlier awarded the title 'Hero of the Republic of Cuba', Cuba's highest award – remarked that he was sent to a war that was lost. He was executed in Cuba in 1989. Sir Robin Renwick*)* wrote [in *Unconventional Diplomacy in Southern Africa* (1997)] that "stopping the massive Soviet and Cuban backed advance in October 1987 required some quite heroic actions by South Africa's 32 Battalion and the other heavily outnumbered South African forces involved." Dr Chester Crocker [in his *High Noon in Southern Africa* (1993)] wrote: "The Soviets and Angolans had been thoroughly defeated… crowing when they managed not to lose Cuito Cuanavale."

The defeated FAPLA/Cuban/Soviet forces retreated to their starting point: Cuito Cuanavale. A few skirmishes with South African forces occurred. South Africa had no intention to take Cuito Cuanavale. It would have been absurd to do so, because we were expecting talks to start with Angola and Cuba in the near future. They knew that negotiations were in the offing and had to destroy UNITA before a ceasefire would be agreed to. Our purpose was to prevent them from doing that. We prevented them from regrouping and re-starting another assault on Jamba. They had sufficient evidence that their war could not continue. Our concern was to leave UNITA in as strong a position as possible. Their concern was to leave the MPLA in as strong a position as possible. The South African defence was designed to protect the advance towards Jamba. Frankly, the idea that Cuito Cuanavale was a smashing victory is incredulous. The statistics provide irrefutable truth.

The Americans were very important in facilitating a final settlement. Chester Crocker knew Reagan quite well, and he himself saw achieving a peaceful settlement as a challenge. He endured 8 years of grinding negotiations, because he fully realised what it would mean to his administration. We got on very well but PW Botha disliked him. Why? Because he epitomised – in PW Botha's view – a US strategy to undermine the SA Government. Crocker himself was aware of the animosity of Botha. He was often very sympathetic to me because he realised what I had to put up with! The lectures, admonitions, etc. My allies in Cabinet were: Barend Du Plessis, Minister of Finance; Dawie de Villiers, who had been the SA Ambassador in London; Leon Wessels; and Roelf Meyer. We had inherited the system of collegiate Cabinet government from the British. There was thus no official voting in Cabinet, but every minister had the right to express their point of view. In the end, the chairperson sums up the debate and his opinion becomes the Cabinet decision. If Cabinet ministers still did not agree, the way was open for them to resign. There was no other way. In reality, the government's decision was the PM's decision in summarizing what he believed it should be.

SO: What was the role of SA's nuclear programme in SA foreign policy and the final Angolan/Namibian settlement?

RB: On the nuclear side, we dealt with a different team in State Department, led by an official Kennedy. But, of course, these issues were intimately interconnected with our discussions with Crocker. The discussions of the SA team with Kennedy were dealing specifically with disarmament and the NPT. During the whole protracted period, there was severe pressure on us from Washington. The British and French also exerted pressure; however, the Americans [were] consistently and regularly pressing us heavily. I have no

doubt that they had their suspicions and secret information that we were developing a nuclear device. Shortly after I became Foreign Minister in April 1977, the American ambassador Hepplethwaite came to see me one morning in Pretoria. He was looking very sombre. He spread out on my desk 10-12 photographs, asking me what did I think these pictures represented? Obviously, it was a drill, in an arid region, digging a rather large hole. I immediately said, 'A drill.' He replied, 'Yes, Minister. But look at the size of the drill.' 'But, Mr Ambassador, if you are in the Kalahari, you need to dig a big hole for water!' He did not smile at all. No sense of humour.

At that point, I was not fully informed of the SA nuclear programme. But of course I immediately realised what the images represented. They were Soviet satellite pictures, forwarded to the Americans. I told the Ambassador to leave the matter with me and I would discuss it with the Prime Minister. This I did. Vorster was upset. I said, 'Prime Minister, we cannot afford this. It may cause tremendous international action against us. What I suggest we do is this. The satellites will continue to monitor the site. But we must remove the drilling apparatus immediately.' He agreed with me.

Years later, when we were in the process of completing the seventh bomb – in about 1986-87 – the military/scientific technical establishment again wanted to test a device. I won that one as well, because PW Botha had very good friends in the proposed test region, in the Northern Cape Province National party. I told him it doesn't matter what the experts tell you. If a nuclear device is exploded and some radiation starts to contaminate the water or air, can you imagine what your friends in that region will do to you? That did it. That stopped that 7th bomb and testing device. But I also used the commitment I made to Reagan in 1981 to persuade PW Botha to order the military experts not to go ahead with testing.

In our discussions with the Americans, we indicated that we were in principle ready to sign the NPT, but [that] we wanted assurances that this would not interfere with what we called our research and programme in producing products for 'peaceful purposes'. I did not agree with the basic reason for the development of the bomb. It was the dirty Hiroshima/Nagasaki type of device. The SA military believed that it was a powerful deterrent, and it should be kept: not as a battlefield weapon, but as a deterrent. The question was – particularly after the Angolan incursion – where would the Soviets stop? If they advanced in Angola and then in Botswana and Zimbabwe, the Witwatersrand industrial area would come within range of Soviet aircraft. This would be potentially disastrous for the security and survival of the SA state. Therefore, atomic weapons could be used as a deterrent against this advance and as a means to get western aid – along the lines of, 'Unless you help us, we will drop the bomb'.

Personally, I did not think this would work, or that atomic weapons would ever be used; and, I believed that the West would realise this. South Africa had so much more to lose if there was a nuclear exchange with the USSR. However, the concept of deterrence did play a role when I first met Ronald Reagan in March 1981. The drill was that, before meeting the US President, you had to clear the agenda first with the Secretary of State, Alexander Haig. Namibia was top of my agenda, but I kept up my sleeve the subject of alleviating the pressure on the French not to supply the fuel elements for the Koeberg

nuclear power electrical station. In Carter's days, they passed a law prohibiting the re-export or shipment of low enriched uranium to South Africa. This had happened soon after Carter's inauguration as President. SA had anticipated that this would be stopped, but had expected a 6-month time frame – not the pre-emptory immediate ban. This was a serious development which could delay the completion of Koeberg for years. Would Koeberg, which was a very expensive installation, be a 'white elephant'? It would be a huge blow to the Government and the administration, given the billions of Rand involved in its design and construction: a waste of taxpayers' money. After meeting Ronald Reagan, Bill Clark – an ex-judge – was sent on a tour of SA and Namibia, with instructions to report back to Reagan with suggestions on how to tackle the complicated issues thwarting implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 435.

But, at my meeting with Reagan, I also brought up the question of the supply of fuel elements to Koeberg. Haig almost lost his temper and intervened that I had not cleared my agenda with him first. Reagan overruled him and asked me directly: 'Are you producing a bomb?' I replied, 'Mr President, we have the capacity to do so. But I commit my Government in assuring you that we will not test such a device without first consulting the US government.' Reagan's response was, 'That sounds fair.' Haig again objected, 'We cannot be associated with this at all.' I appealed to Reagan, 'Mr President, I believe the Soviet Union also believes we are in the process and have the capacity. And this suspicion may act as a deterrent to not to go too far in fomenting unrest in Southern Africa. And we believe that is a deterrent.'

Ronald Reagan bought what I was saying and silenced Haig. 'I think this is a fair explanation, Mr Secretary, and we should speak to our French colleagues about Koeberg.' When our military experts considered testing a device – as mentioned earlier – I used this commitment to persuade our military experts to abandon their plan.

SO: When did you learn about the SA nuclear programme?

RB: After my assumption of the Foreign Affairs portfolio. But I only saw the bomb in its casing years later. PW Botha took us on a tour. A few ministers were taken by helicopter to Pelendaba, given tea and biscuits, [and] then shown the missile casings. They were about as long as this table – approx 8 feet. Brand Fourie also knew. It suited us that the West and the whole outside world feared SA production of atomic weapons. We did not acknowledge their existence. In my discussions with the US over the years, my approach was: what would we get in return for signing the NPT? Without ever admitting the existence of the bombs, I proceeded with the line, 'Let us assume the lady is pregnant. Now what can we do for such a lady?'

In the Bush Administration, Cohen succeeded Crocker. He was a fine fellow. He continued the process of putting pressure on us to sign the NPT. As we were approaching 1990, I am almost sure their intelligence informed them – particularly after PW Botha's departure on 14 August 1989 – that we were going to release Mandela. And, after one of our meetings with the Americans in 1988 or 1989, one of my officials reported that a US official had told them – at a closed meeting – that, 'You'd better hurry up in signing the NPT because, if the ANC come to power in South Africa, they will not do so.' The Americans

had in mind Qaddafi/Arafat/Fidel. I raised this with Cohen. He strongly denied it. It is possible that the USA wanted the whole issue of nuclear capacity to be resolved before there was an ANC government. Perhaps Britain and France, as well as the Russians, were of the same view.

Immediately after FW de Klerk became president, on 15 August 1989, I told him that our two top priorities were the release of Mandela and dismantling our nuclear bombs. He agreed. This led to the formation of a committee to institute this. No lesser a person than former President Nyerere came to see me in Cape Town when I was Minister for Minerals and Energy in the post-1994 government. We had a brotherly chat about the past. He blamed me for decommissioning the nuclear programme! He said it had been a tremendous technical achievement for Africa.

SO: What were your views of the process of the end of apartheid?

RB: It was not the case that we did not have an alternative but to give in. We had enough military power to keep the country going for years. PW Botha was not a racist. An authoritarian, a militarist, yes; and certainly a disciplinarian. He introduced gradual reforms and retracted a number of the apartheid laws. The rescinding of the Immorality Act was of key importance. The concept of apartheid, inherited from our colonial past, was of separation: the underdeveloped group of people versus the people with technical knowledge of development. The inheritance of British colonialism was the 1910 Parliamentary Voting Act, which institutionalised this. The key element in bringing about change was the acceptance of black permanence in white areas. The 1976 Soweto riots led to the establishment of a Commission and the first cracks where exceptions were being made. From this point, there was serious thought about what to do for black education, property rights, how to remove eventually the Pass laws. Therefore, what eventually occurred was how to get rid of the immoral and indefensible legislation in this country. The battle was taking place in our own ranks: between those who believed in the inevitability of change and those who felt that it should be resisted. I was reprimanded in Parliament in 1986 by PW Botha for stating publically that SA would have a black president in future.

The nightmare was within the Nationalist Party. How to move away from the oppressive policy in a way that did not destroy our country? Mandela saw our plight.

SO: Where was the locus or engine of change? In your view, what role did sanctions play?

RB: They did not help. In a statement to the Security Council in 1974 – as Ambassador to the UNO – I delivered a speech in which I even stated, in 1974, that I could not defend discrimination based on the colour of someone's skin. The policy of the NP was based on the belief that black rule would destroy our country; hence, it had to be prevented at all costs. There was also legislation that offended every element of human engagement and respectability. Removing the Immorality Act did not mean much to a black person because it did not affect substantially the quality of his life. They wanted freedom of expression, movement, employment, the vote, property, and fundamental rights. These demands had enormous implications for the

Afrikaner community. In Afrikaner religious beliefs, it took a long time to acknowledge that apartheid was a serious sin – in terms of our Christian principles. The struggle was how to free yourself from this. When apartheid was removed, this liberated the Afrikaner community from the moral prison. Whites were now free to make a positive contribution to the well-being of our people. What angers me today is that there are whites who say to us, the former Government, 'You betrayed us. You handed us over, you ought to have known.' No one asks themselves, what was the alternative? Where is our memory? If we had not handed over power, what would have happened? We were doing the right thing, for what was the alternative? Catastrophe. Violence. By ending the Angolan war, we could release Mandela. At that stage, my obsession was [that] we have to firstly reduce the tension and conflict. Secondly, start talks. The Soviet Deputy Foreign Minister – Adam Adamishin, a very reasonable fellow – who attended our negotiations was completely quiet. He observed. Chester Crocker dealt with the various parties and acted as mediator, not merely as an observer. The crossing of 2000 SWAPO fighters across the border on 1 April 1989 nearly sank everything. Mrs Thatcher was in Windhoek that day, inspecting the British troop UNCTAD contingent. The SA troops were already confined to barracks. The SADF was ratcheting up extreme pressure on me to release these troops. I paid Mrs Thatcher a courtesy visit at the airport, saying we had to release our troops to deal with these incursions. Mrs Thatcher immediately responded, 'If you do, the British Government will not support you. We will consider this a very serious action. You must get the UNSC or the Secretary General of the UN's agreement.'

So I telephoned Perez de Cuellar. He said he could not assemble the UNSC. I then contacted Marti Ahtisaari, the representative of the UN in Windhoek, who told me, 'I cannot give you permission to do this. You will have to be in touch with Peres de Cuellar.' I told him, 'White farmers might organise commando groups. We might be heading for civil war. You are going to have to tell the world you did not stop this.' His comment was ambiguous. 'I see.' I interpreted this as an agreement by implication. 'Thank you. We understand each other better now.' And I put down the phone. I told Mrs Thatcher my impression was that he had agreed. We released our troops, who stopped the invasion. At an emergency meeting a few days later, South Africa, Cuba and Angola together issued a joint statement denouncing SWAPO and demanding their withdrawal to north of the 16 degree latitude. This saved the whole situation from total disruption and enabled Namibia to achieve independence peacefully.