

UK'S LISTENING LINK WITH APARTHEID

Compelling evidence of a 'disgraceful' new intelligence link between Britain and the South African government has just been published in the United States. DUNCAN CAMPBELL, with PATRICK FORBES, explains how the new evidence exposes a British betrayal of the front-line African states and reveals active intervention — on the side of apartheid

SINCE 1981, the British signals intelligence agency, GCHQ, has co-ordinated and assisted South African intelligence monitoring and targeting of the 'front-line' African states and the African National Congress. In a major report, last week's *New York Times* disclosed that British, American and South African intelligence officials visited GCHQ Cheltenham in the mid-1980s to co-ordinate their electronic monitoring operations.

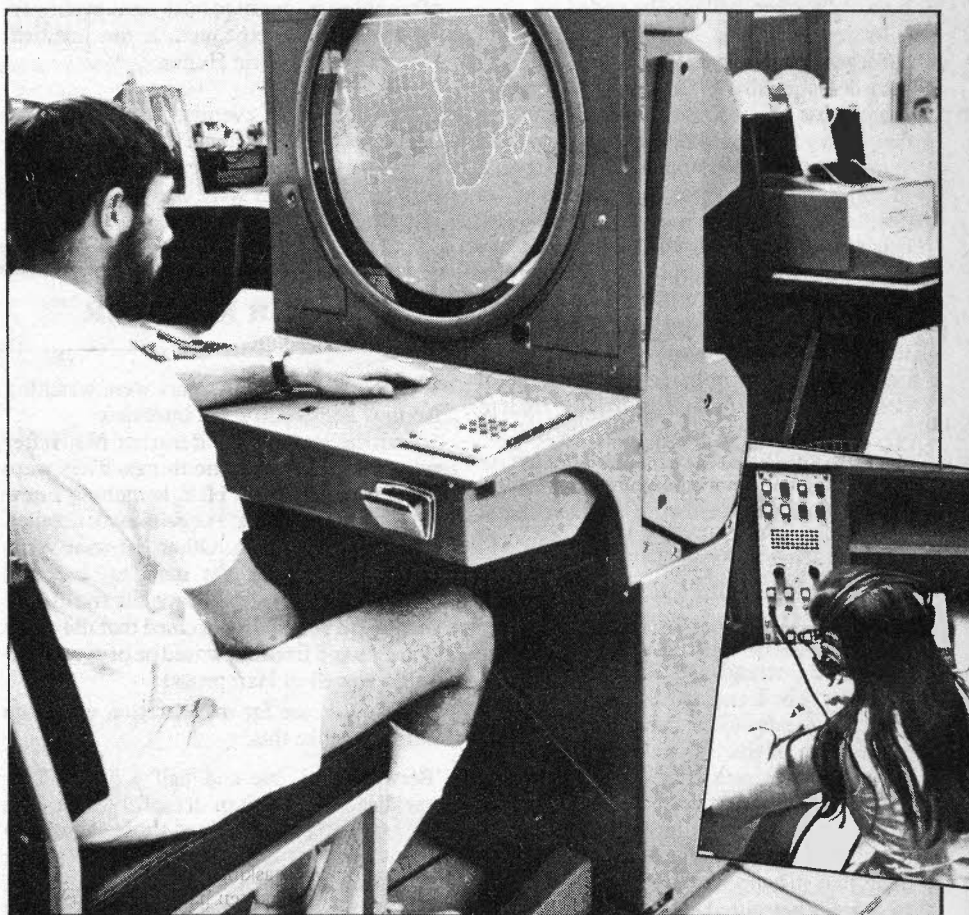
The secret arrangements for collaboration between Western intelligence agencies give responsibility for Africa to GCHQ. Specifically, under the 1947 British-American 'UKUSA' pact on signals intelligence, GCHQ is the 'tasking authority' for all electronic monitoring in Africa, as well as the Middle East and Europe up to the Ural mountains. This continuing arrangement requires the explicit political authority of the Prime Minister of the day.

Britain also provides most of the listening posts in the area and is currently operating clandestine 'Sigint' stations in Zambia, Swaziland and Malawi — and possibly also in Botswana. The Zambian station can intercept communications to and from the ANC headquarters in Lusaka, in conjunction with South African stations in Namibia. British stations in Swaziland and Malawi are well positioned to intercept signals in Angola. Communications with Mozambique, where the ANC has training bases, are covered from a listening post on Ascension Island.

We have put the *New York Times* allegations to former and serving GCHQ and intelligence officials. None denies the story and some have provided substantial background information about British monitoring in Africa.

The US report was largely based on information from three past and present intelligence officials in the Reagan administration. In particular, a former member of the US National Security Agency (NSA), GCHQ's much larger counterpart in the United States, told reporter Sy Hersh in convincing detail how three countries' Sigint agencies had met in Cheltenham in the mid 1980s, for a 'tasking' conference.

The Foreign Office refused this week to comment on the US report, despite the clear extra embarrassment it must have caused to Foreign Secretary Geoffrey Howe's 'mission' to Southern Africa. But Denis Healey, the shadow foreign secretary, described the collaboration as simply 'disgraceful'.



Inside the underground maritime and communications surveillance centre at Silvermine, near Cape Town. (Above): the watch on shipping; (Inset): the interception of communications

UNTIL THE 1974 LABOUR government abrogated the Simonstown Agreements, which gave the Royal Navy base rights at Simonstown near Cape Town, GCHQ staff were openly posted to South Africa. During the early 1970s, British military and intelligence officials were accommodated at the South African communications centre at Silvermine, near Cape Town.

The *New York Times* says that liaison staff from NSA also worked at Silvermine. But collaborative monitoring arrangements at that time were limited to strategic surveillance of the Cape sea route, particularly the movements of Soviet bloc and Chinese shipping and submarines. They did not include the 'targeting' of the liberation movements, or of Angola, Mozambique, or Zimbabwe, all of which were then under

colonial or white rule. Reports from Silvermine were sent first to Cheltenham and then on the NSA headquarters in Maryland.

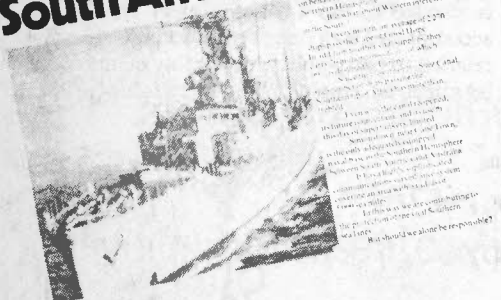
The presence of GCHQ staff in South Africa is confirmed by a 1970 report in *The Monitor*, the magazine of the Association of Government Supervisors and Radio Operators, which formerly represented GCHQ radio monitoring staff. The report details revised subsistence allowances at overseas stations, including a new rate for South Africa, agreed by GCHQ in June 1969.

After the Simonstown Agreements were put under review in 1974, South Africa itself was a major GCHQ target. A senior GCHQ analyst who saw top secret signals intelligence on South African security operations told the *New Statesman* this week that it was of high quality and was assessed to be an accurate

source of information on the course of the liberation struggles of the 1970s. But GCHQ intelligence reports were deliberately distorted before they reached Labour Cabinet, the African specialist alleged this week.

GCHQ intercepted reports of regular tripartite security meetings between the DGS (the Portuguese security police), Rhodesian intelligence officials and Colonel (later General) van der Bergh, the head of the South African Bureau of State Security (BOSS). Because DGS accurately reported Portuguese losses, GCHQ gained valuable information. But back in Whitehall, GCHQ's intercepts about Frelimo gaining the upper hand were

Could an organisation like NATO have a base in Simonstown, South Africa?



In a desperate attempt to establish links with NATO countries, the South African government advertised the capabilities of its intelligence systems in western newspapers in the mid 1970s

not believed. 'It was only when we had reports of them [guerrillas] operating in every district that they [the Joint Intelligence Committee staff] had to admit that they had the upper hand.'

GCHQ also targeted South African military communications during their intervention in Angola in 1976. It wasn't difficult to crack South African codes:

It was pretty simple stuff, they all relied on hand ciphers, if they used any ciphers at all. We had a pretty clear picture.

These reports are confirmed by a leaked Australian report we have obtained. The 1974 annual review by Australia's Director of Joint Intelligence Organisation, marked TOP SECRET UMBRA, says that western Sigint information was of particular value in reporting on 'armed incidents between liberation movements and security forces in South Africa... Sigint made a substantial contribution to our total information.'

There is no evidence that GCHQ once again began to collaborate actively with South Africa before 1979. GCHQ sources say that any formal link of the type described would be difficult to conceal.

After Britain withdrew from Simonstown in 1975, the South African Department of Information surprisingly took to advertising its new intelligence system as a bait for closer links with NATO. An advertisement in *The Times*, asked whether an organisation like NATO have a base in Simonstown, South Africa. Simonstown, it said:

has a highly sophisticated communications surveillance system covering an area with a radius of 5000 sea miles... In this way we are contributing to the protection of the vital Southern sea lanes. But should we alone be responsible?

The 1974-79 Labour government did, however, repeatedly license the supply of communications equipment for the South African surveillance and communications system, known as Project ADVOKAAT. The *New York Times* report alleged that during the 1970s, quantities of electronic equipment, 'were secretly shipped from Britain and West Germany... to enable the South Africans to build more listening sites'.

There is strong evidence that this is true, though most of the South African surveillance equipment seems to have come from West Germany. But Marconi did supply a long range 'troposcatter' communications system for use in Namibia, vital in setting up distant listening stations. James Callaghan also permitted the sale of a high security message switching system, which he said could be 'legitimately exported to South Africa'.

BUT THE SCENE had changed by the early 1980s, and GCHQ staff in southern Africa were again professionally involved with South Africans. This would have been part of the process leading up to the meeting at Cheltenham, described by the *New York Times* source. In his presence, GCHQ officials swapped details of current and desired future 'tasking' with the South Africans.

The meeting was called as part of a wider review of Sigint operations in sub-Saharan Africa and was part of the normal NSA-GCHQ liaison arrangements. Each network to be monitored or target to be covered is broken down as a specific 'task', and allocated with an appropriate degree of priority to one or more monitoring stations. The South Africans handed over a priority list which included:

- political, military and diplomatic intelligence about Zambia, Botswana, Tanzania, Angola and Mozambique. The South Africans provided GCHQ with their information about radio frequencies used by these countries and asked GCHQ and NSA to cover any 'items of interest to South Africa'
- any and all tasking related to the ANC's Oliver Tambo and ten named members of his ANC high command staff.

Tambo and the others would be put on GCHQ and NSA's 'watch list', which is used to programme computers which scan all international communications, other than telephone calls.

Millions of messages are annually sifted automatically for information on the 'watch list' targets. This type of interception produces good information about travel and business arrangements. The South Africans asked GCHQ and NSA to report on any flights that Tambo took abroad Soviet and Cuban airlines. Such information could have been used either in an assassination attempt, or to support propaganda aimed at representing the ANC as Soviet-supported puppets.

The South Africans also wanted GCHQ and NSA to give 'special emphasis' in Sigint requirements to ANC communications. This gave the NSA observer the clear impression

that the South Africans badly wanted assistance. 'It was clear [that the South Africans] were unable to independently intercept all of the communications [of the ANC] they deemed essential.'

The ANC's communications network is centred on Lusaka, Zambia, where GCHQ operates a covert monitoring station inside the British High Commission, according to two GCHQ staff. There are ANC links to training camps in Angola and to the movement's 30 or so international offices, including one at the United Nations.

It is clear from the *New York Times* story that the South Africans were already using standard Sigint designation systems, called 'case notation', to identify networks and cypher systems which they were covering or wanted covering. Every network is given a code, indicating the country of origin, the use of the system, and the cyphers in use (if any).

The use of 'case notation' implies that co-ordination has been under way for some time. Other officials said that the South Africans had been receiving political intelligence as well as advance warning of ANC operations'.

In return, GCHQ and NSA representatives at the meeting asked the South Africans for:

- continued monitoring of Soviet and Cuban activity in Angola and Mozambique;
- weekly reports on Soviet submarine and shipping activity around the Cape of Good Hope;
- reports on Soviet commercial and economic activity in sub-Saharan Africa, with special emphasis on support for rebel activity.

Such a tasking conference would be held under the aegis of one of the five GCHQ subdivisions which monitor the world outside the Soviet Bloc. All are part of K Division, responsible for 'General Sigint'. GCHQ's section K25 is in charge of monitoring the communications of sub-Saharan Africa, while section K11 co-ordinates the detailed monitoring and tasking of the intercept stations. K25's targets include all the former British, French and Portuguese colonies of southern Africa.

British Sigint on southern Africa now comes primarily from the chain of small monitoring stations inside the target countries themselves. We have confirmed from GCHQ sources that during the 1980s such listening posts have been in operation inside the British High Commissions at Lusaka, Zambia; Blantyre, Malawi; Gabarone, Botswana; and Mbabane, Swaziland.

But not all K Division's intercept stations are in Africa. A GCHQ listening station in Hammersmith, west London, intercepts communications of African and other Third World embassies in and out of London, from the commanding heights of the 24th floor of the Empress State Building. In contrast, the American NSA has never had major monitoring facilities in southern Africa and has relied on GCHQ and visits by spy ships.

But it is now clear, given the deafening silence from Whitehall and Cheltenham about the *New York Times* allegations, that Britain has been caught out. GCHQ's chain of secret African listening stations have been turned round not only to spy on their Commonwealth hosts, but to use the host territory to aid and comfort the Botha regime.