

IN MEMORY OF ANDREI YURYEVICH URNOV



Andrei Yuryevich Urnov was a distinguished Soviet and Russian diplomat, Doctor of Historical Sciences, who specialized in African studies and international relations, and a regular contributor to the “Journal of the Institute for African Studies.” From 2008 to 2025, he worked at the Institute for African Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences. In his work, he combined practical experience in the International Department of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs¹ with academic research in African studies. He held the diplomatic rank of Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary. He was awarded with high honors, including the Order of the Badge of Honor, the Order of Friendship of Peoples, and medals from several African countries.

His specialized diplomatic training at the Moscow State Institute of International Relations (MGIMO) of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, coupled with his extensive practical experience, enabled him to approach the study of such a multifaceted topic as the US African strategy in a highly professional and systematic way. He used his original analysis, based on a problem-chronological approach, as well as on numerous documents, including those from US government agencies, and reports from international news agencies. He has published six monographs on this topic [Urnov 2015; Urnov 2017; Urnov 2020a; Urnov 2021; Urnov 2023; Urnov 2024], as well as numerous articles in the “Journal of the Institute for African Studies” [Urnov 2018; Urnov 2019; Urnov 2020b; Urnov 2022], “Asia and Africa Today,” “World Economy and International Relations,” and other academic periodicals, which comprise together a coherent research program and have long since found their place on the shelves of Russian scholars in African Studies and International Relations.

¹ On the death of A.Yu. Urnov. *MFA of Russia*. 11.08.2025. (In Russ.). https://mid.ru/ru/activity/shots/vnutrivedomstvennye_novosti/nekrologi_pamyati_kolleg/2040970/ (accessed: 01.12.2025)

The administration and staff of the Institute for African Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences and the editorial board of the “Journal of the Institute for African Studies” express their deepest condolences to the family and friends of A.Yu. Urnov, who passed away on August 10, 2025.

Below is an essay about A.Yu. Urnov, written by his colleague at the Institute for African Studies and his workmate, Doctor of Historical Sciences, Professor V.G. Shubin.

COMRADE ANDREI

I met A.Yu. Urnov while I was a student at MGIMO, where he was a year ahead of me. We met again a few years later when I started working at the Soviet Afro-Asian Solidarity Committee after leaving military service in 1969.

By that time, Andrei Yuryevich had already been working as a desk assistant in the International Department of the Central Committee of the CPSU. After graduating, he was offered a position in the Department, initially as a junior desk assistant. This typically involved interpreting. A. Urnov most often dealt with guests from the United States. He translated for various people, including state leader N.S. Khrushchev.

In 1966, there was a marked shift both in the area and level of his work in the Department; he was appointed to the position of desk officer, in the African Sector. Andrei Yuryevich was then under 30 years old, which was considered too young for an “official with responsibilities” at the time. His responsibilities included maintaining ties with political forces in the countries of East and Southern Africa, the most important of which were the national liberation movements in South Africa, Zimbabwe, and Namibia. A. Urnov occupied this position for over fifteen years, and it would not be an exaggeration to say that he was directly involved in all significant events in the Soviet Union's relations with them. He “had a hand” in all decisions regarding assistance to fighters against colonialism and apartheid made by our country's leadership.

For example, when Tanzania closed the military camp of the African National Congress (ANC) of South Africa on its territory in 1969, he facilitated the decision to send fighters for training in the USSR, thereby helping to preserve the core of the ANC's military organization. He also played a direct role in sending groups of Soviet military specialists to Angola to train fighters of the ANC, the South West Africa People's Organization (SWAPO), and the Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU).

In 1982, his responsibilities expanded significantly when he became head of the Africa Sector within the International Department. This made him responsible for relations with all African countries south of the Sahara.

I had the opportunity to travel to African countries with A. Urnov several times, and, perhaps, two of these trips were the most interesting. In 1975, even before Mozambique gained independence, when a transitional government was in power, A.Yu. Urnov arrived there as part of a Soviet public (and, in fact, the first political) delegation, which visited five provinces and 11 cities in that country, and, together with other members, he participated in 30 rallies.

Another trip to Angola in early 1984 was related to the emerging tensions between that country's leadership and SWAPO. Sam Nujoma, the president of SWAPO, had the knack of remaining outwardly calm even in a clearly unfavorable situation. In conversations with us in the presence of other Namibians or Angolans, he would show no signs of anxiety, and only after descending with Andrei Yuryevich into a dugout, inaccessible to outside ears, did he tell him about the difficulties he was facing. It is

worth noting that this level of trust with the leader of SWAPO during the struggle for independence contributed to A.Yu. Urnov's successful work as an ambassador to Namibia from 1990 to 1994.

While working in the International Department, despite being extremely busy, A.Yu. Urnov defended his PhD's and then Doctor of Sciences dissertations on South Africa's policy and published two monographs, one in Russian, titled "South Africa's Policy in Africa" [Urnov 1982], and the other in English, titled "South Africa Against Africa (1966–1986)" [Urnov 1988].

Let me digress for a moment: during a conference in South Africa, I witnessed A. Urnov presenting a copy of this book to Frederik Botha, also known as "Pik" Botha, who served as Minister of Foreign Affairs in the racist South African government for many years.

It was at this point that his career took a new turn: in the summer of 1986, he was appointed Deputy Head of the International Department of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union Central Committee. His responsibilities now included Latin America and South Asia, and he had the opportunity to visit Mexico and India in his new role. However, due to his position, he had to focus most of his attention on Afghanistan. He not only visited Kabul but also served on the Central Committee commission that dealt with almost all matters related to relations with the country.

Andrei Yuryevich's life changed again after the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan in 1989, this time radically. Having worked on Staraya Square, where the Central Committee departments were housed, for nearly three decades, he moved to Smolenskaya Square to work in the building of the Soviet MFA. On August 15, 1990, A.Yu. Urnov was appointed as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary to Namibia. This appointment was perceived by the SWAPO leadership as an expression of Moscow's special relationship with that country. During the ceremony of presenting credentials, Sam Nujoma himself looked at the ambassadorial uniform of A.Yu. Urnov and said: "Comrade Andrei, I did not know you were an admiral."

Andrei Yuryevich's tenure in Namibia as Ambassador of the USSR, and then Russia, coincided with one of the most difficult periods in our country's history. But although he was not able to achieve all that he had planned, it should be acknowledged that he had laid the foundations for the good relations that still exist between Moscow and Windhoek. After Namibia, he held other diplomatic posts: Ambassador to Armenia; Director of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' Department for Relations with Subjects of the Federation, Parliament, and Socio-Political Organizations; Ambassador-at-Large; and Head of the Russian Working Group on the Caspian Sea. Even after his official retirement in 2004, he continued his diplomatic work, serving for three years as Deputy Secretary-General of the Permanent International Secretariat of the Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation.

In 2008, Andrei Yuryevich, as he himself put it, "returned to Africa," becoming a Leading and soon the Principal Research Fellow at the Institute for African Studies. He initiated his work there with the publication of the monograph "Africa and the UN at the End of the First Decade of the 21st Century" [Urnov 2011]. This was followed by six books on US policy in Africa, organized chronologically [Urnov 2015; Urnov 2017; Urnov 2020a; Urnov 2021; Urnov 2023; Urnov 2024].

But his most significant and valuable work is undoubtedly the monograph "Foreign Policy of the USSR during the Cold War and the New Thinking" [Urnov 2014], to which he dedicated many years of efforts. It's not an exaggeration to say that this book deserves

the attention of anyone who is interested in our country's history and wants to understand the twists and turns of world politics after World War II.

To use the traditional expression, the Motherland highly valued the merits of A.Yu. Urnov, awarding him the Order of Friendship of Peoples, the Badge of Honor, and medals. His achievements were also recognized by our friends: in 2015, he was awarded the Order of the Companions of O.R. Tambo (in silver) by the South African President Jacob Gedleyihlekisa Zuma for his "excellent contribution to the fight for the liberation of the people of South Africa."²

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During his long life, the author of this essay has encountered many leaders, including intelligent, calm, and kind ones. However, Andrei Yuryevich, who was my official supervisor for almost ten years and even more years in fact, combined all of these qualities, and that doesn't happen often.

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² Ambassador Andrey Yurievich Yurnov. The Order of the Companions of O.R. Tambo in Silver. *The Presidency. Republic of South Africa*. <https://www.thepresidency.gov.za/ambassador-andrey-yurievich-urnov> (accessed: 12.01.2025)