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ANGOLA AND THE U.S. : THE SHAPE OF A PRUDENT COMPROMISE

INTRODUCTION

The most successful anti-communist resistance movement in the world in the past decade has been the Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA) in Angola. And it, along with the Afghan freedom fighters, also is the most determined movement. UNITA has resisted efforts of the Soviet and Cuban backed regime in Luanda to crush it, now controls one third of Angola and has placed guerrillas in nearly every province. Nowhere can the Soviets, Cubans, and their Angolan wards feel safe.

Not since early 1976 has the United States provided any effective support for this resistance. The Reagan Administration policy has been to try to secure a pullout of Cuban troops from Angola as a part of an overall settlement of the issue of independence for Southwest Africa or, as it is widely called, Namibia. A reconciliation of the Angolan conflict could then proceed with its greatest obstacle--Cuban troops--already removed. However, the momentum of such negotiations should not be permitted to lead to an imprudent "compromise"--one that leaves the Cuban troops in place. This would undermine UNITA and remove the very pressure on the Luanda regime that pushes it toward negotiations. On the other hand, a settlement in Angola with the removal of Cuban troops would do more than any other action to facilitate a settlement of the Namibia issue and therefore should be a paramount U.S. aim.

BACKGROUND

After the 1974 coup in Portugal, the new regime in Lisbon declared that it would grant Angola independence. There were three contenders to succeed the Portuguese: the Soviet-backed Popular Movement for the Independence of Angola (MPLA) led by

Agostinho Neto, the anti-colonial National Front for the Liberation of Angola (FNLA) based mainly in Zaire and led by Holden Roberto, and UNITA whose leader Jonas Malheiro Savimbi had led a guerrilla movement inside Angola.

At Alvor in Portugal in January 1975, an agreement was reached among the parties calling for joint rule by the three contenders under a rotating presidency and a unified Angolan-Portuguese army to draft a constitution and hold elections prior to the end of Portuguese rule in November 1975.

There followed in early 1975 an intense political struggle for control among the MPLA, FNLA, and UNITA. Each feared a military takeover by its adversaries. The MPLA received Soviet financial aid, arms and Cuban military advisors. The FNLA from its base in Zaire trained a small army while trying to build political support, especially in the north. UNITA found fairly broad political backing throughout Angola. An Organization of African Unity (OAU) mission in August 1975 estimated that UNITA enjoyed the best prospect of electoral success.

After much wrangling and skirmishes among the followers of the three groups, the MPLA used its greater military strength around Luanda in the summer of 1975 to expel the FNLA from the capital. Having done that, the MPLA turned on UNITA and did the same to them. A civil war ensued. In early 1976, the MPLA, with massive Soviet and Cuban support, forced its two chief rivals to give up a conventional war and take to the bush. The MPLA ran up its flag in the colonial capital of Luanda and claimed to be the government of all Angola.

Backed by the USSR from its inception, the MPLA was assured of a preponderance of weapons by the Soviets and was provided with a Cuban army expeditionary force to do much of the fighting. The United States, Zaire and eventually South Africa supported the two other liberation movements--the UNITA and the FNLA--at first politically and later with arms when the political agreement made at Alvor, Portugal in January 1975 broke down.

On December 18, 1975, the United States Senate voted against further aid to the FNLA and UNITA. Support which the FNLA and UNITA enjoyed elsewhere quickly dissipated following this vote. But the MPLA regime in Luanda--even with 25,000-40,000 Cuban troops to stiffen its army--failed to pacify Angola. The MPLA could neither win the allegiance of the majority of Angolans nor subjugate them.

UNITA, led by Savimbi, retreated into the bush of southeast Angola, "the land of the end of the world." From there, with little outside support but drawing on a reservoir of popular sympathy, Savimbi re-formed the UNITA forces and began a guerrilla war. (It was nothing new for him; he had been fighting in the bush from 1964 to 1974.) Today, UNITA controls at least a third of Angola and vigorously contests another third, where its patrols appear to roam almost at will.

ANGOLA: BASIC FACTS

Angola is sparsely populated, with six million people over an area as large as Texas and New Mexico. It is ethnically divided among what are usually called tribes, but which have the characteristics of separate nationalities--people sharing a common language and customs and occupying a particular and readily defined area. Within each of these ethnic groups there are many individual clans. The differences between, say, Bakongo and Ovimbundu are of the same order as between Frenchmen and Germans.

Roughly from north to south, the principal ethnic groups are:

- 1) Bakongo--spill over into Zaire and form the tribal base of the FNLA (about 14 percent of the population);
- 2) Mbundu--occupy the region of the capital of Luanda and its hinterland. Luanda, on the coast, was the center of Portuguese colonization. The Mbundu region is the heartland of the MPLA (about 23 percent of the population);
- 3) Ovimbundu--occupy the food-producing central highlands. The Ovimbundu tend to be rural, and characteristically independent minded and traditionally inclined. They are the tribal base of UNITA (about 39 percent of the population);
- 4) the others who make up 24 percent: the Lunda-Quioco (Chokwe), the Nganguela, the Nhanaka-Humbe, the Cuanhama (Ovambo in South West Africa), and the Lunkhumbi.¹

This great diversity in strong-minded ethnic groups makes it highly unlikely that any single group successfully can dominate all the others to govern the whole country. This explains the difficulty the two movements, FNLA and UNITA, found in uniting in 1975 even when faced with a common enemy.

TRIBES, FACTIONS AND POLITICS

During Portuguese rule, Angolans were divided into readily distinguishable classes: Whites, mixed race or mestizos, black assimilados--Portuguese-speaking, educated and enjoying political rights as Portuguese--and black indigenas--the mass of the population, most of whom were illiterate, and with relatively rare exceptions, not politically conscious.

The Portuguese rule was extended through and benefitted the whites, mestizos and assimilados in that order. These groups tended to be located in urban areas especially along the coast and, in particular, around Luanda where the black population is predominately Mbundu. It is from the Mbundu tribe that a large portion of prominent assimilados was drawn.

¹ Mention should also be made of the Mayombe who are the prominent tribe in oil-rich Cabinda.

The attitudes of Angolans reflect their ethnic and socio-racial background. Example: leftist mestizos and assimilados from Luanda and other cities have largely favored the MPLA, as have blacks from the Mbundu ethnic group. This gave the MPLA a larger initial cadre of educated and trained personnel than other groups. Many of the MPLA leaders were educated by the Portuguese or in Eastern Europe. They have been active in the Portuguese Communist Party or related groups and trained in special schools in Communist countries. MPLA leaders tend to have taken Portuguese names.

The Bakongo have been the backbone of the now weakened FNLA. Their traditional tribal domains extend into Zaire--where many have kinsmen--and it is relatively easy for them to move to Zaire when their position in Angola becomes temporarily untenable.

Blacks of the Ovimbundu and other groups of the interior have favored UNITA, although recently they have been obtaining support from other tribes. These people have had less contact with the old Portuguese regime and tend to resist domination from the capital and by foreign troops.

THE MPLA REGIME

Seven years after taking power, the MPLA still needs the Cuban troops as its chief prop. In addition, East Germans run the security services and the Soviets provide armaments, oversee the Cubans, and ensure a communist education and indoctrination of the population. Economically, MPLA rule is a disaster. Food is scarce: Angola's once sizable food surpluses have vanished and needs are being met by costly imports. An accord on fishing with the USSR has meant that the catch from Angola's rich fishing grounds now goes to the USSR and fish has disappeared from Angolans' diet. Angola's economic life, employment and government services are all at catastrophically low levels. Sanitation has broken down and the regime is unable to provide elementary social services for the cities it controls. Where possible, the Angolan people have been coerced into submission, with political reeducation camps, reprisals and informers the order of the day.

That Moscow controls the MPLA has been clear from the start. Individual MPLA leaders at times have tried to assert independence, but were quickly forced into oblivion. A large faction, the "Active Revolt," composed mainly of leftists who sought to control their country's own destiny, was eventually crushed.

In 1977, a coup d'etat was mounted against Neto's government by blacks in the army. Initially successful, the insurgents seized army barracks and headquarters, the radio station, the telephone center, and key government offices. Some five hours later, after apparently having received a signal from Moscow and Havana, Cuban armor rolled out of its compound and crushed the revolt.

The MPLA leaders all know who is in charge and the consequences of diverging from what the Soviets want and can enforce through the Cuban army and the foreign technicians. The moderates are in no position to challenge the Soviet rule nor openly to call for steps such as the removal of Cuban troops. At best they can make secret contacts with UNITA and try to cover themselves in the event of an unlikely but not impossible Soviet pull-out.

UNITA: CURRENT POSITION

After the MPLA broke up the attempt at coalition government in mid-1975, Savimbi organized his followers for a military campaign which was scoring impressive successes until the Cuban troops arrived with their heavy weapons, and until American support ended. After that, Savimbi retreated into the isolated bush where he has created a unified, largely self-sufficient movement able to defend itself against a modern and well-equipped army.

UNITA now controls a large liberated area, with a capital in the bush, a well-functioning administration, and what visitors describe as the participation of the population in local and national party conferences and other political activity. Foreign visitors to the area--journalists and European parliamentarians among others--have remarked on the signs of genuine support for UNITA among the population.

This has been accomplished with the foreign aid remnants of the 1975-1976 period, some subsequent modest help from European and Arab countries and some limited access to South West Africa (Namibia) for diesel fuel, used military material and other essentials from the outside world.

SOUTH AFRICA AND UNITA

UNITA's Savimbi describes UNITA's relationship with South Africa as "uncomfortable." He points out that with no other country willing to help, UNITA has had to turn to Pretoria. UNITA's only overland access to the outside world has been through Namibia.² UNITA has needed this access to survive, just as Mozambique, Zimbabwe, and Zambia rely on South African railways, ports, and trade to survive economically. In fact, UNITA's economic relations with South Africa are far less in aggregate value than are those of any of these "front line" states. Indeed the MPLA regime which attacks UNITA as a "South African puppet" reveals in its own trade statistics that South Africa is its largest trading partner in Africa.

² UNITA depends on this access through Namibia for fuel for its 300 captured diesel trucks, medicine, spare parts, and old military material. Some of this it may get without charge. Other items are purchased on credit or out of the proceeds of a small (\$5 to \$10 million a year) trade in which UNITA exports wood and other products through Namibia.

Savimbi stresses that UNITA is not bound to South Africa politically, and that UNITA does not approve of apartheid. Western journalists who have gone into UNITA-held territory determined to expose the South African hand behind UNITA's success, have come back without finding any evidence of either a South African presence or significant opposition to UNITA control.

MILITARY SITUATION

For UNITA, 1983 saw its first major offensive--the anti-Cuban campaign. Battles were fought in nearly every province in Angola--in Cuanza Norte, Malanje, Moxico, Lunda, Cuanza Sul and even Luanda province. UNITA's military success in so many areas has had the important political consequence of transforming it into an all-Angola movement. And in late 1983, UNITA gained control of the Angolan side of the border with Zambia (the Cazombo Strip).

UNITA forces have developed skills in communications, military engineering, intelligence and logistics to move from earlier defensive operations. An officer corps has been developed with battle tested young company and battalion commanders.

The Cuban troops for the present have abandoned aggressive sweeps into UNITA controlled areas. Rather, they stay in well-defended garrisons and avoid battle, sending small advisory missions with the MPLA forces and providing air support. This practice may have to change as UNITA drives into more and more of Angola. With the arrival in 1983 of huge quantities of heavy weapons from the USSR, there will be pressure on the Cuban army to use them to crush UNITA.

In March 1983, UNITA captured 61 Czechoslovaks, later some seventeen Portuguese, Canadians and Brazilians, and in December a group of Brazilians, Japanese and Filipinos. All but 20 Czechoslovaks have been released. The MPLA has refused to exchange them for its UNITA prisoners. It has been UNITA policy to release such foreigners despite the aid their presence may have offered the MPLA, although policy on Soviet-bloc prisoners may be changing.³

As it expands, UNITA recruits new soldiers for its training schools, and as it moves out of the Ovimbundu tribal lands, it forges a national army. Moscow has reacted by sending the Cubans more tanks, artillery, missiles and helicopters.

UNITA POLITICAL GOALS

Savimbi always has sought a unified Angola--free of the domination of foreign troops--and the reconciliation of the diverse

³ Two Soviet pilots, captured in 1980 when their transport aircraft was shot down by UNITA employing a Communist-made SA7 anti-aircraft missile, were released in a trade for three Americans captured in 1976.

groups which make up the country. He probably does not expect to defeat the Cuban army and chase it out of Angola soon. But he is believed to feel that his war of attrition, the deteriorating state of affairs in MPLA-controlled areas, losses suffered by the Cuban soldiers, and desertions from the MPLA army will lead to the MPLA's collapse of will. Savimbi has said that eventually Moscow will be forced to choose between committing Soviet troops to help the MPLA and the Cubans or cutting off its aid to the Luanda regime.

Savimbi seems willing to involve other African nations in the process of removing the Cuban troops. He has welcomed the idea of substituting Nigerian for Cuban troops, if the MPLA regime insisted that such forces were needed to protect against a South African attack; the MPLA leaders oppose this. But if UNITA forces continue to be victorious and as Savimbi's willingness to compromise becomes better known, there should be greater acceptance of Savimbi in Africa, Western Europe and North America. One compromise that seems a key plank in his platform is to include the Mbundu people in important government positions.

ANGOLA AND THE NAMIBIA NEGOTIATIONS

The U.S. skillfully has promoted the cooperation of South Africa and the MPLA, leading in spring 1984 to a disengagement of their forces in Angola and the restraint of attacks into Namibia from Angola by the South West Africa People's Organization (SWAPO), the terrorist group that has been fighting for Namibian independence. A joint South African-MPLA commission has begun to oversee the South African withdrawal from southern Angola. This is to be followed by the application of U.N. Security Council Resolution 435/78 which calls for the introduction of a U.N. military force to patrol the Namibia-Angola border, the withdrawal of South African troops from Namibia, and U.N. supervised elections in Namibia. But the U.S. and South Africa will only proceed on the implementation of this resolution when a satisfactory agreement is reached concerning the withdrawal of Cuban forces from Angola.

The problem is that the Soviets retain sufficient power in Angola to frustrate this American effort. They may permit some accommodating rhetoric by the MPLA, such as a promise to ask the Cuban troops to withdraw. (An earlier promise by Fidel Castro to withdraw 200 Cuban troops per week saw the Cuban expeditionary force actually reinforced in the process.) If Moscow will make any concrete concession it surely only will be under relentless military pressure from UNITA. If that pressure should cease, the MPLA could return to business as usual.

For over 20 years the Soviets have worked to put and keep the MPLA in power. They were not deterred in 1975 by the damage their intervention in Angola might do to East-West detente. They have not yet suffered economic, material or human casualties of

great magnitude. They cannot be expected to abandon their position in Angola as long as they see some hope that their MPLA clients will retain total power. The MPLA regime is faltering, but there are no present signs that the Soviets will cut and run.

AMERICAN OIL COMPANIES IN ANGOLA

One reason the Soviets can afford to hold on is economic. The cost of the Cuban army of occupation and the East European technicians is more than covered by the revenue from the largely American-managed oil companies,⁴ which reached \$1.7 billion in 1983, amounting to 90 percent of exports.⁵ Even though the MPLA has mismanaged its agriculture, fishing and non-mineral resources, it can pay the USSR, Cuba, East Germany and others with much needed hard currency because of oil revenues.

U.S. POLICY IN ANGOLA

In 1975, Washington tried to promote a political settlement in Angola based on the Alvor Agreement of early that year. When that failed--the Soviets having rushed arms to the MPLA--the U.S. attempted to arm the two anti-Communist factions--UNITA and FNLA. This was cut off by Congress in late 1975 and early 1976. The following June, Congress passed the so-called Clark Amendment (named after Senator Dick Clark, the Iowa Democrat) which provided that Congress must approve any American aid which directly or even indirectly might improve a nation or group's ability to fight in Angola. The Clark Amendment was revised somewhat in the International Security and Development Cooperation Act of 1980, but it retains its essential character. In effect, this law--which is constitutionally questionable--tightly tied the President's hands in developing and pursuing U.S. policy toward southern Africa.

When the Reagan Administration came to power, it tried to repeal the Clark Amendment. The Senate accepted a compromise short of outright repeal which was blocked in the House.

⁴ Several foreign oil companies, including American ones, are present. Gulf Oil remains the largest. The position of the Gulf Oil Corporation is quite clear. Gulf developed and exploited the Cabinda field when Angola was Portuguese. Now Cabinda, an enclave north of Angola proper, is controlled by the MPLA and the offshore oil wells are for now out of UNITA's reach--in effect protected by Cuban troops. The MPLA has quite understandably placed no obstacles in Gulf's way. Gulf could not--by its own unilateral action--upset Angola's oil sales. If Gulf pulled out because of scruples about contributing to the Communist hold on Angola, another operator would move in. For three months ending September 30, 1983, Gulf produced an average of 57,000 barrels per day from its 49 percent share of the Cabinda field. The other 51 percent belongs to the MPLA's Sonangol Company. This production compares with 253,000 barrels per day from Gulf's production in the United States.

⁵ Agence France Press, Paris, March 22, 1984.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

The MPLA leadership says that it needs Cuban troops to protect Angola from South Africa. In truth, the MPLA hard core leaders need the Cuban troops to keep themselves in power--and for protection against more nationalistic elements within the MPLA itself; they remember how Agostinho Neto was saved by Cuban troops after he was briefly deposed in 1977.

Thus, there is little likelihood that the present MPLA leadership will ask the Cuban troops to leave. Further, there is no foreseeable way they could induce the Cuban troops to leave even if they were to so ask; and there is slight chance that South Africa will hand over Namibia to SWAPO as long as Cuban troops--that expression of Soviet power--remain in Angola.

The U.S. can offer some carrots to the MPLA regime such as the prospect of diplomatic recognition; the suggestion of future American aid; and the expectation of American political support toward some greater independence of Luanda from foreign rule. However, it would be a mistake to give up such carrots, and thereby undermine UNITA, if the Cuban troops do not leave.

Repeal of the Clark Amendment would be a strong stick to accompany the carrots. To black nationalist elements of the MPLA somewhat estranged from, but intimidated by, the Soviets and Cubans, repeal may signal a further rise in UNITA's fortunes and the need to seek secret accommodation with UNITA for their future safety. Included in this group would be elements of the thoroughly demoralized MPLA army.

Similarly, greater public attention to UNITA--by African, European and North American governments and private groups--may deter a potential Cuban-led counter-offensive against UNITA that would make a future reconciliation even more difficult. Moreover, both the U.S. and South Africa should make it clear to Luanda that any major offensive against UNITA would undermine confidence in the existing agreement that provides for the South African withdrawal from Angola.

The goal of a satisfactory resolution in the Namibia question remains of tremendous importance to the U.S. But the essential pre-conditions for achieving this goal are: the restoration of peace in Angola; a reconciliation of its people; and most important, the removal of foreign troops from Angola.

CONCLUSION

Washington must confront the likelihood that the MPLA is not negotiating in good faith. It is not unusual for a faltering regime to enter into negotiations to play for time, to weaken an adversary, and to curry the favor of the potential allies of that adversary. The U.S. should not let such negotiations handcuff it in what it does and says about southern Africa. The U.S. should:

- Re-state its policy of firmly supporting the rights of the Angolan people to choose their own regime in peace.
- Call for the reconciliation of the contending factions in Angola and for the establishment of a government free of foreign troops. Any agreement for the withdrawal of troops must be verifiable.
- Draw the world's attention to the current repression of Angolans.
- Encourage expanded humanitarian aid for Angola, including relief supplies to the parts of Angola controlled by UNITA. The U.S. should ask UNITA's neighbors to facilitate the movement of such supplies from Africa, Europe, and America. Such aid becomes more urgent as the Soviets and Cubans prepare more devastating retaliation for UNITA's successes.
- Encourage missions of prominent Africans, Europeans and Americans to Jamba, the provincial capital of UNITA in south-east Angola, to confer with Savimbi regarding humanitarian assistance to the area as well as to the future of southern Africa. This would balance the many official missions to Luanda. Consulting with Savimbi might elicit some new ideas about how to bring peace to Angola.
- Repeal the Clark Amendment. A simple vote to remove the Clark Amendment would remove an important psychological defense now enjoyed by those responsible for the most repressive neo-colonial regime in Africa. It would encourage other countries to re-examine their own positions.
- Provide scholarships for educating UNITA's youth, as a step toward filling future needs for doctors, teachers, engineers and administrators.

These are modest steps. But they would have an immediate impact on Africa and the world. They would serve notice that the U.S. opposes the subjugation of an African people by foreign troops and will cooperate with those who are sympathetic to that view and who seek the end of such neo-colonialism in Africa. Such steps would impress those who seek a truly conciliatory and peaceful solution of the issues of Angola and Namibia.

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