

# Savimbi and South Africa: No Casual Affair



Photo: Rich Reinhard/IMPACT VISUALS



Photo: Orde Eliason/IMPACT VISUALS

*Jonas Savimbi, South Africa's tool for war in Angola.*

*South African President P.W. Botha provides major backing for Savimbi.*

## FACT:

- Jonas Savimbi and his group, the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA) is supported mainly by racist apartheid South Africa which provides major military support.
- Savimbi said "... I can see the Executive President of South Africa as my friend ... I consider him as my friend." CBS's "60 Minutes," January 26, 1986.
- The Organization of African Unity (OAU) and all leaders of the southern African Frontline States oppose any U.S. aid to UNITA and Savimbi. The OAU has called Savimbi "a known agent of Apartheid South Africa ... responsible for the wanton killing of civilians ..." The OAU adds, "... Any American covert or overt involvement in ... Angola ... will be considered a hostile act against the OAU ..." OAU Declaration, Addis Ababa, July 18-20, 1985.
- Anglican Archbishop Desmond Tutu, Reverend Allan Boesak, Reverend Beyers Naude, the National Education Crisis Committee, the United Democratic Front (UDF), and other major anti-apartheid leaders and organizations inside South Africa have strongly condemned U.S. support for Jonas Savimbi.
- Key religious leaders inside Angola, such as General Secretary Jose Belo Chipenda of the Angolan Council of Evangelical Churches and Bishop Emilio de Carvalho of the United Methodist Church of Angola (UMCA), oppose UNITA and have called upon the U.S. to support Angola's struggle for self-determination and against South Africa. In 1984, the UMCA characterized any aid to UNITA as "... blatant intervention in [Angola's] sovereignty ..."
- In 1986 The European Parliament in Strasbourg denied Savimbi an opportunity to address it and passed a resolution describing UNITA as a 'terrorist organization' and condemning U.S. support for the group.
- Every nation in the world, except the United States and South Africa, has extended diplomatic recognition to the People's Republic of Angola.
- U.S. aid to UNITA is aid to South Africa's war against the Angolan people.

For more than a decade, South Africa has been waging an undeclared war against Angola. Using the illegally occupied territory of Namibia, South African troops have continually bombed and invaded Angola, killing tens of thousands of civilians, destroying economic targets and social services, provoking famine and causing one of the highest child death rates in the world.

The major instrument of this South African war, apart from direct invasion, has been Jonas Savimbi, who heads a rebel group called the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA). UNITA is the South African-backed "contra" group fighting to overthrow the government of Angola. South Africa provides UNITA with weapons, funding, bases, training and logistical support.

The U.S. government supports the war against Angola by supplying military aid and political recognition to the UNITA rebels. The Reagan Administration says it is fighting for freedom when it backs groups like the "contras" in Nicaragua or Angola. In reality, this "Reagan Doctrine" has involved the U.S. directly in the apartheid government's war against the Angolan people. U.S. foreign policy is being determined by the incorrect perception that the conflict in southern Africa is an "East-West" struggle. Cold War slogans cannot hide the fact that working with South Africa's war machine undermines self-determination in southern Africa. The greatest threat to peace and the largest obstacle to economic development and majority rule in southern Africa is APARTHEID.

Savimbi is very effective at public relations. He presents UNITA as a genuine African nationalist movement and claims that the majority of Angolans support him. By telling Western audiences that the real problem in southern Africa is not Pretoria but Moscow, he touches chords calculated to loosen Washington's pursestrings. His military ties with South Africa, he says, are merely an unfortunate necessity.

In his quest for personal power, Savimbi has used a wide variety of slogans: black nationalist, Maoist, and anti-communist. But he has survived as a regional warlord primarily because he has made himself useful to forces opposed to self-determination in Africa: first the Portuguese colonialists, then the South African apartheid regime.

From a covert military alliance in 1971 with the Portuguese colonialists he was supposedly fighting, Savimbi turned to South Africa as the Portuguese withdrew in 1975. For Angolans and others around the world, this decade-long alliance has discredited Savimbi and exposed him as a traitor of the African liberation struggle. The image projected by Savimbi and his publicists grossly distorts the historical record as well as the present Angolan situation.

The people of the United States need to take a closer look and demand that the U.S. government stop sending Savimbi taxpayers' money to kill Angolans.

## Who is Jonas Savimbi?

Jonas Savimbi was born in 1934 at Munhongo, a small town on the Benguela railroad in eastern Angola. He attended high school in southern Angola. Going to Portugal for university in 1958 and on to Switzerland in 1960, Savimbi joined other students and exiles in criticizing Portuguese colonialism. In 1961, shortly before guerrilla warfare broke out in Angola, he joined the movement headed by Holden Roberto which was later called the National Front for the Liberation of Angola (FNLA).

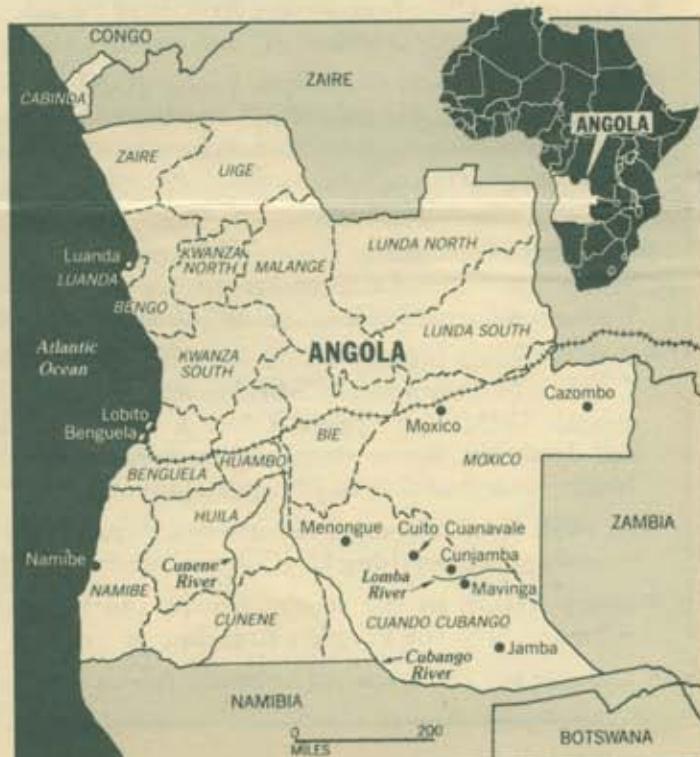
Savimbi became Foreign Minister of the FNLA while finishing his undergraduate studies in Switzerland (his claim

## UNITA and the Portuguese

UNITA began as an anti-colonial guerrilla movement. But it soon proved weaker than the rival MPLA. The Portuguese military worked out a covert scheme codenamed "Operation Timber," to use UNITA against the stronger MPLA. Savimbi agreed to this secret alliance.

Initially, UNITA gained popular support, infiltrating guerrillas into eastern Angola through newly independent Zambia. But its extravagant promises and ill-planned military tactics soon disillusioned many followers. By attacking the Benguela railroad, Savimbi also alienated the government of Zambia, which expelled him in 1967.

In the same years the MPLA was building up its own guerrilla organization in eastern Angola. The MPLA's military operations and political work with the local



Dave Cook/Washington Post

to a doctorate is a later public relations invention). The FNLA had backing from governments in the Congo (the country to the north of Angola, now called Zaire) and received funding from the CIA.

The FNLA carried on a low-key war against the Portuguese. But it also executed guerrillas of the rival Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA), and was divided by tensions between Roberto's followers (mainly Kikongo-speaking) and the southern and eastern ethnic groups Savimbi claimed to represent.

In July 1964, Savimbi left the FNLA. He criticized Roberto for his tribal favoritism, inefficiency and his ties with the CIA. But he refused offers to join the MPLA under

Agostinho Neto, unless he be given a top position immediately. He attacked the prominence in the MPLA of Kimbundu-speaking people from the Angola capital, Luanda, and criticized its acceptance of mesticos (of mixed race) and whites. After leaving the FNLA, he asked for Soviet assistance to form another liberation movement. After Moscow refused him aid, he also denounced the MPLA for its socialist views and backing from the Soviet Union. Searching the world for patrons, he eventually found support in China and adopted Maoist rhetoric.

In 1966, with followers in eastern Angola, Savimbi founded his own organization—UNITA.

---

population were more effective than UNITA's, and it won more support than Savimbi even in his home area. Portuguese military documents show it was the MPLA that posed a serious threat to the colonial troops. (*Facts & Reports*, Amsterdam, August 18, 1973.)

By 1971, according to General Costa Gomes, Portuguese commander in Angola 1970-1972, Savimbi had signed a secret accord with the Portuguese military, agreeing to cooperate against the MPLA (Costa Gomes, *Sobre Portugal*, Lisbon, 1979, p. 32; also interview with Costa Gomes by David Martin and Phyllis Johnson in April 1984). When the Paris-based magazine *AfriqueAsie* (July 8, 1974) published letters documenting the agreement, Savimbi dismissed them as forgeries. Fritz Sitte, a pro-Savimbi Austrian journalist, has admitted that

the letters were genuine. Sitte defends the alliance, citing Savimbi's "premonition" that the MPLA would be the enemy after the Portuguese left (Fritz Sitte, *Flug in die Angola-Hoelle*, Graz: Verlag Styria, 1981, pp. 137, 151). As a result of the accord, Savimbi gained a protected zone near the Lungue-Bungo River, just south of the Benguela railway, as well as ammunition to use against the MPLA.

At the same time as Savimbi was collaborating with the Portuguese, he and his lieutenants promoted themselves around the world as the most militant of Angolan nationalists. They courted the left in Europe and America with ultra-revolutionary rhetoric. To black Americans they presented themselves as the authentic black nationalist movement and pictured the MPLA as dominated by whites and mesticos.

**ANGOLA**, on the west coast of Africa, is a country almost twice the size of Texas with a population of nine million people. Angola was one of the areas most devastated by the slave trade, after the Portuguese settled on the coast 500 years ago. At the beginning of this century, Portugal also conquered the African peoples of the interior of Angola.

Angola's major export before the 1950s was coffee. Later, oil came to provide more than 90 percent of export income. Since independence in 1975, the Angolan government has shared control of oil production with foreign companies, such as Gulf/Chevron.

From 1961 to 1974, Angolans fought a war for independence. Portugal, ruled by a fascist dictatorship, refused even to consider negotiations for independence, arresting and killing protesters. In 1974 the Portuguese army, tired of fighting the colonial war, overthrew the Portuguese government. This opened the way for negotiations for the independence of Angola and Portugal's other African colonies such as Mozambique and Guinea-Bissau.

But Angola's oil riches and strategic location made it a target for outside intervention. The apartheid regime of South Africa and the U.S. intervened to block the nationalist movement they saw as the most significant threat, the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA), led by Agostinho Neto. In doing this, they used two rival Angolan movements—Holden Roberto's National Front for the Liberation of Angola (FNLA) and Jonas Savimbi's National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA). The MPLA in response sought aid from Cuba and the Soviet Union.

In late 1975, the conflict culminated in a massive attack on Luanda, the Angolan capital. With limited outside aid, the MPLA defended the capital against the FNLA and Zairean troops advancing from the north. When South Africa invaded southern Angola, however, the MPLA called for additional international support, including Cuban troops. The MPLA defeated the Zaireans, FNLA, South Africans and UNITA and became the government of independent Angola in November, 1975.

But the war never stopped. South Africa, together with UNITA, has been attacking Angola ever since.

# UNITA and South Africa: Act One

Savimbi first appealed to South Africa in 1975, when he found himself losing the competition for power as the Portuguese left.

When the Portuguese army overthrew the fascist government in Lisbon in April 1974, none of the movements in Angola were in a strong military position. The MPLA's greatest strength was in Luanda and surrounding areas. It was favored by African urban workers, students and white-collar employees around the country, as well as most mesticos and a few whites.

The FNLA had little presence in Angola, despite a relatively well-equipped army in President Mobutu's Zaire (formerly Congo). Savimbi, trying to set himself up as the leader of the Ovimbundu and other southern and eastern ethnic groups, also won the support of white settlers by presenting himself as the least radical of the African contenders.

In January 1975 at Alvor, Portugal, the three movements jointly negotiated with the Portuguese to reach an accord with Lisbon on the date and arrangement for independence. They agreed to share power with Portugal in a transitional government and then hold elections after independence day set for November 11, 1975. However, what came to be known as the Alvor Accord was destroyed two weeks later by the United States and the FNLA. Only days after the accord was signed, the National Security Council's 40 Committee under President Gerald Ford's administration approved \$300,000 in covert CIA military aid to the FNLA. Then National Security Advisor and later Secretary of State Henry Kissinger had presided over the 40 Committee's deliberations. According to John Stockwell, who ran the CIA's war in Angola, the FNLA with U.S. encouragement destroyed the Alvor Accord and any hope of peaceful reconciliation by attacking the MPLA without provocation. The agreement collapsed and open warfare erupted among all parties.

The MPLA, with some arms supplied from eastern European countries and a few Cuban advisers, raised a substantial army inside Angola, pushing back the FNLA and Zairian troops. UNITA took control in the south and east, raising money and arms from conservative white settlers and killing hundreds of Ovimbundu who supported the MPLA. The U.S. responded by sending another \$30 million in covert aid to the FNLA and UNITA.

Thousands of Portuguese settlers fled the country. Some in UNITA argued for an agreement with the MPLA, but Savimbi chose the anti-MPLA coalition. He joined Roberto on the CIA payroll and appealed to South Africa for support, declaring himself opposed to guerrilla warfare against white-minority regimes (Johannesburg Star, May 3, 1975). South African advisers began training Savimbi's forces in early 1975.

In October 1975 thousands of South African troops along with mercenaries, UNITA and FNLA forces launched a massive assault aimed at Luanda. According to John Stockwell, there was a close liaison between the CIA and the South Africans and Wayne Smith writes that the U.S. "knew in advance" of the South African invasion (*Foreign Policy*, Spring 1986). The militarily superior South African army came close enough to threaten to overrun the capital.

It was this invasion by South Africa which prompted the MPLA to call for large scale assistance from Cuba. For the first time in the conflict, Cuba airlifted troops to Angola numbering in the thousands who helped repel the South African-led attack. On November 11, 1975, Angola became independent under an MPLA government. As the covert South African role was revealed, African opinion rallied to the side of the MPLA, and U.S. public opinion pushed Congress to curb CIA involvement in Angola with passage of the Clark amendment.

Within a year virtually every country except South Africa and the U.S. had recognized the new People's Republic of Angola.



UNITA leader Jonas Savimbi (right) and South African Foreign Minister Pik Botha.

Photo: Jeune Afrique/The Guardian

Additional copies of "Savimbi and South Africa: No Casual Affair" are available for 75¢ each for 1-10; 50¢ each for 11-50; 30¢ each for over 50 copies. (Add 35% for postage).

Another resource available from WOAEF is "Destabilizing Angola: South Africa's War and U.S. Policy." Copies of this resource are available for: \$2.00 each for 1-50 copies; \$1.50 each for 51-100 copies; \$1.00 each for 501-1,000 copies. Prices negotiable for 1,000 copies. (Add 35% for postage.)

# UNITA and South Africa: Act Two

UNITA and South Africa had been defeated and forced to retreat into Namibia. Many of Savimbi's followers fled into the bush; others went to South African training camps. South Africa created the "32 Battalion" with ex-FNLA guerrillas, mercenaries, and South Africans to join UNITA in destabilizing Angola.

In early 1981 two deserters from the "32 Battalion" described how their unit swept through villages, killing women and children. They worked in parallel with UNITA. "The '32' [Battalion] and UNITA had separate spheres of operation," said one deserter, "but the same boss—South Africa." (*Africa News*, March 23, 1981.)

The "32 Battalion" still operates from Namibia, the territory to the south of Angola, illegally occupied by 100,000 South African troops. UNITA and South Africa also attack the South West Africa People's Organization (SWAPO), the liberation movement of the people of Namibia. The South Africans justify their repeated attacks on Angola's infrastructure and people as "hot pursuit of SWAPO."

Despite these actions, the MPLA has gained control of much of the population in the war zone. By 1980, the majority of the Ovimbundu had abandoned the UNITA guerrillas, and a significant number of government troops were themselves Ovimbundu.

**After 1980, South Africa greatly escalated its attacks on Angola. The integration of UNITA with the South African military became even closer.** Successive invasions by South African troops captured villages and installed UNITA bases with regular supply links for fuel and ammunition. A stage-set capital was built at Jamba, just north of the Namibian border, and frequent visits arranged for reporters and other visitors, including a number from the U.S.

Beyond this "zone of control" in sparsely populated southeastern Angola, **UNITA guerrillas and elite South African commandos attack strategic economic targets, and wage a campaign of terror against civilians.** The South African Defense Force (SADF) supplies the logistical base for both the '32' Battalion and UNITA detachments. Special South African commandoes carry out particularly difficult sabotage missions, and regular SADF troops are called in whenever UNITA needs extra help. Some recent examples:

- A South African commando, Capt. Wynand du Toit, was captured in May 1985 in an attempt to blow up Gulf Oil installations in Cabinda. At an international news conference he admitted UNITA was set to take credit for the operation.
- In February 1986, UNITA attacked the village of Camabatela in northern Angola, massacring over 100 civilians. (*Washington Post*, July 29, 1986.) Eyewitnesses told a



Photo: Dorothy Thomas/Washington Office on Africa.

Angolan victims of UNITA/South Africa war, Bie Province.

As Josefina Antonio Kaponte tells it, the attackers went on a wild rampage, ransacking homes and government buildings, blowing up one of the town's two water towers and a gasoline service station and killing civilians indiscriminately.

Together with her aging mother and 30-year-old daughter, Kaponte was ordered to line up outside her mud-brick home while the guerrillas cleaned out the two-room abode of all the family's clothes, food and cooking utensils. At the last moment, her husband bolted through a rear window and hid in a nearby banana grove.

The last thing that Kaponte remembered before she passed out from shock was the sound of gunfire as the guerrillas opened up with their Soviet-made AK47 automatic rifles.

Her mother and daughter died instantly. Josefina Kaponte survived the bullet that ripped through her abdomen.

By all available accounts here—from villagers, from the Catholic priests living in a nearby mission and from government officials—the massacre at Camabatela on February 8 was the work of guerrillas fighting under the banner of Jonas Savimbi's National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA).

— *Washington Post*, July 29, 1986

Washington Post correspondent that UNITA guerrillas lined up and executed villagers, including the Methodist pastor and four of his children.

Similar incidents are repeatedly reported from the war zones in southern Angola, such as an attack killing 133 civilians in Huambo province on January 21, 1987 (*Washington Post*, March 15, 1987.)

- UNITA regularly plants landmines in the fields and on paths used by peasants, producing severe food shortages and, according to the Red Cross, over 20,000 amputees.

According to relief workers, this is a systematic strategy designed to cause famine and terrorize the civilian population. The result is that Angola has the highest rate of amputees in the world. There are over 50 new landmine victims a month, Red Cross director Gerald Peytrignet told the *Washington Post* in 1986.

- A UNICEF study estimated that over 50,000 children a year are dying in Angola as a result of South Africa's war. (*Children on the Front Line*, UNICEF, January 1987.)

Death rates are increasing from direct casualties, famine and, above all, UNITA's attacks on health services. Medical workers and vehicles transporting health supplies, UNICEF noted, "are all deliberately chosen as targets."

**These attacks make no sense if UNITA really has the support of the civilian population, or is trying to win that support. But they fit perfectly into South Africa's strategy of intimidating and terrorizing black southern African countries.**

Savimbi tells different stories at different times about his South African connection. In September 1984 he was the only African guest at President P.W. Botha's inauguration, welcomed warmly by South African whites. He features prominently on South Africa's state-owned television. But when seeking U.S. support, Savimbi downplays his South

African connection, sometimes denying it and sometimes trying to justify it.

In August 1985, for example, South African troops and jet fighters saved Savimbi's base at Mavinga from falling to an Angolan offensive. South African Defense Minister Magnus Malan admitted they were helping Savimbi, saying "He stands for the same norms and values in which we believe" (*London Guardian*, September 21, 1985). At that time Savimbi denied he was getting any help from South Africa (*Washington Post*, October 9, 1985). But later he admitted to another correspondent that the South Africans had supplied aircraft and heavy weaponry to the battle. In Savimbi's own words, ". . . we had to ask the South Africans to take 2,000 [of UNITA's] troops . . . and put them here [outside Mavinga]." Regarding South African support he added, "I think they will do all they can to continue to support UNITA" (*Washington Post*, July 30, 1986). South African troops have also fought alongside UNITA forces in the battlefield.

In June 1987, Savimbi was welcomed to South Africa by Foreign Minister Pik Botha. "President Botha needs support now," Savimbi said. He praised the South African leader for his willingness to reform and criticized black South African leaders for their opposition to the government. (*New York Times*, June 7, 1987.)

## UNITA and the United States

The congressional Clark Amendment barred U.S. military involvement in Angola from 1976 to 1985. But U.S. encouragement of UNITA escalated dramatically in 1981, when the Reagan Administration took office. The ban on direct support to UNITA was lifted in 1985, when Congress repealed the Clark Amendment. In 1986 the U.S. sent more than \$15 million in covert CIA military aid to Savimbi, including several sophisticated Stinger missiles. A June 11, 1987 *New York Times* report said the Reagan administration has agreed to send another \$15-17 million of taxpayers' money to Savimbi!

Many people in Washington subscribe to Cold War rhetoric or the "Reagan Doctrine" and accept Savimbi's claim to be "fighting for freedom" in Angola. They ignore the fact that aid to UNITA is aid to South Africa. Savimbi's real base has long been the South African army that directs his military strategy and backs him up with airpower and troops. As South Africa escalates its war against

independent Africa, UNITA is one of its most important instruments.

Judged by the facts rather than by Savimbi's propaganda, continued U.S. aid to UNITA is not in the U.S. interest:

1. It strengthens the U.S. alliance with the apartheid regime in Pretoria.
2. It prolongs the war and forces Angola to increase its dependence on the Soviet Union and Cuba.
3. It continues the deadly terrorist attacks by UNITA on the Angolan people.

Despite these facts, the U.S. is committed to aiding Savimbi and South Africa. And Congress has refused to stop such aid. Only increased public awareness and protest can put an end to this U.S. collaboration in South Africa's war.

August 1987

Prepared by the

Washington Office on Africa Educational Fund  
110 Maryland Ave., NE, Washington, DC 20002  
(202) 546-7961

Principal Author: William Minter, WOAEF board member and author of *King Solomon's Mines Revisited: Western Interests and the Burdened History of Southern Africa* (Basic Books, 1986).

Editorial and production assistance by WOAEF/WOA staff: Damu Smith, executive director; Imani Countess, Larry Gilley, Jacki Wilson and Jennifer Drayton, along with Kathy Flewelling of the AFSC.