

ANGOLA'S FREEDOM FIGHTERS: WHY THEY MERIT U.S. AID

As Jonas Savimbi, President of the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA), visits Washington this week for the first time since the United States resumed U.S. military assistance to his freedom fighters two years ago, events are moving on several fronts that will affect the future of his struggle:

◆◆ Four-party negotiations between the communist Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA) regime of Angola, their Cuban patrons, South Africa, and the U.S. have begun to explore a negotiated solution to the conflicts in Angola and Namibia.

◆◆ At last month's Moscow summit, U.S. and Soviet officials agreed to set next September 29 as the deadline for the negotiators to reach agreement on a southern African deal.

◆◆ Cuban leader Fidel Castro has reinforced his contingent of combat forces in Angola by 12,000 since last January, bringing the total to an estimated 50,000. Ominously, they have been deployed within artillery range of the Angolan-Namibian border.

Turning the Tables. Amid this diplomatic and military maneuvering, Savimbi brings a simple message of gratitude and hope to Washington: gratitude for U.S. help and hope that, with continued help, the war will end in true peace. With U.S. assistance, estimated at \$30 million over the past two years, UNITA has been able to turn the tables in the 13-year war against the MPLA and its Soviet and Cuban patrons. U.S.-supplied *Stinger* anti-aircraft and *TOW* anti-tank missiles have blunted the effectiveness of the MPLA's vast arsenal of sophisticated combat aircraft and heavy tanks, allowing UNITA to take the offensive against MPLA garrisons in the northern provinces of Angola. It is UNITA's increasing military successes that have forced the MPLA and the Cubans to the negotiating table. Today Savimbi's forces control 40 percent of Angola, and, in effect, have established a government in the liberated zone.

In desperation, Castro has sent reinforcements to southwestern Angola. This has heightened U.S. and South African concerns over the MPLA's sincerity in the discussions, and could be designed to provoke a South African military response. Cuban forces have patrolled so close to the Namibian border that they have clashed with South African units: a battle earlier this week left hundreds of Cubans, Angolans, and South Africans dead.

Communist Concession. While Savimbi was arriving in Washington, U.S. diplomats led by Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs Chester Crocker were returning from the latest round of the four-party discussions, held in Cairo on June 24 and 25. Prior to his departure for Egypt, Crocker announced that discussions with MPLA representatives in Washington had yielded a major concession: the Angolan communists had agreed to drop their demand that the U.S. terminate its assistance to UNITA. But serious doubts still remain about the MPLA's intent in these negotiations. Do they really seek a negotiated peace for Angola and independence for Namibia, or are the discussions a stalling tactic until they can reinforce their defenses? Two considerations seem to indicate that, contrary to the hopes of U.S. diplomats, the MPLA is not serious about the talks.

First, the timing is suspect. With a U.S. presidential election less than five months away, why would the MPLA bargain in good faith? They know that Michael Dukakis, the Democratic Party's presumptive standard-bearer, has promised that, if elected, he will terminate U.S. aid to UNITA. Why should the MPLA seek a deal now, when they would have to give up something of value, when they stand at least an even chance of a new Administration ending aid to UNITA unilaterally? The MPLA understands, moreover, the political embarrassment for the Reagan Administration — and for Vice President George Bush — that would come with failed negotiations. There likely would be a strong temptation within the State Department as the deadline approached to accept a flawed deal in the hope it would boost the Administration's diplomatic prestige. Second, and perhaps more important, UNITA is not represented in the discussions. No matter what conclusions are reached in the four-party negotiations, true peace will elude Angola until the MPLA reaches an accord with UNITA. Contrary to MPLA propaganda, UNITA is no one's "puppet." UNITA has fought for true independence for Angola for over two decades, first against the Portuguese Empire, and then against the Soviet Empire. UNITA will lay down its arms when it decides that it is in its interests to do so. Savimbi long ago announced his conditions: removal of all foreign forces and the creation of a coalition government to hold free elections under international supervision.

Testing Sincerity. U.S. negotiators should inject these demands into the discussions. The Reagan Administration should insist that a UNITA delegation be invited to the negotiations; this should be a test of the MPLA's sincerity. Washington then should test Moscow's claims of "new thinking" in its foreign policy by pressing the Kremlin to use its influence with its Angolan clients to force the MPLA to deal with UNITA. The U.S. also should demand that Moscow use its influence with its Cuban clients to remove the additional 12,000 Cuban soldiers from Angola. The Administration, moreover, should recognize the dangers of an artificial deadline and reject the agreed upon September 29 date.

Above all, Washington must remember what forced the MPLA and Cuba to the negotiating table. U.S. military assistance to UNITA should continue until all Cubans have withdrawn from Angola and a coalition government has been formed to hold free elections. Until that occurs, UNITA will continue to fight for true freedom in Angola, and any negotiations will be a waste of time.

William Pascoe
Policy Analyst

For further information:

Fred Bridgland, *Jonas Savimbi: A Key to Africa* (New York: Paragon House, 1986).

William Pascoe, "In Southern Africa, the State Department Bets Against the Reagan Doctrine," Heritage Foundation *Background* No. 633, February 12, 1988.