

Soviets seek armed clash with So. Africa

On Monday, Dec. 9, 1985, the U.S. Senate voted by a two-to-one margin to prohibit American assistance to the anti-Soviet UNITA guerrilla forces in Angola, led by Dr. Jonas Savimbi. The following day, President Reagan, in a speech in observance of "Human Rights Day," launched into uncharacteristic verbal violence against the Republic of South Africa, condemning it for its "abhorrent" regime. Meanwhile, during the immediately previous weekend, in Luanda, the Angolan capital, Soviet Politburo member Geydar Aliyev, addressed the conference of the ruling MPLA party and promised unqualified material support to the pro-Communist guerrilla forces fighting to overthrow the governments of South Africa and South West Africa/Namibia.

From all available public evidence, it appears that the Reagan administration has abandoned its previous policy of constructive engagement with respect to South Africa, and embraced the policy adopted by the latest meeting of British Commonwealth heads of government which, under the chairmanship of Queen Elizabeth II, resolved to turn the southern portion of Africa over to the military onslaught of Soviet- and Cuban-directed military bands.

According to UNITA spokesmen abroad, the Soviets, using the Angolans and Cubans, have prepared a December rainy-season offensive, even though the weather will be unfavorable for maneuvering armored convoys off paved roads. UNITA says the Soviet objective is to take the town of Mavinga, deep within UNITA territory, turn it into a major logistics base for the FAPLA (Free Angolan People's Liberation Army) and the Cubans, but, primarily, to then bring in sophisticated radar equipment, extending the operating range of Angolan MiG-23s into southeast Angola and northern Namibia. From there, a drive would be launched all the way to the Okavango river, at the Namibia-Zambia border. Mavinga is currently an important point in UNITA's own logistic system.

On Dec. 5, UNITA attacked a large convoy of 250 vehicles, including APCs, on the road from Menongue to Catalari. They claim to have destroyed 28 vehicles and killed 27 Cuban troops, also shooting down two MiG-23s and one MI-25 Hind helicopter. The next day, they reportedly shot down another MiG-23 and another helicopter. The convoy was part of large-scale supply operations involving increas-

ing docking of Soviet freighters at the ports of Luanda and Benguela, and subsequent day and night air shipment to pre-positioning areas for the offensive.

The entire situation is designed to force South Africa's hand, and in particular, as the Angolans have recently boasted, they now feel themselves in a position to challenge South African air superiority. According to a report out of Windhoek, there is an increased call-up of troops going on in Namibia with increased military activity of the SADF (South African Defense Forces) and SWATF (South West African Tactical Forces). If these are sent into southern Angola to help UNITA, as they did back in September 1985, the rainy season will present a serious hindrance to their armored convoys, with the risk that the Angolans will use their air force against them.

According to the British intelligence sheet, *Africa Confidential*, the South African Impalas (combat version of the Italian Aeromacchi trainer aircraft), Mirage F-1s, and aging Buccaneers "are no match even for indifferently piloted MiG-23s," and also, "the Soviets, who manage top down all Angolan military operations, have initiated a rainy season offensive, not waiting for the March beginning of the dry season, which means that they are ready to risk a significant Angolan/SADF clash, minimally in the air."

The Soviets are also opening up a front on the Zimbabwe/South African border. In recent weeks, there have been repeated African National Congress minings of roads in the Northern Transvaal border areas, combined with rocket attacks. According to a South African source, there is a SADF military build up in the area due to these increased cross-border ANC terrorist activities. On Dec. 8, Zimbabwe Prime Minister Mugabe, just back from Moscow with weapon pledges, said that South African troops were massing near the border and that his government was prepared to ward off any invasion. The ANC is obviously deployed in a way to force the hand of the South Africans in terms of cross-border operations.

The Nov. 25 *International Herald Tribune* reported on a London *Observer* article that Castro is seeking Soviet approval for a formal declaration of war on South Africa. A senior Cuban diplomat was quoted stating that Castro was eager to bring the crisis in South Africa to a head, with the aim of removing "Pretoria's forces or their protégés from Angola, Mozambique, and Namibia." Several RSA military attachées queried on this said it would be disinformation, primarily designed to test the waters, but did readily concede that the Soviets would want to escalate to a military crisis.

In the current situation, the Soviet escalation could possibly attain the objective of administering a shock to South Africa's military reputation, if their air force is challenged and mauled. Minimally, it creates a military "override" of South Africa's leverage on the Front Line States due to their economic dependency on South Africa, giving the Soviets the upper hand with Zimbabwe and Mozambique.