

Angola News Summary

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UNITED STATES AND ANGOLA
(excerpted from Southern Africa magazine, April 1976)

Since the House of Representatives voted overwhelmingly to cut off funds for CIA intervention in Angola on January 27, the MPLA victory has reduced the immediate significance of US policy toward the Angolan struggle. Nonetheless, the denouement of the Washington debate on Angolan policy has revealed some prominent trends in the reform of US policy toward southern Africa and the Third World, provoked by its failure in Angola.

Secretary of State Kissinger, in his January 29 testimony to the Senate and in a press conference February 13, continued to present the Soviet Union and Cuba as the "culprits" in Angola - despite well-established facts to the contrary. "Our principal objective has been to respond to an unprecedented application of Soviet power achieved in part through the expeditionary force of a client state." In Kissinger's version, the Soviet Union has violated detente, and if the US fails to counter such violations with force, it will only invite more of the same.

Kissinger's second point has been that the US was doing the Africans a favor: that Zaire and Zambia, among other African states, wanted the US to intervene and that the US had intervened on behalf of the "majority" in Angola - a simplistic and much exaggerated claim. One corollary of this fallacy has been more explicit expression of the "obligation" to aid and support "moderate" African states - like long-time client Zaire and new found ally Zambia. Little has been said of the US's other "African" friend, South Africa, though the implications of the US emphasis on "stability" in southern Africa are clear.

The prospect for an overt aid request to Congress by the Administration had faded by mid-February in light of the crumbling position of the US Angolan allies, but both houses of Congress had to deal with previously introduced legislation which would establish procedures for considering such overt aid. The vehicles were amendments to the military aid bill. The full Senate adopted a provision giving Congress an option to veto any request for overt aid. The House International Relations Committee moved February 17 to adopt a stronger position, requiring specific Congressional authorization for further aid. The full House is expected to adopt the stronger, specific-authorization language. Which version prevails in the House-Senate conference may depend not on Angola but on the precedent which Congress wishes to set for dealing with the Angolas of the future.

The overt aid amendment represented the high-water mark for the House International Relations Committee in its deliberations over Angola. The same day, February 17, an amendment cutting the Administration's vastly increased military aid proposal for Zaire back to last year's level was withdrawn. (A floor amendment to this effect may still

be offered). Most of the Committee was probably more supportive of the Zaire aid package after the US defeat in Angola as a way of "preventing another Angola." The following day, moderate Republican Paul Findley of Illinois introduced another amendment condemning Soviet and Cuban intervention in Angola as "completely inconsistent with any reasonably defined policy of detente." Findley cited "Russian intervention in Portugal, or the Middle East; now Angola, perhaps next Zambia. The trend is unsettling and argues in favor of increasingly stern US responses..." Kissinger could not have put it better. The Committee adopted it unanimously.

Such behavior may seem surprising in light of the huge votes in both houses prohibiting covert intervention in Angola. Some scratching beneath the surface, however, can put these apparently conflicting attitudes in proper perspective.

First, the large negative votes in Congress were cast in opposition to the Administration's specific conduct in the Angolan case - the decisions taken in secret, by the Executive alone, to involve the US heavily in a major civil war, over the objections of Administration Africa experts and on the side of weak and poorly organized allies. When those allies began to collapse and the US role was increasingly exposed, Congress voted in revulsion against the spectre of a second Vietnam. Many members voted against the style of the operation, that is, Executive War; they did not necessarily reject the policy of support for one of the factions.

Second, many members felt that the US must pursue its "interests" in Africa in a more sophisticated and subtle way. This strategy was summed up by Representative Preyer of North Carolina, recently returned from Africa, who explained his vote to cut off CIA funds by the following analysis:

"The basic problem we face in Africa is how to bring home the dangers of Russian imperialism to the uncommitted African nations without appearing to act like an imperialist power. Our credibility in Africa depends on our image as a friendly and disinterested power. We must avoid any appearance of imperialism and any appearance of racism. In my judgement, the present United States approach in Angola is the wrong way to do this, while Kenya points toward the right way to do it." (emphasis added)

Third, some members of Congress seemed to feel embarrassed at the speed with which MPLA drove to victory after the Congressional cut-off of funds. In short, they seemed to be put on the defensive by President Ford's statement that they "lost their guts" and similar charges.

While there is emerging general agreement between Congress and the Executive, that the Angola scenario must not be repeated, there is some difference over how to prevent it.

One strategy following from Representative Preyer's rationale is to foster the development and strength of "moderate" black states in the region - in other words, as non-revolutionary and as independent

of the Soviet Union as possible. The leaders of Zambia and Zaire will be the chief beneficiaries of this approach. Their emissaries have already combed the Hill, seeking and finding much support for aid to bolster these regimes now that the "Marxist contagion" is allegedly threatening them from Angola. Kissinger has indicated that "the Administration almost certainly will approach Congress for a considerable increase of arms aid to other African countries especially Zaire and Zambia." (Washington Star, Feb. 19, 1976)

A variation on this approach, espoused by several on the "left" in Congress, is a new "realism" in dealing with liberation movements. Thus, the US should not have isolated MPLA as the enemy, which only increased its "radicalism" and reliance on the Soviets. Prominent spokesmen for this approach have been Senators John Tunney and Dick Clark. Tunney sent an aide to Luanda in January to confer with MPLA and serve as go-between for MPLA and the State Department. Clark will hold hearings this month on US relations with the liberation movements. So far, however, this strategy of improving relations with liberation movements has not been tied to cutting US support to their oppressors in power.

The logical extension of communication with the MPLA advocated by Tunney and Clark and others is US diplomatic recognition for the People's Republic of Angola under the MPLA. Although the State Department has permitted Gulf and Boeing to resume their business dealings with Luanda, Ford and Kissinger have indicated they will not budge on recognition until the Cubans leave and MPLA is recognized by Zaire and Zambia. However, this "realistic" approach is reflected by the Administration's recent statements on Rhodesia. The US says it is now putting its full weight behind the negotiations between Smith and Nkomo, the latter now representing a moderate position. This recent interest is in marked contrast to the lethargy shown by the Administration last fall, when it had an opportunity to pressure Smith to negotiate through restoration of full economic sanctions against his illegal regime.

Another and more ominous development in the wake of Angola is the rush by conservatives to the side of the defeated South African regime. At least 28 Senators have written a letter to President Ford urging a general re-evaluation of US policy towards South Africa, to include a relaxation of trade restrictions and a lifting of the arms embargo. The Administration, pressed not only by Senators but by industries who would benefit from a new stance towards the PRA, is currently considering restoring full Export-Import Bank facilities for South Africa.

NEWS FLASHES

Zimbabwe continues to move toward large scale armed conflict. Mozambique President Samora Machel has called his country "the victim of racist aggression" by the Rhodesian government. In recent weeks Mozambican villages have been bombed, invaded, and some virtually destroyed by Rhodesian forces. At least four Mozambicans have been killed and several wounded. The United Nations has scheduled a meeting on the conflict between Mozambique and Rhodesia for next week. Mozambican Foreign Minister Joaquim Chissano will attend the session.

Gulf Oil Corp. recently announced that it has given the People's Republic of Angola \$102 million in royalties that had been held in escrow since last December. Gulf is also negotiating with the PRA for resumption of oil drilling under new arrangements.

CUBAN SOLIDARITY WITH ANGOLA

The MPLA Solidarity Committee representative to the Havana Conference on Angola reports that the experience of being in Cuba enabled her to understand more fully the Cuban support for Angola. Walking along the streets of Havana wearing an MPLA Solidarity button, she says she was often stopped and asked where the button came from. When the Cubans learned she was from the United States and the button was made by the MPLA Solidarity Committee in New York City, they would vigorously shake her hand and warmly congratulate her. Then they would invariably say that their brother or sister or some relative was fighting in Angola and how proud they were that a member of their family was participating so directly in support for Angola.

Cuban support for Angola is demonstrated in many very concrete ways. For example, people living in a large new housing complex, Alamar, just outside Havana called a meeting to discuss what they could do to support Angola. They decided to send volunteers to help construct housing there similar to their own. In the national newspaper, Granma, recent headlines read that more than 3,000 Cuban students would spend their school vacation doing agricultural work in the interior of Angola. Before the start of an evening performance of the National Folkloric Theatre in Havana, it was announced that the performance that night was being dedicated to the struggle of the Angolan people.

Cuban support for the Angolan people's struggle for national independence goes back more than a decade. During the armed struggle against Portuguese colonialism, MPLA cadre received medical and military training and assistance from the Cubans. One of the Angolan delegates to the Havana Conference, Olga Lima, now Director of Political Affairs in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of Angola, had spent three years studying politics in Cuba. During the armed struggle she served as a MPLA militant on the eastern front.

Cuban-Angolan relations go back centuries. As Fidel reminded the Cuban people in a speech last December, Cuba is not only a Latin American country, it is a Latin-African one with the blood of Africa flowing abundantly in the veins of Cuba's 9 million people. (See AWNS Jan, 22, 1976).

Cuban participation in the recent drive by the People's Republic of Angola to expel South African, Zaire and other mercenary troops from their country is best understood as a logical extension of this long relationship of solidarity between the two peoples and the two countries. That relationship is clearly described in posters currently in windows and on posterboards throughout Havana which show Cubans fighting in Angola. Underneath is written the caption "in compliance with our internationalist duty."

NOTICE

The next Angola News Summary will be in two weeks. By that time we hope to have developed specific plans for implementing goals for supporting the People's Republic of Angola established at the Havana Conference.

How people's power works in Angola

By WILFRED BURCHETT
Guardian staff correspondent

Luanda, Angola

What kind of government rules in Angola?

Now that the majority of the world's governments have recognized the People's Republic of Angola (PRA) and the patriotic soldiers of the MPLA have chased the neocolonialists to the country's fringe areas, let's take a look at how the government is structured and the political administration operates.

The PRA was established by President Agostinho Neto when Portugal withdrew from its 500-year colony Nov. 11. At the same time, a constitution was declared for the new republic.

The constitution was expanded by Decree Law No. 1, approved in February by the ruling Council of the Revolution. This decree, dealing with "people's power," was inspired by article three of the constitution, which states: "The masses shall be guaranteed broad, effective participation in the exercise of political power through the consolidation, expansion and development of the organizational forms of people's power."

The new decree provides for a pyramid-shaped structure, with each level electing the next higher one, up to the level of provincial committees. In the rural area, the process starts with Village People's Assemblies which elect Village People's Committees; the latter electing Commune (or county) Committees which in turn elect District Committees which elect the committee to govern the country's seven provinces. In the urban areas, the basic unit is the Barrio (neighborhood) Committee which merges with the Village Committees at the Commune level. One of the aims is to provide the maximum of decentralization of political and economic power.

The supreme body at the top is to be the People's Assembly, but its composition and the manner of its election will be decided only after the government controls the entire country. In the meantime, the top governing body is the Council of the Revolution composed of all members of the Political Bureau of the MPLA (Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola), the FAPLA (People's Armed Forces for the Liberation of Angola), members of the government appointed by the MPLA, the provincial commissioners and the chiefs of staff and political officers of the five military fronts, about 40 in all.

In a preamble to Decree Law No. 1, the origins of the notion of "people's power" are explained as follows: "In case of popular insurrection; of profound crises in which the bourgeoisie loses the monopoly of the exercise of political power; or during a protracted people's war—conditions exist for the appearance of people's power.

"In such historic moments, people's power emerges in certain regions, or in places of work and exists parallel to bourgeois power, being in constant struggle with the latter...."

"Under such conditions, the class struggle sharpens and two developments are possible. Either the organs through which the people exercise power develop and spread out—consolidating themselves throughout the country, destroying the political order of the exploiters and creating conditions for setting up a people's democratic state—or the people's organs are crushed and the exploiting classes continue to exercise their dictatorship...."

In the specific case of Angola, states the preamble, the launching of armed struggle on Feb. 4, 1961, enabled the MPLA to

immediately control large regions in which "the people, armed and organized, held power and exercised it through their own organs...."

The provisions of the Decree Law are thus aimed at institutionalizing on a countrywide basis practices developed during the armed struggle. On paper at least, a profoundly democratic system is envisaged which provides for maximum initiative from the grassroots level in all matters of public life.

The lowest level, the Village (or neighborhood) People's Assembly is comprised of the entire population but with voting rights for those 18 and more years old. The Assembly elects a committee of five to 10 members and three "substitutes" for one year. Mandates can be revoked at any time a majority decide at the monthly assembly meetings. Special meetings can also be called. The 18 points which fall within the "functions and competencies" of the Village People's Committee include such matters as: "To fight against obscurantism, tribalism, regionalism and racism through public discussion of any conflicts among the people..." and "to struggle against alcoholism, prostitution, vagrancy, absenteeism from work and other antisocial behavior."

As one moves up the ladder of the People's Committees, their functions and responsibilities obviously become more important. At the *conselho* (district) level, these included: "participation in drawing up and supervising the execution of the provincial plan and budget" and "to take decisions on all affairs of special interest to the district, notably the organization of production and distribution of production, the creation of strategic reserves of essential goods... to exercise control over the functioning of public enterprises, services and organizations" and to "resolve any conflicts which emerge between the Commune Committees within the district...."

The Provincial People's Committee—the highest elected body in the country—had very wide and virtually autonomous powers. Its decisions would be considered ratified if they were not contested by the Provincial People's Assembly within 15 days. One of the major functions at the provincial level is to draw up economic plans and a budget to be integrated into the national plan and state budget.

Coordination of state policy and application of the MPLA line was ensured by the appointment from the Administration of Internal Affairs of commissioners—whose functions at every level were also clearly defined in the decree—from commune up to provincial level. Their activities and behavior are also to be subject to sharp scrutiny by the local committees, which could recommend the removal of the commissioners or any other public functionaries if their performance was considered inadequate.

In swearing in the first six of seven Temporary Provincial Commissioners Feb. 13, President Neto reminded them that "power belongs to the people" and he urged them, above all, "to fight against tribalism, regionalism and racism."

What is envisaged adds up to an original form of people's participation in the decision-making processes at the levels at which these affect their own existence, cutting right across tribal boundaries and prejudices. If it works, it will enormously simplify the tasks of administration, a major problem here because of the departure of about 90% of the Portuguese who held a virtual monopoly in all branches of administration.

Civilians were slaughtered in Angola retreat

BARELY three weeks after the fall of the FNLA-UNITA former capital of Huambo, life in central and southern Angola—except in the 50-mile wide strip still occupied by South Africa's army—is gradually returning to normal.

For two weeks I have travelled 2,000 miles south of the Queve River driving my own car in complete security. I interviewed dozens of black, mestizo and white Angolans, some MPLA militants and sympathisers, others, ordinary people with little idea of politics; their story is of 100 days of chaos, arbitrary arrest, killings, robbery and destruction of property by apparently undisciplined FNLA and UNITA troops.

At its worst, the FNLA-UNITA alliance deliberately set out to eliminate its civilian opponents; at best the alliance leaders were either unable or uninterested in controlling their armed forces, allowing wholesale destruction and murder.

Nobody can estimate with any accuracy the number of civilians shot by UNITA and FNLA troops. But the total must be counted in many thousands, as far as I can judge more than the number of military deaths in the war.

Rosa Nogueira's husband was a local MPLA official in a suburb of Huambo. He was shot dead by UNITA soldiers in front of his five small children, of whom the youngest is aged three. UNITA would not allow his burial for many days and his body lay rotting where it fell.

As a relative of President Agostinho Neto he was a clear target. But what about

Maria, an Ovimbundu farm worker's wife to whom I gave a lift on the road south from Benguela? Her child was shot dead by UNITA soldiers, her husband fled from compulsory conscription, and her home was ransacked, although she had never even thought about politics, let alone been an MPLA activist.

A white businessman in Huambo tells of the 24 'control points' UNITA soldiers set up along the road from Lobito to Huambo: they were nothing less than tolls where each soldier extracted payment for freedom to continue your journey. Today the MPLA has two checkpoints along the same road, where soldiers—as elsewhere in the MPLA's Angola—simply ask for your travel document and check the car papers and driving licence.

In Lobito, where UNITA's Jorge Valentim had set up what local mestizos and whites described as Hitler-type elimination of non-blacks, I spoke with some who escaped from prison and hid for two months in friends' homes. One man said he had been taken on to a hillside and escaped death by firing squad as a bullet only grazed his lip; when he fell down simulating death, the UNITA soldiers ripped off his watch, took his wallet and left him alongside the bodies of the dead.

The horror and atrocity stories are only one aspect of the hundred days. There was apparently little or no attempt at governing.

The main bridges were blown up for strategic reasons during the war, but both the ports of Lobito and

Moçamedes are intact. However, the merchandise in the warehouses and on the dockside has been stolen or destroyed, and the damage must total millions of pounds.

Remarkably, none of the main cities I visited (including Lobito, Benguela, Sa da Bandeira, Moçamedes and Huambo) had the aspect of recently occupied, garrison towns. The MPLA military presence is small, Luanda is sending new police to the area (many of the old police have proved untrustworthy in the past fortnight—in Moçamedes I watched some in their colonial uniforms looting a private house) but all those police or civil servants who want to stay are still at their desks. There have been no mass arrests and no executions.

Because of this deliberate absence of a strong military or police presence by the MPLA, it is possible to argue that the danger of continuing sabotage and of the guerrilla warfare promised by UNITA leader Jonas Savimbi is substantial.

Groups of MPLA soldiers are engaged gradually in sweeping the bush areas for enemy troops in hiding, before, as one MPLA military man said, 'the scattered soldiers have time to organise into effective guerrilla groups.'

In the cities, the MPLA emergency commissions are already starting work. Priorities are food, water and electricity for areas deprived during the 100 days, and getting offices and factories back into working order. Fuel supplies, too, are gradually returning to normal.

from JANE BERGEROL in Luanda

Observer, London
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