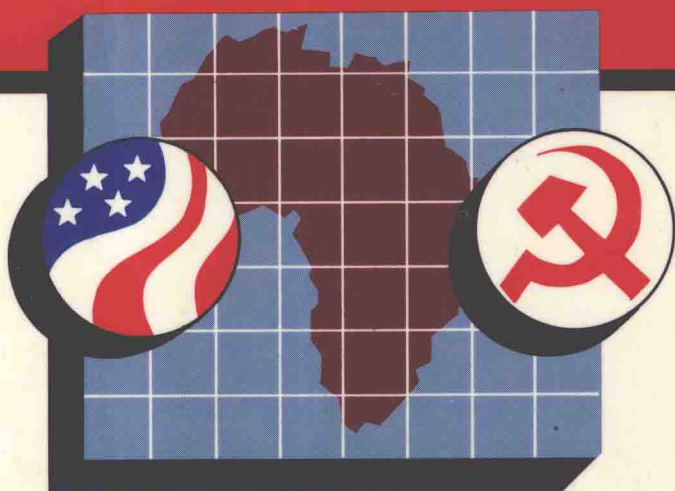


The SUPER- POWERS and AFRICA

**The Constraints of a Rivalry
1960–1990**



ZAKI LAÏDI

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*The Constraints of
a Rivalry,*
1960—1990

Z A K I L A Ì D I

Translated by Patricia Baudoin



The University of Chicago Press

Chicago and London

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The University of Chicago Press, Chicago 60637
The University of Chicago Press, Ltd., London

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Printed in the United States of America

99 98 97 96 95 94 93 92 91 90 5 4 3 2 1

First published as *Les contraintes
d'une rivalité: Les superpuissances
et l'Afrique (1960–1985)*, © Editions La Découverte,
Paris, 1986.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Laïdi, Zaki.

[Contraintes d'une rivalité. English]

The superpowers and Africa : the constraints of a rivalry,
1960–1990 / Zaki Laïdi; translated by Patricia Baudoin.

p. cm.

Translation of: *Les contraintes d'une rivalité*.

Includes bibliographical references.

ISBN 0-226-46781-3 (cloth) 0-226-46782-1 (paper)

1. Africa—Foreign relations. 2. Africa—Foreign relations—
United States. 3. United States—Foreign relations—Africa.
4. Africa—Foreign relations—Soviet Union. 5. Soviet Union—
Foreign relations—Africa. 6. World politics, 1945– I. Title.
DT30.5.L3513 1990
960.3'2—dc20

90-10832
CIP

∞ The paper used in this publication meets the
minimum requirements of the American National Standard
for Information Sciences—Permanence of Paper for
Printed Library Materials, ANSI Z39.48-1984.

To my sons

Abbreviations and Acronyms

ABAKO	Association des Bakongo
ACP	Afrique-Caraïbes-Pacifique
ADF	African Development Fund
AID	Agency for International Development (US)
ANC	African National Congress
BOSS	Bureau of State Security (South Africa)
CAD	Comité de Aide au Développement (OCDE); = DAC
CDA	Cooperation for Development in Africa
CDSP	Current Digest of the Soviet Press
CEDEAO	Communauté Economique des Etats de l'Afrique de l'Ouest; = ECOWAS
CFA	Communauté Financière Africaine
CMEA	Council of Mutual Economic Assistance; = COMECON
COMECON	= CMEA
CONAKAT	Confédération des Associations Tribales du Katanga
CPSA	Communist Party of South Africa
CPSU	Communist Party of the Soviet Union
DAC	Development Assistance Committee (OECD); = CAD
DOS	Department of State (US)
DTA	Democratic Turnhalle Alliance (Namibia)
ECA	Economic Commission for Africa (UN)
ECLAC	Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (UN)
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States; = CEDEAO
EEC	European Economic Community
ELP	Portuguese Liberation Army
EPRP	Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party
ESF	Economic Support Fund
Eximbank	Export-Import Bank
FBIS	Foreign Broadcast Information Service

FNLA	Frente Nacional de Liberação de Angola
Frelimo	Frente de Liberação do Mocambique
Frolinat	Front de libération nationale du Tchad
FSM	Fédération syndicale mondiale; = WFTU
GAO	Government Accounting Office (US)
GNP	Gross national product
GRAE	Angolan Revolutionary Government in Exile
HNP	Herstigte Nasionale Parti (South Africa)
IBRD	International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (World Bank)
IDA	International Development Association
IMF	International Monetary Fund
JMNR	Jeunesse du Mouvement national révolutionnaire (Congo)
JPRS	Joint Publication Research Service
KANU	Kenyan African National Union
MFA	Movimento das Forças Armadas (Portugal)
MNC	Mouvement national congolais (Zaire)
MNR	Movimento Nacional de Resistência (Mozambique); = RENAMO
MPLA	Movimento Popular de Liberação de Angola
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NGO	Nongovernment organization
NIEO	New International Economic Order
NSC	National Security Council (US)
NSWFP	National Socialist Workers and Farmers Party (Nigeria)
OAU	Organization of African Unity
OCDE	Organisation de Coopération et de Développement Economiques; = OECD
OECD	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development; = OCDE
OPEC	Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries
OPIC	Overseas Private Investment Corporation
OSPAAAL	Organization of Solidarity of the Peoples of Africa, Asia, and Latin America
PCP	Partido Comunista Portugues
PCT	Parti congolais du Travail
PRPB	Parti révolutionnaire du peuple béninois
PSP	Partido Socialista Popular (Cuba)
RENAMO	Movimento Nacional de Resistência (Mozambique); = MNR
RTP	Rally of the Togolese People
SCP	Sudanese Communist Party
SDAR	Sarawi Arab Democratic Republic

SWAPO	South West Africa People's Organization (Namibia)
TAD	Trade and Development Board
UNCTAD	United Nations Conference on Trade and Development
UNITA	União Nacional por a Independência Total de Angola
UPA	União dos Populações de Angola
UPC	Union des Populations du Cameroun
UPNA	União dos Populações do Norte de Angola
USET	United States Embassy Telegram
WAMU	West Africa Monetary Union
WPE	Workers' Party of Ethiopia
WFTU	World Federation of Trade Unions; = FSM
ZANU	Zimbabwe African National Union
ZAPU	Zimbabwe African People's Union
ZIPRA	Zimbabwe Independent People's Revolutionary Army

Acknowledgments

This work is the fruit of academic reflections during the late 1970s. They were delineated in the 1979 publication of *Grandes Puissances et l'Afrique* (Paris, Cahiers du CHEAM) and in the defense of my thesis on the same subject for a doctorate in political science. Begun in the graduate school of the Institute for Policy Studies in Paris, this analysis was later pursued within the extremely productive cadre of the Center for International Studies and Research (CERI) of the National Foundations for Political Science.

Throughout those years, I had the benefit of essential support from my research director, Alfred Grosser, as well as the unstinting assistance of Guy Hermet, director of CERI. Without their aid, and without the stimulating comments of J.-C. Gautron, R. Girault, P. Hassner, and J. Leca, offered during defense of my thesis, this work would probably never have seen the light of day.

The product of a personal effort, this work is equally the sum of valuable and often informal reflections exchanged with colleagues and participants in the political life of Paris, Washington, and Brazzaville. It owes much to the effort to renew Africanist research within CERI, to the review *Politique africaine*, and most particularly to the inestimable support of J.-F. Bayart.

To all those mentioned herein, along with C. Perrot, S. Haas, H. Arnaud, and H. Cohen, I express my profound gratitude and friendship.
Alger-Vandoeuvres, August 1985

For this American edition I would like to thank my translator, Patricia Baudoin; Aristide Zolberg, who encouraged the University of Chicago Press to publish the work in English and who made many valuable suggestions; and Priscilla Coit Murphy, who not only edited and fine-tuned the translation but researched names, terms, and bibliographical references for the benefit of the English-speaking reader.

Paris, December 1989

Introduction to the American Edition

On December 22, 1988, the United States and the Soviet Union sponsored an Angolan–Cuban–South African accord anticipating the total though gradual withdrawal of Cuban troops from Angola by July 1991, as well as South Africa's departure from Namibia. Thus ended not only the last chapter of decolonization in Africa but also one of the most acute African crises. In many respects, the Soviet-American benediction in southern Africa confirms the crucial role the superpowers have taken on in the exacerbation and the denouement of African crises since 1975.

The Angolan crisis developed in a context of East-West tensions. It was attenuated in a more serene environment marked by collaboration between the superpowers. Taking this perspective further in the same direction, one might see in this historical agreement the triumph of American policies and the failure of the Soviet Union's. Indeed, after eight years of efforts, the United States achieved recognition by all regional actors of a link between the withdrawal of Cuban forces and Namibia's independence. On the other hand, the Soviet Union had lost all ideological illusions about that part of the world, which some were tempted to see as a possible area for extension of the communist system.

This being said, one might be susceptible to a reductionist view of the dynamics of relations between the superpowers if one insists on a stubborn interpretation of the stakes there as a zero-sum game. One might also be subject to a linear and mechanistic view of international relations if the following essential fact were forgotten: the results of a policy should rarely be measured by original objectives only; results must be interpreted according to the stakes at the time. Let us be more explicit about these two hypotheses. They seem essential, for they will serve as a foundation for the rest of this book.

One fact seems undeniable: the superpowers have clearly managed to synchronize the rhythm of African tensions with the state of their global relations. The tensions have been exacerbated when it was in the super-

powers' interest to do so and diminished when it was to their advantage. This mechanical relationship is maintained by the superpowers' ability to control the different economic or military flows to the different actors. But this relationship is not purely material or instrumental. The local actors' perceptions of the international climate and the political risk they can accommodate to advance their own interests is a fundamental element of international reality. It is also one of the most difficult to circumscribe since it rests sometimes so much on subjective elements.

The Dialectic of the Internal and the External

Scientific understanding of this phenomenon is particularly complex because interpenetration of the internal and the external is extremely difficult to measure. Neither the ebb nor the flow of African Marxisms is independent of the political evolution of the Soviet Union; but at the same time, nobody can seriously believe that the international factor was the sole determinant. And what is true for Marxism is also true for South Africa. Its withdrawal from Namibia after so much shuffling back and forth was the result, without any doubt, of the effectiveness of external pressure. But these pressures utterly fail to explain the evolution of South Africa's position. The semidefeat of Pretoria's troops at Cuito-Canavale (Angola) had strong repercussions in South Africa, to the extent that it demonstrated the erosion of its military power before Angola. This erosion was in large part the result of the loss of South African air supremacy, a loss itself largely caused by the effectiveness of the West's military embargo.

The impact of economic sanctions is more difficult to evaluate. Although more than a third of American companies in South Africa left the country, half of them maintained license contracts; and this arrangement is not the only factor to have reduced the impact of sanctions. The precipitous sale of American companies, for example, was transacted below their value, thus creating an indirect subsidy to the economics of apartheid. Added to this must be the renewed shipment of products through intermediaries (Botswana and Swaziland); restrictions on the repatriation of capital; and the possibilities for supplying South African companies through third parties. In reality, as is often the case, sanctions are more important for their induced and unforeseen effects than for their originally intended consequences. Commercial sanctions have had but a very limited effect on South African trade dynamics. They have, however, contributed to accelerating the net outflow of capital at precisely the time when restimulation of private investment is so crucial. Beyond these economic consequences, it is the erosion of South Africa's international position that the sanctions reveal.

In fact, it is the coincidence between internal and external dynamics that leads all too often to overestimating the importance of external dynamics. The weight of external dynamics often deserves to be downplayed even more because the ability of the superpowers to lessen the scope of a conflict or to modify its direction may in no way indicate the ability to resolve it. The Eritrean conflict survived all of the evolutions of the East-West conflict. The reduction of its level of interiority did not necessarily mean its resolution. And what is true for Eritrea is a fortiori true for Angola or South Africa.

The Illusions of the Zero-Sum Game

Let us come back to the December 22, 1988, accord and an evaluation of its significance for the different protagonists. The Angolan government, like Cuba's, made a major concession: they both accepted a link between the presence of Havana's forces and those of South Africa's in Namibia. Even though Cuba never considered its presence in Angola definitive, it was not in charge of its withdrawal. It is in that sense that the New York accord forced Cuba into a retreat without fanfare. That being said, the symbolic defeat has been largely compensated for by a partial political victory. The immediate objective of Cuban intervention was to keep the Angolan regime in power. It has now been consolidated, even if it finds itself constrained to negotiate the terms of a division of power with UNITA.

The results of American policy are symmetrically ambiguous. On the face of it, the United States' diplomatic victory was complete. But appearances are deceptive. One year before the signing of the New York accords, the situation was at a complete impasse. The reversal of the situation underscores simply that in international politics the margin between failure and success is extremely narrow and often unexpected. American policy in southern Africa did not escape that rule. In truth, the plan initially drawn up by Chester Crocker was only loosely followed. From the outset, he was burdened by the concept of linkage, which he had never planned on. He later found himself forced to integrate into his efforts those economic sanctions he had once fought. Finally and above all, United States policy had to take into account two factors that were unpredictable from the start: the internal eruption in South Africa and changes in Soviet policy.

Collaboration with Moscow enabled Washington to accelerate the withdrawal of Cuban troops. But in doing so, the United States lost all ideological advantage. At the beginning of the eighties, getting Cuban troops to withdraw had a particular meaning: it meant rolling back the limits of the Soviet empire and calling into question the sacrosanct principle of ir-

reversibility. But from the moment the Soviet Union relinquished that principle and opposed Cuban conservatism, the American success seemed limited. It is, again, for symmetrical reasons that the Soviet failure seems less obvious than is usually thought. To be sure, the ideological softening of the Soviet Union seems patent. But once Moscow questions its own past, the indices by which to interpret its policies are modified. In addition, the notion of failure or success is, in Africa, more a question of degree than of kind. On this continent there is no Korean success to oppose to a Vietnamese failure, no capitalist triumph or communist failure. None of the United States' African allies has truly kept its promises. Liberia's failure, the bloody turn taken by events in Somalia, and the politically disquieting developments in the Kenyan regime demonstrate to what extent American expectations can be disappointed in this part of the world. In fact, what the Soviet Union loses and has lost at the level of ideology has been perhaps regained on the more classic diplomatic-strategic terrain. Moreover, Moscow was careful to reinforce the Luanda regime militarily before pushing it along the road toward negotiations with UNITA. Even if it has changed considerably at the political level, and not only under external pressure, the 1975 Angolan regime is still in place. Furthermore, by opening the dialogue with Pretoria and ceasing to align itself with the more maximalist African positions, the Soviet Union is perhaps providing itself with the means to be present more than ever in southern Africa. By moving from the position of militant ally to that of arbiter, it converges with the United States position while simultaneously giving itself the means to compete with the United States on its own ground.

In evoking the most recent configuration of international relations in southern Africa, we have evoked an essential dimension of the dynamics between the superpowers in Africa. It stems from the non-univocal nature of relations between external actors and internal stakes. If Africa is a continent particularly permeable by external interference, it is far from conforming to external schemas. In this regard, the superpowers' ability to control regional tensions is only equal to their impotence in integrating Africa into a capitalist or communist matrix.

The purpose of this book is to show, in a historical perspective, how the dialectical relationship between the superpowers and African actors has evolved. For the most part, doing this means studying the diplomatic-strategic framework; but although it is essential to the analysis, it is not always the determining factor and at any rate not the only one. The importance of economic considerations led us to pay more attention to some aspects traditionally neglected by classic internationalist analyses, such as the economic and social impact of aid policies. The considerable importance on the African continent taken on by the Bretton Woods institutions naturally led us to focus on the direction of these new actors and on the

importance of their mediation. The incredible decline of French influence in Africa, remarkably unrecognized in the United States, also claimed our attention.

This book was for the most part written in the mid-eighties. Only this introduction, the epilogue, and certain parts concerning economic issues and American aid are new to this edition. If I had to write it today, I would do it differently. That said, none of my major conclusions seems to me to have suffered the wear and tear of time.

Paris, October 7, 1989

Introduction to the French Edition

On a par with the “inscrutable East,” perhaps, Africa¹ lends itself easily to normative approximations or a succession of commonplaces. A scarcely declared African crisis gives rise to spontaneous interpretations whose persistence owes a great deal to their sketchiness. Even where they differ in their definitions of the enemy (“tribalism,” “communism,” or “imperialism”), these reductive explanations implicitly converge toward the same rallying point: essentialism. Basically, whether seen as awash with tribalism or as tainted by communism, Africa emerges as a continent that willingly accepts simple and univocal explanations.

Such specious analyses, whose forms could be drawn in detail and whose martyrs could be enumerated, are linked to a network of causes and responsibilities amply shared.

Western colonialism has powerfully contributed to this imagery. The cultural stereotypes that it has applied and popularized insist on the infantilism of African tribes, their irresponsibility, and their pressing need for tutelage. Today still, the conflicts that run through African societies or their economic decay feed sordid explanations more easily than finely tuned analyses. These prejudices have in no way been mitigated by a “Third World vulgate” whose waves are still breaking along African coastlines. Thus, under the guise of wanting to denounce neocolonial domination, certain African authors always take cover in mechanistic analyses that deny African actors any piece of autonomy vis-à-vis their “foreign tutelage.”² From this point of view, they join those who hunt out indisputable signs of allegiance with Moscow behind any Marxist reference.

In fact, the difficulty of thinking about Africa as an actor in its own right, regardless of external forces putting pressure on it, would not be so great were it not for the rudimentary level of our knowledge of African societies.³

This cloudiness gets even murkier as soon as one ventures to grasp these societies’ mechanisms for entering into the international arena. Confronted

with undeniable problems of empirical validation, such an attempt suffers from obvious methodological weaknesses.

The first such weakness arises from the excessively operational or pragmatic nature of inquiry in international relations, from the difficulty analysts seem to have in removing themselves from normative interpretations to the prospect of good reviews or serious censure. The strategies of different actors are more or less reduced to simple strategies of diplomatic maximization, as if instrumental rationality could explain everything. Measuring Soviet-Angolan ties only according to the volume of aid granted by the Soviet Union would lead to privileging diplomatic circumstance with all its risks (crisis, tensions or, conversely, a strengthening of relations), at the expense of more structural elements, such as the role of the Soviet Union in the internal legitimization of Angolan power.

The second problem stems largely from the choice of "objects" of international analysis. A study of relations between the superpowers and Africa will spontaneously turn to inter-state relations with the whole parade of declarations and negotiations. In placing the soldier and the diplomat at the center of the board, such a gameplan overestimates identifiable variables (diplomatic-strategic actors) and apparent or immediate stakes (Cuban presence), at the expense, perhaps, of the process of ideological dissemination exercised by non-state actors, of economic influences (the role of the IMF), or even of undeclared stakes (Franco-American competition).

This weakness seems all the more regrettable since almost everywhere in Africa one sees a shattering of state frameworks that could be targets of influence or sources of power. Indeed, none of these problems would be so acutely manifest if the dichotomy between internal and external fields were not so pronounced and if their respective analysts did not sometimes develop in such different theoretical contexts. Most of the Sovietologists' analyses of Soviet policy in Africa barely even bother with matching the elements that are at work in Moscow (the socialist orientation, for example) with their local expression or adaptation. On the other hand, internationalist Africanist research still only occupies a marginal position in the effort to renew this discipline.

Fifteen years after the decolonization of Portuguese-speaking Africa and the accompanying, marked arrival of the superpowers, the role of these two great powers in Africa is still noteworthy. In southern Africa American policy has been deeply involved in the processes of Namibian independence, as "political reconciliation" in Angola and Mozambique and "peaceful transition" in South Africa. In Angola and Mozambique, Soviet support remains as crucial as ten years ago. In fact, with greater or lesser intensity, the East-West dividing line in southern Africa crosses the entire continent. Given this, it does not seem so important to list its location as

to understand the unstable and impure dialectic of the relations between regional stakes and external strategies. For in the zero-sum competition between the Soviets and the Americans, there is a whole series of shadings and interactions that, because of or in spite of the superpowers, contributes sometimes to exacerbation of that competition and other times to its devitalization. The case of South Africa is revealing in this respect. The persistence of the apartheid regime is an indisputable factor in East-West polarization. At the same time, South Africa's great power in the region inhibits the control external powers have on its actions. While modulating the intensity of East-West tensions, these same shadings and interactions sometimes end up displacing the center of gravity of what is at stake. Even though directed against the Soviet Union, American influence in Africa is perhaps competing still more with the presence of France.

This book offers only fragments of answers to all of these problems. But by putting Soviet-American relations in Africa since 1960 into historical perspective, it focuses on a double process: the integration of the superpowers into the African political arena and the capture of these actors in the East-West vise. Until 1975 this double process had a form both fragmented and discontinuous. For the most part, intervention by the superpowers answered a simple need: to deny the other access to any supposedly vacant area. On the African side, the mechanism of appeal to the superpowers answered a similarly modest need: to decrease their sources of dependency with an eye to maximizing diplomatic ties.

Since the 1975 Angolan crisis, the equation of relations between the superpowers and Africa has changed. Soviets and Americans no longer fight only over African space. They are rivals competing in part, at least, where organization is concerned. Moves made by African actors also have changed. They are motivated less by the desire to come up with an alternative to the old tutelary powers than by an attempt to take advantage of East-West divisions. This shift brings with it new significance: Soviet-American competition has ceased to be limited to the diplomatic-strategic realm. It now extends to the internal legitimation of African states as well as to economic dependence.

Given the evidence, this process is far from uniformly spread throughout the whole continent. It is also far from being expressed in identical terms by each of the superpowers. It simply brings about a new form of inquiry that no longer focuses on the unstable, or rather persistent, character of the superpowers' involvement in Africa, but rather on their ability to organize the three areas that constitute the African political scene (internal legitimation, diplomatic maximization, economic dependence) around their own global goals.

Alger-Vandoeuvres, August 1985

