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ANGOLA TESTS THE REAGAN DOCTRINE

INTRODUCTION

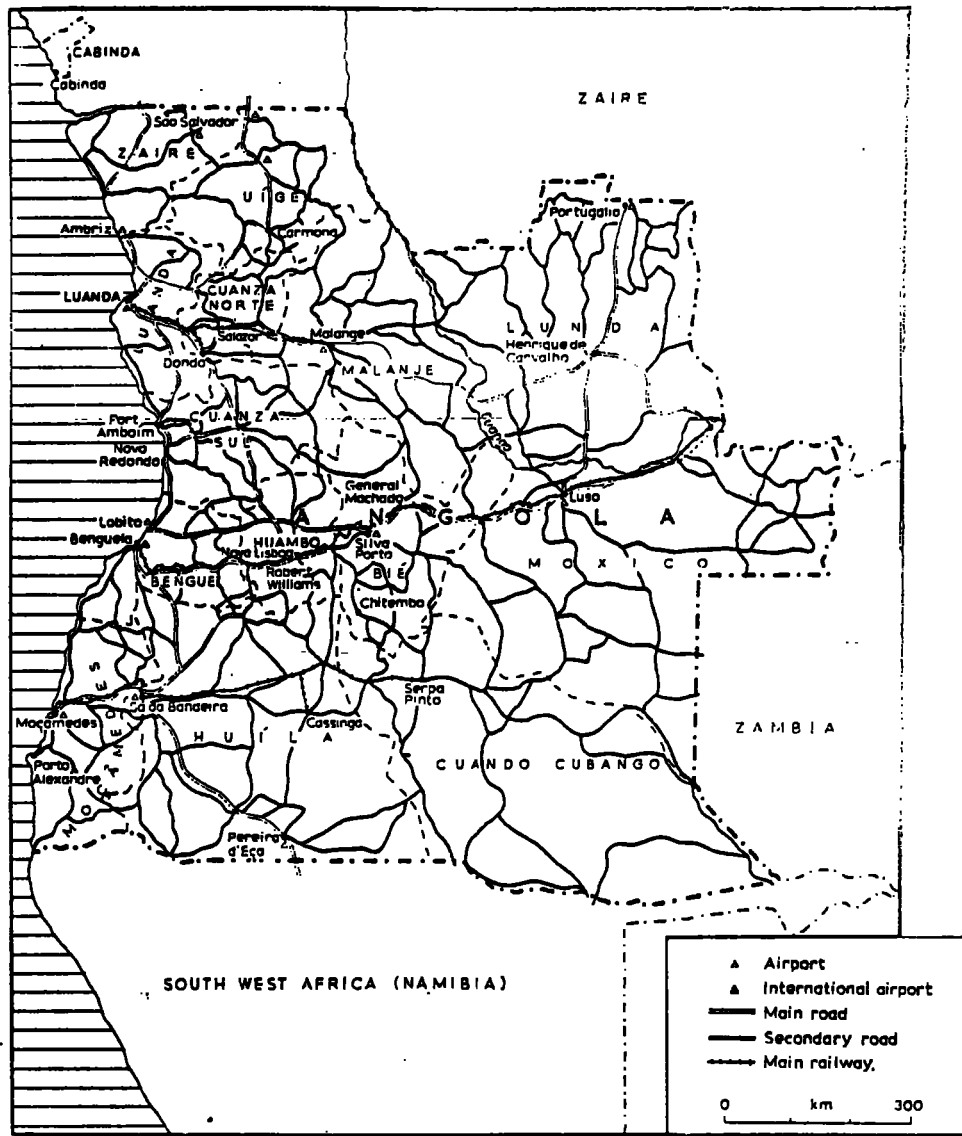
Angolan government troops, backed by Cuban forces and directed by Soviet battle commanders, have been escalating their military campaign against the pro-Western insurgents of the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA) led by Jonas Savimbi. Heavily resupplied by the Soviet Union over the past eighteen months, and bolstered by as many as 7,000 extra Cuban troops--bringing their total to more than 35,000¹--government forces launched their most serious offensive yet in their ten-year-old war against UNITA. Their goal: the capture of Jamba, UNITA's headquarters in southeastern Angola, and the destruction of Savimbi's formidable fighting forces.

The combat has been fierce. On September 28, the Luanda government claimed that Savimbi had abandoned his base at Jamba and withdrawn into neighboring Namibia.² Savimbi denied this and on October 8, brought Western journalists to the Lomba River to see the remains of a decimated MPLA-PT mechanized column.³ UNITA had blunted

1. The additional 5,000 to 7,000 Cubans were troops that had been transferred from service in Ethiopia, according to a CIA analyst. See Peter Clement, "Moscow and Southern Africa," in Problems of Communism, March-April 1985, p. 34. Regarding the total number of Cuban troops, see David B. Ottoway, "U.S. Weighs Angolan Rebel Aid," The Washington Post, October 16, 1985, p. A29.

2. Allister Sparks, "Rebels Driven from Base, Angolan Government Claims," The Washington Post, September 29, 1985, p. A23.

3. The official name of the communist party that rules Angola is The Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola-Workers Party (MPLA-PT). Its army is the Popular Armed Forces for the Liberation of Angola, or FAPLA.



the Angolan offensive 20 miles northwest of Mavinga, a key UNITA stronghold, and had forced the MPLA-PT to retreat.⁴ For the moment, at least, Savimbi had won.

In Washington, meanwhile, a different battle has been raging. This one tests the Reagan Doctrine's commitment to help Freedom Fighters and push back the frontiers of communist domination. In this battle, U.S. officials have been wrestling with the question of Washington's policy toward Savimbi. His forces are genuine Freedom Fighters as defined by the Reagan Doctrine and thus clearly deserve U.S. backing. This is recognized on Capitol Hill by Republicans and Democrats alike. In the House, legislation calling for \$27 million in humanitarian aid for UNITA was introduced on October 1;⁵ a bill providing a similar amount in military aid was introduced October 24. Inexplicably, the State Department is actively opposing these bipartisan measures, even though they simply translate the Reagan Doctrine into action. Secretary of State George Shultz even has gone so far as to write House Minority Leader Robert Michel of Illinois, asking him to block the legislation.

This understandably puzzles some of Shultz's colleagues in the Administration. Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger and CIA Director William Casey apparently are pushing for substantial covert aid to UNITA.⁶ They recognize that since 1976, Angola has been the key to Moscow's strategy for the region, providing a stable base for SWAPO guerrillas to destabilize Namibia.

The Administration now must make up its mind. Does it or does it not take seriously the Reagan Doctrine's pledge to aid Freedom Fighters? If it is more than empty rhetoric, the White House must direct the State Department to embrace and back vigorously Congress' bipartisan efforts to help UNITA.

4. Allister Sparks, "Angolan Forces Fall Back from Site of Heavy Battle," The Washington Post, October 9, 1985, p. A1; Michael Sullivan, "Costly Rebel Victory in 'A Land God Forgot,'" The Washington Times, October 9, 1985, p. 1A.

5. Bob Robinson, "Bill Asks \$27 Million to Aid Angolan Rebels," The Washington Times, October 3, 1985, p. 1A.

6. David B. Ottoway, "Angola Rebel Aid is Pushed," The Washington Post, November 1, 1985, p. A1. On the Secretary of State's letter to the Minority Leader, see James Morrison, "Shultz Works Against Bill To Aid UNITA Anti-Marxists," The Washington Times, October 23, 1985, p. 1A.

ROOTS OF THE PROBLEM

Ten years ago, the departing Portuguese colonial government signed an agreement with the three Angolan independence movements. The Alvor Agreement created a coalition government made up of the MPLA, FNLA, and UNITA, which was to hold elections. Before they could be held, the MPLA imported 13,000 Cuban troops and Soviet advisors, and ousted the other two movements. The FNLA disbanded, while Savimbi and his UNITA forces retreated into Angola's southeastern corner, an area labelled by the Portuguese as "The Land That God Forgot."

From his redoubt, Savimbi has forged a powerful fighting machine.⁷ In 1981, with his troops numbering 50,000, he recaptured Mavinga, a small town 150 miles to the northeast of Jamba. With its hard-packed gravel airstrip, Mavinga became a key logistical center for UNITA and the base for its supply lines to the north.

In August 1983, Savimbi launched a successful assault against the MPLA-PT garrison at Cangamba in central Angola. The two-week battle, the first major conventional UNITA attack against MPLA-PT forces, was a turning point in the war. It confirmed Savimbi as a serious threat to the Luanda regime, forced the Angolan communists to shift away from tentative negotiations with South Africa and back to the battlefield, and forced Moscow and Havana to reassess the situation.⁸

Immediately following the battle, Lucio Lara, believed to be the leader of the MPLA-PT's pro-Soviet faction, rushed to Moscow.⁹ The Soviets apparently decided to reinforce their Angolan clients and began sending massive amounts of arms to Luanda, including T-62 heavy tanks, MiG-23 jet fighters, SU-22 fighter bombers, and MI-24 helicopter gunships. This bolstered an arsenal which already included MiG-17s, MiG-21s, and hundreds of T-54/55 and PT-76 tanks. Concurrently, the Soviets installed a new air defense line in southern Angola, deploying radars and SA-8 surface-to-air missiles. In November and December 1983, additional Cuban troops were transferred to Angola from Ethiopia, bringing the total number to 35,000.¹⁰

7. For a more detailed overview of the growth of UNITA, see Edward P. Cain, "The Agony of Angola" in Charles Moser, ed., Combat on Communist Territory (Lake Bluff, Illinois: Regnery-Gateway, 1985).

8. See Clement, op. cit.

9. Ibid., pp. 32, 34.

10. Ibid.

Through last year and the first half of this year, the Soviets restocked the MPLA-PT's arsenal. By this August, government forces had over 500 Soviet tanks, including 30 T-62s; over 100 sophisticated Soviet fighter aircraft, including about 30 MiG-23s and 70 MiG-21s; and roughly 25 deadly MI-24 helicopter gunships. The value of these arms transfers has been estimated at \$1 to \$2 billion.¹¹

THE SOVIET OFFENSIVE

The Soviet offensive began in earnest in late July, with a two-pronged assault. The strategic objective of the first prong was the capture of the Cazombo salient, an area of eastern Angola which juts into neighboring Zambia. It has the psychological importance of being the birthplace of the MPLA. Its recapture, and with it the reopening of the Benguela railway linking the mineral wealth of eastern Angola to the west coast ports, would provide a tremendous morale boost to MPLA-PT forces.

The assault was launched from recently recaptured Menongue, with air cover from Luena on the Benguela railway. Four government brigades, directed by Soviet commanders who coordinated ground, artillery, and air attacks, moved against UNITA positions. The advantages of direct Soviet operational control down to the battalion, and possibly even platoon, level were immediately evident: where MPLA-PT troops previously had advanced only until they encountered strong enemy fire and then fell back, this time they fought on under heavy fire. Savimbi inflicted hundreds of casualties on the attackers. But rather than risk a major conventional battle where he was outmanned and outgunned, he withdrew his forces to the south, where he anticipated the next thrust.

The objective of the second Soviet-led prong was the occupation of Jamba itself. Built up over the last several years, Jamba is UNITA's political, social, and cultural headquarters. With a population of 10,000 and factories, schools, and hospitals, it is Savimbi's showplace in the Angolan bush. Its loss would be a devastating blow to UNITA.

Four brigades of government troops were commanded by Soviet officers. Soviet and Cuban pilots flew the Angolan Air Force's

11. Ottoway, "U.S. Weighs Angolan Rebel Aid," op. cit.

MiG-21s, MiG-23s, SU-22s, and MI-24s, according to an Angolan pilot shot down and captured by UNITA.¹²

On September 26, Savimbi launched a counterattack, leading 5,500 UNITA soldiers against the 4,600 MPLA-PT troops caught between Mavinga and the river. Trapped in the loose, sandy soil of southeastern Angola, the Soviet armored vehicles and tanks were sitting ducks for the more mobile UNITA forces. The result was an overwhelming UNITA victory. On September 29, Soviet commanders ordered retreat, leaving behind 2,300 dead MPLA-PT troops; 410 UNITA soldiers were dead.¹³ By one account, MPLA-PT losses included 79 vehicles destroyed, 52 captured, and 22 aircraft downed--including several MI-24s and at least one MiG-21.¹⁴

REASONS FOR THE OFFENSIVE

Several factors apparently prompted the Soviets and Angolans to launch their offensive. For one thing, Moscow surely wanted to bolster a client regime in geostrategically important southern Africa and to appear tough before the Geneva summit with Ronald Reagan. For another, Moscow probably wanted to shatter the Lusaka Accord and demonstrate to the black African states the vulnerability and weakness of U.S. diplomacy, which had backed the accord. For the Angolans, questions of prestige were involved, along with internal debates within the MPLA-PT politburo.

The Soviets and the MPLA also almost certainly felt that they had to check Savimbi's advances. July 1985 had been UNITA's best month ever. With 60,000 troops--34,000 guerrillas and 26,000 regulars¹⁵--under his command, Savimbi had mounted hundreds of attacks all over the country that month.

Moscow's decision to attack in Angola seems part of a worldwide pattern of Soviet offensives that include Afghanistan, Ethiopia, Mozambique, and Nicaragua. This may be part of Moscow's pre-summit

12. Sparks, "Angolan Forces Fall Back..." The Angolan pilot, Franciscoe Matamba, told reporters he had spent three years in the Soviet Union learning to fly Soviet MiG aircraft.

13. "UNITA's Savimbi Holds Press Conference," Foreign Broadcast Information Service Daily-Middle East and Africa, October 9, 1985, p. U4.

14. Sullivan, op. cit.

15. R. Evans and R. Novak, "The Soviet Move in Angola," The Washington Post, September 30, 1985.

posturing. Gorbachev not only would be testing the Reagan Doctrine but would be daring the U.S. Congress to deliver on its much-ballyhooed new support for anti-communist insurgencies.

The MPLA-PT had its own reasons for the offensive. Luanda was hosting the Ministerial Conference of Non-Aligned Nations in September and was anxious to undermine the image of UNITA as a viable force. Luanda probably feared that several of the delegations to the conference would call for negotiations that could lead to an Angolan coalition government as had originally been planned under the Alvor Agreement. UNITA already had demonstrated its capability to black out the capital. For good reason did the Angolan communist regime want to force Savimbi back into his base of operations.

The MPLA-PT, moreover, had scheduled its Second Party Congress for late November and early December. One faction of the party was expected to push for negotiations with UNITA, possibly leading to a coalition government. The aim of this group was to appear moderate enough to get U.S. diplomatic recognition and economic aid. The hardliners, however, sought to make the question moot by crushing UNITA before the Congress.

U.S. POLICY OPTIONS

The Reagan Administration now has an extraordinary opportunity in Angola. This is due to Savimbi's success in holding his troops together in the face of a massive Soviet-led onslaught, the rainy season which prevents another Soviet offensive at least until next March, and Congress' repeal of the 1976 Clark Amendment which banned U.S. aid to UNITA. Administration options include:

1) Overt humanitarian aid. Representative Claude Pepper, a long-time liberal Democrat from Florida, helped lead the move to repeal the Clark Amendment. He now has introduced legislation in the House providing \$27 million in humanitarian aid to Savimbi's forces. Modeled on the current aid package for the Nicaraguan Freedom Fighters, the funds would purchase food, clothing, and medicine; neither the CIA nor the Pentagon would be allowed to administer the program. It is believed that the White House assured Pepper that it will back such legislation.¹⁶

2) Economic sanctions. Representative Bill McCollum, a Republican from Florida, has introduced legislation imposing economic sanctions on the Angolan government if progress is not made toward democracy in Angola; this must include negotiations with UNITA on

16. Ottoway, "Angola Rebel Aid...", op. cit., p. A1.

forming a coalition government to prepare for elections. Based on the South Africa sanctions enacted by Congress this summer, McCollum's bill would restrict imports from Angola and prohibit new loans by U.S. government agencies and private banks to the Angolan government.

3) Declare Angola Communist. The State Department has not yet formally labelled the decade-old MPLA-PT regime as "communist." That the Luanda regime is communist should be beyond doubt. Ten years ago it asked for and received massive arms supplies from Moscow; it hosts some 35,000 Cuban, Soviet, and communist bloc troops; and it has modeled its internal policies after the Soviet-dominated regimes of Eastern Europe. Whether the State Department classifies a nation as "communist" is of considerable substantive as well as symbolic importance. Communist nations, for example, cannot receive any U.S. economic or military assistance; nor are they eligible for Export-Import Bank loans.

4) Raise the Angola issue at the Geneva summit. At his meeting later this month with Mikhail Gorbachev, Ronald Reagan could warn that continued Soviet interference in Angola contradicts Moscow's rhetoric that it is seeking world peace and stability. Reagan further could warn that this Soviet intervention in Angola is going to start meeting with active U.S. resistance.

5) Covert military aid. Several Senators, including Republicans Steven Symms of Idaho and Orrin Hatch of Utah, are pressing the Administration to give covert military aid to UNITA. These funds could buy UNITA anti-aircraft and anti-tank weaponry, the arms they most need. This aid could be funnelled to UNITA through a friendly nation (as Pakistan channels U.S. covert aid to the Afghan Freedom Fighters) or the aid could be distributed directly to UNITA.

6) Overt military aid. Representative Mark Siljander, a Republican from Michigan, has introduced legislation providing \$27 million in overt military aid to UNITA. This bill already has 70 bipartisan cosponsors.¹⁷ They argue that the time has come for the President to back up his rhetoric about supporting Freedom Fighters with action. And since the U.S. never has recognized the Luanda regime as the legitimate government of Angola, no laws would be broken by aiding forces seeking to overthrow the MPLA-PT.

17. Interview with Kevin Callwood, Minority Staff Consultant to the Africa Subcommittee of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, October 31, 1985.

CRITICISMS OF AID TO UNITA

Critics offer four arguments against providing such aid: 1) U.S. aid to UNITA strengthens the Angolan government's dependence on the Soviet Union and Cuba, and thereby increases Soviet influence in the region; 2) aid to UNITA undermines the three-way negotiations between the Angolans, the South Africans, and the U.S. over the independence of South West Africa/Namibia at a very delicate stage in the negotiations; 3) aid to UNITA would "ally" the U.S. with South Africa, thus damaging the U.S. image in southern Africa; and 4) aid to UNITA would widen the Angolan civil war.

As for the first argument, it is hard to see how the MPLA-PT could possibly become more dependent on the Soviets and Cubans than it already is. The regime receives massive amounts of military and economic assistance from the Soviet bloc, Soviet and Cuban pilots fly the combat missions for the Angolan Air force, and Soviet officers have taken direct control of combat operations.¹⁸

There are serious doubts, moreover, as to the ability of the Angolan communist regime to send the Cuban troops and Soviet commanders home even if they wanted to. In a conversation held with The Heritage Foundation earlier this fall, Angolan Minister of Trade Ismael Gaspar Martins could not answer in the affirmative when asked if the MPLA-PT would be able to remove all Soviet bloc forces if it wanted to. Three times he was asked this question very specifically; three times he evaded it.

Even if U.S. aid to Savimbi would increase Soviet influence over the MPLA-PT, this would be of little consequence if Savimbi continues to win battles and eventually defeats the MPLA-PT or, at least, forces his way into a coalition government. The best way to reduce Soviet influence in southern Africa is to remove a Soviet client regime from power. Aid to UNITA could do just that.

The second argument against U.S. aid is made, curiously, by Secretary of State George Shultz. He claims that negotiations between South Africa and Angola have reached a very delicate stage; as such, goes the argument, U.S. aid to UNITA would cause Angola to quit the discussions. Shultz and his principal State Department advisors feel that the only way to ease Cuban forces out of Angola is to broker an accord trading their departure for a South African withdrawal from Namibia.

18. R. Evans and R. Novak, "The Soviet Move in Angola," The Washington Post, September 30, 1985. See also "South Africa and UNITA," Station Commentary by Johannesburg Domestic Service, "Defense Minister cited on UNITA Support," FBIS-MEA, September 24, 1985, p. U3.

The problem with this, of course, is that these negotiations have been underway for a decade and are no closer to conclusion now than when they began. The State Department, for reasons unknown, overlooks the fact that the main purpose of Cuban forces in Angola is to prop up the MPLA-PT regime. The only realistic hope of removing Cuban troops is a UNITA victory over the MPLA-PT.

The third argument is that aid to UNITA effectively would ally the U.S. with South Africa. While it is true that Pretoria aids UNITA overtly, so do West European, black African, and Middle Eastern states concerned about Soviet expansionism in southern Africa. By helping UNITA, therefore, Washington also would be allying with these nations.

U.S. aid to UNITA, in fact, actually would lessen Savimbi's reliance on South Africa. For one thing, U.S. aid would dilute immediately the influence of South Africa. For another, and more important, it would signal those nations already aiding UNITA that the U.S. agrees with them on the need to help Savimbi. They probably would increase their own aid, further weakening South Africa's influence.

The final argument against U.S. aid to UNITA is that it would widen the war. But this is only true if "widening" means enabling UNITA to fight effectively enough to win--and to end the civil war. The men and women of UNITA--Angolan, nationalist, and anti-colonialist--are fighting to drive the foreign Cuban and Soviet occupying forces from Angolan soil. Savimbi does not want or need foreign troops to help UNITA wage its war; in fact, he specifically rejects this solution. He merely wants aid.

CONCLUSION

The Soviet assumption of control of military actions in Angola is a serious escalation of Soviet intervention in southern Africa. It is a new threat to U.S. interests in that geostrategically and economically critical region. In response, the U.S. must take new actions to prevent the defeat of UNITA by Soviet-directed and Cuban-backed MPLA-PT troops.

The greatest threat to Savimbi comes from the addition of massive airpower to the Angolan arsenal. The deadly MI-24 helicopter gunship, already used by the Soviets in Afghanistan and Nicaragua, gives the MPLA-PT effective air cover and, when used in conjunction with high performance MiG-23 and SU-22 fighters, and in coordination with heavy T-62 tanks, shifts the tactical balance in Angola. Savimbi's forces so far have been able to destroy some of these helicopters only by attacking them on the ground with mortars. Shoulder-fired anti-aircraft missiles would greatly improve UNITA's defensive

capability and would help to balance the tactical equation. Anti-tank weapons similarly would help UNITA.

Western European, black African, and Middle Eastern nations already aid UNITA. But they are hesitant to make their assistance known publicly for fear of provoking the Soviet Union. U.S. aid to UNITA would reassure them and encourage them to boost their backing. When the rainy season ends in March, the Soviets are sure to launch another offensive against UNITA. By then, the Reagan Administration will have demonstrated whether the Reagan Doctrine and its vow to help Freedom Fighters are simply empty rhetoric or a blueprint for American policy. Democrats and Republicans in Congress, in mounting numbers, want to turn that rhetoric into policy. Perplexingly, only the Administration--and particularly the State Department--stands in the way.

William W. Pascoe, III
Visiting Fellow