

1989 in South(ern) Africa: The Fall of the Nuclear Wall

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ABSTRACTS

Dieser Artikel basiert auf neu erhaltenen Archivquellen und Interviews mit zentralen Akteuren und zielt darauf ab, einige Lücken in der Geschichtsschreibung zum Ende des Kalten Krieges im südlichen Afrika zu schließen. Es werden die letzten Jahre des südafrikanischen Atomwaffenprogramms vor dem Hintergrund der Beendigung des globalen Kalten Krieges in der südafrikanischen Region erörtert. Es wird argumentiert, dass die Ereignisse in Osteuropa im Jahr 1989 den grundlegenden Veränderungen in Südafrika nach einem jahrzehntelangen Befreiungskampf gegen das repressive Apartheidregime gegenübergestellt werden sollten. Es wird gezeigt, dass sich der September 1989 in Südafrika als ebenso bedeutsam erwies wie in Leipzig. Die Wahl von F. W. de Klerk zum Staatspräsidenten brachte Südafrika auf einen beispiellosen Reformkurs, einschließlich des Beschlusses, die sprichwörtliche „Atommauer“ der Apartheid abzureißen. Der Beitrag argumentiert, dass die Entscheidung der De Klerk-Regierung, das im Land entwickelte Atomwaffenarsenal zu beenden und zu demontieren, durch das Zusammentreffen von einheimischen und regionalen Faktoren ausgelöst wurde, aber auch die Ereignisse in Osteuropa beeinflussten, nicht zuletzt den bevorstehenden Fall der Sowjetunion, dem jahrzehntelangen Feind des Apartheid-Regimes. Die Entscheidung zur Denuklearisierung hatte außerdem wichtige Auswirkungen über die Region hinaus. Dies wird durch den phönixartigen Aufstieg von Pretorias Führern in der globalen nuklearen Nichtverbreitungsszene nach dem Ende seines Atomwaffenprogramms und dem Beitritt zum Atomwaffensperrvertrag veranschaulicht.

Resting on newly obtained archival sources and interviews with key actors, this article aims at filling some gaps in the historiography on the end of the Cold War in Southern Africa. It discusses the final years of the South African nuclear weapons programme against the backdrop of the winding down of the Global Cold War in the Southern African region. It argues that the events in Eastern Europe in 1989 should be juxtaposed against the fundamental changes in South Africa after a decades-long liberation struggle against the oppressive Apartheid regime. It shows how September 1989 proved to be as significant in South Africa as it was in Leipzig.

F.W. de Klerk's election as State President put South Africa on a path of unprecedented reform, including a decision to tear down Apartheid's proverbial 'nuclear wall'. The paper argues that while the decision of the De Klerk government to terminate and dismantle the indigenously developed nuclear weapons arsenal was triggered by a confluence of domestic and regional factors, the events in Eastern Europe also had an influence, not least being the impending fall of the Soviet Union, the Apartheid's regime decades-long enemy. The decision to denuclearize furthermore had important repercussions beyond the region. This is exemplified by the phoenix-like rise of Pretoria's leaders on the global non-proliferation scene, following the end of its programme and NPT accession.

On 9 November 1989, the Berlin Wall fell, sparked by peaceful political protests in Leipzig against the oppressive German Democratic Republic (GDR) government, ongoing since 4 September 1989. These events triggered a domino effect of events that ultimately brought the Soviet Union to its knees and ended the decades-long Cold War. The events of the time in Eastern Europe at first appear very far removed from Southern Africa; however, in an attempt to go beyond the rather Eurocentric interpretation of '1989', which take Europe as the center of the analysis from where repercussions triggered similar outcomes around the globe, it is indispensable to de-center a spatially bound narrative and instead engage with a plurality of stories of the many 1989s. Indeed, Engel, Middell, and Hadler in their book on the global events of 1989 convincingly show that "in fact, '1989' happened from sub-Saharan Africa to Central Europe and from Latin America to Southeast-Asia."¹

In Southern Africa, 1989 ushered in the fall of the last colonial power in Africa: the minority Apartheid regime in South Africa. It also brought an end to the regime's nuclear weapons program. South Africa is by no means the only country to denuclearize; former Soviet states Ukraine, Belarus, and Kazakhstan inherited nuclear weapons from the Soviet Union and opted to return them to Russia as they did not have the money or other means to control and maintain these weapons.² South Africa, however, is the first (and only) state to date that decided to completely destroy an indigenous nuclear weapons arsenal, which was developed as a secret strategic deterrent during a time when one of the last proxy wars of the Cold War was playing out in Southern Africa.

This paper will investigate how, if at all, the events of 1989 contributed to the rapidly changing political scene in Southern Africa, and in particular, the decision of the Apartheid regime to tear down its proverbial 'nuclear wall'. The paper reviews the historiography of the South African nuclear dismantling case and fills some of the blank spots in the narrative with archival documents from the United States, United Kingdom, and South Africa. Light will be shed on the confluence of geostrategic and national events in the mid-late-1980s which impacted on the decision-making of the late Apartheid regime

1 U. Engel / F. Hadler / M. Middell, Introduction, in: F. Hadler / M. Middell / U. Engel (eds.), 1989 as a Global Moment, Leipzig 2015, p. 15.

2 U. Friedman, Why One President Gave Up His Country's Nukes, The Atlantic, 9 September 2017. Available at <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2017/09/north-korea-south-africa/539265/>.

and led to the unprecedented decision to dismantle its indigenously developed nuclear arsenal.

Raising The 'Nuclear Wall': The Cold War arrives in Southern Africa

By 1989, South Africa had developed a small nuclear arsenal of six nuclear bombs, with a seventh being under construction. The arsenal was developed as a deterrent to what the Apartheid regime perceived to be a massive communist onslaught on Southern Africa and a threat to their position of power in the region. This arsenal was developed over a period of about 10–12 years, after the political executive took a formal decision in 1978 to this effect. Former Apartheid leaders unanimously agree that these weapons were never developed with the aim of utilizing it in a first strike capacity; rather, a three-phase nuclear strategy was sanctioned, which in short entailed the clandestine development of nuclear weapons, secretly revealing that nuclear capability to the United States and other countries in case of a military threat to South African territory, and lastly, if the secret disclosure had no effect, a public announcement of the capability and possibly a nuclear test. For fear of retaliation, the program did not envision actual military use. It was only meant to place South Africa in a position of power and authority in any future political or major international negotiations. The Apartheid regime had hoped to persuade the international community, more specifically the United States, to intervene to defuse any situation where South Africa's security was threatened.³

The watershed in South Africa's nuclear development came in 1974. A coup in Portugal led to the overthrow of the colonial governments in Angola and Mozambique, which in turn led to the influx of a communist presence in Southern Africa, from 1975. In Angola, there was a notable build-up of Cuban forces, assisted by the Soviet Union and the GDR. Here, it should be remembered that Pretoria regarded all radical black nationalist movements, including the exiled African National Congress (ANC) and Pan African Congress (PAC), as totally under communist control, in particular from the Soviet Union, China, and East Germany.⁴ The Apartheid regime felt that its security position was rapidly deteriorating due to the changing geostrategic landscape in Southern Africa, exemplified by the gradual vanishing of what Pretoria had for years perceived as a crucial buffer zone to the north and east of South Africa.⁵ Pretoria also became convinced that

3 M. Malan, *My Life with the South African Defence Force*, Pretoria 2006, p. 216; J. Shearar, *Denuclearization in Africa: The South African Dimension*, in: *Disarmament* 16 (1993) 2, pp. 171–186; P. Liberman, *The Rise and Fall of the South African Bomb*, in: *International Security* 26 (2001) 2, p. 56; D. Albright, *South Africa and the Affordable Bomb*, in: *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* 50 (1994) 4, pp. 37–48, 56; J. Richelson, *Spying on the Bomb*, New York 2006, p. 283.

4 Richelson, *Spying on the Bomb*, pp. 244–245; Albright, *South Africa and the Affordable Bomb*, p. 41; Liberman, *The Rise and Fall of the South African Bomb*, p. 56; D. Albright, *South Africa Comes Clean*, in: *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* 49 (1993), pp. 3–6; Shearar, *Denuclearization in Africa*.

5 South African Department of Defence Archives (SADOD Archives), Memorandum by R.F. Armstrong, 'The Jericho Weapon System', 31 March 1975.

the threat of the use of nuclear weapons against the country could not be discarded, that its defence strategy must take a potential nuclear threat into account, and that suitable steps should be taken to guard against such a threat.⁶

In 1975, South Africa became involved in the Angolan Civil War. Having the Cubans in Angola with Soviet support meant that there was a communist threat on their doorstep (South-West Africa was still under the administration of South Africa at the time). They were also asked by the United States to become involved in covert cooperation with the CIA; a fact confirmed in discussions with the former head of the South African Defence Force, General Jannie Geldenhuys, and the former Minister of Foreign Affairs, P. W. Botha.⁷ Like Pretoria, Washington was concerned about the large communist contingent being present in Angola, leading President Gerald Ford to state that resistance to Soviet expansion by military means must be a fundamental element of US foreign policy.⁸

In 1976, the perceived threat to South Africa's security was further enhanced through two events: the US Congress pulling the plug on American involvement in Angola, which also brought an end to the covert CIA support of the South African military forces; and the Soweto riots of June 1976, which led to many young black South Africans to seek refuge in the Front Line states,⁹ where they received military training under communist advisors. This gave new impetus to the ANC's armed struggle and guerrilla insurgencies against South Africa, which would eventually culminate in an internal threat to Pretoria's security.¹⁰ Finally, the involvement of the Soviet Union in Southern Africa raised fears among the Nationalists in Pretoria about its nuclear capabilities. In the words of former Minister of Defence Magnus Malan:

*If your enemy is sitting with a nuclear bomb and you don't take precautions about it, there's something wrong [...] the Russians had one and we had the Russians in Angola. There was nothing preventing their using it, other than the international community.*¹¹

All these events convinced the Apartheid regime that it could not bank on international support against the perceived threats to its security.¹²

From 1977, South Africa became internationally more isolated. The Soviet Union spotted the construction of an underground nuclear test site in the Kalahari Desert in August 1977, alerted the United States in an unfamiliar show of cooperation, and Pretoria was warned not to proceed with a nuclear test. Pretoria denied with indignation that any

6 Ibid.

7 Anna-Mart van Wyk, conversations with General Jannie Geldenhuys and former Minister P. W. Botha, 2009–2010.

8 P. Gleijeses, *Conflicting Missions: Havana, Washington, and Africa, 1959–1976*, Chapel Hill 2002, p. 291; R. Massie, *Loosing the Bonds: The United States and South Africa in the Apartheid Years*, New York 1997, pp. 373, 382–383.

9 Jimmy Carter Library (hereafter JCL), White House Central File (hereafter WHCF), CO141: 20 January 1977–31 May 1977, Box CO-53, Memorandum, Paper by Ruth Morgentau, U.S. Southern African policy revisited, 1 March 1977.

10 P. van Slambrouck, 'South Africa Prepares to 'Go Nuclear'', in: *The Christian Science Monitor*, 31 January 1984, p. 1; R. W. Walters, *South Africa and the Bomb: Responsibility and Deterrence*, Lexington, MA 1987, pp. 91–92.

11 General Magnus Malan, quoted in: H. Hamann, *Days of the Generals: The Untold Story of South Africa's Apartheid-Era Military Generals*, Cape Town 2001, p. 165.

12 Massie, *Loosing the Bonds*, pp. 494–495.

explosion was contemplated.¹³ However, in the months following the Kalahari incident, South Africa's position in the international arena deteriorated rapidly. Its participation in the United Nations (UN) General Assembly and the specialized agencies of the UN was suspended, a mandatory arms embargo and a voluntary oil embargo were instituted against it in 1977, it lost its designated seat on the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Board of Governors, and it was denied participation in the General Conference of the IAEA. Regionally, the Apartheid regime started to face an even bigger threat to its security, with the looming independence and black majority rule of neighbouring Zimbabwe, which would mean that two radical black nationalist governments were established on South Africa's northern frontiers.¹⁴ During all these events, the Apartheid regime remained absolutely immovable on political and racial justice at home. Defence spending was increased, and new security laws introduced that made South Africa a garrison state designed to suppress the revolts of the black majority.¹⁵ A new strategy was launched, aimed at blocking pressure for majority rule and non-conventional onslaughts.¹⁶ Part of this strategy included a formal decision in 1978, to develop a limited nuclear capability,¹⁷ thereby raising a proverbial 'nuclear wall'. Since the 1978 decision to go nuclear, the Apartheid regime followed an ambiguous nuclear posture, which was based on creating a high degree of uncertainty about, firstly, their nuclear capability and secondly, their intentions regarding the use of that capability.¹⁸ The 'Border War' with Angola was heating up and the exiled ANC accelerated its attempts to break the Apartheid regime's grip on South Africa through a new strategy involving mass mobilization and an intensified armed struggle. By the mid-1980s, the set was changing again, and the Apartheid regime now faced the biggest ever threat to its security. Between December 1983 and January 1984, the South African Defence Force launched Operation Askari. It was aimed at disrupting the planned infiltration of the People's Liberation Army of Namibia¹⁹ (PLAN)'s special units into South West

13 van Slambrouck, *South Africa Prepares to 'Go Nuclear'*, p. 1; Walters, *South Africa and the Bomb*, pp. 91–92; South African Diplomatic Archives, Pretoria (SADA Pretoria), Brand Fourie Personal Papers, Nuclear Energy, Report, 1 U.S. option: Help South Africa enrich, in Nuclear Fuel, 8 August 1977, pp. 1–2; National Security Archive (hereafter NSA), National Security Council (hereafter NSC), Memorandum for Secretary of State and others, South Atlantic Nuclear Event, 22 October 1979; Moscow says A-bomb near in South Africa, *The New York Times*, 7 August 1977, p. 13; Richelson, *Spying on the Bomb*, p. 279; South Africa lashes out at U.S., in: *The Christian Science Monitor*, 8 August 1977, p. 2. For the most recent work on the abandoned South African test as well as on the United States/USSR response to it see: S. Bidgood, *The 1977 South Africa Nuclear Crisis*, in W. C. Potter and S. Bidgood (eds.), *Once and Future Partners: The United States, Russia And Nuclear Non-Proliferation*, Abingdon, 2018, pp. 55–78.

14 Shearar, *Denuclearization in Africa*, pp. 176–181.

15 JCL, WHCF, CO141: 20 January 1977–31 May 1977, Box CO-53, Memorandum, Paper by Ruth Morgentau, U.S. Southern African policy revisited, 1 March 1977.

16 ARMSCOR Archives Pretoria (hereafter AAP), State Security Board, Economic Liaison Committee, File 1/15/2/3/2, Vol. 5: Main Management: Departmental Committees, Commissions and Management Boards, Administration Total War: Feedback to the Management Committee, 11 September 1981; J.F. Burns, *Afrikaners dig in against threat to their rule*, in: *The New York Times*, 4 April 1977, pp. 1, 8.

17 Shearar, *Denuclearization in Africa*, pp. 176–188.

18 J. E. Spence, *South Africa: The Nuclear Option*, in: *African Affairs* 80 (1981) 321, p. 444.

19 PLAN was the military wing of the South West Africa People's Organisation (SWAPO), who fought for the in-

Africa. It was a counterinsurgency operation that quickly developed into a conventional battle, with the South Africans outnumbered six to one against a force enjoying superior firepower by a tank company.²⁰ The outcome was a realization by the SADF that its conventional capacity was questionable and this may well have spurred on the more rapid development of a nuclear capability to maintain the myth that South Africa was militarily invincible. By the mid-1980s, the number of Cuban soldiers in Angola also started to increase rapidly, leading to an escalation in South African military involvement in both Angola and South West Africa.²¹

By 1985, the tables started turning for the Apartheid regime. Globally, the wave of anti-Apartheid protests escalated to an unprecedented level. Comprehensive economic sanctions were introduced against South Africa, triggered by the United States' Comprehensive Anti-Apartheid Act of 1986, which followed the May 1986 SADF raid of ANC facilities in three neighbouring countries.²² A number of other countries also instituted comprehensive sanctions against South Africa in the aftermath of the raids.²³ Within the borders of South Africa, continued incursions by ANC guerrillas and resistance against Apartheid reached a boiling point, leading to a series of states of emergency being declared by State President P.W. Botha from 1985. An estimated 26,000 people were detained and hundreds killed during these states of emergency.²⁴ The ANC started changing its tactics, realizing that scattered sabotage and assassination was about all the military force they could muster against Pretoria, and that they needed to focus more on diplomatic tactics. In early 1987, a series of successful initiatives were launched, which were aimed at painting Pretoria as the unreasonably party. South Africans were also encouraged to defy Pretoria's laws and meet with the ANC abroad – a tactic that led to a successful and positive meeting between a group of liberal Afrikaners and an ANC delegation in Dakar.²⁵ The Apartheid regime faced condemnation in virtually every sphere of international relations, and the UN demanded the immediate independence of South

dependence of South West Africa/Namibia, which was still under the control of the South African Apartheid regime at the time.

20 M. Norval, *Death in the Desert: The Namibian Tragedy*, Washington, DC, 1989, available at <http://www.geocities.com/odjobman/norch16.htm>.

21 Hamann, *Days of the Generals*, p. 168.

22 AAP, SAE, Box 3, File 5, Legislation, The Comprehensive Anti-Apartheid Act, 18 October 1986; AAP, Main Management, Foreign Affairs and Organization (hereafter MMFAO), Embargo, File 1/17/1, Vol. 5, Research Document, Sanctions against South Africa: Current legislative issues, 14 August 1986.

23 Ibid.

24 United Nations General Assembly, Resolutions 39/50 A and B, The Situation in Namibia Resulting from the Illegal Occupation of the Territory by South Africa, and Implementation of Security Council resolution 435 (1978), 12 December 1984, available at <http://research.un.org/en/docs/ga/quick/regular/39>; 'Security Council Widens S. Africa Arms Embargo', in: *Los Angeles Times*, 14 December 1984, p. 12; AAP, SAE, File 5, Legislation, The Comprehensive Anti-Apartheid Act, 18 October 1986; AAP, Main Management, Foreign Affairs and Organization (hereafter MMFAO), Embargo, File 1/17/1, Vol. 5, Research Document, Sanctions against South Africa: Current legislative issues, 14 August 1986; Massie, *Loosing the Bonds*, pp. 639–40; South African History Online, *State of Emergency in South Africa: the 1960s and 1980s*, available at <https://www.sahistory.org.za/topic/state-emergency-south-africa-1960-and-1980s>.

25 Massie, *Loosing the Bonds*, pp. 639–640; U. van der Heyden, *Der Dakar-Prozess: Der Anfang vom Ende der Apartheid in Südafrika*, Kiel 2018.

West Africa.²⁶ In the words of former South African State President F.W. de Klerk: “If all these things, taken together, did not constitute a total onslaught, I can hardly imagine a situation which does deserve this label.”²⁷

In Angola, even though the Soviet Union under the progressive leadership of Gorbachev was looking for a way out, Fidel Castro believed that his Cuban troops could only withdraw with honour if they were instrumental in obtaining the independence of South West Africa.²⁸ More Cuban troops were sent to Angola, and the Apartheid regime responded with also deploying more troops. In 1987, a military stalemate was reached at Cuito Cuanavale between Cuban and Angolan troops on one side, and SADF and South African-backed National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA) insurgency forces on the other. At this point, it was clear that the Angolan War had been transformed from being primarily a game of cat-and-mouse to a standoff between two small armies with heavy artillery and modern weapons.²⁹ “The risk of hair-trigger reactions and miscalculations were substantial [...] a small spark could have ignited a cycle of bigger clashes [...]”³⁰

Fears that the military situation in Angola could escalate into something far more severe grew steadily, leading in July 1988 to Pretoria requesting talks with the United States, Britain and the Soviet Union on accession to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT).³¹ Simultaneously, negotiations ensued to end the Border War. From March–December 1988, representatives from the United States, Soviet Union, Angola, South Africa, Cuba, the United Nations, UNITA, South West Africa People's Organisation (SWAPO), the ANC and the Front-Line states engaged in intense negotiations. Pretoria was once again urged to sign the NPT in the best interest of all the countries of the Southern Africa region and the world as a whole.³² The negotiations, brokered by representatives of the Soviet Union and the United States, brought about the independence of South West Africa (now to be called Namibia), and can be considered as the start of the winding down of the Cold War in the Southern African region.³³

26 NSA, South Africa: The Making of United States Policy, 1962–1989, Resolutions, General Assembly 19/50 A and B, Condemnation of the occupation of Namibia and demand for its independence, 12 December 1984; Security Council widens S. Africa arms embargo, in: Los Angeles Times, 14 December 1984, p. 12.

27 F.W. de Klerk, quoted in Malan, *My life with the SA Defence Force*, p. 188.

28 Massie, *Loosing the Bonds*, pp. 639–640.

29 Ibid.

30 Chester Crocker, quoted in Massie, *Loosing the bonds*, pp. 640–641.

31 P. Lewis, Pretoria willing to discuss atom ban, in: The New York Times, 15 July 1988, p. A3.

32 Pretoria says it can build A-arms, in: The New York Times, 14 August 1988, p. 16; Superpowers urge SA to sign nuke treaty, in: The Citizen, 22 September 1988, p. 5; Massie, *Loosing the bonds*, pp. 641–642.

33 C. Saunders/S. Onslow, The Cold War and Southern Africa, 1976–1990, in: M. P. Leffler/O. A. Westad (eds.), *The Cambridge History of the Cold War*, Cambridge 2019, pp. 222–243, 240–241.

Breaking Down the 'Nuclear Wall'

The multilateral negotiations which led to the Angola-Namibia Accords on 22 December 1988 in New York ushered in a new era of engagement between South Africa and its neighbouring states. As stated, it granted independence to Namibia and ended the direct involvement of foreign troops in the Angolan Civil War. This changed the geopolitics of the Southern African region significantly, leading to an improvement in South Africa's external security situation. Furthermore, Soviet leader Michael Gorbachev's progressive change of stance towards radical liberation movements, coupled with the ongoing political protests across the GDR and the fall of the Berlin Wall in November 1989, resulted in the withdrawal of Soviet support and the potential for a nuclear incident in Southern Africa. Cuban and South African military forces started to withdraw from Namibia shortly after the New York Accords and were replaced by a UN peacekeeping force.³⁴ This reduced the rationale for the Apartheid regime's nuclear weapons programme drastically, while at the same time affecting the Armaments Corporation (ARMSCOR) and the South African defence sector generally, because the settlement of the regional conflicts called for a reduced military budget.³⁵

It is further important to note that the South African political landscape changed fundamentally in 1989 when P.W. Botha suffered a stroke. On 18 January 1989, the South African parliament was informed that he would be recovering for six weeks. While still in hospital, he proposed a separation of the offices of State President (which he had become in 1984, with the position taking on the executive role he previously enjoyed as prime minister) and leader of the National Party (NP). He called on his party to elect a replacement for him, indicating that he would remain president himself until the South African general election later that year. His successor at the helm of the NP became F.W. de Klerk, who was elected by the NP caucus after a narrow victory over Finance Minister Barend du Plessis.³⁶ The resulting leadership vacuum in the domestic political arena, in which it was not clear whether P.W. Botha would come back on a full-time basis or whether he would resign, presented a crucial element of uncertainty with regard to any governmental decision on the nuclear programme.³⁷

Botha resigned as State President in August 1989. De Klerk became Acting State President until he was formally elected in September 1989. While the NP had failed to win the same number of votes compared to the previous election in 1987, it nevertheless

34 C. Saunders, *The Role of the United Nations in the Independence of Namibia*, in: *History Compass* 5 (2007) 3, pp. 737–744, at pp. 740–742.

35 H. Steyn / R. van der Walt / J. van Loggerenberg, *Armament and Disarmament: South Africa's Nuclear Weapons Experience*, Pretoria 2003, pp. 97–99.

36 H. Gilliom, *The Last Afrikaner Leaders: A Supreme Test of Power*, Cape Town 2012, p. 280; D. Geldenhuys / H. Kotze, *De Klerk: A Political Leadership Study*, in: *Politikon* 19 (1991) 1, pp. 20–44, at p. 37.

37 Foreign and Commonwealth Office, *South Africa and the NPT*, 20 January 1989, Teleletter Pretoria to FCO, File No. SEE 083/1 Part A.

emerged as the strongest party.³⁸ De Klerk was quick to describe his vision candidly to Cabinet and select others: Nelson Mandela would be released and South Africa should become part of the international community again by signing the NPT.³⁹

The eclipse in power from Botha to De Klerk also meant a stronger role for the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) under the leadership of Foreign Minister Pik Botha. Previously, following the transition from John Vorster to P.W. Botha in 1978, the DFA, South Africa's prime actor with regard to foreign policy matters, had become side-lined by the military (SADF) and intelligence establishment, a fact often lamented by leading officials in the department.⁴⁰ P.W. Botha's leadership style meant he personally wanted closer control over South Africa's military and security apparatus.⁴¹ However, in the lead-up to the 1988 New York Accords, Pik Botha was at the forefront of negotiating the settlement which ended the Border War. The DFA subsequently assumed a more influential position within the South African government in 1989,⁴² boosted by the uncertainty about P.W. Botha's health and the prevalent power vacuum.

As far as the nuclear weapons program is concerned – Pik Botha in later years insisted that in the late 1980s, he had lobbied P.W. Botha and subsequently De Klerk, to dismantle its nuclear weapons because it was going to have far-reaching consequences for the country if they did not do so.⁴³ It should be remembered at this point that the nuclear weapons program was still top secret and Pik Botha as foreign minister was among very few people who were privy to it.⁴⁴ His contention that he urged an end to the program is supported by an unsigned document from the South African Diplomatic Archives, dated September 1988 and titled 'A balanced approach to the NPT: ARMSCOR/AEC concerns viewed from a DFA standpoint'.⁴⁵ Even though it gives the "DFA standpoint",

38 African Elections Database: Elections in South Africa, available at http://africanelections.tripod.com/za.html#1989_House_of_Assembly_Election.

39 N. von Wielligh / L. von Wielligh-Steyn, *The Bomb: South Africa's Nuclear Weapons Program*, Pretoria 2016, p. 216.

40 R. Pfister, *Apartheid South Africa and African States: From Pariah to Middle Power, 1961–1994*, London 2005, pp. 15, 108 and 146.

41 For a detailed discussion of the rise and fall of the securocrats under P. W. Botha, see C. Alden, *Apartheid's Last Stand: The Rise and Fall of the South African Security State*, Basingstoke 1996.

42 Alden, *Apartheid's Last Stand*.

43 Pik Botha's keynote speech at the Conference on After the Wall: 20 years on, Scholarship and Society in Southern Africa, Rhodes University, Grahamstown, South Africa, 8–9 November 2009.

44 In September 1978, P.W. Botha formed a top-level Cabinet committee, known as the Witvlei Committee, and tasked them with "determining the way forward in the transition to the manufacture of suitable nuclear weapons for SA – taking into account the development already accomplished by the AEB with the peaceful uses of nuclear explosives – and, after approval of proposals, implementing them in earnest." The Witvlei Committee henceforth became responsible for all nuclear-related decisions. The Committee was chaired by Botha and included the minister of mining (at that point, future President F.W. de Klerk), the minister of foreign affairs (Roelof 'Pik' Botha), the ministers of finance and defence, the chairman of ARMSCOR, the director of the AEB, and the director general of foreign affairs as secretary. (H. Purkitt / S. Burgess, *South Africa's Weapons of Mass Destruction*, Bloomington 2005, pp. 61–62; Steyn et al., *Nuclear Armament and Disarmament*, p. 42; P.W. Botha's Speech at the Opening of Kentron Circle, in: Von Wielligh / Von-Wielligh-Steyn, *The Bomb*, p. 477; C. Gould, *The Nuclear Weapons History Project*, in: K. Allan [ed.], *Paper Wars: Access to Information in South Africa*, Wits University, Johannesburg 2009, p. 93).

45 SADA Pretoria, NPT-IAEA, Agreement/Negotiations on full-scope safeguards, Memorandum: A balanced approach to the NPT: ARMSCOR/AEC concerns viewed from a DFA standpoint, September 1988.

it was likely written by Botha or the Director-General of Foreign Affairs, who was the only other DFA person being part of the Witvlei Committee (see footnote 44). The document outlines the DFA standpoint of wanting a balanced approach to South Africa's nuclear capability and signing of the NPT, versus ARMSCOR and the Atomic Energy Corporation (AEC), who still favoured a military and strategic application of nuclear energy. ARMSCOR wanted to continue developing the weapons program to tactical and strategic preparedness, as well as continue the "strategy of uncertainty". The DFA however felt that ARMSCOR's proposed strategy neglected pressing social, political and other technological concerns, for example nuclear energy.⁴⁶

The DFA furthermore opined that the continued development of nuclear weapons could only be justified based on three arguments: the certainty of eventual use, the deterrence factor, and national pride. According to the DFA, each of these presented its own difficulties. The eventual use of a nuclear weapon was fraught with national, moral and religious problems. For example, "against whom and how effectively can such a weapon be used in the sparsely populated openness of Africa?"⁴⁷, not to speak of the immediate international response that would follow the use of a nuclear device, which would without a doubt destroy the political and military component of the South African society or government that had initiated the use of the device. In addition, the practical problems of contamination and fallout would have a devastating effect on the entire sub-continent.⁴⁸

The DFA conceded that the deterrence factor of a nuclear weapons capability had some merit at face value; after all, it had been at the root of the superpower nuclear build-up during the Cold War. However, in the South African domestic context, it did not seem as if all the posturing and uncertainty have deterred Apartheid regime's "enemies" at all. In fact, the DFA argued, the inappropriateness of reliance on a nuclear deterrent was evidenced by continuing ANC attacks on South Africa, foreign boycotts and sanctions and the increasing political and physical isolation of South Africa. In addition, the deterrence strategy as decided upon in 1978 had led to increased pressure on South Africa and greater international condemnation of Pretoria's nuclear policy, as well as increased isolation from the international nuclear fraternity. Furthermore, the DFA strongly believed that should a situation arise where South Africa would advance its deterrent strategy to the third stage, it could not be rationally expected that the superpowers would just idly await the materialization of the threat. In fact, given the global sensitivity to nuclear proliferation at the time, as well as South Africa's unique political situation, mere confirmation of Pretoria's nuclear capacity might provoke the world's superpowers into pre-emptive action. Finally, the DFA did not believe that the national pride of South Africa would be enhanced at all by a public realization that South Africa's position had become so desperate that it had to rely on nuclear weapons for protection, and that South Africa

46 Ibid.

47 Ibid.

48 Ibid.

“was now fully capable of destroying itself and thereby the region in which we live”. Instead, South Africa’s national pride would be more enhanced by the country “becoming a respected member of the international community, thereby taking its rightful place as a leader within the nuclear family.” In conclusion, the DFA stated that it was convinced that when measuring the vast cost and danger of developing a nuclear weapons capability against social needs within South Africa, it created a moral and political dilemma that would eventually have grave political consequences.⁴⁹

F.W. de Klerk seems to have shared the sentiments of the DFA. He contends that when he became State President in 1989, he was already determined to dismantle the nuclear weapons programme as a priority.⁵⁰ One of his first actions after assuming office in September 1989 was to summon an expert committee composed of senior officials from ARMSCOR, the AEC, the SADF, and a select group of government ministers, to review the nuclear weapons programme. The next, at an ad hoc cabinet meeting in November 1989, De Klerk instructed the AEC, ARMSCOR and the SADF to immediately terminate the nuclear weapons program.⁵¹ In February 1990, de Klerk gave the final order to dismantle the weapons.⁵² In what was called the Mantel Project, the process of dismantling had to be completed before the end of September 1991, including the destruction of all documents related to the program.⁵³

Over the years, De Klerk was asked many times what his reasons were for terminating the nuclear weapons program. He played the moral card, claiming he had misgivings about the program since he became minister of mineral and energy affairs⁵⁴ and was told it existed:

*I felt it was meaningless to use such a bomb in what was essentially a bush war – that it was unspeakable to think that we could destroy a city in one of our neighbouring countries in any way whatsoever.*⁵⁵

In his autobiography, De Klerk recalled that he believed the nuclear weapons to be a burden to his government after they had lost their deterrence purpose following the end of the conflicts in the southern African region.⁵⁶ With a view to the military threat to his country and the decisions he took, De Klerk recalled:

49 Ibid.

50 S. Onslow / R. F. Botha / R. Craggs, Interview with RF ‘Pik’ Botha, Commonwealth Oral History Project. Pretoria, 13 December 2012.

51 Von Wielligh / Von Wielligh-Steyn, *The Bomb*, p. 216.

52 D. Albright, *South Africa’s Secret Nuclear Weapons*, ISIS Report. 1994. Available at <http://isis-online.org/isis-reports/detail/south-africas-secret-nuclear-weapons/13>.

53 Von Wielligh / Von Wielligh-Steyn, *The Bomb*, p. 218.

54 Prior to becoming minister of mineral and energy affairs, De Klerk was the Minister of Mines, Energy and Environmental Affairs. Some sources, such as Purkitt and Burgess, allude to him being privy to the program since its inception in 1978, when he was the minister of mines. See Purkitt / Burgess, *South Africa’s Weapons of Mass Destruction*, pp. 61–62.

55 Friedman, *Why One President Gave Up His Country’s Nukes*.

56 F.W. de Klerk, *The last Trek – A New Beginning: The Autobiography*, New York 1999, p. 274.

*[...] the whole picture had changed and that helped me, or let me rather put it differently, that robbed those who might have been against my decision [to end the nuclear weapons program] of arguments to advance why we should keep it.*⁵⁷

He also stated later, in 1993, when he finally revealed the existence of the program to Parliament, that when he replaced P.W. Botha as President in 1989, it was evident to him that it was in the national interest of South Africa to totally reverse its nuclear policy and that there was “the prospect of moving away from a confrontational relationship with the international community in general and with our neighbours in Africa [...] to one of cooperation”.⁵⁸ He further said that when he became president, Foreign Minister Pik Botha urged him to take two key steps if he wished to improve South Africa’s relationship with the world: “The first was to release Nelson Mandela, and the second was to dismantle our nuclear weapons and accede to the NPT.”⁵⁹ [Interesting that this is exactly what he said in a special meeting in September 1989, as noted above]. Last but not least, he alluded to the fall of the Berlin Wall in November 1989 and the collapse of Soviet communism having created a completely new global strategic environment, thereby removing one of South Africa’s central concerns. “I realized that there would never again be so favourable an opportunity for negotiations with our regional neighbours, so my colleagues and I did not hesitate to act.”⁶⁰ Moreover, the timing also seemed conducive for pushing through a decision with regard to possible internal adversaries. In fact, De Klerk recalled no opposition from his colleagues and the military/security circles during the meeting in September 1989 and contends that even if some people didn’t like it, there was nobody who forcibly argued against his suggestion.⁶¹

It should be noted also that by 1989, ARMSCOR was no longer committed to the nuclear weapons programme, because it believed an emphasis on the satellite and conventional delivery programme might be more viable in the future. The AEC had also changed direction towards NPT signature, partly because the enrichment package it could offer if the restrictions on South African uranium sales were lifted following accession to the Treaty, was considered too expensive on the world market.⁶² The AEC furthermore wanted South Africa to adhere to the NPT as soon as possible in the light of a possible ANC takeover of government.⁶³ It is interesting to note that De Klerk never mentioned a potential nuclear proliferation risk by the ANC as a specific concern, o

57 Robin Möser, Interview with F.W. de Klerk, 20 February 2017, Cape Town, South Africa.

58 History and Public Policy Digital Archive, WWICS, Washington, DC, Speech by South African President F.W. de Klerk to a joint session of Parliament on accession to the Non-Proliferation Treaty, 24 March 1993, as contributed by J.-A. van Wyk. Available at: <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/116789>.

59 F.W. de Klerk, South Africa, The Nation That Gave Up Its Nukes, Opinion piece, Los Angeles Times, 22 December 2013. Available at <https://www.latimes.com/opinion/op-ed/la-oe-deklerk-south-africa-nukes-20131222-story.html>.

60 De Klerk, South Africa, The Nation That Gave Up Its Nukes.

61 Möser, Interview with F.W. de Klerk, 20 February 2017.

62 SADA Pretoria, Memorandum by Richard Carter, South African Department of Foreign Affairs, Main Points Arising from Luncheon on 14 November 1989 with Atomic Energy Corporation (AEC), 17 November 1989.

63 Ibid.

indeed, as motivation for him to end the nuclear weapons program. The AEC's Waldo Stumpf, who was involved in the dismantling of the weapons, relates that De Klerk never relayed anything on this matter. According to Stumpf, for De Klerk:

*This was not the factor. The factor was the handing over of a white minority to a black majority. That was already a complex business. Why make the process more difficult [...] I never got the impression that De Klerk was afraid that the ANC would act irresponsibly with the nuclear bombs. But there were just too many complications. How would you hand the bombs over? Emotions would have run high in South Africa. In any case, would Mandela have been accepted on the world stage with 'nukes in his backyard'?*⁶⁴

However, others in the political establishment did raise concerns on the matter. Stumpf and Pik Botha shared a similar assessment: acknowledging that the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) had a desire to possess a nuclear capability; and acknowledging that there were elements within the ANC leadership who shared this view. The Director-General of the National Intelligence Service at the time, Niel Barnard, was also concerned:

*If our nuclear weapons capacity had been handed over to the ANC, it would have had very serious and negative implications for South Africa's international relations, its constitutional status, and indeed its legitimacy as a state. This was an important reason for dismantling the nuclear arsenal. [Also] I was worried about these weapons ending up in the hands of the ANC, particularly as Mandela and Gaddafi were quite close at the time.*⁶⁵

Interestingly, former South African General Constant Viljoen later alleged that some pressure for dismantling also came from ANC stalwart Nelson Mandela, whom De Klerk had apparently briefed completely about South Africa's nuclear capabilities,⁶⁶ although this is highly doubtful.

Domestically, the general openness toward reforms displayed by the De Klerk Government was soon to have far-reaching consequences for the country. De Klerk set into motion fundamental domestic political reforms aimed at bringing full democracy to South Africa, including talks with the ANC, the unbanning of the liberation movements and the release of the ANC stalwart, Nelson Mandela, and other political prisoners.⁶⁷ And on 7 June 1990, he announced the lifting of the state of emergency in all provinces except Natal, where the ANC and the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) were still engrossed in political violence that had resulted in the deaths of 4,000 black South Africans over the previous four years.⁶⁸

64 Von Wielligh / Von Wielligh-Steyn, *The Bomb*, p. 276.

65 Ibid., pp. 277–278.

66 Hamann, *Days of the Generals*, p. 169.

67 W. Stumpf, *South Africa's Nuclear Weapons Program: From Deterrence to Dismantlement*, *Arms Control Today*, 25, December 1995/January 1996, p. 6; Shearar, *Denuclearization in Africa*; Malan, *My Life with the SA Defence Force*, p. 218.

68 President F. W. de Klerk lifts the State of Emergency, 7 June 1990, *South African History Online*. Available at <https://www.sahistory.org.za/dated-event/president-fw-de-klerk-lifts-state-emergency>.

Into the Unknown: Beyond 1989

It is clear from the above discussion that it was a confluence of factors, both domestically and internationally, that led De Klerk to the decision to dismantle South Africa's entire nuclear deterrent capability.⁶⁹ During 1990 and 1991, the weapons were disassembled and its casings melted; the uranium enrichment plant was closed down, and the blueprints for the weapons were destroyed.⁷⁰ Still, Pretoria did not sign the NPT. One reason for this was fear of the right-wing element in South Africa who was watching De Klerk closely and who would possibly regard De Klerk's accession to the NPT as a sign of sell-out. Another important reason was that it wanted to use its voluntary nuclear dismantlement as a bargaining chip in resuming full participation in the activities of the IAEA, closer collaboration with other African countries in the development of nuclear technology, unconditional support for the principle of declaring Africa a nuclear weapons-free zone, and participation in global efforts to prevent the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.⁷¹ Some sources also suggest that Washington wanted Pretoria to sign the NPT as soon as possible as it might prompt other African states who were not yet signatories to the NPT to take the step of adherence. This in turn would rid the IAEA of the contentious political issue of South Africa's non-adherence and would provide an important impetus to the upcoming NPT review conference in 1995.⁷²

On 28 June 1991, Pretoria at last announced that it was ready to sign the NPT.⁷³ In a statement following the announcement, Foreign Minister Pik Botha emphasized that South Africa's many years of refusal to sign the NPT was on the basis that doing so would jeopardize the country's security, and that Pretoria had never tested a nuclear weapon, either alone or in cooperation with other countries.⁷⁴ On 8 July 1991, Botha proceeded to sign the NPT at a ceremony in Pretoria, thereby permitting inspection of all South Africa's nuclear installations.⁷⁵ However, Botha remained tight-lipped about Pretoria's nuclear arsenal, only acknowledging that South Africa had the potential to develop a nuclear bomb and had a plant that produced weapons-grade uranium.⁷⁶

69 Shearar, *Denuclearization in Africa*; Malan, *My Life with the SA Defence Force*, p. 218.

70 Liberman, *The Rise and Fall of the South African Bomb*, p. 56.

71 Shearar, *Denuclearization in Africa*. Furthermore, the former head of the NIS, Dr. Niel Barnard, spoke of a "wish list" he and others argued for in 1989–90, which should have been granted by Western governments in return for South African NPT accession, but it was never conveyed to the United States or the United Kingdom (Robin Möser, Interview with Niel Barnard, 21 February 2017, Gansbaai, South Africa).

72 George Bush Library (hereafter GBL), Bush Presidential Records, Staff and Office Files (hereafter BPRSOF), National Security Council (hereafter NSC), Daniel B Poneman Files (hereafter DBPF), South Africa [OA/ID CF01350], Analysis: South Africa: Ready to Accede to the NPT, 8 February 1990.

73 GBL, BPRSOF, NSC, DBPF, South Africa [OA/ID CF01350], Memorandum: Daniel Poneman to Brent Scowcroft Proposed press release on South African adherence to the Non-proliferation Treaty, 27 June 1991.

74 C.S. Wren, Pretoria accepts atom-arms ban and agrees to plant inspections, in: *The New York Times*, 28 June 1991, p. A1; K. Nelmapius, *SA sal kernspervdrag onderskryf*, *Beeld*, 28 June 1991, p. 1.

75 GBL, Public Papers, Statement: South Africa's accession to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.

76 Wren, Pretoria accepts atom-arms ban, p. A1; Nelmapius, *SA sal kernspervdrag onderskryf*, p. 1.

In the months following South Africa's accession to the NPT, both Washington and the ANC suspected that Pretoria had hidden nuclear bomb components and manufacturing plants, and that they had been evasive about their stockpile of weapons-grade uranium.⁷⁷ The ANC, backed ironically by Washington, demanded full disclosure of all present and past activities of the South African nuclear weapons program. They said that continuation by the Apartheid government to act clandestinely and give ambiguous answers on all nuclear matters undermined the important process of building the confidence of all South Africans in the process of democratizing the country.⁷⁸ Finally, in March 1993, De Klerk at a joint session of the South African Parliament confirmed that South Africa had developed six and a half crude nuclear bombs during a top-secret fifteen-year program, and that this arsenal had been completely dismantled since a decision in this regard was made in late 1989.⁷⁹ Subsequent to the announcement, on 2 July 1993, the South African Act on the Non-Proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction (Act 87 of 1993) was passed.⁸⁰

In the meantime, preparations for the first ever fully-inclusive democratic elections in the history of South Africa were underway. On 27 April 1994, the decades-long reign of the Apartheid regime ended when the ANC won the elections and Nelson Mandela became President of the Republic of South Africa. A month later, Vice-President Thabo Mbeki assured the UN Security Council that the new South African government was eager to see the fast establishment of a treaty on an African zone without nuclear weapons, coupled with an undertaking that South Africa would fulfil all its commitments resulting from its international agreements, including the NPT.⁸¹

All of the above actions, along with the highly publicized fact of South Africa becoming the first nation to fully develop a nuclear arsenal and then voluntarily dismantle it, opened the way for her to emerge as a world leader among non-aligned nations in promoting nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament. President Julius Nyerere of Tanzania later lamented the relinquishment of 'home grown' African technological skills that had developed the ultimate weapon of power, but the fact remains that only two years after De Klerk's announcement, South African diplomacy played a significant role at the UN-sponsored NPT Review Conference held in April 1995. By outlining a plan

77 Bombs away, in: *Economist*, 27 March 1993, p. 1; D. Albright/M. Hibbs, *South Africa: The ANC and the Atom Bomb*, in: *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* 49 (1993) 3, pp. 32–38; Albright, *South Africa and the Affordable Bomb*, pp. 37–48.

78 Albright/Hibbs, *South Africa: The ANC and the Atom Bomb*, pp. 32–38.

79 B. Keller, *South Africa Says It Built 6 Atom Bombs*, in: *The New York Times*, 25 March 1993, p. A1; News summary: Pretoria built nuclear bombs, Old suspicions confirmed, in: *The New York Times*, 25 March 1993; Albright, *South Africa Comes Clean*, pp. 3–6; De Klerk: *South Africa had the Bomb*, in: *Africa Report*, p. 6; Liberman, *The Rise and Fall of the South African bomb*, p. 56; R. J. Smith, *South Africa's 16-Year Secret: The Nuclear Bomb*, in: *The Washington Post*, 12 May 1993, p. A1.

80 Act on the Non-Proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction (Act 87 of 1993). Available at https://www.gov.za/sites/default/files/gcis_document/201504/act87of1993.pdf.

81 W. Pretorius/F. Swart, *Wapenverbod teen SAKan gou waai; Thabo Mbeki na VN met brief van pres*, in: *Mandela, Beeld*, 23 May 1994, p. 1; F. Swart, *Kernkrag: SA se rol ter sprake, Mbeki woon debat in Veiligheidsraad by*, in: *Beeld*, 24 May 1994, p. 4.

for indefinite renewal of the NPT, South Africa played a major role in forging a consensus amongst member nations of the NPT to extend the agreement indefinitely.⁸² South Africa thereby came full circle in its nuclear development – under the ANC, an original decision founded on *Realpolitik* was turned into a claim to moral authority and leadership in international relations.

Conclusion

Usually, in the literature on ‘1989’, the African continent is not discussed thoroughly and tends to be marginalized. However, the dynamics at play towards the end of the 1980s in Southern Africa had far-reaching consequences. The region underwent some fundamental changes.⁸³ This included, *inter alia*, the end of the conflict in southern Angola, Namibian independence, the thaw of the Apartheid regime as well as the nuclear weapons program its leaders had built during the height of the Cold War. For this reason, all the events discussed in this article should be juxtaposed against the symbolism of 1989: just like East Germans overthrew their oppressive regime through protests that eventually spread across Eastern Europe and brought the Soviet Union to its knees, so did the decades-long liberation struggle against the oppressive Apartheid regime bring fundamental change in South Africa by the end of the 1980s. Those in East Germany were elated about the latter, as both the government and public in that state supported the anti-Apartheid movement in South Africa, especially after the Soweto Uprising in 1976.⁸⁴ Of course, there is a huge paradox that remains: the same oppressive East German government that supported the liberation struggle abroad, denied its citizens democratic and human rights at home.⁸⁵ There is no doubt, however, that the events of 1989 in Eastern Europe had a far-reaching ripple effect even beyond the European continent. In South Africa, September 1989 proved to be as significant as it was in Leipzig. F.W. de Klerk’s election put South Africa on a path of unprecedented reform. Coinciding with the fall of the Berlin Wall, De Klerk’s November 1989 decision to tear down Apartheid’s ‘nuclear wall’ was unprecedented. Similarly, his release of Nelson Mandela in February 1990, the unbanning of the liberation movements, and negotiations for a democratic

82 P. McNab/J. Raisin/ R. Jones, UN Security Council Lifts Arms Embargo, in: Military and Arms Transfer News 94 (1994), available at <http://csf.colorado.edu/dfax/matr/matr9401.htm>; Curbs on South Africa end, in: The New York Times, 26 May 1994, p. A10; Shearar, Denuclearization in Africa; B. Crossette, South Africa Emerges as a Force for Extending Nuclear Arms Pact, in: The New York Times, 23 April 1995, p. A1; T. Robinson/J. Boutwell, South Africa’s Arms Industry: A New Era of Democratic Accountability?, in: Armed Forces and Society 22 (1996), pp. 599–619. For the most recent work on South Africa’s role in the 1995 NPT Review Conference, see M. Onderco and A. van Wyk, Birth of a Norm Champion: How South Africa Came to Support the NPT’s Indefinite Extension, in: The Nonproliferation Review 26 (2019) 1–2, pp. 23–41.

83 Engel et al., Introduction, pp. 7–32.

84 M. Koch, Opposing Apartheid from Behind the Berlin Wall, in: DW, 15 December 2013, Available at <https://www.dw.com/en/opposing-apartheid-from-behind-the-berlin-wall/a-17297407>.

85 J.-J. Leidecker, East German Solidarity with South African Liberation, 23 April 2019, Available at <https://www.rolux.de/en/news/id/40327/remembering-east-german-solidarity-with-the-south-african-liberation-struggle/>.

South Africa ushered in a new era of freedom for millions of oppressed South Africans. South Africans, East Germans and Eastern Europeans alike entered the 1990s with visions of liberation and freedom.

One can therefore not entirely dismiss the point that 1989 in Eastern Europe did impact on the events in Southern Africa. As noted above, De Klerk in his speech announcing the release of Mandela and the unbanning of the ANC, directly referred to the events in Eastern Europe, portraying them as one factor for his crucial decision.⁸⁶ Indeed, the case of South Africa's nuclear dismantling shows that "depending on which end of the kaleidoscope one looks through, 1989 can be seen as a global 'happening' with local manifestations, or as a concatenation of local events with global importance".⁸⁷ For the nuclear non-proliferation regime in particular, the South African reversal had important ramifications. Not only did it bolster the NPT and strengthen non-proliferation norms, it also ushered in a period in which the whole Southern African region signed the NPT, the entire African continent was made officially nuclear weapons free through the Pelindaba Treaty of 1996, and in which disarmament was promoted globally in the run-up to the 1995 NPT Review Conference.

86 C. Saunders, 1989 and Southern Africa, in: Hadler / Middell / Engel (eds.), 1989 as a Global Moment, pp. 349–362, at pp. 353–354.

87 B. Mazlish, Global Importance of 1989, in: *ibid.*, pp. 419–428, at p. 428.