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DIRECTORATE OF
INTELLIGENCE

WEEKLY SUMMARY

Special Report

South-West Africa: Frustrations for South Africa

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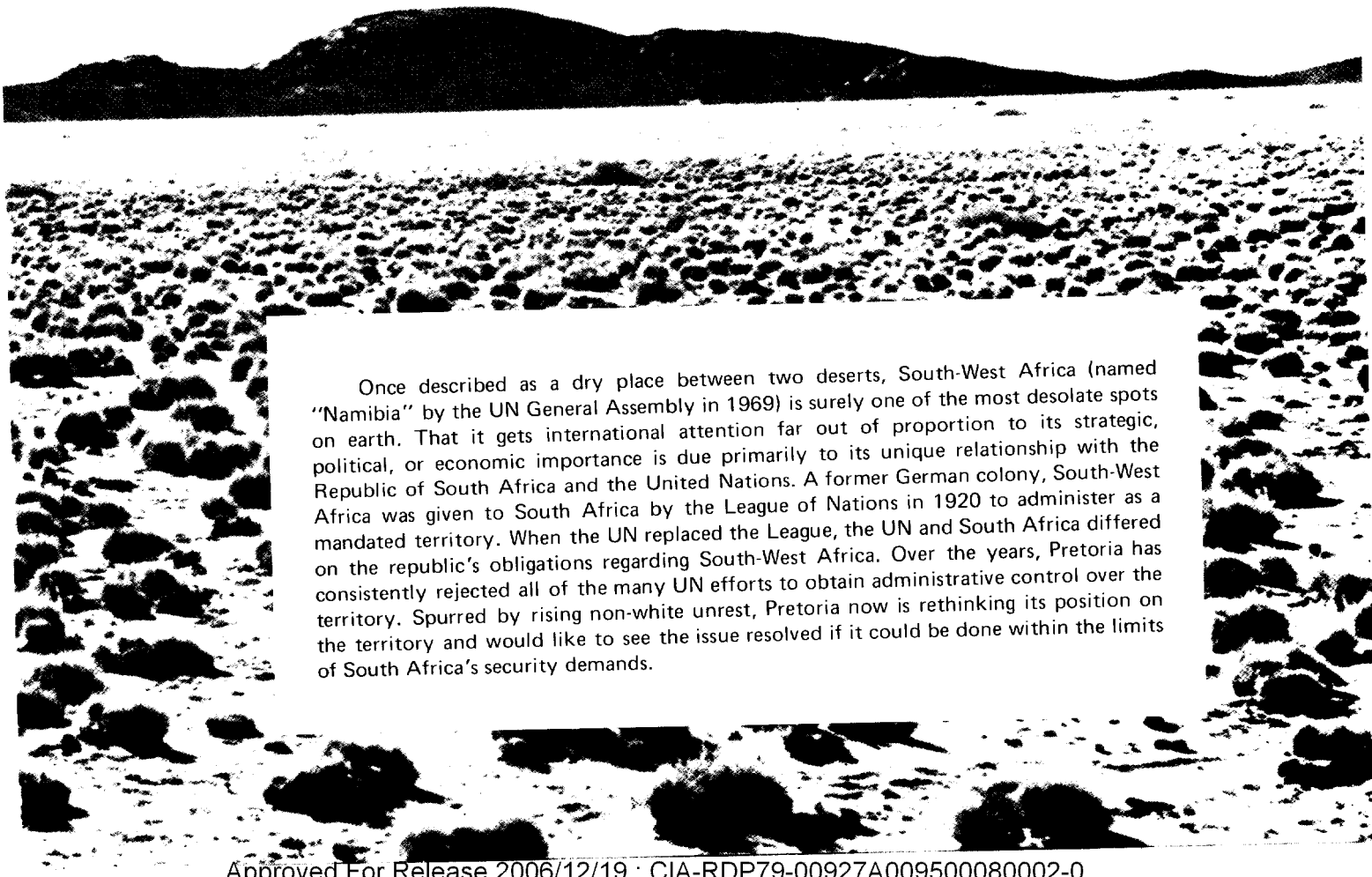
SOUTH-WEST AFRICA

Frustrations for SOUTH AFRICA



Once described as a dry place between two deserts, South-West Africa (named "Namibia" by the UN General Assembly in 1969) is surely one of the most desolate spots on earth. That it gets international attention far out of proportion to its strategic, political, or economic importance is due primarily to its unique relationship with the Republic of South Africa and the United Nations. A former German colony, South-West Africa was given to South Africa by the League of Nations in 1920 to administer as a mandated territory. When the UN replaced the League, the UN and South Africa differed on the republic's obligations regarding South-West Africa. Over the years, Pretoria has consistently rejected all of the many UN efforts to obtain administrative control over the territory. Spurred by rising non-white unrest, Pretoria now is rethinking its position on the territory and would like to see the issue resolved if it could be done within the limits of South Africa's security demands.

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CHRONOLOGY OF UN EVENTS REGARDING SOUTH-WEST AFRICA	
1946	Pretoria submits plan to annex South-West.
1947	Pretoria decides not to proceed with incorporation of the territory, agreeing to continue administering it in the spirit of the League of Nations mandate and to submit reports to the UN.
1949	Pretoria notifies UN it will no longer furnish reports.
1950	International Court of Justice issues advisory opinion that UN is legally qualified to exercise supervisory functions previously exercised by the League of Nations and that South Africa is obliged to submit reports.
1960	Ethiopia and Liberia, as former League members, file a complaint with the Court that South Africa had refused to live up to the terms of the mandate.
1966	(July) Court dismisses case on the grounds that the applicants lack sufficient legal standing to be entitled to a determination on the merits of the case.
	(October) General Assembly passes Resolution 2145 declaring the mandate and any further South African rights in South-West Africa terminated. Pretoria declares resolution "illegal" and continues to ignore UN.
1967	General Assembly establishes a South-West Africa Council charged with assuming control over the territory and preparing it for immediate independence.
1969	General Assembly renames South-West Africa "Namibia."
1970	Security Council requests another advisory opinion from the International Court on South Africa's continued presence in the territory.
1971	Court issues opinion that General Assembly has supervisory rights in the territory, that it had the power to terminate the mandate in 1966, and that the measures approved by the Security Council since then to force South Africa to withdraw are legally binding.
1972	(February) Security Council urges Secretary General Waldheim to make contacts with the South African Government.
	(March) Following a one-week visit to South Africa and South-West Africa, Waldheim and Vorster sign a statement agreeing to eventual self-determination for the territory's inhabitants and to create a position of UN representative for South-West Africa.

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Pretoria's Ties to South-West

South Africa's interest in the territory is primarily strategic. The vast, arid territory provides a huge buffer between the republic's borders and the black guerrilla movements to the north. Pretoria fears that if it lost control of South-West Africa, the continent's black liberation movements might be able to drive a wedge between South Africa and the Portuguese territory of Angola, opening a third front for the Portuguese to contend with and menacing South Africa's flank.

South Africa treats South-West as if it were a fifth province of the republic. South-West sends representatives (elected by whites only) to the South African Parliament, and most government services are run by bureaucrats in Pretoria. South African police patrol South-West's borders, and South African businessmen control most of the profitable mining in the southern part of the territory. Despite platitudes to the contrary, the annexation of South-West Africa to South Africa is in most respects a reality.

Pretoria has moved slowly and carefully. Until the mid-1960s, the government's major efforts in South-West were to develop the territory's roads, dams, airports, schools, and hospitals, following the Odendaal Plan, Pretoria's long-term development scheme for the territory. Such improvements were certainly in keeping with the League's mandate, "Promote to the utmost the material and moral well-being and the social progress of the inhabitants." They may also have been selected over more politically sensitive "improvements"—such as establishing African homelands (reserve areas legally set apart for non-white residents)—because Pretoria at that time was under a threat of an adverse International Court of Justice decision.

In July 1966, however, the court dismissed the South-West Africa case brought by Ethiopia and Liberia without ruling on its merits, and Pretoria breathed a sigh of relief. Since then, South Africa has moved to acquire greater control over the territory. The South African Parliament extended some of South Africa's Draconian security laws, specifically the Suppression of Communism Act and the Sabotage Act, to South-West. Parliament followed with a retroactive Terrorism Act (1967), opening the way for tighter police control of guerrillas in the northern part of the territory and general intimidation of all non-white political activity. In 1968 it established a legal framework for the territory to be divided into tribal homelands in accordance with the over-all apartheid policy. The following year, Pretoria took over much of South-West's administrative machinery and the principal sources of revenue.

Nowadays, apartheid is being pursued in South-West with no less vigor but with much less fanfare than in the republic. Eleven homelands for the territory's non-whites are rapidly being established and given some self-rule. All the land has been secured, and all the borders have been defined. Each tribal unit has a solid geographic hunk of land (in contrast to the homelands in South Africa that often are several non-contiguous parcels scattered among white-owned lands), and relatively more of the territory's non-whites currently live in homelands than do blacks in the republic. On the other hand, some of the pettier aspects of apartheid common in South Africa are not found in South-West. Censorship laws differ, for example, permitting films to be shown in South-West that are prohibited in the republic. And there are fewer public evidences of apartheid, such as separate telephone booths and park benches.

South-West Africa's economic value to the republic has increased steadily in recent years and is now quite substantial. Of the more than $350 million in private foreign investment in South-West, more than 75 percent (or some $250 million) is South African. Most important are the diamond mines, which produce over $100 million worth of diamonds annually; copper, lead, and zinc also are mined at extremely profitable rates,

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largely because all the mining utilizes cheap non-white labor. New investment in the territory by South African businesses is estimated at about $30-40 million a year. South-West Africa's exports contribute almost $200 million annually to South Africa's foreign exchange. Thus, the republic receives a very high return on private investment in the territory; other benefits include a guaranteed access to certain important raw materials and an enlarged market for South African industrial products.

Plebiscite Proposal

In early 1971, when the International Court of Justice began hearings on the Security Council's request for an advisory opinion on South Africa's continued hold on South-West, Pretoria surprised many observers by choosing to fight the case. It asked unsuccessfully for the disqualification of three of the fifteen judges and presented a 700-page brief challenging the court's jurisdiction. Most interesting, however, was Pretoria's proposal to hold a plebiscite that would permit the inhabitants of South-West to decide whether they wanted to remain under South African administration or come under UN supervision. The South Africans suggested that such a plebiscite be jointly supervised by the court and the South African Government.

The proposal produced considerable controversy at the UN. Most delegates were unwilling to accept the offer at face value, presuming that

Herero Children

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Pretoria would manipulate the plebiscite in some way. Some believed that acceptance would concede too many legal points—such as South Africa's right to a say regarding South-West's future. In any case, the court declined to accept the plebiscite offer, and the proposal was withdrawn in January 1972.

Pretoria probably was sincere in its proposal because at the time its administrators in the area assumed that South Africa would win such a plebiscite. The commissioner general for South-West told visiting newsmen in June 1971 that 85 percent of the black people would support South Africa. He may have been right, especially if the timing was right. If a plebiscite had been held at the time, the politically unsophisticated Africans probably would have voted as instructed by their headmen, who get their guidance from Pretoria. As time wears on, however, the outcome is becoming less certain, and will become even less so if time is allowed for voter education and open campaigning.

Ovambo Bossboy

Rising Discontent in South-West

The International Court of Justice issued an advisory opinion in June 1971 that South Africa had no right to be in South-West. The ruling prompted a spasm of political activity there, mostly supporting the opinion and calling on South Africa to honor it. Leaders from at least four South-West tribes praised the ruling. Several days of demonstrations by high school students (there are no universities in the territory) finally necessitated the closing of the schools until the end of the year. Church leaders wrote an open letter to Prime Minister Vorster demanding, in effect, independence for South-West; they followed their letter with a two-hour discussion with the prime minister in August described as "frank."

Though a malaise was simmering just below the placid surface of black-white cooperation, black discontent had never been made particularly manifest in South-West Africa. South African leaders, therefore, tended to dismiss the problem as not particularly serious. After the court ruling, a few high-level leaders made hasty trips from Pretoria to South-West, presumably to check the level of discontent first hand and to assure worried whites that Pretoria would take care of them.

The strike of Ovambo mine workers last winter finally convinced Pretoria's leaders to take a much closer look at the discontent in South-West. Ovambo workers had gone on strike before, but never for so long or so effectively. Fourteen thousand workers left their jobs for seven weeks and the modern sector of South-West's economy suffered a substantial setback. South African officials finally agreed to abolish the egregious labor contracts under which the miners labored and to substitute better ones. The solidarity of the Ovambo workers surprised many, and the support and sympathy they received from other tribes was

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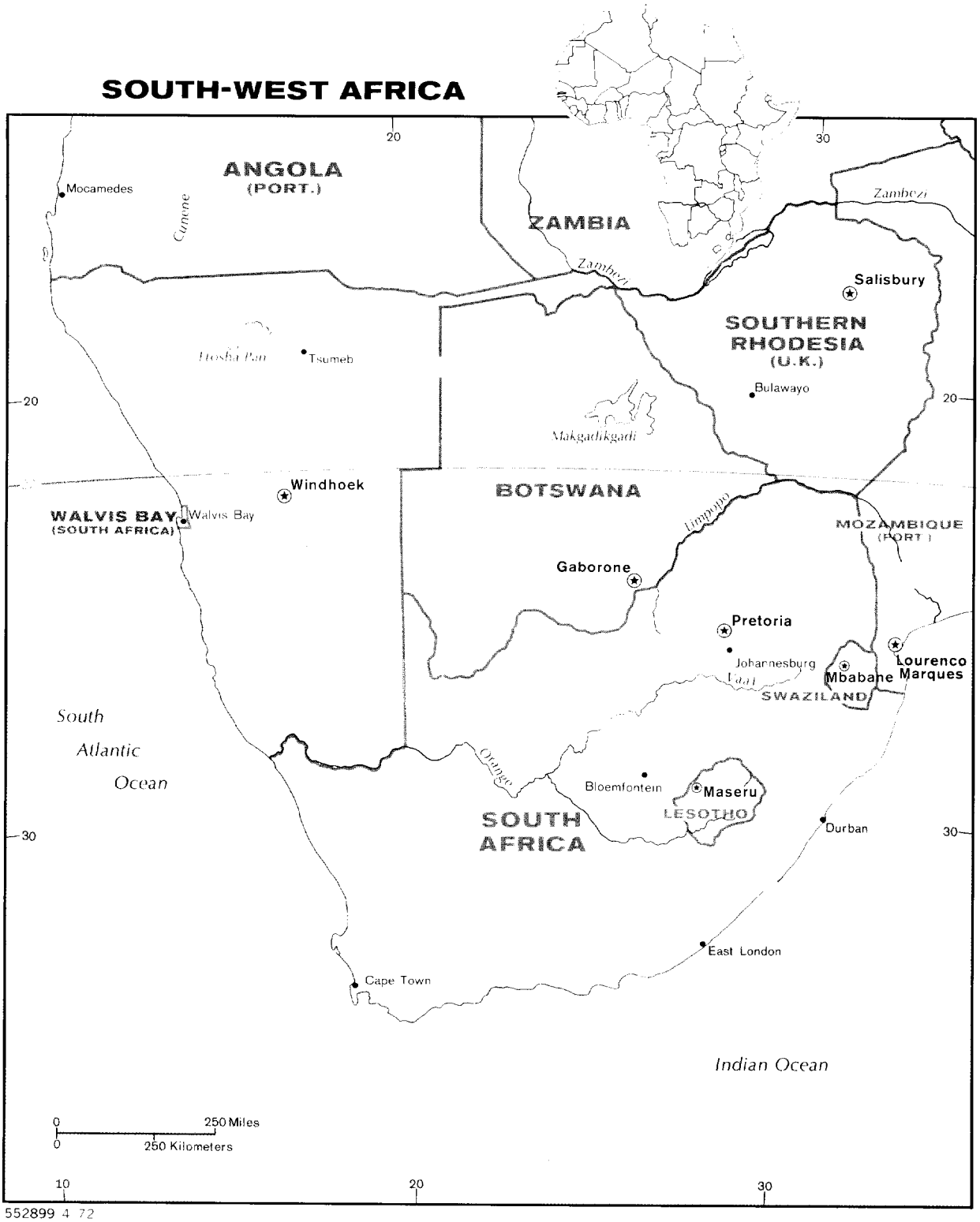

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not lost on Pretoria, which has always maintained that its presence is instrumental in preventing inter-tribal warfare.

Having successfully challenged the white power structure, the Ovambo returned to their jobs, but with heightened expectations. Almost at once, management had trouble with workers who refused to do chores or submit to disciplines that were common and unquestioned before the strike. The Ovambo are likely to grow even more militant since only a few of their grievances were actually accommodated after the strike. New strikes have been called, but have fizzled quickly. Continued labor trouble is almost a certainty.

Even before the strikers began straggling back to work, there were unmistakable signs that their success had triggered outbursts against a wide range of other long-suppressed grievances. The Ovambo dismantled miles of fence that the government had built along the Angolan border. Scattered disorders led to a South African decision to send army units to assist the police in maintaining order. Such activities on the part of the Ovambo—long the tribe that has profited the most from South African rule—further eroded Pretoria's claim that its administration has the overwhelming support of the territory's people.

Pretoria Takes Stock

These events have forced Pretoria's leaders to sit back and take a fresh look at the territory: in quick succession, Pretoria lost a major case at the International Court of Justice; black discontent grew and found expression in quickening political activity; labor grievances culminated in a major strike and there will be more.

All this at a time when the world is paying increased attention to the area and adding to the pressure on the South African Government to justify its presence in South-West. The territory has indeed become something of an embarrassment to the republic, which, for the past few years, has been trying to improve its international image. Pretoria's leaders now appear to be reassessing the territory's importance. They are searching for ways of resolving the impasse in the perhaps forlorn hope that this might help take southern Africa out of the international spotlight. In October 1971, for example, the republic's deputy finance minister admitted publicly that the disadvantages of administering South-West already outweigh the advantages and that the territory will become an even heavier burden.

Seeking a Way Out

The plebiscite proposal made to the International Court probably marked the beginning of a new effort by Pretoria to find an honorable way out. The offer was withdrawn in January 1972, when the depth of feeling against South Africa displayed during the Ovambo strike made it apparent to Pretoria that it might not win such an election.

In February 1972, rumors began to circulate that Pretoria might consider a partition of the territory at the 22nd parallel, which crosses the country just above Windhoek. Under this scheme, South Africa would incorporate the southern half into South Africa, and the non-whites could do what they want with the northern part. This would have the effect of protecting South Africa's borders and reserving for the republic most of the profitable mines. Most of the non-white homelands are in the northern sector, so only a few non-white groups would be dislocated. It is most doubtful that the UN would agree to such a partition. It would not be popular with the non-whites who put a premium on freedom to move around and would not want to be restricted to a smaller piece of territory.

Another scheme currently being discussed is to grant independence to several of the tribal homelands when the South African Government believes they are ready for it (which could be years for some, decades for others) and guide these independent units into a sort of federally structured nation. This divide-and-rule technique

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would keep each independent unit fairly dependent on South Africa's good will and not strong enough to go against South Africa's wishes or threaten its security. The South Africans claim, with some justification, that the various tribes are antagonistic toward each other and that a federal structure is necessary to protect the weaker from domination by the stronger. The editor of a prominent Windhoek daily newspaper asserted, following private conversations with Foreign Ministry officials, that Pretoria is ready to make real concessions and even give up some land if one or more ethnic groups chose independence.

This may have been the idea foremost in the minds of South African officials when they played host to UN Secretary General Waldheim for a week's visit in early March. Although the trip was made at Waldheim's initiative, the South Africans welcomed him and gave him a quick tour of South-West; they even gave him time to talk with selected black spokesmen. Talks between Vorster and Waldheim were not particularly substantive, but Vorster seemed to be anxious to do something about the South-West problem. A federal structure of eventually independent units was no doubt what Vorster had in mind when he agreed in his talks with Waldheim to a policy of self-determination and independence for the territory.

The Future

Will the current round of rethinking and discussion produce any real changes? Probably not in the short run. South Africa wants off the hook, but a satisfactory compromise with the UN probably cannot be struck soon. The UN is seeking self-determination for the territory as a whole, while South Africa seeks it for each ethnic group individually. Furthermore, there is a feeling at the UN that South Africa is backed into a corner and has few options. Indeed, most UN members may feel that if the UN only holds out, South Africa will eventually be forced to give up the territory.

South Africa's room for maneuver is very limited by domestic considerations. Unless the ground had been very carefully prepared, a backdown on South-West would cause Vorster and his conservative Afrikaner regime endless headaches. Simplistic in domestic politics and unrealistic in international affairs, they may not fully appreciate that even a little movement on the South-West issue may put in motion a process of change that could be difficult to stop.

So, the fact that South Africans are moving at all is worthy of note. After years of total intransigence, the South Africans have come to accept the principle of "accountability" to the UN. The agreement between Vorster and Waldheim to create a position of UN representative for South-West Africa represents a concession from Pretoria to the view that the UN has some legal rights in the territory. A dialogue has been started that may not produce results as soon as the African states at the UN would like, but it is a start. 25X1

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