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# STAFF NOTES:

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**MIDDLE EAST – AFRICA – SOUTH ASIA**

This publication is prepared for regional specialists in the Washington community by the Middle East - Africa Division, Office of Current Intelligence, with occasional contributions from other offices within the Directorate of Intelligence. Comments and queries are welcome. They should be directed to the authors of the individual articles.

*C O N T E N T S*

French Territory of Afars and Issas: Moving Toward Independence . . . . .	1
Angola: An Overview of Chinese Policy and Activities . . . . .	3

Oct 29, 1975

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**SECRET**

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French Territory of Afars and Issas

*Moving Toward Independence*

Ali Aref Bourhan, the president of the local government in the French Territory of Afars and Issas, told representatives of the Organization of African Unity in Addis Ababa last week that he will propose a referendum on independence to the territorial assembly in mid-November. The proposal will also have to be ratified by the French parliament.

Ali Aref's statement indicates that Paris has decided to grant independence to the territory. A time table has yet to be worked out, and the French face serious problems in arranging an orderly transfer of power and in preventing the territory from becoming a source of contention between Ethiopia and Somalia. In addition, objections from the French defense ministry which still considers the base at Djibouti strategically important, and from important conservatives in parliament must be overcome before the government can formally announce its intentions.

Both Ethiopia and Somalia have claims to the territory, based on the affinity between Ethiopian Afars and Somali Issas and their kindred tribes in the territory. Ethiopia's military government, however, has declared its support for independence. Ali Aref, an Afar, received a reaffirmation of this support during apparently cordial talks in Addis Ababa last week.

Somalia also gives lip service to independence, but views it as a prelude to the incorporation of the territory into Somalia. Ali Aref's recent visit to Addis Ababa has increased Mogadiscio's distrust of him and lessened the chances that Somalia will accept the territorial integrity of an independent government led by Ali Aref.

(Continued)

Oct 29, 1975

1

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The French government is considering arrangements for providing international guarantees for an independent state. The French are leaning toward seeking such guarantees from the Red Sea countries--Saudi Arabia, the two Yemens, and perhaps Egypt. If this fails, France will turn to the OAU, the Arab league, or the UN.

The absence of a recognized national leader of a strong nation political force increased the chances of instability in the territory as independence approaches. Neither Ali Aref nor his opponents have acquired a political base that transcends tribal lines.

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Most Afars and Issas view politics as a struggle to ensure the dominance of their respective tribes. This hostility is likely to increase now that the stakes involve control of an independent government. (CONFIDENTIAL)

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Oct 29, 1975

2

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## Angola

### *An Overview of Chinese Policy and Activities*

Peking's adoption in the early 1970s of a flexible, pragmatic foreign policy emphasizing good state-to-state relations brought to a virtual halt Chinese support for subversive activities against incumbent black African governments--an activity that was in general decline in any case. Peking, however, was able to retain a revolutionary aura for its African policy by continuing to support black nationalist efforts to depose white minority governments in southern Africa. The Chinese were also seeking to expand their African contacts with an eye to limiting Soviet influence throughout the region and saw their involvement with the liberation movements as a means of gaining stock with black African leaders--who were and still are united in their opposition to white rule in the south.

Of the three most important areas of confrontation in 1970--Mozambique, Angola, and Rhodesia--a settlement has been achieved only in Mozambique. In Rhodesia the basic white-black conflict remains unchanged, but major differences have emerged among interested black governments and the liberation leaders themselves over the best tactics for ending white rule in Salisbury. In Angola the contrast between the start of the decade and the present is even more dramatic: the movement to replace Portuguese colonialism has evolved into a civil war among black Angolans.

### Early Misgivings in Angola

Although its involvement with the Angolan liberation movements goes back to the early 1960s, Peking probably long had misgivings about its role. In varying degrees, all the liberation movements in southern Africa were rent by internal rivalries that

(Continued)

Oct 29, 1975

3

SECRET

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undermined the effort to overthrow white or colonial rule. These problems, however, were particularly acute in Angola, where even in the mid-60s the three major liberation groups spent as much of their energies skirmishing with each other as they did fighting the Portuguese. In these circumstances, Peking avoided continuing obligations to any of the three, shifting its support to first one and then the other group, sometimes aiding all three simultaneously, and reviewing the results of each individual infusion on the political and military activities of the recipient. Although by the early 1970s Agostinho Neto's Popular Movement (MPLA) had emerged as the most effective and widely recognized organization, Peking grew increasingly disenchanted with the MPLA's close ties with Moscow and in 1973 cut off its contacts. Holden Roberto's National Front (FNLA) began receiving the bulk of Chinese assistance while Jonas Savimbi's National Union (UNITA) continued to receive occasional financial support from Peking. This policy also related well to Chinese efforts to curry favor with Zaire's Mobutu and Zambia's Kaunda--backers of FNLA and UNITA respectively.

The Chinese reacted cautiously to the Alvor agreement of January 1975, whereby the three contending Angolan groups agreed to participate in a transitional government and Lisbon set November 11 as the date for Angolan independence. Publicly, Peking lauded the agreement--Chou En-lai even sent his personal congratulations to the three leaders--and the Chinese no doubt hoped the truce would stick, since it enjoyed a measure of influence with two of the three groups which theoretically at least stood an equal chance of solidifying their position in an elected post-liberation government. Moreover, with Lisbon's unilateral decision to decolonize, Peking's "revolutionary" approach to the Angolan situation ceased to have much relevance. A peaceful transition to independence would allow Peking to ease out of its special relationship with UNITA and particularly with FNLA and develop a new Angolan policy more in line with the realities of the situation.

(Continued)

Oct 29, 1975

4

SECRET

SECRET

Ten years of dealings with the mutually antagonist Angolan groups, however, undoubtedly suggested to Peking that the odds favored its early collapse. As a result, Peking felt compelled to continue to provide training and equipment for FNLA units so as to assure their military capabilities should full-scale hostilities begin with MPLA. Reports of FNLA dissatisfaction with the level of assistance and of Chinese reluctance to provide more support suggest that Peking was trying not to increase FNLA capabilities to the point where Holden Roberto of his own accord would be tempted to opt for a military solution to his feud with MPLA.

#### Sliding Downhill

Developments in Angola since mid-year have probably exceeded Peking's darkest fears. When it became obvious early in the summer that increased Soviet arms deliveries had tipped the military balance in favor of MPLA, Peking apparently tried to forestall a total collapse in Luanda by inviting an MPLA delegation to Peking and offering to "reassess" Chinese support for all three groups if the tripartite status quo were maintained. When this effort failed and MPLA unleashed its freshly equipped units against both FNLA and UNITA, Peking responded by stepping up its shipments to FNLA via Zaire and by attempting to work through Zambia and Tanzania to provide increased support to UNITA.

While renewed arms deliveries and direct Zairian involvement have averted a total military victory for MPLA, Peking's clients are still in precarious positions. Despite its recent battlefield successes, for example, FNLA has little prospect of regaining all the military and political ground it has lost since mid-year. Even if it does, the rivalry between the two major groups has grown so unyielding that a new rapprochement appears virtually unattainable. UNITA has always been a relatively impotent military force,

(Continued)

Oct 29, 1975

5

SECRET



SECRET

staying in the game by virtue of the tribal support it receives in the area it controls. UNITA's prospects appear linked to Savimbi's willingness to formally ally himself with either of the other two groups--a move that could still be decisive--but so far he appears determined to maintain his independence. Under these circumstances, MPLA will almost certainly continue to hold all the advantages when the Portuguese pull out next month, and Peking's chances for future influence in Angola will remain shaky.

On the regional level, moreover, Peking's Angolan connections have shown signs of becoming significant irritants in state-to-state relations. Tanzanian President Nyerere, for example, has embargoed a recent shipment of Chinese arms to UNITA and has privately blasted Peking for letting the Sino-Soviet rivalry in Angola take precedence over the interests of the Angolan people. Nyerere is a long-time supporter of MPLA but, if recent African speeches at the UN are any indication, even those African leaders who are not closely connected with any of the contending Angolan groups are taking a similarly dim view of external involvement of any sort in Angola. Support for FNLA and UNITA still gains Peking points with Zaire and Zambia to be sure, but such returns would be largely vitiated if a wider African backlash develops. Foreign Minister Chiao Kuan-hua in his own UN speech last month appeared to reflect concern for the potential damage to Peking's image when he blamed the Soviets and the US for using Angola as an ideological battlefield and tried somewhat lamely to portray China's treatment of the Angolans as "even-handed."

#### Running Out of Options

As things now stand there appears to be little the Chinese can do to shore up their position in Angola. Peking could, of course, cut its losses by ending its involvement altogether or by switching its support to MPLA in hopes of eventually weaning

(Continued)

Oct 29, 1975

6

SECRET

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it away from Moscow. From its talks with the MPLA delegation in Peking this summer, however, the Chinese know that the latter would be a poor gamble. Abandoning FNLA and UNITA would cede dominant influence in Angola to Moscow, and such a Chinese default in the Sino-Soviet rivalry while there still exists a chance of retrieving the situation is clearly unthinkable in Peking. The Chinese have also apparently discarded the option of stepping up their military assistance, probably recognizing that, as other outside powers have begun to provide military assistance, the military shortcomings of FNLA and UNITA are now more the result of training and severe logistic problems than arms shortages per se.

For the short term at least, Peking thus appears to have little choice but to play out its string in Angola. The Chinese can be expected to continue to help keep FNLA and UNITA afloat and to lend their support to efforts at political compromise. Peking will probably use its leverage with regional governments and with its Angolan clients to promote African reconciliation attempts such as the current undertaking by the Organization of African Unity. Although they have almost no leverage in Lisbon, the Chinese may also take what steps they can to encourage the Portuguese not to leave the MPLA in de facto control of Angola on November 11. Peking might even see some merit in a Portuguese move to involve the UN in a peace-keeping role, although it would almost certainly not take the lead in seeking such international intervention.

Nevertheless, Peking by now probably reckons that the chances are dim for anything but continued fighting in the post-liberation period and that China will be facing hard decisions regarding Angola in the near future. Indeed, the possibility that FNLA and UNITA may establish a rival regime or regimes and that Peking might be drawn into a prolonged insurgency in Angola may already be creating heartburn in Peking.

(Continued)

Oct 29, 1975

7

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For the moment, however, the Chinese appear to be hoping that some eleventh-hour solution will present itself and that they will be able to salvage something from a situation that has gone sour on all fronts.  
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Oct 29, 1975

8

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