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Vietnam Again?

U.S. Intervention in Angola Could Resurrect Bitterness

By George M. Houser

Within the last few weeks big power intervention in Angola has become front page news. A rationale for American intervention has developed, some reasons stated clearly and some implied. They may be summarized as follows:

1. The Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA) has a Marxist ideology and its possible control will create a Communist Angola.
2. The Soviet Union is giving overwhelming assistance to the MPLA and will "take over" Angola, thus upsetting the balance of power in Africa.
3. Outside interference in the Angolan struggle should end, but if others are there the U.S. must be too.
4. United States interests in Angola and Southern Africa must be protected.
5. The U.S. must do what it can to safeguard Angolan self-determination.

As one who is opposed to U.S. intervention in Angola, I should like to comment briefly on these points.

Very little distinction is made in American parlance between "communism" and "socialism". There is no African government that calls itself "communist", but there are many striving to build a socialist economy. Americans must understand that Africa does not really have an option between "capitalism" and "socialism". The average African lives

on a subsistence level. The few individuals in some African countries who have accumulated private capital are the exception rather than the rule, and they have been able to accumulate their own private capital only through relationship with foreign companies. Most African states do not want their economies controlled by foreign concerns.

During the long years of the liberation struggle in Portugal's African colonies, the major liberation movements were very clear on their ideological and political independence. They did not wish to be labeled as "Communist" or "Marxist", even if they rejected capitalism as impossible. Amilcar Cabral, the founder and leader of the African Party for Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde (PAIGG), (unfortunately assassinated in 1973) spoke most clearly on this point in 1971. He said, "We believe that a struggle like ours is impossible without ideology. But what kind of ideology? Our desire to develop our country with social justice and power in the hands of the people is our ideological basis. I am a freedom fighter in my country. You must judge from what I do in practice. If you decide that it's Marxism, tell everyone that it is Marxism. If you decide it's not Marxism, tell everyone it's not Marxism. But the labels are your affair; we don't like these kinds of labels".

An interview with Dr. Agostinho Neto, president of the MPLA, appeared in the United Methodist Magazine Motive in February, 1971. Neto said, "Our organization is not Communist and never has been... Our policies are not subordinated to socialist countries, to their practical policies, to their orientation or daily ideology... Our movement defines its external policies as those of an independent movement, a movement not tied to, or subordinated to, the policies of another country."

In an article in the Christian Science Monitor of Dec. 2, 1975, Dana Adams Schmidt wrote from Angola that in the eyes of most of the observers there "Dr Neto... is more an African nationalist than a 'Marxist'".

One can get the best insight into the ideology of the MPLA through its practical policies in liberated areas under its control in Angola during the long struggle against Portuguese domination. People's stores were organized where the peasants could trade

their products through a system of barter for goods such as shoes, blankets, salt and soap which were given to them by friendly countries and organizations overseas. On the village level, the people farmed land collectively in part and for themselves in part. There was both communal and private land. MPLA reflected a non-racialism and a non-tribalism. The leadership made clear that MPLA had some good friends in predominantly white countries and some enemies in black countries. The equality of women was emphasized.

The MPLA leadership is practical. When I talked with MPLA leaders in Angola in March, 1975 and raised the question about their relationship with the Gulf Oil Company, for example, they said they were getting along all right. The main objective of newly independent governments is not to drive out foreign business nor to end all individual ownership of business enterprises.

FOREIGN INTERVENTION NOT NEW

Many U.S. Government spokesmen seem to assume that because the MPLA has been receiving assistance from the Soviet Union, unrestricted Soviet control in an MPLA-led Angola will follow. The record of Soviet experiences in Africa would dispute this. For many years the Soviet Union was giving significant help to Egypt for example. In 1972, some 20,000 Soviet military and civilian advisers were expelled from Egypt by Sadat. The military aid which the Soviet Union had been giving to President Amin in Uganda did not deter Uganda from virtually ending diplomatic relations last November precisely because of differences on the Angola issue. Likewise, the fact that in years past the Soviet Union has given great assistance to Algeria, to the Republic of Guinea, and to Ghana has not led to "take-overs".

According to David Ottaway, writing in the Washington Post on Dec. 3, Mozambique has recently turned down a request by the Soviet Union for the use of Mozambique ports

for Soviet warships, this despite the fact that Mozambique received Soviet aid during the long years of their liberation struggle. It is an insult to an African country to think that it will allow any foreign government to come in and give it direction. It is a gross distortion to equate Soviet aid with Soviet control.

The Soviet involvement in the Angolan economy is almost non-existent. In a speech over Tanzania radio Dr. Neto said: "Who exploits the iron ore of Angola? The Germans! Who exploits the petroleum? The Americans and the Belgians! And to whom does the Benguella Railway belong? The English! Who owns the Diamond Company? The Americans, the Belgians, the French and the English. The Angolan people must have the riches of our country."

Foreign involvement in the struggle for Angola is not new. The active struggle for independence goes back to 1961 and outside involvement dates from at least then. The MPLA received help from the Soviet Union and from other eastern European countries who sympathized with the liberation struggle. It also has received assistance from Scandinavian countries, particularly of a humanitarian sort, and from various African countries. Some African, European and Asian countries aided the Front to the National Liberation of Angola (FNLA) too. Apparently the U.S. gave covert support to the FNLA from early 1962 until at least 1969 and then reactivated this assistance again in 1974. Most American aid has gone through the government of Zaire.

The really critical role of foreign assistance came in 1975. This aid has escalated as the fighting between the three liberation movements for control became more intense. Secretary of State Kissinger has said that the U.S. has given military assistance to the two allied movements -- FNLA and the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA) -- only because the Soviet Union has been aiding the MPLA. Yet the Ford Administration's initial authorization for substantial Central Intelligence Agency financial operations inside Angola came in January 1975, more than two months before the first significant Soviet build-up.

Much attention has been given to the presence of Cuban troops in Angola. Yet it must be remembered that the build-up of Cuban forces began in Angola in November after white mercenary troops and South African regular army columns crossed into southern Angola from Namibia.

The Chinese have been much less involved. For approximately a two-year period (1973-75) they had military advisers in Zaire training FNLA troops. The Peking government announced in December that it was withdrawing from its involvement in Angola.

The point is that outside interference and intervention is a fact. The U.S. has been a part of it and according to all the evidence available from public statements this intervention is on the increase.

Angola is potentially one of the richest countries in Africa. Yet U.S. economic interests are not great in Angola. There are only about 25 American corporations there and most of them are on a small scale. The total value of fixed U.S. investment is small, under \$70 million outside of Gulf Oil interests in Cabinda.

As far as strategic interests are concerned, according to National Security Study Memorandum 39, written under Kissinger's direction in 1970, it was argued that the "interests" were not "vital".

U.S.- SOUTH AFRICA ALLIANCE

It may be embarrassing to Washington leaders that the U.S. is now in practical alliance with South Africa in the military effort to stop the MPLA. South Africa fears that an MPLA victory would threaten its continued illegal hold on Namibia with the presence of another unfriendly neighbor— Mozambique in the east and Angola in the west. The South African government has long tried to achieve joint action with the Western alliance in a campaign to "stop the spread of communism" in Africa. South Africa sees its opportunity in the Angolan conflict. The apparent alliance which UNITA and the FNLA

have with the white mercenaries based in Namibia and South Africa is doing irreparable damage to the possibility of support for them from the rest of Africa. U.S. relations with most of Africa can only suffer as a result of a working alliance with South Africa.

United States spokesmen have said that their aim is to protect the right of the self-determination of the Angolan people. The seriousness of this objective is suspect. Where was the U.S. during the long years of the liberation struggle? Instructions given to U.S. ambassadors in Africa were to have no contacts with liberation movements in the Portuguese colonies. When representatives of these movements occasionally visited the United States or the United Nations, they never had open contacts with American governmental leaders. The U.S. was militarily allied with Portugal. Military equipment was sent through NATO to Portugal. Government leaders apparently feared that American bases on the Azores would be threatened if any support was given to the liberation struggle. U.S. policy in Angola is not basically aimed at Angola but at the Soviet Union.

Secretary of State Kissinger dismisses the analogy of the Angolan conflict with Vietnam. Yet there are startling parallels. American involvement in Vietnam began on a small scale with contributions of money and material. Only gradually were men committed first as advisers, then gradually as fighting men. American money, supplies, and mercenaries are already in Angola. The U.S. government stated that its purpose in Vietnam was to preserve the freedom of the people and to stop communism. These statements are parallels with Angola.

If U.S. interference in Angola grows, the division which was tearing the U.S. apart over the Vietnam issue will be resurrected.

Methodist work began in Africa with the arrival of Melville Beveridge Cox in Liberia in 1833. In 1885, 45 missionaries left the United States and opened work at six other stations in Africa, five of them in Angola. Because of the present conflict, no United Methodist missionaries are there now, but under the leadership of Bishop Emilio de Carvalho, the Methodist Church of Angola is one of the most dynamic institutions in that country. Present-day Methodist work is divided between two major regions: Luanda and Malange. There are approximately 40,000 full and preparatory members served by more than 130 ordained and supply pastors.

The Rev. George M. Houser, a United Methodist minister, is founder and executive director of the American Committee on Africa, one of the nation's foremost organizations specializing in African affairs.

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