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SOVIET DRAFT DECLARATION OF 1960 IN THE UNITED NATIONS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR SOUTHERN AFRICA

Abstract

The United Nations Organisation fulfils an instrumental role in addressing injustices, conflict and humanitarian problems. After the Second World War the demand of African states for independence from colonial rule became inevitable as they strove to bring about a more free and humane world. By the 1960s, the Soviet Union, as principle member state of the United Nations, proposed a draft declaration that called for the total eradication of colonialism in all its forms. In terms of global political relevance, it was to be of critical importance as it stimulated intense discussion against colonialism. Although the declaration of the Afro-Asian group would be formally approved as the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Territories and Peoples, the initiating role of the Soviet delegation could not be underestimated. The implications of the draft declaration proved wide-ranging, as it led to an intensification of political pressure and economic sanctions against the remaining colonial states in Southern Africa, the minority rule in apartheid South Africa in particular. The author seeks to reassess the original Russian political documents of the Soviet draft declaration that formed the foundation for the eradication of colonialism since the mid-20th century.

Keywords: Soviet draft declaration; United Nations; colonialism; NS Khrushchev; Soviet foreign policy; K Nkrumah; Afro-Asian Bloc; Southern Africa; apartheid South Africa.

Sleutelwoorde: Sowjet-konsepverklaring; Verenigde Nasies; kolonialisme; NS Chroesjtjof; Sowjet buitelandse beleid; K Nkrumah; Afro-Asiatiese Blok; Suidelike Afrika; apartheid Suid-Afrika.

1. INTRODUCTION

The United Nations Organisation provides a forum for member states to not only discuss issues concerning the prevention of war, but also to seek fundamental solutions to dire ethical and humanitarian problems.¹ Without the necessary urgency to address matters of serious political concern, the majority of member states would remain indecisive, even ignorant, in confronting politically unjust issues or systems. As a regulatory principle in the United Nations, it remains a prerequisite to obtain a majority vote from member states to ensure a unified appeal to press for a resolution against a problematic political issue. One such attempt by a principle member state to confront a major problematic issue persistently and with much determinism was the appeal for the eradication of colonialism. This would also apply to states blameworthy of oppression or racial subjugation in African and Asian countries in the second half of the twentieth century.

Given the immediate circumstances and disruptiveness after the Second World War, two bodies within the United Nations, the Trusteeship Council and the Committee on Information, favoured the continuation of the *status quo* maintained by the colonial powers.² There existed an almost equally balanced composition of non-colonial and colonial countries in the United Nations, thus preventing or ensuring a deadlock situation to maintain the domination of colonial powers over their overseas colonial possessions. Critics made the assumption that this was merely a “manoeuvre” or “illusory” granting of independence by the colonial powers, as the Russian historian, Irina Filatova, emphasised, to “perpetuate their colonial status or at least keeping them within the sphere of the former colonial power”.³ Arguably, the continuation of this status, with the tapping of mineral and natural resources of its former colonial assets would persist, later also in the form of neo-colonialism, irrespective of the formal departure of the colonial power.

Globally, the face of colonialism was to change dramatically after the 1950s when the colonies of France, Spain and the United Kingdom gradually succeeded in proclaiming their independence. This gave impetus to countries still under

1 The author wishes to especially acknowledge the assistance of Anna Khitrina for research conducted at the Russian State History Library, Moscow, Russian Federation, as well as Dr Elina Komarova-Tagar of Constantia, Cape Town, for her assistance in translating and interpreting the original Russian political documents.

2 AG Mezerik, *Colonialism and the United Nations*. Decolonization Declaration. Committee of 24. Neo-Colonialism. Border Questions. Africa's Colonial Heartland (International Review Service. X (83), p. 4.

3 I Filatova and A Davidson, *The hidden thread. Russia and South Africa in the Soviet Era* (Jonathan Ball: Johannesburg & Cape Town, 2013), p. 219.

colonial rule, especially national liberation movements on the African continent, to strive for decolonisation.

In a determined effort, it was the Soviet Union that took the first initiative of comprehensively addressing the exploitive and intolerable system of colonialism. Contrary to the perception that it was international pressure from liberals in the English-speaking world and the United States of America that pleaded most for the removal of colonialism, it was in fact the Russian delegation and its groundwork at the United Nations that paved the way for the total demise of colonialism. Hence, it is the purpose of this article to reassess and interpret the Soviet draft declaration presented at the General Assembly of the United Nations in 1960 and its consequences for Southern Africa.

2. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

2.1 Instilling the objectives of the October Revolution

In the aftermath of the Second World War, the Soviet Union emerged as a superpower set to propagate the ideology of Marxism-Leninism and the communist system. This ideology permeated all aspects of Soviet politics. After the death of the Soviet dictator, Joseph Stalin, in March 1953, the prestige of the Soviets rose remarkably, with the Sputnik satellite winning the opening round of the space race, and claims of Soviet strategic capability. The American historian, Mary McAuley, stated that, “the USSR was presenting itself as a superior development model for the underdeveloped world”.⁴ As the American-Soviet rivalry escalated during the Cold War, the newly declared independent states on the African continent deemed favourable opportunities for incorporating those countries into the socialist bloc, or at least drawing their allegiance to the side of the Soviets.

Following in the policy principles as stipulated by the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, the objectives of its founder, Vladimir Lenin, were to be applied worldwide. After the triumphant October Revolution in 1917 Lenin stated, “the revolution in Russia marked the beginning of an epoch of socialist and national liberation revolutions”, and predicted that the, “exploited classes and oppressed peoples will follow the example of this revolution and use it as the basis of their further social progress”.⁵ In the post-war period, the nations of the Third World looked upon the socialist system with optimism, and although African national liberation or anti-colonialist factions were not essentially communist,

4 M McAuley, *Politics and the Soviet Union* (Penguin: Harmondsworth, 1977), p. 153.

5 *The October Revolution and Africa* (Progress Publishers: Moscow, 1980), pp. 6-7.

they reflected a sense of African nationalism. The Soviet appeal for equality, non-racialism and freedom from exploitation under capitalism induced many independent states in Africa to experiment with the imposition of the communist model. Those African and Asian countries could tentatively be assured of political, lucrative trade relations, and in some cases military aid, to strengthen the USSR's position in the Third World.⁶ It would also have to serve as barrier against possible Western and United States mobilisation.

The succession of Nikita Sergievich Khrushchev to the Soviet leadership after 1953 spurred on a further propagation of the Marxist-Leninist ideology in the decolonised states. By 1955, with the tide of anti-colonialism turning against the colonial powers, the notion that these independent states could progress straight from capitalism to socialism, thereby bypassing the modes of production and capitalist state, seemed an obtainable reality. According to Khrushchev, regarded as the last of the Soviet expansionists, the emergence of the socialist bloc by means of violent upheavals was no longer a necessary stage of struggle for socialism because, "conditions could be created for radical political and economic transformation by peaceful means".⁷ For the Soviets, the transfer of political power from colonialist to African national liberation movements was to be an evolutionary, even required process.

2.2 Soviet foreign policy towards Southern Africa

In geopolitical terms, Southern Africa ranked rather low or secondary on the priority list of Soviet foreign policy. With the intensification of the Cold War, the Soviet Union attempted to forge favourable relations with the newly independent states in Africa, and to struggle to gain sovereign rights for the peoples still under colonial rule. Nonetheless, the remaining colonial powers of the United Kingdom and the Portuguese Empire seemed indifferent to the plea from the Soviets to voluntarily give up their colonial assets. Southern Rhodesia (today Zimbabwe) was regarded by the Soviets as the last citadel of British colonialism in Africa. Rhodesia was despised for its discriminatory laws, which allowed for the, "ruthless suppression and reprisal" of African resistance by its armed forces.⁸ However, as Rhodesia attained self-administration from Britain in 1923 and had thus already achieved a degree of autonomous governance, the United Nations considered it unnecessary to grant them independence. The Soviets rejected this presumed false assertion and continued with proposals that white English colonialists withdraw from Rhodesia. While Rhodesia was believed to be a

6 Filatova and Davidson, p. 72.

7 *Ibid.*, p. 220.

8 A Krashennikov, *The remnants of colonialism must be destroyed (Soviet Contribution in the United Nations to the Abolition of Colonialism)* (Novosti Press Agency Publishing House), p. 20.

shield defending the Union of South Africa on their southern border, the Soviets' involvement in their far distant political issue was becoming increasingly fierce and acrimonious.

In the Union of South Africa with its segregationist political dispensation and Christian Calvinist religion, the very idea of communism was tarnished and its possible spreading to Southern Africa perceived as a dangerous encroachment on personal freedom. This was ironic, as there existed an almost brotherly relationship between predominantly Afrikaners and Russians who collaborated during the South African War of 1899 to 1902, as well as the sending of donations of blood to aid the Russians during the Second World War. The October Revolution could then be considered a watershed event, as thereafter relations worsened to the extent that the Soviet Union was seen as, "enemy number one".⁹

After the victory in the elections of 1948, the National Party, mostly comprising Afrikaner politicians, almost all political ties with the Soviet Union were cut. The Suppression of Communism Act was promulgated, thereby forbidding any communist conspiracy in South Africa.¹⁰ The so-called "Red peril" was propagated feverishly in political quarters and the Dutch Reformed clergy in particular. It was to be a clash of incompatible differences between Afrikaner nationalism and its affiliation to the Western nations and Russian communism, fuelled by inflammatory propaganda.

The relations between the USSR and the South African Communist Party (SACP), established in 1921, provided a foothold or leverage for the Soviets to advise the black working class majority in South Africa. A classless society based on equality and non-racialism was to be promoted amongst all ethnicities in Southern African states. According to Philip Nel of the former Unit of Soviet Studies at Stellenbosch University, it was argued that "not only black majority interests were to be supported, but also those of the white ruling class minority. Despite racial animosity, the communists made the final resolution that would give assurance to the white minority that they would be given full and equal rights in an "independent native republic".¹¹ For that matter, Nel pointed to the Soviet's consideration of South Africa as a geographic unit in which a white minority nation was exploiting a black majority, with disproportionate privileges to the minority. This invariably created the impression that South Africa represented, "a colonial situation of a special type" in Soviet foreign policy.¹²

9 A Gromyko and J Kane-Berman, *The Moscow Papers. The USSR and South Africa similarities, problems and opportunities* (South African Institute of Race Relations: Johannesburg, 1991), p. 10.

10 Filatova and Davidson, p. 194.

11 GW Breslauer, *Soviet policy in Africa. From the old to the new thinking* (University of California at Berkeley: Berkeley, 1992), p. 148.

12 Breslauer, p. 148.

What made the Soviets perceive South Africa as even more colonialist, was their incorporation of South West Africa (today Namibia) as a mandated territory under South African jurisdiction. This instilled the notion that South Africa extended not merely its racial policy of segregation of races, but also a quasi-form of colonialism to safeguard its northwestern border. In addition, the Soviets viewed the South African control over the natural resources, including Western overseas monopolies, of South West Africa as tenacious capitalist exploitation of the black population.¹³

Within the framework of Soviet foreign policy, Southern Africa, with the Union of South Africa being the undisputed economic powerhouse, was moulded in a negative sense. South Africa's relations with the United States furthermore led the Soviets to believe that South Africa was a stooge of the United States as, "the latter is trying to get control over South Africa with huge resources of very important strategic raw materials... and that as a result American imperialists are assigned by the policy of the reactionary government of the Union of South Africa".¹⁴ Soviet policy was therefore aimed at isolating and weakening the apartheid regime, with support for the African National Congress (ANC), South African Communist Party (SACP), South West African People's Organization (SWAPO) and other national liberation movements, but with the clear understanding that a full-scale military conflict with the United States over South Africa be avoided at all costs.

The bitterness in relations would worsen because of the increasing discrimination against non-whites and Indians in South Africa, and were heightened by the Sharpeville massacre of 21 March 1960, which provoked international condemnation for its suppression of black resistance. Together with Rhodesia and South Africa's political complexities over apartheid, the General Assembly of the United Nations referred these issues to the Security Council. This would lead to the setting up of a permanent Special Committee on Apartheid, "to keep the racial policies of the Government of South Africa under review".¹⁵

2.3 The United Nations and Soviet ambitions

For the Soviet Union, the United Nations offered an opportunity to express its views on world peace, prevention of war and participation in long-standing debates against racialism. With the Cold War, tensions rising as a result of the "Iron Curtain" and the construction of the Berlin Wall, dividing Europe, as well as the downing of the American U2 spy plane over the USSR, the Soviets had,

13 Krashennnikov, pp. 25-26.

14 Filatova and Davidson, p. 229.

15 KM Campbell, *Soviet policy towards South Africa* (MacMillan: London, 1986), p. 78.

until the 1960s, a largely defensive strategy in the United Nations so as to ensure “peaceful coexistence” with the West.¹⁶

The anti-imperialist wars and decolonisation in Africa and Asia had the effect that by 1960, 17 new member states from former colonial territories had been admitted to the United Nations, marking a turning point in the history of the United Nations Organisation. The Soviet delegation to the United Nations reckoned that the increase in member states would either mean a reinforcement of the existing order, or would at the worst case scenario be “a potential violation of Soviet security”.¹⁷ To their advantage, the majority of these states would be salient to the strategic political ambitions of the Soviet Union, and as such the Soviets made a shift in their attitude towards these member states.

The dissolution of the French Empire in Africa, that constituted 13 territories, enlarged the size of the new “African Bloc” substantially. According to GA Mezerik the United Nations membership of the Afro-Asian Bloc comprised 44 out of 99 member states by 1960.¹⁸ Consequently, the previous relatively minimal influence of countries on anti-colonialism was to change overnight due to its increased member states, which meant that the anti-colonialist vote would gain an absolute majority. A two-thirds majority vote would guarantee an overwhelming victory, ultimately tipping the scales against colonialism.

Soviet political ambitions were to be steered and re-orientated in order to attain the favour of these new member states. The Soviets were to vote in support of the “African Bloc” on issues relating to colonialism, as well as speaking out “frequently against apartheid”. KM Campbell mentioned that with the emerging anti-colonial sentiment, “the USSR was to find itself more frequently than not with the winning coalition on anti-colonial legislation”.¹⁹ In accordance with the Soviet standpoint, the pro-Russian and propagandist message appealed to the new member states in the United Nations because, “the Soviet Government resolutely supports the anti-imperialist struggle of Panama and Cyprus and exposes the intrigues of the colonists on the continent of Africa and Indochina... and that peoples fighting for liberation can always count on Soviet support”.²⁰ Thus, with the added benefaction, the USSR’s position within the United Nations was strengthened and allowed it to undertake more ambitious initiatives.

16 J Isaacs and T Downing, *Cold War. For 45 years the world held its breath* (Bantam Press: London and New York, 1998), pp. 154-155.

17 Campbell, pp. 72-73.

18 Mezerik, p. 6.

19 Campbell, p. 74.

20 Krashennnikov, p. 9.

3. THE SOVIET DRAFT DECLARATION: PRESENTED BY KHRUSHCHEV TO THE UNITED NATIONS AND HIS CORRESPONDENCE WITH NKRUMAH

With the events of 1960 and the proclamations of independence by many former colonial states, that year became known as “Africa Year”. This paved the way for the Soviets to initiate the first formal memorandum, with the supposition that it become a Declaration. Though what prompted the Soviet Union to intervene in Africa was the immediate cause of the Congolese crisis. After their declaration of independence from Belgium colonial rule in June 1960, the Prime Minister, Patrice Lumumba, asked for Soviet assistance to prevent a secessionist faction from beleaguering the capital of Leopoldville (today Kinshasa).²¹ In the ensuing crisis the Soviets blamed the Secretary General of the United Nations, Dag Hammarskjold, for refusing to support the central government in the Congo and demanded his resignation.²² Nonetheless, Soviet support would result in a stalemate in the civil war circumstances that would continue until 1964, when a UN peacekeeping force was employed to maintain order.

Against the background of the Congolese crisis the chairman of the Council of Ministers of the USSR, Nikita Khrushchev, prepared and presented a detailed memorandum to the General Assembly of the fifteenth session. The measures and stipulations therein were to be delivered by Khrushchev with boldness and seriousness before all the member states on 23 September 1960.²³ In the official Russian political documents on Soviet-African relations, these stipulations, as contained in the proposed draft memorandum, were to be regarded as “*cekretno*”, or qualified. It was in the formal political correspondence between Khrushchev and President Kwame Nkrumah of the independent Republic of Ghana in which the fundamental points raised at the General Assembly were elaborated extensively.²⁴ Evidently, these points were to be straightforward and well-coordinated.

21 Campbell, p. 83.

22 S Hamrell and CG Widstrand, *The Soviet Bloc, China and Africa* (Pall Mall Press: London, 1964), p. 89.

23 Т. 16-20 1970: Документы внешней политики СССР. Б.м.:Б.и. 1970. Роль СССР в принятии оон декларации о предоставлении независимости колониальным странам и народам. № 106. Министрoинoстранныхдел.А.А. Громыко – ЦККПСС. (Translation: Foreign Political Documents of the USSR. No place: Publisher unknown, 1970. Roll of the USSR declaration to the United Nations on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Territories and Peoples, No. 106. Minister of Foreign Affairs AA Gromyko, Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union.)

24 Т. 16-20 1970: Документы внешней политики СССР. № 107. Председатель Совета Министров СССР Н.С. Хрущев – Президенту Республики Гана Кваме Нкруме. Послание о проекте Декларации о предоставлении независимости колониальным

In his correspondence Khrushchev commenced by stating that, “it was absolutely imperative that the present and future progress of nations cannot take place without the stumbling block of colonialism”.²⁵ His first statement was that “all colonial countries, as well as Trust and non-self-governing territories must be granted forthwith complete independence and freedom to build their own nation state in accordance with the freely exposed will and desire of their peoples”.²⁶ Khrushchev expressed the opinion in his preamble, almost 4500 words in length, that the development of infrastructure in colonial countries was a mere smokescreen to uphold or exploit, “the indigenous population and plundering the natural wealth of those countries, as well as providing grounds for atomic tests”.

Without the removal of colonial administration and monopoly over their territories, Khrushchev argued that the colonial-oppressed would have no opportunity to determine their own destiny. Secondly, it was stated that, “all strongholds and forms of colonial possessions and leased territories, under which SWA resorted, must be eliminated”. Thirdly, it was emphasised that the governments of all countries needed to be steadfast and strictly urge the United Nations to make the Declaration concerning the equality and to allow, “no manifestation of colonialism or any special rights or advantage for some states to the detriment of other States”.²⁷ The debating points, as presented in the USSR’s draft declaration number A/4501, were described to Nkrumah as an urgent matter that, “those countries still exploiting colonial peoples are making themselves guilty of robbing their natural resources”, therefore typifying their skilful maintenance of the oppression of colonial people.²⁸

Khrushchev also pointed sharply to the preventative measures taken by colonial powers to defend their colonial interests for fear of possible economic recessions. According to Khrushchev, colonial powers were deterring the proposed recommendations by maintaining their more platonic relations with the colonial people, and that as an example, the Portuguese claimed that the extent of their colonial harshness was, “nowadays drifting to the past or taking on new forms in the colonial state”.²⁹ Khrushchev riposted that any emollient attempts

странам; внесенном СССР на обсуждение Генеральной Ассамблеи ООН; 12 ноября 1960 г. (Translation: Foreign Political Documents of the USSR, No. 107. Chairman of the USSR NS Khrushchev – President of the Republic of Ghana, Kwame Nkrumah. Message on the project of the declaration of the eradication of colonialist states; the USSR’s entry into discussion in the General Assembly of the United Nations, 12 November 1960).

25 *Ibid.*

26 *Ibid.*

27 *Ibid.*

28 *Ibid.*

29 Т. 16-20 1970: Документы внешней политики СССР. № 107. Председатель Совета Министров СССР НС Хрущев – Президенту Республики Гана Кваме Нкруме. Послание о проекте Декларации о предоставлении независимости колониальным странам; внесенном СССР на обсуждение Генеральной Ассамблеи ООН; 12 ноября 1960 г.

by colonial powers to alleviate the terms of the draft memorandum, or to obfuscate it so as to benefit or play into the hands of colonialists, would be futile.

Strictly speaking, it could be contended that the USSR's perceptions neglected to take into consideration the levels of socio-economic development in colonial territories and the capability of liberation movements to immediately take over and manage their newly-attained political power productively. Arguably, many colonial states required adequate time, or at least a transition period, that would enable the indigenous people to transfer politico-economic power peacefully. It would also prevent the possibility of inter-ethnic conflict between various tribal groups, such as the reciprocal atrocities committed by the Hutus and Tutsis in Rwanda, after the colonial power had departed. In this regard, the Soviet delegation miscalculated the practicalities for the transfer of power as a consequence of their perceptions of liberation and freedom pertaining to class, rather than a distinctive societal community or ethnic group.

Continuing in his correspondence with Nkrumah, Khrushchev made the statement that, "I think we must take a decisive stand against the deceitfulness/slyness of colonialism and promote an inner struggle on the spiritual level for all freedom-loving peoples, which would be our highest duty".³⁰ He advised that anti-colonialist and national liberation movements must complement each other and seek righteousness as a unified force. However, he warned that the, "shameful colonial rulers might even start wars, or make attempts to jeopardise the authority of the United Nations" and disrupt the proposed draft memorandum.³¹

In his concluding correspondence to Nkrumah, the hand of brotherhood was reached out to support the liberation struggle of which the countries in Asia, Africa, Latin America and Oceania would unify for the ultimate liquidation and removal of colonialism. But in his short response, Nkrumah expressed his sincere gratitude to the Soviet leader in attempting to break the shackles of colonialism for countries still, "languishing under the yolk of foreign domination".³² A sense of disinclination on the part of the African leader was evinced, as he mentioned that there might be false underlying intentions in the Soviet's draft declaration. The reluctance of Nkrumah and other Afro-Asian states became evident when the Afro-Asian Bloc introduced their own, rather different in political orientation, draft declaration on the very same opening day of debate on the issue of

30 *Ibid.*

31 *Ibid.*

32 Т. 16-20 1970: Документы внешней политики СССР. № 107. Председатель Совета Министров СССР НС Хрущев – Президенту Республики Гана Кваме Нкруме. Послание о проекте Декларации о предоставлении независимости колониальным странам; внесенном СССР на обсуждение Генеральной Ассамблеи ООН; 12 ноября 1960 г.

colonialism in the General Assembly.³³ Their dissatisfaction with the Soviet draft declaration was not so much as a result of their rejection of the USSR's assertions, but to avoid possible participation in the Cold War by siding with the Soviets.

Moreover, the Afro-Asian Bloc, which was renowned for its close cooperation with the communist bloc, publicly rebuked the Soviet's draft memorandum. President Sekou Toure of Guinea appealed, "directly to the communist group not to use the issue of ending colonialism for propaganda because the issue was much too important to the Asian-Africans".³⁴ As the draft declaration of the Soviets contained no specific reference to foreign monopolies, military bases or special rights and no identification of any state as a colonial power, the USSR's draft was perceived as "anti-imperialist", not "anti-colonialist".³⁵ The United Kingdom expressed concern that the Soviet draft declaration seemed to, "generate hatred rather than friendship, violence rather than peace", and that the structures of co-operation built up over the years should not be disrupted by, "unconstructive and irresponsible assaults".³⁶

In addition to the anti-Soviet stance, countries from the non-aligned world were not convinced of the Soviet draft declaration. Representatives from Tunisia were of the opinion that the colonialist question must not evolve into an ideological struggle, "within the framework of the one in which East and West vie against each other". Herein the Pan-African notion of promoting, "Africa for the Africans" and their right to self-determination came to the fore. The fundamental idea that Pan-Africanism was a call upon Africans to become self-reliant was reiterated, and led to the belief that they could, "make it on their own" without being affiliated to either the West or Eastern Bloc. Timothy Murithi emphasised this ideological proclivity of African leaders to switch between the Soviet Union and the United States to strengthen their own regimes. The bottom line was that Africans were recognising the value of their own interests, which were, according to Murithi's description, "worth defending and which are non-negotiable".³⁷

33 T. 16-20 1970: Документы внешней политики СССР. № 107. Председатель Совета Министров СССР НС Хрущев – Президенту Республики Гана Кваме Нкруме. Ответном письме 15 ноября 1960 г. К. Нкрума. (Translation: Foreign Political Documents of the USSR, No. 107. Chairman of the USSR NS Khrushchev – President of the Republic of Ghana, Kwame Nkrumah. Response letter from K Nkrumah, 15 November 1960).

34 Mezerik, p. 8.

35 *Ibid.*, p. 9.

36 *Yearbook of the United Nations. Special Edition. UN Fiftieth Anniversary 1945-1995, Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples*, pp. 187-188.

37 T Murithi, *The African Union. Pan-Africanism, peacebuilding and development* (Ashgate, 2005), p. 10.

4. A DECISIVE BLOW TO COLONIALISM

With the indifference shown to the Soviets, the Afro-Asian Bloc came to regard the Soviet's draft declaration as too radical, and felt that a softer or more considerate approach had to be explored. Whereas the Soviets' memorandum was overtly "anti-imperialist" with marked censure of the West, the Afro-Asian declaration was to be a concerted effort seeking only the independence of people without any reservations, allegiances or underpinnings of their political rights.

The draft resolution introduced in the United Nations by the Cambodian representatives was to persuade the majority of member states of their more careful and open-minded recommendations in their draft resolution. In highlighting the significant points raised, the essence of the resolution was proclaimed as follows: "all States shall observe faithfully and strictly the provisions of the Charter of the United Nations, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and this Declaration on the basis of equality, non-interference in the internal affairs of all states, and respect for the sovereign rights of all peoples and their territorial integrity".³⁸ Comparatively speaking, the Afro-Asian declaration was to be much more compassionate towards the future outcomes of countries after decolonisation.

As the Soviet draft declaration appeared too sweeping, the Soviet delegation attempted to reassert and strengthen their appeal by introducing two amendments. The Soviet diplomatic tactics in their second appeal to the United Nations were described in the official Russian document, number 108, as the, "decisive inquiry or strike against colonialism", or "*pravka ot dela*", which was drawn up by the Russian administrator N Fedorchenko.³⁹ The general sentiment expressed was that non-liberated and decolonised African states, as described in the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet in Moscow, could count on unconditional support from the Soviet government.

In Fedorchenko's outline for the required stipulations of the first amendment that was to be presented, four main points were addressed. "Firstly, that the liquidation of colonialism had to be immediate for all countries suffering under colonialism. Secondly, that the Afro-Asian resolutions would be

38 Mezerik, p. 10.

39 Т. 16-20 1970: Документы внешней политики СССР. № 108. Справка Отдела международных организаций МИД СССР. О тактике советской делегации при обсуждении Декларации о предоставлении независимости колониальным странам на 1-й части X сессии Генеральной Ассамблеи ООН в сентябре-декабре 1960 г; 20 февраля 1961 г. p.174 (Translation: Foreign Political Documents of the USSR, No. 108. Decisive inquiry to the international organisation of the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the USSR. On the tactics of the Soviet delegation for the discussion on the Declaration for the Granting of Independence to Colonial Territories and Countries to the first session of the Tenth United Nations General Assembly in September-December 1960; 20 February 1961, p. 174).

regarded as lesser or inferior to the Soviet declaration. Thirdly, that the Afro-Asian declaration would not be the primary declaration, as they would require a two-thirds majority vote. And fourthly, that the declaration offered by the Soviets would not bring about a collection of a two-third majority vote, but the possibility of conflict to eradicate or finally liquidate colonialism".⁴⁰ With these new stipulations it was hoped that the Afro-Asian Bloc would consider and vote on the inclusion of the amendment to the Soviet declaration and that the General Assembly would ensure the transfer of full sovereign power to the peoples of dependent territories.

What made the first amendment even more unacceptable or unrealistic in practice was that the Soviet draft declaration made suggestions for target dates, or deadlines for when colonial countries should attain independence. The target dates set for most countries were to be no later than 1961, which was wholly unrealistic, but with consideration of African states the date was extended to 1970 as more achievable for the gradual transfer of power. The Soviets' suggestion was that all military bases would be dismantled, and colonial trade agreements would be nullified by 1962.⁴¹ The target date issue was to be prolonged until well after the 1960s, as non-communists would take the initiative over setting the target dates.

The second amendment to the Soviet draft declaration concerned the implementation of the declaration at the Sixteenth Session of the United Nations in September 1961. The USSR called for the establishment of a "*troika*" commission consisting of a representation from the three main groups of states, namely the socialist, Western and neutral or non-aligned states – with the intention that the Soviets would invariably lead the socialist group.⁴² The issue, which motivated most of the member states in the General Assembly in its decision against the amendments, was the concern over the possible disruption of national unity, stability and territorial integrity of colonial countries after independence was granted.

Furthermore, American president Dwight Eisenhower intervened and made a statement that demanded a combined United Nations effort, rather than

40 Т. 16-20 1970: Документы внешней политики СССР. № 108. Справка Отдела международных организаций МИД СССР. О тактике советской делегации при обсуждении Декларации о предоставлении независимости колониальным странам на 1-й части X сессии Генеральной Ассамблеи ООН в сентябре-декабре 1960 г.; 20 февраля 1961 г. p.174 (Translation: Foreign Political Documents of the USSR, No. 108. Decisive inquiry to the international organisation of the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the USSR. On the tactics of the Soviet delegation for the discussion on the Declaration for the Granting of Independence to Colonial Territories and Countries to the first session of the Tenth United Nations General Assembly in September-December 1960; 20 February 1961, p. 174).

41 *Ibid.*, p. 175.

42 Mezerik, p. 11.

a one-sided attempt from the Soviets, with the aim of economic development in support of the new African states. Consequently, the results of the voting were detrimental to both the USSR's first and second amendments. The first was rejected entirely upon a vote of 29 in favour to 47 against, with 22 abstentions. The second amendment was similarly unsuccessful as it failed to obtain a two-thirds majority vote, with 41 in favour to 35 against, with 22 abstentions.⁴³

Although initiated by the Soviets, the voting results for the Afro-Asian declaration came as a complete surprise. With an overwhelming number of countries, 89 in all, in favour and none against, with nine abstentions, the Afro-Asian declaration was finally adopted on 14 December 1960.⁴⁴ Resolution 1514 (XV) was therefore a remarkable success, as the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Territories and Peoples was approved by the United Nations, ironically being made possible with the supportive vote from the USSR.⁴⁵

5. ASSESSING THE IMPLICATIONS OF THE SOVIET DRAFT DECLARATION FOR SOUTHERN AFRICA

5.1 Accelerating decolonisation

The instigation of the Soviet draft declaration to gather sufficient support for the ultimate liquidation of colonialism could be assessed in accordance with the effect thereof on the member states in the United Nations. It emphatically heralded the acceleration of decolonisation. It became evident that the momentum of the eradication of subjugation in the remaining colonial states increased during the

43 Т. 16-20 1970: Документы внешней политики СССР, № 108. Справка Отдела международных организаций МИД СССР. О тактике советской делегации при обсуждении Декларации о предоставлении независимости колониальным странам на 1-й части X сессии Генеральной Ассамблеи ООН в сентябре-декабре 1960 г; 20 февраля 1961 г, р.174 (Translation: Foreign Political Documents of the USSR, No. 108. Decisive inquiry to the international organisation of the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the USSR. On the tactics of the Soviet delegation for the discussion on the Declaration for the Granting of Independence to Colonial Territories and Countries to the first session of the Tenth United Nations General Assembly in September-December 1960; 20 February 1961, p. 174).

44 Mezerik, pp. 11-12.

45 Т. 16-20 1970: Документы внешней политики СССР, № 108. Справка Отдела международных организаций МИД СССР. О тактике советской делегации при обсуждении Декларации о предоставлении независимости колониальным странам на 1-й части X сессии Генеральной Ассамблеи ООН в сентябре-декабре 1960 г; 20 февраля 1961 г. 178 (Translation: Foreign Political Documents of the USSR. No. 108. Decisive inquiry to the international organisation of the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the USSR. On the tactics of the Soviet delegation for the discussion on the Declaration for the Granting of Independence to Colonial Territories and Countries to the first session of the Tenth United Nations General Assembly in September-December 1960; 20 February 1961, p. 178).

following year, especially after the adoption of the declaration in 1961, when a well-coordinated Decolonisation Committee consisting of 24 member states was formed. The committee was set to implement the proposed principle as laid out in the declaration, and the target dates for the declaration of independence were constantly highlighted.

At this point, it was revealed that the communist and other Afro-Asian states would not agree to a too distant date, as it would be considered a pretext for delaying all independence by 1970. Notwithstanding the increasing decolonisation, the Portuguese territories of Angola and Mozambique, as well as the British colonial states of the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland, remained undeniable colonial states.⁴⁶ Yet, it was in the 1960s that Harold Macmillan's asseveration during his speech in the South African Parliament that the, "winds of change" were blowing over much of Africa, sparked fundamental change.

Although the Soviet amendments were voted against and failed, the very mention of or pressing for the declaration in 1960 proved successful. This in turn stimulated a greater demand for political-military support of the liberation movements in Southern Africa. The effects of the committee resolutions shed light on the three demands or elements, which were to be carried out with radical action, namely, "a call to administering powers to release all political prisoners, to repeal all laws restricting public freedoms and cease all repressive actions". Secondly, it was demanded that elections had to be called for to make possible universal suffrage. Lastly, it was made blatantly clear that the committee, "express[ed] their regret that the administering powers had not carried out previous United Nations resolutions", with particular referral to the condemnation of Portugal, South Africa and to a lesser extent the United Kingdom.⁴⁷ According to the United Nations some 60 colonial territories, inhabited by more than 80 million people, attained independence in the decade that followed decolonisation.⁴⁸

In relation to Southern Africa, the Soviet draft declaration was to be decisive. Although it must be emphasised that the draft declaration was not directed directly at Southern Africa or South Africa in particular, as the latter was not regarded by the United Nations as a "colony", but rather at the Afro-

46 Mezerik, p. 14.

47 Т. 16-20 1970: Документы внешней политики СССР. № 108. Справка Отдела международных организаций МИД СССР. О тактике советской делегации при обсуждении Декларации о предоставлении независимости колониальным странам на 1-й части X сессии Генеральной Ассамблеи ООН в сентябре-декабре 1960 г; 20 февраля 1961 г. 178 (Translation: Foreign Political Documents of the USSR. No. 108. Decisive inquiry to the international organisation of the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the USSR. On the tactics of the Soviet delegation for the discussion on the Declaration for the Granting of Independence to Colonial Territories and Countries to the first session of the Tenth United Nations General Assembly in September–December 1960; 20 February 1961, pp. 175–178).

48 *The United Nations today* (Department of Public Information, United Nations, New York, 2008), p. 300.

Asian Bloc. Political scientist, Willie Breytenbach, made the counter-argument that the Soviet draft declaration was of lesser importance than the MacMillan speech.⁴⁹ His standpoint was that, from a comparative political perspective, the later promulgations of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, and especially the United Nations Resolution of 1973 in which the USSR shifted its attention from the Afro-Asian Bloc to more humanitarian discussions, were incomplete and suggested that, “apartheid be declared a crime against humanity”.⁵⁰ Apart from this shift, Soviet and Chinese communist involvement in “armed conflicts” against colonialism in Africa would increase. To their dismay, the results of assistance would not necessarily prove worthwhile, as would become evident in the civil conflict in Rhodesia between ZAPU under Josua Nkomo, which were backed by Soviet support, and ZANU-PF under Robert Mugabe, which received assistance from the Chinese communists. In the aftermath of the conflict, the USSR would lose political face, as Nkomo lost humiliatingly.

5.2 The “Red peril” and rising political pressure

The political sanctions against, and isolation of Rhodesia and the “armed struggle” against apartheid South Africa were stepped up, especially with respect to the imprisonment of Nelson Mandela as the effective leader of the ANC and the harsher resistance shown by national liberation movements.⁵¹ As a punitive method the Soviet Union were to apply economic sanctions, as was the case against Yugoslavia, Albania from 1961 to 1982 and later also Poland from 1981 to 1982, as a means of “punishing deviant states”.⁵² It was also speculated in a seminar paper delivered by Roger Pfister at the University of Berne in 1992, that by strangling or controlling South Africa, the USSR would be able to control the vitally important sea trade lines around the Cape of Good Hope. This would presumably have resulted in an endangerment of petroleum deliveries from the Persian Gulf to the United States and the West.⁵³ Moreover, in the United Nations, individual territories in Africa were singled out for attention, such as the landlocked states of Basutoland and Swaziland within South Africa; the concern being that any South African attempt to annexe those countries would be considered an act of aggression.⁵⁴

49 E-mail correspondence. Prof W Breytenbach, 1 September 2017.

50 *Ibid.*

51 Filatova and Davidson, pp. 299-300.

52 M Orkin (ed.), *Sanctions against apartheid* (David Philip: Cape Town and Johannesburg, 1990), p. 160.

53 R Pfister, *United Nations sanctions against apartheid in the period 1960-1990 – A legal, historical, and political approach* (Seminar Paper, Seminar “Migration”, 1991), p. 37.

54 Mezerik, p. 17.

The Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland was to be dissolved and independence granted, while the white minority held power for the sake of stability as part of the British Commonwealth. For Southern Rhodesia, this would mean a total breakaway from the United Kingdom with the Unilateral Declaration of Independence in 1965, inevitably starting a civil war between the white minority and the national liberation movement.

A serious appeal was likewise made against South Africa regarding its mandate over South West Africa, leading to the gradual imposition of an arms embargo. The United States of America and West Germany were presumably evading the call for sanctions by the resolutions of the United Nations, thereby maintaining trade relations with South Africa. In 1963, the Security Council decided to impose more stringent punitive action in the form of economic sanctions, with only the United Kingdom and France standing aloof, and with the ability to veto the Council decisions. Despite the tightening of international sanctions, it had, in the short term at least, only a marginal impact on the economy of South Africa. Nonetheless, it would indeed have a disastrously draining effect on the military resources and manpower due to the intensifying border war, internal upheaval and the states of emergency, which were declared in order to uphold white minority supremacy.

Immediately after Khrushchev made his speech, the reaction from the South African media coverage was swift to detail the severity of the Soviet draft declaration that cast the Union into disfavour at the United Nations. On 24 September 1960, it was reported that the Prime Minister, HF Verwoerd, had emphasised that the issue of South West Africa had been exploited by the Communists and non-White inciters. Verwoerd argued vehemently that, "Western nations and their liberalism are being swept away without their knowledge by the Communistic stream... as the Hammer and Sickle takes away everything established by Western initiative".⁵⁵ Verwoerd made the assumption, that due to the sharp differences on the SWA question, "the natural friends were grist to the mill of the Communists' aim to extend their hold over Africa and thereby the world".⁵⁶

In November 1960 the liberal newspapers reported that the Soviet delegation had stepped up its accusations against the Union of South Africa on SWA, and that as a result the Soviets had urged the native population of South West Africa to, "take the right to resort to force" by means of arms.⁵⁷ The Soviet delegation, then lead by MI Kuchava, drastically called for the immediate liquidation of colonialism in SWA, as the South Africans were branded as "barbarians" for their inhumane suppression and ill-treatment of natives. With

55 *Cape Times*, 24 September 1960, "Reds helped by S.W.A. inciters, says Verwoerd".

56 *Ibid.*

57 *Ibid.*, 22 November 1960, "Soviet attacks SA 'Barbarians' in South West Africa".

the final adoption of the declaration in December 1960, newspaper articles again epitomised the seriousness of the declaration for South Africa. On 19 December, it was reported that by a vote of 90 – 0, with three abstentions, the United Nations demanded that South Africa had to depreciate its apartheid policy in SWA and revoke all laws based on racial policy.⁵⁸ For the general South African public, alarm bells for the reconsideration of the SWA mandate and the apartheid policy went on.

For the ruling Afrikaner nationalists the debates and Soviet draft declaration in the United Nations proved more serious, as the threat of communism became evident. *Die Burger* newspaper, then the propagandist mouthpiece of the National Party, remarked in a troubled tone that, according to Minister Jim Fouché, the communist strategic plan for the African continent was already in its fourth stage. Notions of a “Red Revolution”, and the reappearance of the “Red peril” appeared in the Afrikaans newspaper and speculations were made that the Union could expect a communist takeover as early as 1962.⁵⁹ Consequently, the hastiness of the Soviet communist drive in the United Nations was met with concern, leading to a strengthening of the *laager* mentality, especially in religious circles and among Afrikaner nationalist politicians, against communism.

Contrary to the perception that the Soviets would inevitably launch an invasion of Africa, the Soviet Union was incapable of doing so, being in a state of economic stagnation because of financial constraints. Moreover, with his succession to power after Khrushchev’s fall in 1966, Leonid Brezhnev, with his emphasis on international cooperation and detente with the West, the importance of African affairs fell significantly lower on the agenda of Soviet foreign policy. It is therefore debatable how capable the USSR was in reality of enforcing determined pressure on the remaining colonial powers, irrespective of their sending military advisors or munitions to the national liberation movements or anti-colonialist forces.⁶⁰

The wavering influence of the Soviet Union was again evident in the matter of South West Africa. In the United Nations discussions in 1978 the United States, United Kingdom and Canada proposed a final settlement and the creation of a special representation for Namibia, namely the United Nations Transition Assistance Group (UNTAG), which in fact took place without the participation of the USSR. The West’s joint pressure would eventually lead South Africa to agree to the Security Council to accept a ceasefire in the Border War against SWAPO. After favourable elections, black majority rule came into effect under Sam Nujoma

58 *Cape Times*, 19 December 1960, “UN calls for end of Apartheid in S.W.A.”

59 *Die Burger*, 17 December 1960, “Rooi Rewolusie in 1962 beoog”.

60 E-mail correspondence. Prof W Breytenbach, 1 September 2017.

and SWAPO, thereby ending the drawn-out war and leading to the declaration of independence of Namibia in 1990.⁶¹

With the demise of the Portuguese colonies in 1975, the era of colonialism seemed at an end, though there were still states under guardianship or colonial rule, with financial companies continuing with trade and economic activities. Neo-colonialism was to persist until the present day in more undetectable forms, with multinational companies remaining in the new independent state and some critics being blamed for continuing with the practices of exploitation. According to Krasheninnikov, the Soviet draft declaration and the role of the United Nations had an enduring effect, and made an applicable contribution in striving against any forms of colonialism. He stressed that: "Mankind's conscience cannot be calm as long as the peoples still under the colonial yoke are being humiliated by foreign oppressors and racialists. It is the sacred duty of the United Nations and all progressive forces of the world to do away as quickly as possible with the disgraceful colonial system".⁶²

6. CONCLUSION

The Soviet draft declaration in the United Nations General Assembly in December 1960 was of critical importance for that specific time span. Contrary to assumptions that the draft declaration was of inferior significance in relation to other events concerning Southern Africa, such as the MacMillan speech and UN Resolution of 1973, it would be naive to underestimate the impetus of the Soviet draft declaration. Arguably, it would have been doubtful if the remaining colonial countries had gained independence so soon during the ensuing decade without the determined pressure from the Soviet Union. As apparent from the original Russian political documents it was to be a bold, daring and unyielding appeal to the member states of the United Nations. From this attempt by the Soviet, the delegation would sprout the more universally acceptable Asia-African declaration. Although the Soviet draft declaration, as well as later amendments, had failed, their supportive vote for the adoption of the latter declaration demonstrated their stance on the strengthening of the international struggle against colonisation.

The significance of the declaration was, according to the 50th anniversary of the United Nations Yearbook, to be highlighted. The yearbook stated that in the relatively short period of fifty years since 1945, when more than 750 million people lived in colonies, by the 21st century less than 1,3 million people remained under colonial rule. The UN as an organisation thus complemented the

61 *The United Nations today*, p. 301.

62 Krasheninnikov, p. 67.

Declaration of 1960 as a landmark resolution, which made decolonisation a legal requirement.⁶³ The yearbook emphasised that, “decolonisation had contributed to an acceleration of the pace of decolonisation, and regretted that certain colonies still clung to their colonial possessions”.⁶⁴ The declaration was to receive much attention over the decades and was commemorated during the 20th anniversary on 12 December 1980 and the 30th in December 1988 respectively, with the vast majority of ex-colonial states that had gained independence being represented at the United Nations.⁶⁵ This led to the proposal that the General Assembly declare the period 1990 to 2000 as the final decade for the Eradication of Colonialism, and called for the international community to assist non-self-governments to exercise their right to self-determination.

It is evident that the Soviet’s growing political influence as superpower and permanent member in the United Nations appealed favourably to Third World countries, especially on the African continent. Krashennikov emphasised the success of the USSR’s siding with the Afro-Asian Bloc, “the adoption of the declaration was a great victory for the countries taking a consistent stand in the struggle for peace and independence... and a victory for the socialist states that supported the national liberation of all oppressed peoples”.⁶⁶ Regardless of the propagandist undertones from the Soviet Union, their presentation of the draft declaration made a long-lasting impact. It has been seen that within the Southern African context the declaration played a major role in enforcing the tide of anti-colonialism. In global political terms the declaration provided a solid foundation for support for, and for acknowledgement of, the striving of the national liberation movements and exiled political parties. Though South Africa remained largely ignorant about the Soviet draft declaration and its indirect influence, its long-term effects would culminate in reconsiderations for peaceful coexistence. The final ending of apartheid, which the Soviets had perceived as an extension of colonialism, would indeed occur in 1994 with the political transition from minority to democratic black majority rule.

Campbell had expressed his view that the USSR’s “divergent” political foreign policy interest had shifted from “leader” since the 1960s to a steady decline in subsequent years, behaving more as a “follower” of the Third World.⁶⁷ With the criticism of human rights violations and repression of dissidents such as Alexandr Solzhenitsyn, Andrei Sakharov and others until the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, it appears that the validity and legacy of the declaration has

63 *Yearbook of the United Nations. Special Edition. UN Fiftieth Anniversary 1945-1995* (Department of Public Information, United Nations, New York, 1995), p. 181.

64 *Yearbook of the United Nations. Special Edition. UN Fiftieth Anniversary 1945-1995*, p. 191.

65 *Ibid.*, pp. 188-189.

66 Krashennikov, p. 67.

67 Campbell, p. 93.

become vague or forgotten. In the restored Russo-South African relations in the 21st century, and with both countries involved in Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa (BRICS), a new understanding and cooperation are being forged.⁶⁸ Therein the ANC, as the current ruling political party, acknowledges the ex-Soviet effort for their support for the liberation struggle against colonialism and racism by taking into cognisance the significance of the Soviet draft declaration and the eventual Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples.