

The Heritage Foundation **Backgrounder**

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U.S. AID PAYS DIVIDENDS FOR ANGOLA'S FREEDOM FIGHTERS

(Updating Backgrounder No. 470, "Angola Tests the Reagan Doctrine," November 14, 1985.)

Jonas Savimbi and his democratic resistance forces are closer than ever to winning the war in Angola. This is in great part due to Savimbi's meeting with Ronald Reagan one year ago this week. This meeting signaled a major shift in U.S. policy toward Angola, leading to U.S. military aid to Savimbi and the freedom fighters which he heads as President of the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola--or UNITA. Critics warned that U.S. aid to UNITA merely would force the Angolan communists to be more dependent on the Soviet bloc and reduce the chances for a negotiated end to the conflict. Now a year later, it is clear they were wrong. Since Savimbi's visit, UNITA has liberated increasingly larger sections of Angola and brought the nation closer to peace than it has been in a decade.

Early in 1976, in the wake of Watergate and the U.S. failure in Vietnam, the U.S. Congress cut off assistance to UNITA. For ten years, Savimbi's forces had to rely on other sources for assistance to fight the Leninist MPLA regime ruling Angola. The Cuban forces bolstering the MPLA grew from 12,000 in 1976 to 21,000 in 1981 to 35,000 in 1986. The Soviet Union sold \$4 billion worth of arms--including fighter aircraft, helicopter gunships, and heavy tanks--to the MPLA. Despite this, UNITA's strength grew and exerted control over an expanding share of the national territory. By late 1985, the MPLA's control over Angola was so tenuous that for the first time, Soviet officers took control of field operations in a massive offensive against UNITA. Yet Savimbi's forces were able to withstand and then defeat the assault.

By last year's Reagan-Savimbi meeting, UNITA was close to victory in Angola. Savimbi asked for U.S. aid and received some of the anti-aircraft and anti-tank weapons required to blunt the attacks of sophisticated Soviet weaponry. U.S. aid so far has totaled about \$15 million.

The past year has seen important gains for Savimbi. Among them:

- o UNITA has shot down some 42 MPLA aircraft. Deprived of air cover, and because of substantially increased UNITA actions in Angola's northern provinces, MPLA forces were unable to launch a major offensive in 1986.

- o UNITA has been gaining global recognition and acceptance. In October, Savimbi was received by members of the European Parliament. In his first public visit to France, he met with cabinet ministers, the National Assembly president, and the secretary general of Prime Minister Jacques Chirac's political party. David Owen, leader of Great Britain's Social Democratic Alliance, meanwhile, indicated support for assistance to UNITA on a recent visit to the U.S.

- o In the U.S. Congress, the Hamilton Amendment to the Intelligence Authorization Act, which would have cut off covert aid to UNITA, was defeated soundly. The McCollum Amendment added Angola to the list of communist countries prohibited from receiving Export-Import Bank loans, guarantees, or insurance. The Grassley Amendment denied foreign tax credits and income tax deferrals to companies that operate in Angola.

- o The Soviet Union now seems uncertain how to proceed in Angola. Instead of massive new arms shipments to offset U.S. assistance, Moscow only has replaced MPLA aircraft and weapons lost in the fall 1985 offensive.

It is becoming increasingly clear that the MPLA regime cannot achieve military victory. UNITA's successes, with the modest U.S. assistance, have raised the MPLA's costs of fighting the war. Meanwhile, dropping prices for oil, Angola's major export, have decreased the MPLA's ability to fund the war. UNITA and Zaire officials report that the MPLA privately has broached the subject of a negotiated settlement. U.S. assistance to UNITA has brought the war closer to a peaceful finish--on terms that serve U.S. national interests as well as those of the Angolan people.

These terms were laid out last August at UNITA's sixth party congress: withdrawal of all foreign forces; a ceasefire; and establishment of a coalition government to hold free elections under international supervision. Washington should support this framework for national reconciliation and continue its assistance to UNITA. Militarily, U.S. aid should continue at somewhat higher levels, to help Savimbi inflict as much damage as possible on the MPLA arsenal. Politically, the U.S. must continue to make clear to Moscow, Havana, and Luanda its unwavering commitment to Savimbi's democratic resistance forces. Moscow cannot afford major grants of new weapons to Angola and the MPLA cannot afford to pay for them. This small commitment of U.S. resources has proved, dollar-for-dollar, a sound investment for freedom and democracy.

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