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Before Independence—MPLA's Agostinho Neto, (left) who now heads the Government of the People's Republic of Angola, is seen here with FNLA's Holden Roberto (center) and UNITA's Jonas Savimbi during January 1975 unity talks in Mombasa, Kenya.

THE U.S. INVOLVEMENT IN ANGOLA

By Courtland Cox

The internal struggle in Angola has a relatively long history. The long standing differences between the leaders of the National Front for the Liberation of Angola (FNLA) and the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA) are both ideological and personal. As far back as 1964, the Organization of African Unity (OAU) tried to mediate the differences between the two factions, but gave up in 1966 without success.

Given the long and bitter ideological and personality differences between FNLA head Holden Roberto and MPLA head Agostinho Neto, it should not be too surprising to see them opposing each other in the Angolan conflict.

The American Role

The United States played a dual role in Angola from 1961 to 1969. It supplied Portugal's military needs for the colonial wars in Africa; at the same time, hedged its bets in Angola by supporting FNLA with funds for political and logistical purposes.

Ostensibly, the United States sold millions of dollars in arms—including bombs, napalm, munitions—to Portugal for NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) purposes. However, during hearings by Congressman Charles Diggs (D-Mich.) in March, 1973, it was revealed that the United States had indeed contributed to the prosecution of the counter-insurgency warfare in Angola, Mozambique and Guinea-Bissau.

Also, the United States subsidized—at a much reduced level—Holden Roberto's FNLA through Zaire and CIA conduits from 1961 to 1969. (*New York Times*, September 23, 1975). But, in 1969, the Nixon administration decided to end the covert aid program to FNLA as a part of

policy decision to improve relations with the white regimes in Southern Africa. (According to State Department aides at a hearing before the Subcommittee on Africa, Senate Foreign Relations Committee, February 5, 1976, the CIA kept Roberto on the payroll [reportedly at a sum of \$10,000 annually] as an intelligence source).

In January, 1975, when it became clear that Angola would receive its independence, this time the Ford administration turned Roberto back on by granting him a sum of \$300,000. According to testimony by Secretary of State Henry Kissinger before the Senate Subcommittee on Africa, January 29, 1976, the funds were given to Roberto for the purchase of supplies and bicycles.

In the early spring of 1975, President Gerald Ford made the decision to also fund the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola [UNITA], which was founded in 1966 by Jonas Savimbi. The 40 Committee—a body in the Executive branch that approves large scale covert operations (chaired by Kissinger), approved \$300,000 in secret subsidies for UNITA. Both President Ford and Secretary Kissinger were aware that bringing UNITA to the American side constituted a major step—close to a commitment that the United States would not allow MPLA to control Angola.

An official of the Ford administration told John Marks, an associate at the Center for National Security Studies, that Kissinger pushed hard for increased CIA intervention. "Henry wanted to be told why we should intervene," said the official, "not why not." (*Intelligence Report*, Vol. 1, No. 1, December 1975). Many within the State Department were

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"European"—the rulers;
"African"—minimally, 95 percent of the population of Angola, oppressed, exploited, and angry.

In 1954, the Bakongo tribe of Northern Angola chose Holden Roberto as its new chief in a secession quarrel that was tied up with reform issues and Catholic-Protestant religious conflict. What Roberto stood for at this point was separation of the Bakongo from Angola, and tribal self-determination through the reestablishment of the old "Bakongo Empire" of the 15th Century, which stretched between Angola and what is now Zaire. The organization formed for this purpose was UPNA—the Popular Union of Northern Angola.

During this same period, men like Agostinho Neto, Marcelino Dos Santos, and Amilcar Cabral, all "assimilado" from Portugal's African colonies, were returning to Africa after university education and political involvement in the Portuguese left.

Neto, who returned to Luanda, had already been jailed in Portugal for his militant anti-fascist poetry. As a gynecologist, he set up practice in Luanda's slums, but also maintained political commitment, becoming involved in the formation of the MPLA—the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola—in 1956. This movement at this time was primarily urban-based and different from UPNA in its non-tribal orientation as well as in its leadership which, while "nationalist," was also politically leftwing—borrowing much, though not blindly, from Marx and Lenin.

At the persuasion of a number of African leaders attending the 1958 All African Peoples Conference in Ghana, Roberto dropped the "N" from UPNA and redefined the movement as a movement for national liberation. UPA, however, never lost its tribal image or its hostility to the "urban elites" of MPLA. In political terms this translated into an anti-communist hostility—communism being the rather inaccurate view by UPA of MPLA's objectives. Though ill-defined politically, UPA's

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opposed to the United States intervention in Angola.

Nevertheless, America and its European allies provided arms to FNLA and UNITA. Official sources indicate that the United States alone spent \$32 million for arms in Angola during 1975. A closer figure to the truth would be between \$125 and \$150 million. The White House has suppressed the House Intelligence Committee report which points out that the Ford administration undervalued arms sent to Angola from four to ten times their actual value. (*New York Times*, January 20, 1976).

Before the FNLA military demise, U. S. transport planes C-141 and C-130, flying on behalf of the CIA, would land regularly in Kinshasa, Zaire, disgorging tons of military supplies, including rifles, machine guns, light artillery, rocket launchers and munitions; these in turn were flown to the Angolan town of Ambriz by smaller planes. In addition to the arms and munitions, the United States flew artillery spotter planes, piloted by Americans, into the Angolan battle zones. Mercenaries were either trained or paid for with funds from the United States.

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Despite the opulent airlift of French, Belgian, German and American arms, FNLA lost ground steadily. By the end of September, 1975, FNLA suffered major military defeats. On the other hand, MPLA controlled the Angolan capital of Luanda, all the major ports, both ends of the strategic Benguela railway and, most importantly, 12 of Angola's 16 provinces. FNLA had been forced back into the two northern provinces of Uige and Zaire, and in early October, 1975, was being pressed even there.

In the southern part of Angola, FNLA had formed an uneasy alliance with UNITA, which at that time controlled the provinces of Huambo and Bie. UNITA had joined the fighting with reluctance in August and recruited, along with FNLA, foreign mercenaries to stiffen resistance against MPLA forces.

The South African Offensive

In the last week of October, 1975, the military situation in Angola drastically changed. According to wire service reports, unidentified forces—South African troops—moved into Angola from Namibia (South West Africa). The South African troops took Pereira de Eca, a major road junction just north of the border.

Sa da Banderia, the capital of Huila province, some 150 miles to the northwest, fell two days later. Mocamedes, a port just to the west of Sa da Banderia, was occupied on October 20. On the

The United States, it would seem, perceives itself as the number one power in the world and, in pursuit of its superpower status, has engaged in a form of permanent war. Richard Barnet, in his book *Roots of War*, points out that since 1945 the United States has conducted a major military campaign in paramilitary CIA operations in a former colonial or dependent country in Africa, Asia, Middle East, Latin America, South America and Europe on an average of once every 18 months.

morning of November 2, FNLA and UNITA forces—led by South Africans—attacked Benguela, which is less than 300 miles to the north of Mocamedes. By November 11, in less than three weeks, MPLA had lost control of most of the coast of Angola and all of the southern provinces. The South Africa-United States-UNITA-FNLA military objective of pushing the MPLA back from most of the provinces in southern Angola was accomplished. On November 11, MPLA had control of only 6 of 16 provinces, and its claim to rule Angola as the sole political entity was effectively discredited.

While the South Africa-United States offensive succeeded militarily, it was a disaster politically. Many African nations that had adhered to the OAU's call for a government of national unity sided with MPLA. Nigeria, Tanzania, Ghana and others recognized the government of the People's Republic of Angola as a direct result of the South African offensive. For a time it seemed that most of Africa would

join in a condemnation of South Africa at the OAU summit in Addis Ababa, January 10-12, 1976. To prevent a political rebuke of United States-South Africa policy in Angola, President Ford sent Assistant Secretary of State William Schaufele, Jr., to confer with five African heads of state. Personal messages from the President were sent to 38 other African heads of state.

The OAU meeting stalled in a 22-22 deadlock, with Uganda and Ethiopia abstaining.

Since the OAU conference, the military situation has turned again dramatically in MPLA's favor. FNLA has been made ineffective as a military force, UNITA is in retreat and South Africa has pulled back—or was pushed back—by a combined Cuban-MPLA military force.

Why did the United States intervene covertly in Angola?

The United States, it would seem, perceives itself as the number one power in the world and, in pursuit of its superpower status, has engaged in a form of permanent war. Richard Barnett, in his book *Roots of War*, points out that since 1945 the United States has conducted a major military campaign in paramilitary CIA operations in a former colonial or dependent country in Africa, Asia, Middle East, Latin America, South America and Europe on an average of once every 18 months.

In all of the above campaigns, the United States, according to former U.S. Ambassador Charles E. Bohlen, had "no sinister design, no hidden purpose, certainly no imperialist ambitions in our policy, *but simply moved to answer a challenge.*"

Why did the United States intervene covertly in Southern Africa?

The Portuguese government, after the April 25, 1974 coup, decided to decolonize in Africa. Some United States foreign policy planners and national security experts feared the stability of

Southern Africa would be threatened. American policy, as outlined in the 1970 National Security Study Memorandum No. 39, was based on the assumption that the white governments of Southern Africa were going to maintain their power in the area. The United States, therefore, could depend on South Africa, the Portuguese government, and the Ian Smith regime in Rhodesia to maintain stability in the area.

The United States government was not overjoyed when Portugal gave in to the demands of Frelimo to govern Mozambique. Frelimo was socialist, it had received substantial military aid from China and the Soviet Union in its struggle for independence. Mozambique could also serve as a rear base for African militants in South Africa. To prevent Frelimo from heading the government of Mozambique, the CIA tried to cause civil strife by giving money and arms to a small group called Ceremo. But Frelimo proved too strong and popular; the CIA's covert operation failed. Both the United States and South Africa reluctantly accepted a Frelimo government in Mozambique, well aware that Mozambique's economy was deeply and unavoidably tied to South Africa's economy.

A Long Struggle

On the other coast of Southern Africa, the Angolan people achieved independence after a 14-year liberation struggle. During the independence struggle, the movements received arms and monetary support from either the Soviet Union or China. SWAPO (South West Africa People's Organization) received support from both UNITA and MPLA in the struggle for the liberation of Namibia from South African rule. However, the Angolan economy, unlike that of Mozambique's, was not so heavily dependent on the South African economy.

The trend in Southern Africa, after the Portuguese coup, was toward independence and liberation. South Africa, if the

trend continued, would be isolated and vulnerable. To retard the forces of liberation, a four part strategy was advanced. First, South Africa would not take an overt belligerent stance toward Mozambique; instead South Africa would try to strangle Mozambique economically. Second, Rhodesia should be given majority rule under a responsible (to South Africa) Black government, so as to forestall revolutionary armed struggle. Third, South Africa would try to end its diplomatic isolation through its detente efforts. The South Africans, through loans and other inducements, would split Africa's hostility to its apartheid regime. Finally, South Africa and its allies wanted to be certain that only a government favorable to them would come to power in Angola. The government of Angola had to be approved by both President Mobutu of Zaire and Premier Vorster of South Africa. FNLA met the qualifications. During Angola's pre-independence transition period, the United States gave covert aid and arms to FNLA so that it might have overwhelming political and military advantage.

Unlike most of Africa, Angola's independence came during a state of civil strife. In the 1960s, most of the decolonization process in Africa was peaceful. Occasionally, when hostilities occurred, the fighting was between the former European colonial power and the African nationalists. The lines were sharp, and the choices were clear.