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The limits of regional power: South Africa's security strategy, 1975–1989

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ABSTRACT
This article examines the strategic decision-making of the South African regime between 1975 and 1989. Existing scholarship argues that Pretoria was a regional hegemon and that this position underwrote its security strategy. We suggest that scholars have overstated the implications of its regional strength. Using archival documents and interviews with retired military and political elites, we show how Pretoria's threat perception, conventional military operations, and nuclear strategy were in fact conditioned by an awareness of the limits of its power within the global distribution of power; its isolation in the international system; and fears of conflict escalation vis-à-vis extra-regional threats.

The scholarly debate about apartheid South Africa's security strategy during the late Cold War starts from the premise that it was an economic and military hegemon in Southern Africa. Indeed, even scholars who disagree substantially in their interpretation of Pretoria's ambitions emphasise its overwhelming regional strength. For some scholars, South Africa's power predominance empowered a belligerent and imperialist strategy that sought to dominate neighbouring states; for others, it provided the space and security necessary to preserve a regional 'status quo' while negotiating withdrawals from Angola and South West Africa (Namibia). The assumption that Pretoria's dominance within its region underwrote its behaviour is common across both of these conflicting accounts.

If South Africa's regional strength is the starting point for analysis, however, various aspects of its behaviour are puzzling, including (i) its profound sense of insecurity and perception of threat, despite its military and economic dominance of its region; (ii) its inefficient and destructive conventional strategy, which protracted regional conflicts rather than ended them in Pretoria's favour; and (iii) its development of nuclear weapons, despite its conventional military superiority and the absence of any other nuclear states in Southern Africa.

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In this article, we solve these puzzles by suggesting that scholars have overstated the implications of South Africa's regional strength for its security strategy during the late Cold War. While South Africa was economically and militarily stronger than its neighbours throughout this period, we argue that much of Pretoria's security strategy was in fact conditioned by an awareness of the *limits* of its power vis-à-vis extra-regional threats. In particular, political and military elites in Pretoria were deeply concerned that their regional dominance was at risk of being overturned by deeper Soviet intervention in Southern Africa, which would stretch the limits of the apartheid state's capabilities. This motivated a security strategy that sought to aggressively pursue Pretoria's regional interests while at the same time manage global escalation risks. We show how these often-contradictory objectives affected Pretoria's threat perception, conventional military operations, and nuclear strategy.

Our findings shed light on the limits of regional power in international relations. While South Africa possessed unrivalled *regional* power, we show that its strategy was in important ways driven by its vulnerability within the *global* distribution of power. This highlights a simple but important theoretical point: that regional balances of power are fragile. Indeed, even regions characterised by stark imbalances of power owing to the predominance of a regional hegemon like South Africa can be susceptible to meddling by global great powers. This fragility means that regional power is inherently limited; even regionally dominant states must pay careful attention to the global distribution of power in preparing for 'worst case' scenarios.

In what follows, we draw on primary and secondary materials to explore the limits of regional power and their implications for South Africa's security strategy during the late Cold War. These include semi-structured interviews with former South African military commanders, political leaders, and diplomats; archival documents and declassified intelligence reports; and the memoirs and personal accounts of political and military veterans. The article proceeds in three parts. First, we outline the debate about South Africa's security strategy during the late Cold War. Second, we offer a new perspective on the limits of regional power and its implications for the South African case. Third, we show how fears arising from extra-regional threats affected Pretoria's threat perception, conventional military operations, and nuclear strategy. Finally, we consider the implications of our findings for scholarship on South African strategy and international relations.

South African regional power and the existing literature

South Africa's security strategy during the late Cold War is a subject of controversy among scholars, journalists, analysts, and participants.[1] Even among those

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[1] For an extended treatment, see Gary Baines, *South Africa's 'Border War': Contested Narratives and Conflicting Memories* (London: Bloomsbury 2014).

who disagree on a range of questions about Pretoria's regional aims, however, there is broad consensus that its power predominance within Southern Africa underwrote its security strategy.

Pretoria's potential for regional hegemony emerged in the 1960s, as 'Winds of Change' swept away the vestiges of European colonial rule on the African continent, leaving South Africa in possession of unrivalled capabilities across most metrics of state power. A brief quantitative sketch clarifies the disparity between South Africa and its regional rivals of Angola, Botswana, Mozambique, Tanzania, Zambia, and Zimbabwe – a coalition known as the Frontline States that formed in opposition to apartheid and white minority rule. Figure 1 provides an overview of South Africa's military expenditure and national capability relative to its regional foes. The apartheid state's expenditure on arms, equipment, and troops exceeded that of the Frontline States *combined* in every year from 1975 to 1989, while domestic investment in weapons development provided Pretoria with a high degree of self-sufficiency in small arms, armoured personnel carriers, infantry fighting vehicles, artillery, tanks, and aircraft. The number of personnel in the South African Defence Force (SADF) was relatively restricted, owing to a reliance on white conscripts; however, numerical deficiencies were offset by advantages in equipment, logistics, mobility, and tactical training in both counter-insurgency warfare and conventional operations.[2]

Economically, South Africa was similarly powerful, with a gross domestic product that kept pace – and regularly exceeded – that of the entire anti-apartheid coalition. The country possessed a diversified economy, enjoying advantages in
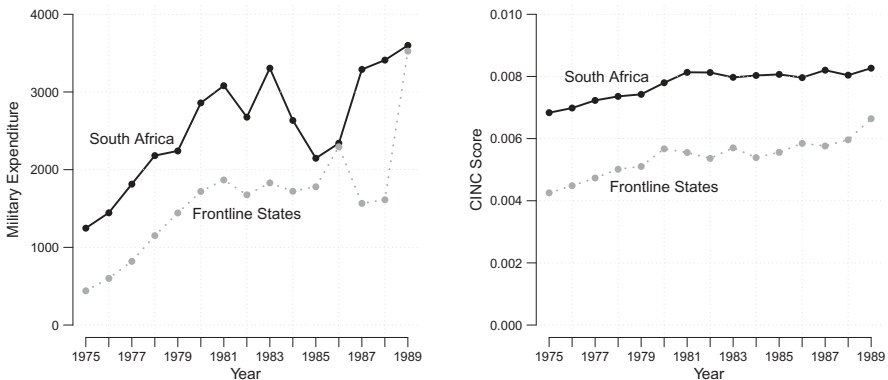
Figure 1. Comparison of South Africa's military expenditure (in millions of current US dollars) and Composite Index of National Capability (CINC) score relative to the Frontline States, 1975–1989. Data compiled from the Correlates of War Project's National Material Capabilities Dataset, Version 5.0.

[2] Only white South African men were subject to conscription, although non-white citizens were eligible to serve as volunteers. On military service in South Africa, see Ian Van der Waag, *A Military History of Modern South Africa* (Oxford: Casemate Publishers 2018), 255–256.

finance, communications, and technology; it was the leading producer and exporter of non-oil minerals in the developing world, with reserves of coal, uranium, diamonds, and precious metals; and between 1975 and 1989, its rate of steel production was over 12 times the Frontline States combined, while its energy consumption was over 3.5 times greater than that of the anti-apartheid alliance. These advantages are reflected in its Composite Index of National Capability (CINC) score, a measure of a state's share of global power, which was greater than the combined scores of the Frontline States throughout the late Cold War period.[3]

To be sure, the apartheid regime was rotten at its core, relying on mass repression to secure the white minority government's control over the majority non-white population. In the 1960s, the African National Congress (ANC), in partnership with the South African Communist Party (SACP), formed Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK) to begin an armed campaign after decades of non-violent protest. Yet at no point did MK present a serious military threat to the regime. As one US National Intelligence Estimate put it, the state's security services were not only 'well-equipped and well-armed,' but possessed 'almost unlimited powers of surveillance, arrest, and detention. It uses these powers vigorously.'[4] Indeed, the state's repressive apparatus permeated South African society down to the municipal council level. The suffering inflicted on South Africa's non-white population was profound: labour exploitation, political oppression, physical violence, and mass population dislocation. Even as popular unrest, township protests, and boycotts surged in the mid-1980s, the threat posed to the apartheid regime remained limited.[5]

In the existing literature, Pretoria's power predominance serves as a natural starting point for the analysis of its security strategy and regional ambitions. Johnson and Martin, for example, see the apartheid state's domestic power and oppression replicated at the regional level, describing a regime with 'superpower aspirations' that sought to extend 'South African hegemony over the subcontinent through the creation and maintenance of a dependence that is economically lucrative and politically submissive.'[6] Similarly, Gleijeses describes South Africa as 'the region's powerhouse' and a 'juggernaut', with expansive regional objectives and an aggressive foreign policy.[7] Those more sympathetic to the apartheid regime – including those

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[3]For raw data on which these calculations are based, see the Correlates of War Project's National Material Capabilities Dataset, Version 5.0, first published in J. David Singer, Stuart Bremer, and John Stuckey, 'Capability Distribution, Uncertainty, and Major Power War, 1820–1965', in Bruce Russett (ed.), *Peace, War, and Numbers* (Beverly Hills: Sage 1972), 19–48.

[4]US National Intelligence Estimate, *South Africa in a New Decade*, Apr. 1972, 3.

[5]Jeffrey Herbst, 'Prospects for Revolution in South Africa', *Political Science Quarterly* 103/4 (1988), 665–685.

[6]Phyllis Johnson and David Martin, *Apartheid Terrorism: The Destabilization Report* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press 1989), vii, 1, 9, 11, 159.

[7]Piero Gleijeses, *Visions of Freedom: Havana, Washington, Pretoria, and the Struggle for Southern Africa, 1976–1991* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press 2013), 11; Piero Gleijeses, *Conflicting Missions: Havana, Washington, and Africa, 1959–1976* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press 2002), 301.

who fought for it – argue that its objectives were more limited: the maintenance of a regional 'status quo.'[8] Yet these works, too, highlight South Africa's military predominance as central to its security strategy, at times even claiming a role for the SADF in the termination of the Cold War.[9] In short, there is widespread agreement – even among works that diverge significantly in their interpretation of South Africa's regional aims – that Pretoria was a regional hegemon, and that this position drove its security strategy.[10]

Yet, the existing literature's emphasis on South Africa's dominant position within the regional distribution of power leaves a number of puzzling behaviours unexplained. For example, if Pretoria enjoyed a position of regional hegemony, what accounts for its profound sense of insecurity within Southern Africa? Similarly, given its unrivalled military strength, why didn't South Africa do what was necessary to win in the various regional conflicts in which it was engaged? Why did it adopt an inefficient strategy that protracted regional conflicts? And how should scholars make sense of South Africa's nuclear weapons programme? After all, Pretoria enjoyed conventional military superiority and none of its regional rivals possessed even rudimentary nuclear capabilities.

To resolve these questions, we offer a new perspective. While we concur that Pretoria's strategy was facilitated by its military strength within its region, we highlight the importance of *extra*-regional threats in shaping and constraining its security policy. In particular, we argue that South African elites were deeply fearful that their state's dominance over the regional distribution of power might be quickly overturned by deeper Soviet intervention in Southern Africa. These fears were amplified by an acute sense of isolation in the international system – a perception that was driven by the ambivalence of the United States towards Pretoria and by Washington's unwillingness to guarantee the apartheid regime's survival. In this way, South Africa's security strategy during the late Cold War was the product not only of its dominant position within its regional distribution of power, but also by its vulnerability within the global distribution of power.

The limits of regional power

We advance a simple argument to help explain South Africa's security strategy during the late Cold War: regional distributions of power are fragile. They are fragile because they are susceptible to meddling by global great powers

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[8]For works of this sort, see Jannie Geldenhuys, *At The Front: A General's Account of South Africa's Border War* (Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball 1994); Magnus Malan, *My Life With The SA Defence Force* (Pretoria: Protea Book House 2006); Leopold Scholtz, *The SADF in the Border War, 1966–1989* (Cape Town: Tafelberg 2013).
[9]Malan, for example, argues that South Africa's 'greatest battlefield victor[ies] [. . .] played a decisive role in the international change of course that occurred in Africa and it also made a contribution to the fall of international communism in 1989'. See Malan, *My Life With The SA Defence Force*, 286.
[10]See also, Robert I. Rotberg, ed., *South Africa and Its Neighbours: Regional Security and Self-Interest* (Lexington: Lexington Books 1985); Joseph Hanlon, *Beggar Your Neighbours: Apartheid Power in Southern Africa* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press 1986).

that possess the means and motivations to intervene outside their own regions. When they choose to do so, states with global power projection capacity have the potential to shift regional distributions of power. For this reason, all states – even regionally dominant states like South Africa – must pay careful attention to the global distribution of power in preparing for 'worst case' scenarios.

While this argument may seem uncontroversial, it in fact diverges from many existing theoretical accounts. Indeed, international relations theorists commonly contend that regional distributions of power are of central importance for most states, most of the time. Geographic proximity is a key determinant of conflict onset, and as Friedberg puts it, 'most states have historically been concerned primarily with the capabilities and intentions of their neighbours.'[11] For these reasons, a large literature emphasises the importance of regions in explaining a range of outcomes in international politics, from trade liberalisation to nuclear proliferation.[12]

Yet, despite the widespread view that regional distributions of power are central determinants of state behaviour, scholars in fact regularly smuggle global power dynamics into regional analyses. In their seminal contribution on regionalism, for example, Lake and Morgan suggest that states need not be members of a region to count as regional powers; global powers with the capacity to project military force over distance can be considered members of even distant regions. Thus, in their account, the United States is a regional great power not only in the Americas but also in Europe and the Middle East.[13] A similar approach is adopted by Mearsheimer, who does not require regional great powers to be geographically located in a given region. Consequently, during the Cold War, the United States is considered not only a regional hegemon in the unipolar Americas, but also a regional great power in bipolar Europe.[14]

Instead of smuggling in global power dynamics while claiming that regional power is paramount, we make a simple but explicit theoretical claim about the importance of the global distribution of power. We argue that regional distributions of power are inherently fragile precisely because global powers often have both the motivation and the means to intervene well beyond their own region. Indeed, states that have global power projection capacity have regularly advanced ideologies prescribing military intervention

[11] Aaron L. Friedberg, 'Ripe for Rivalry: Prospects for Peace in a Multipolar Asia', *International Security* 18/3 (1993/1994), 5.

[12] See, respectively, Michael A. Allen, 'The Influence of Regional Power Distributions on Interdependence', *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 62/5 (2018), 1072–1099; Etel Solingen, *Nuclear Logics: Contrasting Paths in East Asia and the Middle East* (Princeton: Princeton University Press 2009). For more general treatments of regionalism, see David A. Lake and Patrick M. Morgan, (eds.), *Regional Orders: Building Security in a New World* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press 1997); Barry Buzan and Ole Wæver, *Regions and Powers: The Structure of International Security* (New York: Cambridge University Press 2003).

[13] Lake and Morgan, (eds.), *Regional Orders: Building Security in a New World*, 12.

[14] John J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (New York: WW Norton & Company 2001).

around the world; have often sought to control material resources well beyond their regions; and have mobilised military forces to undermine overseas peer competitors. Scholars who emphasise the importance of regional dynamics often challenge the ease with which states can project power outside their regions – Mearsheimer, for example, emphasises the 'stopping power of water.'[15] But this argument risks underestimating the advantages that global powers possess to impose their will beyond their region. The imperial powers of Britain, France, and Spain had sufficient technological superiority to plunder and dominate overseas territories around the world; after World War II, the United States largely 'solved the problem of the stopping power of water' with 'large numbers of forward deployed troops and prepositioned materiel in Europe and northeast Asia … [to] support the rapid projection of additional U.S. power.'[16] In short, technological advantages in communications, logistics, remote sensing, surveillance, and ballistic accuracy grant global powers the ability to affect change far beyond their regions.

When global great powers have both the motivation and the means to intervene beyond their regions, states around the world must pay close attention to the possibility of their intervention and accord it considerable importance within their security strategies. In what follows, we show how this simple insight helps explain South Africa's security strategy during the late Cold War, including its threat perception, its conventional operations, and its nuclear programme.

South Africa in the global distribution of power

The threats faced by the apartheid regime between 1945 and the mid-1970s were viewed as manageable by its security establishment. South Africa (and South West Africa, which Pretoria occupied and ran as its own territory) was bordered by Portuguese colonies that did not threaten its discriminatory domestic political institutions and that were controlled by tens of thousands of Portuguese forces, while the white minority government in Rhodesia provided an additional sympathetic neighbour. These states together formed a *cordon sanitaire* that buffered Pretoria from the instability of Africa's anti-colonial wars. Believing its fate to be inextricably linked to the survival of its neighbours, Pretoria coordinated closely with Portuguese and Rhodesian officials, providing men, equipment, and funding to assist their counterinsurgency efforts on the frontiers of white minority rule.

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[15]Ibid.
[16]Christopher Layne, 'The "Poster Child for Offensive Realism": America as a Global Hegemon', *Security Studies* 12/2 (2002), 131–132.

The collapse of the Portuguese dictatorship in April 1974 fundamentally changed the South African national security calculus.[17] The new ruling junta in Lisbon granted independence to Mozambique and Angola, and informed Pretoria that it was no longer permitted to conduct operations in these territories.[18] Suddenly, two crucial buffer states had collapsed. Making matters worse for the apartheid state, in 1980 the white minority regime in Rhodesia fell to Robert Mugabe, paving the way for black majority rule in Zimbabwe.

South Africa's new neighbours were weak militarily, posing little threat to Pretoria themselves, but what worried South African policymakers was their close relationship with Moscow. The Soviet Union dwarfed South Africa's economic and military power by several orders of magnitude, possessing enormous resources with which to overturn the regional balance of power should it so choose. And there were valid reasons to expect the Soviets to take an interest in the subcontinent: the newly independent states were led by avowedly Marxist leaders, opening the door for Soviet influence in the region. Indeed, as Former Deputy Foreign Minister Anatoly Adamishin explains, in the mid-1970s Moscow's 'geopolitical interests were gaining more and more weight: the aim was to capture strategic ground in the South of the African continent to oppose the United States.'[19] A presence in Southern Africa could provide the Soviets with a 'full picture' of the Atlantic Ocean, offering the ability to station reconnaissance aircraft and refuel surface ships and submarines.[20] To those ends, Soviet aid began flowing into the former Portuguese colonies immediately following their independence. In Mozambique, Soviet arms shipments began in 1975, with support increasing sharply following the establishment of a military advisory group in the country. By 1978, the Soviets had deployed hundreds of advisors to train Mozambican forces, monitor combat operations, and serve as technicians.[21] In Angola, Soviet military planes established an air bridge that began transferring thousands of Cuban troops and equipment in the fall of 1975.[22] By April 1976, some 36,000 Cuban troops had been deployed, playing a decisive role in the dynamics of the Angolan civil war.[23]

South Africa's vulnerability to the regional deployment of communist troops, weapons, and supplies was exacerbated by its isolation in the

[17] Jamie Miller, 'Things Fall Apart: South Africa and the Collapse of the Portuguese Empire, 1973–74', *Cold War History* 12/2 (2012), 183–204.

[18] Gleijeses, *Visions of Freedom*, 31.

[19] Anatoly Adamishin, *The White Sun of Angola,* 2nd edition, trans. Gary Goldberg and Sue Onslow (Moscow: Vagrius 2014), 6.

[20] Vladimir Shubin, *The Hot 'Cold War': The USSR in Southern Africa* (London: Pluto Press 2008), 72.

[21] On the Soviet presence in Mozambique, see CIA, *The Soviets in Mozambique: Is the Payoff Worth the Price?* Feb. 1988.

[22] The extent to which these actions were themselves triggered by South African intervention in Angola is disputed. See Scholtz, *The SADF in the Border War*, 21–22; Gleijeses, *Conflicting Missions*, 254–262.

[23] Gleijeses, *Visions of Freedom*, 34.

international system. Because of its racist policies and political institutions, Pretoria had few friends. As one US National Intelligence Estimate put it, '[a]s long as the Pretoria regime pursues its present racial policies, official US ties with the South African Government will come under criticism, both at home and from other nations.'[24] Washington's ambivalence towards the apartheid state was laid plain in the aftermath of Operation Savannah, South Africa's covert invasion of Angola in the fall of 1975. US officials had secretly urged Pretoria to intervene in the country to prevent the Marxist-aligned *Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola* (MPLA) from seizing power. But as South African forces, in support of the rebel movement *União Nacional para a Independência Total de Angola* (UNITA), neared the capital city of Luanda, news of the invasion leaked to the outside world. In an about-face, Washington denounced the South Africans, while the US Congress terminated aid to the operation. Forsaken by the Americans and facing down tens of thousands of Angolan and Cuban troops, Pretoria ordered South African forces home.

Washington's abandonment was a bitter pill for Pretoria to swallow. As the then Defence Minister P.W. Botha decried to South African Parliament, 'the story must be told of how we, with [American] knowledge, went in there and operated in Angola with their knowledge, how they encouraged us to act and, when we had nearly reached the climax, we were ruthlessly left in the lurch.'[25] Following the Operation Savannah fiasco, South African leaders were convinced that American aid could not be relied on. As Major General Gert Opperman puts it, 'the United States had only one interest, and that was their personal interest in the situation [...] I don't think we ever considered the Americans to be reliable.'[26] Similarly, Major General Johann Dippenaar recalls 'one day [the United States] will support you, the next day there will be a vote and they will say, "Stop the support".'[27] Even during the Reagan administration, South African policymakers remained wary of US ambivalence. Pieter Snyman, who served as a diplomat in Washington, recalls that 'we had good friends in Congress and in the [Reagan] administration, but [we knew that] they [might] succumb to the pressure of their own [anti-apartheid] constituencies.'[28]

Thus, while Pretoria dominated its *region* economically and militarily, within the *global* balance of power it was vulnerable: in the cross-hairs of

[24]US National Intelligence Estimate, *South Africa in a New Decade*, 2. South Africa's nuclear programme provided an additional constraint on American support in the 1970s and 1980s, given US nonproliferation efforts. See Anna-Mart Van Wyk, 'The USA and Apartheid South Africa's Nuclear Aspirations, 1949–1980', in Sue Onslow, (ed.), *Cold War in Southern Africa: White Power, Black Liberation* (New York: Routledge 2009), 55–83.
[25]Republic of South Africa, 'Debates of the House of Assembly', 17 Apr. 1978: col. 4852.
[26]Author interview with Major General Gert Opperman (retired), Pretoria, 23 June 2014.
[27]Author interview with Major General Johann Dippenaar (retired), Pretoria, 30 June 2014.
[28]Author interview with Pieter Snyman, Roodepoort, 24 June 2014.

the vastly more powerful Soviet Union, yet isolated from the West owing to its abhorrent domestic policy of apartheid. This makes the South African case a useful test with which to assess the relative importance of the regional and global distributions of power in shaping state security policy. If Pretoria's calculations were driven by its position within the regional distribution of power, its security strategy should reflect its unrivalled regional strength. If, on the other hand, its calculations were conditioned by its position within the global distribution of power, its strategy should reflect its vulnerability to potential Soviet intervention. Which of these two predictions are realised in the historical record? We argue that Pretoria's strategy, while facilitated by its regional military strength, was shaped by threats emanating from the global level. More specifically, South Africa was deeply afraid that its regional position could be overturned by deeper Soviet intervention in Southern Africa. These fears affected three aspects of South African behaviour: its threat perception, its conventional military operations, and its nuclear strategy.

South African threat perception and escalation fears

South African elites were confident that the SADF possessed military superiority in their region. A 1984 White Paper on Defence, for example, confirmed that the military balance with respect to South Africa's neighbours was favourable. However, there was a profound fear in Pretoria that the level of Soviet involvement in the region might escalate in ways that could overturn the SADF's qualitative edge. As the white paper warned, 'a conventional threat does exist,' because the Soviet Union's 'sustained supply of advanced weapons and personnel to these states is disturbing the military balance.'[29] South African anxieties centred on the Soviet Union's provision of advanced weapon systems, including heavy armour, ground-to-air missile systems, and advanced fighter aircraft.[30] As Deon Fourie, who taught at the South African Defence College during the 1970s and 1980s, relates, 'everybody was shaken rigid [by the buildup].'[31]

There was little doubt among political and military elites about the scope and hostility of intentions of the Soviet Union towards the South African regime. Colonel Jan Breytenbach, who commanded covert operations across

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[29] Quoted in Robert S. Jaster, 'South Africa and its Neighbours: The Dynamics of Regional Conflict', *Adelphi Papers* 26/209 (1986), 19.

[30] Ibid., 20. André Buys recalls that 'the main weapons systems like fighter aircraft were slightly beyond our ability to develop. We could upgrade what we had, and we did that, but we couldn't replace it totally with a modern fighter aircraft – it was just beyond the means of a country the size of South Africa. So our Air Force was getting into a serious difficulty – the Russians were bringing in MiG-23s, we upgraded our Mirage-3s to the Cheetah, which was not quite on a par with the MiG-23. [...] And if [the Soviets] went further – they had much more advanced weapons than that – then we would have been outmanoeuvred there. So because of that, it raised the risk of losing a conventional war'. Author interview with André Buys, Pretoria, 1 July 2014.

[31] Author interview with Professor Deon Fourie, Pretoria, 16 June 2014.

Southern Africa, puts it bluntly: 'when outside powers come to Africa, they don't come here to enjoy a holiday. They come here to expand their influence.'[32] Pretoria perceived Soviet goals in the region to be ambitious, including the overthrow of the apartheid regime. David Steward, a former ambassador to the United Nations, head of the Bureau for Information, and Chief of Staff to President F.W. de Klerk, recalls that 'we believed that we were facing an existential crisis and we were extremely worried about the incursion of the Soviet Union into Southern Africa because […] Southern Africa was a particularly significant target for the Soviet Union […] they wanted the SACP to take over.'[33] Victor Zazaraj, a former South African Ambassador and Private Assistant to Foreign Minister Pik Botha during the 1980s, similarly recalls that the situation was 'perceived and experienced as an existential crisis […] whereby the country's future existence, as we understood it, was under threat […] we had this [hostile] arc across Southern Africa that separated us from the rest of Africa.'[34]

For the South African security establishment, the communist threat merged seamlessly with the danger posed by black liberation movements. As the Truth and Reconciliation Commission describes, 'all forms of conflict and instability in Africa were seen as "avenues for Soviet involvement," with the SADF arguing that South Africa was faced with "a Soviet-backed revolutionary war".'[35] The battle against African liberation movements was understood to be 'part of the same battle that the US and Western Europe were waging against Eastern Europe and the USSR.'[36] For Pretoria, this Moscow-orchestrated 'total onslaught' necessitated a 'total strategy': a coordinated, state-wide mobilisation of economic, political, and military resources in a fight for survival.[37]

Total strategy would redefine South African domestic and foreign policy for the remainder of the Cold War. The State Security Council (SSC), originally established to advise the government's national security policy, was catapulted to the top of the state decision-making process. Chaired by the prime minister, the SSC's membership was restricted to the ministers of defence, foreign affairs, justice, and police, as well as the heads of the SADF, the South African Police, and the National Intelligence Service. This small elite would replace the cabinet as 'the dominant institution in the formulation of foreign policy.'[38] In addition, the National Security Management System was

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[32]Author interview with Colonel Jan Breytenbach (retired), Wilderness, 20 June 2014.
[33]Author interview with David Steward, Johannesburg, 6 June 2014.
[34]Author interview with Ambassador Victor Zazeraj (retired), Johannesburg, 4 July 2014.
[35]Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa, *Final Report, vol. 2* (1998), 14.
[36]Ibid., 16. See also, Malan, *My Life With The SA Defence Force*, 190; Jannie Geldenhuys, *We Were There: Winning the War For Southern Africa* (Pretoria: Kraal Publishers 2012), 19.
[37]On the intellectual origins of 'total strategy', see van der Waag, *A Military History of Modern South Africa*, 250–253.
[38]Gleijeses, *Visions of Freedom*, 117.

established, integrating national, regional, district, and local centres of power to provide the government with 'an inside view of every region, city and township in the country.'[39] The domestic arms industry was expanded, upgrading the SADF's tanks, armoured cars, artillery, and fighter aircraft.[40] And in external affairs, the regime adopted a more unilateralist and defiant approach, both in its relations with regional rivals and Western powers. As Miller puts it, '[t]otal onslaught and total strategy became entrenched at the heart of the apartheid regime's understanding of its place in the world, its sense of self, and its existential predicament in the region – where they would remain right up until the end of the Cold War.'[41]

To be sure, South African elites exploited fears about communism for political purposes, not least to divert international attention from the apartheid regime's racial oppression. And as Onslow rightly points out, Pretoria 'failed to appreciate the extent to which their own policies and activities had produced this threat and associated coalition of forces.'[42] But the communist threat was not entirely illusory: the SACP was the oldest communist party in Africa and was closely associated with the Comintern;[43] many liberation movement and Frontline State leaders were genuinely influenced by Leninist ideology;[44] and Soviet agitation in Southern Africa was explicitly anti-colonist and anti-apartheid.[45]

Thus, while South Africa was powerful relative to its regional rivals, Pretoria's fears centred on extra-regional threats. Policymakers understood their position to be at the mercy of the whims of Soviet foreign policy: if Moscow decided that Southern Africa was a geopolitical priority and invested commensurate military resources into the region, Pretoria could not hope to sustain its regional advantages. As we elaborate below, this awareness of the *limits* of South African power influenced Pretoria's conventional operations and nuclear strategy in a number of ways.

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[39]Van der Waag, *A Military History of Modern South Africa*, 253.

[40]Jamie Miller, *An African Volk: The Apartheid Regime and Its Search for Survival* (New York: Oxford University Press 2016), 210.

[41]Ibid., 283.

[42]Sue Onslow, 'The Cold War in Southern Africa: White Power, Black Nationalism and External Intervention', in Sue Onslow, (ed.), *Cold War in Southern Africa: White Power, Black Liberation* (New York: Routledge 2009), 10.

[43]The SACP supported the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia, for example. See South African Communist Party, 'The Czechoslovakian Crisis', in *South African Communists Speak: Documents from the History of the South African Communist Party, 1915–1980* (London: Inkululeko 1981), 364–365.

[44]Jeffrey James Byrne, 'Africa's Cold War', in Robert J. McMahon, (ed.), *The Cold War in the Third World* (New York: Oxford University Press 2013), 107–109.

[45]Vladimir Shubin, 'Unsung Heroes: The Soviet Military and the Liberation of Southern Africa', in Sue Onslow (ed.), *Cold War in Southern Africa: White Power, Black Liberation* (New York: Routledge 2009), 154–176.

South Africa's conventional military operations

In an effort to coerce its regional rivals into submission, Pretoria unleashed a vicious and protracted campaign of destabilisation across Southern Africa. For over a decade, South African forces attacked targets in neighbouring countries' territories, undertook cross-border assassinations of liberation movement leaders and personnel, engaged in military sabotage, and sponsored rebel movements fighting against regional rivals. This was a violent and militaristic approach, inflicting untold suffering across the region.[46] But in light of South Africa's power predominance over the Frontline State coalition, the strategy is puzzling. Destabilisation served to protract regional conflicts and prolong South African intervention; it did not end these conflicts in Pretoria's favour. Why, then, did South Africa adopt this inefficient and destructive strategy? Why did it not leverage its unrivalled military strength to more decisively prevail in regional conflicts?

Pretoria's approach cannot be attributed to a lack of military options vis-à-vis its regional rivals. As noted above, the SADF enjoyed significant advantages in equipment, technology, and training. And while conquering the Frontline States would not have been feasible, not least due to vast distances, troop shortfalls, and the costs an occupying force would entail, the overthrow of uncooperative regimes – or at minimum, the establishment of pliable and dependent clients – would have been an attractive option relative to the inefficient and violent strategy Pretoria ultimately adopted.[47]

To make sense of its conventional strategy, we highlight the apartheid regime's escalation fears. South African policymakers confronted a contradiction in policy aims: the desire to repress and undermine regional threats – black liberation movements and the Frontline States coalition – while at the same time avoid provoking deeper Soviet intervention in the region. Their solution to this dilemma called for a combination of regional aggression and calculated restraint: even as it blatantly violated the sovereignty and territorial integrity of its neighbours, Pretoria sought to hedge against extra-regional threats. While this approach succeeded in managing escalation risks, it simultaneously constrained

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[46]For an account of the destabilization campaign in Mozambique and Zimbabwe see, respectively, Steven Metz, 'The Mozambique National Resistance and South African Foreign Policy', *African Affairs* 85/341 (1986): 491–507; John Dzimba, *South Africa's Destabilization of Zimbabwe, 1980–89* (New York: St. Martin's Press 1998). On South Africa's role in the Angolan civil war, see Gleijeses, *Visions of Freedom*; Scholtz, *The SADF in the Border War*.

[47]Indeed, and in line with 'total strategy', Pretoria originally sought to establish a wider 'Constellation of Southern African States' that would incorporate Botswana, Lesotho, Malawi, Swaziland, Zaire, Zambia, and Zimbabwe, as well as Angola, Mozambique, and a nominally independent Namibia. It was expected that these states 'would be anticommunist, tolerant of apartheid, and eager to persecute the ANC and SWAPO [South West Africa People's Organization]' (Gleijeses, *Visions of Freedom*, 201). In countries with hostile governments, such as Angola, regime change would be necessary. As the State Security Council put it in March 1979, Pretoria's strategy in that country was 'to further the establishment of a well-disposed or at least neutral government in Angola and to perpetuate its existence after it has come to power' (quoted in Ibid., 104).

South African conventional operations and protracted the conflicts in which Pretoria was involved.

The imperative of escalation control necessitated that attacks on regional enemies be calibration to avoid provoking further Soviet intervention. As one classified memo on the effects of South African attacks on ANC bases in Mozambique warned, Pretoria 'would be foolhardy' to dismiss Russian threats of retaliation. 'The Russians lay great emphasis on "loss of face"', it explained, and would be likely to react in order to defend their allies' sovereignty. The memo stresses that '[i]t must be borne in mind that every attack upon the ANC *will* be interpreted as an attack on Mocambique [sic] sovereignty and thus provide a pretext for Russia to sink her bear-claws deeper into that state. This should not stop us from raiding ANC bases in the future, but such action should be carefully considered in light of its potential for escalating the Russian presence.'[48] Similar escalation fears surrounded South African participation in the Angolan civil war. As David Steward recalls, 'even though we were confronted with fairly sophisticated forces in southern Angola, we never really felt that we were not capable of dealing with them [...] [but] we were worried that there might be further troops, further Russian troops, further intervention, that would then affect our conventional superiority.'[49]

Military veterans recall how these fears became constraints on South African conventional strategy and tactics. Major General Dippenaar, for example, explains that 'politics put a lot of restrictions on all operations [...] there was a constant caution.'[50] Indeed, fears of deeper Soviet involvement in the region – or even direct confrontation with Cuban troops deployed in Angola – led Pretoria to adopt limited intervention strategies in neighbouring civil wars. For example, while South African forces were engaged across Southern Africa throughout the 1970s and 1980s, SADF operations were geographically restricted and time limited. This force posture reflected concerns that prolonged deployments risked Soviet retaliation. Colonel Breytenbach, for example, recalls that 'we could have taken over the Cunene Province [in Angola], for instance – we used to go in there quite often [...] but then of course the Russians would come back *en masse*.'[51] Rather than hold territory, the SADF prioritised mobility – rapid offensives and withdrawals. Territory was to be held only as long as tactical advantage flowed from it.[52] As

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[48]N.C. Schofield, 'Effects of SA Attack on ANC Bases in Maputo', Mozambique: Foreign Policy and Relations, Folder No. 1/113/7, Vol 2 (9.1.79–31.3.81), 4 Mar. (Pretoria: Department of Foreign Affairs Archive 1981), 1–2. Emphasis in original.
[49]Author interview with David Steward, Johannesburg, 6 June 2014.
[50]Author interview with Major General Johann Dippenaar (retired), Pretoria, 30 June 2014.
[51]Author interview with Colonel Jan Breytenbach (retired), Wilderness, 30 June 2014.
[52]Scholtz, *The SADF in the Border War*, 247–251.

Ambassador Zazeraj explains, '[w]e would not have wanted to have drawn [the Russians] in, or created a pretext that would allow them to do us more harm than we could cope with.'[53]

While limited intervention strategies served to manage relations with the Soviet Union and avoid direct confrontation with Cuban troops, it paradoxically resulted in stalemated conflicts and prolonged interventions. By adopting policies that sought to control escalation in regional conflicts, Pretoria hamstrung the SADF's capacity to prevail on the battlefield. In effect, strategic concerns about threats emanating from the global level necessitated tactically disadvantageous decisions at the regional level.[54]

Escalation fears also lie behind Pretoria's micromanagement and centralised control of its military commanders. As Major General Opperman put it, 'the politicians were in charge.'[55] Major General Dippenaar concurs: 'every time before operations could take place, we had to have approval – and there was no chance you could have done anything without political approval from our side.'[56] Similarly, Colonel Breytenbach confirms that 'every time we went across the border it was planned at the highest level, and there were generals sitting there on this planning committee with the Minister of Defence.'[57] New orders were handed down on a daily basis, and individual commanders were often unaware of the ultimate goals of the missions they were undertaking.[58] And while former military commanders may have an incentive to claim they were under strict orders so as to minimise their personal and collective responsibility for the unsavoury activities that occurred during the period of destabilisation, some political elites also agreed that tight political control was exercised over military operations. Ambassador Zazeraj, for example, confirms that the generals' accounts 'was very much the case – they really did not want the situation to get out of control […] the political elite was dead scared that something would create an international incident.'[59]

Notably, Pretoria's control over operations often caused tensions in civil–military relations. Major General Roland de Vries recalls that 'the high command started micro-managing the battle front, which was highly infuriating for the commanders on the ground.'[60] Likewise, Major General Dippenaar complains that 'approvals came out with very strict conditions: you can't be longer than this; you can't take more than that kind of vehicle; there can't be any casualties on our side. I mean, how do you go to war with an instruction that you can't have casualties?'[61] During

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[53]Author interview with Ambassador Victor Zazeraj (retired), Johannesburg, 4 July 2014.
[54]For a detailed discussion of this point generally, and in the context of South African intervention in Angola specifically, see Noel Anderson, 'Competitive Intervention, Protracted Conflict, and the Global Prevalence of Civil War', *International Studies Quarterly* 63/3 (2019), 692–706.
[55]Author interview with Major General Gert Opperman (retired), Pretoria, 23 June 2014.
[56]Author interview with Major General Johann Dippenaar (retired), Pretoria, 30 June 2014.
[57]Author interview with Colonel Jan Breytenbach (retired), Wilderness, 20 June 2014.
[58]Ibid.
[59]Author interview with Ambassador Victor Zazeraj (retired), Johannesburg, 4 July 2014.
[60]Author interview with Major General Roland de Vries (retired), telephone, 9 September 2014.
[61]Author interview with Major General Johann Dippenaar (retired), Pretoria, 30 June 2014.

interviews with military commanders, it was also hinted that when officers did exceed the bounds of their authority, they were punished for their transgressions.[62]

Constraining military operations also allowed the apartheid regime to claim the role of a 'good faith' participant in negotiations to bring an end to regional conflicts, regardless of its actual willingness to make concessions. But here again, Pretoria sought to make it harder for extra-regional powers to legitimise deeper intervention in Southern Africa. For example, while the apartheid regime accepted the idea of an independent Namibia in principle, its willingness to relinquish control of the territory was tied to the policy of 'linkage': the idea that South Africa's withdrawal must be linked to the removal of all Cuban troops from Angola.[63] The political benefits associated with participating in negotiations thus provided an additional mechanism linking South African decisions to restrain its military operations to a reduced risk of extra-regional intervention.[64]

In sum, escalation fears exerted a powerful conditioning effect on South African conventional operations. While the SADF willingly leveraged its military strength to impose its will on regional rivals, political leaders in Pretoria also understood the need to manage global escalation risks. These often-contradictory policy aims lie at the heart of South Africa's inefficient and destructive conventional strategy.

South Africa's nuclear strategy

If one takes South Africa's regional military predominance as the driving force behind its strategic choices, the apartheid state's nuclear weapons programme is deeply puzzling. Why would a country with unrivalled military strength need nuclear weapons? Given its conventional military superiority, many scholars conclude that South Africa's nuclear programme and posture were strategically irrational. Walters highlights the puzzle: 'Sceptics have concluded – utilizing conventional deterrence theory – that since there is no comparable conventional military power, let alone nuclear power in Africa, South Africa would not invest in the development of such weapons.'[65] Indeed, this line of reasoning led US intelligence, wrongly, to doubt Pretoria's interest in nuclear weapons.[66]

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[62]Author interview with Major General Gert Opperman (retired), Pretoria, 23 June 2014.

[63]An additional stipulation was that an independent Namibia could not be ruled by SWAPO, the militant organization fighting for the territory's independence. See Gleijeses, *Visions of Freedom*, 180–185.

[64]The combined use of South Africa's military and diplomatic capabilities in this way was consistent with 'total strategy', which sought to dedicate *all* dimensions of state power toward reducing both internal and external threats to the apartheid regime. We thank an anonymous reviewer for this suggestion.

[65]Ronald W. Walters, *South Africa and the Bomb: Responsibility and Deterrence* (Lexington: Lexington Books 1987), 63.

[66]See Martha S. Van Wyk, 'Ally or Critic? The United States' Response to South African Nuclear Development, 1949–1980', *Cold War History* 7/2 (2007), 203–204.

In fact, the same awareness of the limits of South African power that conditioned Pretoria's conventional operations also underpinned its nuclear strategy. While South African research into nuclear energy had begun decades before, it was the raised threat of Soviet intervention beginning in the mid-1970s that accelerated the programme and turned it decisively towards acquiring nuclear weapons.[67] Fears of deeper Soviet intervention in Southern Africa also explain Pretoria's nuclear strategy, which explicitly sought to control escalation at a number of different stages. South Africa's conventional and nuclear strategies cannot, therefore, be easily disentangled; they were coherently combined to support the overall goal of deterring and controlling extra-regional threats.

In examining Pretoria's thinking surrounding its nuclear programme, it is important to note the limited number of individuals involved in discussions of nuclear strategy. Very few officials knew of the existence of the programme, and there was little discussion of it within the South African government. Thus, while many in the apartheid regime, and especially in the Department of Foreign Affairs, were sceptical of the utility of nuclear weapons, their views were marginalised within the South African decision-making process on nuclear issues.[68] Major General Opperman, who served as Military Secretary to Defence Minister Magnus Malan at the time, explains that the views of President Botha and Defence Minister Malan 'dominated the discussion', and that both believed that nuclear weapons served a 'clear political purpose.'[69] That political purpose was, in large part, to grant South Africa greater capacity to control escalation. As Major General Opperman recalls, 'the fear of escalation, from a nuclear point of view, was [...] very prominent [in the reasons for nuclear acquisition].'[70] In particular, the nuclear programme aimed to solve a problem that might materialise in the future: if the Soviets continued to pour resources into Southern Africa, Pretoria might face a threat that its conventional forces would be unable to match. Under such circumstances, nuclear weapons would be South Africa's only hope for deterring its opponents.

The nuclear strategy South Africa adopted – the so-called 'three stage' strategy – was designed to provide multiple points within a conflict at which nuclear weapons could be used to manage conflict escalation.[71] André Buys, who managed the team of South African scientists that designed and built the country's nuclear weapons, details the nuclear strategy as follows:

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[67] Jo-Ansie Van Wyk and Anna-Mart Van Wyk, 'From the Nuclear Laager to the Non-Proliferation Club: South Africa and the NPT', *South African Historical Journal* 67/1 (2015), 32–46.
[68] Author interview with Ambassador Jeremy Shearar (retired), Pretoria, 1 July 2014.
[69] Author interview with Major General Gert Opperman (retired), Pretoria, 23 June 2014.
[70] Ibid.
[71] On South Africa's nuclear posture, see Vipin Narang, *Nuclear Strategy in the Modern Era: Regional Powers and International Conflict* (Princeton: Princeton University Press 2014), ch. 8.

> The first stage was that we would keep it secret, and for that, you don't need any physical hardware – the strategy of uncertainty, just keep them guessing. The second stage was that if the military threat escalates to the point where we want to start activating the deterrent strategy, we would tell the U.S. – you had Ronald Reagan as president, we had Margaret Thatcher in Britain, these were people our politicians could talk to and they could be informed: 'we've got this problem, but we've got nuclear weapons, so please try and intervene and get the pressure off.'[72]

Thus, at a particular conflict threshold – perhaps the invasion of South West Africa by the large number of Cuban troops stationed in Angola – South Africa would have communicated to Washington its intention to conduct a nuclear test.[73] In fact, Foreign Minister Pik Botha explicitly promised President Reagan that South Africa would not test without first informing Washington.[74] This notification of an intention to test aimed to exploit American desires to avoid overt nuclear proliferation and persuade the US to intervene – whether diplomatically to put pressure on the Soviet Union to restrain its own clients, or militarily by providing South Africa with conventional resupply or reinforcements. However, South Africa's nuclear strategy included plans beyond mere threats of testing, because, in Buys' words, such threats 'might not work'. If threatening to test failed to manage escalation risks, Pretoria would move to the third stage of the strategy:

> [W]e would detonate one underground. If that brings sense to the military threat, if the threat is relieved, then okay. If it is not, the idea was that we would demonstrate a nuclear weapon. And what we had in mind was to actually go and do a mock attack with a nuclear weapon over the ocean – fly out and actually detonate a nuclear weapon a thousand kilometres south of South Africa in the ocean.[75]

The strategy thus provided opportunities for Pretoria to tamp down escalation at three points in a potential conventional conflict.

South African elites also considered adding a fourth stage to the strategy. As Buys describes, '[t]here was a lot of discussion about whether we should add a fourth step or not – it was never officially added, but the debate was, if that [a test over the ocean] doesn't work and they still attack South Africa – do we actually use it tactically? It was never approved by the politicians [...] but it was certainly discussed.'[76] Consistent with this account of considering more sophisticated nuclear capabilities (including tactical capabilities), South Africa toyed with designs for tactical nuclear weapons and alternative delivery

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[72] Author interview with André Buys, Pretoria, 1 July 2014.
[73] Author interview with Waldo Stumpf, Pretoria, 11 June 2014; author interview with Ambassador Victor Zazeraj, Johannesburg, 4 July 2014.
[74] Or Rabinowitz, *Bargaining on Nuclear Tests: Washington and its Cold War Deals* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2014), 106.
[75] Author interview with André Buys, Pretoria, 1 July 2014.
[76] Ibid.

systems, including ballistic missiles and artillery guns, but such devices were never approved for construction.[77]

Thus, far from an irrational appendage to its security strategy, Pretoria viewed nuclear weapons as crucial for its broader goals of escalation control. To those ends, South African elites set up their nuclear strategy in such a way that allowed them opportunities to tamp down escalation at several different thresholds within a potential conventional war. As such, the nuclear pro-gramme fit coherently within its broader security strategy, which aimed to secure Pretoria's regional interests and foreign policy goals while managing global risks.[78]

Implications and conclusions

South Africa's security strategy during the late Cold War was a function not only of its regional power predominance, but also its deep-rooted fear of conflict escalation vis-à-vis extra-regional threats. This argument helps make sense of the behaviours and strategies adopted by Pretoria that remain puzzling if one considers only its regional position: its profound sense of threat, its inefficient and protracted conventional military operations, and its seemingly 'irrational' nuclear weapons programme. In each case, these puz-zles are resolved when one considers the broader global context within which South Africa was making strategic decisions, and the fear of extra-regional intervention that occupied the minds of South African political and military elites.

These findings add nuance to the debate about South Africa's security strategy during the late Cold War. While Pretoria maintained power predo-minance over its regional rivals throughout the period under study, it was neither a rampaging hegemon nor a purely status-quo power. As discussed above, these are the dominant and dichotomous current understandings of South African behaviour within the literature, but they fail to capture the contradictory pressures that shaped South African strategy. The apartheid regime sought to advance its interests while simultaneously limiting the risk of provoking further intervention originating from outside its region. In this respect, South Africa's strategy was a product of both its regional dominance *and* its global vulnerability.

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[77]Ibid.; author interview with Waldo Stumpf, Pretoria, 11 June 2014; Peter Liberman, 'The Rise and Fall of the South African Bomb', *International Security* 26/2 (2001), 54; Malan, *My Life With The SA Defence Force*, 219.

[78]South Africa's nuclear strategy was thus consistent with 'total strategy' – the use of all aspects of state power in service of its broader goals. On the ways in which nuclear weapons support states' foreign policy goals, see Mark S. Bell, 'Beyond Emboldenment: How Acquiring Nuclear Weapons Can Change Foreign Policy', *International Security* 40/1 (2015), 87–119; Mark S. Bell, 'Nuclear Opportunism: A Theory of How States Use Nuclear Weapons in International Politics', *Journal of Strategic Studies* 42/1 (2019), 3–28.

This perspective reinforces the importance of understanding global geopolitical dynamics in regional and intra-state conflict. As we have shown in the South African case, the potential for increased intervention by the Soviet Union – and the unwillingness of the United States to underwrite the apartheid regime's survival – shaped and constrained Pretoria's security strategy. Disentangling the effects of local, regional, and global actors sheds new light on the international dimensions of protracted conflict and the influence of distant great powers on regional security policies. Even in conflicts in which great powers are not directly involved, the shadow of their potential intervention can profoundly affect the calculations of belligerents.

Our findings also have implications for debates over balance of power theory. The empirical literature has often examined particular regions to test the predictions of balance of power theory, yet existing work incorporates extra-regional great powers in different ways. Some works focus on specific regions that could make a plausible case for being 'closed' systems, such as medieval Europe or ancient China;[79] others examine specific regions while incorporating external powers as members of those regions;[80] and still others examine specific regions while bringing external powers into the analysis only when they appear relevant.[81] These competing approaches have generated divergent conclusions, a factor that may contribute to the widespread scepticism about the utility of balance of power theory.[82] Our findings highlight that testing balance of power arguments within particular regions without systematically considering the implications of the global distribution of power risks generating misleading inferences.

This insight matters not only for academic debates, but also for policy debates that hinge on questions about the distribution of power. For example, what forces might be required in East Asia to deter a rising China? What forces might be required in Eastern Europe to deter Russian adventurism? Can the United States deter regional aggression while acting as an 'offshore balancer'? Our findings suggest that while the regional distribution of power undoubtedly matters, the global distribution of power and the *potential* forces that the United States could ultimately bring to bear in a conflict may have a profound effect on the calculations of regional actors, even if those forces are not deployed in the region. As such, our findings offer support to those who argue that the United States could pursue a more restrained grand strategy without substantial risks to international security.[83]

[79]For example, Jørgen Møller, 'Why Europe Avoided Hegemony: A Historical Perspective on the Balance of Power', *International Studies Quarterly* 58/4 (2014), 660–670; Victoria Tin-bor Hui, 'Toward a Dynamic Theory of International Politics: Insights from Comparing Ancient China and Early Modern Europe', *International Organization* 58/1 (2004), 175–205.

[80]For example, Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*.

[81]For example, Stephen M. Walt, *The Origins of Alliances* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press 1987).

[82]See, Daniel H. Nexon, 'The Balance of Power in the Balance,' *World Politics* 61/2 (2009), 330–359.

[83]For example, Barry R. Posen, *Restraint: A New Foundation for US Grand Strategy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press 2014).

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