

SWAPO Ready to Continue the Struggle

South Africa is seeking a way out of allowing free, UN supervised elections in Namibia. Recognizing this, SWAPO is preparing for a protracted people's war of liberation.

Hidipo Hamutenya has been a militant with SWAPO since 1961. Now at the age of 39, he sits on SWAPO's central committee and executive. He lives in Lusaka, Zambia and teaches history and politics to SWAPO cadres at the Institute for Namibia.

Hamutenya was a member of SWAPO's delegation to the most recent round of "proximity" talks on Namibia in March. While in New York, he spoke with Southern Africa about current developments inside Namibia and the prospects for the future as SWAPO sees them.

Recent months have seen considerable reporting on the Namibian diplomatic process, but there has been little or no news about the war there. What's happening on the ground inside Namibia?

There has in fact been an intensification of guerrilla activities. The South African government itself has of late adopted the tactic of not reporting what has actually happened, except when it happens on such a large scale that it is impossible to cover it up. They only report when they feel obliged to justify some of their own activities, such as going into Angola or Zambia, ostensibly to strike at SWAPO bases.

But in general the intensity of guerrilla activity has been pretty high in recent months.

What types of activities has SWAPO been engaging in? Are there attacks on South African outposts, or are there actions in the cities as well?

There are both. There has been an ongoing penetration by our units into the country, and they have been engaging South African troops in their own camps and on patrol duty. There has also been contact with the people and underground work at an organizational level which has reached far into the towns.

The South Africans have been admitting that a lot of sabotage—blowing up bridges and railways—has been going on in the

Windhoek and Swakopmund areas, some 500 miles away from the border with Angola. This gives proof that guerrillas are deep inside the country and gives the lie to the nonsense that SWAPO only has bases in Zambia and Angola. The truth of the matter is that there are many units active deep inside the country.

The South Africans recently announced that they found a depot of arms, explosives, and weapons in three different farms in the Keetmanshoop vicinity, some 100 miles south of the Angolan border.

The South Africans say that their defense forces have been keeping a low profile in Namibia in recent months, and they have blamed all the violence on SWAPO. Have they been keeping a low profile?

Of course, they don't keep a low profile. They are constantly looking for SWAPO. They are terrorizing the local population. They are engaged in border patrols. They are torturing people, trying to find out the whereabouts of SWAPO guerrillas. They are very busy.

Many more troops have, in fact, been brought in recently. It seems that the South Africans had decided that in case there was a chance to implement the UN plan or to come to a ceasefire agreement, they wanted to have the upper hand on the eve of the signing of the agreement. So they have been pouring in troops and tanks throughout Namibia, and in particular in the northern parts.

How many troops do the South Africans have there now?

Previously, the estimate was 50,000. Now the number is closer to 65,000, an increase of more than 10,000 men in uniform.

How can this be reconciled with the terms of the UN plan which calls for a withdrawal of South African troops?

There is a contradiction here. The South Africans are worried, and wrongly so, that SWAPO will throw thousands of armed

men into the country, and they are trying to prevent that from happening.

This is wrong because our people are already inside the country. It's a waste of time and effort for them to pretend that it is now that they can block off the penetration of our forces into Namibia.

We are saying: let the ceasefire be announced and the world will know. We will be able to call our units to regroup inside Namibia at the time of the ceasefire. They will be able to see with their own eyes that our forces are there inside the country.

What effect has this long period of negotiations—a year to agree to a plan and now almost a year to implement it—had on SWAPO's struggle inside Namibia?

At a political level, many of our cadres have been arrested and detained to neutralize and weaken SWAPO just in case an election comes. But as they arrested our cadres who are organizing more or less publicly, there were many more underground activities going on, organized mainly by PLAN, SWAPO's Peoples Liberation Army of Namibia.

If the South Africans finally decide to go against the UN plan, we know they will round up all our people who are publicly active. So we have organized alternate lines of mobilization through our underground network.

We are pretty certain that whatever they do—even if the plan fails—we will be able to function in our underground organization.

If the UN plan succeeds SWAPO will have to surface a complete political organization inside Namibia to participate in the elections. Is SWAPO's political structure in good shape? Can it mount an effective campaign?

We are absolutely certain of that. We believe that we not only have the organizational structure but also the relevant political platform to win the election. We

think that we are the only organization which will not be ashamed to admit that we intend to seize the resources of Namibia and put those resources at the service of the working people of Namibia.

We will not compromise on that. We have not made any deal with the ruling system. We think the people of Namibia will see who is talking in their interest. Medical, housing, whatever problems must be solved immediately—we feel we are the only organization which has a clear program.

The past year has seen many confusing events in Namibia—constant negotiations, the December internal elections, the formation of other political groups. What's been the reaction of the ordinary Namibian?

Ordinary Namibians know one thing: they have lived under South African rule. They understand or at least feel the anomaly of being dominated by South Africa. And they also understand the position of the groups sponsored, organized and maintained by South Africa. They are clear on that.

We think that once the doors are wide open for us to state clearly and categorically our position and tell the Namibian people what we are prepared to do for them to gain control over the economic life of our society—in terms of dispossessing the forces of the multinational corporations controlling the economic life of our society, in terms of improving the educational, medical, cultural facilities of our society—we are very confident that the people will choose us over anybody else.

What happens if South Africa doesn't accept the UN plan and proceeds with its own internal settlement?

We believe that is what will happen. We agreed to come to these talks fully aware that South Africa is not prepared to see a SWAPO government in Windhoek. The implementation of the plan—the way it is now—will definitely mean a victory for SWAPO.

So South Africa will find a way out, a way to wreck any chances of implementing the plan.

That being the prospect, we have never relented in our preparations for a protracted people's war of liberation. We are doing everything—training is going on, recruiting. We will continue the struggle.

We are confident that we have a reliable rear base upon which we can always count in Angola and Zambia. We also see our struggle not just as an isolated incident. We see it as an integral part of the overall struggle in southern Africa.

Some people would like us to believe that it's an impossible task to try to confront South Africa, but our answer is that just as much as Guinea-Bissau could play its part

in the destruction of the Portuguese fascist system, we are doing just that job. We are not alone. We are allied with the people of South Africa and Zimbabwe, and we are confident that on all these fronts, the ruling group in South Africa will be confronted. We are only doing our part, and we are very certain that when pressure is on, South Africa will have no choice but to abandon at least one of the fronts, and that will be Namibia. We will make it extremely costly for them to maintain Namibia.

The puppets cannot last for South Africa. Their installation will make no difference. We will be fighting the same South Africa we are fighting now. The puppets will be in Windhoek, but they will not be able to carry on the war on their own. And we are also certain of continued and increased material assistance from socialist countries and progressive African countries.

What do you think the West will do if, as you expect, South Africa doesn't go along with the plan?

We know one thing. The Western countries will not impose economic sanctions on South Africa. That is very clear. They are not in a position to cut their own throats. The multinational monopolies will never allow the governments in Washington, London, Paris, Ottawa, and Bonn ever to carry out economic sanctions against South Africa. In a recent interview with Botha by a journalist in one of the London dailies, Botha states clearly that he knows that sanctions will not only hurt South Africa, but other countries as well—referring of course to the West.

Now, the West will find an excuse. They are trying to blackmail us with all sorts of ridiculous demands, one of which is that SWAPO must not be allowed to have bases in neighboring countries which are not monitored by UNTAG. The other is that SWAPO should not be allowed to have bases inside Namibia. These are things they have agreed to during the talks.

We have made our position clear that our forces will be monitored, confined, and controlled in bases within Namibia. Now they are pretending that it wasn't clear during the talks. But it was clear.

They are trying to find an excuse so that they can justify their failure to get the cooperation of South Africa. They now have the option either to let South Africa confront the situation alone or to choose to pump money, agents, weapons, into the puppet regime that South Africa is going to set up in order to be able to fight "communist infiltrators from Angola."

They have tried that in Vietnam and in many other parts of the world, and they failed. The tide of history is on the side of what's right, and what is right is that South Africa and its neo-colonial plans in Namibia must be defeated.

