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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY  
NATIONAL FOREIGN ASSESSMENT CENTER

15 November 1978

MEMORANDUM

ANGOLA'S RELATIONS WITH THE SOVIET UNION

Relations between Luanda and Moscow are generally good, with no indications of serious policy differences. Nevertheless some strains remain. The Soviets are not well liked in Angola. Many Angolans regard them as neocolonialists interested primarily in exploiting Angolan resources for the benefit of the USSR. Moreover, Angolans are disappointed with the failure of their Soviet and Cuban allies to halt the downward slide of the economy or to suppress UNITA.

Complaints about poor Soviet performance in the economic sphere are common in sub-Saharan Africa and in the case of Angola are probably not taken too seriously by the Soviets. Of more concern to the Soviets is the belief, held by some members of the Angolan elite including Neto, that the Soviets were behind the Alves coup attempt in May 1977. We know of no evidence to support the charge but it persists despite repeated Soviet demonstrations of support for Neto.

*This memorandum was prepared by the USSR Division of the Office of Regional and Political Analysis. Questions and comments may be addressed to the author, [redacted]*

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Despite these points of friction, both sides continue to observe the provisions of the Soviet-Angolan Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation that was signed in October 1976. The treaty follows the general format and substance of other Soviet treaties with third-world states, outlining a commitment to cooperate in a wide variety of fields. It provides for the strengthening of military cooperation on the "basis of corresponding agreements which are being concluded..."

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The Soviets--and Neto--realize that military assistance is the foundation of Soviet influence in Angola and Neto is likely to remain dependent on Soviet and Cuban military support for some time. The Angolans cannot handle the UNITA insurgency by themselves and neither the United States nor other Western countries are likely to provide the type of assistance Neto needs to suppress the insurgents. As long as Neto needs the Cubans to deal with UNITA, he will need Moscow.

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The Soviets also probably believe that the large number of Angolans trained in the USSR and other communist countries will be more receptive to Soviet than Western influence. Last year alone some 2,000 Angolans went to the USSR for training and large numbers went to Cuba, East Germany and Czechoslovakia. In addition, Soviet and Cuban personnel provide training in Angola as do contingents from Czechoslovakia, East Germany, and Bulgaria.

Soviets have also moved to make their influence felt in key financial and commercial ministries, particularly in the Finance Ministry and the Central Bank and have reportedly replaced Cubans in the Transportation, Fisheries and Trade ministries. Soviets in these ministries will be in a good position to monitor contacts between the West and Angola and perhaps to influence developments in ways favorable to the USSR.

In sum, the prospect of improved US-Angolan relations is probably not a major source of concern to the Soviets, or at least not of great enough concern for them to threaten their position with Neto by trying to thwart his efforts. Moscow nonetheless will be alert for any sign of a significant US presence aggravating existing difficulties in the Soviet-Angolan relationship.

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