

USSR-AFRICA RELATIONS IN THE 1970s AND 1980s: AN ANALYTICAL PROPOSAL OF MOTIVATIONS, CONDITIONING ELEMENTS AND IMPACTS

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Introduction

The actuality of the theme of USSR relations with African countries in the 1970s and 1980s is grounded in the revision of a dimension of the mainstream historiography of the Cold War and in the current Russia-Africa interaction, which has deeper roots, essential for its comprehension. The USSR-Africa relations constitute a historiographical gap, dominated by subtly instrumental works produced in the context of the late escalation of the Cold War on the continent. Within this framework, the present text is based on ongoing research. In two previous articles, here taken as a starting point, the focus was on the African Revolutions of the 1970s and 1980s, followed by the analysis of African Marxist Military Regimes during the same period. From this point forth, relevant matters emerged, such as the profile of the relations between the Second and Third Worlds, and the doubling of the number of self-proclaimed socialist states with a Marxist-Leninist orientation, all of which emerged in the periphery (rising from 14 to 30). Two-thirds of these new regimes were African.

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In this context, the present article examines the Soviet Union (USSR) relations with the African States that were its allies in the 1970s and 1980s. The analysis focuses on the reciprocal motivations, the conditioning elements and the resulting impacts and legacies. This process gained significance belatedly, within a short period of two decades (1969-89), targeting a limited number of countries, yet it was intense (sometimes motivated by Cuba) and had a considerable impact on the transformation of Africa. It is argued that African nations were not “pawns” of the Cold War in their cooperation with Moscow, nor that the USSR pursued a systemic project of “exporting the revolution” or a geopolitical Grand Design for Africa (Coker 1985).

The countries under focus are those that implemented socialist-oriented regimes through National Liberation Movements or Military Coups: Angola, Mozambique, Ethiopia, Somalia, Madagascar, People’s Republic of the Congo, Benin, Burkina Faso, and Seychelles. The USSR also actively supported the National Liberation Movements that fought against the racist regimes of Zimbabwe (Zimbabwe African People’s Union/ZAPU), Namibia (South West Africa People’s Organisation/SWAPO), and South Africa (African National Congress and South African Communist Party/ANC-SACP).

The article also seeks to identify the soviet perception of these countries, through the concepts of *Socialist-Oriented States* and *Non-Capitalist Way of Development*, formulated by the Academy of Sciences of the USSR. Likewise, it seeks to comprehend the perception and expectations of African actors regarding the socialist bloc and bilateral cooperation, concluding with a reevaluation of the effects of this relationship. Usually regarded as a “failure”, there are, however, elements in this process that suggest another result in the ulterior evolution of the analyzed nations, despite the immense human costs at the time. With few exceptions, they are currently modernized states with increasing state capacity and significant international protagonism.

By the mid-1970s, the Soviet state was militarily powerful, but it was facing relative economic stagnation and diplomatic pressure. How, then, was the paradox of the Soviet superpower projecting itself into Africa and the Third World possible precisely when it was facing difficulties? A plausible explanation is that the motivation stemmed from local factors, which were predominant during the crisis of the 1970s and the concurrent imbalance in the world order. The cautious and hesitant Soviet policy toward National Liberation Movements, in a short period of time, had to reposition itself in the face of African Revolutions and Military governments that adopted socialist regimes and sought diplomatic, military, and economic support within the Soviet sphere (Halliday 1999).

Precisely during its decline, the USSR and other socialist industrialized countries became involved in the Revolutions of the Third World (Geopolitical South), although relatively limited by the formal state diplomacy in force in the international system. The Italian literary scholar Franco Fortini, during the celebrations of the Bicentennial of the French Revolution, when the Eastern European regimes were collapsing in 1989, remarked that “every Revolution, before being swept away, flares up for a moment to illuminate the reasons for the one to come” (Fortini 1989, n.p., our translation)². With the reaction of the Reagan Era, the conditions of this relation became extremely difficult: the New Cold War, the deepening of regional conflicts in Africa, increasing economic problems, and, finally, the gradual withdrawal of Soviet support under Gorbachev and the USSR’s collapse itself, leaving its African allies in the lurch (Westad 2007).

In specific terms, the cases outlined in the abstract are analyzed, questioning and contextualizing arguments such as the support to the National Liberation Movements allegedly aimed at spreading a World Revolution, a superpower action with geopolitical purposes and economic interests in exploring resources from African allies. Subsequently, topics such as the role of Sino-Soviet rivalry and Sino-American convergence in Africa (with regional and global impacts), as well as the opportunity that emerged from the revolutions and military regimes converted to Marxism, will be examined (Gromiko 1983). Cuba’s active role and the discreet East German protagonism supported the Soviet logistical-military opportunism in offsetting setbacks such as the loss of the alliance with Egypt and the dispute with China. At this point, the aforementioned concepts developed by the Communist Party and the Academy of Sciences of the USSR to address this unexpected reality acquire significance: *States of Socialist Orientation* and the *Non-Capitalist Way of Development* (Agafónov 1984; Ivanov 1987).

In Moscow, there was an internal debate and a complex multi-level structure for the formulation and implementation of foreign policy. In the African case, the main protagonists of the soviet decision-making process were the International Department of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU), the Central Committee, and the Military-Industrial Complex, among others. Finally, synthesizing and further deepening the findings of the two previous articles, the interests of African leaders, their perceptions, needs, difficulties, expectations, and frustrations are taken into consideration (Visentini 2012).

2 In the original: “cada Revolução, antes de ser varrida, acende-se por um instante para iluminar as razões daquela que virá” (Fortini 1989, n.p.).

Theoretical and methodological aspects

The theoretical framework is based primarily in the analyses developed in Fred Halliday's work *Revolution and world politics: The rise and fall of the sixth great power*³, as well as in *Rethinking International Relations* and other productions of the same author, identified in the bibliography. Regarding the case of Marxist Military Regimes, there are three works of major relevance, with theoretical approaches to the matter: Hughes (1992), Markakis (1986), and Ottaway (1982).

Academically, International Relations began as the study of war as a rational and deliberate act of aggression, and not as the internationalization of a social conflict. The Charter of the United Nations itself conceives the world order as if it were separate from the internal situation of states. Accordingly, Anglo-American Political Science considers the Revolution as a disruption of regular processes. Until the publication of Theda Skocpol's work (which, to a large extent, updates Barrington Moore Jr.'s *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy*), Revolutions were regarded as internal phenomena. Jack Gladstone, in turn, emphasized that international factors, such as economic-fiscal pressures and politics of destabilizing alliances, weakened the state and triggered revolutions.

Realists and neorealists, such as Kenneth Waltz, by not connecting the internal and external dimensions, ignore the fact that most alliances aim to prevent revolutions within member states. It is worth noting that every revolution seeks to internationalize itself, just as counter-revolutions (in pursuit of homogeneity) do, though generally without success. Thus, the limits of the "export of the Revolution" (or of counter-revolution) give rise to truces, a reduction in ideological rhetoric, and a more diplomatic stance. Nevertheless, this does not mean that revolutions have been "socialized", because, according to Halliday, "as long as their post-revolutionary domestic orders remain intact, they continue to pose a challenge to the system of other states" (1999, 187, our translation)⁴.

To historic sociology, the "international" created the state, and not the contrary. Regarding the revolutionary processes here studied in their international dimension, it is important to highlight that wars produce revo-

3 Halliday, Fred. 1999. *Revolution and world politics: The rise and fall of the sixth great power*. London: Macmillan Press.

4 In the original: "enquanto suas ordens internas pós-revolucionárias permanecerem intactas, elas continuam a representar um desafio ao sistema de outros Estados" (Halliday 1999, 187).

lutions and vice versa. In the analyzed cases, for instance, it is evident that the revolutions of the 1970s led to conventional wars in the periphery (with the involvement of great powers), to which the international community was not prepared. Furthermore, in the regional plan, the greatest impact comes not so much from the deliberate action, but from the example set, which serves as a catalyst against the established order.

Even Marxism, which supposedly could explain the revolutions it produces, has explanatory limitations. One of them is its scarcity of tools to analyze the differences between various revolutions and the persistence of the national matter. One exception is found in Brucan (1974). Another limitation is that the emphasis on “infrastructural” elements leads to an analysis that privileges systemic capitalist relations on a global scale. Paradoxically, little attention is paid to the possibilities of revolutions. Wallerstein, for instance, places his emphasis on anti-systemic social movements, while Arrighi focuses on the economic cycles, without giving prominence to the *ruptures* of revolutions, nor adequately addressing states that have broken with the capitalist model. They conceive the international system as a global socio-economic system (capitalist) overlaid by secondary political structures.

Methodologically, Halliday proposes four instruments that will be used as research elements: a) **cause**: the extent to which the “international” produces the revolution; b) **foreign policy**: how Revolutionary States conduct their relations with other nations; c) **responses**: what is the reaction of other states; d) **formation**: how, over a longer period, international and world-system factors constrain the post-revolutionary internal development of states and shape their political, social and economic evolution.

The gradual Soviet involvement in revolutionized Africa

The broader objective of this analysis consists in contributing to the discussion of socialist and/or revolutionary foreign policy within the context of the History of International Relations, based on the case of interaction between a socialist superpower and self-proclaimed socialist African regimes. The temporal framework covers the 1970s and 1980s, identifying the political motivations, historical determinants, and impacts of the USSR’s relations with African states with which it had significant interactions, both as allies and adversaries. The countries under focus are Angola and Mozambique (both independent through the actions of National Liberation Movements), Ethiopia, Madagascar, the People’s Republic of Congo, Benin, Burkina Faso,

Seychelles, and Somalia (already independent from France, except for the last two, where military coups established socialist regimes). Additionally, the National Liberation Movements that fought against the racist regimes of Zimbabwe (ZAPU), Namibia (SWAPO), and South Africa (ANC/SACP) are considered (Shubin 2008).

The approach primarily focuses on the degree of Soviet involvement in each country. In Ethiopia and Somalia, where alliances shifted, the Soviet and Cuban presence was intense due to the Ogaden War and Ethiopian separatist conflicts. Similarly, in Angola, a civil war took place involving interventions from Zaire and South Africa, as well as the indirect involvement of the United States and China. This resulted in a conventional war in which Cuban forces supported the MPLA with combat troops and relied on Soviet weaponry, logistics, and advisors. In Mozambique, Cuban-Soviet support was limited, but East German assistance played an important role. However, racist South Africa and Rhodesia felt threatened and sought to militarily destabilize their new revolutionary neighbors. The response was the formation of the *Frontline States* (Tanzania, Zambia, Botswana, Angola, Mozambique, and, after 1980, Zimbabwe). To address this challenge, they received multiple forms of Soviet support, with the USSR providing military training to the Liberation Movements against the rival regimes. This support forged political and interpersonal ties with Moscow that persisted even after these movements came to power and the USSR no longer existed (Shubin 2008).

Francophone states, on the other hand, were less relevant to the Soviets and still maintained strong dependence on France, which suggested caution, as Paris had withdrawn from NATO and represented a counterbalance to Anglo-American influence on a global scale. Madagascar and Seychelles (the latter anglophone and non-militarized) were elements in the struggle against *Apartheid* and the U.S. militarization of the Indian Ocean, with the former receiving moderate support. The same applied to the small People's Republic of Congo (Brazzaville), which was rich in oil, had a strong national left, and was important for supporting Angola and its oil fields in Cabinda. Benin and Burkina Faso, while of lesser relevance, serve as examples of socially fragile countries with low strategic and economic importance, but that could not be politically ignored. In all cases, there was Cuban presence and agency, training of cadres by all socialist countries, and development and security cooperation projects (Silveiro González 2018).

The starting point must be the historical analysis of the Soviet foreign policy in its overall decision-making process, the role of the colonial world,

and, in particular, the little-known Africa during the Stalin and Khrushchev eras. The latter began to recognize the relevance of decolonization, but achieved disappointing results in his voluntarist African initiatives, such as in Nkrumah's Ghana, Sékou Touré's Guinea, and Lumumba's Congo. The USSR lacked Africanists and in-depth knowledge of the continent, and did not perceive significant strategic relevance in Africa. Its relations with the National Liberation Movements were also limited, rhetorical, and superficial. The primary objective was the defense of the USSR, whether as the "Homeland of Socialism" or as the Russian state, which required maintaining a *détente* with the United States and its NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization). Accordingly, it sought to avoid counterproductive "revolutionary adventures" in adversary geopolitical areas. In the same vein, it was necessary to exploit France's rivalry with the Anglo-Americans within NATO and the rearmament of West Germany, which included refraining from directly confronting French colonialism and neocolonialism in Africa.

What, then, prompted the USSR to re-engage in Africa? Despite previous setbacks, at the beginning of the 1970s the situation changed in a rapid, intense, and unexpected way. As a **challenge**, a 180-degree shift took place in Sadat's Egypt, which expelled Soviet advisors and moved closer to Israel and the United States (resulting in a loss of position in the Middle East), as well as the challenging competition with China (allied with the U.S. since 1971) in Africa. As an **opportunity**, the Carnation Revolution in Portugal impacted Angola and Mozambique, and the Ethiopian Revolution brought down a solid ally of the United States in the region, while it was also being defeated in Vietnam. Brezhnev's USSR saw *détente*'s shift and had to react, compensating for losses and seizing opportunities, although its diplomacy was mostly reactive.

To this end, the USSR had to rely on Cuba, which possessed a strong presence, initiative and connections in Africa (Leogrande 1980). Since the 4th Summit of the Non-Aligned Movement (Algiers, 1973), Fidel Castro engaged with the African situation and established strategic cooperation with the USSR. Several Eastern European countries also had interests on the continent, and the National Liberation Movements sought avidly for external support. The process became more acute as Angola's independence began to evolve into a Civil War with interventions from South Africa and Congo/Zaire, with North-American and Chinese support. The same occurred with the inversion of alliances in the Horn of Africa, as Soviet support shifted from Somalia to revolutionary Ethiopia (Cardoso 2020).

What was the intensity of the interaction and the objectives of the USSR in Africa during these two decades? The conjuncture showed that Cuba and several African leaders took initiatives that presented the Kremlin with *faits accomplis*, compelling it to become involved economically, diplomatically and militarily. Angola and Southern Africa became the stage for an internationalized Civil War, as did the Horn of Africa (Telepneva 2014; Halliday 1983). Moscow's diplomatic-military involvement, although intense, was differentiated and cautious, developing a diplomacy that sought to align with the Organization of African Unity (OAU), regarding the maintenance of borders and opposition to the racist regimes condemned by the UN and the OAU. Despite contributing by sending equipment, weapons, advisors and intelligence information, combat troops were almost exclusively Cuban.

Concerning the diplomatic-military aspects, Soviet assistance was decisive for the survival of the new regimes, but economic cooperation proved insufficient and inadequate. With Gorbachev's rise to power in Moscow, the focus shifted toward gradual Soviet disengagement. But a rather interesting factor that delayed the withdrawal intended by *Perestroika* was that, during this cooperation, bonds of camaraderie and personal friendship were forged among mid-level African and Soviet cadres in military, party and intelligence spheres, creating mechanisms of resistance to the leaders' decisions. They relied on Cuban support and enabled belated victories, such as the Battle of Cuito Cuanavale in Angola (1988), that contributed decisively to Namibia's independence when negotiations had stagnated.

The African Revolutions' perceptions about Soviet socialism

Basically, there were five aspects that African countries found appealing in the Soviet Marxist experience: 1) a revolutionary doctrine for conquest and maintenance of power; 2) an economic development strategy alternative to liberal capitalism; 3) a policy for nation (either unitary or federal) and state building; 4) an ideology of state and social control; and 5) a source of international support in the military, diplomatic and economic spheres (Fontaine 1982; Patman 1990; Ottaway 1982).

It is necessary to detail this relevant matter: why did the revolutionary African leaders who came to power in the 1970s adopt Marxist-Leninist references and seek support in the Soviet camp? Marxism — and later the practice of Marxism-Leninism — represented a doctrine that offered a range

of appealing solutions to the major challenges faced by countries that chose the path of revolutionary rupture in the attempt to construct a post-capitalist society, according to Clapham (1996). Ethiopia, for example, was an ancient empire with feudal structures, dominated by the Orthodox Church, and which had gone through an expansion period that led it to control a vast territory with significant ethnic diversity.

In this regard, the first appeal that Marxism offered was obviously that of a *revolutionary doctrine for the conquest and maintenance of power*. Unlike most colonial or semi-colonial states — which carried out the revolutions primarily through nationalist and anti-colonial ideologies, seeking liberation above all — the revolutionaries who embraced Marxism (with more or less sincerity) considered it a radical and progressive alternative to the existing status quo. This applied both to the organization of political and/or armed movements aimed at seizing power and mobilizing popular support, as well as to the post-seizure scenario within a confusing balance of forces. In the case of the *African Marxist Military Regimes* that conquered power through a *Coup d'État*, “the usurpation of power requires legitimacy through a credible alternative to the fallen regime. (...) Radical soldiers shared the illusion that socialism could be reached quickly and by a decree” (Markakis 1986, 4, our translation)⁵. Furthermore, it was necessary to occupy the political space of the radical civilian left, an ally that challenged the new holders of power.

Secondly, Marxism also offered them a *doctrine of development*. This doctrine advocated the destruction of the oligarchic power that controlled the country until then — seen as an obstacle to the well-being of the people — and its replacement with a more efficient state combined with a free peasantry. This development strategy sought alternative paradigms to the neocolonial form of liberalism and to the purely moralistic and voluntarist experience of “African Socialism”, and was therefore based on Marxist development premises, grounded in a structure of central planning, socialist distribution, and, when viable, industrialization.

A third and fourth appeal of Marxism-Leninism for revolutionary governments was *nation-building*, whether *unitary* or *multiethnic*, and *state-building*. How could they deal with the internal divisions stemming from low levels of development, historical legacies, and manipulations of colonizers or external actors? It was necessary to forge a nation under new foundations. Certainly, the USSR, which combined an effective central government with

5 In the original: “a usurpação do poder requer legitimidade através de uma alternativa crível ao regime derrubado. (...) Os soldados radicais compartilhavam a ilusão de que o socialismo poderia ser alcançado rapidamente e por decreto” (Markakis 1986, 4).

respect for the cultural identities of several nationalities and a considerable degree of autonomy, consisted of an attractive model. In a dialectical relation with this factor, the new governments emerging from colonialism or neocolonialism faced administrative structures internally limited and addicted by external domination, whether in its direct or indirect form. It was essential to organize an apparatus capable of handling the massive transformations and conflicts that were approaching, a new type of state. Thus, Marxism-Leninism was also an *ideology of state control*.

Finally, the fifth appeal of Marxism-Leninism for revolutionary governments was its use as a source of *international support* in the context of the Cold War. The USSR, China and the socialist community in general thus represented the only consistent source of military supplies, legitimacy, and political and economic support. The necessity to secure external support was a necessary condition to the survival of many Marxist regimes. However, Soviet support, besides creating dependency ties, was generally concentrated in the military sphere, leaving much to be desired in the economic and financial fields. Regarding this point, Arnold Hughes (1992) argues that it equally represented a *guarantee of national sovereignty*.

Hughes also adds three additional elements that have a connection to African political culture. Marxism was perceived as a *superior ideology*, as an alternative to Western capitalism and to African Socialism, both considered in the 1970s as inoperative projects for the continent. Through Marxism, ruling groups felt part of the global socialist modernity, as it brought a sense of security through an ideological discourse that enabled them to identify problems and formulate policies and strategies to solve them.

For several radical African leaders, Marxism, besides being a rational strategy, also possessed the qualities of a “*political amulet*”, with “an almost magical charm to ward off the political diseases of neocolonialism and underdevelopment” (Hughes 1992, n.p., our translation)⁶. According to Zolberg (apud Hughes 1992, 13, our translation), *Planning* was not only an objective instrument, “but also a *symbol* of rationality, control, and order. Political ideology becomes an enchantment that genuinely transforms reality, and even if nothing happens, it changes how men perceive it”⁷. For him, the “amulet” would enable the intelligent elites to control the future.

6 In the original: “um charme quase mágico para prevenir as doenças políticas como o neocolonialismo e o subdesenvolvimento” (Hughes 1992, s.p.).

7 In the original: “mas também símbolo de racionalidade, controle e ordem. A ideologia política se torna um encantamento que, genuinamente, transforma a realidade, e mesmo que nada aconteça, mudando a visão dos homens sobre isso” (Zolberg apud Hughes 1992, 13).

Finally, particularly for the middle classes, the Marxist regime represented a possibility for social *self-promotion*. The state constituted the main provider of formal employment, and the socializing development model greatly expanded jobs in this sector. But it was not solely about economic gains, since broad segments of youth and the middle class believed that the Marxist option offered the hope of a better future. By removing a large part of the elite linked to the former colonizer, the regime opened space for social and political ascension of new actors.

Marxist-oriented socialism succeeded, during the 20th century, in driving a series of victorious revolutions in successive waves. The first wave took place in the aftermath of World War I, with the triumph of the Russian Revolution and the construction of socialism in the USSR. The revolution in Mongolia, due to particular circumstances, is considered part of this period. The second wave was a result of the anti-fascist movements and the outcomes of World War II, institutionalized at the Yalta Conference. It affected Eastern Europe both through the “top-down revolutions” supported by Moscow, which formed the People’s Democracies, and also by the autonomous national revolutions of Yugoslavia and Albania. It is important to highlight that there is a recent historiography that recognizes the existence of autochthonous revolutionary roots even in countries that were part of the Warsaw Pact and depended on Soviet international support.

The third wave, which developed in parallel with the previous one, had as its epicenter the Chinese Revolution, which began in the 1920s and was characterized by the peasant question. After a quarter of a century of guerillas and wars, the world’s most populous nation became a socialist regime. The Korean Revolution and the first stage of the Vietnamese Revolution are part of this phase. These Marxist revolutions and the regimes forged in the first half of the 20th century occurred “on the periphery of the center”. This was because the industrial capitalist powers that dominated the system’s core entered into open conflict (the imperialist race, World War I, and World War II) while struggling to redefine the international system and the hegemonic position within it. Thus, it became possible for two revolutions and their corresponding regimes, the Soviet and the Chinese, to triumph and shape a new world order. Both were located in the periphery of the geopolitical space — which was deeply affected by the massive confrontation and transformation.

Finally, in the fourth and last wave — within which the phenomenon addressed in this study is situated — the decolonization movement and Third World nationalism protagonized the triumph of several socialist-oriented revolutions, such as the Cuban, Vietnamese, Afghan, South Yemeni, and

the African ones of the 1970s. These occurred in the second half of the 20th century “at the center of the periphery”, that is, in the southern region of the planet that was still non-industrialized, where the expansion of the *uneven and combined development of capitalism* was taking place (Westad 2007). Among the referred revolutions, despite their limited resources, two became paradigmatic and had systemic effects worldwide: the Cuban and the Vietnamese. Evidently, they were linked and depended on the two great foundational revolutions (the USSR’s and China’s), but developed their own dynamic. Therefore, the comprehension of the USSR-African states relations during the 1970s and 1980s is essential to examine the motivations, conditions, and impacts of these processes.

Motivations, conditioning elements, and impacts: preliminary results

Regarding the motivations, initially, it is observed that the original and late African Revolutions, both the ones resulting from guerrillas of the National Liberation Movements as the ones implemented by military *Coups d’État* without a Marxist link, had *fundamentally autochthonous origins*. The international alignment with the soviet field resulted from necessities that emerged gradually, where ideology was adjusted according to the circumstances. It is important to note that the USSR was, back then, the only Permanent Member of the Security Council integrally favorable to the revolutionary regimes and to the Liberation Movements against South Africa.

The Soviet motivation to support such regimes was based, conjuncturally, in tactic-opportunist factors, explored to respond to unexpected situations of the 1970s crisis, without a prior guiding Grand Strategy, whether a global geopolitical one or one “exporter of the Revolution”. The negative outcomes for Moscow in the international scenario and the almost simultaneous eruption of several revolutions required a Soviet response, so as not to lose its prestige in the Third World and counter the Chinese accusation of “social-imperialism”. The decision-making process was far from being consensual, but it occurred in support of internationally recognized states, which suffered external aggression. Above all, the Soviet Union suffered from political-ideological competition with the People’s Republic of China (Permanent Member of the Security Council of the United Nations since 1971) regarding legitimacy among Third World countries. As a result, in Africa, they supported rival movements and countries.

The Soviet support to the National Liberation Movements opposed to the anglophone racist regimes of Southern Africa, unlike that offered to Revolutionary Regimes, was one of “subversion” of the status quo. However, this occurred against the racist regimes of South Africa and Rhodesia, states under wide international condemnation, even by Western countries. There was sort of an undeclared war between the USSR and the *Apartheid* regime, which went far beyond the partial Euro-American diplomatic sanctions. The training of revolutionary cadres was the strongest point, as well as the support in weaponry to the Frontline States that were destabilized by the racist regimes.

The timing of the process of connecting the USSR with the allied African Revolutionary States happened under unfavorable conditions for both sides. What the Soviets could offer was little in view of what the USSR possessed, and insufficient to the necessities of African allies. The degree of extroversion of the Soviet economy was very limited and concentrated on COMECON (Council for Mutual Economic Assistance), in addition to the expense of supporting Cuba, Vietnam, Nicaragua, Ethiopia, South Yemen, and Afghanistan. The African revolutionary states, which admired the model and realizations of the Soviet economy, had the expectation of receiving economic assistance. To these limitations, it must be considered that there were numerous revolutions, which happened in a short period of time, that would need to be helped, something unfeasible.

For this reason, many of them applied for membership in COMECON, but that was also unfeasible, due to the precariousness and economic disorganization of these countries, where not even the regimes were consolidated and faced armed opposition. Based on this and on the previous African experiences, the concepts of Non-Capitalist Way of Development and Socialist-Oriented States were forged. They argued that these were regimes in transition, which should create a mixed economy, with state, cooperative, and private sectors, without a complete rupture from the global capitalist economy. In parallel, they should build the new state and organize and mobilize society, particularly women, young people, and workers.

The shipment of weapons and agricultural and industrial machinery was, to a limited extent, compensated by concessions for mining and fishing. Still, very little was materialized, since internal insecurity and logistical problems made cooperation unfeasible. Even so, there are authors, such as Campbell (1986), who argue that the USSR's interest in Africa was to search for a supply of minerals and energy. If this affirmation were correct, it would have been a bad deal, because African states have accumulated an enormous

debt to Moscow, which practically could not be paid. Such an argument, as well as the idea that the Kremlin wished to “export the revolution” to Africa, is typical of the New Cold War narratives.

The “revolutionary decade” of the 1970s was succeeded by the “conservative decade” of the 1980s. Contrary to the dominant argument, which affirms that the USSR-Africa cooperation was a failure, there were constructive factors as a legacy. Despite the suffering caused by wars, they facilitated the rise of the Liberation Movements in Southern Africa with the end of *Apartheid*, Ethiopia’s modernization, and the survival and/or modernization of African states. The training of African professionals, such as administrators, doctors, industrial and agricultural technicians, teachers, and military personnel, among others, was intense and had lasting effects. Today, in many countries, they come back to power in progressive governments.

In short, the USSR was important to this group of African states in the following aspects: a) it was the only Permanent Member of the Security Council of the UN that, at the time of the Sino-American alliance, assertively positioned itself by their side; b) besides being a nuclear power, it caused surprise for its logistical capacity in sending massive military support to distant Angola and Ethiopia; c) it possessed a solid technological-industrial base, the only one independent from capitalist powers; d) and it had an economic and state organizational model that was appealing to the young African nations, which searched for alternatives to the neocolonial system.

Therefore, it is necessary to proceed to an objective evaluation of the impact of armed conflicts that occurred within the framework of Soviet-African cooperation. The terrible humanitarian cost is widely explored in the historical literature: dead, wounded, mutilated, refugees, orphans, and material destruction. On the other hand, the newly independent societies suddenly had to deal with wars involving advanced weaponry and organization, demanding organizational effort, which had repercussions on the formation of cadres and political-administrative structures. As in the case of European states, war led to an increase in state capacity.

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ABSTRACT

The article analyzes the Soviet Union (USSR) relations with African states that were its allies. The period studied covers the 1970s and the 1980s, focusing on reciprocal motivations, conditioning elements and the resulting impacts and legacies of this relationship. This process gained relevance belatedly, over a short period of two decades (1969-89), targeted a few countries, but was intense (often motivated by Cuba) and had a relevant impact on the transformation of Africa. The article seeks to demonstrate that African nations were not “pawns” of the Cold War in their cooperation with Moscow, nor did the USSR have a systemic project of “exporting the revolution” or a geopolitical Grand Design for Africa.

KEYWORDS

Soviet Diplomacy. USSR-Africa Relations. African Socialist Regimes.

Received on August 11, 2025

Accepted on August 18, 2025⁸

Translated by Luiza Gabriel de Souza

8 How to cite: Visentini, Paulo G. F. “USSR-Africa relations in the 1970s and 1980s: an analytical proposal of motivations, conditioning elements and impacts.” *Brazilian Journal of African Studies* 10 (19): 32-47. <https://doi.org/10.22456/2448-3923.149438>.