

2003**Vladimir Kazimirov, 'My MGIMO [Moscow State
Institute of International Relations]' (excerpts)****Citation:**

"Vladimir Kazimirov, 'My MGIMO [Moscow State Institute of International Relations]' (excerpts)", 2003, Wilson Center Digital Archive, A. V. Torkunov, ed., "Old House in the Moscow River: Our MIGIMO (1948-1953)" (Moscow: Moscow State Institute of International Relations (University), 2003). Available online at <http://www.vn.kazimirov.ru/d002.htm>. Translated from Russian and included in "Southern Africa in the Cold War, Post-1974," edited by Sue Onslow and Anna-Mart Van Wyk. <https://digitalarchive.umd.edu/document/118174>

Summary:

Russian diplomat Vladimir Kazimirov recalls events surrounding and following the establishment of peace in Angola in 1988 and the lead up to establishment of diplomatic relations between Russia and the Republic of South Africa.

Credits:

This document was made possible with support from Leon Levy Foundation

Original Language:

Russian

Contents:

Translation - English

In the first days of October 1987, a week after the arrival of new ambassador to Angola the government troops suffered a defeat at the Lomba River from the UNITA rebels, actively supported by the South African armed forces. President Reagan extolled "the heroes of Lomba". The acquaintance with war-torn Angola and its President Eduardo dos Santos took place against a background of this defeat. Gradually encounters with him it became regular (almost twice per month), thorough, they found trust. In one of them arose the possibility to probe the attitude of the President toward the peaceful decision of the long-standing armed conflict with UNITA. Scale and bitterness of military actions made up intransigence toward UNITA in the government of Angola. I had an impression that even inside the Politbureau Dos Santos could not then discuss the idea of negotiations with UNITA. I wrote to Moscow, that the President was ready to examine the peaceful way of settling the conflict as well, but no instructions came to continue conversations with Dos Santos in this direction.

Later Shevardnadze met me in a dual way, supporting a general direction of these encounters, he criticised me for my actions without permission from the Centre [Moscow]. In a sly way. He instructed me to draft his paper to M.S. Gorbachev, where the theme of peace negotiations would be wholly put in the mouth of Dos Santos. Thus our work in favour of a peaceful settlement of the conflict in Angola was "legalized". It facilitated first the New York agreements between Angola, RSA and Cuba (December 1988) and then the signing of a peace accord near Lisbon in June 1991, when Dos Santos and Savimbi shook hands for the first time.

After the meeting [in December 1990] between Shevardnadze and Savimbi vacillations nearly appeared in Moscow—whom to orient ourselves to? Our embassy defended orientation towards dos Santos in defiance of the fashion of those days and to spite various "democrats". Shevardnadze's assistants and even our press began showering praise on Savimbi, pointing to his intellect, sense of humour, etc. It reminded how Americans praised him to me, underlining in our discussions that he was quoting Rousseau in French, Mao Zedong in Chinese, etc. However the champions of democracy could not but see that, in addition to Savimbi's cult, witchcraft, corporal punishments and other "democratic" pearls of the Middle Ages were flourishing in UNITA.

The end of Jonas Savimbi is well-known now, but somehow we do not hear from the other side of the ocean repentances towards the people of Angola that for a quarter of a century had been bearing the full brunt of a destructive war due to fanaticism of the UNITA leader, for so long obliged by the USA and on their advice by other governments.

The war and other Angolan matters required meetings with Jorge Risquet and Carlos Aldana, members of the Cuban leadership who visited Luanda, with General Ochoa, the commander of the Cuban troops in Angola, who was later sentenced and shot in Havana. Cubans sometimes lamented Dos Santos, they considered him irresolute. I replied to them that for a ruined country, Angola a leader who takes a measure seven times before cutting is better. As in the years of a protracted war, Jose Eduardo Dos Santos, a rare political veteran and once a student in Baku, remains at the helm of the country almost unnoticeably for an outside world.

Working in Angola and then heading the Department of African Countries of the USSR MFA I took part in establishing contacts and later diplomatic with then still racist South Africa. The first South African official, whom I met at the talks in Luanda, was Niel Barnard, head of intelligence. In summer 1991 he was secretly in Moscow as a guest of KGB and requested to invite his first Soviet interlocutor for a launch.

A colourful figure was the then South African Foreign Minister Roelof (Pik) Botha. Meetings with him sometimes were rather harsh. Initially at the talks in Johannesburg

and Vienna it was agreed to exchange the missions of interests attached to the embassies of Austria in Pretoria and Moscow. Then, having organised a dinner for us in Pretoria, Botha used blackmail: he accused us in "cowardice" and said that he will not go for a halved decision, only for the establishment of full diplomatic relations. By the end of the dinner I pretended that I had already informed Moscow about his position (albeit, we have no mobile phones then). The roles were changed, and Botha had not just to agree, but to strive for the exchange of missions. All this was made official in Vienna with the participation of Kleistel, General Secretary of the Foreign Ministry and future President of Austria.

Botha was rather extravagant later as well. He managed to impose his personal visit to Moscow, moreover precisely on 7 November 1991. (We have to agree to it, because the mayors of Petersburg and Moscow Sobchak and Popov to spite of the Centre agreed to meet him in that day. Talks with him were conducted by Pankin, a short-lived USSR Foreign Minister.)

In February 1992, I was present at the officialisation of the diplomatic relations between Russia and the RSA by [Foreign Minister] A. Kozyrev and R. Botha. In the transitional period Pik Botha was Minister of Mines, and some years ago even jointed the ANC.