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U. S. INVOLVEMENT IN ANGOLA

Recent disclosures in Congress and the press of United States secret involvement in Angola have raised the fears of many Americans that another Vietnam is in the making. These fears are heightened by the Administration's determination to press on with its support for one side, the FNLA-UNITA coalition, despite the Senate's 54-22 vote for an aid cutoff. U. S. involvement is massive. Already some \$50 million has been expended on military hardware and as The Christian Science Monitor has reported, at least 300 Americans have been secretly recruited as mercenaries to fight in Angola. This recruiting has been done under the auspices of the CIA via private organizations. The Administration has backed away from its earlier strong denials of this activity.

The Ford Administration has justified this covert support on the grounds that it is necessary to counter Soviet and Cuban aid to the other side, the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA). The implication is that if the MPLA should win, Angola would become a Soviet satellite. What are the facts?

The MPLA was organized in 1956 under the leadership of Dr. Agostinho Neto. After pressing unsuccessfully for a peaceful transition to independence from the Portuguese, the armed independence struggle began in 1961. During this time the United States was giving active military support to the Portuguese in their attempts to hold on to their rich West African colony. The United States has large investments in Angolan oil and is a chief importer of its coffee. It did not want to see these jeopardized by a possibly unfriendly Black-majority government.

The MPLA first approached Western sources for aid, particularly the United States. With this it was unsuccessful and had to turn to the only source of support available--the socialist countries. Belatedly, the United States CIA realized that if the West was going to have any influence in an independent Angola it had better get involved with the Angolans. In 1962, the CIA began funding another group, the tribally-based National Front for the Liberation of Angola (FNLA). The FNLA's leader, Holden Roberto, a son-in-law of the CIA-installed President of Zaire (Congo-Kinshasa), General Mobutu, has been on a \$10,000 a year CIA retainer ever since. A third group, the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA) was formed when Jonas Savimbi broke with Holden Roberto in 1965. This group, also primarily tribally-based was, paradoxically, supported by the Portuguese secret police (PIDE).

During the long war for independence, the activities of FNLA and UNITA were, not surprisingly, not very vigorous or effective. MPLA, on the other hand, not only liberated large areas of the country but set up schools, hospitals, and representative government in the liberated zones. When Independence came on November 11, 1975, MPLA had support in and control of 16 of Angola's 20 provinces. Consequently, MPLA set up the People's Republic of Angola with its capital in Luanda. This has been recognized the the only legitimate government of Angola by 22 African nations as well as Scandinavian, East European, and Asian governments. The opposing government in Huambo, set up by FNLA-UNITA, has not been recognized as legitimate by any other nation in the world.

Following the Portuguese coup in April, 1974, MPLA, FNLA, and UNITA set up a coalition government in Luanda as a prelude to Independence. This broke up in early 1975. Following recent revelations by high U. S. State Department officials in the New York Times, we now know the reason why. In January, 1975, the United States greatly stepped-up its support for the FNLA-UNITA partners in the coalition, giving them enough strength so that they felt they could go-it-alone. This makes recent U. S. calls for a coalition government in Angola have a particularly hollow ring.

As was reported in the same New York Times article, this U. S. military increase preceded by three months an increase of Soviet aid to the MPLA in April, 1975. These revelation, coming from high State Department sources, completely contradict the Administration's contention that U. S. aid was a response to a Soviet build-up. The truth of the matter is the exact opposite.

Left to their own resources, the MPLA would quickly triumph. (State Department officials have privately declared that FNLA-UNITA could not fight their way out of a paper bag). The situation has been greatly complicated, however, by the participation of numerous outside interests. Propping up the FNLA-UNITA side, besides the United States, are Zaïre (the funnel for U. S. supplies), Britain, France, West Germany, South Africa, and numerous white mercenaries. These countries have made it clear that their participation is primarily to protect their sizeable investments in Angola.

In addition, South Africa is involved to protect its northern flank. South Africa illegally occupies the United Nations Trust Territory of Namibia (South West Africa) which borders Angola on the south. The South West Africa Peoples Organization (SWAPO) has been waging a war of national liberation against the South African occupation (and is recognized as the only legitimate government of Namibia by the U. N.) for years, using southern Angola for sanctuary. The MPLA has always expressed its solidarity for SWAPO. South Africa hopes that its support in the form of troops and supplies for FNLA-UNITA will make them so indebted to it that Angolan sanctuary will be denied SWAPO in the future.

South African troops first entered Angola in August, 1975. By mid-October, over 3000 South African combat personnel were fighting 450 miles inside Angola. This contradicts South African statements that its forces are only operating on the border. As the New York Times has reported, the entry of Cuban troops in support of MPLA came only in early November, 1975. This was after the South African invasion and in response to it. Many American officials are privately worried that U. S. support for South Africa, the bastion of apartheid and racial oppression, will harm U. S. standing with the rest of Black Africa. This does not seem to bother Secretary of State Kissinger, who declared on December 23rd: "We are warning now that what is happening in Angola has nothing to do with the local situation in Angola." What is at stake is the security of white-minority ruled South Africa which the U. S. has continually supported materially while denouncing verbally.

United States Ambassador to the U. N. Daniel Patrick Moynihan has claimed that the Soviet Union is attempting to "colonize" Africa. As we have seen, such a claim is a total disregard for the facts. Might not MPLA be beholden to the Soviets, however, for their aid and become in effect a Soviet satellite as the Ford Administration has charged? In a widely circulated interview in the influential French daily, Le Monde, MPLA President Neto responds with a resounding "NO!" "Just because the Soviet Union supplies us with weapons, he states, it doesn't mean that we have become a satellite. We've never been one. We've never asked Moscow for advice on how to set up our state. All the major decisions in our country are taken by our movement, our government and our people." Dr. Neto has repeatedly stated that MPLA has sought Soviet and Cuban aid only to counter the prior foreign interference by the United States and South Africa. As we have seen, this is, in fact, true. This is hardly the position of a Soviet puppet.

The U. S. House of Representatives will be considering in the next two weeks the Tunney amendment cutting off all covert aid to Angola and thus limiting the possibility that the American people will be dragged unknowingly into a new Vietnam. It is important that Americans throw their support behind this amendment by writing their Congressmen and demanding that they vote for it. In this 200th anniversary of American Independence Americans should be sympathetic to the independence struggles of others. In Angola the only group fighting for true independence, uncompromised by foreign concessions, is the MPLA. Americans can celebrate their bicentennial by supporting the independence struggle in Angola.