

Democracy as a Fortuitous By-product of Independence UN Intervention and Democratization in Namibia

Christof Hartmann

Abstract

Democratization of Namibia was a more or less fortuitous by-product of independence. Universal suffrage was the rallying cry in the racially dominated system of South African Apartheid rule in Namibia because it equalled independence. It was thus the participatory aspect of democracy which allowed the acceptance of a liberal constitution and a set of democratic institutions. Independence meant that the armed liberation movement simply took over the state. External UN intervention was still crucial in creating a level playing ground for the first free and fair elections. UNTAG success was helped by a clear Chapter VI mandate, decisive leadership, a thinly populated country, and a South African administration which was no longer controlled by hardliners. International negotiations over Resolution 435 started fifteen years before their implementation, and international actors were integral to keeping the parties to its promises. External actors thus played a major and supporting role in the background.

Key words: Namibia, independence, democratization, South Africa, UNTAG.

There was a time when the promotion of democracy after civil wars seemed to be a manageable task. It was a time in the early 1990s when the United Nations was believed to finally assume its role as a powerful promoter of peace and security and to be able to shape the political destiny of populations toward a peaceful co-existence; this included the right to democratic governance. The UN experience in Namibia was partly responsible for this euphoria. It showed that protracted conflicts could be resolved and viable and democratic states could emerge after a UN peace mission. There were no apparent spoilers in Namibia, no questionable legitimacy of international coalitions, and no

Christof Hartmann is Professor of Political Science at the University of Duisburg-Essen, Germany. <christof.hartmann@uni-duisburg-essen.de>

endless debates about “exit options” or “sequencing” of state-building and democratization.

Anybody interested in the relevance of international interventions for the fate of democratic experiments in post-conflict countries should thus have a closer look back at the Namibian experience. Although the operational and military aspects of the United Nations Transition Assistance Group (UNTAG) have been comprehensively analyzed, the actual importance of UNTAG for the democratic stability of postwar Namibia has not received sufficient attention.¹ Is there anything to learn from Namibia’s case for the political engineering in today’s UN missions? The look at the Namibian example proceeds in four steps. The next section describes the democratic qualities of the Namibian political system. The second section gives an overview of the violent conflict, its main roots, its dynamics, and the peace process that led to the establishment of UNTAG. The third section presents UNTAG’s mandate and discusses more precisely its role in the imposition or promotion of democracy in Namibia. As the article’s title suggests, the thesis presented here is neither imposition nor promotion, but rather the establishment of democracy as a by-product of decolonization. A final section will briefly discuss the role of aid in the Namibian democratization process.

A Successful Case of Postwar Democratization?

Namibia has been considered a liberal democracy ever since its independence in 1989. The core dimensions of democracy (i.e., full participation and meaningful competition) are guaranteed. Universal suffrage was the rallying cry in the racially dominated system of South African Apartheid rule in Namibia. After independence, the government assured the conditions for an effective suffrage of the Namibian population and the turnout in elections has generally been high (1989, 97.3 percent; 1994, 76 percent; 1999, 62.8 percent; 2004, 84.8 percent).² Elections have been free and fair since independence. The Constituent Assembly elections in 1989 were supervised by UNTAG; regional and local elections were held in 1992 and presidential and parliamentary elections in 1994, organized by the Directorate of Elections, a body attached to the Office of Prime Minister, without any oversight by external actors. The lack of an independent or autonomous electoral commission did not spark major debate, and for the early post-independence elections, there were actually few complaints regarding electoral malpractices. Political parties

¹ One important exception is Henning Melber, “Decolonisation and Democratisation: The United Nations and Namibia’s Transition to Democracy,” in *The UN Role in Promoting Democracy*, ed. Edward Newman and Roland Rich (Tokyo: United Nations University Press, 2004), 233-257.

² Data are drawn from Michael Krennerich, “Namibia,” in *Elections in Africa: A Data Handbook*, ed. Dieter Nohlen, Michael Krennerich, and Bernhard Thibaut (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 659-676.

were free to operate; only in the South West African People's Organization's (SWAPO's) strongholds in the north, opposition parties complained about the lack of impartiality of police and public administration, especially in the run-up to the 1999 elections.

Following independence, there was a clear concentration within the party system; the number of parties standing for election and gaining seats in parliament decreased from 1989 to 1994, and again until 1999. In the wake of the initial overwhelming victory of SWAPO and its structural dominance in the political competition, opposition parties had a difficult life in mobilizing their membership and attracting funds. In light of the structural dominance, SWAPO did not have to resort to intimidation of political opponents or a restriction of political competition.³ Intraparty democracy also has been weak within all parties, including SWAPO, where long-time President Sam Nujoma hand-picked the party leadership and the top thirty posts on the party lists for parliamentary elections. It is only very recently, following Nujoma's departure from the presidency (2004) and later departure from party leadership, that more open debate has been allowed within SWAPO. While the principle of inclusive political participation of citizens is guaranteed, its practice is rather restricted: national parliamentarians are elected from national party lists, and even for municipal elections, list systems are applied. Decisions about candidates for local offices, such as mayor, are largely made in the party headquarters in Windhoek, and there is little formal political consultation and participation at the local level.

Civil society has become a stronger part of Namibian democracy, but this is primarily due to international support since the 1990s. In the early years of independence, there was still considerable conflict between SWAPO-aligned organizations and those representing constituencies from the pre-independence period (e.g., in the trade unions, student bodies, and women's associations). There is a diverse landscape of nongovernmental organizations, but they do not represent a distinct public realm. The lively debate in press publications has been confined primarily to their readership in the large urban centers.

With respect to the rule of law, the Namibian courts are independent, and judges and officials act in accordance with the constitution and legal norms. Legal protection of citizens has been strong in theory, since independence and civil liberties enjoy special protection under the constitution. In practice, the institutions responsible for protection, such as the courts and the police, have not always been effective in fighting growing insecurity or in handling the enormous backlog of judicial cases (due to a shortage of judges). These problems stem from an overall lack of capacity (especially at the local level),

³ Oda van Cranenburg, "Namibia: Consensus Institutions and Majoritarian Politics," *Democratization* 13, no.4 (2006): 584-604.

however, and not from unequal enforcement of rules with regard to specific groups in the population.⁴

The Namibian Constitution attaches great weight to the division of powers and competencies among the different branches of government, but mechanisms of accountability are weak, as in most other emerging democracies. The government not only has a large majority in parliament and was re-elected by a two-thirds majority in 1994, 1999, and 2004, but also it has “delivered” in terms of social development, even if this development has not been evenly distributed among the various African population groups in the country. It is important not to forget that SWAPO has a history as an armed liberation movement, and the party leadership is still controlled by people who led the struggle from exile. While the SWAPO leadership did not question either the principle of elected leadership or the idea of a democratically-based legitimacy, many of its members still feel primarily legitimated through their role in the liberation of Namibia; they feel that voters trust them because of their membership in the movement and not because of any specific policy output.⁵

Democratic institutions have been strengthened by a quite considerable degree of “stateness,” both in the sense of the “scope” of the state and its “capacity” to execute its appointed tasks.⁶ The Namibian state “inherited” a well-functioning bureaucracy in charge of governing the “commercial” areas and “white” municipalities. Enormous differences remain in the bureaucratic capacities of the national government and the decentralized authorities (regional and local governments), and the capacities of the municipalities in the former “communal” areas are still weak both in terms of quantity and quality.⁷ Although the country still has one of the highest GINI coefficients of economic inequality in the world, the government started directly after independence to make efforts to influence and change the social disparities through legal regulation, proactive efforts to attract investment, and developmental incentives and measures. The government also has strongly supported economic empowerment for the country’s black population not only in the public but also in the private sector. The growing income from diamond

⁴ The brutal interrogations in connection with the so-called secession attempt in the Caprivi strip in 1999 were a notable exception.

⁵ Melber, “Decolonisation and Democratisation: The United Nations and Namibia’s Transition to Democracy,” 233-257.

⁶ I refer here to the distinction made by Michael Bratton and Eric C. Chang, “State-building and Democratization in Sub-Saharan Africa: Forwards, Backwards, or Together?” *Comparative Political Studies* 39, no.9 (2006): 1059-1083.

⁷ The author conducted interviews in Namibian municipalities and towns in 2000, 2003, and 2004. Some results are published in Christof Hartmann, “Local Government and the Management of Conflict in Fragmented Societies: South Africa, Namibia, and Mauritius Compared,” in *Managing and Resolving African Conflicts: Conflict Resolution and Post-Conflict Reconstruction*, vol. 2, ed. Alfred Nhema and Paul Tiyambe Zeleza (Oxford: James Currey, 2008), 94-119.

exports and the uranium boom have strengthened regime capacities.

Namibia has been rated “free” by Freedom House for the entire period since 1990 and obtained a positive record of +6 from Polity IV. Particularly since the late 1990s, domestic observers have become more sceptical with regard to remaining deficits in the democratic process, especially the lack of a vibrant political opposition and of a democratic political culture (within parts of SWAPO leadership and the population at large). It is clear, however, that the by and large uncontested dominance of the former liberation movement, SWAPO, in the political process has been highly advantageous for the consolidation of democratic institutions. There was only limited competition for important public offices, and, thus, a high degree of stability with the “founding father,” Sam Nujoma, as the country’s president between independence and 2005. Namibia remains a “democracy without democrats,” with a substantial number of ordinary Namibians supportive of possible nondemocratic alternatives and a low level of popular demand for democratic participation and accountability.⁸ This scepticism is not rooted in cultural obstacles, but in the centralist and socialist legacy of the liberation movement, which has ostracized and marginalized opposition.

The decision of Sam Nujoma in 2004 not to run again (for a fourth time) for the presidency certainly bolstered Namibia’s democratic institutions. It marks a slow departure from a rather centralist and sometimes authoritarian style of policy making. However, even under Nujoma’s presidency, there were few authoritarian excesses and the political leadership (sometimes grudgingly) kept to the spirit of the constitution. In contrast to the seemingly shaky support to democracy among the population, nearly all relevant elite actors support the democratic process, and the lack of alternation in office is thus not a major deficit, even if some political scientists have contrary theoretical convictions.⁹ The political system also has survived the departure of “founding father” Nujoma, but the real consolidation test will come only when the electoral dominance of SWAPO is at risk, a scenario which in neighboring Zimbabwe triggered a political crisis and authoritarian regression.

⁸ Christiaan Keulder and Tanja Wiese, *Democracy without Democrats? Results from the 2003 Afrobarometer Survey in Namibia*, Afrobarometer Working Paper No. 47 (Windhoek, Namibia: Afrobarometer, 2005).

⁹ Adam Przeworski et al., *Democracy and Development: Political Institutions and Well-Being in the World 1950-1990* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000), included the “Botswana rule” in the coding of political regimes in order to explain why, according to them, effective alternation is an additional but necessary element of a democracy. The scenario they give for Botswana is similar to the context of Namibia: “No constraints on the opposition, little visible repression, no apparent fraud.” (See p. 23.) “If all these conditions are satisfied and if the incumbents subsequently held but never lost elections, we consider such regimes authoritarian.” Space does not allow a more comprehensive discussion of Namibia’s democratic consolidation prospects in the light of the contrasting models of positive and negative consolidation; cf. Andreas Schedler, “What Is Democratic Consolidation?” *Journal of Democracy* 9, no. 2 (1998): 91-107.

By comparative standards both within Africa and the developing world in general, the democratic rules in Namibia are fairly well institutionalized, and we can thus consider Namibia a successful case of democratization. The more intriguing question, however, is to what extent the international community has been instrumental in guaranteeing a rather successful consolidation of democratic institutions. Before trying to solve this puzzle, there is a need to embed the activities of international actors within the more specific contexts of violent conflicts and their dynamics until 1989.

Violent Conflict in Namibia (1966-1989)

Roots of Conflict and Conflict Dynamics

Most parts of the territory of today's Republic of Namibia became a protectorate of Imperial Germany in 1884. At that time, the foundations were laid for a settler-dominated society and racial segregation. Following the German defeat in World War I, the colony South West Africa was declared a C-Mandate of the League of Nations (with far-reaching authorities transferred to the mandatory power). The trusteeship was eventually executed by South Africa on behalf of the British Crown. Thus, South African *de facto* administration of Namibia started back in 1919-1920. The replacement of the League of Nations by the United Nations in 1945-1946 and the concurrent radicalization of white rule in South Africa (victory of the National Party in the 1948 elections) led to increasing disputes between the UN and South Africa with regard to the status of the territory and South Africa's legal and administrative role.

South Africa had attempted to incorporate South West Africa into the South African Union by holding a referendum in late 1945, a step rejected by the United Nations General Assembly. South Africa subsequently refused to sign a formal trusteeship agreement with the United Nations and maintained that the mandate had lapsed with the dissolution of the League of Nations. In 1950, the International Court of Justice put forward an advisory opinion that the mandate for South West Africa remained in force; in 1953, the UN General Assembly decided, accordingly, to supervise the administration of the territory, even without the cooperation of South Africa.

When most African states became independent in the first half of the 1960s and the Non-Aligned Movement took control of the United Nations General Assembly, the unresolved question of the decolonization of South West Africa moved to the agenda of regional and international politics. On October 27, 1966, the UN General Assembly formally revoked South Africa's mandate with Resolution 2145 (XXI), and subsequently labeled its continued presence there as illegal occupation. With Resolution 2372 (XXII), South West Africa was renamed "Namibia" in 1968 by the UN General Assembly. Within Namibia, the liberation movement, South West African Peoples' Organization (SWAPO), had formed in April 1960, which soon achieved recognition by the international

community and the United Nations as the sole legitimate representative of the Namibian people (1973). Against the will of many Western states, SWAPO also obtained formal observer status to the United Nations bodies.

SWAPO launched its armed struggle within Namibia at the beginning of 1966, and the war “officially” started on August 26, 1966, with an attack by South African police on a provisional first base established in Namibia by fighters belonging to the People’s Liberation Army (PLAN), SWAPO’s armed wing, near Omgulumbashe in the northern Ovambo region. Two PLAN fighters were killed in a helicopter attack, and nine were captured, together with forty-five of their recruits from the surrounding area.¹⁰

The violent conflict went through four distinct phases. During the guerrilla war fought from Zambia between 1966 and 1974, there were phases of minimal or no action (1969-1970), as SWAPO first had to build its military organization. The only way to infiltrate the country was through the Caprivi Strip, a narrow protrusion of Namibia eastward about 450 km between Botswana on the south and Angola in the north, giving Namibia access to the Zambezi River. In 1971, SWAPO also began using land-mines. Military activities remained localized and sporadic, however. The second phase (1974-1978) was marked by the offensive of SWAPO from Angola (from 1975 on) and the first successful attacks beyond the so-called “Red Line,” the veterinary protection fence dividing the Ovambo, Kavango, and Caprivi regions along the northern border from the white farming areas. PLAN army headquarters were moved from Zambia to Angola in 1976. SWAPO thus brought the war for the first time to the white farming areas. They were able to assassinate the Chief Minister of Ovambo, Chief Philemon Elifas, in August 1975, and to shoot or abduct foreign construction workers.

The third phase (1978-1984) started with massive South African “external operations” and major air and other bombing attacks in 1978, following an intensification of PLAN activities early that year (large-scale clashes, sabotage, assassinations, and land-mine explosions). In the late 1970s, PLAN lost the strategic initiative when South Africa began to strike at will in Angola. In 1981, key areas of the southwest of Angola were effectively occupied, forcing SWAPO to move its headquarters permanently. The conflict escalated toward a conventional war, and SWAPO’s ability to infiltrate into the Ovambo area of Namibia began to diminish rapidly and was effectively limited to the rainy season (January to March). The final phase (1985-1988) was marked by a conventional war, primarily in southern Angola. This led to the stalemate of Cuito Cuanevale (a town in southeast Angola that Cuban and Angolan troops managed to defend against the South African Defence Forces [SADF]

¹⁰ My account of the war history is based primarily on Colin Leys and John S. Saul, eds., *Namibia’s Liberation Struggle: The Two-Edged Sword* (London: James Currey, 1995), and Lionel Cliffe et al., eds., *The Transition to Independence in Namibia* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 1994).

and the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola [UNITA] over months) and eventually to the settlement of the conflict. When South Africa was persuaded it could not gain a military victory and it also became clear that Fidel Castro wanted to bring home the approximately fifty thousand Cuban soldiers from Angola, the doors for a negotiated solution were opened.

Throughout these years, the armed conflict was restricted to Angola and northern Namibia (Kavango, Ovambo, and Caprivi), with isolated attacks and killings across the “Red Line” in the farming areas of the so-called “Death Triangle” between Otavi, Tsumeb, and Grootfontein (in 1982, one PLAN unit was active in the Tsumeb area for two months), and some sabotage acts in the cities of central and southern Namibia. It is also important to underline that SWAPO leadership rarely perceived liberation by violent means as a realistic prospective, but they saw this commitment as a necessary price to pay for international recognition and for diplomatic and material support by the Soviet Union and the People’s Republic of China.¹¹

Official South African figures set the combat-related deaths for the whole period between 1966 and 1999 at 715 security force members, including the South African Defence Forces, the South West African Territorial Force (SWATF), and the police forces, as against 11,291 PLAN fighters and Angolan soldiers.¹² SWAPO never has published any of its own figures or estimates. South African sources estimate that two thousand civilians were killed in the course of the Namibian war. This does not include estimates of those who “disappeared” from both sides. The civilian population in the northern part of Namibia was affected only marginally by the fighting, but it strongly felt the repression of the police and counter-insurgency forces whenever and wherever there was an indication of support for SWAPO.¹³ The Angolan war caused enormous material damage, and in the early 1990s, Angola set the number of war-displaced people at 900,000, but this suffering is not directly related to the conflict over Namibia.

The Namibian war was never a domestic conflict between a central government force and rebels. SWAPO sought—ever since its formation in 1960—Namibia’s liberation from outside the country, and the headquarters

¹¹ Susan Brown, “Diplomacy by Other Means—SWAPO’s Liberation War,” in *Namibia’s Liberation Struggle: The Two-Edged Sword*, ed. Colin Leys and John Saul (London: James Currey, 1995), 19-39.

¹² The highest number of casualties occurred when South Africa started the “external operations” between 1978 and 1983 (i.e., the clearing of guerrilla bases inside Angola, using heavy weapons and air strikes). For each year during which these large-scale operations took place, an annual casualty rate of around 1,500 PLAN fighters and up to a hundred security forces was estimated. In the eleven years until 1977, official casualties had been 363 insurgents and 88 security force members.

¹³ Brown rightly states that “nonetheless, for a war lasting 23 years, which culminated in pitched conventional battles, casualty...figures on this scale indicate that it was for long periods a low-intensity war.” See Brown, “Diplomacy by Other Means—SWAPO’s Liberation War,” 37.

of SWAPO was based in Dar-es-Salaam (Tanzania), from where it moved to Lusaka (Zambia) and eventually to Angola. Throughout the twenty-three years of war, SWAPO never held bases on Namibian territory, although its fighters regularly crossed into it and often stayed there for several days.

The violent conflict between 1966 and 1975 was a “hit and run” guerrilla war, fought by PLAN fighters against South African infrastructure and personnel within Namibia as well as against traditional leaders who collaborated with South Africa, especially in the Ovambo region. The independence of Angola completely changed the nature of the conflict as well as political and military strategies. With the help of a friendly regime in Luanda, SWAPO could build its bases along the northern border with Namibia and intensify political propaganda and military incursions into its heartland in the Kavango and Ovambo regions. The victory of armed liberation movements in Angola and Mozambique (as well as Zimbabwe in 1979) also strongly boosted the morale of fighters and led to a mass recruitment of several thousand young Namibians who joined the struggle in exile.

War in and over Namibia was first a conventional guerrilla war between South Africa and a very disciplined rebel movement, and later a violent conflict involving more but still well-structured and professional military actors on both sides. Private economic interests were of no relevance, especially as the violence never reached the economically interesting (rich) regions of Namibia (except for attacks on the white farming area in the “Death Triangle” between 1979 and the mid-1980s).

In the late 1970s, the armed liberation war became increasingly intertwined with the civil war in Angola, where SWAPO had moved its bases. As a reaction to the increased military presence of PLAN, South Africa diversified its military presence in Namibia. First, it created a Namibian military force, the South West Africa Territorial Force, made up mostly of ethnically recruited battalions. Alongside this “Namibianization” of the military forces opposing SWAPO, South Africa also created a police counter-insurgency unit (Koevoet), partly composed of bodyguard units of traditional leaders from northern Namibia but officered by whites. This constellation of fighters (SWAPO/PLAN against SADF-SWATF-Koevoet) remained in place on Namibian territory until the cease-fire in 1989.

With the “linkage” introduced by the United States following the arrival of the Reagan Administration in 1981, more actors entered the scene. The U.S. effectively allowed the South Africans to “link” the implementation of Resolution 435 (and thus the holding of UN-supervised elections in Namibia) to the withdrawal of Cuban troops from Angola. During the 1980s, particularly between 1985 and 1988, military conflict in southern Angola turned into a conventional war, with sophisticated military equipment on both sides, including tanks and Mirage bombers. In this war, Cuban and regular Angolan troops fought (with Soviet military equipment and with some help of SWAPO

fighters) against the South African army and the Angolan rebel movement—the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (assisted by U.S. military equipment and intelligence). This was clearly no longer a war over the future of Namibia, but a broader military conflict between the super-powers and their local allies, which had to end in a military stalemate.

The various violent conflicts in Southern Africa were thus closely intertwined, and this was evidently part of the South African “total onslaught” strategy. It has been argued that “linkage” politics blocked an earlier resolution of the Namibian conflict and the implementation of Resolution 435. Details regarding the implementation of Resolution 435 (Constitutional Principles, “Impartiality Package,” see below) had indeed been fixed in 1982, and it was the broader Angolan and East-West conflict that continued to “fuel the war” to an extent. Even without U.S. linkage, it is difficult to believe that South Africa would have allowed the implementation of Resolution 435 in the first half of the 1980s.

Since the 1960s, South Africa unsurprisingly had denied the UN General Assembly’s competence to deal with the issue of Namibia. SWAPO had been recognized as the “sole and authentic” representative of the Namibian people by the United Nations General Assembly in the early 1970s. It thus received diplomatic and political recognition, material support from Nordic countries and UN bodies, and weapons and financial support from East Bloc countries. SWAPO also was firmly supported by the Non-Aligned Movement and by the “Frontline States” (FLS), a group of south and east African states that had mobilized African and international opinion against white rule in the subregion.

South Africa, meanwhile, had already started to institutionalize a system of racial segregation in Namibia and considered it a fifth province which was governed by a South African “administrator general.” In the mid-1970s, South Africa started to build an internal government with indigenous administrative structures and a security apparatus in an attempt to create some legitimacy for its continued rule in Namibia. On the basis of a first conference in the “Turnhalle” in Windhoek, an umbrella organization of “ethnic” parties was formed (Democratic Turnhalle Alliance, DTA) and elections were held in December 1978 for ethnically-based “Representative Authorities,” similar to the South African “Bantustans.” The DTA won forty-one out of fifty seats and formed a Council of Ministers in 1979 (with continued veto powers for the South African administrator general). In 1980, the South West African Territorial Force was created to fight alongside the South African Defence Forces against SWAPO. Following the resignation of the DTA Council in 1983, the administrator general again took over direct control.

The extent to which South Africa indeed liberalized its colonial rule over Namibia following 1975 is a matter of debate. Bauer argues that, especially during the so-called Government of National Unity, the second of the two

South African-sponsored “interim” governments (1985-1989), “political space opened up, allowing a new level of organized activity.”¹⁴ While these bodies were denied any international recognition, they certainly created an embryonic party system, and at independence, these party leaders could count on considerable governmental and administrative experience. The liberalization attempt left an ambiguous legacy. To an extent, it increased the political polarization between the liberation movement and the “collaborators,” but it also disillusioned the DTA leaders with regard to the role of South Africa, and thus induced the moderate parties to consider full independence.¹⁵

The Namibian conflict was a traditional independence war, with the core source of conflict territorial-government. South Africa was eager to keep influence over Namibia for a mix of geo-strategic considerations as well as economic interests in the Namibian diamonds, uranium, and zinc resources. But perhaps most critical was the impact that full political rights in Namibia would have on the political conflict within South Africa proper. Politicized ethnicity may have played a role in explaining the participation of Namibians in the “homeland” policy and the build-up of indigenous anti-SWAPO military forces. The core conflict remained, however, throughout the twenty-three years, a conflict over full territorial control and sovereignty. Although SWAPO was created as an ethnic movement from Ovamboland in the 1950s (and continues to be dominated by Ovambo today), it soon became a multi-ethnic organization. To argue that “during the 1980s, the war of liberation from South Africa took on more of the quality of a civil war, with Namibian political groups and military forces fighting each other for control of the state”¹⁶ is largely missing the point. It is true that by the mid-1980s half of those fighting within SWAPO and SWATF were indigenous Namibians (and few of them ethnic Ovambo), but these forces never controlled strategy. They always remained subordinated to the estimated eighty thousand regular South African troops stationed in Namibia.

The Peace Process

In the context of the military stalemate reached in Cuito Cuanevale, and the massive Cuban and South African military presence in Angola (including direct clashes between their troops at Caleque on Angolan soil in June 1988), the United States, Cuba, and also the Soviet Union urged the belligerents toward negotiations. The war fizzled out in 1988, with negotiations starting

¹⁴ Gretchen Bauer, “Challenges to Democratic Consolidation in Namibia,” in *State, Conflict, and Democracy in Africa*, ed. Richard A. Joseph (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 1999), 430.

¹⁵ Axel Harneit-Sievers, *Namibia: Wahlen zur Verfassungsgebenden Versammlung 1989: Analyse und Dokumentation* (Hamburg: Institut für Afrika-Kunde, 1990), 4.

¹⁶ Lise Morjé Howard, “UN Peace Implementation in Namibia: The Causes of Success,” *International Peacekeeping* 9, no.1 (2006): 101.

in July 1988.¹⁷ The Geneva Protocol of August 5, 1988, provided for a cease-fire in Angola starting on August 10, 1988. The tripartite Peace Agreement (Angola, Cuba, and South Africa) was signed in New York in December 1988, but without direct involvement of UN agencies. It was supposed to have a binding character for SWAPO, as it included the implementation of Resolution 435 and SADF withdrawal from Namibia. At the same time as a bilateral agreement between Cuba and Angola provided for a staggered withdrawal of Cuban troops northward, South Africa fulfilled its obligation of withdrawing its SADF troops to the barracks, and the still 22,000 SWATF troops were demobilized. With the exception of the April 1989 incidents (see below), there was no further fighting or breakdown of order following the signing of the peace agreement. According to the Geneva Protocol, the remaining PLAN troops were to be deployed north of the 16th parallel (that is inside Angola) and await demobilization by the UN there.

The peace negotiations were mostly an international achievement with U.S. Undersecretary Chester Crocker as the main negotiator, strongly assisted by Cuba (and later also by the Soviet Union and the Contact Group). Negotiations took place first in Cairo (June), then in New York (July 13, New York Principles), in Geneva (August, protocol concerning the timing of disengagement of military forces and security measures affecting SWAPO deployments), and in Brazzaville and New York (four rounds between September and December, focusing mainly on a precise timetable), leading to the Brazzaville Protocol of December 13, 1988, and the signing of the agreement in New York on December 22, 1988. According to the participants in the process, neither the United States nor the Soviet Union applied pressure to coerce any of the three parties.

No cease-fire was signed between South Africa and SWAPO because South Africa refused to sign a document with SWAPO. The UN Secretary General thus sent identical letters to South Africa and SWAPO, proposing a specific date and hour for the formal cease-fire. These letters were sent on March 14, 1989, proposing that the cease-fire should begin at 0400 hours GMT on April 1. The Secretary General requested each of the parties to assure him in writing, no later than March 22, 1989, that it had accepted the terms of the cease-fire and had taken all necessary measures to end all warlike acts and operations. These included tactical movements, cross-border movements, and all acts of violence and intimidation in, or having effect in, Namibia. SWAPO and South Africa formally accepted the proposal on March 18 and 21, 1989, respectively.

¹⁷ The best account of the peace process is, Heribert Weiland and Matthew Braham, eds., *The Namibian Peace Process: Implications and Lessons for the Future* (Freiburg: Arnold-Bergstraesser Institut, 1994).

In retrospect, it is quite astonishing that there was no direct involvement of SWAPO in the peace negotiations, but South Africa insisted on this point with the argument that UNITA had the same right to participate as SWAPO. In fact, since around 1979, Angola had played the leading role among the Frontline States in defending Namibia's interest in the 435-diplomacy.¹⁸ Nujoma wrote on August 12, 1988, to the UN Secretary General that SWAPO would honor the cease-fire to which there had been agreement in Geneva. The SWAPO Politbureau also made clear on August 26, 1988, that the cease-fire would also be valid inside Namibia, with effect from September 1, 1988.

Why was there so little opposition to the peace agreement on Namibia? For South Africa the real issue was Angola. The 1988 peace process was decisive for South African willingness to end military occupation and allow Resolution 435 to be implemented. Most of the implementation details of Resolution 435 already had been negotiated at the beginning of the 1980s, however, and these "details" were of no lesser importance than the military solution itself. The "collaborationist" parties were quite optimistic concerning their chances in the UNTAG elections (especially given the South African financial support), and had no reason to block the implementation of Resolution 435. There were no apparent losers in the peace process, if we do not consider Apartheid South Africa as the main loser. South African companies maintained their economic assets in the new Namibian state. Power sharing was indirectly guaranteed through the two-thirds majority requested for the approval of the constitution in the Constituent Assembly and the pure proportional electoral system which assured all minor parties a representation in the Constituent Assembly. This condition had been negotiated in 1982 by the Contact Group in order to get South Africa's approval to an implementation of Resolution 435. It has to be stressed that the peace agreement did not consist of a power-sharing agreement between two (or more) domestic parties. The Namibian peace agreement was part of a broader package negotiated by international actors with sufficient leverage over Namibian actors to enforce it. South Africa accepted the political supremacy of African political movements in a new Namibia, but international actors "ratified" this solution only when SWAPO accepted the core constitutional principles of a liberal democracy and a market economy.

With the cease-fire on April 1, 1989, armed conflict came to an end. However, fighting erupted April 1 between the South African military and police forces and SWAPO fighters who moved toward the demobilization camps across the Angolan border. Up to 1,600 PLAN forces apparently had not been deployed to camps in Angola (as provided for in the Geneva Protocol) and remained in (or re-infiltrated into) Namibia. SWAPO maintained that a document signed by then UN Secretary General Waldheim in 1979 had allowed the SWAPO

¹⁸ Ibid., and Franz Ansprenger, *Freie Wahlen in Namibia* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1991), 25.

movement to confine troops to bases within Namibia. But the document left the details to further consultations, which never took place as South Africa had vehemently protested, and in subsequent negotiations SWAPO's entitlement to bases in Namibia were never mentioned again. In fact, in the morning hours of April 1, there were no UNTAG troops in Angola or northern Namibia, which could have monitored the confinement of PLAN forces to camps. UNTAG chief Ahtisaari apparently had no other choice than to remobilize SWATF and SADF troops, which subsequently used the opportunity to kill many PLAN fighters. According to South African sources, 316 PLAN forces died, and there were thirty-seven victims on the South African side. There has been an enormous amount of speculation about the motives of both sides in this tragic final episode of the war. South Africa knew about the presence of PLAN fighters and let SWAPO walk straight into this trap. SWAPO leadership apparently saw a visible presence of liberation fighters on the territory as a crucial advantage in the preparation for the elections. It cannot be excluded that the (calculated) killing of the fighters was intended to create more public solidarity with SWAPO.¹⁹

After mid-April, there were no further clashes. As pointed out above, the Namibian War was actually a "conventional" war between the military forces of South Africa and a single armed liberation movement that had maintained coherence and unity throughout more than twenty years in exile. After the signing of the New York Agreement in December 1988, both parties were perfectly able to discipline their troops and to avoid break-away armed splinter groups (radical whites or dissatisfied Africans). The presence of UNTAG observers also assured the safety of returning refugees and the demobilized liberation fighters. Within a couple of months, Namibia became a country with little violence (except for two politically motivated assassinations of SWAPO supporters in summer 1989) and has remained so since then.

The Relevance of Military Intervention for Democracy Promotion

UNTAG's Mandate

The UN Intervention called the United Nations Transition Assistance Group officially started on April 1, 1989.²⁰ UNTAG in principle had been mandated by Resolution 435 (1978), but the implementation had been blocked by the South African administration. The mission had a Special Representative, Martti Ahtisaari, from Finland, appointed in 1978, who used the eleven-year

¹⁹ For this hypothesis, see Ansprenger, *Freie Wahlen*, 41.

²⁰ An analysis of UNTAG peacekeeping is Gwinyayi Albert Dzinesa, "A Comparative Perspective of UN Peacekeeping in Angola and Namibia," *International Peacekeeping* 11, no. 4 (2004): 644-663, and Howard, "UN Peace Implementation in Namibia," 99-132. Cf. Simon Chesterman, *You the People, the UN, Transitional Administration and State Building* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

delay to visit Namibia several times and to carefully choose a staff.

Resolution 435 did not specify the start-date of the operation, but it defined the pull-out date to be one year from the start-date. UNTAG was a multidimensional operation based on Chapter VI of the UN Charter, and thus implemented only upon consent of the warring parties and following the signing of the cease-fire in Geneva and by SWAPO and South Africa with regard to Namibia. Hostilities had stopped by that time, in principle, although the events of the first week of April nearly brought the whole UN mission to an abrupt end before it had started.

The clear and limited political mandate of UNTAG, as set by the parameters of Resolution 435 (1978), is often considered one of the main secrets behind the apparent success of this intervention. The central feature of UNTAG's mandate, as reiterated in Resolution 632 (1989), was the supervision of free and fair elections for a Constituent Assembly in order to assist in a transition to an independence that would be acceptable to the whole international community. The mandate clearly did not provide for a full UNTAG organization of elections, but left this role to the South African administration, in this case, the administrator general. UNTAG also had a major role in creating the conditions for such free and fair elections, mainly through monitoring the demobilization and, in the case of the South Africans, the withdrawal of troops, by assuring the return of Namibian refugees, and through the prevention of police intimidation.

UNTAG was a genuine UN operation under Chapter VI of the UN Charter. In its final form, it was the brain-child of the so-called Contact Group of five Western powers that had pushed for this compromise solution between 1976 and 1978. At that time, the Soviet Union and Czechoslovakia had abstained in voting and China had not participated in the council meeting. The decision to implement Resolution 435, and thus to start UNTAG, was made during international negotiations in the second half of 1988. There was no particular lead nation in UNTAG nor any resistance against the intervention. Some debate did come up over the administrative modalities, in particular, the budget cuts decided at the beginning of 1989 (from U.S. \$700 million to \$416 million), but regardless, the same number of implementation tasks was maintained. Many African states and SWAPO itself feared that a limited deployment of military observers would allow South Africa to manipulate the whole process. The UN General Assembly voted on the budget only on March 1, 1989, thus delaying the effective deployment of the huge majority of UN forces until the end of May.²¹

The maximum strength of UNTAG's military component was 4,493

²¹ UNTAG had a budget of U.S. \$416.2 million. More than half of it was financed by the five permanent members of the Security Council, with another \$155 million contributed by other industrialized countries and the remaining \$11 million by less developed countries.

in all ranks. Initially, an upper limit of 7,500 had been set, but when the implementation was discussed at the beginning of 1989, budgetary reasons led the Security Council (including the Soviet Union and China) to reduce this number. Following violent protests from the Frontline States and SWAPO, Secretary General Perez de Cuellar chose a diplomatic solution: four additional battalions were held in reserve and were prepared to be activated in case the military situation on the ground required it. The 4,493-strong military component consisted of three elements: three hundred military monitors and observers (drawn from fourteen different countries); three enlarged infantry battalions provided by Finland, Kenya, and Malaysia; and a number of logistics units. The civilian police component was initially scheduled to reach a maximum of five hundred personnel, but after conflicts with the remaining counter-insurgency forces within SWAPOL, personnel numbers were increased to two thousand. UNTAG finally had an additional international and local staff of just under two thousand. One hundred eighty additional staff members from within the UN system were flown in for the registration of voters. UNTAG thus reached a maximum of eight thousand personnel on the ground. Specifically for the elections, twelve hundred additional election observers were mobilized through member states.

UNTAG had both a military and a police component.²² The military component had the task to confine to base and to disarm SADF and SWAPO troops, to monitor the withdrawal of the South African forces from Namibia, and to demobilize the Namibian regular and territorial units who fought against SWAPO (i.e., SWATF). At the beginning of April 1989, there were still around 32,500 non-SWAPO troops to disarm and demobilize, only half of which could be sent back to South Africa. Demilitarization of SADF forces went according to schedule. By the end of November 1989 (i.e., after the elections) all troops had departed for South Africa. At that time, SWAPO's PLAN fighters, around five thousand, were also released as civilians from their camps in Angola and returned to Namibia. UNTAG overlooked the continued presence of SWAPO fighters in Namibia itself, as they did not disrupt the electoral process and South Africa did not want to formally recognize their existence. SWATF demobilization was complete by September 1989. By the end of UNTAG's mission, PLAN and SWAFT forces were integrated in equal numbers into the Namibian army. Disarmament of heavy arms was concluded within three months; these arms were transported to South Africa, accompanied by UNTAG monitors. More problematic was the collection of small arms. Due to lack of resources, only one large collection site was established in Windhoek, and the task thus remained largely uncompleted.

The mandate had also included the possibility of civilian policing. The primary task of these police observers was not executive policing or to

²² See for details, Howard, "UN Peace Implementation in Namibia," 99-132.

maintain law and order in Namibia (as is sometimes erroneously stated in the literature²³), but to accompany and monitor the regular police. This included accompanying the regular police forces on foot and in vehicle patrols, during political gatherings, and in police stations in the discharge of their duties. These observers had a pivotal role in “helping” the South West African Police (SWAPOL) in enforcing the law impartially, in ensuring that people could express their views without fear of harassment, and in ensuring a free and fair electoral process. Police observers also had an important psychological role in maximizing the visibility of the UN in Namibia. A problem in enforcing this mandate was the fact that the infamous counter-insurgency unit, Koevoet, initially had not been demobilized, but survived rather intact (with approximately three thousand men) as one division of the regular SWAPOL (although it was supposed to have been confined to base by December 1988). In light of this intimidating force, UNTAG soon increased the number of Civilian Police (CIVPOL) observers from five hundred to two thousand. The CIVPOL presence apparently worked well as a deterrent, and the UN Special Representative had to intervene only in a handful of cases. The main challenge remained Koevoet’s activities, and this problem had to be resolved at the level of the Security Council. Upon strong pressure from the Security Council, on October 30, 1989, a few days before the elections, 1,600 ex-Koevoet members of the police were officially disbanded under UNTAG supervision. The remaining 1,500-strong “Merlyn Force” was disbanded following the official certification of the Constituent Assembly elections on November 21, 1989.

Although heavily criticized at the beginning by Namibian actors on the ground (particularly by SWAPO for not protecting its fighters in the April incidents), in retrospect, UNTAG seems to have been sufficiently equipped to fulfill the mandate. Following some difficult months, however, it was helped by cooperative actors on the ground. Although the general capacities were small, Namibia was a thinly populated country of approximately 1.6 million people, and UNTAG had the huge advantage of a ten-year preparation time, which allowed an efficient use of resources. The mandate of UNTAG was a Chapter VI mandate, which reduced its role to military observation and preparation of elections. The UN had never recognized the sovereignty of South Africa over Namibia.

Whatever the precise formulation of the mandate indicated, the “intrusiveness” into the sovereignty of a domestic authority (which haunted so many following UN interventions) was not really the issue. The acceptance of a South African role in administering Namibia throughout the transition period had been part of a political incentive structure, not a legal argument for South African sovereignty. UNTAG was actually the attempt to restore the sovereignty of the Namibian people, and one could thus ask to what extent

²³ Dzinesa, “A Comparative Perspective of UN Peacekeeping in Angola and Namibia,” 650.

the mission did create a context in which the Namibian people could freely exercise this sovereignty. In these rather uncommon circumstances, Ahtisaari at times managed to extend his influence beyond what his mandate actually allowed him.

Resolution 435 clearly fixed a time-span of one year for the fulfilment of the mandate. UNTAG managed to achieve this and to withdraw even nine days before the expiration of the mandate. Several hundred UNTAG personnel stayed in the country as consultants to Namibian ministries, particularly as trainers for the newly created Namibian Police (NAMPOL), but the mission was normally terminated in the wake of Namibia's independence on March 21, 1990. UNTAG was helped in this success by the fact that the elections had produced a highly "productive" result; they gave a convincing majority to SWAPO, but this was short of the two-thirds which would have allowed the movement to manage the constitution-making process at will.

Support to Elections and Democratization

Supervision of elections included the whole process from the elaboration of legal regulations and registration to the voting act. Election monitoring was the main objective of UNTAG. Within UNTAG, the Electoral Division was responsible for advising the Special Representative on all specialist and technical aspects of the election and for the supervision of the registration and electoral processes. It was also responsible for assisting the Special Representative in his and his deputy's negotiations with the South African Administrator General concerning the electoral legislation and the manner in which the South African authorities would implement it.

UNTAG looked after the whole electoral process:²⁴ This concerned (1) the drafting of relevant legal documents, and (2) the terms of electoral registration (where South Africa initially tried to restrict suffrage to people over twenty-one). For this purpose, UNTAG and the South African administration set up thirty-six permanent registration centers. There was (3) the necessary regulation of political parties with appropriate rules, reducing the number of parties from the initial forty-five to ten. UNTAG also started (4) civic education and information programs (more than two hundred radio broadcasts [usually translated into the country's many languages], thirty-two television programs, and more than 590,000 separate information items were produced). Before the (5) electoral campaign could begin, UNTAG had to guarantee that all discriminatory legislation had been repealed. Following the visit of UN Secretary General Perez de Cuellar, a more specific regulation of the electoral campaign was enacted via a Code of Conduct, laying down the ground rules for political conduct in a country which had never before enjoyed free and fair elections and providing for a mechanism to handle campaign-related complaints

²⁴ See Howard, "UN Peace Implementation in Namibia."

of parties. UNTAG (6) finally oversaw the voting exercise between November 7 and 11, 1989. Observation of the elections was organized by UNTAG, which employed 1,758 observers from the UN system. In the process, both SWAPO and the main South African-backed party, the Democratic Turnhalle Alliance (DTA), benefited from material and diplomatic support, severely constraining UNTAG's capacity to create a truly level playing ground for all parties. Under these circumstances, the UNTAG acted more as an "honest broker," seeking compromises with both major parties at the cost of a more principled defense of the core democratization issues.²⁵

Installing a democratic regime in Namibia was not an explicit objective of the UN resolutions. Over the years, the direct negotiations among the parties, and particularly the diplomatic work of the Contact Group, had led to a number of informal understandings on the Constitutional Principles (1982) and on a system of proportional representation for the elections envisaged in Resolution 435 (1985). These agreements were meant to help South Africa accept the implementation of Resolution 435, and were "legalized" in various reports of the Secretary General, but they were never enshrined in Security Council resolutions. When the Namibian Constituent Assembly was convened, its first decision was to solemnly accept the 1982 Constitutional Principles as a basis for all further negotiations.

Thus, the new Namibian Constitution has been heavily shaped by external actors. SWAPO had to accept some constitutional guidelines in 1982 before South Africa was willing to implement Resolution 435. These substantive and procedural rules were considered as a (pre-) condition for any international support to the constitution-making process, and indeed for an international legitimization of the political transition to independence. The elaboration of the constitution in the first months of 1989 was a short exercise because most aspects already had been discussed over the years, and there was no real conflict among the various parties regarding main provisions of the constitution (e.g., a democratic polity with a catalogue of political and civil rights). It remains unclear how much informal pressure was applied on SWAPO to not restart a debate on some of these issues, particularly the regulation of land issues and the takeover of civil servants employed by the previous administration.

Paris has argued that the core decisions concerning the democratization of the country had thus been made by external actors.²⁶ One should be careful in stressing this point too much: Namibian actors had a certain discretion to ignore these clauses if they had wanted to do so; external actors were certainly happy with the rapid "ratification" of an internationally-sponsored constitution through the Constituent Assembly (all decisions taken by consensus), but their

²⁵ See Melber, "Decolonisation and Democratisation."

²⁶ Roland Paris, *At War's End: Building Peace after Civil Conflict* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

core problem back in 1982 had been to avoid a socialist constitutional order that would have allowed the new state to nationalize the assets of South African as well as Western companies. The democratization of Namibia was neither the main objective in 1982 nor the main preoccupation of external actors in 1989. The political outcome of the Constituent Assembly elections (denying the SWAPO a two-thirds majority and revealing the narrow base of the DTA) led all political actors toward compromise; this might explain the outcome of constitutional negotiations as much as the pressure from external actors.

UNTAG activities were thus represented fairly well, in line with the preferences of the international community for creating an orderly transition to independence. This was an aim which UNTAG could realistically achieve. All further objectives which have been read into UNTAG's experience, such as the promotion of democracy, were certainly more ambitious, and it would have been much more difficult to ensure widespread acceptance of such an objective within the Security Council.

Decolonization and democratization were actually supported by all domestic actors, except for some hardliners from the *ancien régime*. Namibia was simply not a regime struggling for democratization with incumbent elites defending their interests; it was a society eager for self-determination and political rights. It might be that these actors meant different things when they spoke about democratic change, but this did not modify the huge consensus among the elites about the political reform program (the constitution was adopted with consensus). Democratization was thus not a question of compliance with external actors (and with a price to pay for this "sell-out"), but a truly national aspiration linked to national independence.

SWAPO had a huge interest in the success of UNTAG and in ensuring free and fair elections because the movement was relatively confident that the elections would bring them the "political kingdom" for which they had strived so long. Majority rule was broadly accepted because of its instrumental value for reaching independence and government. Democratic institutions were a compromise during the UNTAG period, and afterward a "luxury" that SWAPO could afford without losing its domination. The DTA had a similar interest in a free and fair electoral process and wanted an orderly transition to independence without a predominance of northern ethnic groups. Generally, all African population groups shared an enthusiasm for the end of South African domination.

Post-Conflict Reconstruction and Namibian Democracy

In today's violent conflicts, a major role of the international community is not only humanitarian intervention but also post-conflict reconstruction, with the latter considered to be of even more importance for the democratization of the war-ravaged countries than the former.

Namibia received very little Official Development Assistance (ODA)

under South African occupation, most of which was channeled through NGOs. SWAPO had received humanitarian aid through UN bodies since the 1970s. During the twelve months of UNTAG, there was still little assistance, as Namibia had not acceded to independence and did not qualify for membership in international organizations. Although some foreign countries started a diplomatic presence during 1989, no formal diplomatic relations could be established.

Following independence, Namibia could expect to receive special treatment by the UN member states. In June 1990, a donor-pledging conference was held in New York, for which the newly created Namibian government presented a “General Policy Statement.” It said, among other points, that “Namibia will need to receive appropriate levels of development assistance for a considerable time from the international donor community.”²⁷ This need was justified less by the per capita income which would have put it into the group of middle-income countries, but rather by the massive need to overcome the inherited socio-economic inequalities and consolidate the state structures of the independent country. An important step was Namibia’s official recognition as a “quasi-Least Developed Country (LDC),” through the UN General Assembly in December 1990. This status as an LDC was extended in 1996, and recognized the fact that Namibia was in many ways less developed than its statistical level of GDP per capita may have suggested (also evident in its poor Human Development Index [HDI] standing). LDC status allowed Namibia to benefit from particular favorable ODA conditions.²⁸

ODA rose rapidly in the first two years following independence and stabilized—after a small decline caused mainly by a sharp decline in EU funding at a given level. Notwithstanding Namibia’s birth as a “UN product,” bilateral ODA soon became the main financing mechanism for Namibia, and UN financial support minimal in comparison with other donors. Until 1994, Namibia had not negotiated any structural adjustment or poverty reduction program, and both the IMF and the World Bank were initially absent from the list of ODA donors. The most important bilateral donors were the four Nordic countries, Sweden, Norway, Finland, and Denmark, and Germany. The German government made huge commitments soon after independence, but the bureaucratic nature of the German ODA system hindered rapid implementation, so that Germany became the biggest bilateral donor only after 1993.²⁹

In 1990, external assistance exceeded 10 percent of government expenditure, but according to most observers, “the country had not yet reached

²⁷ Republic of Namibia, *The Reconstruction and Development of Namibia: General Policy Statement* (Windhoek, Namibia: Republic of Namibia, 1990), 10.

²⁸ Henning Melber, *The Role of Donors in Transitional Settings: The Case of Namibia*, NEPRU Working Paper No.68, (Windhoek, Namibia: NEPRU, 1998).

²⁹ Horst H. Gebauer, “Fünf Jahre entwicklungspolitische Zusammenarbeit mit Namibia,” *Namibia-Magazin*, no. 2-3 (1995): 38-40.

a stage where aid dependency could create serious distortions in government policy or administration.”³⁰ With an average 4 percent of aid disbursements per GDP, Namibia was more aid-dependent than most of her direct neighbors, but still not considered “aid-dependent” and still below the sub-Saharan African average of aid dependency. Aid was certainly critical for creating social stability in Namibia, but it is very risky to suggest that the democratic institutions would not have survived without the ODA amounts delivered.

Namibia gained its independence at a time when democracy aid did not feature in the ODA portfolios of donor states. At the end of the 1980s and right into the early 1990s, ODA was still dominated by technical infrastructure, rural development, and social services. The World Bank launched the key concept of governance in 1992, and the “political turn” of ODA has manifested itself only since the mid-1990s (and at the management level of aid agencies, in most cases even later). It is not to be expected, consequently, that bilateral donors would have spent massive resources on the promotion of democracy or the media during that time. A closer look at the sectoral breakdown of ODA disbursements in the first half of the 1990s would indeed reveal that there was no political aid at all.³¹

There was also no democratic conditionality in the aid sector. On the contrary, there was a kind of “benign neglect” toward the deficiencies in the political practices of the young democracy.³² External support for the post-colonial transformation of Namibian society has been widely perceived as a matter of development assistance confined to socio-economic issues.³³

Political conflicts between bilateral donors and the Namibian government became clearer only at the end of the 1990s, particularly due to Namibia’s involvement in the regional military conflicts in Angola and the Democratic Republic of Congo. Finland’s ambassador to Namibia did not return from his holiday in mid-2000 on request of the Namibian government, and Finish ODA ended in 2007. Norway closed its embassy in 1998, Sweden’s ambassador left in mid-2001, and the embassy closed at the end of 2008. The fact that the

³⁰ Bertil Oden et al, *Namibia and External Resources: The Case of Swedish Development Assistance* (Uppsala: Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, 1994), 3.

³¹ Things have changed since the late 1990s, with a stronger emphasis on governance in bilateral and multilateral ODA projects and programs, although, as an example, in the period 1997-2000, the UNDP allocated only 3.5 percent of its budget to “support to good governance.”

³² Written communication to the author by Henning Melber, March 22, 2008.

³³ Rainer Barthelt, then head of the division for Southern Africa in the German Ministry for Development Co-operation, published in 1995 an article about German-Namibian development cooperation, which clearly stated that Namibia not only had fulfilled the five political criteria (the so-called Spranger criteria: respect for human rights, political participation, rule of law, liberal economic order, and development-orientation of government) which had been introduced in 1991, but also that the Namibian government had set these objectives as benchmarks of their own policies. See Rainer Barthelt, “Der Werdegang der entwicklungspolitischen Zusammenarbeit mit Namibia,” *Namibia-Magazin*, no.2-3 (1995): 36.

Nordic countries which have been the strongest supporters of SWAPO for many decades (South Africa vetoed Sweden's military participation in UNTAG) no longer have diplomatic representation in Namibia is not necessarily evidence of "political conditionality," but it could be interpreted as a more subtle sign of alienation.

The generous financial support of the international community to Namibia has certainly contributed to strengthening the legitimacy of the democratic regime and the newly independent state (and its long-time President Nujoma). Henning Melber argues that the UN and donors have not used the opportunity to further entrench democracy and a more democratic political culture by a stronger orientation of aid portfolios toward the strengthening of democratic institutions, civil society, human rights, and civic education.³⁴ While it would be erroneous to see ODA as bolstering authoritarian tendencies within the Namibian state, this case study points to a more general dilemma: Regimes that fulfill the basic criteria of a liberal democracy (such as Namibia) are difficult to further democratize through ODA. ODA is simply much better in institution-building than in actually modifying political behavior (or attitudes).³⁵

Conclusion

Namibia's history of democratic transformation is basically a history of decolonization. The liberation war led to an international settlement, which included the holding of free and fair elections for a Constituent Assembly under the supervision of the United Nations. The large victory of the liberation movement, SWAPO, in these elections and the elaboration of a remarkably liberal constitution, which protected the economic rights of the previously ruling white minority, guaranteed a broad consensus for the new democratic dispensation and assured a rapid consolidation of the new democratic institutions.

Post-conflict Namibia became a new state and had little resemblance to the South African-administered entity pre-1989, but it benefited from an established bureaucracy and a well-developed physical infrastructure in large parts of the country, which are products of that era.³⁶ When the violent conflict came to an end, the state did not have to be reconstructed; the main challenges were state transformation and the peaceful transfer of power. That this would

³⁴ Melber, "Decolonisation and Democratisation."

³⁵ Of course, institutions are supposed to guide behavior; but in places such as Namibia, actual political behavior is mostly guided by a set of complex, overlapping, formal and informal institutions in which external actors have difficulties in setting the right incentives.

³⁶ The national territory, of course, was basically the same as before. Namibia's main harbor of Walvis Bay, which had been a territorial enclave and part of South Africa's Cape Province since 1977, was initially not returned to Namibia. Only after the formal end of Apartheid rule in South Africa in 1994 was Walvis Bay eventually made part of the Republic of Namibia.

happen according to democratic rules had been decided back in 1982, and it was very much the condition of international negotiators and the South African side (as bizarre as this might sound in light of the denial of political rights within South Africa at that time) before agreeing on the implementation of Resolution 435 and the organization of elections.

From a comparative perspective, Namibia certainly represents an exceptional case with its history of decolonization (probably partly comparable with Timor-Leste) and its “early timing.” The ending of violent conflict in Angola and Namibia and the implementation of Resolution 435 became a reality only in a changed international context, which was marked by two important and closely-linked developments: *Perestroika* in the Soviet Union and the erosion of the Apartheid system in South Africa. *Perestroika* allowed the Soviet Union, Cuba, and the United States to accept a peace agreement for Angola and Namibia, and the combined pressure from external sanctions and growing internal resistance had softened the Apartheid regime to a point where the “loss” of Namibia became acceptable.

In comparison to the external intervention cases of the 1990s, Namibia “benefited” from a Cold War conflict with coherent and ideological conflict parties who were forced to give up some of their ideological baggage in the light of *Perestroika*. Only in this context was it possible to successfully pursue a Chapter VI operation. “International timing” thus mattered, but there is no doubt that Namibia’s way to independence might have become even smoother after 1994, when South Africa had an African National Congress (ANC)-run government.

Different contexts will make it quite difficult in other conflicts to adopt Chapter VI mandates or to have UN missions with fifteen years of preparation time. A military conflict without much fighting inside the national territory and a limited number of victims (at least with regard to the total length of the conflict) made a peaceful transition phase possible. ODA came quickly and without political strings. Short of direct international administration, donors have difficulties in controlling the enforcement of democratic institutions. ODA, and especially so intergovernmental bilateral- or even multilateral-aid transfers, are strongly formalized and tied to contracts and to bureaucratic, political, and economic interests in donor countries. All of this severely constrains ODA’s use as an instrument of leverage.

External intervention was crucial in creating a level playing ground for the first free and fair elections, organized by the outgoing South African administration. But the quality of Namibian democracy, in the end, is less the outcome of intentional international intervention or a favorable international systemic context, than a reflection of some broader domestic structural features; this includes South African heritage of rule of law and competitive democracy (even in its biased form), and the “natural” dominance of the ruling party, SWAPO, which allowed it to accept the democratic principle of majority rule.