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US POLICY TOWARDS ANGOLA: 1974-1976?

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1. The beginning of the 1970's witnessed the dislocation of the Cold War to Southern Africa, mainly to the Portuguese colonies of Angola, Mozambique and Guinea Bissau and even to the white minority-dominated regimes of South Africa and Rhodesia.

2. One main factor lay at the base of this dislocation of the Cold War – the new a more offensive stage of Soviet Union foreign policy as a result of 3 systematic developments:

(1st) the acquisition of a relative nuclear parity

(2nd) the Sino-Soviet conflict

(3rd) the U.S. debacle in Vietnam

3. Angola was the first workout of this new soviet offensive

In July of 1970, Moscow elaborated a set of assistance packages to the MPLA, comprising military items, logistics and political training.

In addition, the Soviets provided political back up to the movement headed by Agostinho Neto within the framework of its shortcomings with other neighbouring African States – Zambia, Zaire and the Congo.

The overthrow of the Portuguese authoritarian regime in 1974 accelerated this “soviet African policy”.

As the soviet documents reveal, as early as May of 1974 Moscow concluded that the Portuguese colonial empire was about to collapse, a belief that drove the Kremlin to adopt a strengthening policy towards the MPLA, under the leadership of Agostinho Neto, with the aim of transforming it into a dominant movement in a future post-colonial government coalition. (Westad, 2007, p.222)

4. It was the acceleration of soviet African policy who led to a change in the USA’s African policy

In fact, up until the 1975 Angolan Crisis, North-American foreign policy gave African issues a very low priority (except for Congo crisis)

In late 1974, early 1975 Africa became relevant and even then solely based on concerns about the consequences to the Cold War equilibrium in view of Soviet intervention on Angolan soil, mainly after the Vietnam debacle. (Henry Kissinger, 1999 p.701)

5. The existing documents suggest that North-American intervention in Angola began in January of 1975.

A nuclear fact unleashed the decision to intervene: *the intelligence received by the CIA pertaining to the Soviet Union’s shipping of weaponry to the MPLA through Congo-Brazzaville.*

On the 22nd of January, 1975, the 40 Committee approved *raising the support to the FNLA to about 300 thousand USD, annually*; but it rejected the extension of that aid to Jonas Savimbi. (Witney Schneidman, 2005, p.265-66)

6. Although the US intervention in Angola started in January of 1975, the US Government only gave priority to the Angolan case in July of 1975.

In the 8th of July the Ford Administration approved a wide secret operation supportive of the FNLA and UNITA, which was destined to contribute to the victory of these movements in the Angolan civil war – the operation codenamed IAFEATURE

A decision was reached in the sequence of a *40 Committee* recommendation advocating the strengthening of the support given to Holden Roberto, as well as extending that support to Jonas Savimbi.

“The secret Angolan programme” that was based on two sets of measures:

-an aid worth 20 million USD to FNLA and UNITA, to be made available by the CIA via Zaire, which was destined to train, equip and transport the armed forces of these movements

-the recruitment of mercenaries from Brazil, Portugal and other African countries, so that the latter might serve as military counsellors to both FNLA and UNITA

7. Still in July of 1975 the South African government took the decision of military intervening in Angola:

-In August, small South African military units were operating inside Angola.

-On the 15th of September, the first South African training camp destined for the training of UNITA troops was operational in Mpupa (South of Angola).

-In mid-October, as the confrontation taking place in Angola were intensifying, Voster instructed the invasion of Angolan soil by South African regular military forces (it was the onset of operation SAVANNAH)

South African archive materials already available do not duly explain the reasons presiding the decision of the South African government to military intervene in Angola; there is, however, a memorandum from the Secret Service in Pretoria that points to the fact that *the said intervention might have occurred “in response to North-American pressure”*. (Odd Arne Westad, 2007, p.230)

8. In August 1975 Cuba set up its own plan of military intervention in Angola, through the direct involvement of Cuban military forces:

-still in the summer of 1975 there were around 250 (two hundred and fifty) Cuban military advisors in Angola

-In the *beginning of October* the first Cuban combat troops arrived in Luanda, via Congo-Brazzaville, having the latter's transportation been either air-borne, or sea-borne

-And on the *23rd of that month* the Cuban forces participated for the first time in war operations on the ground. (Piero Gleijeses, 2002, pp.328-246)

9. In the beginning Brejnev refused the Cuban plan, in consonance with the advice of his Armed Forces and from the Secret Service, who alerted to the consequences of a direct intervention by the USSR in the Angolan civil war, where the *Détente* with the USA was concerned.

But in the third week of October, the USSR accepted to take charge of the air transportation of troops from Havana to Luanda, of the supply of military equipment and of technical advisory –through the Soviet counsellors sent to the ground.

According to available Soviet archives, *the probable cause of this decision was attributed to South African forces' invasion of Angolan territory, an intervention that was interpreted by the Kremlin as a joint South African and North-American action destined to destroy the MPLA* (Odd Arne Westad, 2007, p.236)

10. USA only reacted to the Soviet air lift in mid-November of 1975:

(1) in November, the 14th the *40 Committee* approved a request for additional funds to compensate the increase of communist influence;

(2) the USA exposed Soviet intervention in Angola, through both diplomatic and public channels, and *menaced Moscow with the end of détente*;

(3) the USA initiated a campaign to induce the OUA to refuse acknowledging the MPLA and to appeal to the withdrawal of all external forces;

(4) the USA initiated *talks with France* with the goal of assuring *a joint USA-France action in Angola* (Henry Kissinger, 1999, p.724)

11. But in 19th December 1975 the White House – Congress conflict definitively ends the North-American “Angolan programme”

In 19th December *the Senate approved the Tunney amendment* to the Defence Budget law, prohibiting any use of funds to Angola, except for those specifically accounted for in the Budget.

The Tunney amendment was the end of the American chance to win in Angola

(In June of 1976, *the Clark amendment* conferred upon the *Tunney amendment* a permanent state of affairs)

12. In the end of December, South Africa decided to withdraw from Angola, in part due to internal issues, in part due to the fact that the North-American Congress had voted for withholding all funds destined to secret operations in Angola

13. The USSR won in Angola

In mid-February, 1976, the majority of African countries had recognized the Popular Republic of Angola, as the OUA did, to a great extent due to diplomatic pressure exerted by the USSR.

Where the control of the central regions is concerned, the African civil war ended in the beginning of March, 1975.

According to Soviet archival sources, quoted by professor Westad, the MPLA victory in Angola, combined with that of Vietnam, lead to an unprecedented feeling of optimism in the USSR, where its policy for the 'Third World' was concerned (Odd Arne Westad, 2007, p.237)