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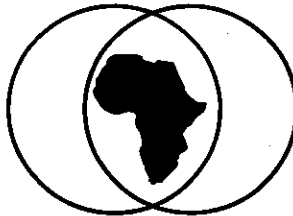
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THE ANGOLAN CONFLICT

Internal and International Aspects

John Barratt

THE SOUTH AFRICAN INSTITUTE OF INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS



DIE SUID-AFRIKAANSE INSTITUUT VAN INTERNASIONALE AANGELEENTHEDE

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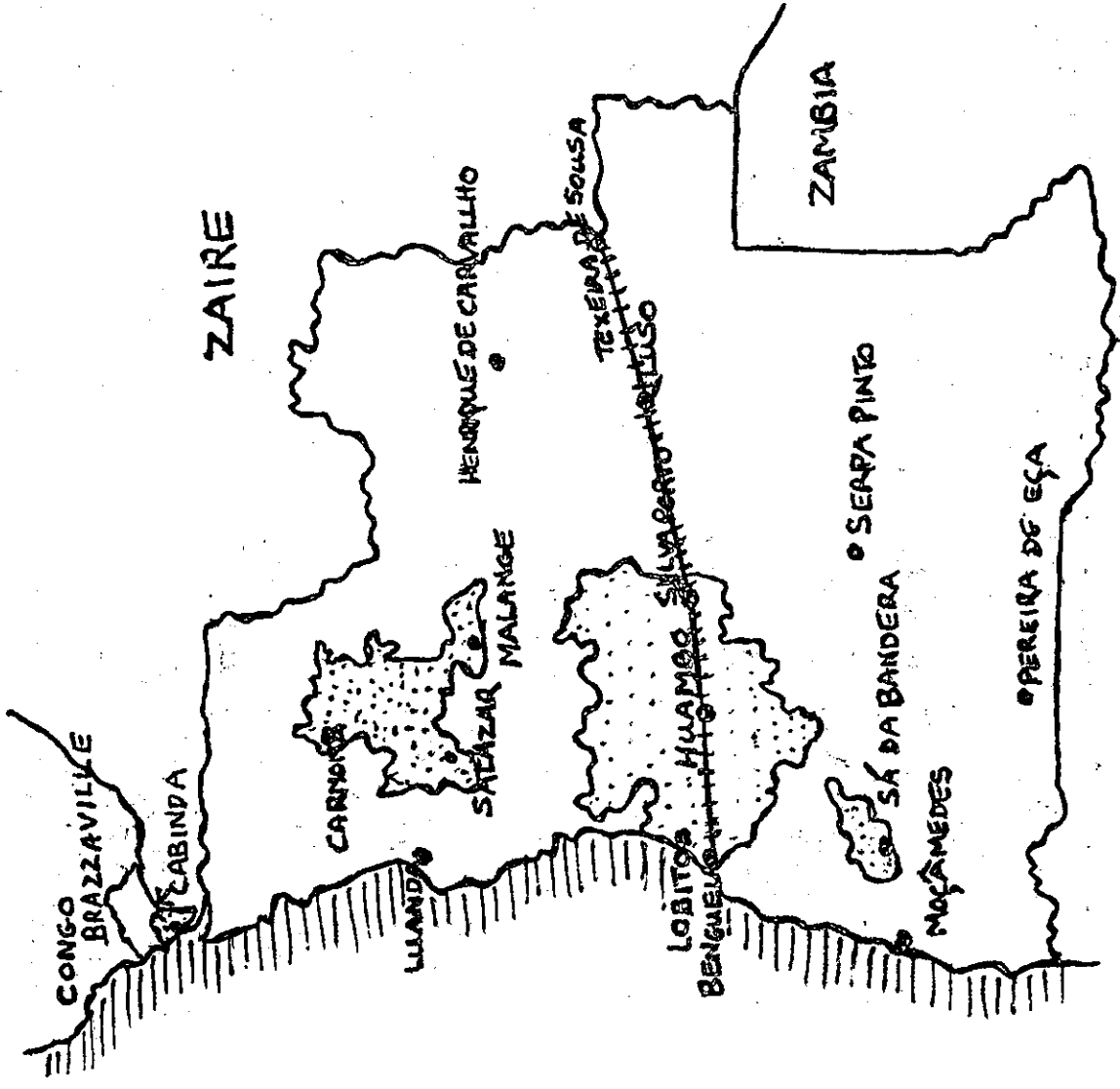
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ANGOLA
SHOWING CONCENTRATION OF POPULATION AND MAIN TOWNS.



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A proper analysis of developments in Angola during the second half of 1975 and early 1976, and of their implications for the future of Southern Africa, will require more firm information than is available at present. But it may be useful, in approaching a better understanding of these developments, to look at the background to the conflict and the positions of the various parties involved, in particular the people of Angola themselves and their nationalist movements, as well as the non-Angolan powers - both those from outside Africa and those in Africa with a closer regional interest in the conflict.

The Country and Its People

With a land area of over 480 000 square miles, Angola is one of the largest political units in Africa; in fact, of the countries lying entirely south of the Sahara, Angola is second in size only to its neighbour, Zaïre, with which it has a long frontier on its north and north-eastern sides. It adjoins Zambia in the south-east and South West Africa in the south. It has a long coastline of about 1 000 miles from the Zaïre River in the north to the Cunene River in the south. Behind the strip of coastal lowland the country rises to the great interior plateau which covers two-thirds of the surface of Angola. North of Angola proper lies the small enclave of Cabinda (vitally important as a source of oil), wedged between a strip of Zaïre on the south, along the Zaïre River, and the Congo Republic (Brazzaville) on the north. The Cabinda enclave is only about 2 800 square miles in size.

The total population of Angola is about 5,5 million, which makes it a relatively sparsely populated territory - the average population density of only a little more than 10 persons per square mile is less than half the average population density of Africa as a whole. However, there is a high concentration of population in certain areas, and 62 per cent of the people live on 12,2 per cent of the territory. (See map.) The two areas of densest population are, firstly, the central highlands, including the towns of Silva Porto and Huambo (Nova Lisboa) and running down to the sea at Lobito and Benguela; and, secondly, an area due east of Luanda with the towns of Salazar and Malanje in the south and Carmona in the north. Then the region north to the border of Zaïre is also relatively densely populated. The vast areas to the east and south are very thinly populated.

These facts about the spread of the population of Angola are very significant when one considers the conflict which has been going on there in recent months. Once the MPLA forces had reached the line in the south running from Moçamedes on the coast through Sã da Bandeira to Serpa Pinto, and the Zaïre border in the north, they had embraced about two-thirds of the population. The other vast areas on the map of Angola are less important as far as control of the people is concerned.

However, the people of Angola do not form a homogeneous society; there is a variety of ethnic groupings. This factor was of considerable significance

in the struggle against the Portuguese through the 1960's and early 1970's, as well as in the struggle to gain control of Angola after April, 1974. It remains important in the present conflict, although one must guard against considering this matter as simply one of ethnic or tribal differences, because there are regional, historical and ideological factors, as well as personal leadership rivalries, which have contributed to the divisions between the three main movements competing for the control of the country.

Without going into any detail about the origin and migration of the people now inhabiting Angola, one must recall the fact that at the time of the first European contacts with this region, there were several flourishing kingdoms in central/southern Africa, including the territory now known as Angola. Important among these was the Kongo kingdom which, from about the 14th century, was located astride the lower Congo River, with its capital city south of the river. It was this strongly centralised kingdom with which the Portuguese first came into contact in 1483. Although the European contact gradually weakened, and eventually destroyed, the unity of the Kongo kingdom, the idea of an historic kingdom of importance lived on in the minds of the people and some of their leaders, and it has influenced politics in modern Angola (as well as in neighbouring Zaïre).

Immediately south of the Kongo kingdom was the kingdom of Ndongo, inhabited by the Mbundu people. The title of the king was "N'Gola" - the origin of the name "Angola". Although the Portuguese had established their first contacts with the Kongo, they moved further south in the 16th century to find a more stable base for their trading activities - mainly the slave trade. Relations were therefore established with the Ndongo kingdom, and the strength of these people (the Mbundu) and their king was now greatly increased, largely through the supplying of slaves to the Portuguese from groups further inland.

The third and last kingdom of importance to mention as a background to the current situation, is that of the Ovimbundu. This was a kingdom established on the central highlands in the 17th century, later than the other two already mentioned. Its people became very important as regards both numbers and influence, with a well-developed trading system - until the Portuguese penetrated into the interior in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The Ovimbundu now constitute the largest ethnic group in Angola - about 1,7 million, or roughly one-third of the total population.

It has been among the Ovimbundu that UNITA and Dr. Jonas Savimbi (himself from this region) found their support. But before dealing with the growth of this nationalist movement and the other two earlier ones, we must consider briefly the intervention of the Portuguese into Angola.

The Portuguese

It is perhaps often forgotten that, although the Portuguese claimed in recent times to have been in Angola for about 500 years, in fact for most of this time there was nothing more than a small Portuguese presence at points on the coast, and the main interest was not, of course, development of the territory or even colonisation, but the slave trade. There is no need now to go into the terrible history of this lucrative trade, with human beings as the commodity, and its effect on the African societies involved. But it is important to recall that this was the main interest which Portugal had in the region, and that it was only from 1884 (Congress of Berlin), when the boundaries

of the territory were drawn, that Angola could really be called a colony. Even then Angola had no attraction for colonists and, until well into the 20th Century, the Portuguese people thought that Angola was little more than a graveyard for soldiers and "degredados" i.e. exiled criminals. By the end of the 19th Century the European population of Angola was primarily composed of "degredados", with a life expectancy on arrival of 13,6 years. In 1881 Luanda had 1 470 European residents, of whom 721 were "degredados" and only 394 free male citizens. Angola was also considered unhealthy and unsafe for women, and at the beginning of this century there were only about 100 women from Portugal in the whole of Angola, of whom all but 10 were "degredadas".

Furthermore, before the 20th Century the few Portuguese immigrants did not venture beyond the coastal towns of Luanda, Moçamedes and Lobito. There were thus almost no European agricultural settlers in the interior - only soldiers, a few traders and missionaries. During the first half of the 20th Century there were various attempts to encourage colonists to settle in Angola and many dreams of "transplanting Portuguese rural life to rural Angola". But, as has been pointed out by one writer, attempts at land settlement "became more of a complicated nightmare than a coherent reality."¹ This negative image of Angola among the Portuguese (and this applied to Mozambique, too) was in contrast to the attraction which the Americas had. For instance, Brazil, Argentina and the United States attracted one million immigrants from Portugal during the years 1900 to 1939. During the same period less than 35 000 went to Angola.

Those who did go to Angola came mostly from the poorest classes, least successful in Portugal itself, with no capital, no special skills, no particular ambition, often illiterate, etc. There was also a tendency to switch from agriculture to commerce, which seemed to offer more lucrative prospects, and to settle in the towns rather than the rural areas. Thus by 1950 there were only 2 746 Whites working in Angolan agriculture (less than 10 per cent of the active White male population). In addition to the poor quality of the colonists, there was a lack of Government technical and financial assistance, which resulted in the failure of many settlement schemes. Also, there was a lack of adequate infrastructure: for example, practically no roads or rail lines until the mid-20's. The Benguela Railroad was completed only in 1929, after more than a quarter of a century of work, and over 80% of the financing for this railroad came from British sources. Even by 1953, Angola had only 53 miles of tarred roads.

By the 1950's, however, Portugal was devoting considerably more effort to the development of the territory and to its colonisation. By 1950 the European population of Angola had gradually increased to approximately 78 000, from approximately 9 000 in 1900. In the next five years this number jumped to 110 000, and by 1960 it was 172 000, so that the number of colonists increased in one decade by 94 000, compared with 69 000 in the previous 50 years. The outbreak of the guerilla war in the early 1960's appears to have been the cause of even greater acceleration of both development and colonisation.

By the mid-1960's the White population had risen to about 250 000, and by the early 1970's it was estimated to be over 300 000.²

¹ Heimer, F.W. ed., Social change in Angola, Weltforum Verlag, 1973, p.237

² Wheeler, D.L. and Pelissier, R., Angola, London, Pall Mall, 1971, p.138
Abshire, D.M. and Samuels, M.A., eds, Portuguese Africa: a handbook,
Pall Mall, 1969, p.205

All the above population figures come mainly from these two sources.

Then in 1975 the number of Portuguese and other Europeans dropped very rapidly, with the large scale exodus from the country as independence approached, and the conflict between the three nationalist movements escalated.

It is clear from these figures that the effective presence of the Portuguese people in Angola was a very recent factor and one of short duration. It is interesting to note, in fact, that the dramatic increase in numbers, as a result of special efforts by the Portuguese Government to promote white agricultural settlement, took place at the very time when other colonial powers were withdrawing from Africa and handing over to Black Governments. This was a measure of Portuguese determination to stay in Africa, a determination which was to come to an abrupt end in April, 1974. But, of course, the changes in the rest of Africa did not leave Angola unaffected, and in the 1950's when Portugal was beginning these major efforts for development and colonisation, the nationalist movements were emerging to begin the struggle against the Portuguese and between themselves for power in Angola.

The Nationalist Movements

There have been three main streams of Angolan nationalism: The Bakongo, associated with the old Kongo kingdom in the north; the Luanda-Mbundu stream, centred in Luanda and among the people of the region to the east of Luanda; and the Ovimbundu stream. The three movements which emerged from these streams are obviously associated with the ethnic groups referred to earlier, but it would be wrong to conclude that they are simply ethnic movements; the degree of ethnic identification varies between the three, with the strongest ethnic base among the Bakongo in the movement which became the FNLA (the National Front for the Liberation of Angola), and the least ethnic identification in the MPLA (Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola) which emerged in the Luanda-Mbundu region.

The MPLA was the first nationalist movement to be formally launched. It grew out of several small groups in Luanda and other towns, which were supported or inspired by the Angola Communist Party (which was itself an offshoot of the Portuguese Communist Party), and it was founded in December, 1956. It was essentially an organisation of mestizos, with only a few black Angolans involved initially, and many of the early members were intellectuals. For example, the first Secretary General was a talented poet and also a convinced marxist, Viriato da Cruz, who had been the editor of a review "Mensagem", which was the mouthpiece of a group of cultural nationalists whose slogan was: "Let us discover Angola". This cultural nationalism provided much of the motivation for the founding of the MPLA, but there was also from the beginning the influence of white Portuguese communists.

The MPLA leaders were harassed by the Portuguese administration in Luanda; da Cruz had to flee in 1957, eventually to France where he was an organiser in exile. His view at this time was that the Angolan struggle was developing as the consequence of the "violent social contradictions provoked by the establishment and development of capitalism in that country".³ In 1959 there were mass arrests in Angola, and in June, 1960, another leading member of the MPLA, Dr. Agostinho Neto, was arrested.

Born in 1922, the son of a methodist pastor, Neto was educated in Luanda and then in Portugal, where he studied medicine. He was also a poet and, while a student in Portugal, he became a leader of an anti-fascist youth

³ Gibson, R., African Liberation Movements: Contemporary struggles against white minority rule. Oxford Univ. Pr., 1972, p.213

movement. He was twice arrested during the 1950's. However, he completed his medical training and returned to Angola in 1959 to take up a general practice. As a result of his leading role in the clandestine activities of the MPLA, he was arrested in late 1959, and this led to demonstrations for his release in Catete (the main town of his district near Luanda), during which there were several deaths as the result of police action.

The major explosion was to come a few months later in Luanda where the MPLA leaders decided to take bold (some would say rash) action to free their members from prisons - possibly in the hope of causing a general insurrection, but also to attract international attention. Their timing was perhaps influenced by rumours of peasant uprisings in the north and also by the fact that in late January/early February, 1961, there were many foreign journalists in Luanda, because of the expectation that the highjacked Portuguese liner "Santa Maria" (under the control of Captain Henrique Galvao) would head for Angola. (In fact it went to Brazil.) The attack on a police station and a prison by several hundred Angolans took place on 4 February, 1961, resulting in the death of seven Portuguese policemen and about forty Africans. This was followed by widespread retaliation during the following days against blacks and mestizos by whites.

In this way the violent struggle against Portuguese rule began, but the uprising organised by the MPLA in the city of Luanda could fairly easily be contained by the Portuguese. More serious for them was the rural uprising among the Bakongo in the north, which occurred the following month - March, 1961 - and which was organised by the Union of the People of Angola (UPA), the forerunner of the FNLA.

The UPA was founded in July, 1957,⁴ by exile groups in what was then the Belgian Congo. It was concerned entirely with the Bakongo people, and initially aimed at restoring the independence of the Kongo kingdom. In fact, the first name of the movement was the Union of the Population of North Angola (UPNA). One of the active leaders from early on was Holden Roberto, who was closely related to the two founders of the movement, Necaca and Pinock. During the period 1958 to early 1960 he travelled widely in Africa and the United States (including the U.N.) seeking support.

Born in 1923 (a year after Neto of the MPLA) in Sao Salvador, capital of the Bakongo, Holden Roberto came from a Baptist family, and he was educated in a Baptist mission school in Leopoldville where he lived from the age of two. Apart from two years at a Baptist school in Sao Salvador in Angola, he continued to live and work in the Belgian Congo. It was apparently only in the early 1950's that his nationalism and opposition to the Portuguese began to develop, and through family connections he then became active in the UPA.

Although the details are not clear, it appears that Holden Roberto had a major hand in the organising of the uprising which began in northern Angola on 15 March, 1961, as the U.N. Security Council was about to discuss the Angolan situation. This uprising was by no means a well prepared guerilla action against the Portuguese, but rather an expression of raw tribal violence, which resulted in massacres on both sides. It has been estimated that 750 Portuguese settlers and officials lost their lives in the first

⁴ There are some claims that it was founded a year or two earlier.

three months of fighting, and that in retaliation some 20 000 Bakongo were killed. The undisciplined tribesmen were no match for the Portuguese forces brought into the region after the outbreak. Many blacks fled into the Congo - about 150 000 by the end of 1961.

It was only after the outbreak of this initial violence that the UPA began to train for more controlled guerilla war. But the stigma of racism remained with Holden Roberto's movement. Not only was his movement accused of fostering anti-white violence, but it was also said by opponents to be liquidating non-Bakongo Africans and mestiços in northern Angola.

A major opponent was the MPLA which claimed that its supporters were being annihilated when trying to cross UPA-held territory between the Congo and the Luanda region. Some years later, after the formation of the third movement, UNITA, one of its supporters stated that the "killings perpetrated in the north by Holden Roberto's men (were) always the most serious handicap to the development of the national struggle".⁵ Against this background it is not surprising that the efforts of some leaders in other African countries, e.g. Nkrumah of Ghana, to bring these two nationalist movements together in their struggle against the Portuguese, did not succeed. The bitterness between them has obviously continued to the present day, although the MPLA can now, nearly fifteen years later, be said to have taken its revenge.

It is not possible to discuss here in any detail the history of these two movements since the outbreak of violence in Luanda and in northern Angola in February and March, 1961, respectively. Certain aspects of their development must, however, be mentioned.

In March, 1962, a small party based on a particular Bakongo tribe joined the UPA and the name was changed to the National Front for the Liberation of Angola (FNLA) - an obvious attempt to present an appearance of a national movement. Shortly afterwards the Revolutionary Government of Angola in Exile (GRAE) was set up. An effort was made to include non-Bakongo in this "Government", and a member of the Ovimbundu group, Dr. Jonas Savimbi, became Foreign Minister. (Holden Roberto was Premier.) But the movement remained predominantly Bakongo, and its guerilla forces remained concentrated in northern Angola.

Meanwhile the MPLA was not able to mount any effective campaign inside Angola. While it did not have the negative tribal image of the FNLA, its lack of a strong ethnic or regional base was a handicap in attempts to build up support inside the country. It suffered a split in leadership in 1962 when Viriato da Cruz publicly refuted the MPLA claims to have more than 1 000 men fighting in Angola, and joined the FNLA (where he did not, however, play any prominent role). The MPLA was also hampered by the suspicion of many black Angolans about the number of mestiços in leadership positions.

After the February, 1961, uprising in Luanda, the MPLA's organisation appeared to have been destroyed within Angola, with its leadership now operating outside the country. Dr. Neto was in prison at the time of the uprising, but he rejoined the leadership in 1962, having escaped from Portugal where he was under house arrest. He became President of the MPLA in December, 1962, with his headquarters first in Conakry, Guinea, before moving to Leopoldville (Kinshasa), where he tried hard to bring about a union between the MPLA and UPA, or FNLA as it became. As already indicated, however, the

⁵ Gibson, R., African Liberation Movements : Contemporary Struggles against white minority rule, Oxford Univ. Pr., 1972, p.229

rivalry between the two movements continued, and eventually the Government of Zaïre (formerly Congo-Kinshasa) closed down the MPLA offices - having recognised Holden Roberto's "government in exile" (GRAE). Neto and the MPLA then found refuge across the river in Congo-Brazzaville, from where they attempted an operation against the Portuguese in the Cabinda enclave. (The only Congo Government which had some sympathy towards the MPLA was that of Moïse Tshombe in 1964/5 - mainly because of Tshombe's opposition to Roberto and GRAE/FNLA. Hence the help given to the MPLA during the recent conflict in 1975/6 by previous supporters of Tshombe from Katanga.)

Although the Cabinda operation was not effective, this period (the mid-1960's) was important as the turning-point in the fortunes of the MPLA. It had not thus far been able to achieve wide recognition, mainly because it was not active in Angola, while the FNLA had the support of Zaïre and of the O.A.U., with the advantage of easy access to Angola across the Zaïre border. But now the MPLA began more effective training in Congo-Brazzaville, and its guerillas gained experience in Cabinda. Moreover, it began now to receive more meaningful assistance from its super-power ally, the Soviet Union, and from Cuba, as well as from Algeria (which had previously been supporting the FNLA). Its activities in Cabinda earned it recognition from the O.A.U. Liberation Committee and half the subsidy from that Committee, which had previously all gone to the FNLA.

More important than the O.A.U.'s financial assistance was the Russian and Cuban support. It is worth noting now that, over ten years ago, there ⁶ were Cubans providing assistance to the MPLA as advisers and instructors. So the Cuban and Russian help is nothing new.

In 1966 the MPLA set up a base in Zambia and shortly afterwards was able to launch its second front in eastern Angola, across the Zambian border.

By this time the third movement, UNITA,⁷ had come on to the scene - founded in March, 1966, inside Angola near Luso by Dr. Jonas Savimbi who had broken away from Holden Roberto and the FNLA, accusing Roberto of tribalism and corruption. Born in 1934 in the Ovimbundu region, Jonas Savimbi was the son of an official on the Benguela Railroad. Like Roberto and Neto he was educated at Protestant mission schools (Presbyterian) and was sent to Lisbon to study medicine in 1958. He did not stay in Lisbon, however, but moved to Switzerland in 1960, where he studied political science. He was influenced by Tom Mboya of Kenya to become involved in independence politics, and he then joined Holden Roberto's UPA in 1961.

After his break with Roberto in 1964, he worked to establish a new national movement to liberate Angola. He based this movement on support within Angola from the Ovimbundu people, but he was also able at first to organise from Lusaka. Then in August, 1967, he was forced out of Zambia following reports that UNITA guerillas had cut the Benguela Railroad. Zambia then confined its support to the MPLA, while UNITA had to operate without sanctuaries across the border. For arms Savimbi had to rely mainly on China which he visited in 1968. (In 1975, when it became apparent that the MPLA was seeking sole power in Angola by military means, with Russian/Cuban assistance, Zambia switched its support back to UNITA.)

UNITA managed to extend its influence over much of the south and centre of the country. In the east it was threatened by the MPLA, and there were many

⁶ Wheeler, D.L. and Pelissier, R., Angola, London, Pall Mall, 1971, p.216 for example.

⁷ União Nacional para Independência Total de Angola

clashes between the two movements. In the north the FNLA retained its predominant position, with some pockets of MPLA guerillas active in the Mbundu area east of Luanda. This was the general position of the three movements in the early 1970's, but none of them appeared to be gaining any notable military successes against the Portuguese. In fact, immediately prior to the army coup in Lisbon in April, 1974, Angola was relatively quiet - compared especially with Mozambique - and the Portuguese Government was claiming that the war in Angola was more or less over.

After the Lisbon coup, however, and the subsequent decision to withdraw from Angola, it soon became clear that the MPLA had considerable latent support in the towns, especially in Luanda, support which must have been there, waiting to emerge, since the abortive uprising of February, 1961. This gave the MPLA its great advantage when various attempts were made by the Portuguese to form a government in Luanda out of the three movements, and it led to the establishment of a government there by the MPLA alone, after the final departure of the Portuguese in November, 1975.

While the MPLA had the strength in the towns and among the more sophisticated of the Angolans, the FNLA still remained strong in the north among the Bakongo, and UNITA, under Jonas Savimbi, was extending its influence among the Ovimbundu on the central highlands and throughout the south. Angola was thus in effect divided into three parts, and there seemed to be only three alternative ways out of the impasse:

- 1) Angola would have to be partitioned - but this was unacceptable to the O.A.U. and apparently to the three movements themselves.
- 2) A government of national unity would have to be formed, with the support of all three movements - but this proved impossible, mainly because of resistance from the MPLA, and to some extent also the FNLA.
- 3) The movements would have to engage in a struggle for control throughout Angola by political and/or military means.

The MPLA chose the latter course, and its leaders had reasons to believe they would succeed. Firstly, the MPLA was the only movement which was not limited to one ethnic or regional base. Although strongest in the Luanda region, it had support in many other towns as well, and it had penetrated in the eastern - admittedly thinly-populated - areas. Secondly, it had the active support of a great power, the U.S.S.R., on which it could rely, plus the Cubans. Without this support, it could not have hoped to overcome the FNLA and UNITA rural strongholds in the north and central/south, respectively - except perhaps in a very long drawn-out war.

Two problems, however, arose for the MPLA, which perhaps were not at first foreseen, or at least were considered unlikely to be significant. The one was the United States Administration's initial decision to step up its support for the FNLA, and the other was the South African decision to become involved in support of UNITA. To overcome these challenges, the MPLA had no other option but to seek even greater Russian and Cuban aid, if its plans to control the whole of Angola and to suppress the other two movements were to succeed.

International Implications : the Background

The conflict in Angola has thus been essentially a civil war - a struggle between three nationalist movements, with differing ideologies, to achieve power in the country. The roots of the struggle go far back into the past, from the days of the independent kingdoms in the region, through the centuries of Portuguese contact on the coast for the purposes of the slave trade, the recent attempts in this century to colonize Angola, the advent of nationalism in Africa, the collapse of the Portuguese, and finally the independence of the country on 11 November, 1975, with no recognised Government in power. With this history, it is not surprising that there has been disorder and conflict in Angola; it is also not surprising that there has been external involvement in the internal struggle for power. In any case, civil wars, while they are theoretically the concern only of the people of the country, tend to attract outside involvement, because there are always outside powers who consider that their interests will be affected by the outcome of the civil conflict, and because the internal parties look for outside assistance in their efforts to gain the upper hand. The danger, therefore, is always that a civil conflict will ignite a larger international conflagration. This has been the danger in the Angolan conflict, both as regards the central and Southern African region, where countries took opposite sides in the conflict, and as regards the global international arena, where the two super-powers chose to support opposing nationalist movements.

The danger of a wider conflagration, stemming from the Angolan War itself, has now receded with the almost complete victory of the MPLA, and those countries which supported the other movements are gradually having to come to terms with this situation. But this is not the end of the effects of the Angolan conflict on the relationships between the countries of Southern Africa and on internal developments in these countries. Nor have the wider international implications, for instance for the relations between the Soviet Union and the United States, yet been played out.

The question of Angola was, of course, an international one long before the armed conflict broke out between the three nationalist movements. Colonialism clearly became an international question in the early years after World War II, in spite of the efforts of all the colonial powers at first to maintain that the development of their colonies was a domestic matter - a position held by Portugal right up to 25 April, 1974. In fact, one should perhaps say that this was true throughout the colonial era, as the "scramble for Africa" was determined by European international rivalries and settled by international agreement, in which boundaries of African territories were drawn to suit European interests and without any consideration for the interests of the African peoples. We are now reaping the bitter fruits of the seeds sown by European powers in a past age. Unfortunately, there is little reason to believe that in the modern world the non-African powers (whether from the East or the West) are less likely to put their own national interests first when they deal with Africa.

One would like to hope that Africa could be left alone to solve its own problems, without interference. But this would be a vain and unrealistic hope, as the Angolan conflict has shown. Apart from any designs that outside powers may have on Africa, African Governments and nationalist movements have themselves sought outside intervention - in the same way as African kings and chiefs in the past accepted European assistance in their conflicts with rivals, thus helping to open the way for European colonial domination. Modern African leaders appear confident that they can ride the tiger and not end up inside,

whether it be the tiger of so-called "neo-colonialism" from the capitalist West, or the tiger of armed assistance for national liberation from the Socialist World. So far there is admittedly considerable evidence that African leaders are able to keep their own national interests paramount, as they see those interests, and to resist attempts at actual domination over the policies of their governments. The Egyptian Government's abrogation of its treaty of friendship with the Soviet Union is a case in point, and in Black Africa over the past two decades the fortunes of the United States, the Soviet Union and China, as well as of the European powers, have been very mixed. But these are still early days, and it may be that the play for influence in Africa is only just beginning.

Lest it be thought that this possible danger for African independence of accepting outside intervention refers only to Black Africa, it is necessary to draw attention to the South African inclination, given strong expression during the Angolan conflict, to look for outside intervention - from the West in this case. In spite of ever stronger insistence that South Africa is an African state, sharing common destinies with other states on the continent, it seems that White South Africa finds it very difficult finally to let go of the Western apron strings and stand up independently in the admittedly rough world of African politics, making the adjustments necessary for survival in this world. The constant identification ideologically with the West (even though the West itself resists this identification) unfortunately contributes towards a reaction on the part of Black Africans away from the West towards those who are seen as the West's opponents and thus as the natural allies in a struggle against White and Western South Africa.

Against this background of the potential threat to the real political independence of African countries, including South Africa, from outside involvement in African problems, it may be useful to examine briefly the positions and reactions of non-Angolan powers in respect of the Angolan conflict, both non-African powers and some of those in Africa with a closer regional interest in the conflict.

Portugal

One need not spend very long on the role of Portugal as an actor in the Angolan drama, because Portuguese influence after 25 April, 1974, in the various attempts to prevent and then stop the conflict, proved to be entirely ineffective, and now Portugal (caught up in its own internal problems) can be said to have withdrawn almost entirely from any active involvement. Even the internal influence of people of Portuguese origin has been drastically reduced, as a result of the large-scale exodus of Portuguese from the country. Bearing in mind that the effective colonisation of Angola by Portugal was only attempted in this century (and mainly in the 1950's and 1960's), as explained above, one cannot expect any long-term commitment to or even interest in the development of Angola.

No doubt some economic links will remain, and these could be of importance to Portugal. But there is not much that Portugal can offer Angola, and it can be expected that the Angolan Government will look for other trade links and for other sources of development assistance.

The Soviet Union

As the Russian involvement in the Angolan conflict has given rise to widespread concern and even fear about the possibilities of Soviet domination

in Africa and the threat of Soviet intervention in other Southern African conflicts, it may be worth attempting to look at Soviet policies in a wider context than simply the Angolan issue.

One must be careful about jumping to conclusions about the motivation and goals of the Soviet Union's policy and actions in Southern Africa. With inadequate information and with no authoritative South African specialists on the Soviet Union and its policies, simple and extreme conclusions are often drawn, such as that Southern Africa has become a major target for domination by Soviet Communism, or, at the other extreme, that there is no real threat from this source (because Africa rejects communism as an ideology and will always assert its nationalism). There is a tendency to place Africa, and Southern Africa in particular, in the centre of the world picture - a not unnatural tendency perhaps in South Africa at present. It would seem, however, that if some understanding of Soviet policy in this region is to be reached, one must attempt to see it in a global context.

Whether one assumes that the Soviet leadership's overall objective is that the Soviet Union should become the dominant power in the world, or whether one assumes a more limited objective, such as the survival of the Soviet system with the gradual extension of its influence as against that of other world powers, one can identify certain aspects of current global policies of the Soviet Government.

(1) Europe remains of prime importance to the Soviet Union. In Eastern Europe it has largely succeeded in having its position of dominance legitimised, i.e. the position achieved at the end of World War II, and in Western Europe the Soviet Union seeks to erode United States influence and weaken the cohesion of the European states. (In this regard the détente policy in relations with the United States has served to reduce the fear of Soviet aggression, which was the binding force in the post-war Western alliance in NATO.)

(2) Soviet foreign policy seeks to avoid nuclear war, which is perceived as a serious danger. Therefore, the policy of détente is followed (including the SALT negotiations) to reduce the chances of confrontation with the United States, while at the same time Soviet nuclear capability is developed as far as possible to deter the United States from making, or even threatening, a first strike. In view of the vital importance to the Soviet Union of avoiding nuclear war, there is an awareness of the risk of provoking the United States too far, particularly in Western Europe. But this does not prevent a build-up of Soviet conventional forces adjacent to the NATO area, e.g. in East Germany, as recently reported by General Alexander Haig, commander of NATO forces, and other defence experts;⁸ nor does it prevent a build-up of Soviet naval power around the world.

(3) Détente as a Soviet policy does not, however, mean an end to the ideological struggle or the avoidance of all forms of armed conflict. As has been stated in a memorandum prepared by the American Defense Intelligence Agency:⁹

⁸ The Star (Johannesburg), 8 March 1976

⁹ Nato's Fifteen Nations, Dec. 1975 - Jan. 1976, p.87

"Peaceful coexistence does not mean an injunction against all forms of armed conflict. According to Soviet doctrine, peaceful coexistence 'promotes the intensification of all currents of the revolutionary process' and the development of 'both peaceful and non-peaceful forms of the struggle for power.' What is meant by non-peaceful forms is left vague in Soviet pronouncements - probably deliberately so, given the requirement to avoid direct military confrontation with the U.S. It expressly includes support for wars of national liberation. Judging by past and present Soviet policies in the Middle East, Indochina, and the Indian sub-continent, peaceful coexistence permits Soviet support and encouragement of nations seeking to change a regional balance of power. In short, détente does not mean acceptance of the international status quo, nor does it preclude Soviet use of force or wars by proxy."

Soviet leaders have a conviction that there is a relentless shift in the global balance of power away from the capitalist world and in their favour. But at the same time they are acutely aware of foreign and particularly domestic problems which confront them. Détente provides time and the means, by obtaining Western technological and economic assistance, as well as trade, for overcoming some of these problems. Mr. Brezhnev is said to have remarked to East European leaders in early 1973 that détente represented an interval of ten to fifteen years in which Soviet ascendancy would be achieved.¹⁰

(4) Apart from the competition with the United States and the capitalist world generally, Soviet policies seek to isolate China in the world. China challenges the Soviet Union on its own ideological ground for influence in Communist countries and in the Third World. China is also perceived as a potential military threat, particularly if the Soviet Union were to be involved in a confrontation with the West. Détente with the West therefore serves to reduce the danger of such a two-front confrontation in the short or medium term, while efforts are made to isolate China effectively, or even in the longer term to bring about a change within China acceptable to the Soviet Union.

In its global contest with the United States on the one hand and China on the other, it seems obvious that the Soviet Union would seek to extend its influence in the uncommitted parts of the world - the Third World - in order, as already suggested in point (3) above, to change the global balance of power in its favour. The aim would seem to be the extension of political influence, rather than military domination, but both military and economic means are used to this end. The expansion of naval capabilities, for instance, gives the Soviet Union greater opportunities of exerting influence, as naval power has done for the United States. Military and economic assistance can also extend influence and even foster client relationships. (These are, of course, means which have also been employed by the United States.)

It should not be assumed that, in choosing countries and areas for special attention, the Soviet leaders necessarily have a clear blueprint for the extension of their influence and power. If one leaves aside areas of direct strategic interest to the Soviet Union, such as Europe and the Middle East, it seems rather that Soviet activities are developed on something of an ad hoc basis, depending on particular local and international circumstances. For instance, local areas of instability can provide fruitful ground for extending regional influence, especially if the Soviet Union can come in on the side of anti-colonialism, anti-racism, anti-Americanism and so on. In the wider

¹⁰ Ibid

international context, the current confusion about the role of the United States in the world (in the post-Vietnam era and in an American election year) gives the Soviet Union greater room to move decisively without great risk of U.S. reaction. This situation could change very rapidly, and the Soviet leaders are probably well aware of the need to "make hay while the sun shines".

Looking at Africa, it cannot be mere coincidence that there are several areas in Africa where at the present time the Soviet Union is involved in challenges to U.S. centres of influence. In the case of Angola, the pro-Western posture of Zaïre and Zambia is threatened; Ethiopia, which has received considerable support from the U.S., is threatened by Soviet-backed Somalia; and Morocco in the north is facing a hostile Soviet- and Cuban-supported Algeria in the dispute over Spanish Sahara. Furthermore, in Nigeria - a major supplier of oil to the U.S. - there is reported to be a rising mood of anti-Americanism,¹¹ while the Soviet and Cuban intervention on behalf of the MPLA is strongly defended. These are all unstable areas where the Soviet Union appears to be actively seeking to influence developments in a direction more favourable to itself at the expense of the U.S., and also of China.

Within this broader framework one can draw some conclusions with regard to Soviet involvement in Angola.

In the first place it must be recognised that, although the Soviet Union claims to be opposed to intervention in the internal affairs of other states, it does not consider that support for national liberation movements constitutes such intervention. Identification with movements involved in such struggles is always legitimate, and the Angolan conflict is seen in those terms. For example, at the 25th Communist Party Congress in February, 1976, Mr. Brezhnev singled out the victories by Soviet-backed forces in Angola and Vietnam as proof that "nothing can crush the people's aspiration to freedom". He added: "Our Party supports, and will continue to support, peoples fighting for their freedom. This attitude to the complicated processes within the developing countries is clear and definite." Mr. Brezhnev also criticised "bourgeois leaders" for being surprised about Soviet solidarity with "the struggle of other peoples for freedom and progress. This is either outright naïveté or more likely a deliberate befuddling of minds." He continued by reaffirming the policy of détente, but denied that this meant reconciliation with "capitalist exploitation". "The ideological struggle becomes livelier. In the struggle of the world systems, there is no place for neutrality or compromise."¹²

Secondly, there is the fact that the Russians have consistently supported the MPLA from its inception, initially from an ideological point of view, and later, from the mid-sixties onwards, also with weapons. Together with the PAIGC in Guinea-Bissau, the MPLA was probably more strongly Moscow-oriented than any other liberation movement in Africa. However, although there was this Soviet commitment to the MPLA from the beginning, the material support given to the movement was sharply stepped up after the Portuguese coup of April, 1974, and the delivery of larger quantities of, and more sophisticated, weapons was noted from the end of 1974.¹³

¹¹ See e.g. the Sunday Tribune (Durban), 14 March, 1976

¹² Rand Daily Mail and The Star, 25 Feb. 1976

¹³ See "Angola after Independence: Struggle for Supremacy" issued by the Institute for the Study of Conflict in November 1975.

Initially, after the coup, the Soviet Union was assisted by the fact that the Portuguese Communist Party played a key role in the Lisbon Government, and therefore in the Angola administration. When the Russians lost their influence in Portugal, with the reaction there against the Communists, they appeared to place even more emphasis on Angola, so as not to lose their influence there, too.

Thirdly, the circumstances of Angola offered the Soviet Union an opportunity to increase its influence in a vital part of Africa where the United States has for a long time been influential. This includes not only Angola itself, but especially Zaïre, where the Government of General Mobutu Sese Seko has been strongly supported by the United States, both militarily and economically.

A fourth factor in Soviet motivation has no doubt been the desire to counter Chinese influence which was steadily growing, especially in East Africa, and it so happens that China was supporting the FNLA and previously also UNITA. The Soviet Union has no doubt tried to show in Angola that when the chips are down, it is better to have a friend with real power, who can produce the military hardware which China cannot match.

A fifth factor is probably that the Soviet Union saw Southern Africa as an unstable area, particularly since the Portuguese withdrawal, and that it wished to be in a position to influence events from a strong political base in the region. There is also some reason to believe that the Soviet Union is not satisfied with its position in Mozambique, where in spite of considerable aid to Frelimo over the years, China still has strong influence.

There is finally a possible interest in the natural resources potential of Angola on the part of the Soviet Union, not necessarily to satisfy its own needs, but to close them off from the West. But in this regard the Angolan Government, even controlled by the MPLA, is likely to be sensitive, as it will not wish to be seen, in the eyes of other African states, to be allowing the Soviet Union to be controlling its national policies.

Now that the Angolan conflict appears - for better or worse - to be nearly over, except for some limited continued resistance from UNITA in the south, the question arises as to possible Soviet activities elsewhere in Southern Africa. Soviet support in the past for FRELIMO in Mozambique and for Rhodesian movements is no secret, but there is no reliable indication of stepped-up support on nearly the same scale as that for the MPLA. It cannot simply be assumed that this will happen at this stage, for several reasons. The supply of sophisticated weapons requires men trained to use them. e.g. the Cubans, and there is no indication that the states and movements involved with the Rhodesian issue want that type of combined intervention repeated - not yet anyway. Furthermore, China has been, and still is, also involved in support for Tanzania, Mozambique, Zambia and the ex-Zanu section of the Rhodesian ANC. (ZAPU was the movement closer to the Soviet Union.) The Chinese involvement thus acts as an inhibiting factor for the Soviet Union and Cuba.

China, as would be expected, is working to prevent the Soviet Union taking advantage of its success in Angola. In a recent expression of support for Mozambique the Peking Government accused the Soviet Union of "hatching new schemes" in Southern Africa in the wake of its intervention in Angola.

Cuba

Cuban support for the MPLA is not a new development; ten years ago there were reported to be Cubans assisting the MPLA as advisers and instructors in Congo-Brazzaville.¹⁴ Also, although it suits the Russians to use proxies in pursuing their policies, it would be wrong to regard Cuba simply as a Russian pawn. Although a close ally of the Soviet Union, Cuba does have its own interests, as well as a certain revolutionary zeal which Russia lacks : Castro has, for instance, referred to the Angolan events as an "extension of the Cuban revolution". Castro has also spoken of African blood running in Cuban veins, and of Cuba as an "Afro-American" nation.

Cuba has been, and still is, also involved elsewhere in Africa. Eight countries, in addition to Angola, have been identified in this regard : Congo (Brazzaville), which has been the main staging area for Angolan activities; Equatorial Guinea, where Cubans provide army training and internal security services; Guinea, with military and other technical assistance; Guinea Bissau (previously Portuguese Guinea); Somalia, with military training; Tanzania, with mainly military training assistance; Sierra Leone, where there are a few Cubans; and Algeria, where the Cuban presence has been linked in reports with Algerian attempts to oppose Moroccan control over part of the previous Spanish Sahara.¹⁵

In the light of this increasing commitment to Africa (contrasted with the apparent lack of Cuban success in Latin America), it is not surprising that Angola in particular, and Southern Africa generally, should be seen by Castro as a fruitful ground for his efforts to play a world role as a "liberator", tough fighter against imperialism, etc. But, of course, he cannot do this without Russian backing and Russian equipment.

There have been vague reports of Cuban intentions to move now to Mozambique, in order to participate in the Rhodesian struggle. However, there are some factors operating against such a development, at least in the immediate future, as already indicated. Moreover, the Mozambique Foreign Minister, Mr. Chissano, has denied that there are any Cubans in Mozambique or that Mozambique has even requested Cuban assistance; and Bishop Abel Muzorewa, the Rhodesian A.N.C. leader, has denied reports that he is planning to call in the Cubans.

Within Angola itself, it can be expected that the Cubans will remain to assist in a military sense and also as technical advisers in other fields. There has also been the suggestion that Cuba wants the use of Angolan ports for its fishing enterprises,¹⁶ and economic links in general with Angola could probably be important to Cuba.

The United States

It is not intended to deal with the United States' position vis-a-vis Angola and Southern Africa as extensively as in the case of the Soviet Union

¹⁴ See above, page 7.

¹⁵ Except for Algeria, these countries are all identified in U.S. News and World Report, 8 Dec. 1975

¹⁶ It is reported that a Soviet/Cuban/Angolan agreement is being negotiated to provide assistance in developing the Angolan fishing industry.

above, but some attempt must be made to put the United States' involvement - or lack of involvement - in perspective. In order to understand this, one should attempt to see the position as viewed from the United States as far as possible, and not simply from a South African viewpoint, with our own interests clouding the perspective.

One must begin by appreciating that Africa has always had a low priority in U.S. official interests. This has been true especially for the Secretary of State, Dr. Kissinger, whose interests are very largely centred on U.S./Soviet relations and Europe. Angolan developments have had importance for him, it appears, only insofar as they affect his main concern, and it is in that context that his recent much stronger statements about Soviet and Cuban involvement in Southern Africa must be seen.

Secondly, there is the current mood of reaction to the Vietnam involvement, and U.S. opinion generally, as reflected in the Congress (but not limited to Congress), is that there should not be any involvement now in a place which, until very recently, was of no particular interest to the U.S. Congressmen and others argue that no American national interest is at stake in Angola, and that the U.S. must not simply react every time the Soviet Union acts somewhere in the world. To this line of argument there is no clear objective answer, and in any case it is presumably not for outsiders to determine what the Americans' national interests are. More general questions, however, have been raised, namely: What is the role of a world power, and does it have special responsibilities apart from its own particular national interests? Is the United States entering into a period of isolation, during which the Soviet Union will have a fairly free hand in the world?

A third factor to be taken into account in looking at the background of U.S. reaction to the Angolan situation is domestic American politics. There is no doubt that a Democrat-controlled Congress is not inclined to give support and comfort to President Ford or to Dr. Kissinger, especially in an election year. Furthermore, President Ford is involved in an election contest with opponents on the right (in his own Party) and on the left, which makes it difficult for him and his Administration to develop clear-cut, and possibly unpopular, policy positions.

Fourthly, the Angolan conflict is seen in the context of the whole Southern African situation, and there is great reluctance in the United States to be seen in any way as an ally of South Africa. This is a domestic political problem, but also a foreign policy one.

In the latter regard it is difficult for White South Africans to appreciate the American position, which in a sense turns on its head the South African argument about the urgent need to stop the spread of Russian influence by supporting the South African position (as a bulwark against Communism). The American view - as reflected at least in the Congressional majority - is that support for South Africa, with its present internal policies, would in fact lend strength to Russian influence in Black Africa, at the expense of American influence. A particular case in American minds is that of relations with Nigeria - the strongest black African country and becoming the largest external supplier of oil to the U.S.

In view of all these circumstances, i.e. the realities of the American position, it could not have been expected that there would be any large-scale involvement in Angola - and certainly not direct military involvement. It is true that the U.S. had been giving support to Holden Roberto and the FNLA, which

was considered the movement most favourably disposed to Western interests, and it is also true that Zaïre, under Mobutu's government, has been seen as a good centre of American influence in Africa. But there have also been increasing doubts in the U.S. about the wisdom of relying on the ethnically based FNLA and about the viability of Mobutu's government. In other words, the case for further and greater material support for the FNLA and its allies in Zaïre, in order to counter Russian support for the MPLA, was an increasingly difficult one for the U.S. Administration to make in the Congress.

South African expectations of continued, and even increased, American assistance to the anti-MPLA forces may have been based on the fact of past support for the FNLA and the fact that this was stepped up during 1975. Perhaps the FNLA and UNITA were convinced that this aid would continue and even be further increased, before the Congressional decision to cut it off, and perhaps this conviction was passed on to South Africa. This is pure speculation in an attempt to find an explanation for South African expectations and for the publicly expressed disappointment that the United States, or the West generally, had not "done its duty" in Angola. American official spokesmen have specifically denied that there was any co-ordination with, or undertakings to, South Africa over Angola, or even any approval of South African actions there.¹⁷ For the time being those statements must be accepted, until more is known of the diplomatic background. But the U.S. Under-Secretary of State for Africa, Mr. Schaufele, has indicated that there was "some understanding of South Africa's perception of its role" in Angola.¹⁸ This implies at least some contact between the United States and South Africa over the issue.

The apparent indecisiveness of the U.S. over Angola does not mean that the Soviet/Cuban intervention has left Western attitudes unaffected. Growing criticism in both the U.S. and Europe may well lead to harder attitudes towards the Soviet Union and Cuba, and this is beginning to threaten the basis of the détente relationship between East and West. This trend does not suit the Soviet Union's approach, and one must now watch to see what effect it has on current Soviet policies.

West European Attitudes

There is some concern being shown in Western Europe about the implications of Soviet actions in Angola - for instance, the Soviet Union's ability to project and support military operations at long range. This has been coupled with concern about the United States' position and the apparent inability of the U.S. to formulate clear objectives which it can pursue. The West German Foreign Minister, Mr. Genscher, has expressed disappointment with the way the U.S. has reacted to Soviet intervention. In this regard he said :

"In considering the responsibility which we and the European Community bear, we should not forget that in the dialogue between the super powers, the United States and the Soviet Union, it is necessary for the U.S. to make clear where the limits of what they will stand for lie. This applies also to the policy of détente, which is indivisible.

¹⁷ In the Security Council debate on 31 March, 1976, the U.S. actually criticised South Africa's involvement in Angola, in spite of its own earlier involvement.

¹⁸ To the Point, 20 Feb. 1976

One cannot simply ignore what happens in Africa and fix one's gaze only on Europe and other matters, and there is no doubt we would have liked to have seen these limits successfully being made clear in the super power dialogue at an earlier stage, before the completion of the intervention in Angola." ¹⁹

Mr. Genscher was speaking after a meeting of the European Community's Foreign Ministers during the first week in March, when agreement, he said, had been reached on a European assessment of the situation in Africa. Events in Africa were of great importance for Europe, and there was a need for the public of all NATO allies, as well as the U.S. Congress, to be made more conscious of this. He added : "It must be in the interests of us all that in a decisive phase like the present, the U.S. Government is capable of action even during an election campaign."

This concern in Europe does not mean that there is one view on what the U.S. should have done on the Angolan issue, and certainly there was no demand from European countries that the U.S. should intervene militarily. In fact, European opinion has been, and still is, divided, and perhaps criticism of the U.S. for not giving a clear lead is easier for Europeans than formulating specific policies themselves.

With the Angolan issue now more or less over, the growing concern in Europe is focussed more on what may come next as a result of the MPLA victory. Warnings have been sounded, for instance by U.K. Prime Minister Wilson, that the Soviet Union must not feel it can simply repeat its intervention elsewhere. These warnings have also been stated strongly by President Ford. Although there are no indications of what will be done if the Soviet Union disregards these warnings, it is probable that the Soviet leaders will take them seriously, if only because they do not wish to provoke the U.S. and Western Europe too far and thus risk a complete ending of détente. Already President Ford has stopped using the word, in view of reaction in some quarters in the U.S. This is a danger sign for the Soviet Union, because a reversal of American and European attitudes on détente would not suit its current global strategy.

South Africa and the Region

The general implications for South Africa of developments in Angola would require much more extensive treatment than is possible here, where the aim is now primarily to look at some of the possible reasons for South African involvement in this conflict - without trying to make any overall judgement on the merits of the Government's policy in this regard. It is too early to make final judgements, because not all the facts and considerations behind the policy are known. In fact, even in trying to reach some tentative conclusions - which one cannot avoid trying to do - one is forced to fall back on a fair amount of speculation.

To start with, one can identify three reasons for some degree of involvement on South Africa's part :

- (1) Concern regarding the security of the South West African border in a situation of disorder within Angola, aggravated by the presence of SWAPO units in the area and an arms build-up across the border in southern Angola.

¹⁹ The Star, 8 March, 1976

- (2) The hydro-electric and irrigation scheme at Ruacana on the Cunene River, including the Dam at Calueque, which it is deemed necessary to protect, for the good of people in Owambo (i.e. within S.W.A.) and Angola, and in view of South Africa's considerable investment in the project.
- (3) The Angolan refugees in camps maintained by the South African Army within Angola, whom the South African authorities did not wish to allow into South West Africa and South Africa. There were not as many of these refugees as were apparently expected at one stage, but nevertheless their situation became a bone of contention between South Africa and Angola, and with the U.N.

These three reasons apply to the limited degree of involvement within Angola, which existed until 27 March, 1976, when all South African units were withdrawn across the border into South West Africa.²⁰ But there was more than this. In trying to identify some general reasons for what appeared to be involvement in a civil war, and what has been criticised as contrary to South Africa's declared policy of non-intervention in the internal affairs of other countries, one can first exclude certain suggestions :

- (1) There is no evidence to conclude that South Africa has been seeking to secure some special economic interests in Angola for itself - although this has been suggested in view of Angola's great potential wealth. In fact South Africa has shown relatively little interest in Angola in the past.
- (2) Likewise, South Africa can have no territorial ambitions - although it has been suggested that some would like to see a Greater Owambo as a separate state, incorporating part of southern Angola with the present Owambo Homeland in South West Africa.
- (3) A simple desire to defeat, or annihilate, the MPLA seems highly unlikely, in view of the proclaimed policy of non-intervention and the willingness to live with ideologically different neighbours, as shown in the Government's very proper relations with Mozambique.
- (4) Even though South Africa's involvement was reported to have begun before Angola's formal independence on 11 November, 1975, there is no indication that this was an attempt to help the Portuguese at their request to bring order to the country before independence - although there is evidence that Portugal agreed to South African protection of the project on the Cunene River.

Paradoxically perhaps, it seems that the reasons for involvement must be found within the context of the Government's détente policy. This was a policy conceived as a means of maintaining stability in a region threatened by sudden and uncontrollable changes. Change, it was recognised, would have to take place; but it had to be controlled as far as possible. The issues threatening to lead to confrontation would have to be settled by negotiation. In this approach Mr. Vorster appeared to have the general support of President Kaunda. The concrete results of this approach, especially on the Rhodesian issue, were not forthcoming as easily and as quickly as earlier expected, and then a situation developed in Angola which was perceived as a serious threat to this whole concept of détente, namely the intervention, on behalf of a potentially hostile MPLA, of the Soviet Union and Cuba - powers which it was felt could only be intent on destroying any possibility of the peaceful

²⁰ Serious concern among the refugees (black and white) about what would happen to them after the withdrawal of South African protection, led to their following the South African troops over the border.

resolution of differences in the sub-continent. Something had to be done to halt this development - in the interests of détente.

This may have been the general background to the agreement to give assistance to the UNITA/FNLA alliance in resisting the MPLA. Furthermore, it does seem clear from published reports, inside and outside South Africa, that the Government did not act unilaterally in this matter. Dr. Jonas Savimbi has said, for instance, that South Africa consulted Zambia, Zaïre and the Ivory Coast and did not act without their "approval". He also said, after South African withdrawal, that the S.A. Government acted "painfully" correctly.²¹ The Prime Minister, Mr. Vorster, maintained in Parliament on 30 January, 1976 :

"South Africa's involvement was not an isolated involvement; others were also involved. I am not going to mention their names. It is not for me to do so."

These indications support the view that the Government's decisions were taken in the context of its Africa policy, and that it saw itself acting not only in its own interests, but in the interests of other African states which also had reason to be concerned about Soviet and Cuban intervention. However, there was an additional element in the South African approach (judging by many official statements), namely the belief that the interests of the West coincided with those of South Africa and the expectation that Western (i.e. U.S.) support would be forthcoming.

Initially there was support for the anti-MPLA forces from the United States and this was increasing in the second half of 1975. The circumstances therefore seemed very propitious for South Africa to pursue its own interests across the border - by chasing the radical MPLA away from the area and also dealing a blow at SWAPO - while at the same time demonstrating a willingness to assist both Black African states and the West. The main intended beneficiaries of this assistance were presumably Zaïre and Zambia. They were, in their own interests, against a take-over of Angola by the MPLA alone, and this South Africa would help to prevent. There was also their vital interest in the Benguela Railroad, which it was presumably hoped South Africa would help to secure, so that it could be opened again for their copper exports.

South Africa also saw these states, and the Ivory Coast, as anti-Communist states which could be shown that the South African Government was serious in its expressed willingness to resist Communist encroachment in Africa.

The South African decision to become involved was, therefore, a political one, and there can, of course, be differences of opinion regarding this decision. The final decision to withdraw after about four months, apparently against the wishes of Dr. Savimbi of UNITA, without having achieved the goals of the original policy decision, was also a political one. It was not due to a military defeat, although this impression may have been created in some quarters, because in fact South African involvement was only limited and could have been substantially increased if considered necessary. However, military considerations were obviously involved in the sense that the supply of weapons from the U.S. to FNLA/UNITA was cut off, and the Russian/Cuban material assistance increased beyond expectations towards the end of 1975.

²¹ See Rapport (Johannesburg), 15 Feb. 1976, for an account of these developments by Dr. Savimbi. It should be noted, however, that in the Security Council on 31 March, 1976, the Zambian representative condemned South African actions in Angola.

The political decision to withdraw was thus presumably based on two general considerations. (Information is not available on the specific factors involved, or on negotiations which must have preceded the various policy decisions.) Firstly, the U.S. support was not forthcoming; instead American attitudes showed a clear disinclination to be involved, least of all to be linked in any way to South Africa. Secondly, public support from Black Africa was not given - not even from Zambia, Zaire and the Ivory Coast - and this left South Africa alone to face mounting world criticism of its involvement, without any political support.

There are, of course, many questions still to be answered about the events of the past six months, and it is still too early to say what the effects will be on South Africa's future relations with its neighbours and the rest of Africa. It can at least be said at this stage, however, that relations with the few other African countries with which South Africa has been developing contacts, have not apparently been detrimentally affected. There has been, for instance, the official visit in March of the South African Minister of Information to the Ivory Coast and, according to reports, to another unnamed African state as well.

In any case, attention has now shifted back to Mozambique and Rhodesia - an area where the threat and implications of violent confrontation are more serious than they were in Angola and where, therefore, every possible effort must be made to find the means of defusing the critical issues.