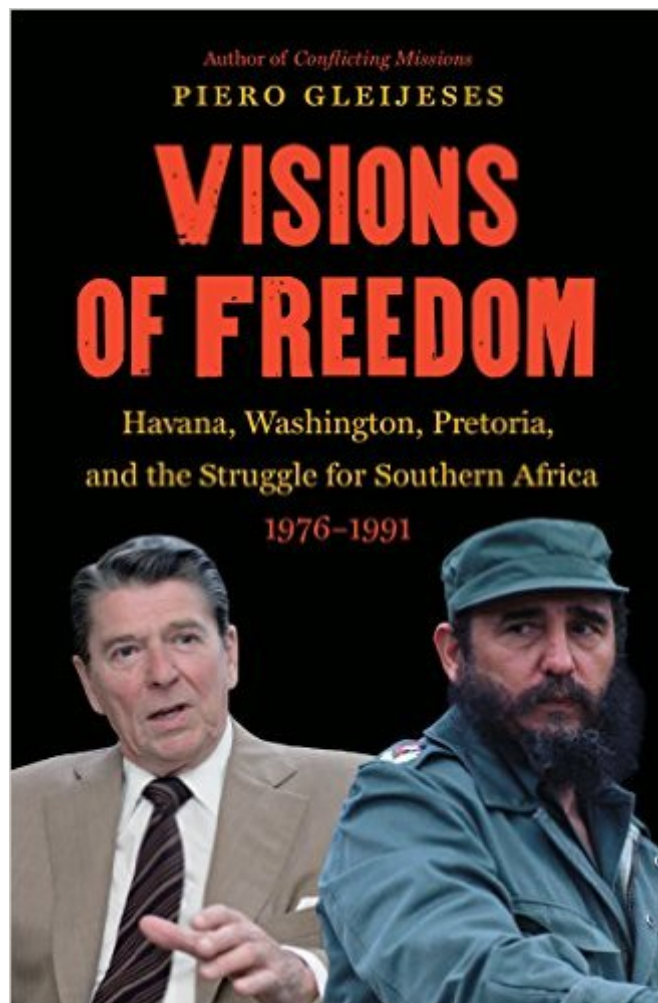


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Visions Of Freedom: Havana, Washington, Pretoria, And The Struggle For Southern Africa, 1976-1991 (The New Cold War History)



Synopsis

During the final fifteen years of the Cold War, southern Africa underwent a period of upheaval, with dramatic twists and turns in relations between the superpowers. Americans, Cubans, Soviets, and Africans fought over the future of Angola, where tens of thousands of Cuban soldiers were stationed, and over the decolonization of Namibia, Africa's last colony. Beyond lay the great prize: South Africa. Piero Gleijeses uses archival sources, particularly from the United States, South Africa, and the closed Cuban archives, to provide an unprecedented international history of this important theater of the late Cold War. These sources all point to one conclusion: by humiliating the United States and defying the Soviet Union, Fidel Castro changed the course of history in southern Africa. It was Cuba's victory in Angola in 1988 that forced Pretoria to set Namibia free and helped break the back of apartheid South Africa. In the words of Nelson Mandela, the Cubans "destroyed the myth of the invincibility of the white oppressor . . . [and] inspired the fighting masses of South Africa."

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Yesterday Nelson Mandela died, and you would think from all the gushing praises that the US government had supported him from the beginning. Nothing could be further from the truth. During Mandela's first visit to the US, it was leaked that the CIA had played a role in his capture. The US considered the ANC a "Communist" and "terrorist" organization. Of course everyone they didn't like

got called at least one of these things. In this book, as in its prequel *Conflicting Missions: Havana, Washington, and Africa, 1959-1976*, Piero Gleijeses, a professor of American foreign Policy at Johns Hopkins, discusses the opposing roles played by the US and Cuba in the battle to free Southern Africa. This is a work of careful research, the author using archives of the US, Cuba, South Africa, and Russia, as well as interviews with and quotes from memoirs of key players in these countries and others. It will be impossible to refute, although we can be sure some will try. The US supported Portuguese colonialism until revolution in Portugal forced an end to it. Then they supported the most pro-imperialist forces in the former colonies; those willing to collaborate with the apartheid regime to see that no radical change took place. UNITA in Angola was one such movement; their atrocities were glossed over, and their South African ties downplayed. While publically taking their distance from apartheid South Africa, the US government collaborated with them against the MPLA in Angola and SWAPO in Namibia (no country in the world publically opposed independence and free elections in the South African colony).

This is an incredibly well researched book that reads like a thriller. For those who follow or have followed events in southern Africa this is a MUST read. The shortcoming in this book is that Professor Gleijeses sees historical developments in terms of "goodies" versus "baddies" and is obviously enthralled by Fidel Castro's Marxist religious fervour. Castro could do no wrong in his "internationalist" vision of fighting imperialism and is presented as a wise knowledgeable leader. Therefore the massacres in Ethiopia by Cuban ally Mengistu are glossed over; Cuba's blatant interference in Angola's internal affairs (the Nito Alves affair) practically ignored. The massacre of tens of thousands of people that followed that attempted coup and ordered by Agostinho Neto (presented in the book as a sort of malevolent dictator) is also ignored. Jonas Savimbi was perhaps a ruthless bloody "war lord" (the professor's description) but to say that the dos Santos govt is "far better than the alternative Jonas Savimbi" makes one wonder: How does he know? It could hardly ever be more corrupt than the dos Santos government and it seems many African leaders would disagree (including perhaps Nelson Mandela who had a very tense relationship with the MPLA government). I am sure this was not professor Gleijeses' intention but by the end of the book one cannot escape the feeling that the Cubans were not taking the Angolan government seriously.

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