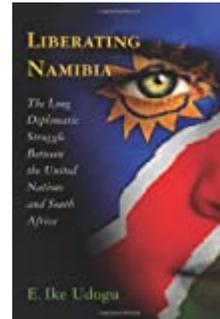




E. Ike Udogu. *Liberating Namibia: The Long Diplomatic Struggle Between the United Nations and South Africa.* Jefferson: Mcfarland, 2011. 264 pp. \$55.00 (paper), ISBN 978-0-7864-6576-7.



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Muehlenbeck on Udogu

At the conclusion of World War I imperial Germany was stripped of its overseas colonies and the territory of South West Africa came under the jurisdiction of the newly created League of Nations. The League granted temporary administrative control over the territory to the United Kingdom, which then quickly transferred responsibility to South Africa as a reward for Pretoria's participation in the war. Under the terms of the League of Nations mandate, under which South Africa took over control of South West Africa, Pretoria was supposed to administer the territory temporarily while simultaneously preparing its people for eventual independence. Instead, however, it moved to annex South West Africa to make it the fifth province of the Union of South Africa (later renamed the Republic of South Africa)—an act which the United Nations and the majority of the international community deemed illegal.

In *Liberating Namibia*, Appalachian State University professor of political science E. Ike Udogu revises his previously unpublished 1980 doctoral dissertation by updating his account of the long diplomatic struggle be-

tween the United Nations and South Africa (subtitle) over South West Africa up through its independence as Namibia in 1990.

The book opens with a good overview of the peoples, natural resources, and early history of Namibia. It is unfortunate, however, that the author never attempts to explain how any of this influenced the conflict-resolution process in the region. The chapters that follow discuss the respective positions of South Africa, the United Nations, and the South West Africa People's Organization of Namibia (SWAPO) in succeeding chapters, followed by chapters which discuss international diplomatic actions, military operations in Namibia's war for independence (1966-88), and the mediation efforts of five Western powers (United States, United Kingdom, France, Canada, and West Germany) to resolve the diplomatic impasse.

Two significant milestones occurred in 1978. First, in April, the concerned parties agreed to a Western-mediated agreement which eventually became United Nations Security Council Resolution 435 (UNSCR 435) in

September of that year. However, only a few months later Pretoria undermined that resolution in December when it sponsored an election in Namibia (boycotted by SWAPO) that resulted in the electoral victory of the South African-sponsored Democratic Turnhalle Alliance (DTA). This election, condemned by most of the international community as a farce, then allowed South Africa to ignore enactment of UNSCR 435 on the grounds of its own national security interests and the DTA government's wishes.

Udugu's account of the Namibian conflict-resolution process essentially ends here, at the end of 1979, leaving the final decade of this drama (arguably the most important years of the process) when the issue was *actually* resolved quickly glossed over without any depth in the book's conclusion. This is highly unsatisfactory and does not allow for nearly enough analysis explaining why South Africa finally agreed to relinquish its control over Namibia in 1989.

Although the author frequently refers to the Namibian case study as a unique conflict-resolution project and model in international and African politics, there is no explanation of the characteristics of this model nor is there discussion of where or when it could foreseeably be applied in the future (p. 159). This does not greatly upset me as a historian although I find it peculiar for a work which positions itself as political science to be almost completely devoid of theory. Of greater concern to me is the fact that there is also very little historical analysis of why the process took so long to resolve, nor is there an adequate explanation of the primary factors involved in Namibia finally getting its independence in 1990 as opposed to earlier or later.

In his conclusion, Udugu posits that there were two principal reasons why South Africa's occupation of Namibia lasted for another eleven and a half years after the passage of UNSCR 435. The first, according to the author, was that South Africa's powerful economic interests compelled Pretoria to stay in Namibia to continue its economic exploitation of that country (p. 153). The second reason Udugu gives is that the dynamics of the Cold War, with the United States supporting South Africa and the Soviet Union supporting SWAPO and Angola, made resolution of the crisis impossible.

If these factors caused South Africa to ignore UNSCR 435 and retain control over Namibia for another eleven and a half years, what changed at the end of the 1980s? Surely Pretoria's economic interests in the country remained the same. Recently, a historiographical debate

has arisen over this question. Piero Gleijeses, for example, has argued that Havana won Namibians their freedom on the battlefield, stating that the Tripartite Accord granting Namibia its independence would not have been possible had it not been for the Cubans' prowess on the battlefield and skill at the negotiating table.^[1] Alternatively, South African historian Chris Saunders sees Namibia's independence as more the result of the end of the Cold War, diplomatic pressure from Washington and Moscow to resolve the dispute, and Pretoria's gradually changing perception of SWAPO as a nationalist movement rather than a communist proxy which would threaten South Africa's own security if in power in Windhoek.^[2] Surprisingly, Udugu has little to say on this issue, opting to not lend his voice to this debate.

Indeed, this reviewer was surprised at how rarely outside powers appeared in Udugu's account of Namibian independence. For example, the United States is mentioned only five times and the Soviet Union three times in the entire book. Prominent international supporters of Namibian independence such as Ghana and Ethiopia appear only once apiece, while Liberia and India are not mentioned at all. Cuba receives only slightly more attention, appearing a total of six times in the work. The cumulative effect of this is an inaccurate portrayal of Namibia's fight for independence which severely downplays the decisive factor countries other than Namibia and South Africa played in the process.

A review of the book's bibliography finds few sources published within the past fifteen years, with the majority of newer sources being general texts about African politics which are not specific to Namibia. Important works by Piero Gleijeses, Vladimir Shubin, and Chris Saunders are nowhere to be found.^[3] Furthermore, the only primary source documents consulted were the official published records from the United Nations and South African parliament. No archival research was conducted. This study could have been vastly improved had archival research been done in South African and United States government records, the United Nations archives, and particularly the SWAPO Party Archive and Research Centre in Windhoek. Such archival research would have added much-needed nuance to the discussion of South African and Namibian motivations and strategies during the conflict-resolution process and revealed, for example, that Pretoria feared that the United States was preparing to militarily invade South West Africa in support of International Court of Justice rulings against South Africa's continued occupation of the country.^[4]

One of the strengths of this work is its inclusion of a great many excerpts from League of Nations and United Nations resolutions and South African government legislation. However, I often found it distracting to have such documents intermingled within the text and would have preferred to have these documents compiled in an appendix instead. There are other instances in which better organization of the book would have been beneficial for the reader. For example, Udogu spends four pages discussing the fact that South West Africa became classified as a "C" mandate by the League of Nations in chapter 1, but it is not until chapter 2 that his readers learn why it was classified as a "C" mandate, what it meant to be a "C" mandate, or how "C" mandates differed from "A" or "B" mandates. Similarly, in chapter 2, which discusses the 1978 South African-organized election which took place in Namibia, the reader learns that the Democratic Turnhalle Alliance was the main opposition party to SWAPO and won the vote with 80.3 percent of the votes cast (SWAPO boycotted the election) (p. 58). Yet it is not until two chapters later that Udogu reveals the makeup of the support base of the DTA and the important fact that the party was sponsored, perhaps even created, by Pretoria.

The story of the conflict-resolution process in Namibia would also have been easier to fully understand had the book been organized chronologically rather than thematically. Having separate chapters covering the mediation efforts at the United Nations, the policies of South Africa, the guerrilla war efforts of SWAPO, and the mediation efforts of outside forces made it more difficult to understand how the moving pieces fit together chronologically in this complicated process.

The author's prose is at times puzzling, such as oddly using quotation marks when discussing Pretoria's "atrocities" in Namibia (p. 11) or describing the gold rush in California in the second half of the nineteenth century as "purported" to have happened (p. 19). As in most political science scholarship, awkward jargon such as "disputatious" is littered throughout. Additionally, some will

find the author's use of the word "natives" to describe indigenous Africans politically incorrect.

While *Liberating Namibia* has value as a basic reference source for the Namibian conflict-resolution process, and in particular as an overview of the pertinent United Nations resolutions, its aforementioned limitations make it of little value to those interested in understanding Namibian independence and the factors that made it possible.

Notes

[1]. Piero Gleijeses, "From Cassinga to New York: The Struggle for the Independence of Namibia," in *Cold War in Southern Africa: White Power, Black Liberation*, ed. Sue Onslow (London: Routledge, 2009), 216.

[2]. Chris Saunders, "The Anogla/Namibia Crisis of 1988 and Its Resolution," in *Cold War in Southern Africa*, 225-40.

[3]. Recent important historical works related to Namibia uncited by Udogu include Piero Gleijeses, *The Cuban Drumbeat: Castro's Worldview: Cuban Foreign Policy in a Hostile World* (New York: Seagull, 2009), Gleijeses, *Conflicting Missions: Havana, Washington, and Africa, 1959-1976* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), Gleijeses, "From Cassinga to New York," Gleijeses, "A Test of Wills: Jimmy Carter, South Africa, and the Independence of Namibia" *Diplomatic History* 34, no. 5 (2010): 893-921; Vladimir Shubin, *The Hot & Cold War: The USSR in Southern Africa* (London: Pluto Press, 2008), Shubin, "Unsung Heroes: The Soviet Military and the Liberation of Southern Africa" in *Cold War in Southern Africa*, 154-76; Chris Saunders, *Documenting Liberation Struggles in Southern Africa* (Uppsala: Nordic Africa Institute, 2010), and Saunders, "The Anogla/Namibia Crisis of 1988."

[4]. See Philip E. Muehlenbeck, *Betting on the Africans: John F. Kennedy's Courting of African Nationalist Leaders* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 191.

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