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Kaunda and the Liberation of Namibia: Towards an Assessment

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When he died in June 2021, Kenneth Kaunda was widely hailed for his support for Southern African liberation movements. This paper considers the case of Namibia and the South West Africa People's Organisation (SWAPO) and asks how Kaunda went about trying to bring about the liberation of Namibia in the 1970s and 1980s. He initially let SWAPO military operations take place from Zambia. SWAPO had its headquarters in Zambia in the 1970s, and many thousand Namibian refugees settled in Zambia. In international fora Kaunda gave SWAPO full support, and he backed the establishment of a United Nations (UN) Institute for Namibia in Lusaka. But he was willing to engage with the apartheid regime to try to facilitate the UN process towards independence for Namibia, he ended SWAPO's military activity from Zambian soil, and he intervened decisively against democratic forces in an internal crisis in SWAPO. Though he continued his personal attempts at mediation in the early 1980s, they achieved little, and his most important contribution to Namibia's liberation was probably the influence he wielded as a key figure in the meetings of the leaders of the Frontline States.

Key words: Kaunda, Zambia, Namibia, liberation, SWAPO

When Kenneth Kaunda addressed his United National Independence Party (UNIP) at the Mulungushi International Conference Centre in Lusaka in September 1990, six months after Namibia's independence, he told his audience that Zambia had "worked in a spectacular manner to bring freedom to the rest of Southern Africa" (Chan, 1992: Appendix 3, 207). When he died over three decades later, in June 2021, he was widely heralded for his contribution, as president of Zambia, to the liberation of Southern Africa. Kaunda will be remembered, wrote one obituarist, "as a giant of 20th century African nationalism – a leader who, at great cost, gave refuge to revolutionary movements..." (Evans, 2021). Under Kaunda, others said, Zambia had played an important role in aiding the independence struggles in the region, inter alia by hosting liberation movements at great political and economic cost. While such statements were

not incorrect, they glossed over the complex relationship that Kaunda had to the various liberation movements of Southern Africa in the 1970s and 1980s, a relationship that changed over time and as circumstances altered. At times Kaunda acted in ways the liberation movements were deeply unhappy about. In this paper, I use the example of Namibia to illustrate some of the ambiguities in Kaunda's support for Southern African liberation from the 1960s to Namibian independence in 1990.

Namibians shared the positive assessments of Kaunda as a "symbol of African liberation" (Smith, 2021) that were made at the time of his death. On hearing that Kaunda had passed away, Hage Geingob, the Namibian President, proclaimed a week of mourning in his country and praised what he called Kaunda's "selfless contribution to Namibia's independence" (Xinhua, 2021). The Speaker of the Namibian Parliament, a veteran of the struggle, said that Kaunda had "deserved a Nobel Peace Prize for his contribution to the liberation of Southern Africa, and the role he played in support of the national liberation movements" (Katjavivi, 2021). When Geingob attended Kaunda's funeral in Lusaka, accompanied by his Minister of International Relations, he again hailed Kaunda for the support he had given to SWAPO and Namibia during the liberation struggle. Geingob mentioned in particular Kaunda's support for the establishment by the United Nations (UN) of an Institute for Namibia in Lusaka. Geingob himself had headed UNIN from its inception in 1976 until his return to Namibia from exile in 1989 (Geingob, 2021). Having been resident in Lusaka all those years, Geingob had not been at the forefront of SWAPO's armed struggle, which was fought mainly from Angola, but he of course knew of the controversial role Kaunda had played in the 1970s and 1980s in relation to Namibian liberation, and chose not to recall it.

There can be no doubt that Kaunda was always a strong supporter of the liberation of Southern Africa. He actively promoted that cause in the Organisation of African Unity (OAU), the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), the Commonwealth, the UN and other international organisations. In 1970 he was chair of both the OAU and the NAM. In 1974 he was one of the founders of the informal alliance of the leaders of the Frontline States (FLS), an alliance born in Lusaka, and he chaired that influential grouping on a number of occasions. His precise role in FLS meetings is, however, unfortunately unclear, for the FLS kept no record of its proceedings (Anglin and Shaw, 1979: 303 n. 4; Khadiagala, 1994: Chapters 4 and 5). It is similarly unclear to what extent Kaunda acted, on certain occasions, on the advice of his foreign policy advisors, of whom the most important in the 1970s were Mark Chona and, until 1976, Rupiah Banda (Chan, 1992; Onslow,

2015). But there can be no doubt that Kaunda himself was the central figure in the making of Zambia's foreign policy, on Namibia as on other issues.

Kaunda saw the liberation of Southern Africa as advancing in stages, with South Africa, the hardest nut to crack, the last phase in the long struggle to achieve the liberation of the entire region. In the late 1970s he devoted most of his diplomatic attention to help end the escalating war in Rhodesia, not least because of the Rhodesian attacks on Zambia because his country hosted camps of the Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU). To help bring about the independence of Zambia's southern neighbour, Kaunda was prepared to engage with the South African Prime Minister John Vorster and then, from 1976, with Henry Kissinger, the American Secretary of State, hoping that they could influence the Rhodesian settler regime of Ian Smith to surrender power. Kissinger, however, thought Namibia might be easier to "solve" than Rhodesia because it involved South African occupation and he could put direct pressure on Vorster (DeRoche, 2016: chapters 3 and 4; Khadiagala, 1994:103). At the same time, Kaunda was insistent that, for both Rhodesia and South West Africa/Namibia, nothing short of "genuine independence", which meant a form of transition to majority rule endorsed by the liberation movements, would be acceptable. At the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting held in Lusaka in 1979, he helped persuade the British Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher, not to support an internal settlement for Rhodesia/Zimbabwe from which the liberation movements would be excluded (e.g, Scarnecchia, 2021).

Although there is a considerable literature on Kaunda's role in aiding the liberation of Zimbabwe (e.g., Chongo, 2015; Moore, 2005), his role in relation to the liberation of Namibia has received hardly any attention.¹ An examination of that role will reveal some of the ambiguities involved in the complex story of the liberation struggles in Southern Africa. Once Rhodesia became Zimbabwe in 1980, Kaunda could focus more exclusively on trying to bring about the end of the South African occupation of Namibia, seeing that as a forerunner to his goal of helping to end apartheid in South Africa itself. As in the 1970s, his tactics did not always meet with the approval of SWAPO and its supporters. How successful were his efforts to try to end the war in northern Namibia and southern Angola and bring about the independence of Namibia? Why did he act as he did? What forms of support did he provide to SWAPO? What assessment can be made of that support in retrospect?

SWAPO was among a number of Southern African liberation movements that were able to establish offices in Lusaka as Zambia moved to independence.²

Before he became Zambia's president, Kaunda had encountered Sam Nujoma, the founder and president of SWAPO, at meetings of the NAM and the short-lived Pan-African Freedom Movement of East, Central and Southern Africa (PAFMECSA). Over time, as the two men met regularly at NAM, OAU and other fora, Kaunda and Nujoma became relatively close (Nujoma, 2001:122, 125; Leys and Saul, 1995:43).³ Within weeks of Zambia's independence, the Caprivi African National Union, which had strong links with Zambia's United National Independence Party (UNIP), merged with, and in effect was absorbed by, SWAPO, and this increased ties between Zambia's leadership and that of SWAPO. Kaunda was always firm in his support for the SWAPO leadership and never gave any significant assistance to its main rival in the 1960s, the South West Africa National Union (SWANU).

Even before SWAPO launched its armed struggle in 1966, recruits for that struggle travelled via Zambia from Namibia to Tanganyika for military training. Once trained there, they returned, with Kaunda's consent, through Zambia, crossing from Sesheke into the Caprivi Strip in occupied Namibia, from where they made their way westwards to Ovamboland. As SWAPO began to get its armed struggle under way in the late 1960s, Kaunda covertly gave permission for it to set up guerrilla bases in south-western Zambia, despite the danger to his own country in doing so, for it was always likely that South Africa would launch attacks on SWAPO's bases if the war escalated.⁴ At the same time, Zambia allowed refugees from Namibia to settle in camps in different parts of the country. The number of such refugees increased greatly once Namibia's northern border opened in 1974, after the coup in Portugal heralded the Portuguese withdrawal from Namibia. Between four and six thousand Namibians entered Zambia in 1974-5 alone (Williams, 2015:94).

SWAPO not only had an office in Lusaka from 1964, but in 1972 it moved its headquarters from Dar es Salaam in Tanzania to the Zambian capital. In Lusaka the SWAPO leadership worked out of rooms in the complex of buildings, surrounded by a high wall for security reasons, known as the African Liberation Centre, in Kamwala Township. That Centre also housed the offices of the African National Congress (ANC) of South Africa, and other liberation movements in exile. Nujoma and members of the SWAPO leadership spent long periods in Lusaka in the 1970s and 1980s, where they interacted with Zambian officials and others who were involved in the struggle to liberate the rest of Southern Africa. Though SWAPO, unlike the ANC, moved its headquarters from Lusaka to Luanda in Angola in 1979, after SWAPO had established its main military bases and

refugee camps in that country, few in the SWAPO leadership spoke Portuguese and Nujoma and others continued to spend considerable time in Lusaka. There Nujoma mostly occupied a modest three-bedroomed house in Kamwala, but he was sometimes able to stay, at Kaunda's invitation, in a government house in the grounds of the President's State House (Nathanael, 2002: Chapter 4; Lister, 2020:173).

In the OAU, and then at the UN General Assembly, Zambia supported the idea that SWAPO, as the only Namibian liberation movement engaged in an armed struggle, should be accorded the title of "authentic" then, in 1976, "sole and authentic" representative of the Namibian people (Dobell, 2000:35). While Kaunda never wavered in his support for the SWAPO leadership under Nujoma, he sometimes worked independently of that organisation to try to bring about Namibia's liberation, acting in ways SWAPO did not approve. To understand this, it must be remembered that landlocked Zambia was in a very difficult and vulnerable position in the late 1960s and 1970s, with neighbouring countries still under white rule. Zambia's economic situation was extremely precarious, even after the completion of the railway from Zambia to Tanzania. From the mid-1970s the aggression of the apartheid regime in South Africa increased. The South African Defence Force (SADF) launched raids into neighbouring countries, including Zambia. Kaunda, walking a tightrope between South Africa and the liberation movements, was desperately keen to prevent the conflicts between the liberation movements and the white-dominated regimes from intensifying and spilling over into his country.

It was in that context that in 1969 he played a major role in the drafting and then circulation of the Lusaka Manifesto on Southern Africa, adopted by a summit of the leaders of East and Central African countries. That Manifesto accepted that negotiations with the white minority regimes were necessary to bring the various Southern African conflicts to an end. In the case of Namibia, the Manifesto called for a peaceful solution to the conflict and a transition to independence involving a UN presence in the territory.⁵ SWAPO, which was not consulted on this formulation, did not approve of it, for, after the International Court of Justice had thrown out a case against South African occupation of Namibia in 1966, it had no faith that the UN would take effective action to oust South Africa from Namibia. Instead, SWAPO was beginning to ramp up its armed struggle against the South African occupation of the country. In the early 1970s guerrillas of its armed wing, the People's Liberation Army of Namibia (PLAN) routinely travelled from bases in western Zambia through the Caprivi Strip into Ovamboland to launch attacks on South African installations there.

By the time the Lusaka Manifesto was issued, Kaunda had already begun to correspond secretly with the South African Prime Minister John Vorster, to try to bring about settlements of both the Rhodesian and the Namibian conflicts. Though this exchange came to nothing, after the coup that took place in Lisbon in April 1974, which meant that Portugal would withdraw from Angola and Mozambique, Kaunda was willing to go further and meet Vorster publicly. This seemed to many in the liberation movements, including SWAPO, not only to be foolish, because it was unlikely to achieve anything, but reprehensible because it would give legitimacy to apartheid.⁶ Some in SWAPO spoke of Kaunda's détente policy with Vorster as naïve collaborationism, amounting to selling out the liberation struggles. In as far as Namibia was concerned, such scepticism was justified, for Kaunda did not win any concession from Vorster when the two men met in August 1975 at the Victoria Falls on the Zambia/Rhodesia border. Vorster not only warned him against continuing to aid the armed struggles of the ANC and SWAPO, but threatened military retaliation if he did so. The South African Prime Minister is said to have shown Kaunda pictures of the aftermath of a South African attack on a military base of a liberation movement and to have asked him "if he had such powerful weapons in his arsenals?... A stunned Kaunda was said to have promptly given an order for Zambian forces to surround and disarm SWAPO bases on Zambian territory" (Beukes, 2014:218; Nathanael, 2002:101, n.1).⁷

Though Vorster was not successful in getting Kaunda to put pressure on SWAPO to abandon its armed struggle, as the South African government wanted, Kaunda did, immediately after the Victoria Falls meeting, call together the leadership of SWAPO, with those of the Angolan rebel group UNITA (Union for the Total Independence of Angola), in Lusaka. He told them that SWAPO must end its military activities from Zambian territory, because of Vorster's threat of South African retaliation (Nathanael, 2002:956). The Zambian army was told to disarm SWAPO military bases, and new arms supplies were prevented from reaching the liberation movement. In April 1976 between one and two thousand PLAN fighters in south-western Zambia, having expressed dissatisfaction with their commanders because the armed struggle was not being pursued as they thought it should be, were disarmed by Zambian troops. They were then taken from the border area to the Mboroma camp near Kabwe. Some were later taken from there to another camp far from the border for "re-education", while others "disappeared", presumed killed (e.g., Leys and Saul, 1995:chapter 3).

The curtailment of SWAPO's military operations from Zambia was a major setback to the armed struggle being waged by PLAN against the South African occupation of Namibia, even though, after Angola had obtained its independence in November 1975, SWAPO was able to conduct military operations from the new military bases it established in southern Angola, instead of through the Caprivi Strip. After Kaunda's Victoria Falls meeting with Vorster, Zambia began to curtail SWAPO's activities in Zambia in other ways. From late 1974 tensions had been building up in Zambia between the SWAPO leadership and those who were critical of that leadership and wanted a congress to be called at which that leadership and its strategy could be challenged. Nujoma appealed to Kaunda for assistance in clamping down on the so-called dissidents, and Kaunda agreed that the Zambian army should intervene to do that. Those who had been living in SWAPO's Old Farm refugee settlement some 40 kilometres outside Lusaka were rehoused in what some called "concentration camps" much further from the capital (Nathanael, 2005:99; Williams, 2015:111). Andreas Shipanga and other leading figures in SWAPO who had both called for a new congress and been critical of Kaunda's *détente* policy with Vorster were arrested in Lusaka and taken to Nampundwe camp outside the city, where they were detained in brutal conditions for two months. When a court ordered their release, the Zambian authorities arranged for them to be transferred to prisons in Tanzania (Shipanga and Armstrong, 1989:102ff). A leading Namibian exile then in Lusaka, Hans Beukes, made an impassioned plea to Kaunda, telling him that he had made a "terrible, terrible mistake". Beukes urged him to arrange a process of dialogue between the Nujoma leadership and the dissidents, but Kaunda ignored his long letter (Beukes, 2014: 247-51). The dissidents were crushed thanks to Kaunda siding with the Nujoma leadership against those who wanted to democratise the exiled liberation movement. Kaunda's harsh treatment of the dissidents enabled the Nujoma faction to triumph, though at the cost of a major split in SWAPO, for Shipanga and others formed a rival SWAPO-Democrats in 1978.

Despite Kaunda's order that it do so, PLAN did not immediately stop its military operations from south-western Zambia. In August 1978 it launched rockets across the border onto the town of Katima Mulilo in the Caprivi, killing ten South African soldiers and wounding another ten. This resulted in swift and massive SADF retaliation into western Zambia. That in turn led Kaunda to act more firmly to put an end to PLAN's operations from Zambia, which did now effectively cease, though there were further SADF raids into western Zambia early the following year (Scholtz, 2013:99). Further involvement of SWAPO military forces from Zambia in the liberation war had effectively come to an end, however. From the perspective of the SADF, this was what General Geldenhuys

called a “big breakthrough” because “It made East Caprivi free from insurgence” (Scholtz, 2013:100. Cf. Geldenhuys, 2009: Chapter 8).⁸

While in this way Kaunda weakened PLAN’s military activity, he stood firm in his support for SWAPO in other ways. Those who were critical of his détente policy feared that he might be persuaded by Vorster, or his successor, to agree to a form of independence for Namibia that fell short of one that would bring SWAPO to power, but such fears proved groundless. Kaunda not only totally rejected any idea of dividing Namibia along Bantustan lines, as the South African government proposed, but he would not consider any kind of transition to independence for Namibia that was arranged by South Africa unilaterally. While it was South African strategy to try to arrange a process by which it would transfer power to internal leaders, Kaunda insisted that a free and fair election should be held, expecting that that would bring SWAPO to power. After the South African invasion of Angola had failed by early 1976, and the Soweto Revolt taken place in June of that year, Kaunda briefed Kissinger on what he should say to Vorster on Namibia, (Serfontein, 1976:355) and for a time gave up the idea of trying himself to get the South African government to agree to the independence of Namibia. Instead, in 1977 he gave his full support to the plan for a transition to independence worked out by the so-called Western Contact Group, made up of the five permanent members of the UN Security Council. That plan provided for an election for a Constituent Assembly that would be certified by the UN Secretary-General’s Special Representative as free and fair (e.g., Khadiagala, 1994:105ff).

Having supported the Nujoma leadership against the so-called SWAPO dissidents, Kaunda had a strong hand to play, and he used it to pressure that leadership to accept what the Western Contact Group proposed. He had Nujoma invited to attend some of the FLS meetings. At one of these, in Luanda on 12 July 1978, Kaunda was crucial in persuading the SWAPO leadership, despite the massacre that had taken place at the SWAPO camp at Cassinga in southern Angola less than three months earlier, to accept the Contact Group plan for a transition to independence. Some in SWAPO thought an election unnecessary, for they believed in SWAPO’s right to govern Namibia as the “sole and authentic representative of the Namibian people”, (Dobell, 2000:35) but the SWAPO leadership came to see that the plan, which was embodied in UN Security Council Resolution 435 of September 1978, was the most realistic route to Namibian independence. That they did so was in large part thanks to Kaunda’s influence and pressure.

In the late 1970s and early 1980s the South African government, fearing the prospect of SWAPO coming to power in Namibia, refused to allow the UN

plan to be implemented. Instead, it raised objection after objection to specific aspects of the plan. SWAPO rejected the South African government's demands, and the FLS, with Kaunda playing a leading role, had to try to mediate to keep the discussions going. When the FLS leaders met in Lusaka on 2 June 1980, for example, they put pressure on Nujoma to accept the South African demand for a demilitarised zone along the Angola/Namibia border, in the hope this would lead to an agreement to implement the UN plan (Khadiagala, 1994:126).

Because the South African government remained intransigent, Kaunda again, now that Zimbabwe had become independent, resorted to personal diplomacy with the South African leader on the Namibian issue. After an exchange of letters with Vorster's successor, Prime Minister P.W. Botha (Larmer, 2011:221-2), he agreed to meet the South African prime minister. When the two men met on the South Africa/Botswana border in April 1982, Kaunda urged Botha to agree to the implementation of the UN plan for Namibia. In the event, it would be another six years before Botha was to agree to that, very reluctantly and under great pressure, but the 1982 summit was not without consequence, for from it came a significant mediation role that Kaunda played in 1984.

His mediation that year had two related but separate aspects. He first helped facilitate in February 1984, with the assistance of the United States, the Lusaka Accord between the South African and Angolan governments. He not only met with the two delegations in the Mulungushi Hall in Lusaka, but, to quote the then American Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs, Chester Crocker, "maintained an open door at State House for delegations to seek his counsel or lobby their cause" (Crocker, 1992:4; Chan, 1994:54). The parties agreed that South African forces should withdraw from southern Angola, in return for which Angola would ensure SWAPO would no longer operate from an area north of the Namibia/Angola border. South Africa would also make "progress towards Namibian independence under Security Council Resolution 435" (Chan, 1992:54). Hoping that the Lusaka Accord would pave the way for the implementation of that resolution, Crocker called the February meeting in Lusaka "a sweet success", and "the high-point of Kaunda's involvement in the Namibia-Angola peace process" (Crocker, 1992:194). For Crocker, "Kaunda was tickled with the high visibility pay-off for his gamble on hosting talks that had stopped the war between his neighbours" (Crocker, 1992:196).

SWAPO had not been a party to the Lusaka Accord, however, and critics of it saw it "an apparent breach of African solidarity" (Soggot, 1986:308). Though Kaunda "chose to characterise it as an 'historic opportunity to make progress'" (Ibid), and may have played some role in securing the release of Toivo ya Toivo, a leading SWAPO activist, from South Africa's Robben Island in March 1984, the Accord proved of very limited value in advancing Namibia's independence. A Joint

Monitoring Commission attempted to implement the Accord until May 1985, but the process was never completed because of the numerous violations, mostly by SWAPO, that continued. Though there was no major conflict for a while, there was no progress towards the implementation of Resolution 435. In May 1985, when a covert South African raid into Angola was discovered, the Accord fell away, with Namibian independence no nearer (e.g., Scholtz, 2013:189).

Crocker nevertheless credits Kaunda with helping to facilitate a development that followed the signing of the Lusaka Accord, what he calls “the first authoritative MPLA [Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola] bid on Cuban withdrawal” (Crocker, 1992:207, 459). This was the offer that the Angolan representative Kito Rodriques handed to Crocker in the Mulungushi conference centre in September 1984. Crocker believes this led to the eventual agreement at the end of 1988 that provided that there should be a parallel withdrawal of all the Cuban troops from Angola as the UN plan for a transition to Namibia’s independence was implemented (Crocker, 1992:207, 459). In patronising terms Crocker, in his account of these events, calls Kaunda “a fair-weather friend of our strategy [meaning linkage] [and]...the closest thing to constructive leadership we could come up with among the English-speaking Front-Line States” (Crocker, 1992:459, and cf. 184-7).

Kaunda meanwhile had made another bold attempt to bring about a Namibian settlement. In May 1984 he organised a Namibia conference in Lusaka that brought together SWAPO and the main Namibian parties based within the territory, then grouped in the so-called Multi-Party Conference. Nujoma was very reluctant to meet these parties, seeing them as clients of the South African government, and he insisted that SWAPO would only engage with the South African-appointed Administrator General of South West Africa, representing the South African government. In the event, “SWAPO submitted to pressure from President Kaunda to take part in a conference in which his [i.e., Kaunda’s] co-chairman was none other than Willie van Niekerk”, the Administrator-General, and in which the internal parties participated (Soggot, 1986:312).

Though a somewhat similar so-called “pre-implementation” meeting that had been arranged by the UN in Geneva, Switzerland, three years previously had achieved nothing, the Zambian president hoped that by bringing all sides together again he could achieve consensus on the implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 435. But feelings ran high, with one leading SWAPO figure publicly calling Kaunda a sell-out because of the way he had given in to the South African government’s demands on who should attend the meeting (Lister, 2020:140). For Kaunda, getting the various parties around the same Southern African table was in itself a major achievement, but he soon found that the South

African government and the internal Namibian parties insisted that the Cuban forces in Angola must withdraw before the UN plan for Namibia's independence could be implemented. As a result, the meeting soon broke up in disarray (Lister, 2020:chapter 26:136-42).

That same year Kaunda persuaded Nujoma, who was then living in a former colonial residence on the grounds of State House in Lusaka, to meet some South African generals, but again nothing significant was achieved (Lister, 2020:173; Nujoma, 2001:340-3). After 1984 Kaunda never again played as active a role as an independent actor in the process leading to Namibia's independence, but now worked on the issue primarily as a leading member of the FLS. After the conflict in southern Angola had intensified and, with the winding down of the Cold War, helped lead to the breakthrough to a negotiated settlement in 1988, Kaunda and the FLS were not directly involved in the lengthy negotiations of that year that culminated in the December 1988 agreement that provided for Cuban troop withdrawal from Angola and the independence of Namibia. But, in early 1989, Kaunda was active in arguing, on behalf of the FLS and the NAM, that the military component of the UN mission to be sent to Namibia should not be reduced in size. That argument was not won. Kaunda also wrote to the UN Secretary-General on behalf of the NAM demanding the appointment of Frontline nationals to key posts in the UN mission, again without success (Thornberry, 2004:39).

After implementation of the UN transition began on 1 April 1989, it was rumoured in Harare, Zimbabwe, that it was Kaunda, rather than the Zimbabwe leader Robert Mugabe, who had advised Nujoma to send armed SWAPO guerrillas from southern Angola into northern Namibia on the day of implementation. It was even rumoured that some Zambian military personnel had accompanied the SWAPO guerrillas into northern Namibia and been slaughtered there when they clashed with the South African forces that the UN Special Representative agreed to allow out of their bases. There is, however, no evidence to support such claims of Zambian involvement, and it would have been quite out of character for Kaunda to have given Nujoma such advice.⁹

As a leading member of the FLS, Kaunda was kept in touch with the way the transition unfolded in mid- to late-1989, and he kept his "channels of communication with South Africa open" (Macmillan, 2013:224). When the South African Foreign Minister, "Pik" Botha, heard that the FLS were considering asking the UN Security Council to authorise the UN Special Representative in Namibia to disband the Koevoet para-military unit in northern Namibia, he asked Kaunda, who was chair of the FLS, for a meeting to discuss the matter (Papenfus, 2010:599). Kaunda's acceptance of such a meeting helped precipitate Botha's

resignation as president, and on 28 August 1989 Kaunda met Pik Botha and P. W. Botha's successor, F.W. de Klerk, in Livingstone. The three discussed the way the transition to Namibian independence was proceeding (DeRoche, 2016:217; Chan, 1994:144). Kaunda continued to monitor that process. On 5 March 1990 he wrote to the UN Secretary-General to say that, while the UN mission "had acquitted itself admirably, so far, it could not 'afford to', as it were, abandon Namibia at this critical time in her history" (Thornberry, 2004:358). His concern was unnecessary, for by then the aim of the mission had been achieved, and it formally came to an end on 21 March, when Namibia became independent.

Conclusion

A fuller assessment of Kaunda's role in bringing about the independence of Namibia will need to rest on archival research and interviews that could not be done for this paper. Key archives, such as that of SWAPO in Windhoek, remain closed to researchers, while the author of this paper has not been able to access the Zambian archives in Lusaka and has only been able to look briefly at the UNIP archive online in London at the British Library. A future assessment will set Kaunda's Namibian role more firmly in the context of the ways in which he interacted with other Southern African liberation movements, such as ZAPU or, say, the Mozambique resistance movement COREMO. In his relations with the neighbouring countries, including those still under white minority rule, Kaunda, as we have noted, walked a tightrope. Were his actions "characterised by a ruthless pragmatism based on Kaunda's interpretation of Zambia's national interests, rather than on an idealistic vision of political liberation" (Larmer, 2011:188)? Jamie Miller has pointed out that Kaunda's "pursuit of regional stabilisation reflected internal pressures to focus on domestic rejuvenation amid increasing economic stagnation, rather than continuing to bear the heavy costs of being a frontline host for liberation movements" (Miller, 2016:131). Larmer draws too stark a dichotomy between national interests and pursuit of regional liberation, for Kaunda was able to combine "ruthless pragmatism" with adherence to the goal of the political liberation of all of Southern Africa.

This inevitably led to contradictions and ambiguities. On the one hand, he allowed thousands of Namibian refugees to settle in Zambia in camps tightly controlled by SWAPO. Without his crucial support for the SWAPO leadership, the movement's very survival might have been in jeopardy before it was able to move its operations and headquarters to independent Angola. Kaunda also played a crucial role in the establishment of UNIN, which continued until the eve of independence to help prepare Namibians for the day when South African

rule would end, and they would take over the running of the country. Opening the Institute, which was supposed to be non-partisan,¹⁰ on Namibia Day, 26 August 1976, the day on which, in 1966, SWAPO claimed it had launched its armed struggle, Kaunda claimed that it was the first time that the international community had taken such an initiative for a non-self-governing country. He added then that “The time for the liberation of Namibia is one minute past midnight” (Rogerson, 1980:676), not knowing that it would not be until March 1990 that the day of independence would finally dawn. Almost a decade after he opened UNIN he wrote a Foreword, dated 30 April 1986, to its major publication, *Perspectives for National Reconstruction and Development*. That thousand-page “blue Bible”, as some Namibians called it from the colour of its cover, began with a highly SWAPO-centric historical overview, briefly referred to socialism in a macro-economic survey, then went on to describe the sectors of the Namibian economy and how they could be revived and reconstructed in an independent Namibia. In his Foreword, Kaunda wrote that while the “most urgent concern and collective conviction is to support in every way possible the struggle for immediate genuine independence for Namibia”, the “second and equally urgent and important task is to prepare Namibia for economic independence” (United Nations, 1986). He was pleased “that Namibians themselves under the leadership of SWAPO have determined their goals, policy objectives and priorities” (United Nations Institute for Namibia, 1986; Vigne, 1987).

Though Kaunda tried hard to end the conflict between SWAPO and the South African rulers of Namibia, and bring about Namibia’s independence, his engagements with successive South African leaders, Vorster and Botha, were not successful in advancing that cause. While Kaunda gave SWAPO support in many ways, like other supporters he turned a blind eye to gross human rights abuses within the movement, and was complicit in the detention of many of SWAPO supporters in what they called “concentration camps” (Beukes, 2014:270-1). He actively facilitated the way in which the SWAPO leadership turned on some of its own people in Zambia in 1976, in a manner that was to be taken to even worse extremes in the human rights abuses that the liberation movement perpetrated in Angola in the 1980s. In Larmer’s words, as with a crisis involving the cadres of ZANU (Zimbabwe African National Union) a year before, “the Zambian authorities presented themselves as the neutral arbiter of an internal split”, but “the Zambian state was in fact a major participant in that dispute, ensuring that the incumbent leadership was able to resist widespread demands for organisational accountability” (Larmer, 2011:210).

Yet while Kaunda was helping crush the resistance to the Nujoma leadership in SWAPO, 1976 was also the year in which, as we have seen, he began to try to end SWAPO's military operations from Zambia, and in which he opened UNIN. Two years later he played a vital role in persuading the SWAPO leadership to support the plan for a transition to independence approved in UNSC Resolution 435, while at the same time further weakening SWAPO's struggle by finally closing down its military operations from Zambian soil.

These ambiguities can of course largely be explained by the situation in which Zambia found itself, and by Kaunda's belief in personal diplomacy and dialogue. As host to SWAPO, he could influence how it acted. He could have compelled the Nujoma leadership to be more accountable to the SWAPO membership, or could even have thrown his support behind those who in the mid-1970s called for a congress to elect a new leadership. As Lauren Dobell perceptively wrote, without Kaunda's active assistance, "SWAPO leaders might have had to come to terms with contradictions in the movement, and find ways to incorporate the more radical views of elements of its rank and file into the struggle" (Dobell, 2000:51). Kaunda could also have more fully supported SWAPO's armed struggle, allowing it to continue to operate from Zambian territory, but then Zambia would probably have suffered more severely from South African attacks than it did. What he did was give SWAPO a measure of support that changed over time: having turned a blind eye to its guerrillas operating from Zambia, he effectively stopped this from 1978, but allowed thousands of SWAPO refugees to continue to live on in Zambia until they were repatriated to Namibia on the eve of independence in 1989. Though he was prepared to negotiate with South African leaders and officials, he did not sell out the Namibian liberation movement by agreeing to a settlement that would have left it out in the cold.

In the crucial final phase of the movement towards independence Kaunda lobbied on behalf of the FLS and the NAM but with little success. Within months of Namibia's independence, he was caught up in protests in Lusaka and elsewhere that heralded his ouster from power in 1991. It took time for him to be accorded elder statesman status in Zambia and over twenty years after Namibia's independence before Namibia fully recognised his contribution to its liberation: on a visit to the Namibian capital in 2013, he was given a house there, perhaps in part because Nujoma remembered how Kaunda had given him accommodation in Lusaka. On the same visit, a leading road in the upmarket suburb of Klein Windhoek was renamed Dr Kenneth David Kaunda Street (New Era, 2013). Behind this, and the current Namibian president's words of praise

for the support Kaunda gave the liberation movement during its struggle to end South African occupation and usher in an independent nation, lay, as this paper has begun to show, a complex history of relations between Kaunda and the liberation movement in the years of the liberation struggle.

Endnotes

¹ For a brief and limited account see Hennig, n.d.. Leading scholars who have written on aspects of this topic as part of larger studies include Stephen Chan and Christian Williams: see their work in References. In 2017 President Donald Trump notoriously conflated Namibia and Zambia and referred to “Nambia”.

² The office was established by Hifikepunye Pohamba in September 1964: see the interview with him in Blanch, n.d., 62.

³ Beukes says Nujoma was not close to Kaunda, at least compared to Joshua Nkomo of ZAPU: Beukes, 2014, 254.

⁴ These camps included Senanga on the banks of the Zambezi River, 600 kilometres south-west of Lusaka, and, established later, Central Base near the Kwando River. For a map showing the various SWAPO camps in Zambia see Williams, 2015, 98. Williams provides a detailed examination of the various camps in Zambia in the mid-1970s.

⁵ Text in Chan, *Kaunda and Southern Africa*, Appendix 2. Cf. e.g., Macmillan, 2013, 68-69.

⁶ Anglin and Shaw, Chapter 7: Zambia and Southern African ‘Détente.’ Trehwela, 1990.

⁷ In 1967 Vorster had told Kaunda that in the event of an attack on South Africa, he would ‘hit Zambia so hard that she will never forget it’: quoted Anglin and Shaw, 1979, 282.

⁸ Minor skirmishes continued into the early 1980s between SWAPO guerrillas and the SADF in Western Zambia. Cf. e.g., Macmillan, 2013, 129.

⁹ See the discussion of this in Chan, 1992, 167-170. There is no mention of it in Chan, 2011, 47.

¹⁰ To begin with, it had SWANU lecturers and students (e.g., Beukes, 2014, 252), but became more and more exclusively SWAPO over time.

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