

Angola: The Kremlin's 'Anguished Foreign Policy Review'

The Angola crisis is more than a crisis of confidence between the White House and the Kremlin, more even than a crisis in the detente relationship. Officially, the Kremlin asserts its duty to help "national liberation movements." Unofficially it is letting it be known that it does not want a stand-up fight over Angola. The question now being asked in Western capitals is whether this represents a real division of opinion in the Kremlin or is only a matter of tactics.

The hard line evident in the Soviet press on Angola is certainly more consistent with the views of Soviet hawks rather than doves. Until recently the Kremlin was content to pay a great deal of lip service to its duty to help the national liberation movement, but without putting its money—or much money—where its mouth was. The Kremlin debates on this issue have not always been won by the hawks. The debate held in the last years of Khrushchev's rule was evident only between the lines of the Soviet press, but one obvious policy decision made at that time was to keep Soviet involvement in Vietnam to a minimum.

After his fall this decision was reversed, but at the same time the Soviet leaders began to entertain misgivings about their support of other "liberation movements." They were spending a lot of money on it, and investing a great deal of their political prestige, and it just was not paying off.

Some of the Kremlin's most spectacular successes in the Third World were turned over night into disasters, with the fall of Nkrumah in Ghana, Sukarno in Indonesia, Ben Bella in Algeria. Even Nasser began to turn Egypt against Moscow. The debate

to which these setbacks gave rise led Moscow to pull in its horns. While nibbling continued here and there, and Vietnam presented a special case, major Soviet excursions into the Third World had ceased—until Angola.

The many obvious reasons why the Soviet Union has moved into Angola still do not explain the major change of course in its policy. The Kremlin's earlier commitment to the MPLA faction, its belief that it must react firmly to the U.S. response to its own buildup, its attempt to grasp the opportunity to help the blacks against South Africa—all these, provide only partial explanations. For the evidence suggests that an anguished policy review has been taking place in the Kremlin which transcends the question of Angola.

Every other change of direction in the Kremlin has been accompanied by a reexamination of the political and ideological assumptions on which previous policy had been based. This was usually reflected in the more serious Soviet journals, whose contributions often carry hints about the policy debates at the highest Kremlin levels.

The recent Kremlin debate on the need for a more aggressive policy for Western Communist parties in Europe, which began with hints so vague that many outside observers refused to believe in its existence, is now generally seen to reflect a major reexamination of Soviet foreign policy. There was a similar debate after World War II, even under Stalin's totalitarian rule, and there was another debate after Khrushchev took over and a whole range of assumptions was challenged.

In the current Moscow debate, the question whether Western Communist parties should be pressed to exploit the "crisis of capitalism"—so that Moscow, in turn, should be able to exploit the even greater Western weakness brought about by this—is closely linked to the whole problem of detente. The question for Moscow is what should constitute the main elements of its foreign policy—detente, or the exploitation of Western weakness, which would undermine detente—and in what proportions these ingredients should be mixed.

This is where the question of support for the "liberation struggle" comes in. It is an issue that has been brought circumspically into the debate on how aggressive the policy of foreign Communist parties should be. Official analysts in the West have, for the most part, once again failed to perceive the emergence of the issue, as they previously failed to recognize the importance, or even the existence, of the debate on the "crisis of capitalism" and its relevance to detente and to Soviet foreign policy. What is happening in Angola now is a practical expression of that debate.

No private Kremlin hints to Kissinger that the Soviet Union may moderate its policy in Angola, withdraw the Cubans on certain conditions, and accept a coalition made up of pro-Soviet as well as other elements, will resolve the larger issue. If anything, an apparent Soviet withdrawal of this kind could strengthen the Kremlin hawks. They could argue that a coalition in which the Soviet-supported MPLA faction gains the strongest position could, by the use of the "salami tactics" practiced in Eastern Europe after World War II, be

reduced slice by slice to the condition desired by Moscow. They would see in this a vindication of their earlier argument that the Soviet push into Angola was worthwhile, that their refusal to be put off by vague U.S. warnings was well-advised, and that further probes of this kind would yield even greater returns. Kremlin moderates who might argue that this is too risky would be contradicted by the apparent success of the policy in Angola.

How the tactics pursued in Angola fit into the larger picture of Soviet strategy is depicted in Moscow writings that explain the purpose of detente to the party faithful—not to the West. They make no secret of the fact that the aim of Soviet policy is to change the worldwide "correlation of forces" in favor of "socialism," that is, the Soviet Union. They make it clear that this should be secured by exploiting the three "major" forces over which the Kremlin can exercise some control.

First come the forces of "socialism," the Soviet Union and its immediate allies, whose political influence, and economic and military power, are to be used to change the "correlation" of forces in its own favor. Second comes "the international working class" whose role in the "crisis of capitalism," some Kremlin politicians argue, should be used to alter the "correlation" of power between the Soviet Union and the West. Last comes "the national liberation movement" which, as a result of its victory in Vietnam, is, according to Moscow, undergoing a transition "to a new stage."

As the World Marxist Review explains, what happened in Vietnam was in itself a reflection of the fundamental change in the world correlation of forces. "Its

significance, according to the Review—the journal of the world Communist movement—is that the Vietnam victory "contributes to continued advances in the same direction." What, it asks, are the "international implications" of this? It sees the answer in the contribution Vietnam—and now Angola—makes to the "development of the world revolutionary process." It explains that the revolutionary process asserts the right of peoples to "their own destinies"—as interpreted by Moscow. This, it says, takes the form of struggle against imperialism by "more than a hundred" countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America.

One of these countries is Angola. Its contribution to the change in the "correlation of forces" may be minute. But its success would help Moscow to use the Angola precedent to exact similar contributions from a few at first, then from more, of the "hundred countries" which are its target.

Of course, the Kremlin may fail, as it failed in its previous attempt to exploit the national liberation movement in the 1960s. Of course, the crude version of the domino theory is discredited. Of course, the genuine demand in many of these countries for a form of socialism to help overcome their abject poverty has nothing to do with the Kremlin's own purposes.

But the Soviet grand design is there, it is spelled out in Soviet writings, and it is the subject of debate in the Kremlin. So long as the debate continues, the West can influence its outcome. One thing that is certain to influence the debate is what the West does about Angola—not so much in Angola, as in Moscow.