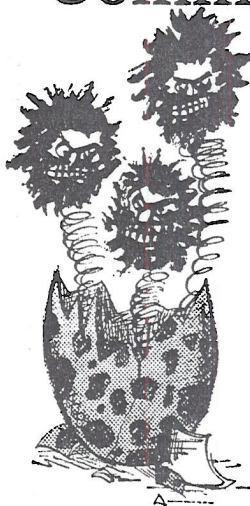


Communism and the War in Angola

By George M. Houser

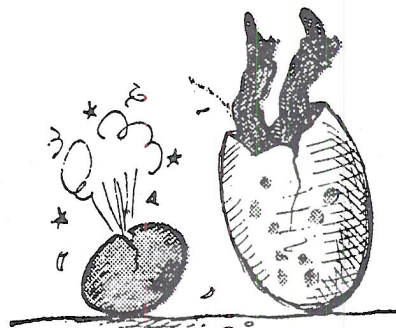


The conflict of opposing political movements for control of an independent Angola is rapidly escalating into an international confrontation reminiscent of Vietnam, and United States spokesmen are grossly distorting the real issues involved.

Secretary of State Henry A. Kissinger has pointed an accusing finger at the Soviet Union and Cuba for intervening in Angola. Characteristically, United Nations Ambassador Daniel P. Moynihan went further when he said that Soviet involvement in Angola was a first step in the colonizing of the whole continent. But little is said about reported United States military aid sent to Angola.

American spokesmen are simplistically portraying the Angolan conflict as "Communism" versus "anti-Communism." The Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (M.P.L.A.), whose government at Luanda has been recognized by sixteen African states (33 countries in all), is constantly described as "Marxist," "Soviet-backed" or just "Communist." The National Front for the Liberation of Angola (F.N.L.A.) and the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA) are called "anti-Communist."

Before any portion of the American people respond to any call for Vietnam veterans to join the fight against Communism in Angola, several important factors should be considered.



What about the Communism of the M.P.L.A.?

I have been in touch with the leaders of this movement for many years, most recently last March when I was in Angola, where I met with

members of all three political movements. They make no secret of a basically socialist orientation in their design for Angola.

In a continent where there is little private accumulation of capital, socialism of one sort or another is an accepted norm. Capitalism is a reality in most of Africa only through the interests of foreign corporations and enterprises. So organizing a society along socialist lines is to be expected.

Such a form of social organization should not automatically end United States willingness to maintain friendly relations. And indeed the United States has recently agreed to diplomatic relations with Guinea-Bissau and Mozambique, countries in which the political parties (African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde and the Front for the Liberation of Mozambique) have programs very similar to that of the M.P.L.A.

In fact, all three had been joined in an alliance against Portuguese colonialism for more than fifteen years. Why then does the United States treat the M.P.L.A. differently?

The issue is portrayed as Soviet influence and control in Angola. Soviet support of the M.P.L.A. is not new. It goes back to the beginning of the armed conflict in Angola in 1961. Scandinavian countries gave support to the M.P.L.A., too. The M.P.L.A. would have been glad to take help from wherever it was offered—even from the United States.

Where was the United States during the years of struggle? It was firmly welded into an alliance with Portugal and had a policy of avoiding contacts with the liberation movements in Portuguese colonies.

The United States limited its "support" to high-sounding statements on the right to self-determination. The M.P.L.A. has little reason to be grateful to the United States. M.P.L.A. support from the Soviet Union does not mean Soviet control in Angola. It has not meant this in Mozambique, Guinea-Bissau, or Cape Verde.

Some Americans may find this difficult to understand in view of our widespread biases against the Soviet Union and Communism. But these political movements, after long years of combat against the Portuguese, will not easily accept domination by a new foreign power. It is a gross and demeaning distortion of reality to present the men and women of the M.P.L.A. as Soviet puppets. And certainly the Cubans are not taking over Angola.

There is a second distortion involved in official United States interpretation of events in Angola. Spokesmen have said virtually nothing about United States involvement in Angola. Covert United States support for the F.N.L.A. and UNITA was admitted in testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on Nov. 6 by William E. Colby, the Director of Central Intelligence, and Joseph J. Sisco, Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs.

The New York Times reported Friday that, according to a high-ranking Government official, the United States had sent \$25 million in arms and support funds to Angola over the last three months and planned to send \$25 million more in supplies. The official said that the first sum had been distributed by the Central Intelligence Agency.

This aid has gone principally through the Government of Zaire, which since 1962 has been the mainstay of the F.N.L.A., the most conservative of the Angolan parties.

Major publications here and abroad have reported that United States transports have been flying daily from Zaire into F.N.L.A. military centers in northern Angola, such as Ambriz, with guns, ammunition and gas.

For Mr. Kissinger and other United States leaders to point the finger at the Soviet Union and make no mention of United States involvement in the conflict in Angola is hypocritical.

United States spokesmen have made no mention of South Africa's growing intervention in Angola. Presumably the involvement of this white-supremacist state is an embarrassment the United States would prefer to ignore. But this involvement is an important development in the Angolan conflict, with far-reaching repercussions. It was the incursion of South African troops that has led Nigeria's "moderate" Government—even in United States Government eyes—to recognize the M.P.L.A. government in Luanda.

There can be no doubt about the growing South African intervention. When I was in Zambia in early November, I was told by high Zambian officials that at that time South African troops and some dissident Portuguese mercenaries from Angola and Mozambique had already occupied a strip fifty miles deep across southern Angola.

South African columns have penetrated hundreds of miles into the interior, with many casualties reported and at least one reconnaissance plane shot down.

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An immediate objective of South Africa is to use the Angolan fighting as a smokescreen behind which it can eliminate the forces of S.W.A.P.O. (Southwest African People's Organization, the main liberation movement of Namibia) from northern Namibia and southern Angola.

Namibia—South Africa calls it South-West Africa—is the territory occupied by South Africa in defiance of United Nations decisions that even the United States has supported.

South Africa sees the Angolan con-

flict as the real beginning of the war for its own survival as a white-dominated state in southern Africa. For years South Africa has been attempting to build itself into the Western alliance on the back of the anti-Communist cause. Now South Africa is calling for the Western alliance to stop a "take-over" in Angola.

The current United States position, supporting the most conservative internal Angolan elements, is directly abetting South African strategy. It is not helping the Angolans preserve

their independence but making them victims of the most reactionary force in Africa. It would be a tragedy for the United States to repeat the errors of Vietnam because it looks upon the Angolan conflict as an occasion for another anti-Communist crusade.

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Another Tunnel?

The National Interest Leads U.S. to Angola

Suddenly and secretly, the United States is once again contesting Communist military power in a remote place. The Ford Administration is doing so apparently to satisfy American national interest defined as it was defined when the United States entered and enlarged the war in Indochina.

It has been disclosed that \$25 million in weapons and support funds have already been sent to Angola, and another \$25 million may soon be sent, for the use of two American-supported factions in that new nation in southern Africa. The weapons were sent by the Central Intelligence Agency through neighboring Zaire.

It has also been reported, and not denied by the Administration, that five American spotter planes, piloted by Americans, are being flown "in and out" of Angola—where the fighting is heavy and continuous and where Cuban troops are fighting on behalf of a third Angolan faction. The possibility of an American casualty is present, though how likely is not known.

Moreover, the United States in Angola is in an ad hoc alliance with South Africa, which is supplying fighting men for the same factions to which Washington is giving weapons. Though the Administration insists it is not even in contact with South Africa on its actions in Angola, the United States is, in effect, fighting by proxy alongside the soldiers of a nation almost universally considered a symbol of racism.

According to Washington reports, the Soviet Union has sent more and better equipment to "its" Angolan faction than the United States—27 shiploads and over 30 plane loads since last spring—and sent "advisers" with them. The number of Cubans fighting in Angola has been estimated variously at 500, 3,000 and 5,000. The size

of the South African force is unknown.

The Vietnam Parallel

Is there a parallel between Indochina and Angola? Secretary of State Henry Kissinger said last week the situations were "not analogous"; William Colby, director of the Central Intelligence Agency, distinguished between them on the degree of American involvement rather than in terms of policy or intention. In fact, there are similarities; whether they add up to an identity will probably be a matter of debate soon.

It may take long, careful analysis to determine, for instance, whether there is significance in the fact that American involvement in both places follows the departure of a European country from its colony—France from Indochina, Portugal from Angola. In Vietnam, the American involvement was at first modest and clandestine; it is the same now in Angola.

More obvious is the relationship between what American leaders are saying now and what they said in explanation of United States policy in Indochina. Last week, Mr. Kissinger, in effect described the following American policy in Angola:

Washington wants an Angolan settlement of Angolan problems, but if the Communists try to provide dominance for one faction by huge arms shipments, the United States "will try to prevent" the Communists from succeeding.

Mr. Kissinger did not say how far the United States would go in maintaining a stalemate between the contending Angolans. However, it was implicit in what he did say that if the Soviet Union upped the ante, Mr. Kissinger would stay in the game.

Nor did he define American intentions except in terms of anti-Communist action. He said it would affect American-Soviet relations "if the Soviet Union engages in a military operation or massively supports a military operation thousands of miles from Soviet territory in an area where there are no Russian interests and where it is, therefore, a new projection of Soviet interest."

It is obviously a changed world as the cold war has been replaced by détente but the recent statements

have familiar echoes.

On March 23, 1961, when relatively few Americans knew where on the map to find Indochina, President John F. Kennedy, at a press conference, read a long, carefully-prepared statement of American policy about a small, new nation called Laos, where several factions were fighting for supremacy. One faction was backed by the Soviet Union. Mr. Kennedy referred to many airlifts, improved weaponry and resulting gains for the Soviet-backed Laotian faction. He said:

"It is this new dimension of externally supported warfare that creates the present grave problem . . . We strongly and unreservedly support the goal of a neutral and independent Laos . . . If these [Communist] attacks do not stop [the United States and others] will have to consider their response . . . No one should doubt our resolution on this point . . . Laos is far away but the world is small . . . The security of all Southeast Asia will be endangered if Laos loses its neutral independence . . . Its own safety runs with the safety of us all . . ."

President Eisenhower before him and Presidents Johnson and Nixon after him involved the United States in the Indochinese war for, essentially, the same reasons.

When the United States finally evacuated Saigon in defeat, a national debate on American policy seemed imminent. It never really occurred, at least not specifically in terms of the Indochinese disaster; the country was apparently simply weary of the subject.

Now, however, the same subject seems to have returned, called Angola: American and Russian power and influence colliding in distant places that are in, as Mr. Kennedy said, a small world.

There have been changes in the law since Vietnam, but the Ford Administration believes there is no question about its authority to take the action it is taking in Angola. Mr. Colby noted the War Powers Act does not preclude "paramilitary operations." Apparently, the Administration has informed the appropriate Congressional committees of the covert action, although how fully or how early is not clear.