

RUSH!

6/1/93

Number 357

PUTTING U.S. ANGOLA POLICY BACK ON TRACK

President Bill Clinton extended diplomatic recognition on May 19 to Angolan President Jose Eduardo dos Santos's government, citing the high priority Washington places on democracy. This is a curious decision. Notwithstanding United Nations-supervised elections held last September, Angola, racked by a brutal civil war, is far from democratic. Political expression often costs Angolans their lives. Moreover, the Administration's Angola-recognition policy will only make peace in that troubled country more difficult to achieve if it appears that the United States has chosen sides.

Dos Santos's Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA) is locked in protracted combat with forces from the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA). Led by Jonas Savimbi, UNITA was an important recipient of U.S. military aid during the Cold War. Cease-fire negotiations, mediated by the United States, Russia, and Portugal, recently collapsed, and MPLA-UNITA hostilities have intensified. In addition to controlling some 70 percent of the Angolan countryside, UNITA now occupies the northwest oil center of Soyo. Meanwhile, the MPLA government has access to more than enough of Angola's approximately \$3 billion in annual oil revenues to fund its arms purchases and mercenaries. Under these circumstances, neither side is likely to win an outright military victory.

Violence erupted throughout Angola in the aftermath of last September's elections, whose outcome the U.N. acknowledged was marred by significant irregularities. The elections were held in accordance with the so-called Bicesse Accords, which were brokered by the U.S. and signed in 1991. As no presidential candidate received 50 percent of the vote, a run-off was required, but never conducted. Dos Santos declared victory and Savimbi as much as declared war.

By embracing dos Santos, the Clinton Administration reversed the Bush policy of withholding diplomatic recognition until the democratic process in Angola was complete. The Administration's action was expected. The State Department, never sympathetic to UNITA, had long favored recognition. Moreover, powerful domestic interests, including the Congressional Black Caucus and U.S. oil companies, had long agitated for it. In his announcement, President Clinton even acknowledged that the U.S. had withheld establishing relations with the MPLA in the hope of gaining negotiating concessions from UNITA. Unfortunately, Clinton's bargaining leverage is now lost. The reason: The MPLA now has less incentive to negotiate in good faith.

The diplomatic recognition of Angola is a mistake, but Clinton can still take steps to lessen its negative impact. Washington has lost its claim to neutrality by suggesting that the democratic process is now complete. Nevertheless, only the U.S. has the clout to make a difference in Angola. For Angola's sake and to serve America's considerable economic interests there, the Clinton Administration should:

- ◆ **Drop the democratic rhetoric.** In his recognition statement, Clinton credited the MPLA government with institutionalizing a democratic system. If so, the MPLA's is a "democracy" few would choose to live in. UNITA partisans, including many political prisoners, constantly fear for their lives. Political freedoms are virtually non-existent, with the MPLA suppressing freedom of expression, freedom of the press, and freedom of association. Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs George E. Moose once said that "elections by themselves do not democracies make." Angola is poignant proof of Moose's observation.

The President's rhetoric undermines his commitment to promoting democracy around the world. It also does nothing for peace in Angola. Predictably, the MPLA is now celebrating the U.S. recognition policy and has hardened its position on a cease-fire. Providing future grist for the MPLA's propaganda mill will not help national reconciliation in Angola.

- ◆ **Treat UNITA's security concerns seriously.** President Clinton suggested that he lost faith in withholding recognition as a bargaining lever when UNITA failed to sign a U.S.-supervised peace agreement negotiated with the MPLA in the Ivory Coast city of Abidjan. UNITA failed to sign for good reason. Legitimate disputes remained over which forces would control such contested areas as the city of Huambo. UNITA was concerned about the security of its forces and civilians who might be targeted as UNITA partisans by the MPLA. This is entirely reasonable given the MPLA's past atrocities, including police executions of MPLA opponents. The President's dismissal of these life and death concerns does not augur well for a credible and balanced American policy toward Angola.
- ◆ **Press both the MPLA and UNITA to protect human rights.** The Clinton Administration claims that an enduring commitment to democracy and human rights will be at the heart of its policy toward Africa. Yet by extending diplomatic recognition to Angola, Clinton has rewarded a regime guilty of massive human rights abuses. These include last October's Luanda massacre of thousands of UNITA sympathizers, including UNITA Vice President Jeremias Chitunda. The MPLA continues to commit atrocities against UNITA supporters and UNITA has frequently responded in kind.

Washington should demand that the MPLA and UNITA permit independent and impartial human rights investigations. Amnesty International and many other groups are capable of this undertaking. Washington's continued silence on human rights abuses in Angola will only diminish U.S. credibility, damaging the prospects of reconciliation.

- ◆ **Appoint a U.S. ambassador who enjoys UNITA's trust.** Angola's hope lies in renewed negotiations to implement the Bicesse Accords. The U.S. inevitably will play a role in these negotiations. Thus, it is essential that the U.S. ambassador to Luanda be viewed as fair-minded by both Angolan parties, and not someone tailored to the interests of the newly recognized MPLA government. The confirmation hearings of the new U.S. ambassador to Angola should focus on whether he or she will impartially consider the views and interests of both the MPLA government and UNITA.
- ◆ **Prevent U.S. humanitarian aid from being used for political purposes.** Since 1990, the U.S. has given over \$100 million in humanitarian aid to Angola. Due to both civil conflict and drought, an estimated two million Angolans face food shortages. Under no circumstances should future American aid be funneled through the MPLA government, which assuredly would use it to enrich party elites and for partisan political purposes. This type of abuse has occurred in all too many African countries; there is no need to risk such a perversion of America's goodwill in Angola.
- ◆ **Support the Angolan arms embargo.** The Bicesse Accords include an arms embargo of Angola, which has been violated by both sides. The MPLA reportedly is buying weaponry at a furious pace from many suppliers, including Spain. President Clinton promised that Washington's recognition would not affect its commitment to maintaining Angola's arms embargo. He should actively discourage other nations from selling arms to any parties in Angola.

More blood will be shed before peace comes to Angola. UNITA and the MPLA are both too eager to take up the sword of war. Against the force of Angolan arms, the U.S. must flex its diplomatic muscle. President Clinton has made a poor start in settling the Angolan conflict, but steps can be taken to control the damage. They should be taken now, not only to advance the cause of peace and democracy in Angola, but to reestablish the credibility of U.S. policy in Angola.

Thomas P. Sheehy
Policy Analyst