

Angolan War: Test for American-Soviet Detente

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By DAVID K. SHIPLER

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MOSCOW, Jan. 7—The Soviet Union's involvement in Angola seems at least partly based on a belief that the ghost of Vietnam still haunts American diplomacy, narrowing American options, reducing American flexibility and undermining Washington's leverage against Moscow. Soviet

News
Analysis

analysts understand the debilitating effects of the United States' involvement in Vietnam. They are keenly aware of the resulting aversion in Congress and among the American public to any substantive role in another civil war.

As a consequence, despite aid to Angolan factions from the Central Intelligence Agency, the Russians appear to have calculated that resistance from the United States on the ground in Angola will be minimal, posing little risk for the Soviet position.

This raises the question of what tools remain to the United States in situations where it chooses to counter the expansion of Soviet influence. Some Western diplomats in Moscow say that without the capacity to respond to Soviet challenges in such peripheral areas as Angola, Washington is being forced into threats to disrupt détente and manipulation of issues more important than Angola.

Kissinger Threat Recalled

These diplomats note that last month Secretary of State Henry A. Kissinger declared:

"We are talking to the Soviet Union within the context of our over-all relationship, and there is no question that our over-all relationship will suffer if we do not find an adequate solution to the Angolan problem."

He then linked two elements of détente to Angola. He said the Soviet involvement might jeopardize his scheduled trip to Moscow in January to continue talks on a treaty to limit nuclear arms. And he announced that the Ford Administration would drop plans to push again in Congress for trade concessions to the Soviet Union.

In a sense, these are higher stakes than were attached to Vietnam. When Moscow supplied the Communists there, Mr. Kissinger did not raise the specter of new Soviet-American tension or suggest that arms negotiations and trade relations would be damaged.

Bluff by U.S. Is Seen

One difference is that the Administration had plenty of military aid to provide in Vietnam. Now, one non-American diplomat observed, "the only card Kissinger has to play is the over-all relationship with the Soviet Union, and I bet the Russians guess they can call Washington's bluff."

Knowing a good deal about Mr. Kissinger's devotion to détente, of which he was a major architect, the Kremlin may in-

deed think he is bluffing. From here, the American position looks brittle, the Soviet flexible. The diplomatic tools left to Mr. Kissinger seem crude, oversized for the job. Some diplomats think they may not even be effective.

The Russians seem to have done well without American trade benefits, which would have lowered tariffs on Soviet goods and increased low-interest credits for Soviet purchases. Moscow has apparently been able to buy all the Western equipment it wants through subsidiaries of American corporations in Japan and Western Europe, as well as from those countries themselves.

The Kremlin is also regarded as unlikely to be moved by Mr. Kissinger's hints that the negotiations on strategic arms may be hindered. Moscow evidently believes that President Ford needs the new pact to bolster his record as he enters the election campaign.

On the other hand, the Russians may be influenced if they appreciate the rising sentiments against détente in the United States, and if they understand how their military support to the Luanda authorities in Angola can become a focus for antidétente emotions during the campaign. This may be what Mr. Kissinger is betting on.

Resurgence of the Right

But some doubt exists in the diplomatic community about the extent to which Moscow comprehends the fragility of the support for détente in the American electorate. The Soviet press has reported on the right wing, but it is not clear that Soviet officials grasp the potential appeal of Ronald Reagan and Henry M. Jackson.

"The Soviets ought to realize that electing the wrong President would be a lot worse for the Soviet national interest than anything that happens in Angola," one diplomat remarked.

Moscow does have highly informed America-watchers, but it is unclear at what stage in the decision-making process their views are heard. There is some speculation that the Angola policy may have been made without their advice and that their analysis has come only as Washington has begun its protests.

Coalition May Be Solution

Now, after Moscow has put its prestige behind the Luanda government, it is almost certainly too late for a simple withdrawal. The main path to compromise seems to lead toward a coalition of the three Angolan factions, something the Russians supported last summer and have indicated that they may be ready to support again. The United States would also favor such a solution.

Much evidently depends on the attitude of the members of the Organization of African Unity, which begins a session on Angola later this week in

Addis Ababa. Diplomats believe that if the organization endorses the Luanda faction, Moscow will hold to its present course.

Meantime, détente undergoes a strenuous test as each side violates the other's assumptions about the relationship.

The Russians, who always regarded the support of "national liberation movements" as ideologically essential, thought that continued competition with the United States was

fair game and are somewhat baffled by Washington's reaction.

The United States thought that détente meant backing off from such confrontations everywhere, and so Moscow's Angola activity is bound to show new mistrust.

"You Americans," one Soviet analyst complained, "tried to sell détente like detergent and claimed that it would do everything a detergent could do."