CHAPTER 13

“KISSINGER IN ANGOLA: ANATOMY OF FAILURE”

BY

GERALD J. BENDER

From:

Rene Lemarchand (ed.)

*American Policy in Southern Africa*

American Policy

Southern Africa:
The Stakes and the Stance, Second Edition Edited by Rene Lemarchand
Gerald Bender
R. Hunt Davis, Jr.
Jennifer Davis
William J. Foltz
Allen Isaacman
William Johnston

Contributors

Rene Lemarchand
Edgar Lockwood
Tilden J. LeMelle
Winston P. Nagan
Stephen R. Weissman
Martin Well

University Press.
CHAPTER II

KISSINGER IN ANGOLA:

ANATOMY OF FAILURE

BY GERALD BENDER.
For more than a decade, basic Angolan realities have had little impact on the formulation of U.S. policies toward that large and potentially wealthy country. Prior to the Portuguese coup in April 1974, a desire to maintain amicable relations with Portugal, a NATO ally, dominated American policy. Following the coup American government officials were preoccupied with the maintenance of “some form of equilibrium between the great powers.”(1) Since the Angolan civil war U.S. domestic politics have strongly influenced American policy toward Angola. This should not suggest that officials in the State Department, CIA, and other branches of government have been oblivious or unsympathetic to Angolan realities -- they have always been considered but ultimately eclipsed by domestic or larger global concerns. The neglect of Angolan realities has proved to be the fundamental flaw in U.S. policy, resulting in a commitment to losing sides (first Portugal, then the FNLA/UNITA coalition) and, ironically, in weakening rather than strengthening the “equilibrium” vis-à-vis the Soviet Union. The principal architect of U.S. policy before and after the Portuguese coup was Henry Kissinger whose realpolitik ignored basic political realities in at least four different spheres: global, Angolan, Portuguese, and domestic American.

I would like to express my appreciation to the following people who provided valuable criticisms and comments: Richard L. Sklar, Tamara Bender, Samuel P. Huntington, Bernard Brodie, David Laitin, Shimshon Zelniker, and G. Harvey Summ.

This chapter was written in early 1976 and revised during the summer of 1976.
The Early Years

Beginning with his inaugural address in January 1960 and throughout most of the three years of his presidency, John F. Kennedy attempted to project an image of the United States as a “friend of all oppressed peoples.” In order to cultivate this image the United States frequently supported anti-Portuguese measures in the United Nations, which provoked anti—American demonstrations in Lisbon and Luanda and threats from Salazar to expel the U.S. from the Azores. Arthur Schlesinger, historian and Kennedy advisor, proudly proclaimed that the President’s anti—colonial posture in the U.N. left the New Frontier “free of automatic identification with colonialism.” (2)

U.S. Angolan policy under Kennedy was not limited to verbal attacks on Portuguese colonialism. The CIA began to shift its support from generally reactionary clients to those who were more moderate. As part of this change in CIA operations, Holden Roberto’s FNLA (then called UPA or GRAB) was extended several million dollars of military and financial support. (3) Although a number of contemporary observers interpret this early support for Roberto as indicative of America’s historically “reactionary” and anti-MPLA position in Angola, few in Washington shared this perspective at the time. In fact, by 1962 Roberto headed the only Angolan nationalist movement recognized by the OAU and enjoyed the support of most African leaders, including Xwame Nkrumah, Patrice Lumumba, and Sekou Toure. Few world leaders expected the Portuguese to be able to hold out against both the “wind of change” and a major armed insurrection therefore,
Roberto appeared to be the most likely first president of an independent Angola: They were wrong for many reasons, including the important fact that the United States, like other major powers who assisted Angolan nationalists, never gave enough support to enable the nationalists to win a military victory.

As the Angolan war dragged on, the U.S. under President Johnson continued modest support for Roberto but also tried to normalize relations with Lisbon. Washington became more reluctant to support U.N. resolutions critical of Portugal when the Azores base was presumed to have an increased importance. While there was a rather strict adherence to the U.N. arms embargo against supplying weapons to Portugal for use in Africa during the 1960s, the CIA allegedly attempted to appease Salazar in 1965 with twenty B-26 bombers for Portugal’s colonial wars. The operation was apparently uncovered by the Treasury Department and immediately halted after only seven of the planes had been delivered. (4) However, the continued support for Roberto enabled some to assert that, at worst, the United States supported “both sides” in the Angolan anti-colonial struggle.

The Nixon/Kissinger Metamorphosis

Less than three months after Richard Nixon became President, his Advisor on National Security Affairs, Henry Kissinger, undertook a major review of U.S. policy toward southern Africa. He directed the National Security Council’s Interdepartmental Group for Africa.
(consisting primarily of employees from the State and Defense Departments as well as the CIA) to prepare a Study including a brief background on each country, major problems in the area, U.S. interests (economic, political, strategic, and scientific), and six policy options based on differing projections of how the future could unfold in southern Africa. This study is known as the National Security Study Memorandum (NSSM) 39.(5)

Kissinger presented NSSM 39 to President Nixon in early January 1970 with the recommendation that the U.S. adopt a “general posture... along the lines of option two” which called for the United States to “maintain public opposition to racial repression, but relax political isolation and economic restrictions on the white states.”(6) In order to better appreciate the perspective on the future of southern Africa held by Kissinger and the National Security Council in 1970, it is useful to quote the premise upon which “option two” was based:

The whites are here to stay and the only way that constructive change can come about is through them. There is no hope for the blacks to gain the political rights they seek through violence, which will only lead to chaos and increased opportunities for the communists. We can, by selective relaxation of our stance toward the white regimes, encourage some modification of their current racial and colonial policies and through more substantial economic assistance to the black states (a total of about $5 million annually in technical assistance to the black states) help to draw the two groups together and exert some influence on both for peaceful change. Our tangible interests form a basis for our contacts in the region, and these can be maintained at acceptable political cost.

In addition, the African insurgent movements were considered ineffectual and not “realistic or supportable” alternatives to the white regimes. Kissinger questioned “the depth and permanence of
black resolve” and dismissed the possibility of “a black victory at any stage.” However, the depth and permanence of Portuguese resolve was not questioned, an error which John Marcum has aptly described as “a basic miscalculation stemming from faulty intelligence, in both senses of the word.” (It is of interest to note that the Soviet Union apparently made the same mistake. Following a visit to Angola in February 1974 – with Portuguese permission -- by the ubiquitous Victor Lewin, the Soviets cut off all aid to the MPLA in March 1974 and did not resume until August or September of the same year. Knowledgeable sources indicate that Lewin’s pessimistic report on the military effectiveness of the MPLA and deep political splits within the party played an important role in the Soviet decision to halt its aid to the MPLA).

Clearly, from the late 1960s until the Portuguese coup, U.S. policy demonstrated two mutually exclusive goals: (1) to express sympathy with the aspirations of Angolans for self-determination; (2) to assist Portugal, a NATO ally. In pursuit of the former goal the U.S. adopted a stance of “communication” and “dialogue” (recommended in NSSM 39) which assumed that the most efficacious means for realizing self-determination was communication, not violence. That assumption was not only naive but hypocritical because no one honestly believed that Salazar or Caetano could be convinced through “communication” of the need for self-determination in the colonies. In fact, the United States never moved the Portuguese an inch closer to granting independence to Angola, Mozambique, or Guinea-Bissau. Furthermore, the policy of communication did not include relations with the nationalist movements (aid to the FNLA was halted in 1969) who were generally ignored so as not to offend the Portuguese. This
fear of offending Portugal actually prevented the American consulate in Luanda from maintaining more than the most minimal communication with Africans.

Pursuit of the second goal, assistance to a NATO ally, was less hypocritical. The U.S. trained Portuguese officers in the United States and supplied Portugal with airplanes, equipment which could serve either civilian or military purposes, $400 million in credits and loans (little of which Portugal used), napalm, herbicides, and, most importantly, moral support. There was, always a sophistic explanation of how each example at U.S. aid to Portugal could be interpreted in “two ways,” but the sum total of American actions left no doubt about which side the U.S. actually supported in the wars for independence in the Portuguese colonies. The U.S. placed its bets on the tenacity of the Caetano regime and the white settlers -- and lost.

The October 1973 war in the Middle East came very close to precipitating a major American shift toward open support of Portugal in her African wars. American use of the Azores to resupply Israel during the Yom Kippur war considerably strengthened Lisbon’s bargaining position with the United States over the pending renewal of the Azores treaty. The treaty negotiations had been practically moribund by the time Henry Kissinger stopped in Lisbon in December 1973 (following a trip through the Middle East) in order to thank the Portuguese for use of the Azores and to discuss the treaty. In light of the troublesome Arab boycott, Portugal raised the ante and demanded that the U.S. provide the Portuguese military with weapons for use in Africa. Kissinger -- who is alleged to have been unaware of the fact that the united States supported a U.N. resolution prohibiting this
kind of assistance agreed, much to the surprise of the Portuguese and to the horror of his closest aides. Fortunately for the United States, the Caetano government did not pursue the matter before it was overthrown five months later, thus sparing Kissinger and U.S. foreign policy considerable problems.

The Portuguese Coup: A Lost Opportunity for Change

The April 1974 coup in Lisbon gave the U.S. a new opportunity to adopt a fresh policy toward the Portuguese colonies in Africa. Only a month before the coup Kissinger had replaced his Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs David Newsom – who had been cast in the difficult role of principal spokesman for the policy of communication with the white-ruled regimes in southern Africa -- with Donald Easum, Ambassador to Upper Volta and a PhD in diplomatic history. Easum, as Kissinger’s chief advisor on African affairs, lost little time in attempting to shift the focus of American policy in view of the imminent decolonization in Angola, Mozambique, and Guinea-Bissau. During a five-week tour of Africa in late 1974, Easum told a press conference in Dar-es-Salaam (November 2) that “we are using our influence to foster change in South Africa, not to preserve the status quo.”(9) Despite the long American record of neglect of the nationalists in the Portuguese colonies and ambivalence toward normalizing relations with the liberation movements in the months after the coup, Easum engineered a diplomatic breakthrough with Mozambique’s FRELIMO in early November 1974. Following a frank and important meeting with FRELIMO President Samora Machel in Dar-es-Salaam, Mr. Easum visited Mozambique; he was the first foreign diplomat to hold a formal meeting with the transitional government in Maputo. While
many applauded Easum’s efforts to change U.S. policy, the Secretary of State clearly was not among them; less than forty-eight hours after returning from his African trip, Easum was informed that he would be replaced (after only nine months in office).

Secretary Kissinger selected Nathaniel Davis to succeed Easum. Davis, who had no previous diplomatic experience in Africa, was best known for his role as American Ambassador to Chile during the Allende overthrow. In an unprecedented action, the Organization of African Unity -- led by Zaire’s President Mobutu Sese Seko, known to be an ally of the U.S. -- strongly and unanimously condemned Mr. Davis’s nomination. Predictably, concern was immediately expressed in the United States and Africa that the U.S. might attempt to implement a policy of “destabilization” in Africa.

However, when the three Angolan nationalist parties moved from the military to the political sphere in the latter part of 1974, Washington showed little inclination to become involved in Angola. The general perception in the State Department of the relative balance of power among the three parties prior to the signing of the Alvor Agreement (15 January 1975) was that the U.S. had little cause for concern. This viewpoint may be summarized as follows: (10)

The FNLA, thanks to considerable aid and training from China and Zaire, was assumed to have the largest and best trained and equipped army among the three movements. Certainly the FNLA’s army would guarantee it a strong position, if not dominance, in any independent government.

There was some question whether the MPLA’s three-way factional
fight (among Neto, Chipenda, and the Andrade brothers) for leadership would leave
the party as a formidable force. Intelligence sources reported that the split in the
MPLA was so severe that they had absolutely no military presence in Angola at the
time of the coup. With the defection of Chipenda’s forces, considered to constitute
the backbone of the MPLA army, the MPLA army was estimated to have about 3,000
soldiers. An MPLA recovery was thought to depend upon Soviet assistance, which
was considered to be unlikely. Throughout most of 1974 it appeared that the Soviets
had given up on the MPLA, possibly because of the party’s debilitating internecine
quarrels. The Soviets had cut all their support to the MPLA in early 1974 (before the
Lisbon coup) and did not resume it until the late fall, and then only modestly.

UNITA, with its apparently widespread support in the populous central highlands,
was thought to have the greatest popular appeal of the three parties. It was even
believed that if elections were held, UNITA had a possibility of winning a majority,
certainly a plurality. If elections were not held, however, UNITA was seen as
extremely vulnerable with its small and poorly armed military forces. UNITA was
estimated to have only 1,500 weapons at this time. Moreover, UNITA’s cadres
beneath the top echelon of leadership were considered weak.

The Decision to intervene

The CIA first raised the possibility of resuming “program assistance” for the
FNLA in mid-January 1975 at a meeting of the 40 Committee, a small group of officials
chaired by Henry Kissinger which
approves or rejects all proposed covert activities. If the 40 Committee had restricted its consideration to Angola’s internal situation, a different course of action might possibly have been followed. But the Angolan context was not perceived as the most relevant factor; domestic politics and global considerations took precedence.

The question of intervention in Angola was being considered at the nadir of the first six years of the Nixon administration’s foreign and domestic policies. The NATO alliance was seriously tested by Portugal’s inclusion of communists in the government and the dispute between Greece and Turkey which left both countries in a position of questionable utility to the alliance. The situation was not improved for Nixon when Congress cut his aid request for Turkey. Even worse was the disastrous state of affairs in Southeast Asia only months before the end of the Vietnam war. In the Middle East step-by-step diplomacy to longer held promise for an all-inclusive settlement. In addition, the CIA was more on the defensive than at any other time in its history with the revelations of its “destabilization” activities in Chile and its illegal participation in the domestic spying on over 10,000 American citizens. And then, of course, there was Watergate!

At his press conferences during these months, Henry Kissinger asked whether it was possible to conduct foreign policy while America engaged in “this orgy of self-destruction.” To complicate matters for the Secretary of State, his policies of détente
and SALT (Strategic Arms Limitation Talks) were under strong attack from conservative critics in both political parties who were encouraged by none other than Nixon’s Secretary of Defense -- and Kissinger’s principal rival in the Cabinet -- James Schlesinger. Kissinger was almost desperate to demonstrate that it was still possible for the U.S. to carry out a decisive and coherent foreign policy in this “climate of recriminations.” One source familiar with the January meeting of the 40 Committee asserts: “I think Kissinger saw this (situation in Angola) as the place to find out if you could still have covert operations.”

At this meeting, which occurred just before the Angolan transitional government was installed on 31 January 1975, the CIA requested approval of $300,000 in covert support to help the FNLA during the predicted scramble for power. It was asserted that the money would give the U.S. “some capital in the bank with one of the leaders of a government that was going to control a fairly sizeable country.” The CIA averred that aid to Roberto would provide the “most stable and reliable government.” In addition, the argument was advanced that this aid would signal to President Mobutu of Zaire, who had been strongly backing the FNLA for a decade and who viewed the MPLA as a mortal enemy, that Washington was sympathetic to his position. The U.S. has been more opposed to Soviet activities in Zaire than in any other African country and has roughly $800 million invested there (about three times more than in Angola). Therefore, Zaire was always a primary consideration in all American decisions concerning covert aid to the FNLA. One account of the meeting
indicates that the Secretary of State used the word “compelling” to describe the CIA presentation on Angola; the request was therefore “routinely approved.” (15)

While there appears to be little controversy over the factors which led to the decision, there has been considerable disagreement over the significance of the clandestine aid that was given in January 1975. Defenders have argued that $300,000 is really inconsequential within the context of American covert aid to factions in other foreign civil wars. Kissinger, in fact, argued that the money was given only to assist in political organizing, “to buy bicycles, paper clips, etc.;” adding that it wasn’t even given in a lump sum. Furthermore, it has been argued, the $300,000 was considerably less than the amount the Soviets had given the MPLA since resuming their support in October or November of 1974.

Critics, on the other hand, have pointed to a number of factors which they argue give the initial grant of $300,000 infinitely greater significance than the U.S. government has claimed. They maintain that it was not the magnitude of the aid which was important but what it signified. For example:

(1) While small, this covert aid to Roberto was thirty times more than the CIA had been supplying him in recent years.

(2) The CIA money should not be considered in isolation but combined with the military aid given Zaire which had been turned over to the FNLA.

(3) The aid indicated that the United States had decided to meddle in Angolan affairs even before the transitional government had an opportunity to prove whether or not it could work.
(4) Given the perceived relative strength of the FNLA and the weakness of the MPLA at the time, the aid gave rise to speculation that the U.S. was intent on helping to assure FNLA dominance.

(5) The covert support hardened a commitment to the FNLA, thereby starting the U.S. down the road to support of a movement which virtually all officials in the State Department (below the Secretary) viewed as having the narrowest base, least popular support, and practically no political organization.

(6) While the amount was not great, it did make a noticeable difference in the FNLA’s spending which was clearly perceived by the Soviet Union, thus signaling to Moscow that the U.S. was back in the business of supplying the FNLA with “program assistance.”

(7) The impact of the American aid had to be viewed in conjunction with the large amounts of support which China had been giving to the FNLA at the same time. The combination of American and Chinese aid, the critics charge, was a clear signal to the Soviet Union that if they failed to escalate their support for the MPLA, Walden Roberto might possibly acquire the means to carry out his frequent threats to crush the MPLA.

The last point lies at the heart of the debate over the impact of the initial installment of U.S. covert aid. The question which has yet to be adequately answered is: Was the large Soviet buildup of the MPLA in March/April 1975 -- which so “alarmed” Secretary Kissinger -- (a) merely a response to the American and Chinese aid, i.e., an attempt to bring the MPLA up to a level of military parity with the FNLA, or (b) a manifestation of Soviet aggressive and expansionist.
policies aimed at putting “the MPLA into power in Angola through stepped up shipments of arms.” (18) This difference in interpretation of Soviet motivation and actions permeates the American debate over Angola both within government and among the general public. The debate has been clouded further by conflicting “facts” presented by the interested parties in order to prove their contentions about Soviet actions at different stages of the Angolan conflict. In short, there is little agreement about which country or nationalist party did what, when, how, and why.

One fact which has not been disputed is the decision by the 40 Committee in January 1975 to reject the CIA’s request for $100,000 for UNITA. This decision later came to haunt the Secretary of State and other officials. As the fighting continued throughout 1975, Roberto demonstrated daily why almost no U.S. official or any commentators in the mass media praised his leadership or organization beyond the acknowledgment that he represented the best means of stopping the MPLA. On the other hand, UNITA, and particularly its leader Jonas Savimbi continued to impress favorably a growing number of Americans. Seven months passed, however, before the 40 Committee decided (on July 18th) to also send covert aid to UNITA. The January decision not to support UNITA was apparently based on “past connections (with the FNLA, and an irrepressible habit of thinking in terms of ‘our team’ and ‘theirs,’ (which) enticed the Administration into choosing one side.” (19)

Following the military defeat of the FNLA and UNITA in early
1976, one of the leading American governmental experts on Angola offered an interesting analysis of why the initial refusal to assist UNITA was a major error for those who believed in the course of intervention. His postmortem analysis can be paraphrased as follows:

I will never understand why we backed the FNLA. Everybody knew that Roberto had little political organization nor did he have support outside the northwest corner of the country. Our biggest mistake was not to have supported UNITA back in January 1975. If we had I am sure that the entire course of the struggle would have been different. We were certain that it would be impossible to form a government in Angola without the MPLA and almost as certain that it would be impossible for the MPLA and FNLA to exist peacefully in the same government. On the other hand, there were numerous signs that UNITA and the MPLA could work together; they were really the natural allies in the struggle. I’m convinced that if UNITA had been well armed by the middle of 1975 (when our intelligence revealed that they still had only 3,000 weapons in their army), the MPLA would have formed a coalition with them rather than fight them. Moreover, since the arms we finally sent to UNITA did not arrive until almost September, we contributed to UNITA’s decision to seek military aid from South Africa, which ultimately proved to be Savimbi’s Achilles heel.

Background to the Major Escalation in July 1975

The occasional exchanges of gunfire and kidnapping which characterized relations between the MPLA and the FNLA at the time of the installation of the transitional government (31 January 1975) had become open warfare by the time the 40 Committee met in mid-July to approve a major escalation of American covert support. During those six.
months each of the three parties attempted to consolidate its influence and control within the region of the country considered to be its “natural” stronghold: the FNLA in the northwest, the MPLA in the west-central area including the capital Luanda, and the UNITA in the central highlands. Because no clear demarcations existed among these spheres of influence, there were frequent clashes. The only party which seriously tried to penetrate another’s bailiwick was the FNLA which challenged the MPLA for control of Luanda and its outlying areas. The capital thus became the focal point of most of the fighting during early 1975.

By late March the FNLA, reinforced with soldiers from Zaire’s army, had moved approximately 4,000 troops to within 35 miles (north) of Luanda. In taking the town of Caxito (23 March 1975) the FNLA killed and mutilated over sixty MPLA supporters which, according to the MPLA, marked the beginning of the civil war, and, for Henry Kissinger, signified “the first of repeated military clashes.” Clearly it was a major turning point in the struggle. The fighting between the FNLA and the MPLA had taken on the proportions of a holy war: each party viewed the other as the devil incarnate, incapable of redemption, part of an international plot directed against itself. Moreover, each party became convinced that the elimination of the other was necessary for the peace and tranquility of the country.

At this time the Soviet Union greatly expanded its military assistance to the MPLA. From March to July American officials estimate that the Soviets delivered over 100 tons of arms (valued at between $20 and $35 million) to the MPLA in Angola. This was
clearly an “escalation” from the previous levels of Soviet support, but the crucial question for American policy makers centered on whether this Soviet aid (especially in March and April) was also a major escalation in the war. In other words, was this jump in Soviet aid merely intended to bring the MPLA to a level of military parity with the FNLA – the position held by most experts in the State Department’s Africa Bureau and a number in the CIA -- or was it intended to provide the MPLA with enough military equipment to forcibly seize power, as the Secretary of State believed? Kissinger’s alarmist perception later provided the rationale for a counter American escalation in July. (22)

Henry Kissinger was attuned to more than battle reports at the time of the 40 Committee’s June meeting when the CIA suggested that the U.S. vastly increase its support in Angola in order to counter Soviet aid. Following General Spinola’s aborted coup attempt, Portugal was seen as having slipped deeper under Communist control, increasing a perceived threat to the security of the NATO alliance. The ignominious end of the Vietnam war had raised questions about American power and resolve which troubled the Secretary of State. He was momentarily bolstered, however, by the strong backing he received in Congress during the Mayaguez incident in mid-May and felt that perhaps it was possible to win over the anti-war alliance in Congress. (23)

Early in June reports began to appear which seemed to confirm
suspicions that Somalia had become a “Soviet satellite in Africa.” Defense Secretary James Schlesinger showed aerial photographs of Soviet missile installations at Barbers to the Senate Armed Services Committee, then proceeded to leak them to a mass circulation weekly -- just in case his point had been missed by the public. Schlesinger’s point, of course, was that the Soviets were taking advantage of detente to expand their spheres of influence to the detriment of the U.S. -- and Somalia was only the latest example. His charges that Kissinger was either naive about the Soviets or so intent on saving détente that he was prepared to overlook almost any Soviet aggression struck a responsive chord In the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the right wing of the Republican Party. “There was plainly an incentive,” Morris maintains in the light of Schlesinger’s attack, “for Kissinger to prove that he could stand up to the Russians.” (24)

Kissinger is reported to have been generally favorable to the June CIA requests for Angola funding and to support for UNITA. First, however, he wanted to have both the State Department and the National Security Council conduct thorough studies of the situation before the 40 Committee’s next meeting in mid-July.

In response the State Department’s Bureau of African Affairs, Policy Planning, and Intelligence and Research recommended that U.S. stay out of the Angolan conflict, attempt to seek a diplomatic solution but play no active role in the war. Chief spokesperson for this position was Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs Nathaniel Davis, who, reflecting the overwhelming majority in the
Neither the FNLA nor the UNITA troops are any match for the MPLA army and the U.S. would therefore be associated with the losing side.

When the U.S. efforts ended in failure, the two African leaders with whom the United States had cooperated in this matter, Presidents Mobutu of Zaire and Kaunda of Zambia, would be jeopardized.

The U.S. might ultimately have South Africa as its only ally which would prove to be a major diplomatic setback.

To assist Savimbi and Roberto would be perceived as a major escalation by the Soviet Union and therefore lead to even greater Russian involvement.

Instead, Davis argued, the appropriate U.S. response should be to launch a diplomatic effort pointing to Soviet activities as a violation of the OAU’s position against outside intervention in Angola (essentially the course China pursued during the latter half of 1975).

Kissinger rejected the State Department’s case against intervention. Unexpectedly, Davis resigned in August. “He believed the policy was utterly wrong,” one official stated, “and he was unable to carry out a policy he was inimically opposed to.” With his timely resignation after only five months in office, Davis altered his public image from the ‘scoundrel in Chile’ to the ‘hero of Angola.’ In both cases, however, the public gave too much credit to Davis and too little to the bureaucracy.

While the State Department overwhelmingly opposed U.S. intervention in Angola, it did not speak with a single voice. The opposition
represented a wide variety of viewpoints whose common denominator was the belief that the United States would lose regardless of the war’s outcome. At one extreme were the “optimists” -- those who did not perceive Soviet assistance to the MPLA (before Angolan independence) as significantly more threatening than the total amount of aid channeled to the FNLA and UNITA from the United States, Europe, and Africa. Moreover, the majority of optimists did not see an MPLA victory as representing a disaster for the U.S. On the contrary, they were (and still are) convinced that the U.S. could maintain relatively normal relations with a government in Luanda dominated by the MPLA.

The “pessimists” tended to view Soviet actions in Angola as highly aggressive and expansionistic. They saw (and still see) the MPLA as a threat to the United States because either they thought that the Marxists in the Party would not take political stands independent of Moscow or, even if they believed the MPLA desired to be independent, they were certain that the Soviet Union would not allow any opposition to its “hegemonic aspirations” in Angola. The pessimists therefore concluded that an MPLA victory would create problems for the U.S.; nevertheless they opposed intervention because they were convinced it would result in even greater problems.

Practically all those who preferred diplomacy to military intervention pointed to the FNLA’s incompetence and the kiss of death which would result from any association with South Africa. This position is cogently expressed by one of the most “pessimistic” among high-level officials at the State Department: “If the U.S. can be seduced to join this ménage à trois, then the U.S. will be completely and publicly
screwed in Africa. There is no win for Uncle Sam in this unholy bed.” While the State Department and National Security council were conducting their reviews of various options on Angola in June/July 1915, the Senate Foreign Relations Committee’s Subcommittee on African Affairs held a series of public hearings on southern Africa. Considerable attention had been focused on Angola because of numerous charges in American and European newspapers that the United States was intervening in Angola through Zaire. The Angola hearings revealed that the Administration had little to fear from Congress at that time. Whereas the three academic witnesses who testified before the Subcommittee vigorously condemned any form of direct or indirect American involvement in Angola, only one Senator had enough time or interest to attend the hearings -- the Subcommittees chairman, Dick Clark, a freshman Senator from the Midwest farming state of Iowa. (28)

Clark pressed Nathaniel Davis on U.S. intervention on July 14, 1975, only three days before the 40 Committee approved the CIA’s request for Angola and one month before Davis’s resignation. In response to Clark’s inquiry as to whether the U.S. military aid to Zaire was being passed on to one or more Angolan factions, Davis responded that that would be possible only after specific agreements were signed and special procedures followed and added that he was “certain” this had not occurred. When Clark noted that those agreements were sometimes violated (e.g., Turkey), Davis responded, “I have no knowledge of violations of the agreement [between the U.S. and Zaire].” (29) For the time being the Senate was held in check; it would present no problems until the fall.
According to the House Select Committee on Intelligence report of January 1976, National Security Council aides blocked recommendations which called for diplomatic efforts rather than military intervention. The NSC provided the justification for the 40 Committee’s July 18th decision to increase the previous level of American covert aid to the FNLA roughly 100 times and to include UNITA as a recipient of CIA aid. Secretary of State Kissinger and others were convinced that it would be futile to attempt diplomacy with the Soviets on Angola without first building up the FNLA and UNITA forces.

In order to accomplish this buildup the 40 Committee authorized the following measures:

A direct shipment of arms to the forces led by Roberto and Savimbi and replacement of arms that had been supplied previously and would continue to be supplied by Zaire and Zambia. It was agreed to permit Zaire and Zambia to provide as much non-American equipment as possible at first in order to minimize the overt link with the United States.

Exposure of Soviet military assistance to the MPLA through information programs amid other means with special emphasis on possibly embarrassing those African nations serving as conduits for Soviet aid to the MPLA.

The launching of an information program designed to build up the abilities and integrity of the FNLA and UNITA. Dispatching $14 million in two stages ($6 and $8 million) to the FNLA and UNITA.
The $14 million which was approved in July was increased to $25 million in August and to about $32 million in November. However, the report of the House Select Committee on Intelligence cites rather convincing evidence that “CIA ‘costing’ procedures and the use of surplus equipment have resulted in a substantial understatement of the value of U.S. aid..., staff advises that the CIA’s ordinance figure should at least be doubled.” (32)

If one were to adjust the underestimated value of American assistance and add to it the total cost of aid sent to the FNLA and UNITA from China, France, Great Britain, West Germany, Belgium, South Africa and others, it would appear to be more or less equal to the CIA estimate of Soviet aid to the MPLA of $80 million through October 1975 when the major foreign interventions occurred. Officials in the Ford Administration reported that French assistance to the FNLA was “substantial” although below the American level, whereas they characterized British support as “modest.” (33)

As noted earlier, there has been so much disagreement over the question of who gave how much to whom and when that it is doubtful whether the truth will ever be known. Nevertheless, it is possible to declare that there was no significant difference in the amount of outside assistance to the two sides (MPLA vs. FNLA/UNITA) between July and October 1975.

Pre-Independence Escalation and Foreign Intervention

Those four months (July-October 1975) were a crucial period in the Angolan conflict. It began in July when the MPLA expelled the
FNLA and UNITA from the capital and the transitional government collapsed. This was followed by South Africa’s first incursion into Angola on August 9th. In mid-August Portugal reassumed power in Luanda; finally, October 23rd marked the major invasion by South Africa just prior to independence. During these four months the MPLA destroyed the myth of the FNLA’s military superiority by expanding its presence throughout Angola; by mid-October the MPLA controlled twelve of the sixteen district capitals. While it might be correct to say that this four-month expansion by the MPLA could not have been accomplished without Soviet aid, it was achieved -- contrary to assertions by the Secretary of State and other officials -- without (a) the use of foreign troops, (b) a significant advantage in the number or quality of weapons over the FNLA, or (c) a larger army than the forces of the FNLA and UNITA. (34)

During the three weeks prior to Angola’s independence (11 November 1975), several important events occurred which dramatically altered the course of the war and, ultimately, U.S. participation. On October 23rd a column of approximately 1500 white soldiers, including South African regular troops, a number of (former) Portuguese soldiers, and a variety of European and American mercenaries, crossed into southern Angola from Namibia and launched a major attack against the MPLA. With minor support from the Chipenda faction of the FNLA and UNITA troops, and backed by dozens of tanks, French Panhard armored cars and helicopters, the column marched north for 400 miles in less than three weeks, driving the MPLA and their Cuban allies from most of the area they had won during the summer. Some Portuguese observers
in Angola thought that the South African-led attack, which eventually included over 5000 South African troops, would reach the capital before independence. (35)

At the same time, with the support of between 2000 and 3000 Zairian regular troops from the north, the FNLA launched a major armored attack. Just prior to November 11th, the FNLA and Zairian troops massed tanks, heavy artillery, and mortars at Quifangondo, only 12 miles north of Luanda, where FNLA President Holden Roberto proudly, boasted that he would “flatten the capital.” At the time of their departure, a number of Portuguese commanders predicted that a “bloody massacre” would occur in Luanda when (not “if”) the FNLA troops arrived in the capital. On November 12th foreign diplomats in Luanda were quoted as fearing that the mercenary column from the south was about to “link up with troops north of Luanda and choke off the city.” (36) There is very little question that if the MPLA had not received immediate and extensive outside assistance at this point, they would have been in grave danger of being defeated militarily by this north/south pincer movement, spearheaded by well over 5000 foreign troops. This is precisely when the Cuban soldiers arrived en masse.

The Cuban Dimension

The numerous versions and interpretations of the nature of Cuban involvement in Angola range from lauding it as a defensive response to attacks by a racist South Africa to portraying it as.
an act of aggression by a Soviet pawn. An accurate picture of Cuban involvement is necessary not only to comprehend what happened in Angola but also to understand and analyze the breakdown on this issue of U.S.-Soviet relations in 1975—76 and the performance of Henry Kissinger during his final two years as Secretary of State.

The Cuban operation during the Angolan war must be viewed in phases, rather than as part of some grand plot formulated at the outset. (37) At least four phases can be discerned and discussed in terms of the number of Cuban soldiers in Angola, the apparent goals of the Castro regime, the military exigencies resulting from the intervention of external forces against the MPLA, and the impact of Cuban assistance on the outcome of the war.

According to U.S. intelligence sources no more than 100 Cuban advisors were in Angola before the beginning of the summer of 1975 when approximately 200 more (advisors) arrived. (38) Their presence was neither initiated nor funded by the Soviet Union, rather it was part of Cuba’s general military assistance program to a number of countries and liberation movements in Africa, Latin America, and the Middle East. In fact, this initial help raised few eyebrows since Cuba had been providing military assistance to the MPLA for over a decade. In addition, at this particular time, Angola was not one of Cuba’s largest or most important military programs in the Third World (i.e., Guinea, Tanzania, Somalia, Equatorial Guinea, Syria, South Yemen). Nor was the Cuban assistance substantial enough to make any appreciable difference in the fighting between the MPLA and FNLA. Cubans were not even involved as combatants until after September. Thus, the Cuban assistance during this period can be characterized...
as an attempt to help train and organize the green MPLA army which American sources believed had almost no officers over the age of 30.

On September 7th troops embarked from Havana, arriving in Angola at the end of September (27th), bringing the total number of Cubans in Angola to approximately 1000. If this second phase of Cuban involvement, spanning most of October, is viewed in isolation or only in relation to the fact that it preceded the South African and Zairian invasions by a few weeks --as the State Department and a number of American and British journalists have portrayed it -- then it could be considered as the turning point when Cuba decided to provide the assistance necessary for an MPLA victory. (39) But it did not occur in isolation.

The decision to increase the number of Cubans in Angola came in response to a request by the MPLA which had become gravely concerned by a number of ominous developments in August. The first invasion by South Africa on August 9th constituted a major escalation of the war; in addition, no one in Angola (including the Portuguese) knew if it was a single action or part of a larger plan to push further into MPLA-controlled territory. Before the end of August, the MPLA was convinced that a major South African invasion was imminent. The party was also threatened in the north when the FNLA and Zairian troops, along with hundreds of former Portuguese commandos, moved to within thirty-five miles of the capital only days after the South African thrust into the South. The massing of troops in Zaire on the borders of Cabinda further threatened to challenge the MPLA’s hold over the oil-rich enclave. Moreover, the seizure of power by the Portuguese in mid-August meant that the MPLA was forced to sur—
render some of its control in the capital to a Portuguese regime which the party considered to be hostile. The fall of the Goncalves regime in Lisbon at this time merely confirmed the MPLA’s worst fears about the Portuguese. Finally, the millions of dollars worth of American weapons to the FNLA and (for the first time) to UNITA, approved by the 40 Committee in July, began to arrive in late August and early September, signaling to the MPLA a major American escalation whose magnitude was as yet unknown.

In light of these developments it is highly unlikely that, when the Cuban Government agreed to the MPLA request (in August) to treble its presence in Angola, either the MPLA, Cuba, or the Soviet Union believed the approximately one thousand Cubans could provide the MPLA with a decisive edge for winning the war outright. If this had been the intention, surely the new arrivals would have been sent immediately on offensive missions instead of remaining in the back lines instructing or being defensively deployed in Cabinda. In fact, according to U.S. intelligence sources, Cubans were not sent to the front until late October, after the South African invasion. Thus the magnitude of the Cubans’ second phase was not sufficient to measurably increase the MPLA’s offensive power. At best,
the Cubans helped to consolidate control over those parts of the country where the MPLA had already been dominant.

The third phase -- which lasted only a few weeks -- was initiated by the October 23rd invasion by South African regular troops and a large assortment of mercenaries. This escalation, along with the FNLA/Zairian thrust in the north, not only threatened the MPLA but the Cubans as well. Both were now clearly on the defensive; few familiar with the situation in Angola at the time were prepared to wager against the probability that the foreign invaders would reach the capital. It would have been difficult to dispute Fidel Castro’s depiction of the situation in early November when the leadership of the Cuban Communist Party decided to grant the MPLA’s request for a substantial increase in troops and weapons:

(When the first Cuban troop unit arrived in Angola on November 5th) the foreign interventionists were 25 kilometers from Luanda in the north, their 140 millimeter artillery was bombing the suburbs of the capital and the South African fascists had already penetrated more than 700 kilometers into the south from the Namibian border, while Cabinda was heroically defended by MPLA fighters and a handful of Cuban instructors.

The only way to interpret the Cuban dispatch of an additional two to three thousand troops by independence day (November 11) as an offensive operation would be to ignore the role of the South African, Zairian, and mercenary forces. In fact, Secretary of State Henry Kissinger appears to have viewed the situation in precisely those terms. With respect to those same events prior to independence, Kissinger argued in testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee:
The UNITA forces launched a successful counteroffensive which swept the MPLA out of the southern and most of the central part of Angola. In the north the FNLA also made significant advances. By Independence Day -- November 11 -- the MPLA controlled only the former colonial capital of Luanda and a narrow belt across northcentral Angola.

In October massive increases in Soviet and Cuban military assistance began to arrive. (42)

From this perspective the Secretary of State could conclude that Cuban actions during the third phase represented an effort “to take unilateral advantage of a turbulent local situation...” (43)

Whereas Kissinger overlooked the presence of foreign troops and assistance to the FNLA/UNITA forces, he greatly exaggerated the importance of the Soviet and Cuban assistance to the MPLA before independence. For example, on the night of Angolan independence the Secretary of State told the Pittsburgh World Affairs Council that “the forces of the MPLA achieved control of the capital with substantial communist assistance,” completely ignoring the vital fact that Luanda has always constituted the very core of MPLA strength in Angola. (44)

The fourth and final phase of the Cuban operation during the Angolan war commenced around independence day when, in Castro’s words, “Cuba sent the men and weapons necessary to win that struggle.” (45) By the end of 1975 an alleged 7000 Cubans were in Angola, and by late January, 1976, the number had risen to over 12,000. The war ended the following month. The FNLA, UNITA, and remnants of their foreign backers were no match for the MPLA and Cuban forces.

While this account of the phases of Cuban intervention fixes the decision to provide the material and manpower necessary for a quick and undisputed MPLA victory to the first weeks of November 1975, it
does not answer the question of whose decision it was to meet the MPLA’s request for help. The debate has focused on whether the Cuban government acted on its own or as a reluctant surrogate of the Soviet Union. Most U.S. officials, including the Secretary of State, and a host of journalists argued that the Cubans went to Angola to pay off their approximately five and one-half billion dollar “IOU” to the Soviet Union for military and economic assistance extended since 1960. In other words, as “surrogates” of the Soviets. Both the MPLA and the Cubans have vociferously denied these charges. In a speech on 19 April 1976 marking the fifteenth anniversary of the Bay of Pigs invasion, Castro asserted that the Soviet Union “never requested” him to send soldiers – “Cuba’s decision was made absolutely under its own responsibility.”

While Americans are generally reluctant to accept Fidel Castro’s word on most matters, The Washington Post confirmed Castro’s version in a story, based on allegedly reliable leaks, which maintained that high “American officials familiar with the available evidence do not believe that the Cubans were pressured” by Moscow into furnishing men for the Angolan battlefields. My own discussions with State Department officials in the African and Latin American bureaus convince me that Castro’s (and The Washington Post’s) interpretation is essentially correct. The decision to send troops was made by the Cubans themselves. They consulted with the Soviets over logistics and strategy but, in the words of a leading expert in the State Department, “the Cubans were never pushed by the Russians to do anything in Angola they didn’t want to do.” However, more important than whether or not
the Soviet Union could command the use of Cuban troops in Angola is the fact that by early November there was a coalescence of interests among the MPLA, Cuba and the Soviet Union to have the Cuban Government send the men “necessary to win that struggle.”

The Debate

At the peak of the pincer movement against the MPLA, just five days before Angola’s independence, the Senate Foreign Relations Committee held a significant closed hearing on Angola. There had been charges daily that the U.S. was involved clandestinely in the Angolan war, yet no Administration official had publicly confirmed the allegations. (48) Some Committee members were determined to discover precisely what the U.S. was doing in Angola and why. Accordingly, they invited testimony from William Colby, Director of the CIA; and Secretary Kissinger who, because he was abroad at the time, was replaced by Undersecretary of State Joseph Sisco. The November 6th hearing was necessitated by the Senate’s apparent failure to exercise its recently acquired power of oversight over covert operations. The Hughes-Ryan Amendment to the Foreign Assistance Act, passed in December 1974, had led most Congressmen to believe that it was no longer possible for the U.S. to become involved clandestinely in a foreign war without their approval. Angola proved that they were mistaken, as is illustrated by the experiences of one member of the Senate Committee, Dick Clark, Chairman of the Subcommittee on Africa.

Following his mid-1975 hearings on southern Africa, Claric asked for and received a CIA briefing in late July on U.S. covert activities
in Angola. (49) A short time later Nathaniel Davis, Assistant Secretary of State for Africa, passed a note to Clark during a public hearing asking not to be pressed on certain points about Angola because “we both know” about these covert activities. Clark was frustrated by this experience because it indicated that “classified briefings actually become an impediment to effective oversight.” In fact, he concluded that the oversight role provided “for nothing more than an ex-post-facto communication to Congress of decisions already reached… [with] no provision for advice or consent.”

Robert Ingersoll, Deputy Secretary of State, also briefed Clark’s African Subcommittee at this time. Committee members protested that the Administration lacked any concept of what the FNLA could or would do with the increased American aid. They suggested that it would be much wiser to discuss the Angolan situation with the Soviets, whose level of escalation was still not great by July 1975. Ingersoll retorted that this would be futile because the Soviets simply would not respond. The U.S. would first have to send substantial material aid to Angola as “bargaining chips.” This remained the Administration’s posture until discussions with the Soviet Union on this matter were initiated in late October, 1975. Unfortunately for the architects of that strategy, by the time the U.S. chose to bargain with the Soviet Union, Uncle Sam’s biggest “bargaining chip” (South Africa) had come up double zero -- through ineffectiveness against the Cubans and bringing considerable condemnation to the American-backed FNLA/UNITA side.

For a firsthand view of the situation, Senator Clark visited Angola in August where he met the leaders of the three contending
factions. He returned further convinced that American involvement was a mistake and
communicated this to the Director of the Central Intelligence Agency. But Colby
disagreed. Frustrated, Clark reported on his trip to the full Foreign Relations Committee,
explaining his objections to American policy in Angola, which resulted in the Committee
deciding to call Kissinger and Colby for a complete review of Angolan and African
policy. The stage was set for the first major confrontation between the Administration
and the Senate over Angola.

On November 6th, behind the locked doors of the Senate chamber. Colby and
Sisco admitted that the CIA was covertly supplying the FNLA and UNITA with money,
rifles, machine guns, mortars, vehicles, ammunition, and logistical support. Many
Senators expressed strong doubts about the wisdom of deepening American involvement.
Clark argued that the U.S. course of military intervention was alienating most African
leaders, to which Sisco responded that the U.S. had to deal with the immediate problem
of Soviet influence. Colby added that the U.S. had a general interest in preventing a new
country from falling under Soviet influence.

While the few interested Senators were generally attuned to the realities within
the Angolan context, the Administration was clearly focused on the global balance of
power between the Soviet Union and the United States. From this perspective Colby and
Sisco defended American covert aid on the grounds that it provided the U.S. with
“bargaining chips” with the Soviet Union. The Senators strongly disagreed but the only
action they could take would be to pass an amendment prohibiting such aid. They were
prevented from doing so only by the factor of secrecy which still cloaked America’s
intervention.
Ironically, that cloak of secrecy fell the following day when The New York Times published the essence of Colby’s and Sisco’s testimony before the Foreign Relations Committee. The Washington Post published more details of the testimony the day after. These stories began an unprecedented series of “leaks” to the press by various members of Congress and other opponents of U.S. intervention in government agencies, including the Department of State, Department of Defense, and the CIA. Over the next two months there were so many leaks about American covert activities in Angola that, according to one knowledgeable source in State Department intelligence, only minor details escaped the attention of the publics “all of the essential facts were published in the newspapers.”

However, it was only in early December that the Secretary of State acknowledged during a press conference that the U.S. was indirectly providing military assistance for use in Angola. This was the first public avowal of American intervention by any official in Washington. The admission of U.S. involvement not only ignited a major debate in the media and among the public but also lifted restrictions from Congressmen who, had been unable to introduce legislation (to cut off U.S. participation) on the grounds that it was not a “public” matter.

Differing perceptions of the lessons of Vietnam were evidenced in the debate on Angola. On one side were those (including President Word, Dr. Kissinger, Director Colby, and Secretary Schlesinger) who
argued that it was imperative for the U.S. to reestablish its “resolve” and “will to resist” Soviet expansion throughout the world. On the other side it was argued that, after Vietnam, the U.S. should not become involved in more remote civil wars where it has no immediate interests. The Country’s mood indicated that the American public, embittered and disillusioned by recent American losses in Southeast Asia, would not support even minor involvement in another remote and confusing civil conflict. This was confirmed in a nationwide poll conducted by Lou Harris (released on 21 November 1975) which showed that 72 percent of all Americans felt that the U.S. should avoid involvement in all guerrilla-type wars in the future when it appears the U.S. is participating in the civil war of another country. \(^{(53)}\)

To a large majority of the Congress, media, and the general public, too many uncomfortable parallels existed between Angola in 1975 and Vietnam before the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution in 1964,

- both were remote civil wars in areas outside traditional spheres of American interest or influence;

- neither was vital to U.S. economic or security interests;

- American involvement in both places followed the departure of a European power from its colony;

- American allies needed vast amounts of equipment, training, and manpower to operate all but the most rudimentary weapons and equipment;

- it was not clear in either case that it would make a significant difference to the U.S. which side won the war;

- the U.S. backing a movement (FNLA) which, in comparison to its rivals, lacked leadership, organization, motivation, and military capabilities (U.S. support for UNITA came too late to be considered relevant); and

- there was no “light at the end of the tunnel” in either conflict -- it was never clear when or how the wars would end.
(Actually, the Administration’s decision to significantly increase its covert commitment in Angola, four times within four months in late 1975 provided an ominous sign that the U.S. was locked into another endless spiral of escalation with the Soviet Union.)

The protestations by Kissinger, Colby, Moynihan, and Ford that Angola was not “another Vietnam” were doubted by many, including those who shared a deep concern over the alleged threat which Soviet activities in Angola portended for the ability of the superpowers to compete on a global scale without resort to war or other unacceptable means. By emphasizing only the global stakes in Angola, the Ford Administration indicated that it had failed to learn a vital lesson from the experience in Southeast Asia -- a lesson which had not escaped the majority of the Congress or the public.

Both “global” and “local” circumstances must be carefully considered before the U.S. commits itself to a faction in a foreign civil conflict. After all, the U.S. did not withdraw from Vietnam and Cambodia because of a change in the perceptions of the “global” aims. The principal American aim was always to stop “Soviet expansion.” The U.S. withdrew when it became clear that “locally” a victory required more than American aid. After spending over $150 billion, it became obvious that more than money and arms was needed to forge a winning combination or to effectuate a desired solution. This realization forced Americans to take a hard look at the Thieu and Lan Nol regimes and most concluded that their prospects for victory ranged from poor to nil. By the war’s end, few Americans disagreed with the proposition that sending further arms or men to Vietnam or Cambodia would be a tragic waste.
Yet, in Angola the Administration was once again telling the public that global ramifications were more important than local realities. In fact, Secretary Kissinger underscored his preoccupation with the global dimension when he told Senator Clark, during the height of the debate, that his opposition to U.S. intervention may be right in the African context, but it was wrong in the global context. However, neither Clark nor a majority of his colleagues was ever persuaded that it was possible to ignore the Angolan context and still win globally. On the contrary, Clark was convinced that the U.S. was backing the only “sure loser,” which guaranteed a loss globally. “Our task,” the Senator observed, “was essentially to save the Secretary from himself.”

The Angolan context had changed considerably by early December when the Senate Foreign Relations Committee strongly endorsed Senator Clark’s proposed amendment to the Foreign Assistance Act to cut off all covert aid to Angola. The Committee firmly believed that the Angolan context indicated the U.S. could not win. Given the massive Cuban presence, an estimated $100 million in Soviet arms, and the poor quality of the FNLA/UNITA troops, it was concluded that the U.S. had no other choice than an immediate cessation of aid. Once the magnitude and sophistication of the Russian arms in the hands of thousands of Cuban troops were apparent, it was no longer a question of going “tit-for-tat” with the Soviet Union in arms supplies. It was also necessary to consider who would operate the increasingly sophisticated American arms being sent. Both Roberto and Savimbi had told Time and Newsweek that they didn’t have Angolans trained to
utilize much of the equipment they received.\(^{(54)}\)

The Committee assumed that since neither the FNLA nor UNITA could absorb or utilize the $28 million in additional military aid proposed by the Administration, the U.S. was faced with some unpalatable options:

1. increase South African participation (which would, in effect, amount to an American—South African alliance)

2. hire mercenaries from around the world; and/or

3. send American advisors and possibly some troops.

They concluded that these options were unacceptable and that the only alternative was to cut off all further aid. When the Clark amendment fell victim to President Ford’s veto of the Foreign Assistance Act, Senator John Tunney introduced an amendment to the defense appropriations bill to prevent any American covert aid from going to Angola. The day before the Senate voted on the Tunney Amendment (19 December 1975), Secretary Kissinger pushed for a “compromise” over the Administration’s $28 million request during a private meeting with two dozen Senators. Kissinger admonished that the U.S. could not sit idly by while the Soviet Union was heavily involved 8000 miles from its shores. He persuaded many of the Senators that some type of compromise was necessary, but Tunney remained adamant. For him it was not a question of another $10, $28, or $100 million in arms but, like many of his colleagues, he was concerned about who would operate the equipment and fire the arms: The United States cannot save a losing cause with money alone. We would have to supply aircraft, tanks, antiaircraft guns and missiles, helicopters and other weapons. Who is to
fly and operate them? There is no time for training programs, there are no allies ready to intervene with such equipment. We would have to send instructors and advisers and, in all probability, American troops in a pattern too reminiscent of Vietnam. (55)

On the 19th of December 1975, the Senate passed the Tunney Amendment by 54 votes to 22. The following month (January 27, 1976) the House of Representatives passed its version of the same amendment by an even greater margin (323 votes to 99) which, for all practical purposes, brought an end to further American participation in the Angolan war. By this time the war was virtually over in any case. The FNLA and UNITA were finally defeated militarily in early February 1976, thus ending the war but, given the tenacity of Ford and Kissinger and the challenge of Ronald Reagan in the presidential primaries, not the debate.

Overview

That American policy toward Angola from the mid-1960s through the end of the civil war in early 1976 was dominated by domestic and global considerations to the exclusion of Angolan realities was never more evident than in the Ford Administration’s decision to choose sides in that civil war. Once the Administration’s defense of its decision to intervene is stripped of its rationalizations, rhetoric, euphemisms, and moralizing, what remains is a single-minded determination to respond to the Soviet Union. That determination was not the result of a conviction that one of the contending factions was better for the U.S or for Angola, but arose from the simple fact that the Soviet Union was backing one of the factions.
Ironically, the CIA saw no real difference among the three nationalist groups. James Pott, CIA Director of African Affairs, told Senator Tunney before the Senate vote on his amendment that it would make “no difference” to the U.S. which of the three movements won. When Tunney pressed him on the “no difference,” Pott conceded “well, perhaps 5 percent.” Colby displayed a similar perspective before the House Select Committee on Intelligence (in mid-December 1975) when asked about the differences among the three contesting factions:

“They are all independents. They are all for black Africa. They are all for some fuzzy kind of social system, you know, without really much articulation, but some sort of let’s not be exploited by the capitalist nations.” If they were all so similar in outlook, why, the Committee tried to determine, were certain nations supporting one group against another?

Congressman Les Aspin: “And why are the Chinese backing the moderate group?”

Mr. Colby: “Because the Soviets are backing the MPLA is the simplest answer.”

Mr. Aspin: “It sounds like that is why we are doing it.”

Mr. Colby: “It is.” (56)

If Colby’s answer did not sound as though it were straight out of the cold war handbook, neither did it have the ring of detente. In Kissinger’s understanding of detente, the United States “must prevent the Soviet Union from translating its growing strength into global or regional preponderance. But we must do so without escalating every crisis into a massive confrontation.” (57) Detente clearly did not rule out competition. In fact, if one carefully
considers Soviet and American competition throughout the Third World during the years immediately preceding the Angolan war, the Soviet Union does not appear to have fared very well. Soviet plans for increased influence in Latin America were partially thwarted by the overthrow of the Allende regime in Chile. In the Middle East the Soviets suffered a series of defeats in Egypt, Syria, Iraq, and South Yemen. In Cambodia, Soviet diplomats were rather unceremoniously sent home when the Khmer Rouge took power. Finally, at the time of the Portuguese coup, the Soviets had few close allies in black Africa besides Guinea, Congo-Brazzaville, and Somalia.

What then was so special or unique about Angola that prompted the U.S. to escalate the “crisis into a major confrontation?” Did the Administration see something unusual in Soviet behavior in Angola which necessitated an American military response? How does one determine when the Soviets have exceeded the boundaries of detente to the point that a military confrontation is worth risking? Kissinger’s attitude was revealed in June 1975, when the U.S. position in Indochina began to crumble. When the Secretary of State was asked to reconcile Soviet behavior in Vietnam, Portugal and the Middle East with detente, he responded that “Vietnam was not caused by the Russians,” it had “its own dynamics,” of which Soviet “actions were only a part.” The trouble in Portugal “was not caused by the Soviets,” but “by the internal dynamics of Portugal itself.” On the Middle East: “I would not be surprised if in Moscow, they made the same argument and said that we have been using detente to improve our position.” (58) Apparently Kissinger made an important distinction between.
Soviet activity in a given country and the “internal dynamics” of that country. Yet, if Vietnam, Portugal, and the Middle East could be accommodated within detente because the Secretary of State believed that their problems were caused by internal dynamics, rather than by the Soviet Union, why not Angola? If ever there was a clear-cut example of the internal dynamics — as distinguished from the Soviet Union — causing a civil war, it was Angola.

Moreover, even if by some twist of the imagination it were possible to view Moscow as the cause of the Angolan war, why did the Administration decide that Angola was the place to oppose the Soviets militarily — especially when Washington saw no vital interests to protect nor perceived more than a slight difference to the U.S. no matter what the outcome of the war? Given the Soviets’ long time support of the MPLA and the American record of support for Portuguese colonialism, the U.S. decided to compete militarily in an area where Moscow held a strong hand. Furthermore, why did the Administration choose in mid-July 1975 to make its military stand on the side of the FNLA and UNITA? By early June intelligence sources had revealed that China was giving up on the FNLA and had told Roberto not to expect more than $100,000 in aid by the end of 1975, at which time all help would cease. Apparently, the Chinese were very disappointed in the performance of the FNLA troops, a view which was shared by almost all American observers. Why, then, did Washington decide to inherit what the Chinese saw as a losing military cause?

The President and Secretary of State frequently castigated the Congress after passage of the Tunney Amendment for being naive about.
Soviet intentions in Angola and for not understanding how to deal with the Soviet Government in such a confrontation. However, after Vietnam, the Administration’s assumption that the Soviets would choose to compromise in Angola when faced by U.S. military power also appears to be exceedingly naive. What led the Administration to assume that the Soviet Union would be more amenable to military pressure on the ground in Angola than to diplomatic leverage involving grain sales, SALT, and other bilateral matters?

The Administration’s path to intervention in Angola is strewn with unanswered questions, false assumptions, and profound misunderstandings. The policy failed both in Angola and the United States because the Secretary of State misperceived:

- the strengths and weaknesses of America’s so-called “allies” and “enemies” in Angola;

- the will of the Soviet Union not to give in to combined American and Chinese military pressure;

- the determination of Cuba to support the MPLA;

- the degree to which South African intervention would prejudice the American cause; and

- his own ability to convince the Congress and American public that Angola would not become “another Vietnam.”

Thus it was Henry Kissinger’s failure to grasp either the Angolan or the American realities which led ultimately to the defeat of his policy during the Angolan civil war.

A New Post-War Policy?

The Kissinger policy failed during the Angolan war because it accomplished precisely the opposite of what was intended. Through
covert military intervention the Secretary of State sought to minimize or negate Soviet influence in an independent Angola. At the time the American policy was implemented, relations between the Soviets and the MPLA were still not cordial, having just been resumed after almost a year of recriminations between the two. Yet during the war the American, Chinese, South African, and other support for the MPLA’s rivals forced the Party to depend increasingly upon the Soviet Union, which ultimately magnified Soviet influence far beyond their most optimistic expectations.

Following the Angolan debacle the Secretary of State was anxious to prevent the Soviet Union from extending its influence from Angola to the rest of southern Africa. Attention immediately focused on Rhodesia. How would Henry Kissinger play his weak hand in Rhodesia? Would he repeat his Angola policy of trying military means, rather than diplomatic, to curb Soviet influence, as urged by Ronald Reagan and other American conservatives? The overriding problem with this option (as Reagan discovered the week before the California primary in June 1976) was that it left only one side to support against the Soviets -- that of Ian Smith, a thoroughly unpopular and unviable alternative.

Initially, Kissinger tried to prevent the spread of Soviet influence by adopting a dual approach toward southern Africa. On the one hand, he vigorously endorsed majority rule in Rhodesia and Namibia; on the other hand he sought to prevent “further Angolas” by threatening U.S. retaliation if the Soviets or Cubans became involved in either of the territories dominated by white minority regimes.
Despite the secretary’s endorsement of majority rule, however, the face remained that U.S. policy did not appear to provide concrete support of that goal. On the contrary, the continued importation of Rhodesian chrome under the Byrd Amendment combined with the threats against the Soviets and Cubans appeared to give sustenance to the Smith regime at its darkest hour. The policy was widely attacked within the U.S. and abroad (even by most countries which had supported the U.S. position on Angola) because it lacked credibility and was, once again out of step with African realities.

At this juncture, Secretary of State Kissinger decided to take a hard look at African realities prior to his two-week African trip in late April, 1976. His first surprise was to learn that practically all African countries, including some of the MPLA’s strongest supporters, were opposed to using Cuban troops to liberate Rhodesia. In fact, the Zimbabwean guerrillas were in agreement with the four African Presidents designated by the Organization of African Unity to coordinate Rhodesian policy (Julius Nyerere of Tanzania, Samora Machel of Mozambique, Kenneth Kaunda of Zambia, and Seretse Khama of Botswana) that the actual fighting should be done by the Zimbabweans themselves. He was also surprised, to learn that the Soviets had their own difficulties with Rhodesia. Their best “bargaining chip” was Joshua Nkomo, a controversial leader who had been discredited after the breakdown of his negotiations with Ian Smith. Moreover, the Chinese had the inside track on the Soviets in the area of training the Zimbabwean guerrillas. Finally, he discovered that with few exceptions African leaders were adamant about keeping the cold war
out of Africa and to accomplish this they were determined to prevent the Americans and Soviets from backing opposite sides in Rhodesia.

Kissinger’s advisors on Africa strongly urged him to consider these facts and to adopt a new policy which would include concrete assistance to Zimbabweans because

- it was “right” with regard to majority rule;
- not providing assistance would leave the field open to the Soviets; and
- U.S. pressure might succeed in encouraging the whites to negotiate in Rhodesia, thereby forestalling a bloody civil war.

In effect, the Secretary of State was encouraged to endorse means which would achieve the same goals supported by the Soviet Union. For the first time in over seven years, Henry Kissinger listened to his Africa experts.

On 21 April 1976 in Lusaka, Zambia, Kissinger spelled out his new African policy. It contained ten points which he pledged to carry out in order to help realize majority rule in Rhodesia and Namibia. (59) Many subsequently criticized the policy for offering too little, too late and especially the Administration for its feeble efforts to push Congress, in the face of Reagan’s challenge prior to the Republican convention to implement the policy. Yet, far more important than the scope or the implementation of the policy is the fact that it removed the U.S. from an almost certain collision course with the Soviet Union and/or Cuba over an issue (majority rule in Rhodesia) which could only have resulted in another ignominious setback for the United States. By adopting the recommendations of his former critics, Henry Kissinger had learned that, contrary to
his conviction during the Angolan debate, his African policy would never succeed in the
global context unless it were also relevant to African realities.

Ironically, however, that lesson was not applied to the problem of normalizing
relations with post-war Angola. The Kissinger policy toward Angola after the war
continued to be guided by domestic and global concerns. And once again, in pursuit of
his goal to minimize Soviet and Cuban influence in Angola, Kissinger accomplished
precisely the opposite.

After the war the general perception within the State Department of Angolan
realities has been that the MPLA is an extremely heterogeneous movement containing a
number of factions competing for power. Prominent among the factions is one commonly
identified as “the moderates,” those who support a multiracial government and who favor
policy of non-alignment. The moderates generally believe that Angola’s independence
can be better maintained by normalizing relations with the U.S. in order to reduce
dependence on the Soviet Union. In fact, in early February 1976 an aide to Senator
Tunney returned from Angola and reported to the Assistant Secretary of State for African
Affairs that a number of MPLA cabinet ministers and other top officials “all took great
pains to point out the danger of forcing the MPLA into a cycle of ever-greater reliance on
the Soviets by refusing to deal with them.” (60) He further indicated that the MPLA is
interested in immediate discussions with the U.S. about normalizing relations.

The feeler was rejected by the State Department, whose attitude.
was “we will have to give them a diplomatic victory someday, but not now.” It was announced that the MPLA would not be recognized until Cuba began to withdraw its forces. However, when the MPLA announced the beginning of the Cuban withdrawal four months later, the condition for U.S. recognition was raised from “substantial” to “complete” withdrawal of Cuban troops (and heavy weapons), signaling what one top Angolan expert in the Department described as “a harder U.S. line on Angola.” (61) In late June, contrary to strong recommendations by UN Ambassador William Scranton, Kissinger vetoed Angola’s application for membership in the United Nations. (62) The “line” hardened even more after the execution of the American mercenary, Daniel Gearhart, which Henry Kissinger stated “hurt any chance of American aid to Angola or any other improvement in relations.” (63)

It was no coincidence that the hardening of the Administration’s line on Angola coincided with the conservative challenge mounted by Ronald Reagan during the primaries. From Florida in February to California in June, Ford (with considerable help from Kissinger) tried to appeal to the right wing of the Republican Party through caustic attacks on Cuba and Angola. (64) The attacks won few Reagan supporters and did nothing to lessen Soviet or Cuban influence in Angola. On the contrary, the Administration’s hardening line ensured that the Angolan moderates’ fear of being forced “into a cycle of ever-greater reliance on the Soviets” would become reality. In a manner so reminiscent of the self-fulfilling prophesy which had pervaded American policy toward Cuba in the early 1960s, American attempts to curb Soviet influence in Angola have ultimately expanded it.
And Henry Kissinger inadvertently demonstrated for the fifth time in seven years that an American policy toward Angola based exclusively on U.S. domestic or global concerns, instead of on Angolan realities is doomed to failure. (65)

Conclusions

The failure of Secretary of State Kissinger’s Angolan policies raises important questions about recent American foreign policy in general and suggests some caveats for future policy makers. When Kissinger took his first serious look at Angola in early 1975, he not only ignored the internal dimension of the conflict but misperceived the nature of external involvement as well. Specifically, he stumbled into a Sino-Soviet dispute apparently without realizing it. The Secretary was not alone in this regard; most American analyses of the global ramifications of the Angolan conflict tended to downplay or ignore the Sino-Soviet dimension. The result was that many Soviet actions in response to China were incorrectly perceived as being directed against the United States. The importance of the Sino-soviet rivalry in Angola prior to the American intervention is assessed by the British commentator Cohn Legum:

The collapse of the Portuguese dictatorship in April 1974 initiated a new phase in the Sino-Soviet struggle, with the Chinese initially making far the greater gains, particularly in Mozambique, and in consolidating their relations with Tanzania and Zambia. Given the strong Chinese position already established with two of Angola’s liberation movements... [FNLA and UNITA] as well as with the Zaire government, the cards were heavily stacked in the Chinese favor at the end of 1974. In this context, and within what was already emerging as a much speeded-up timetable in southern Africa generally, the Soviets made their crucial decision in Angola in 1975. The key to these bold Soviet decisions lay above all in the Chinese factor. (66)
Besides misperceiving the catalytic effect Chinese support for the FNLA had on Soviet moves in Angola, the secretary of State never fully understood why the Chinese withdrew in mid-1975. If China’s withdrawal had been understood, it is unlikely that the United States would have intervened militarily. While China realized in mid-1975 that the FNLA army was a “paper tiger” and therefore made a hasty exit, Kissinger and others in the Administration were only too ready to pick up where the Chinese had left off, ignoring years of accumulated U.S. intelligence on the FNLA and their poor performance on the battlefield.

The failure to comprehend FNLA weaknesses apparently encouraged the erroneous belief early in 1975 that MPLA victories were attributable to Soviet assistance. Yet, as noted earlier, external assistance to the MPLA did not differ significantly from that to the FNLA through the first half of 1975. The MPLA’s early victories can be explained in part by the qualitative difference between the two armies and by the fact that the FNLA chose to attack the MPLA on their own terrain, including within Luanda where the FNLA had practically no support. It was a serious mistake to credit Soviet assistance to the MPLA as the principal explanation for those early MPLA victories. It was an even greater mistake to characterize them publicly as victories for the Soviet Union and losses for the United States. This myopic perspective was the direct result of Kissinger’s propensity, throughout the Angolan conflict, to view events through the optic of an inappropriate global framework.

The Administration compounded its error of inheriting what the Chinese considered to be a losing cause by justifying its continued
escalation as a necessary demonstration to the Chinese that the U.S. still had the will and ability to resist the Soviet Union. President Ford, Henry Kissinger, George Bush (who succeeded Colby as Director of the CIA), and General Brown (Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff) frequently expressed concern over the reaction of China and our western European allies if the U.S. “failed to demonstrate in Angola American will power to resist Soviet expansion.”

What is still not clear is why the Administration ever accepted the interpretation that Angola represented a test of American strength and will power. Even if one were to begin with the premise (which I reject) that Angola was an example of Soviet aggression requiring a strong military response, why should it be assumed that the response was the responsibility of the United States? Moreover, if western allies assumed that an MPLA victory would greatly increase the Soviet Union’s power in central and southern Africa and therefore pose a threat to the West, why did England and France look to the U.S., which has less at stake than they in the region and is much less vulnerable to any potential disruption of oil supplies transported around the Cape of Good Hope? It is interesting to note in light of the fears expressed about Chinese and western European impressions of American will power that in the Security Council vote of June 23, 1976, on the admission of Angola to the United Nations, England and France joined thirteen other nations in favoring admission, while China was not present. The U.S. was left to cast the sole veto.

The American veto of Angola’s admission to the United Nations and refusal to recognize the Peoples Republic of Angola highlight another problem area in U.S. foreign policy, the implications of
which transcend U.S.-Angolan relations. There is no formula which can be used with certainty to provide the optimal timing for establishing diplomatic relations with a country whose leaders or policies are perceived as hostile to the United States. In general, the U.S. attempts to maintain diplomatic relations with all countries without regard to the character of their regimes. Notable exceptions include, besides Angola, North Korea, Albania, the Peoples Republic of China, Cuba, and Vietnam. The latter four countries have indicated that they would welcome U.S. recognition but, for a variety of reasons, the Administration does not believe that recognition is in the best interests of the U.S.

Two imaginative arguments have been advanced recently which advocate American recognition of China and Vietnam for reasons that go well beyond the question of recognition itself. Tiziano Terzani, correspondent for Der Spiegel and author of Giai Phong! The Fall and Liberation of Saigon, avers that there is a power struggle within Vietnam between the “gradualists” and those advocating a firm authoritarian political line (“Stalinist—Confucian”). He argues that the gradualists would be encouraged and strengthened if the Western nations, and particularly the U.S., were to respond favorably to Vietnamese offers of relations and its need for aid -- while they will become weaker if Vietnam remains isolated and thus dependent mainly on the USSR.” (67) In a similar vein Roger Brown, a senior analyst in the CIA who presented his own (not official) views in an important lead article in Foreign Policy, maintains that “U.S. moves to establish full diplomatic relations with China would probably strengthen the pragmatists’ position and Peking’s commitment to expanding ties with
non-Communist countries.”

Brown argues on the other hand,

... prolonged stagnation in Sino-Soviet relations could well contribute to undermining the political power of those individuals and groups within China which are favorably disposed toward Washington, and lead to an increase in the relative power of either pro-Soviet elements in the military, the radicals, or some coalition of both groups.

Both analyses take into account the existence within the Vietnamese and Chinese regimes of competing groups representing alternative strategies for development and differing approaches to the conduct of foreign affairs. One group -- variously called “gradualists,” “pragmatists,” or “moderates” -- favors economic and political relations with the West and non-alignment in international affairs, while the “radicals” or “leftists” advocate avoidance of economic and political contacts with the West and prefer instead to establish close ties with the Soviet Union. It would seem indisputable that it is in the interest of the United States to do everything possible to encourage the pragmatists in these and other countries. If the establishment of diplomatic and economic relations will strengthen their position internally, it should be done immediately.

A similar configuration of competition exists today in Angola. The “moderates” -- led by President Neto and Prime Minister Lopo de Nascimento -- favor the establishment of diplomatic and economic relations with all nations of the world who are prepared to respect Angola’s independence, the maintenance of a private economic sector, cooperation among all classes, and the establishment of a truly multiracial society in which advancement is based on merit, not color. The “moderates” are being challenged by a more radical group of “leftists” -- led by two government
ministers, Nito Alves and David Aires Machado -- who advocate the immediate abolition of the private economic sector and the destruction of the middle and upper classes, cessation of all contracts with multinationals such as Gulf Oil, a more exclusively pro-Soviet policy, the removal of whites and mestiços and the rapid advancement of blacks into positions of importance irrespective of merit. \(^{(70)}\)

What is common to all these countries -- China, Vietnam, and Angola -- is a desire for non-alignment on the part of “moderate” factions within the ruling parties. What is important for U.S. foreign policy is whether or not our government is capable of establishing relations with these countries now, while those advocating non-alignment are still in power.

The United States has made great strides in understanding the Third World since the days of John Foster Dulles, who equated non-alignment and socialism with enmity toward the United States. However, we still have a long way to go. We apparently still do not appreciate that Third World leaders, whom Americans may consider “radical” socialists or Marxists, believe that non-alignment is the only way to guarantee their national independence and that equitable economic cooperation with the West is not only possible but desirable for the economic development of their countries. It would be a tragic mistake for the United States to adopt a posture which undermined their belief and which could force those leaders to enter alliances, however reluctantly, in order to protect themselves from the U.S.

The history of Africa over the past decade and a half shows that, with very few exceptions, the continent’s 47 nations have
preferred non-alignment and some form of nominal socialism. “If there is one message African leaders want the United States Government to understand,” Senator Clark astutely observes, it is that they will not be pawns of either the Soviet Union or the United States. To regard them as such is wrong and can only lead to one mistake after another in our Africa policy. There is no reason to suppose that the Neto faction of the MPLA will be any different; therefore the U.S. should cease reacting to them as an enemy and seek to normalize relations, based on mutual interests, immediately.

Henry Kissinger did not understand nor appreciate that practically all African leaders are strongly committed to non-alignment and he therefore dismissed the advice of his Africa experts who urged him to support the OAU’s unanimous opposition (in mid-1975) to all foreign intervention in Angola. The argument which Kissinger rejected was that if the U.S. were to stay out of Angola and keep its hands clean, African leaders would either prevent the Soviet Union from massively intervening unilaterally or deal them a diplomatic setback. Instead, he took the course of military intervention, which ended in an American setback which need never have occurred.

Fortunately the Secretary of State learned some important lessons from the Angolan debacle. His diplomatic efforts concerning southern Africa in the late summer and early fall of 1976 were premised squarely on the belief that if the U.S. did not choose sides in Rhodesia or Namibia, African leaders will ensure that no other superpower will unilaterally determine the outcome of these present struggles. This dramatic change was just in time for the
U.S. to contribute positively to solutions of southern Africa’s complex problems. Hopefully, it came in time to avert another tragic imposition of superpower rivalries on African realities.
CHRONOLOGY OF MAJOR EVENTS MENTIONED IN TEXT

1969

21 January  Richard Nixon becomes the President of the United States.

April  The National Security Council Interdepartmental Group for Africa begins a major study of U.S. policy in southern Africa under the direction of Henry Kissinger.

1970

January  The National Security Council Study (NSSM 39) is presented to President Nixon. Kissinger recommends following an option which favors a relaxation in the political isolation and economic restrictions against the white-ruled States in southern Africa.

1973

December  An FNLA delegation, led by Holden Roberto, arrives in the People’s Republic of China for an 18-day visit. China’s embrace of Roberto is followed by the shipment of hundreds of tons of Chinese weapons to the FNLA in Zaire. Shortly after the Portuguese coup (25 April 1974) the first members of a 120-man military training mission (headed by a major general) arrive in Zaire to instruct FNLA troops.

Mid-December  Henry Kissinger visits Portugal to thank the Portuguese for use of the Azores base during the Yom Kippur war and promises the delivery of offensive weapons for use in Africa if the Portuguese Government will renew the Azores treaty with the U.S.

1974

February or March  The Soviet Union stops all military and financial aid to the MPLA.

March  Donald Easum replaces David Newsom as Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs.

25 April  Caetano regime in Portugal is overthrown by Armed Forces Movement, which is dedicated to decolonization in Africa.

5 & 21 October  FNLA and MPLA sign cease-fire agreements with the Portuguese and begin to establish offices in Luanda. UNITA had signed the ceasefire on 17 June 1974.
1974 continued

Oct. or November  The Soviet Union resumes aid to the MPLA.

2 & 19 November  Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs Donald Easum, in a speech in Dar es Salaam, urges the U.S. to work.

25 November  Secretary of State Henry Kissinger removes Donald Easum as Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs.

1975

8 January  Nathaniel Davis is nominated to be Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs.

15 January  Alvor Agreement is signed in Portugal by Portuguese Government, MPLA, FNLA, and UNITA. It establishes mechanics for a transition government and sets date of independence for 11 November 1975.

Late January  40 Committee approves CIA request to channel $300,000 to FNLA.

31 January  Transitional Government (comprised of MPLA, FNLA, UNITA, and Portuguese Government) is installed in Angola.

21 February  Organization of African Unity (OAU) unanimously condemns nomination of Nathaniel Davis as Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs.

21 February  Daniel Chipenda, leader of “Eastern Revolt” (dissident faction of MPLA), integrates his approximately 3,000 troops with FNLA, placing FNLA and MPLA on certain collision course.

11 March  General Spinola attempts abortive coup in Lisbon.

23 March  FNLA, supported by Zairian troops, captures Caxito (a town 35 miles north of Luanda), killing and mutilating over 60 MPLA partisans. Kissinger later describes this as first major clash in the war. MPLA considers attack as beginning of war.

March/April  Substantial increase in Soviet aid to MPLA.

Early June  American intelligence learns that China is losing faith, in FNLA.

Mid-June  President Mobutu sends U.S. Ambassador home from Zaire and threatens to sever relations with U.S.

16 June  African Subcommittee of Senate Foreign Relations Committee holds hearings on Angola.

June  40 Committee considers CIA request for massive increase in U.S. covert aid to Angola. Committee decides to postpone decision for a month and commissions State Department and National Security Council to study the issue.

June  Arrival of approximately 250 Cuban advisors in Angola.

June/July  State Department Bureaus of African Affairs, Policy Planning, and Intelligence and Research study and reject CIA proposal for major American military escalation. They recommend that U.S. employ diplomatic leverage instead.

June/July  National Security Council studies options for Angola and endorses a major increase in covert military aid to FNLA and UNITA, strongly rejecting diplomatic efforts until FNLA and UNITA ground forces can be built up.

12 July  Nathaniel Davis testifying before Senate Foreign Relations Sub-committee on Africa, indicates that he has no knowledge that U.S. military equipment sent to Zaire is being passed on to FNLA.

17 July  40 Committee approves CIA request for major increase in U.S. covert aid to FNLA and UNITA of approximately $30 million.

Late July  Senator Clark receives CIA briefing on U.S. covert activities in Angola which he later claimed handcuffed him and actually became an impediment to effective congressional oversight of covert activities.

Late July  Nathaniel Davis asks Clark, during Senate hearing, not to press him on U.S. intervention in Angola because “we both know” about U.S. covert support.

Late July  Deputy Secretary of State Robert Ingersoll briefs Senate Foreign Relations Subcommittee on Africa and rejects Subcommittee’s recommendation to pursue diplomatic course, rather than military course.

August  Senator Clark travels to Angola where he meets with the leaders of MPLA, FNLA and UNITA. He leaves even more convinced that U.S. should not intervene in the conflict.
1975 continued

9 August  First South African invasion of Angola. By end of August MPLA is convinced that this was precursor to a major South African invasion.

9 August  UNITA and FNLA withdraw from Luanda after weeks of attacks by MPLA.

Mid-August  Portugal assumes power in Angola in wake of collapse of Transitional Government.

Late August  Collapse of Goncalves regime in Portugal. It had been generally supportive of MPLA, unlike its successor (the sixth provisional government).

31 August  Nathaniel Davis resigns as Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs because of his strong opposition to U.S. policy of covert military intervention in Angola.

Late August  Major increase in arms for FNLA and UNITA, approved by 40 Committee on 17 July, begins.

25 September  Leslie Gelb, The New York Times reporter, publishes first major leak concerning CIA covert support of FNLA.

Early October  Approximately 700 Cuban military advisors arrive in Angola, bringing total number of Cubans in Angola to approximately 1,000.

15 or 16 October  U.S. rejects Jonas Savimbi’s (UNITA President) request for U.S. troops. Savimbi responds by telling his supporters that he has no other alternative than to ask South Africa for troops.

23 October  South African troops some UNITA troops the Chipenda faction of FNLA, and hundreds of mercenaries launch major attack in southern Angola. Within less than three weeks, attacking forces move 500 miles north, threatening the capital.

Late October  FNLA and 3,000 to 4,000 Zairian troops launch major attack in northern Angola, stopping only 12 miles from Luanda (at Quifangondo) days before independence.

Late October  Cuban military advisors are moved to front lines for the first time in an MPLA effort to stop the north-south pincer movement.

Late October  Ford Administration makes its first contacts with Soviet Union concerning Angola.

Early November  FNLA and Zaire move troops to Cabinda border. They finally attack the oil-rich enclave, with troops from FLEC, on 14 November.

5 November  First contingent of Cuban regular forces arrives in Angola.
1975 continued

5 November  Acting Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs Edward Mulcahy testifies during a House hearing that U.S. policy is against intervention in Angola. He refuses, however, to comment on whether or not the U.S. is, in fact, intervening.

6 November  CIA Director William Colby and Undersecretary of State Joseph Sisco tell Senate Foreign Relations Committee the extent and rationale for U.S. intervention in Angola. Committee disagrees with military strategy of the Administration but little can be done to stop it.

7 November  The New York Times leaks essence of Colby-Sisco testimony of previous day, which brings issue of U.S. intervention into public sphere and stimulates public and congressional debate.

8 November  The Washington Post leaks other aspects of Colby-Sisco testimony, marking the beginning of a series of unprecedented media leaks on U.S. covert activities in Angola.

11 November  Angolan Independence Day.

12 November  Foreign diplomats in Luanda express fear that capital will be choked off by north—south pincer movement launched by South Africa, Zaire, FNLA, UNITA, and an assortment of mercenaries, including many former Portuguese commandos.

Mid-November  Cuban Government begins to dispatch, in Fidel Castro’s words, “the men and weapons necessary to win the struggle.”

21 November  Harris poll indicates that 72% of Americans feel the U.S. should avoid involvement in guerrilla wars when it appears that the U.S. is participating in another country’s civil war.

23 November  Reliable sources estimate the number of South African troops committed inside Angola to be between 4,000 and 6,000.

Early December  Senator Clark, backed by most of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, proposes amendment to Foreign Assistance Act to cut off all covert aid to Angola. Later President Ford vetoes the Act.

10 December  First public acknowledgment by Henry Kissinger (during press conference) that the U.S. is involved in Angolan conflict. 12 December  CIA Director William Colby testifies before House Select Committee on Intelligence that simplest answer to question of why China and U.S. support FNLA and UNITA is that “the Soviets are backing the MPLA.”
1975 continued

19 December By a vote of 54 to 2, Senate passes Tunney Amendment (to Defense Appropriations bill) cutting off all covert aid to Angola.

23 December Kissinger makes his first direct appeal for withdrawal of South African troops from Angola. Many argue that this appeal comes too late to be credible.

31 December Number of Cuban troops in Angola estimated to be 7,000.

31 December U.S. estimates total Soviet aid to MPLA to be $200 million.

1976

19 January House Select Committee on Intelligence report is completed. It indicates that CIA undervalued amount of U.S. covert aid and quotes William Colby’s testimony of 12 December 1975 on why U.S. and China supported FNLA and UNITA.

27 January House of Representatives votes 323 to 99 to join Senate in cutting off American covert aid to Angola.

29 January Henry Kissinger testifies before Senate Foreign Relations Committee. He presents detailed analysis of events in Angola over past year.

Late January - Early February FNLA and UNITA are defeated militarily by MPLA and their Cuban allies. Both FNLA and UNITA promise to return to guerrilla tactics against the victors.

February During Florida Primary (where his major opponent is Ronald Reagan), President Ford makes major issue of Cuban presence in Angola, a theme he repeats throughout remaining primaries.

6 February State Department rejects MPLA feeler to normalize relations (transmitted from Luanda by an aide to Senator John Tunney).

10 February In an attempt to shift whatever “blame” there may be for a “loss” in Angola away from his administration, President Ford accuses Congress of lacking “guts” on Angola.

28 March South Africa completes the withdrawal of its approximately 5,000 soldiers from Angola.

19 April Fidel Castro, in a speech marking 15th anniversary of Bay of Pigs invasion, answers Ford and Kissinger criticisms and asserts that Cuba’s decision to send troops to Angola was made by Cuba alone, not the Soviet Union.
1976 continued

27 April Secretary of State Henry Kissinger spells out his new African policy in Lusaka, Zambia. It includes a ten-point program in support of the goal of majority rule in Rhodesia and Namibia.

28 May State Department adopts a harder line on Cuban presence in Angola by demanding a total withdrawal at the very time Cubans are preparing to initiate a gradual withdrawal.


10 July People’s Republic of Angola executes four mercenaries, including an American, Daniel Gearhart. Both Ford and Kissinger announce that Gearhart’s execution hurts any chance for an improvement in relations with Angola.
FOOTNOTES


4. While in the process of delivering the eighth of twenty B-26 bombers to Portugal, two alleged CIA agents were arrested in Miami by agents of the Treasury Department in September 1965. John Richard Hawke, an Englishman, stated during his trial for munitions smuggling in Federal Court at Buffalo, New York, “I flew B-26 bombers to Portugal for use in their African colonies, and the operation was arranged through the State Department and the CIA.” Quoted in David- Welsh, “Flyboys of the CIA,” Ramparts, 5(December 1966): 12.


There has been considerable controversy over the question of whether or not “option two” was ever “adopted” as policy. The State Department has staunchly denied that any of the six options was ever “adopted.” In fact, Donald B. Easum, who served as Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs throughout most of 1974, has explicitly stated that none of the six options “…was in fact adopted as such,” although a “limited number of operational decisions” relating to the Portuguese territories were made. See Donald B. Easum, “U.S. Policy Toward South Africa,” Issue, 5(Fall 1975): 71. More important than the question of option two actually being adopted is the fact that it does appear to have characterized U.S. Angolan policy between 1970 and 1974.


8. During his brief visit to Lisbon, Kissinger referred to Portugal as a “good and reliable friend of the United States” and went on to predict that his visit would bring the two countries closer together. Kissinger told Foreign Minister Rui Patricio and other Portuguese officials that “On this trip through the Middle East, I was reminded of the fact that Portugal stood by its allies during the recent difficulties, and the United States is extremely grateful for that.” The joint communiqué issued after Kissinger’s visit reported that “there was a large area of agreement with respect to the problems of concern to the two countries.” See Department of State Bulletin (Washington, D.C.), 14 January 1974, cited in Southern Africa, 7(March 1974): 18; and Noticias de Portugal, No.1390 (22 December 1973): 2-3,7


10. Naturally any brief composite of such a general subject as “perceptions in Washington” cannot do justice to all aspects or facets of opinion. This synthesis is derived from numerous personal interviews with officials in Washington involved with Angolan matters and a careful reading of all American press coverage. Also see Kenneth L. Adelman, “Report from Angola,” Foreign Affairs, 53(April 1975): 558—574. This article was based largely on interviews he conducted with American officials in Angola and Zaire. (It is of interest to note that Adelman predicted that Savimbi and Roberto would almost certainly become the winners in Angola.) For a more comprehensive and objective analysis of the three nationalist parties throughout this period,

11. “Program assistance” is the term used when the CIA gives money to a party or organization to help it implement its program; this term is distinguished from “personal assistance” when money is given to an individual for information about the program and activities of a given party or organization. Thus, when the CIA switched from program assistance to the FNLA to personal assistance for Holden Roberto in 1970, it amounted to giving Roberto money for information about the activities of FNLA to defeat the Portuguese rather than money to actually help him carry out his program of ending the Portuguese colonization of Angola. The 40 Committee, a four-person subcommittee of the National Security Council, included at this time Henry Kissinger, William Colby, who was then Director of the CIA, General George S. Brown, Chairperson of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and William Clement, Deputy Secretary of Defense.

12. Quoted in Roger Morris, “The Proxy War in Angola: Pathology of a Blunder,” The New Republic, 31 January 1976, p. 21. This article, written by Kissinger’s former African Affairs assistant in the National Security Council, is the most detailed account of the general climate and actual deliberations of the 40 Committee’s decision to intervene in Angola.


15. Ibid., pp. 20—21.

16. There is no question that the aid was noticed by the Soviets. The American Consulate which had not been informed of the decision to covertly assist the FNLA, reported to Washington in early 1975 a noticeable increase in FNLA spending. They reported, for example, that the party purchased the leading newspaper (A Provincia de Angola) and a television station which prompted an inquiry to discover the source of the funds used to bankroll these purchases. The Consulate concluded (and re-reported back to the State Department) that the money must have been supplied by Portuguese coffee plantation owners in northern Angola!
17. One State Department source, intimately involved with Angolan matters, told me in early 1976 that “in retrospect it appears that the Soviet aid to the MPLA through April 1975 was merely an attempt to bring them up to parity--keep them in the game--with the FNLA.” Seymour H. Hersh, a journalist, has also suggested that Soviet aid to the MPLA in March/April was merely a response to the U.S. and Chinese aid to the FNLA. See “Early Angola Aid by U.S. Reported,” The New York Times, 19 December 1975. Also see Morris and Marder for similar assertions.


20. The most severe early challenge to the MPLA in Luanda came from the breakaway faction of the party (“Eastern Revolt”) headed by Daniel Chipenda, which had set up offices in the capital. Chipenda merged his faction, with the FNLA in February (with Chipenda being named Secretary-General of the FNLA), a move which appeared to tip the military balance strongly in favor of the FNLA. In mid-February the MPLA began to close down Chipenda’s offices, leading to many deaths in the ensuing clashes. Ultimately Chipenda and his forces were pushed out of the capital. See Fola Soremekun, “Angola: The Politics of Transition,” a paper delivered to the UCLA International Conference on “Portuguese-Speaking Africa in Transition,” 12 February 1976, pp. 26-27.

21. Ibid., pp. 26-30. In his 29 January testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Kissinger stated: “On March 23 the first of repeated military clashes between the MPLA and FNLA occurred” (p. 4). Quite clearly there had been a number of “military clashes” before 23 March 1975 but the Secretary is correct to underscore the importance of this event because it did mark a significant escalation in the level of violence. The question -- upon which hangs much of Kissinger’s later rationale, for U.S. intervention -- is whether or not this act of “aggression” (by the FNLA) signaled the start of the civil war (as the MPLA maintains) or if this only occurred later in July when the MPLA’s “aggression” drove the FNLA and UNITA out of Luanda. This dispute over “who started what and when” will undoubtedly continue for many years; however, what is less ambiguous is the impact this attack had on the MPLA and, most certainly, the Soviet Union. The atmosphere in Angola was highly charged at the time: General Spinola’s abortive armed revolt in Lisbon on 11 March provoked, over the following weeks, unsuccessful right-wing attempts to overthrow the governments in both Mozambique and Guinea—Bissau. On 15 March the FNLA began a week-long celebration marking the anniversary of its formal launching of the Angolan nationalist war (15 March 1961), which included strong verbal attacks on the MPLA and which evoked
many uncomfortable memories of the carnage which had occurred in early 1961. The press coverage of the FNLA Caxito massacre is epitomized by the following description in the sober Financial Times (London), 29 March 1975: Eyewitness reports of the massacre by FNLA soldiers of civilians and others suggest beyond a reasonable doubt that what has occurred is a first terrifying attempt by FNLA to kill substantial numbers of MPLA soldiers and supporters and instill a climate of fear in the country such as it did in 1961 on the Zaire border. The FNLA believed that it had to control Caxito in order to maintain a land link with its forces in Luanda.

22. “From March to July, fighting and Soviet arms shipments increased in tandem. Perhaps, as the Administration later asserted, the Soviet arms shipments were a major escalatory move. If so, they seemed at the time not an unreasonable response to Roberto’s own escalation--and in any event were almost certainly encouraged by the continuing desire to head off the Chinese, a motive that never seems to have been taken into account in Washington.” Marcum, “Lessons,” p. 415.

23. Morris, pp. 21—22.


25. The most complete account of Nathaniel Davis’s and the Africa Bureau’s position against military escalation in Angola can be found in Seymour M. Hersh, “Angola—Aid Issue Opening Riffs in State Department,” The New York Times, 14 December 1975. Also see note 29 below.

26. Ibid. For a comprehensive background on Nathaniel Davis’s career, his position against U.S. escalation in Angola and Kissinger’s rejection of his advice, see Roger Morris, “A Rare Resignation in Protest: Nat Davis and Angola,” The Washington Monthly, 7 (February 1976): 22—32. Morris uncovers some interesting perspectives on Kissinger and Davis with regard to Angola. Morris notes that while it is true that Davis objected to further escalation, some of his aides are quoted as believing he actually presented a very weak case: “there’s no question that the arguments against it (military escalation) were weak.” Morris also quotes some.
sources who imply that Kissinger rejected Davis’s opposition to escalation on rather personal grounds. For example, Kissinger is quoted as saying, “What does he know about Africa?… He’s only parroting the incompetents in the bureau.” Moreover, one witness even suggested that “Kissinger figured from the start that Angola would be one Chile too many for Nat,” assuming that Davis had lost his nerve to judge the policy precisely because of his experience in Chile (p. 30). Mr. Davis is currently the U.S. Ambassador to Switzerland.

27. Notable and important exceptions include two of the three foreign service officers stationed at the American Consulate in Luanda in late 1974 and early 1975. While they reported to the State Department their views favoring U.S. intervention, they were unaware that any plans for intervention were under consideration at the time.


29. The exchange between Clark and Davis is recorded in U.S. Policy Toward Southern Africa, pp. 254—255.

30. In the House Select Committee on Intelligence report, footnote 477 states:

> Officials from the Department of State have told this Committee that the majority of that task force (composed of African experts within the Department of State, Defense Department officials, CIA officials and others) recommended diplomatic efforts to encourage a political settlement rather than intervention. After they had prepared their report for the Secretary of State containing this recommendation, they were informed by National Security Council aides that it was improper for them to make a recommendation on policy. Instead, they were instructed to simply list diplomatic efforts as one option among many in their final report. Thus, the African experts who made up the task force were not allowed to place their recommendations on paper to be reviewed by the Forty Committee.

This quote is taken from the version of the report known as the “Pike Papers” which was leaked by former CBS newsman Daniel Schorr to The Village Voice, 21 (20 February 1976): 40.

31. This passage relies upon a full account of the steps authorized by the 40 Committee in July by Seymour H. Hersh, “Early Angola Aid by U.S. Reported.” See also Morris, “The Proxy War,” p. 22, and Harder.
32. This quote can be found in the “Pike Papers,” p. 37. The report indicates, for example, that .45 caliber automatic pistols were valued by the CIA at $5 each and .30 caliber semi-automatic carbines at $7.55. Africa News, normally reliable on southern Africa, reported that the actual value of U.S. aid to Angola may have totaled close to $100 million (6[26 January 1976]:5). A similar figure of $100 million was also reported in the Los Angeles Times, 21 December 1975.

33. Leslie H. Gelb, “U.S. Aides Tell of Covert European Help to Angolans,” New York Times, 10 March 1976. The CIA estimate of Soviet assistance of $80 million as of October 1975 is reported in Harder. Harder also states that “French arms and money had come into the battle covertly with the French intelligence service, the SDCCE, the counterpart of the CIA, cooperating with that agency and with Zaire President Mobutu to channel aid to Roberto’s National Front. Belgian, British and West German aid [was also sent to the FNLA and UNITA].”

34. For a discussion of how the MPLA carried out this expansion, see René Pelissier, “Notes sur la deuxième guerre d’Angola,” paper delivered at a conference on “The Crisis in Portugal,” Toronto, Canada, 17 April 1976, and the excellent reporting by a number of journalists, especially David Ottaway of the Washington Post and Michael Kaufman of The New York Times. Also see Ernest Harsh and Tony Thomas, Angola: The Hidden History of Washington’s War (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1976), pp. 61-18. This is an extremely detailed account of events in Angola and Washington (with a strong emphasis on 1975) from the perspective of the Socialist Workers Party. It should be noted that the MPLA did have a considerable advantage in arms over UNITA which, in part, accounted for MPLA’s successful occupation of the major cities in southern Angola during the summer of 1975.

35. A detailed chronology of the South African invasion of Angola including dates, numbers of troops, descriptions of missions and breakdown of equipment, allegedly based on information from “highly placed officials within the U.S. Department of Defense who are opposed to U.S. policy in Angola,” appears in the report by Sean Gervasi, “Continuing Escalation in the Angola Crisis,” released 19 December 1975 by the American Committee on Africa.

36. The north-south attack against the MPLA near Luanda during the weeks before and after independence was widely reported in the American media. For specific reference to events described in the text see: Washington Post, 1 and 7 November 1975; Washington Star, 8 November 1915; New York Times, 9 November 1975; and Los Angeles Times, 13 November 1975. For a vivid account of conditions in Luanda during the ten months preceding independence see Kevin Brown, “A New Angolan Society,” The Nation (17 July 1976):42—46.
37. For a different periodization of Cuba’s role in Angola, see Edward Gonzalez and David Ronfeldt, “Castro’s Cuba: From Surrogate to Superclient,” unpublished manuscript written in May 1976, pp. 16—33. Also see Edward Gonzalez, “Castro and Cuba’s New Orthodoxy,” Problems of Communism, 25(January-February 1976): 1—19. Both sources contain valuable analyses of the impact of Cuban domestic factors on the Angolan operation. While I differ with Gonzalez and Ronfeldt on a variety of details, I am in complete agreement with their conclusion that “the actual policy behind Cuba’s Angolan involvement appears to have been largely incremental and reactive” (p. 30).

38. For estimates of the timing and numbers of Cubans in Angola based on leaks from U.S. intelligence sources, see Newsweek, 29 December 1975, p. 33, and The Washington Post, 18 February 197

39. Colin Legum dates the Russian and Cuban decisions to win in Angola much earlier than I do. He argues, for example: It is not yet possible to fix with certainty the exact date when Moscow first began to arrange with Fidel Castro to bring large numbers of Cubans. . . . By July, however, the Russians were almost certainly going for broke. By September, two months before the date set for independence on November 11, the Russian and Cuban military aid was of a size that promised military supremacy to the MPLA. The scale of the Soviet/Cuban intervention increased sharply in early October, three weeks before the South African forces entered Angola in any size. . . . The Russian and Cuban contention that their military intervention was the result of the South African invasion is clearly an ex post facto rationalization. “The Soviet Union, China and The West in Southern Africa,” Foreign Affairs, 54(July 1976): 7.50—751. Legum published similar views previously in an unsigned article “Angola: The International Dimension,” in Africa Bureau Fact Sheet, No. 46 (March/April 1976).

40. In early May 1976 it was revealed in the South African Parliament that Defense Minister Pieter Botha had boasted to an MP that South African troops could have easily gone to Luanda and were, in fact, poised to take the capital when they pulled back because “the United States had pleaded with South Africa not to send its forces to Luanda.” Quoted in the Daily Telegraph (London), 7 May 1976. American officials later dismissed this story as “phony.” One of the Americans serving in the Luanda Consulate reported to the State Department at the time that there was not the slightest chance the FNLA could capture and hold Luanda given the size of their forces and the impossibility of operating within the heartland of the MPLA’s ethnic support. I have heard two reports from excellent sources, which I have been.
unable to confirm, that the reason why South Africa did not attempt to capture Luanda with the FNLA is that Jonas Savimbi reached the same conclusion as the American official in the Luanda Consulate and therefore urged his South African allies not to attempt to capture Luanda.

41. Fidel Castro, “Angola African Giron,” speech commemorating the 15th anniversary of the Cuban victory at Playa Giron (Bay of Pigs), Havana, 19 April 1976. The complete speech can be found in Gramma (Havana), 2 May 1976 (weekly review edition).

42. Kissinger, 29 January 1976, p. 4. The same perspective is apparent in his major policy statement on Angola delivered in San Francisco, 3 February 1976.

43. Ibid. Kissinger limited not only his analysis of outside intervention to the Cubans and Russians but his condemnations as well. In so doing, Kissinger signaled to the world that, until the final week of 1975, he viewed Cuban and Soviet intervention as “illegitimate” and threatening but not so the “continental” intervention of South Africa and Zaire. Through his selective criticism, Kissinger unwittingly tainted his Angolan policy with the scourge of South African racism. Despite his later calls for South African withdrawal, which appeared to be a halfhearted afterthought, and his adamant denials of any consultation between the U.S. and South Africa over Angola, Kissinger was unable to convince the majority of African leaders or the U.S. Congress that American policies and goals were independent of South African actions in Angola. Moreover, President Ford, in his personal letters to African Heads of State on the eve of the OAU meeting in January, infuriated a number of African leaders (e.g., in Nigeria and Tanzania) by equating the “uninvited” intervention of racist South Africa with the “invited” Cuban and Soviet assistance (which has been viewed generally by most Africans as legitimate help to the cause of African liberation). Thus, by appearing to have enlisted South African military intervention to resist “international communism,” the U.S. communicated that it feared communism more than white racism in Africa. This alienated the majority of African leaders for whom the issue of white racism still remains paramount and tended to polarize African and world opinion along lines which generated little support for American objectives in Angola.


46. Newsweek, for example, noted that “most U.S. officials believe the Cubans are in Angola because the Soviets presented an IOU for the $5.4 billion in military and economic aid that Moscow has given them since 1960.” (29 December 1975, p. 34.) Kissinger flatly stated that Cuban troops would not have been in Angola without being “under Soviet advice.” (Cited in the Los Angeles Times, 24 December 1975.) For an interesting discussion of the debate among U.S. government officials over the relationship between Cuba and the Soviet Union in Angola, see The Christian Science Monitor, 18 March 1976 and 7 April 1976.


48. The day before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee hearings on Angola (November 5), Edward Mulcahy, Acting Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs, refused to admit U.S. intervention in Angola during a house hearing. When one Congressman asked if it were a proper summation of his position to say “it is our policy not to intervene but you have no comment on whether we are intervening,” Mulcahy replied that this would be “substantially correct.” Cited in The Washington Office on Africa, “Africa Action,” newsletter, November 1975.

49. The Secretary of State frequently stressed the large number of Congressmen who were briefed on American covert activities in Angola: “Altogether more than two dozen Senators, about 150 Congressmen, and over 100 staff members of both houses were informed.” (29 January 1976, p. 7.) It should be noted, however, that most of those briefed had no, or only minor, reservations about the policy. Moreover, serious questions can be raised about the adequacy of the briefings. Senator Clark told me, for example, that he was not informed during his July briefing that the 40 Committee had decided on July 17th to support UNITA as well as the FNLA nor was he informed about the $300,000 given to the FNLA in early 1975. The quotes and information on Clark’s experiences which appear in the next section of the text are drawn from: remarks he made during the various hearings he held as Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee’s African Subcommittee (published in U.S. Policy Toward Southern Africa); observations he made at the Seven Springs Center’s “Second Symposium on Southern Africa,” Mount Kisco, New York, 8-10 May 1976 (see my report on the Symposium’s proceedings, pp. 70-74); and personal conversations with the Senator. Most of the quotes in the text can be found in Dick Clark, “Frustration,” The New York Times, 29 January 1976.

about the CIA and Angola as part of a larger story on CIA aid to Portugal (The New York Times, 25 September 1975). Gelb had come across the information by accident and neither he nor the general public seemed interested in pursuing the matter before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee held its hearings.

51. The New York Times was unrivaled in terms of general coverage of the Angolan debate, providing most major leaks and offering numerous analyses of developments throughout the Angolan conflict.

52. Senator John Tunney articulated this viewpoint well when he said: I am not an isolationist. I, too, am deeply disturbed by the specter of Soviet expansionism. But the course of American foreign policy must not be determined by blind reactive opposition to every movement from Moscow. We must not fall prey to the myopia which removes every civil war, every nationalist struggle from its own geopolitical and social context and places it instead in the realm of some grand Soviet stratagem in a global superpower conspiracy. Senator John V. Tunney, “The Meaning of Détente,” Speech at American University, 5 February 1976. Whatever the validity, Kissinger, Colby, and Sisco all stressed early in the debate that the U.S. did not have important strategic or economic interests to pursue in Angola, but not all Administration spokesmen appeared to understand this point (e.g., Daniel Moynihan, UN Ambassador). For a discussion of American interests in Angola, see Gerald J. Bender, “Is U.S. Being Drawn into Angolan Conflict?” Los Angeles Times, 23 November 1975.

53. The citation to the Lou Harris poll is found in Intelligence Report, p. 6.

54. When Zaire and South Africa sent military aid to UNITA in mid—September, both countries also had to send personnel to operate the equipment. In fact, it was the poor quality of his army which prompted Savimbi one month later (October 15 or 16) to ask “an American friend” for U.S. troops to fight on his side. Savimbi met the “American friend” (whom he assumed to be from the CIA) at General Mobutu’s palace in Kinshasa. When the “friend” turned down his request, Savimbi announced that he had no alternative but to seek further and more direct South African assistance, it is not clear whether or not he was encouraged in this direction by his “American friend.” Most of this information was gathered by an aide to Senator Tunney, Bill Caughlin, who had extended conversations with Savimbi in Silva Porto and

55. Tunney, “Testimony,” p. 5

56. “Pike Papers,” p. 40, note 481. Many Africa experts were incredulous and/or appalled to see so many Congressmen during the Angolan debate argue that there were ‘no differences’ among the three competing factions. What the “experts” did not realize is that most of the Congressmen were merely repeating the assessment they had heard from the CIA. Moreover, many interpreted the open support of Gulf Oil for the MPLA as further proof that the MPLA was not significantly different or more threatening to the U.S. than its two rivals. By mid-1975 Gulf had concluded not only that the MPLA would win the war but also that it was the only party which could provide a stable government in Angola. Since Gulf accounted for most of the American investment in Angola, it made little sense to a number of Congressmen for the U.S. to spend tens of millions of dollars to oppose the party which was supported by Gulf Oil. As one conservative Senator who supported the Tunney Amendment remarked, “the MPLA can’t be all that bad if Gulf is strongly backing them.”


60. I would like to thank Mark Moran, an aide to Senator Tunney, who allowed me to see some of his notes on his discussions with Angolan leaders he met in Luanda in late January 1976. Moran considered President Agostinho Neto and Prime Minister Lopo de Nascimento to be within the moderate faction of the party -- a view which has been repeated by most observers, including top Angola experts in the State Department. Moran noted while still in Angola, “My impression is that there are several positions in the MPLA and that the moderates are in a bit of a quandary over what they recognize as the need for eventual U.S. economic and financial assistance. They need a softening of Washington’s position to legitimize their own standing in the

Concerning past strains between Moscow and the MPLA, Colin Legum observes:

Moscow had a particularly troubled relationship with the Angolan leadership during the liberation struggle. Although they had consistently supported the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA), they had never found it easy to get along with the rather secretive and prickly Agostinho Neto. For a time in 1973 they went so far as to support one of Neto’s challengers, Daniel Chipenda, and cut off all their aid to MPLA; but once it became clear that Chipenda could not win, Moscow switched its support back to Mete (p. 749).

61. The Director of the Washington Office on Africa, Ted Lockwood, noted that the Angolan Desk Officer in the State Department told him on 28 May 1976 that the U.S. was moving toward a harder line on Cubans in Angola. Cited in “Angolan News Summary,” 25 June 1976, p. 8. Ironically, Just as the Cubans were preparing to begin their withdrawal from Angola, a number of reports appeared which suggested that time Cuban military and civilian personnel, were a vital stabilizing influence in Angola. See The New York Times, 16 May 1976; and the Los Angeles Times, 18 and 20 June 1976.

62. When Angola’s membership to the United Nations first came up in May, 1976, Ambassador William Scranton recommended that the U.S. support the application in the Security Council while suggesting an abstention as a fallback position if Kissinger felt that it was too early to indicate such a positive act. The option of a veto was not even discussed as a possibility by Scranton. Nevertheless, the U.S. asked Angola to delay their request for membership in May and then proceeded to veto it when it was proposed in late June. (Anxious to avoid alienating African leaders during the sensitive Rhodesian negotiations, the Administration did not veto Angola’s second application for UN membership in late November 1976, posed in late June).

63. President Ford described the execution of the American mercenary Daniel Gearhart by the Angolan government as “unjustified and unwarranted,” adding that it “will make even more difficult any steps toward the normalization of relations between Angola and the United States.” Kissinger noted that the execution “hurt any chance of American aid to Angola or any other improvement in relations.” (Both are quoted in the Los Angeles Times, 11 July 1976.).

64. It is interesting to note that from his public pronouncements, it would appear that President Ford related to Angola almost.
exclusively in terms of its impact on American domestic politics. Significantly, he never addressed the subject publicly until the week of the Senate debate in mid-December, when it was too late to affect Congressional and public opposition. Following the passage of the Tunney Amendment, he said that if the American people were “fully informed” about American objectives in Angola they would support the Administration. (Quoted in The New York Times, 4 January 1976.) What he neglected to point out here is that it was the Administration’s policy to try to prevent the American public and Congress from being “fully informed.”

Finally, during the primaries President Ford oversimplified and distorted Angolan ‘realities in order to present the Administration’s Angolan policy in the most favorable light possible. He argued, for example, that until Congress cut off funds “the forces we were supporting were prevailing.”

But the minute the Congress said “no” and we couldn’t provide our allies with what they needed, then the Soviet Union and Cuba won. It’s just that simple. That is not the fault of the administration or the executive branch. The Congress just failed to stand up and do what they should have done. So there can’t be any blame of the executive branch failing to challenge the Soviet Union. The Congress just bugged out. That is just what it amounted to.


65. The five failures, all elaborated in the text are: (1) his recommendation of Option 2 in NSSM 39 to President Nixon in January 1970; (2) his offer of offensive weapons to the Portuguese for use in Africa in December 1973; (3) his approval of the initial covert aid to the FNLA in January 1975; (4) his approval of the major military escalation in aid to the FNLA and UNITA in July 1975; and (5) his veto of Angola’s application for membership in the United Nations in June 1976. It should be noted that the State Department made several private attempts through Gulf Oil and Boeing Aircraft to indicate that it desired an improvement in relations with the Angolan Government. The State Department believed that this was sufficient action to signal the moderates in the MPLA that the U.S. supported them but it is unlikely that, given the impossible conditions (e.g., removal of Cuban troops) the U.S. set for an improvement in relations, any Angolans took these representations seriously.


69. Ibid., p. 21.
