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U.S. POLICY TOWARD ANGOLA: PAST FAILURES AND PRESENT OPPORTUNITIES

INTRODUCTION

In the aftermath of the collapse of American policy in Vietnam in 1975, the U.S. Congress abruptly terminated a very modest program of assistance to Angolan nationalists struggling for power against their Soviet-supported adversaries. With the end of American aid and the arrival of Cuban troops, a Soviet-backed regime came to power in Luanda. But in the past six years, despite adverse economic and diplomatic circumstances, the nationalist UNITA forces have continued to resist subjugation by the Cuban and MPLA forces and still control a large portion of Angola. The Marxist regime in Angola has never expanded its control much beyond some urban areas and has clearly failed to win the support of the people of Angola. Just as was the case six years ago, U.S. policy toward Angola could profoundly affect the future of that country. In September, the U.S. Congress will continue consideration of repeal of the prohibition of U.S. assistance to Angolan nationalists.

This paper examines the situation in Angola and, in particular, the viability of UNITA as an alternative government to the Marxist MPLA regime. This study assesses the characters, strengths and weaknesses of the various indigenous opposition movements. On the basis of the those evaluations, it discusses the future course of U.S. policy towards Angola, assuming that the ultimate objective of that policy should be to facilitate the establishment of a truly popular, independent, nationalist government in that country.

THE CIVIL WAR OF 1975

As of 1975, when the Portuguese troops began their withdrawal from Angola, there were three opposition guerrilla groups within

the country: the Popular Front for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA); the National Front for the Liberation of Angola (FNLA); and the National Union for the Complete Independence of Angola (UNITA). The strongest of these groups in 1975 was the FNLA, a nationalist movement led by an Angolan businessman, Holden Roberto. In the spring of 1975, Roberto mobilized between 25,000 and 33,000 men from among his main tribal supporters, the Bakongo of northern Angola. The FNLA also had bases in neighboring Zaire, where Roberto enjoyed the support of his brother-in-law, President Mobutu Sese-Sego.¹

The most popular of the various guerrilla leaders was, undoubtedly, the head of UNITA, Dr. Jonas Savimbi. Savimbi is a charismatic figure who commands particularly strong support among the Okimundu of southern Angola, the country's largest tribal group (accounting for approximately 40 percent of the total Angolan population). He holds a doctorate in politics and law from the University of Lausanne and has received formal guerrilla training in the People's Republic of China. Dr. Savimbi has forged UNITA into an avowedly socialistic, nationalistic, and multi-ethnic movement which is particularly strongly opposed to any foreign interference in the internal affairs of Angola. Unfortunately, he had not founded UNITA until the late 1960s, after his break with the FNLA leadership. Consequently, UNITA did not enjoy a long tradition of international support, as did its chief opponents, and though Dr. Savimbi could mobilize 25,000 men in 1975 he could probably arm only 6,000 of them.²

The smallest of the guerrilla bodies, the MPLA, was the only Marxist-oriented movement. Its main ethnic support came from the Kimbundu, a 25 percent minority of the Angolan population which was concentrated mainly in the country's west-central provinces. The Kimbundu were, however, the most urbanized of the Angolan tribes and, consequently, the MPLA wielded a disproportionate amount of influence in the capital, Luanda. Their leader, Dr. Agostinho Neto, a medical doctor, took over the leadership of the MPLA following his escape from Portuguese imprisonment in 1960. However, he spent most of his time out of the country, partially because the strict Marxist-Leninist wing of his own party had made several attempts to assassinate him. It was variously estimated that, in the spring of 1975, Dr. Neto could call upon the loyalties of between 20,000 and 25,000 men.³

These guerrilla groups enjoyed differing degrees of international support. Contrary to popularly held beliefs, the U.S. had never shown much interest in Angola or, for that matter, in most

¹ The Washington Post, July 7, 1975; The New York Times, June 28, 1975; and The San Diego Union, July 12, 1975.

² Ibid.; U.S. News and World Report, December 29, 1975, p. 19.

³ San Diego Union, July 12, 1975; New York Times, June 28, 1975; and Washington Post, September 14, 1975.

of southern Africa prior to 1975. As early as the 1960s, the Kennedy Administration, angered by Dr. Salazar's refusal to deal with Angolan insurgents, had given some covert aid to the FNLA in order to ensure that an independent Angola would be friendly to the U.S. These grants were, however, limited because of the importance of the Portuguese Azores airbase to the U.S. Air Force. The Nixon Administration reduced the grants to \$10,000 per year for "intelligence collection." Even after the CIA had stepped up covert aid in 1974, the total U.S. assistance to FNLA and UNITA never exceeded \$32 million.⁴

Given the lack of U.S. interest in Angola, President Mobutu of Zaire arranged that Holden Roberto should visit the People's Republic of China in 1974. The visit resulted in the arrival of arms for 5,000 men, rocket-propelled grenades, mortars, and 120 Chinese military instructors for FNLA bases in Zaire. From then on the Chinese, in curious alliance with Zaire and South Africa, became the main backers of the anti-Marxist guerrillas.⁵

SOVIET ROLE IN ANGOLA

The Soviet Union consistently demonstrated a much clearer conception of and greater commitment to its Angolan policy than did the U.S. or the People's Republic of China. Soviet aid to the MPLA began in the early 1960s. The Politburo began to question this aid in 1973 in the light of divisions within the MPLA leadership and the inactivity of its army. However, all reservations were dropped when the Caetano government was overthrown on April 25, 1974, and the Portuguese army announced the decolonization of the country's overseas empire. Moscow began to pour military aid into the MPLA at a rate unmatched by the combined efforts of all other interested parties.

Before discussing the details of this Soviet aid, it would be wise to explore the background to the Soviet Union's interest in Angola. It is unlikely that Moscow was in any way immediately concerned with either oil or strategic minerals. All of the minerals mined in Angola are readily available in other parts of Africa.⁶ Angolan ports could, of course, be used as bases for Soviet ships which could threaten or interdict the tanker route around the Cape; but did the Red Army not have a more effective alternative, namely, sending its troops into the Gulf and cutting off Western oil supplies at the source?

⁴ Stephen R. Weissman, "C.I.A. Covert Action in Zaire and Angola: Patterns and Consequences," in Political Science Quarterly, Summer 1979.

⁵ Ibid., p. 282.

⁶ See Julian L. Symon, "The Scarcity of Raw Materials: A Challenge to the Conventional Wisdom," in The Atlantic, June 1981.

The Soviet Union took a particular interest in Angola for four basic reasons:

1. To establish a zone of influence in southern Africa where it had previously had none and thereby to place itself in a position from which it could take advantage of developments in this increasingly unstable area of the world.
2. To rival the then ascendant influence of the Chinese in Africa and to discredit the Chinese because of their alleged alliance with South Africa.
3. To gain prestige more broadly in the Third World by involving itself in the Black crusade against South Africa.
4. To place itself in a geographic position from which it might ultimately threaten U.S. access to Zairean cobalt and South African strategic minerals.

THE PROLOGUE TO OFFICIAL INDEPENDENCE

Superficially, the situation did not appear hopeless for Angolan nationalists in January 1975. The Portuguese government had just met with representatives of the three guerrilla groups and all had agreed to share responsibility in an interim government until November 11, when a free election would establish a constituent assembly which would then appoint a president (the Alvor Agreement). A second election would return members to a legislative assembly which would take power after the Portuguese had left.⁷

Furthermore, the situation appeared favorable because Angola was not burdened by the economic problems which plagued many African colonies as they emerged into independence. In August 1974, the Economist published an exceptionally optimistic analysis of the Angolan economy. The country's trade had jumped by more than 30 percent in 1973, with exports outstripping imports by 45 percent. Angola's export of oil, diamonds, iron ore and coffee had earned the country an 18 percent growth rate for two consecutive years. Approximately \$400 million in foreign investment was due to enter Angola in 1974.⁸

Unfortunately, the healthy economy and the prospects for internal conciliation were both ruined by the intervention of the Soviet Union and its Cuban surrogates. In March 1975, only two months after the signing of the Alvor Agreement, 230 Cuban "advisors" joined the MPLA. More soon followed.⁹ Simultaneously, the

⁷ Economist, January 18, 1975.

⁸ Economist, August 24, 1974.

⁹ Intelligence Digest, February 14, 1979, p. 8750.

Soviet Union stepped up its arms supply to the MPLA at an exponential rate, shipping \$81 million of weaponry within eight months. The MPLA received rocket-equipped helicopters, 15 T54 medium tanks, 33 PT 76 light amphibious tanks, 41 armored vehicles with anti-aircraft guns, 40,000 hand grenades and 632 122 mm rockets. The flow continued and, by January 1976, one year after the MPLA signed the Alvor Agreement, Angola's Marxists possessed a Soviet arsenal worth approximately \$250 million.¹⁰

This interference inevitably led to the breakdown of the Portuguese-negotiated ceasefire as the MPLA used its superior armaments to seize control of the capital before free elections could be held. Interim truces were used by the Soviets to resupply the MPLA.¹¹ In June 1975, the MPLA began to use its Cuban-manned T54 tanks and armored cars against the FNLA with devastating effectiveness. One month later, Luanda fell to the Marxist forces. The MPLA declared itself the legitimate interim government of Angola and refused to negotiate with either of the two larger guerrilla groups. This refusal has been maintained to the present day.

The Soviet Union, unhindered by the U.S., pressed ahead with its policies. A total of 700 East German military advisors flew into Angola.¹² On September 25, the Cuban ship "Vietnam Heroico" docked at Pointe Noire with a cargo of 20 armored vehicles, 30 army trucks, and 120 soldiers. Another 350 Cuban troops landed on October 5. One week later, a Cuban delegation to the MPLA pledged to supply pilots for the MIG 21s and MIG 17s which the Soviet Union had promised.

On the same day, the Republic of South Africa, feeling threatened by the prospect of a Soviet-Cuban presence in a Marxist Angola, sent an armored column over the Namibian border and up the coast to Luanda in the hope of seizing the capital back from the MPLA before the official declaration of independence. Meanwhile, the FNLA marshalled its northern forces for a drive on the capital. Fidel Castro, fearing for the survival of the minority government, dispatched more Cuban troops. By November 11, there were 2,000 Cuban soldiers helping to guard Luanda and another 2,000 manning the tanks, rocket launchers and artillery which halted the FNLA's southern progress.¹³

CONGRESSIONAL REACTIONS TO ANGOLAN DEVELOPMENTS

The Congress of the United States countenanced this exhibition of Soviet-Cuban imperialism by refusing the Ford Administra-

¹⁰ Joseph C. Harsch in Christian Science Monitor, June 12, 1976.

¹¹ Economist, May 10, 1975.

¹² New York Times, June 28, 1975; and John M. Starrels, East Germany: Marxist Mission in Africa (Washington, D.C.: The Heritage Foundation, 1981).

¹³ Christian Science Monitor, January 13, 1976; and Pretoria News, April, 2, 1977.

tion any aid for UNITA or the FNLA. Senator Tunney (D-Calif.) expressed the opinion that the war in Angola was merely a tribal conflict, one in which the U.S. had no part. Senator Mansfield (D-Mont.) declared that U.S. interests were not at stake in Angola and that the "specter of Vietnam" hung over the whole business. Several senators expressed the hope that the Cubans would eventually be thrown out of Angola by a nationalist revival. Finally, Senator Kennedy (D-Mass.) appealed to his fellow members to remember the "lessons of Vietnam" and the senators accepted an amendment blocking a mere \$28 million in aid by 54 votes to 22. Five weeks later, the House of Representatives approved a Senate amendment by Senator Dick Clark of Iowa barring all further aid to Angolan groups by 323 votes to 99.¹⁴

This legislative response by the U.S. had helped to ensure the victory of an unpopular, Soviet-backed minority, totally dependent upon the aid of foreign mercenaries. The prospect of democratic elections had been eradicated, and the Soviet Union had a foothold in another part of Africa. The whole display was, as the Times of London labelled it, "one of the most vivid manifestations of the paralysis of American power in the 1970's."¹⁵ Lack of U.S. support rendered the South African position in Angola untenable; the Republic withdrew its forces on January 22, 1977, leaving Luanda in the hands of the Cubans and the MPLA. It should be noted in passing that there had never been more than 2,000 South Africans on Angolan soil, a figure which Fidel Castro was soon to multiply several times over.¹⁶

THE MARXIST OFFENSIVE IN ANGOLA

The Soviet Union and Cuba took immediate advantage of U.S. irresolution. At the meeting of the Organization of African Unity (O.A.U.) in January 1976, the Soviet Union used Cubans to lobby African leaders to recognize the MPLA as the legitimate government of Angola, despite the fact that the MPLA then controlled less than 25 percent of Angola's territory and less than 20 percent of its population. The MPLA had never even raised the prospect of elections. The "independent" nationalist leaders, such as President Nyerere of Tanzania, quickly demonstrated their ideological bias by recognizing the MPLA. Some more moderate countries, such as Nigeria, recognized the MPLA in reaction to the South African entrance into Angola. Consequently, although the MPLA did not achieve official recognition from the whole of the O.A.U., the eastern bloc was able to ensure that the meeting broke up in deadlock with twenty-two African states recognizing the MPLA and twenty-two demanding a ceasefire and general negotiations. Significantly, Angola's three immediate neighbors -- Zaire, Zambia and Botswana -- all refused to recognize the MPLA.¹⁷

¹⁴ Congressional Record, Senate, December 1975, pp. 23051, 23047, 23054.

¹⁵ The Times (of London), July 7, 1980.

¹⁶ Sunday Telegraph, June 6, 1977.

¹⁷ Economist, January 17, 1976.

Dr. Neto decided to demonstrate the MPLA's control over Angola by making the meeting of the O.A.U. coincide with a new offensive against the FNLA. Another 1,000 troops arrived from Havana, swelling the Cuban ranks to 5,000. On January 10, 1976, FNLA leaders in the north reported that they were being attacked by new T54 tanks and by Cuban troops backed up by rocket and artillery barrages. Belated attempts to strengthen FNLA forces with mercenaries did little to stem the tide and the Cubans enjoyed several major victories, especially one at Carmona, a major FNLA center.¹⁸ The MPLA, intent upon the complete destruction of its nationalist opponents, resolutely opposed negotiation.

The FNLA had been badly battered, but the struggle for Angola was far from over. UNITA adapted to the changed situation with surprising rapidity. Dr. Savimbi quickly perceived that, given the scale of Soviet military aid to the MPLA, he could not hope to win a conventional war. Consequently, he and his supporters returned to the bush to fight a guerrilla war under conditions which would preclude the use of the enemy's superior weaponry.

The Washington Post reported in April 1976 that the MPLA had won the war in Angola and that claims to the contrary by the FNLA and UNITA were untrue. On April 8, Agostinho Neto returned to Luanda after a trip to Havana, prompting a Post reporter to write:

For Cubans, Neto's visit marked the end of their bold military intervention in the former Portuguese colony 7,000 miles across the ocean. Now they will help the Angolans tackle serious economic difficulties and build up political institutions.¹⁹

This report was, however, guilty of much more than mere anticipation; the Cuban military involvement in Angola was not ending. In fact, it was just beginning. On August 21, Castro announced his intention of withdrawing his troops, which he had gradually raised to a strength of 12-14,000, at the rate of 200 per week.²⁰ He was, however, merely attempting to conciliate liberal opinion in the West, for, in fact, he had no intention of withdrawing his forces.

Despite bold assertions in the press and by various political leaders, the war continued. UNITA headquarters were established only 55 miles from Luso in central Angola and the Benguela Railroad, Angola's main economic artery, was subject to widespread sabotage and attack by Dr. Savimbi's forces.²¹ Moreover, a new

¹⁸ Economist, January 10, 1976.

²¹ Francois Rairberger in The Washington Post, April 8, 1976.

²⁰ Washington Post, August 21, 1976.

²¹ New York Times, July 11, 1976.

group, the Front for the Liberation of the Enclave of Cabina (FLEC), had appeared in the country's northern, oil-rich province, fighting for the area's independence. Meanwhile, elsewhere in the country fighting between the MPLA and the nationalist guerrillas still raged fiercely. On May 20, the London Sunday Telegraph reported that the Cubans had lost as many as 1,500 men in northern and southern Angola. Clearly, if Fidel Castro were to withdraw his troops at this stage, or indeed at any stage thereafter, the MPLA regime would collapse.

The MPLA was totally dependent upon Cuban troops (as well as a growing number of East Germans) and Soviet military aid. On October 8, 1976, Agostinho Neto formalized Angolan dependence upon the Soviet Union when he signed a mutual cooperation treaty which pledged the two countries to "conduct a steady struggle against the forces of imperialism, for the final liquidation of colonialism and neo-colonialism, racism and apartheid."²² All traces of nationalist sentiment had been removed from the MPLA vocabulary to be replaced by classic Marxist-Leninist rhetoric.

The instability of the MPLA and Cuban positions became apparent in the spring of 1977, when the Cuban leadership launched an offensive against civilian supporters of the FNLA and UNITA. Villages were surrounded by tanks while inhabitants who fled to the bush were machine-gunned or bombed with napalm. Children between 10 and 17 years of age were shipped to Cuba for "re-education."²³ However, the guerrillas maintained their counter-attacks and the Cuban troops fell victim to ambush and attrition raids and refused to leave the roads in order to pursue the guerrillas into the bush.²⁴ The Cubans were irregularly paid and poorly supplied, so their morale plunged as the war dragged on. In May 1977, a correspondent of the Christian Science Monitor reported that the MPLA had lost control of the whole of southern Angola to UNITA and that the central provinces were slipping from its grasp. No traffic travelled the Angolan roads after nightfall and all trucks were obliged to convoy, even in daytime.²⁵ One month later Fidel Castro formally announced that the withdrawal of Cuban troops had ended. He neglected to add that five Cuban transport ships were steaming to Angola, expanding the Cuban contingent to 20,000.²⁶ Thus, the much publicized Cuban "withdrawal" in 1977 quietly ended with an escalation of military involvement.

THE SOVIET UNION AND THE ANGOLAN ECONOMY

The embarrassment of the Cubans contrasted sharply with the satisfaction of the Soviet Union, which was systematically plunder-

²² Pravda, October 8, 1976.

²³ Sunday Telegraph, April 23, 1977.

²⁴ San Diego Union, July 12, 1977.

²⁵ Christian Science Monitor, May 9, 1977.

²⁶ Evans and Novak, Washington Post, October 5, 1977.

ing the Angolan economy. Before the war, Angola had produced a surplus of staple diet grains. By 1977, the harvest produced only 10 percent of the country's needs. The production of coffee, formerly a major export, had fallen by 30 percent. The Soviet Union had promised to aid Angola by buying its entire coffee crop, but the agreement provided that Moscow would pay only 38 percent of the world market price. The Soviets subsequently declared that in the future, they would pay for one-half of the crop in the form of tractors and the other half would be offset against the MPLA's war debts.

Portuguese Angola had also enjoyed a prosperous fishing industry. In 1977, the Soviet Union signed a formal agreement, promising to assist the MPLA in rebuilding and refitting the Angolan fishing fleet. However, under the terms of that agreement, only one-third of the Angolan catch was actually to go to Angola, the remainder being shipped to the Soviet Union. Furthermore, since the agreement provided for no Angolan monitoring of the catch, almost all was shipped eastward and fish soon disappeared from the Angolan diet.²⁷

THE ATTEMPTED COUP: MAY 1977

The disparity between Cuban and Soviet fortunes in Angola may account for the differing Cuban and Soviet reactions to the attempted coup within the MPLA in May 1977. The Soviets had never been keen supporters of Agostinho Neto. His commitment to Marxism was suspect, but the Soviet Union had been obliged to retain him because of his prestige in left-wing African states. Soviet support for Neto was, by 1977, even more reserved because the President, despairing of an MPLA victory in a three-front war, was considering negotiating with some of his guerrilla opponents.

Thus, when faced with a possibility of replacing Neto, the Soviets grasped their opportunity. The plotters against Neto were Soviet sympathizers, ideological hard-liners who boasted a broad range of contacts in the army, the National Union of Angolan Workers, and the MPLA youth and women's organizations. Their leaders were members of the MPLA politburo and, significantly, they counted among their number Helder Ferreira, the chief of the Soviet-trained and administered secret police (DISA).²⁸ Little is known of the course of the coup except that the central ranks of the MPLA were decimated by defections and that after severe fighting, the coup was finally put down by the Cubans. Castro may, at this stage, have been considering allowing negotiations to go ahead so that he could cut his losses and be "compelled" to reduce his Cuban contingent without directly offending his Soviet

²⁷ Intelligence Digest, Weekly Review, September 14, 1977.

²⁸ Foreign Report, Economist Newspapers Ltd., June 1, 1977.

masters. The facade of the Marxist coalition was beginning to crack under pressure exerted by the nationalist guerrillas.

MPLA SETBACKS IN 1978

The Cuban-MPLA spring offensive of 1978 failed to achieve any objective beyond the slaughter of innocent civilians. UNITA was gradually gaining control of the Central Highlands of Angola, giving Dr. Savimbi practical control over both of the country's major grain producing areas. Furthermore, his guerrillas kept the Benguela Railroad completely out of action.²⁹ Meanwhile, Cuban losses were mounting. A reporter who travelled with the FNLA guerrillas in the summer of 1978 estimated that Cuban losses in Angola then numbered about 8,000 men. Casualty lists were no longer being published in Cuba. Troops who were wounded or maimed in the fighting were no longer shipped back to Cuba to a hero's welcome, but were sent to hospitals in other African states. At home, Cubans were being induced to serve in Angola by an increasing number of social and economic benefits. Simultaneously, they faced a rising tide of threats and penalties for refusal.³⁰

The MPLA-Cuban military failure bludgeoned the economy of Angola. The MPLA's maltreatment of civilians resulted in the exodus of approximately 1,000,000 productive villagers into the bush. The president of the FLEC claimed that 70,000 Cabindans had fled to Zaire and another 50,000 to FLEC areas. More than 15,000 workers had left the diamond mines in Luanda province.³¹ Food was scarce, even in the capital, and the populace became dependent upon a scarce supply of grain and potatoes. The situation in the provinces was, presumably, worse since the distribution network had collapsed when the Portuguese left. Chaos in Luanda harbor was resulting in the loss of \$40 million in cargo annually.³²

In the face of impending disaster, Dr. Neto was obliged to submit further to the Soviet Union and to toe the strict Marxist-Leninist line. At the Luanda May Day parade in 1978, he tried to rally the hungry faithful by conjuring up images of South African invaders poised on the southern border. On June 13, he publicly affirmed "total and unending support to SWAPO, the Patriotic Front, and ANC, the true representatives of their respective peoples." Seven months later, Neto signed a twenty year treaty of Friendship and Cooperation with Erich Honecker, the General Secretary of the East German Communist Party.³³

²⁹ Congressional Record, Senate, June 27, 1979, p. 8750.

³⁰ Intelligence Digest, Weekly Review, March 22, 1978.

³¹ Intelligence Digest, February 14, 1979; and Congressional Record, Senate, June 27, 1979, p. 8750.

³² New York Times, December 13, 1978.

³³ Luanda Domestic Service, 1200 GMT, May 1, 1978, LD; and Strategic African Affairs, June 15, 1979; Starrels, op. cit.

Meanwhile, during the spring of 1978, the East European presence in Angola grew. The numbers of Soviet personnel in Luanda (who stayed at the five star Panorama Hotel, at Angolan expense) swelled. In May 1978, twelve Soviet generals arrived in Luanda to assist in the direction of the new offensive against UNITA.³⁴ Soviet combat surface ships and submarines began to appear in the capital's docks. Soviet personnel took over the management of the ports of Barro do Cuanza and Porto Alexandre and constructed a military airfield and a vast new radar installation at Mocamedes. The Angolan airforce now boasted a squadron of MIG 17s and another of MIG 21s.³⁵

THE CARTER-VANCE INITIATIVE

Under these circumstances, it is, therefore, surprising that President Carter and his Secretary of State, Cyrus Vance, should have decided that the time was ripe to improve U.S. relations with the MPLA. Representative Jack Kemp and others did point out in Congress that such an initiative would imply recognition of the Cuban-Soviet presence in Angola. Nonetheless, the White House moved ahead rapidly, despite Angolan connivance at the Katanga rebels' raid on Kolwezi in Zaire.³⁶ Though President Neto had been making overtures to the West in the hope of obtaining the economic aid denied to him by the Soviet Union, the U.S. should have known that the Soviets would not tolerate a reversal in the political situation which they had worked so hard to establish.

In September 1979, U.N. Ambassador Andrew Young loudly proclaimed that the U.S. had driven the MPLA into the arms of the Soviets by refusing to recognize the Angolan regime. He ignored the fact that the MPLA was a minority government which had been installed by foreign forces, that it was unpopular with the people of Angola, and that it could provide them with neither peace nor sustenance.³⁷

THE DEATH OF NETO AND THE RUSSIFICATION OF ANGOLA

Neto's overtures to the West did, however, reveal that he had seen through his Soviet allies, though he could not act directly upon this insight. In July 1979, he decided to play a bold card and open a secret line to UNITA. Neto approached President Leopold Senghor of Senegal and asked him to arrange a meeting with Dr. Savimbi.³⁸ Six weeks later, Neto was persuaded

³⁴ Baltimore Sun, July 18, 1978.

³⁵ Congressional Record, House, September 11, 1978, pp. 9741-9742; and Congressional Record, Senate, June 27, 1979, p. 8750.

³⁶ Congressional Record, House, June 23, 1978, p. 5997.

³⁷ Washington Post, September 17, 1979.

³⁸ Wall Street Journal, November 8, 1979.

to go to Moscow for treatment of the leukemia of which he was a known victim. Upon his arrival in Moscow, he was immediately separated from his personal physician. The Soviet medical team decided that an immediate operation was called for and when Neto's physician saw him for the first time, two days later, the President was dead. Since the Soviet wing of the MPLA had attempted to assassinate Neto on at least three occasions before the MPLA takeover, it seems quite possible that his sudden and convenient death was "arranged."³⁹

Neto's replacement, Jose Eduardo dos Santos, a former planning minister, is a man much closer to the Soviet ideal. Dos Santos completed his education at Baku in the Soviet Union, where the authorities demonstrated their trust in him by making him a political organizer of students from other Third World countries. He completed military training by the KGB before returning to Angola.⁴⁰ This is the man with whom the West must now deal if it so chooses.

Several developments occurred shortly after dos Santos came to power. "Ideological cadres" were recruited from within the MPLA. These groups were distinguished by their strict adherence to the Soviet version of Marxism-Leninism. Dos Santos also expanded the Russian language school in Luanda. Eight hundred army officers, political commissars, and members of the secret police began to attend. New Soviet T62 tanks began to appear in operation against UNITA and more East German soldiers arrived, among them the infamous Felix Dzherzhinsky regiment of internal security troops. This regiment, which is named after the founder of the Soviet state security service, specializes in KGB tactics for the suppression of domestic subversion and dissent. Dos Santos also brought back into the politburo two men previously dismissed by Neto for establishing independent ties with the Soviets: Mr. Lope Nascimento is now Minister of Foreign Trade and Mr. Carlos Rocha Diloloa is the President's "personal security advisor."⁴¹

THE MPLA'S ECONOMIC FAILURE

Dos Santos' friends have not, however, proved capable of improving either the economic or the military situation. In May 1980, a reporter for the International Herald Tribune reported that "A 2,000 mile trip through four Angolan provinces produced little evidence of anything save decay and stagnation, incompetence and inefficiency." Food was available only in government shops and only for those who could produce cards proving that they were

³⁹ The Times (of London), July 7, 1980; and Washington Post, September 14, 1979.

⁴⁰ Foreign Report, December 12, 1979.

⁴¹ Ibid.; and The Times (of London), July 7, 1980.

employed. Citizens needed government permission to travel or to change address.⁴² The Angolan government has not published a budget since 1977, but it is obvious that the country subsists almost totally on the oil revenues paid by such corporations as Texaco, Total and Petrobras of Brazil. Gulf Oil, the largest Angolan investor, pays \$5 million per day in royalties, but 60¢ from each dollar goes to pay the MPLA military or to repay the Angolan debt to the Soviet Union and Cuba. Furthermore, the MPLA is currently obliged to pay \$600 per month to Havana for every Cuban teacher whom Castro sends to the country.⁴³

The only other source of national revenue comes in the form of foreign loans and aid. In April 1980, the Export-Import Bank loaned the MPLA \$96.9 million at 8.25 percent in order to finance oil exploration and to pay for oil well repressuring equipment. At the same time, the MPLA, unable to feed the population of Angola, was obliged to appeal for international aid. The International Red Cross set up a food relief program in June 1980.⁴⁴

THE SUCCESS OF UNITA

The military situation of the MPLA has deteriorated further under the premiership of dos Santos. A secret report submitted to the Angolan State Secretariat for Cooperation on August 20, 1979, was leaked to foreign intelligence services. In it, the Cubans affirmed their intention of withdrawing 337 technicians from 30 Angolan municipalities because their security could no longer be guaranteed. In the North, the towns of Kwanza Norte, Vige and Luanda province have all been secretly, but officially, classified as FNLA territory. In the south, UNITA has continued to control Malange, Huambo and Cuanza-Sol since 1979.⁴⁵

The last MPLA-Cuban southern offensive, which was launched in January 1980, failed after only a few weeks because of the refusal of the Cuban troops to leave the roads where they were protected by their armored columns. After the MPLA retreat, UNITA established its control over the districts of Moxico, Bie, Cuando Cubango and Cunene.⁴⁶ In mid-November 1980, UNITA overran an all-Cuban garrison at Belem Dohuambo, south of Huambo. Six months later, it made a successful attack on the joint Cuban-MPLA base at Savate. In these two attacks, UNITA captured seventeen SAM 7 missiles and two launchers. Within three weeks of their capture, these missiles had been used to bring down three ANTONOV 26 and five M-18 helicopters. Clearly, Dr. Savimbi could achieve

⁴² International Herald Tribune, May 20, 1980; and Foreign Report, December 12, 1979.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Journal of Commerce, April 1980.

⁴⁵ Foreign Report, December 12, 1979.

⁴⁶ The Times (of London), July 7, 1980.

a great deal were he guaranteed only a modest supply of Redeye ground-to-air missiles or some similar anti-aircraft weapon.⁴⁷

UNITA now runs its own schools and guerrilla training camps in the areas under its control. In 1979, Dr. Savimbi was even able to host a large international conference, flying visitors in and out of UNITA's own airstrips. UNITA has managed to consolidate a firm grip on the southern provinces of Angola. Its hold over the central districts of Benguela and Huila has not, as yet, become secure, but Dr. Savimbi encounters little difficulty in mounting major guerrilla operations in these areas. He is even succeeding in operating within Luanda itself.⁴⁸ Given the past ignominious performances of the heavily armed MPLA and Cuban troops, it seems only a matter of time before Dr. Savimbi's permanent armed force of 15,000 and his much larger irregular following begin to seriously threaten the Marxist hold on Luanda.

THE MPLA AND HUMAN RIGHTS

The MPLA regime has shown little regard for conventionally recognized political or civil liberties. According to the annual State Department Report on Human Rights:

Angola is a one-party authoritarian state. The MPLA-Labor Party is the only legal political party. The government has banned all political activities by opposition groups, and denies them access to the state controlled media.⁴⁹

The constitution, which was drawn up by the MPLA politburo, enshrines the dictatorship of a one-party system. It grants political power only to "the masses, through organized forms of popular power," effectually limiting its exercise to the MPLA and its affiliates. The exercise of citizens' rights of free speech, assembly and expression must, according to the constitution, fall within "the area of realizing the fundamental objectives of the People's Republic of Angola." Such exercise must also be "in the national interest" and "conform to public order," as defined by the government.

The only legal labor organization is the government-sponsored National Union of Angolan Workers. However, the right to strike is denied by law as a crime against the security of the state. The MPLA maintains a complete monopoly over all news information, placing tight controls on foreign correspondents' access to

⁴⁷ Arnaud de Borchgrave and Michael Ledeen, "Reagan's African Ally," in New Republic, January 17, 1981.

⁴⁸ The Times (of London), July 7, 1980.

⁴⁹ U.S Department of State, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices, February 2, 1981, p. 14.

information. Some reporters critical of the MPLA regime have been expelled from the country and those currently in Angola cannot move freely, even within areas controlled by the MPLA.

Despite the efforts of the Luanda regime to limit access to information, frequent reports indicate that currently there may be as many as 10,000 political prisoners in Angola. Arbitrary arrest is commonplace and prisoners are often held for several years without trial. One U.S. citizen, released in 1980, had been held for three years without charges being preferred against him. In 1978, the Catholic bishops of Angola issued a pastoral letter, castigating the MPLA for, among other things, its systematic subversion of freedom of conscience and worship and for permitting the abduction and exportation of Angolan children and adolescents to Cuba.

The combination of political repression and continued conflict has led to the flight of an estimated 250,000 refugees from Angola into Zaire and other countries. In contrast, it is estimated that only 50,000 refugees from Namibia and Zaire have fled to MPLA territory.

Despite these blatant violations of civil and political liberties, international organizations have demonstrated little interest in the Angolan situation. In 1981, the State Department reported that:

As far as is known, no international or non-governmental human rights organization has attempted to visit Angola to investigate human rights conditions or practices since independence.⁵⁰

On the basis of existing evidence, the United Nations, the Organization of African Unity and various private human rights groups should swiftly focus their attention on Angola.

ANGOLA AND NAMIBIA

It is quite impossible to survey the past few years in Angola without considering events in neighboring Southwest Africa, or Namibia. The MPLA has given shelter to SWAPO guerrillas operating in Namibia and has thereby laid Angola open to action by the South African armed forces, which have launched both ground and air attacks upon SWAPO bases in Angola. Dos Santos is eager to stave off these South African raids, but he does not wish to lose prestige vis-a-vis other radical African states. Consequently, he is now pressuring Sam Nujoma, the head of SWAPO, to come to reach an agreement with the five Western powers negotiating with South Africa. The MPLA also has been at pains to tie

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 14.

its own future policy to developments in Namibia. When George McGovern flew to Angola in 1979 Agostinho Neto informed him that, if the Namibian situation was settled according to the MPLA's liking, the Cuban troops would be told to leave. This assertion has since become the most hackneyed feature of MPLA propaganda relating to Namibia. It deserves examination specifically because it ignores four central points:

1. The MPLA is no position to make the Soviet Union or Cuba leave Angola. Even if Castro desired to bring his battered army home, his complete dependence on the Soviet Union precludes such a course of action. The Cuban and East European troops constitute the most powerful section of the MPLA forces and could easily withstand any threat from the MPLA's own troops. Moreover, events would never be allowed to come to such a pass. As in 1977, the Soviet Union could easily launch a successful coup against any "revisionist elements" in the MPLA politburo which proposed the withdrawal of Cuban and East German forces from Angola.
2. The South African presence in Namibia, which has a history spanning more than sixty years, is not the main obstacle to the withdrawal of Marxist troops from Angola. On the contrary, the presence of imperialistically-inclined Marxist troops in neighboring Angola is, in fact, the main obstacle to the peaceful withdrawal of the traditional South African presence in Namibia. The Republic of South Africa understandably feels somewhat reluctant to depart at the moment, leaving the infant state with a Cuban army on its borders.
3. To allow an illegitimate government such as the MPLA to dictate the course of events in a neighboring state is to give way before the use of Soviet-Cuban force in Africa not just once but twice.
4. The MPLA insists that the true government of Namibia can only be constituted through U.N.-supervised elections. Ironically, the MPLA has consistently refused to test itself by holding any elections whatsoever.

THE FUTURE COURSE OF U.S. POLICY TOWARDS ANGOLA

The Clark Amendment currently prevents the U.S. government from proffering assistance to any of the indigenous Angolan resistance groups. The Senate Foreign Relations Committee has already voted in favor of its repeal. The House Foreign Affairs Committee has taken the opposite course and has supported its retention. However, no motion relating to the Clark Amendment has yet been placed before the full House or the Senate. Hence, the matter is, as yet, undecided.

When the senators and representatives do come to consider the repeal, they would be well advised to maintain an acute

awareness of several key factors. The very fact that UNITA, lacking any major international patron, has managed to survive, let alone expand, in the face of a party heavily supplied by the Soviet war machine and assisted by thousands of trained Cubans testifies eloquently to the movement's innate durability and popularity. UNITA's pressure on the MPLA has, albeit indirectly, done a great deal to bring SWAPO to the negotiating table. Moreover, supporting UNITA is decidedly less risky than recognizing the MPLA, for Dr. Savimbi has already declared his willingness to have his popularity tested in U.N.-supervised elections. If his policies do not embody the aspirations of the Angolan people, he will not come to power.

Several major oil companies have expressed their concern over the maintenance of stability in Angola. This concern is understandable. Their investment in and dependence on Angolan oil is significant, though not major. However, these companies would be well advised to look to the long-term, rather than the short-term, interests of both themselves and the U.S. The record of the past six years points up the inability of the MPLA and its Cuban assistants to provide that political and military stability which will enable the oil companies to make the most of their investment. A UNITA takeover would, undoubtedly, lead to some temporary stoppages at the Cabinda wells, but these dislocations would be more than offset by the long-term stability and improved financial atmosphere which the change of government would bring about.

The MPLA has often hinted a desire to turn towards the West. However, it is difficult to see how a government which is staffed by Soviet-trained personnel and which has bound itself by a rigid Marxist constitution could ever perform such a volte-face. If dos Santos is sincere in his professions, his most obvious course of action would be to enter into negotiations with Dr. Savimbi, particularly since the latter has now withdrawn his demand that all foreign troops leave Angola before negotiations begin. Dos Santos' failure to take advantage of this moderation of the UNITA position suggests insincerity on his part. Until such negotiations have begun and free elections become a viable prospect, the U.S. should keep the MPLA at arm's length while giving serious consideration to supplying more concrete aid to its true ally in Angola, Dr. Jonas Savimbi of UNITA.

CONCLUSION

Even the most sanguine of observers should feel obliged to label past U.S. policy towards Angola as disastrous. The Carter Administration, in particular, consistently proved itself incapable of formulating a rational policy which would in any way assist towards the exodus of foreign troops and the establishment of democratic government. Secretary of State Vance, in attempting to please every African state, pleased none and left the MPLA regime intact in Luanda.

This failure is all the more dramatic since the U.S. has, at all stages of the Angolan conflict, had the capacity to decisively affect its outcome. A limited amount of U.S. aid to UNITA, even if it had been restricted to indirect humanitarian assistance, could have had an extraordinarily beneficial psychological effect upon the popular opponents of the Cuban-MPLA Marxist front. Alternatively, the U.S. could have made it clear that, should the MPLA refuse to countenance peaceful, U.N.-supervised elections, it would consider supplying arms directly to the chief proponents of national self-determination.

Secretary of State Haig and Assistant Secretary for African Affairs, Chester Crocker, may yet succeed where Secretaries Vance and Muskie have failed. Local circumstances are in their favor: UNITA goes from strength to strength, while the Cuban-MPLA regime suffers continual military reversals. Moreover, the Reagan Administration has demonstrated a much closer working knowledge of the subtleties of African politics than did his predecessors.

Several important African heads of state still feel obliged to condemn any U.S. interest within the continent as evidence of "capitalist imperialism," mainly in order to placate domestic left-wing sentiment. However, those same leaders will, in fact, welcome a considerable amount of U.S. "interference" if it is handled in a discreet manner and is consistently directed toward ridding Angola of its new colonial rulers. African prime ministers and presidents may occasionally prove to be unpredictable, but they recognize colonialism for what it is, be it from the east or from the west.

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