

Executive Memorandum

The Heritage Foundation

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ANGOLA AT THE CROSSROADS

Jonas Savimbi's thirteen-year struggle to liberate Angola soon may be reaching its most perilous moment. The United States currently is mediating talks between Cuba, South Africa, and Angola's communist regime designed to remove the over 50,000 Cuban troops from Angola and achieve independence for South Africa-ruled South West Africa, also known as Namibia. But Cuba's Fidel Castro may be using the negotiations to kill off Angola's freedom fighters, the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA), to consolidate Angola's Soviet-backed Marxist-Leninist regime, the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA), and to enable the South West African People's Organization (SWAPO), a Soviet-backed guerrilla movement, to assume control in Namibia. Should Cuba succeed, it likely will represent the most severe blow to Western security interests in the region since the MPLA took power in Angola in 1975. To prevent this, the U.S. must ensure that any settlement on Angola and Namibia does not imperil UNITA's struggle for a free Angola and that elections in Namibia are free of SWAPO or Cuban threats or intimidation.

The U.S.-mediated talks between Cuba, South Africa, and the Angolan regime began last May in London. Their ninth meeting, in Geneva, this week concluded with the three parties stating that they had agreed in principle on a phased withdrawal of Cuban troops and independence for Namibia. U.S. officials report that the tentative agreement envisions a 27-month timetable for the Cuban withdrawal. Some two-thirds of the Cuban troops would be removed in the first year; the remainder would be redeployed gradually in northern Angola. The Cuban pullout would begin simultaneously with the withdrawal of South African forces from Namibia, with United Nations-supervised elections for a constituent assembly to be held seven months from that date. The plan has not yet been approved by the three governments and some details reportedly remain to be worked out, including the starting date. However, a final agreement may be reached in the coming weeks when talks are expected to resume in Brazzaville, the Congo.

Cuba's Aggressiveness. Whether Cuba can be trusted to abide by the agreement is unclear. Even while the talks have been going on, Cuba has increased its aggressiveness in the region. The Cuban envoy in Angola, for example, has threatened pro-Western Zaire with attack, while official spokesmen do "not rule out the possibility" of Cuban troops operating in Namibia. Though South Africa removed its 3,000 troops from Angola this August, moreover, Castro has poured some 15,000 additional Cuban troops into Angola within the last year. Cuban troop strength in Angola now totals at least 52,000. Thousands of them, along with Soviet-supplied MiG-23 jet fighters, are in southwestern Angola apparently poised to attack UNITA's

southeastern strongholds like Caiundo, Mavinga, and Jamba. These troops also could provide cover for SWAPO military attacks from southern Angola into neighboring Namibia.

Weakening the Freedom Fighters. The danger now for American interests in the region is that the Cubans and Angola's communist regime are using the talks to strengthen their military and political position while weakening that of UNITA. In September, Savimbi wrote to Ronald Reagan that the MPLA regime was using the negotiations "to isolate UNITA, so that a military offensive against our forces will have a greater chance of success." Recent Cuban victories in central Angola following the South African withdrawal, in fact, left Savimbi's 65,000 forces in an extremely precarious position. Should the Cubans decide to attack, UNITA likely will suffer heavy losses that may give the Cubans and the MPLA the upper hand in consolidating their regime.

To protect Western security interests in the region, the U.S. should:

- ◆◆ Insist that free elections in Namibia be held only after all Cuban troops leave Angola. If Namibia votes before the vast majority of Cuban troops depart, it is likely that remaining Cuban forces will try to interfere in Namibian affairs. The timetable must be realistic; Cuban troops in Angola do not need over two years to leave.

- ◆◆ Insist on free elections in Angola. The U.S. must be consistent in its call for democracy in southern Africa. Free elections in Angola were promised in the 1975 Alvor agreement to which the MPLA acceded. These elections have not been held.

- ◆◆ Insist that Namibia's elections be monitored, organized, and supervised by an independent entity other than the United Nations. The U.N., already having preempted the elections by declaring SWAPO the "sole, authentic representative" of Namibia, cannot impartially monitor or organize Namibian elections. If the U.S. is unable to prevent U.N. participation, then it should demand that the U.N. reverse its biased comments about SWAPO's legitimacy before the Namibian elections are scheduled. The U.S. should also withhold funding for the U.N.'s international peacekeeping fund for Namibia until the Cubans and the MPLA regime agree to free elections in Angola and national reconciliation talks with UNITA, and an even-handed group is set up to monitor free elections in Namibia.

- ◆◆ Assure continued or increased U.S. aid to the Angolan freedom fighters. Halting aid to UNITA now would essentially end hope for a free and independent Angola. A bipartisan group of 51 Senators, led by Dennis DeConcini, the Arizona Democrat, recently called on the White House to continue assisting UNITA until all Cuban troops leave Angola and until UNITA and the MPLA agree to a date for free elections.

- ◆◆ Pressure the MPLA regime to begin direct reconciliation talks with UNITA. The only way to ensure peace in the country is for such face-to-face talks.

The struggle of the Angolan freedom fighters over the past thirteen years has been gallant. They have succeeded largely because they enjoy wide support among the people of Angola and from many free world nations. While UNITA's future under the tentative agreement currently is uncertain, strong U.S. actions can help to ensure that UNITA continues to pursue its goal of peace with freedom in Angola.

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