

WITH FREEDOM NEAR IN ANGOLA, THIS IS NO TIME TO CURTAIL UNITA ASSISTANCE

In Angola, where a civil war has raged for 15 years between the country's Soviet-backed Marxist regime and an American-supported resistance movement, peace and freedom are now within sight. Unable to achieve a military victory, the Angolan regime of Jose Eduardo dos Santos is at last considering resistance demands for multi-party elections. These elections would allow a cease fire in the Angolan civil war. An obstacle to this has appeared not in Angola, but in the U.S. Congress. There Senator Edward Kennedy, the Massachusetts Democrat, intends this week to attach an amendment to the defense authorization bill that would end American military assistance to Angola's democratic resistance forces, known as the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA). Kennedy thus would remove all incentive for Angola's Marxist regime to continue negotiations, and would likely encourage that regime again to seek a military — rather than diplomatic — solution to Angola's civil war.

The Angolan conflict is now at a critical crossroads. Though Moscow continues to support Angola's Marxist leaders, it is possible that Mikhail Gorbachev's stated intention of ending East-West tensions will prompt him to end the Soviet Union's \$800 million annual military subsidy of Angola. It is possible that Gorbachev eventually would support a democratic settlement in Angola.

Last December, Moscow helped the Angolan regime launch the largest military offensive against UNITA in the civil war's 15-year history. The offensive was backed by an estimated \$1.5 billion in sophisticated Soviet weaponry, including *Hind-25* helicopter gunships, *MiG-23 Flogger* and *SU-25 Frogfoot* aircraft, and T-55 tanks. Some 1,000 Soviet military advisors directed the fighting from the Angolan front. Some military analysts consider the Soviet-backed offensive in Angola among the largest conventional military battles since World War II, matching even the bloodiest conflicts of Korea and Vietnam. The offensive was an indication that Moscow had not yet abandoned the use of military force in pursuit of its global objectives, and that it remains hostile to pro-Western, democratic movements in the Third World.

Forcing Negotiations. With American-supplied weapons and other materiel, the Marxist offensive was turned back. UNITA drove Soviet military advisors and the Angolan army from the key town of Mavinga in May. Now, with dos Santos on the defensive, UNITA is calling for a cease fire and direct negotiations leading to multi-party elections. The Angolan regime agreed to meet UNITA June 18th in Lisbon, and since then the Portuguese government has been involved in negotiations with both dos Santos and UNITA. As a result of UNITA military pressure, the Angolan Marxists announced on July 3 that they would consider working toward a multi-party democracy, though for now the government remains a repressive one-party state.

America's Investment. Since it began arming UNITA in 1986, Washington has made a substantial investment in UNITA's bid for a democratic Angola. American support for UNITA has discouraged Soviet and Cuban military involvement in southern Africa. Indeed, having been defeated in battle, some 65,000 Cuban troops in Angola are now headed back to Havana as a result of a negotiated settlement reached in December 1988.

American support for UNITA since 1986 has also helped advance the cause of democracy in Angola, raising hope that the 15-year conflict can be settled without further loss of blood. Angola's Marxist regime took power in 1975 promising free and fair multi-party elections; it has yet to hold them. Since 1975, UNITA leader Jonas Savimbi has been demanding that the Angolan regime keep its promise. George Bush has supported Savimbi's objective, promising last January that UNITA will receive American support "until genuine national reconciliation has been achieved."

Together with America's commitment to defending Western Europe and supporting those Afghans who fought the Soviet invasion, Washington's support for UNITA has enjoyed bipartisan support. Leaders of the Angolan congressional task forces include Senator Dennis DeConcini of Arizona and Representative Dave McCurdy of Oklahoma, both Democrats, and Senator Robert Kasten of Wisconsin and Representative Joel Hefley of Colorado, both Republicans. They have led this bipartisan charge for freedom in Angola. Without continued bipartisan support for UNITA, the war certainly will continue, and the cause of multi-party elections will be lost.

Effective Incentive. Kennedy and other critics of American aid to UNITA contend that ending assistance to UNITA will prompt the Angolan regime and Moscow to seek a settlement to the conflict. However, this contention ignores what has been happening in Angola. After all, the civil war there raged for eleven years before Washington began assisting UNITA in 1986; during this time Washington advocated an end to the fighting. The Angolan regime ignored Washington and instead called in some 40,000 Cuban troops and billions of dollars of Soviet military aid in an effort to defeat UNITA with armed force. It was only after Washington began supporting UNITA that the dos Santos regime agreed to send the Cuban troops home and to begin negotiations.

Now is not the time for Washington to renege on its commitment to UNITA. American assistance to UNITA continues to be the only hope for peace and freedom in Angola. To terminate that assistance now would remove the only effective incentive Angola's Marxist regime has to negotiate a settlement. It would open the door for further militarism on behalf of the Angolan regime, and close the door on the democratic aspirations of the Angolan people.

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For further information:

Michael Johns, "Angola: Testing Gorbachev's 'New Thinking'," Heritage Foundation *Executive Memorandum* No. 259, February 5, 1990.

Michael Johns, "Namibia and the Global Democratic Revolution," *Heritage Lecture* No. 224, 1989.