

23 October 1981

MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: The U. S. Response to Soviet-Supported Insurgencies

As the Administration considers alternatives for countering Soviet- and Cuban-supported insurgency in Central America, it is essential to bear in mind that this is but one part of the much larger problem of Soviet support for insurgencies and radical regimes throughout the Third World.

Beginning in 1974 and 1975, the Soviets undertook a new, much more aggressive strategy in the Third World (1) based on their perception that the U. S. President's hands were tied in that arena because of the Vietnam experience, (2) taking advantage of a series of events and developments in the Third World itself which made intervention attractive and relatively risk free, and (3) a completely new element--exploiting the availability first of Cuba and subsequently of other countries to serve as Soviet surrogates or proxies (thereby limiting the political, economic and military costs to the USSR). The Congressional defeat of assistance for UNITA in Angola in the spring of 1975--following the U. S. evacuation of Saigon by only weeks--bolstered Soviet confidence that the U. S. would not react to this aggressive strategy.

In the ensuing six years the Soviets have supported, directly or indirectly, radical regimes or insurgencies in virtually every part of the Third World:

1975	Angola	Soviet support and Cuban troops enable MPLA to take and subsequently maintain power.
	Mozambique	Soviets provide military assistance to newly-independent government led by Machel and enable it to combat continuing insurgency of National Resistance Movement (supported by South Africa).
	Laos	After DRV conquest of RVN, DRV moves to assert control in Laos with support of Soviets (military materiel and at least several hundred advisors).
	Oman	Soviets have provided military assistance through South Yemen and Iraq to the Popular Front for the Liberation of Oman. During the most active phase of the insurgency in 1974-75, the Soviets supplied it with significant amounts of weapons. Even after collapse of the insurgency in November 1975, USSR reportedly has continued to supply arms and assistance.

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1977	Ethiopia	Soviets have supported Mengistu government since its assumption of power in 1974. In 1977 they organized its victorious campaign against the Somali-supported insurgency--Soviet leadership and material, Cuban troops transported by the Soviets.
	Zaire	Angola-based rebels move into Shaba but are defeated. No evidence of Soviet involvement at that time but indications of Soviet military support to the Angola-based front for the liberation of the Congo since 1980.
	Zimbabwe	Soviets use Angola base to funnel increased support to Nkomo, whose defeat in 1980 settlement leaves Soviets in weak position.
1978	Kampuchea	DRV moves into Kampuchea with the costs underwritten by the Soviets.
	Namibia	Soviets use Angola base to significantly increase support of SWAPO (which they have been backing since early 1970s).
	Afghanistan	After a coup carried out with at least Soviet complicity, Soviets greatly increase assistance to newly-installed communist government and eventually (Dec. 79) move in their own combat troops to help maintain the government in power.
	PDRY	A coup brings an outright pro-Soviet government to power and Soviets increase their presence to maintain government in power. East Germans and Cubans take responsibility for security.
1979	Yemen Arab Republic	Using PDRY as base, Soviets back insurgents (NDF) while simultaneously maintaining ties with and providing support to YAR government.
	Chad	After remaining aloof from earlier Libyan subversion, Soviets approve and give some support to Libyan military take-over (apparently once it becomes clear that other African states will do no more than register unhappiness over Libyan invasion).
	Nicaragua	Having remained aloof from anti-Somoza insurgency, Soviets move in quickly to help Sandinistas consolidate power. They provide military materiel and some advisory and support personnel.

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El Salvador Encouraged by Sandinista success in Nicaragua, Soviets back Cuban efforts in support of insurgency. Soviet arms and equipment are channeled through Cuba.

Polisario Although Moscow has not directly supported the insurgency against Morocco for fear of disrupting political and economic ties, Soviet arms reach the group via Libya and Algeria and Moscow has sought to suggest sympathy for Polisario aims.

1980 Guatemala Moscow provides financial assistance and para-military training to communist rebels and urges the creation of a broadly-based revolutionary front.

In Central America, Southern Africa, North Central Africa, the Arabian Peninsula, and Southeast Asia the Soviet pattern seems to be to move quickly when local circumstances favor success and then try to use a successful insurgency/new radical regime as a base of operations against neighboring territories. Local circumstances, of course, still determine the ultimate outcome and some victors may eventually turn on the Soviets or run into unexpected resistance (e.g. Angola, Afghanistan). But key to the strategy is establishing a firm base from which to conduct regional operations. Moreover, in nearly all of the above cases, the United States has confronted a situation in which the Soviets have been able to provide significant quantities of arms on a prompt basis directly or through proxies/surrogates either to insurgent forces, to friendly governments supporting neighboring insurgencies, or to new radical regimes.

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We must realize and sooner or later deal with the fact that it is much easier and cheaper for the Soviets [Redacted] to support an insurgency than it is to resist one. [Redacted]

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