

Angola Stirs Questions On Detente Fine Print

By Peter Osnos
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MOSCOW—The clash of Soviet-American interests in the Angolan civil war has revived once again the question of what the Kremlin really means by its advocacy of detente—or as it is called in Russian, “the relaxation of international tensions.”

Can Moscow pursue accommodation with the West at the same time that it is encouraging and supplying revolutionary Marxist movements? From the Soviet perspective, is detente possible while the ideological struggle continues for influence in the Third World? Does Angola reflect a new hard line, as some Western analysts have detected, in Soviet actions?

President Ford and Secretary of State Henry A. Kissinger have said that the large-scale Soviet military involvement in Angola is “inconsistent with the aims and objectives of detente.”

But those lofty “basic principles of relations” committing the two powers to refrain from “efforts to obtain unilateral advantage at the expense of the other,” were signed on May 29, 1972—at a time when the United States was conducting the largest bombing campaign of the Indochina war against armies mostly supplied by Moscow.

And despite champagne toasts to detente at summits and the signing of a host of bilateral agreements, the Indochina war went on for almost three more years while both Moscow and Washington continued to provide aid to their clients.

Indochina somehow came to be written off as a separate matter because it began before the detente era. There are some Russians who contend privately that Angola should also be considered part of the “legacy of pre-detente days” because the first Soviet

and American aid to competing guerrilla groups there dates back to the early 1960s.

That, however, is not the main line of Soviet argument recently. In response to Washington's warnings, Soviet commentators have been saying almost daily that the “policy of relaxation of tensions between states with different social systems cannot be interpreted as a ban on the national-liberation struggle of peoples who come out against colonial oppression or as a ban on class struggle.”

While some Western observers profess to see a hardening of Soviet policy in that formulation, other long-time experts maintain, as one American did here the other day, that “to the extent the Soviets have been asked about it, they have always excluded wars of national liberation from detente.”

Moreover, while the Soviets are said to have provided some \$200 million in military support to the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola, reports from

Washington say that American aid to the other two warring Angola factions is at the \$50 million level.

It also is worth recalling that detente did not prevent the United States from lending covert assistance to anti-Marxists in Chile before the Allende government was overthrown in 1973—an example of subversion for ideological reasons that must surely compare to the Kremlin's unsuccessful effort to promote a Communist-led regime in Portugal last summer and fall.

Nor have Moscow and Washington shown any inclination to restrain the rising spiral of military aid to their

allies in the Middle East, in spite of the continuing threat of war there.

News Analysis

If detente does not preclude this sort of international activity, what, then, does it mean?

President Ford gave his assessment in a recent interview: “We have to recognize there are deep ideological differences between the United States and Soviet Union. We have to realize that they are a superpower militarily and industrially, just as we are.”

“When you have two superpowers that have such great influence, it is in the best interests of those two countries to ease tensions, to avoid confrontation where possible, to improve relations on a worldwide basis.”

Basically, the same view was expressed by Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev in a speech over two years ago in the Ukraine that has just been republished in part by the authoritative party journal “Kommunist.”

“Competition, rivalry between the two systems in the world arena continues,” Brezhnev said. “The crux of the matter is only to see to it that this process does not develop into armed clashes between countries, into the use of force in relations between them, that it does not interfere with the development of mutually advantageous cooperation between states with different social systems.”

Given those sweeping definitions, the Arab-Israeli war of 1973 must be seen as a major failure for detente, as was the climactic postcease-fire fighting in Vietnam during 1974-75. And so now is the war in Angola—where superpower proxies are again doing the fighting.

In all these cases, Moscow and Washington have proven unwilling or unable to prevent conflict—despite their professed common interest in peace.

And, yet, on the fundamental point of detente, the Brezhnev Politburo is plainly as committed as it was 3 1/2 years ago when those “basic principles of relations” were signed.

"Because the scientific and technological revolution and its military applications have produced the means of destruction that could jeopardize the very existence of world civilization and the human race," a senior ideologist said this past November, "in this nuclear age, there is no alternative to the policy of preserving peace."

That means, first of all, continuing the strategic arms negotiations. Moscow and Washington still are at odds on the precise terms of a SALT II accord and a somewhat sharper tone of frustration has become evident recently in the day-to-day statements of leaders in both countries.

Indeed, some diplomats here see linkage between the new Soviet-African friction that Angola represents and the failure to turn the Vladivostok principles into an accord as quickly as the Kremlin expected.

"You can't help wondering whether the Angolan situation would have deteriorated to this stage if Brezhnev had gotten his SALT agreement and trip to Washington last spring," said one American.

While there is obviously no way of disproving such a proposition, the vehemence with which Moscow has been defending its right to back "liberation" movements seems to argue against it.

"Feigning that they do not understand the true nature of revolutionary and national liberation movements,"

Pravda's senior commentator Yuri Zhokov wrote the other day, "... Imperialist circles impute to the Soviet Union what they themselves have long engaged in: Interference in the affairs of states, expansionism and attempts to broaden their zone of influence."

Some analysts here and abroad have interpreted such truculence as a sign the Soviets may be less interested than before in the secondary features of detente such as trade and scientific-cultural contacts and are reverting to more orthodox patterns of Communist solidarity.

On two important issues in the past six months, the Soviets have adopted a defensive strategy. After last summer's European security conference in Helsinki—when Western leaders like France's Valery Giscard d'Estaing called for ideological detente, the Kremlin bluntly said that had always been off-limits.

Now, with the United States complaining about Angola, Moscow asserts that detente "never meant the freezing of the social-political status quo."

An outsider can only wonder whether there is some policy shift in the works as a prelude to next month's 25th Communist Party Congress, or, as the Kremlin contends, Westerners just forgot to read the fine print of detente declarations.