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25X1A

SOVIET/CUBAN OPTIONS IN RHODESIA

I. Conflicting reports re increased external involvement

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A. [redacted] Ethiopian Air Lines to shuttle 10,000 Cubans/Ethiopians to Mozambique.

25X1

B. [redacted] "no intention at this time" to send combat forces to Mozambique.

C. Probably just contingency planning at this point.

II. Nevertheless, we think

A. It is conceivable that we could see, in coming months, a force or forces totalling several thousand Cubans arriving in Mozambique, but we doubt they would have the invasion of Rhodesia as a mission!

B. It is pretty likely that there will be additional Soviets or Cubans arriving in both Mozambique and Zambia, together with more equipment for the guerrillas, but many more in Mozambique than in Zambia;

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C. It is almost certain that there will be a general escalation in the level of Soviet/Cuban interest and activity in connection with Rhodesia (and we suspect that the reporting we are receiving [redacted] is at the very least a reflection of this general leaning-forward posture).

The ultimate size of this force or forces could depend on circumstances. Something between 2 and 10 thousand could do the job, although the smaller the figure the smaller the shock and the political risks.

-- With the higher, more traumatic figure, the force could be fed in gradually, both for political cosmetics and to ease logistic problems.

25X1

SECRET

III. Pressures/Risks

- A. Front Line leaders not eager to bring in Soviets/Cubans (or Ethiopians) because:
1. They would rather have this an African victory. And, like the guerrillas, would prefer to limit the role of "outside forces."
 2. They do not trust Soviets/Cubans. The fewer, the better.
 3. Sudden surge in Soviet/Cuban presence may prompt South Africa to join white Rhodesia.
- B. As situation changes, each Front Line leader's desire to end war -- or even protect his borders -- may outweigh the negative aspects of Soviet/Cuban presence.
- C. Nkomo needs early settlement despite militant rhetoric.
1. He fears that a longer campaign will give his own military leaders a voice larger than his, and he thinks he may be moving toward the end of a long struggle.
 2. He has been saving up his force for the post-victory contest with other nationalist leaders, but it is hard to keep it tight and in reserve at the same time.
 3. His host, President Kaunda, is becoming restive and facing some heat at home over using Zambia's resources for the struggle.
- D. Mugabe's forces have larger share of the struggle :
1. His guerrillas need more protection than they are getting from Rhodesian raids and other counter-guerrilla operations.
 2. The longer the war goes on, the more room there is for the kind of behind-the-back negotiation that Nkomo has been carrying on with Smith.
 3. Mugabe, too, needs something more at his side than a rag-tag guerrilla group to contest power after Smith gives in; the ZANU people being trained in Ethiopia may help here.

- E. The Front Line leaders becoming more frustrated, with situation and each other. While still confident that Smith ultimately will go, they -- especially Kaunda and Machel -- are concerned about the shape they and their countries could be in when that happens.
1. Both Kaunda and Machel are anguishing over their inability to defend their territory against Rhodesian operations and over the incapacity of the guerrilla forces to defend themselves. This may lead them to adopt independent courses, with Machel taking the more militant stand, closer to the Soviets.
 2. Nyerere, and probably Neto, want to see the Rhodesia problem moved along so that they can tend to other matters. Nyerere is incensed by the Nkomo-Smith talks, which he cannot control.
- F. Soviets/Cubans may be willing to accept risks of escalated presence because of:
1. The opportunity afforded to increase their presence in Mozambique and Zambia, as well as to obtain a better footing for their participation in a longer-term campaign focused against South Africa.
 2. Their conviction that they will be, once again, on the historically winning side, even if there are foul-ups and temporarily reverses.
 3. A sense that the Rhodesian situation can be pushed in a direction that would be more favorable to Soviet interests (e.g., Nkomo's forces march into Salisbury with Soviet help rather than sit down at a table to sign yet another "agreement" under US/UK auspices.)
 4. Confidence they have acquired in their technical expertise in projecting Soviet military power overseas, as they have done in Angola and especially Ethiopia.
 5. Possibly, an incentive (arising out of political considerations such as Third World image) to remove Cuban combat troops from Ethiopia combined with reluctance to send them straight home.

- G. The big risk would be South African reaction, and the Soviets/Cubans would have to watch this closely.
1. After all, while the Rhodesians have only:
 - 12,000 troops, 6,000 mobilizable
 - No armor
 - Only 36 MIG-17 equivalent aircraft
 2. The South Africans have:
 - 45,000 troops, trained to European standards (250,000 mobilizable)
 - 200+ tanks, and other armor
 - 200 jets
 - Not to mention a navy with 3 SSs, 3 DEs plus minor combatants
- IV. If force is sent, Soviets/Cubans are under no great compulsion to predetermine mission.
- A. Most likely mission would be a demonstration of "presence" which would
 - Be a significant weight in the diplomatic balance against Smith.
 - Afford deterrence against Rhodesian attacks on guerrilla camps and Mozambique's borders.
 - B. Mission might also be to improve guerrilla effectiveness through training and advisory efforts.
 - C. Mission may be to defend against Rhodesian raids/incursions.
 - D. Least likely mission is direct invasion of Rhodesia, given present conditions. May become a more viable option as the situation eludes settlement.

-- Logistical consideration of the invasion option (if unopposed by South Africa and/or the West)

1. We have no doubt about the Soviets' ability to get people, equipment and material to debarkation ports and air fields in Mozambique, Zambia, Angola and Tanzania. Their resupply efforts in the Mideast ('73), Angola and Ethiopia show they could handle the long-haul logistics of a war against Rhodesia.
2. Considering the lines of communication (LOC) in country, we note that the road, rail networks roughly are comparable in Angola, Ethiopia, and Mozambique/Zambia to say that they have demonstrated an ability to move men and material in country that is adequate to support a campaign in Rhodesia.
3. Examining the suitability of the terrain in and around Rhodesia for mechanized war.
 - a. For military thrusts from across Rhodesia's borders with the FLS, there is only limited ingress for invading forces, e.g., from:
 - (1) Zambia - there are basically three entry points because of the Zambezi gorge and escarpment and Lake Kariba
 - (2) Mozambique - the border is spanned by mountains and jungle except in the south
 - b. But once in Rhodesia itself, the terrain is generally suitable for mechanized conventional warfare.
 - c. On the other hand, there would be free ingress for any possible South African intervention.

V. Bottom Line

-- We doubt very much that we will see a large Soviet/Cuban (or Ethiopian) force arriving for the direct, premeditated purpose of mounting a conventional invasion of Rhodesia (although we would not rule this out completely if the situation grinds on without a settlement).

SECRET 25X1

-- We would not be surprised, however, to see a substantial increase in Soviet/Cuban presence in the Rhodesia area; with most of the increase in Mozambique where the welcome would be less cool and, at this time, the direct need for defensive support -- which this force would likely provide -- would probably be greater than in Zambia.

-- How this would actually come about remains to be seen. This is an unfolding situation in which the players themselves have not made up their minds just how "far and fast, to go" and are casting about for a variety of ways toward a solution they can accept.

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