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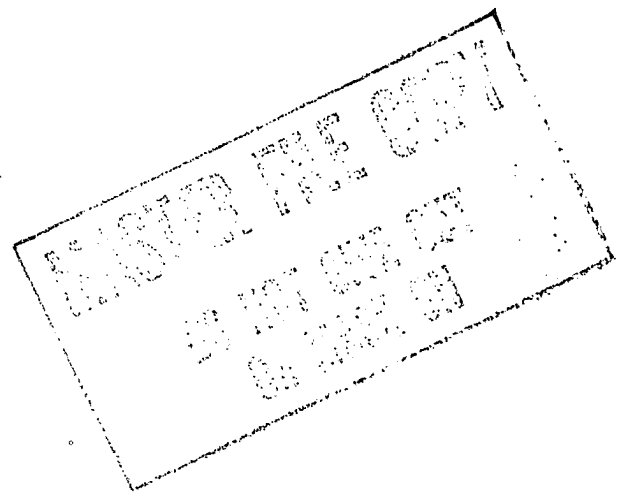


Angola at a Critical Juncture



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An Intelligence Assessment



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ALA 84-10091
September 1984

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Angola at a Critical Juncture

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An Intelligence Assessment

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This paper was prepared by [Redacted]
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with the Directorate of Operations. [Redacted]

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Comments and queries are welcome and may be
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September 1984*

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Angola at a Critical Juncture

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Key Judgments

*Information available
as of 29 August 1984
was used in this report.*

Over the past year, the beleaguered Angolan Government has simultaneously pursued a major diplomatic dialogue with the South Africans and the West and prepared for a massive offensive against National Union for Total Independence of Angola (UNITA) that could begin soon. Both elements of this two-track effort are designed, in our judgment, to provide badly needed relief on four key fronts:

- The escalating UNITA insurgency.
- South African military pressure.
- A costly Communist military presence that is both indispensable and threatening to Angolan sovereignty.
- A devastated economy that cannot improve so long as the first three problems remain unresolved.

The diplomatic offensive, which has produced an agreement by the South Africans to depart southern Angola, has eased some of the pressure on the Marxist regime in Luanda. Movement on negotiations has faltered in recent weeks because of the tough conditions posed by South Africa and the unyielding refusal of the South-West Africa People's Organization (SWAPO) to compromise on the issue of a military standdown.

Preparations have apparently been under way for at least a year for a major military effort against Jonas Savimbi's UNITA forces.

Angola, after serious military setbacks in 1983, sent envoys to Moscow and Havana to obtain—apparently successfully—a significant increase in military assistance. Subsequently, the Soviets have provided Angola an array of new hardware, including MIG-23 and SU-22 advanced fighter aircraft, MI-24 armed helicopters, and new antiaircraft systems. Cuba has, we believe, augmented its forces in Angola with about 5,000 men—raising its total military contingent to as many as 35,000 troops. The Angolans have also reinforced garrisons and built up regional airfields in UNITA-threatened areas throughout Angola.

Luanda plans to use its new muscle in a major offensive against UNITA. We believe that Cuban ground troops will augment Angolan forces as necessary and will play an active role in flying fighter aircraft. Improvements to regional airfields throughout Angola since August 1983 and dispersal of fighter aircraft and helicopters—which in Angola are primarily Cuban piloted—indicate the Cuban air operations will be more extensive than before. The offensive appears designed to cut off UNITA's supply lines to the north, to ease the pressure in areas threatened by the insurgents in central Angola, and to attack Savimbi's base near the Namibian border in southeastern Angola.

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[redacted] the Angolan leadership is increasingly confident of its military capabilities and that some leaders in Luanda believe the offensive will inflict a damaging blow to UNITA, compelling Savimbi to negotiate on near-surrender terms. Moreover, if the negotiation track with Pretoria leads to Namibian independence, these leaders apparently believe that South Africa's will and ability to continue to support Savimbi will be weakened, thus making UNITA an even more manageable problem.

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Luanda has apparently obtained grudging support from the Soviets and Cubans for their diplomatic efforts. Senior Angolan officials have discussed their plans with Cuban President Castro, who appears willing to go along. We have less evidence of the Soviet attitude, but limited diplomatic reporting indicates they also, in the wake of a decisive campaign against UNITA, may go along with a Cuban troop withdrawal in exchange for Namibian independence.

The results of the offensive, however, will probably be more modest than the Angolans expect. The critical factor may be the Cuban role. If the Cubans take on a major ground combat role—which we doubt because of the domestic impact of increased casualties—the prospects for success will increase significantly. With heavy backup help on the ground and a major role in air combat, Havana could ensure that the operation netted some credible results.

If the results prove credible, but not decisive, we believe Luanda—probably with tepid support from Cuba and the Soviets—might still be willing to accept a Cuban troop withdrawal in exchange for Pretoria's agreement to implement UN Resolution 435. Under these circumstances, Luanda may also decide to open negotiations with a less-than-defeated Savimbi, something black nationalists within the regime have long sought.

Luanda's two-pronged strategy carries obvious risks. SWAPO, for example, continues to balk on the issue of a cease-fire with South Africa. Moreover, a successful Angolan offensive against UNITA would sharpen the debate in Pretoria over the wisdom of South Africa's accommodation with Angola and could lead Pretoria to intensify its support for Savimbi's guerrillas.

Should the offensive become an unqualified failure, President dos Santos's credibility at home and with his Soviet and Cuban backers would be damaged. In such a case, the diplomatic offensive could stall as well, leaving Angolan Government officials fearful of allowing the Cubans to depart after UNITA had just taken Luanda's best shot.

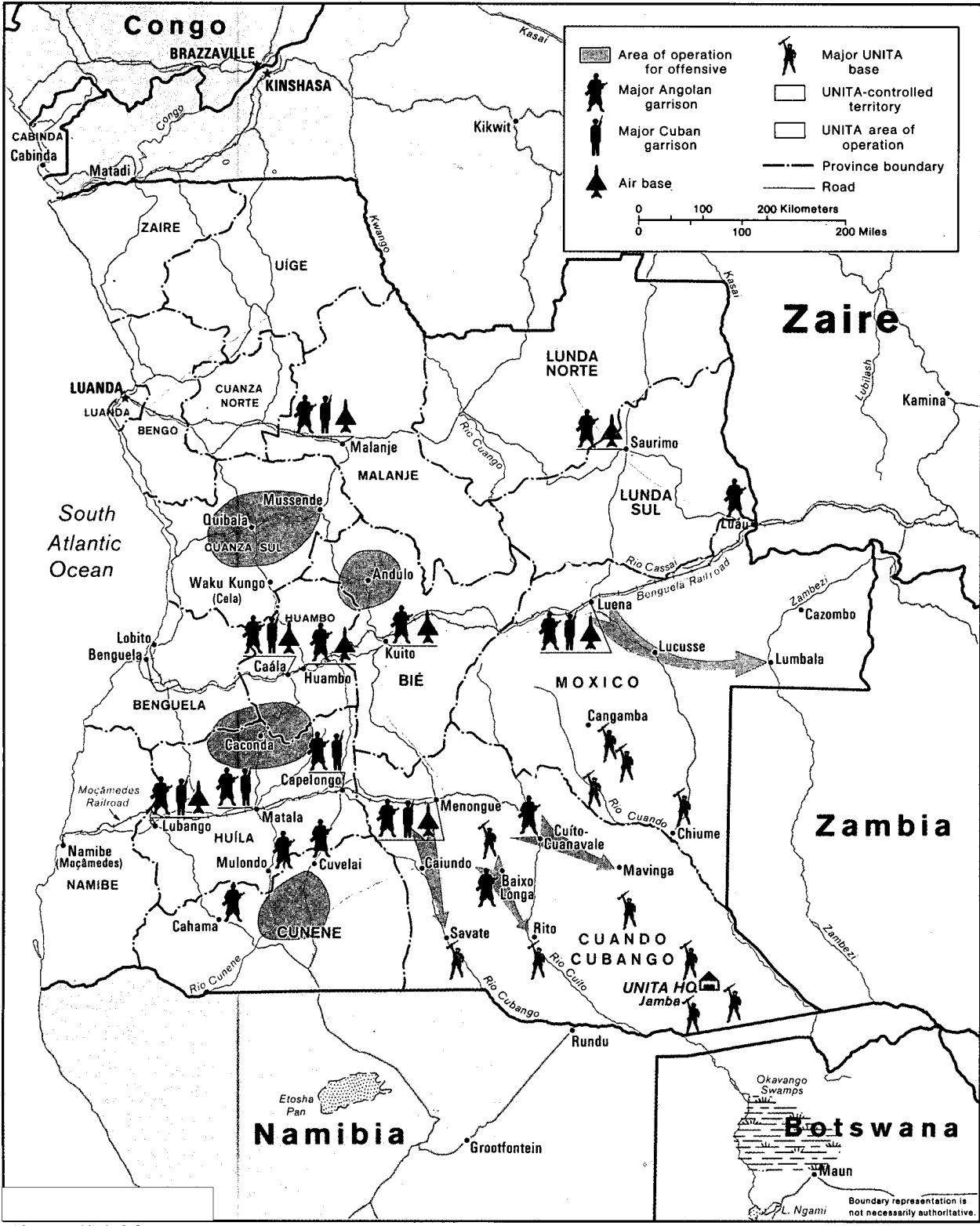
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Figure 1
Angolan Government Offensive



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Angola at a Critical Juncture [Redacted]

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Major Policy Shift

During the past year the Marxist regime in Angola has engaged in an unprecedented series of negotiations with South Africa, reaching an initial agreement with Pretoria in February. Since then, Luanda has contributed military forces to a joint monitoring commission with South Africa that seeks to prevent South-West Africa People's Organization (SWAPO) guerrillas from infiltrating northern Namibia from Angolan soil. South Africa has reciprocated by withdrawing most of its forces from Angola and ceasing direct attacks against Angolan military and economic targets. [Redacted]

In our view, Angola's determined effort at negotiating is part of a change in strategy over the last two years away from a policy of confrontation, even at the price of enduring South African occupation of south central Angola. Previously the Angolan Government hoped that international pressure would force Pretoria to vacate Namibia and cease aiding the National Union for Total Independence of Angola (UNITA) insurgency. Although Angola had been willing to talk to South Africa before, discussions had been fruitless because Luanda was unwilling to do anything that would thwart SWAPO's ability to infiltrate northern Namibia. Luanda's decision to restrain SWAPO—a clear compromise of its "African liberationist duty"—represents a significant shift in policy. [Redacted]

Since making its initial compromise with Pretoria, Luanda's diplomatic strategy has focused on promoting a dialogue between Pretoria and SWAPO and on pressing them, with assistance from the West, to negotiate seriously. In dealing with South Africa, Luanda has dragged its feet on meeting Pretoria's key demand that the joint Angolan-South African force monitoring SWAPO in southern Angola be continued in some form once South Africa completes its withdrawal from Angola. [Redacted]

Similarly, Luanda also has put strong pressure on SWAPO to be flexible in its negotiations with Pretoria. According to diplomatic sources, this effort has

strained the regime's once cordial relationship with the Namibian insurgents. Some senior Angolans apparently were especially critical of SWAPO President Sam Nujoma's unwillingness to agree to an unconditional cease-fire at a meeting with the South Africans in Cape Verde on 25 July. [Redacted]

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Luanda's Diplomatic Offensive

Angola's willingness to compromise, in our view, stems from its need to deal decisively with problems that increasingly have frustrated the government leadership over the last several years. [Redacted]

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[Redacted] President dos Santos and his key advisers—who appear to have a firm grip on power in Luanda—believe they have four urgent problems:

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- The UNITA insurgency that has expanded to the northern province over the last year and now threatens most of the country.
- The potential of renewed direct South African attacks from Namibia.
- A massive, costly, and unpopular Cuban and Soviet Bloc presence that compromises Angolan sovereignty.
- Economic stagnation that results from the insurgency and government mismanagement.

The regime appears increasingly unified on how to approach these problems and seems to believe that if it can dispose of the first two, either politically or militarily, it will then be able to send home Cuban troops and turn to rehabilitating its economy. [Redacted]

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The regime, we believe, sees the diplomatic effort as an important device to make a cease-fire and then a Namibia settlement palatable to both Pretoria and SWAPO. It does not, however, apparently see negotiations as the sole solution to its problems. [Redacted]

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[Redacted] Angola also hopes in the near future to deal a major military blow to UNITA as a key second element in its strategy. For

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UNITA's Response. UNITA insurgents have proved adept at avoiding direct combat in past government offensives and have usually chosen to ambush or raid rear elements. The scope of this offensive, however, and the danger to vital insurgent interests suggest that in some regions UNITA will have to stand and fight. Government operations in the east and southeast present the most immediate dangers to insurgent bases and to supply lines to forces in the north. Severing these links would hinder UNITA's ability to expand its areas of operation and potentially could set the insurgent effort back several years. [redacted]

During earlier government offensives in eastern Angola this year, the insurgents have directly resisted the government efforts. Since February, Angolan forces have tried at least twice to recapture the Cazombo salient. UNITA claims to have beaten back the Angolan attacks, [redacted] [redacted] Cazombo is still controlled by the insurgents. The government efforts and indispensable Cuban air support, however, probably were responsible for saving Luau from capture, and the net result apparently has been a standoff. [redacted]

The government operations elsewhere in central and southern Angola may disrupt the insurgents, but UNITA—which we assume is aware of the planned government offensive—probably will be able to evade the government sweeps. UNITA probably will continue with plans for its own publicly announced offensive and even intensify its efforts farther north to divert government forces. UNITA also may move up its timetable for raids within Luanda, including terrorist attacks. [redacted]

The South Africans disparage Angolan fighting and organizational abilities—even with expanded Cuban support—and see only a slim chance of success for the Angolans. Nevertheless, the South Africans do see the potential for serious harm to UNITA even if the Angolans only partially achieve their objectives. [redacted]

Luanda Confident

[redacted] the leadership has developed new confidence in Angola's enhanced military prowess. Buoyed by the addition of new hardware to their inventory and their credible

performance against a South African offensive earlier this year, Angolan leaders evidently believe the offensive will strike a crippling blow to the insurgents and compel them to negotiate with the regime on near-surrender terms. They also apparently believe that Angola can block another South African invasion of their territory. [redacted] 25X1

Although we doubt Luanda has yet devised a precise scenario for steps to take in the event of a successful offensive against UNITA, we believe it would be more willing to exchange a Cuban troop withdrawal for implementation of UN Resolution 435, a plan that senior Angolan officials apparently have discussed with Cuban President Fidel Castro. [redacted] dos Santos sent emissaries to Havana over the past few months seeking approval for a phased withdrawal of Cuban troops. Although we do not know the precise outcome of these talks, Castro has shown some recent flexibility, and we believe he has have acquiesced. [redacted] 25X1

It is less clear how Luanda hopes to deal with the question of continued South African support to UNITA—support it demands be cut before it allows a Cuban troop withdrawal. We believe, however, that Luanda probably would see the problem as more manageable in the wake of a successful strike against UNITA. [redacted] many in the leadership assume that Pretoria's will and ability to aid Savimbi will be significantly reduced once it begins pulling out of Namibia. [redacted] the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA) Central Committee has agreed to open talks with UNITA after its planned offensive if the insurgents are still a threat. [redacted] 25X1

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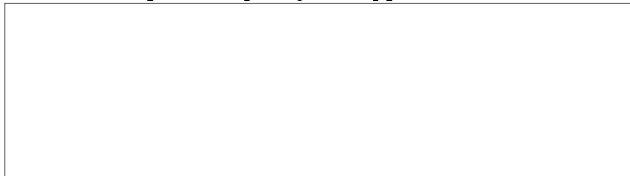
Angola's strategy carries obvious risks. One key problem is getting SWAPO—whose agreement on a cease-fire is necessary before South Africa will complete its withdrawal from southern Angola—to abandon the hard line it took at the 25 July meeting with the South Africans and in all earlier talks. Another

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major problem may be that Angola's military offensive might drive South Africa from the bargaining table. In addition, Angola's fight and talk strategy could collapse if the offensive fails to make any headway against Savimbi's forces. [redacted]

in the military, moreover, probably think that negotiations with Angola should only be tactical in the nature and would prefer a policy of support for Savimbi.



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SWAPO Balking

[redacted] SWAPO is seriously divided over how deeply to become engaged in the negotiation process with South Africa. By committing itself to a cease-fire, SWAPO believes that it would lose the slow but grinding momentum of its insurgency in northern Namibia without any assurance that a political settlement was imminent. By engaging in talks with Pretoria, it fears that implementation of UN Resolution 435, which it believes will eventually place SWAPO in power, will be pushed aside. SWAPO also fears that negotiations outside the framework of the UN plan might trap it in a process that would reduce SWAPO to the status of another internal Namibian party. [redacted]

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Recent events suggest that senior defense officials in the South African Government—enough to lend sufficient political weight to the enterprise—are willing for now to countenance some compromise with Angola, even at Savimbi's expense. We suspect, however, that they would strongly resist any deal that exchanged a cutoff of aid to UNITA for an Angolan promise of a phased Cuban troop withdrawal. Moreover, it is by no means certain that Prime Minister P. W. Botha would be willing or able to override their objections. In the wake of a major Angolan offensive near the Namibia border, the military might dig in its heels further and press for a show of military strength along the border that could sour South African-Angolan talks. [redacted]

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SWAPO's performance in recent talks with South Africa suggests that hardliners who favor unswerving adherence to the UN plan appear to be in control. These hardliners, apparently led by SWAPO President Sam Nujoma, believe that SWAPO's sources of support are sufficiently diverse and reliable to allow it to withstand Luanda's determined pressure to come to an agreement. According to one diplomatic report citing a knowledgeable Angolan source, SWAPO may have had the support of the Soviets in the hardline position it took at the Cape Verde talks. [redacted]

If the Offensive Sputters

Disappointing military results would weaken the case for a Cuban troop withdrawal—namely, that Luanda is capable of putting down UNITA without the Cubans—that dos Santos must make to Havana, Moscow, and the hardliners within his own regime. Savimbi, moreover, publicly claims he is planning his own offensive, which, if successful, could further upset the regime's plans by reinforcing Luanda's sense of vulnerability to a takeover. [redacted]

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Possible Backlash in Pretoria

A successful Angolan offensive against UNITA, especially if it included well-publicized strikes at Savimbi's stronghold, would sharpen the debate we believe already exists within the South African Government over the wisdom of an accommodation with Angola. [redacted]

A military failure might lead Luanda to revert to its previous policy of doggedly fighting on, hoping that UNITA and South Africa will eventually grow weary. Another possible but less likely response to a failed offensive would be to open talks with Savimbi on the basis of rough military and political equality. [redacted]

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Pretoria's powerful military establishment apparently has given only grudging approval to the negotiations with Angola, which have been championed by South African Foreign Minister Pik Botha. The military— [redacted] is, we believe, suspicious of Botha's motives and believes his initiatives might harm South African interests. Many

[redacted] hardliners within the regime have, with Cuban and Soviet support, long opposed such a move, others around dos Santos apparently have favored it. [redacted]

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Soviet and Cuban Spoiler Role?

Even if the negotiations and offensive yield positive results, dos Santos still would face two skeptical allies in a position to undercut him. The Soviet and Cuban role in Angola's current two-pronged strategy has been confined largely to military support. Both Havana and Moscow apparently were not consulted when Luanda decided to negotiate with Pretoria in March, [redacted]

[redacted] Since then, we believe the Cubans and Soviets have acquiesced to Luanda's diplomatic effort but have attempted to toughen Angola's negotiating position—most notably during a hurried visit by dos Santos to Havana in March—although they apparently have not tried actively to scuttle the talks. [redacted]

Castro, after a period of recrimination, now appears to be willing to go along with Angola's request for flexibility on Cuban troop withdrawal. How much and how long he will be willing to compromise, however, is uncertain. His real conditions for a Cuban troop withdrawal may be as tough as those taken publicly—that is, South African withdrawal from Angola, implementation of UN Resolution 435, and the end of South African aid to Savimbi. Moreover, even if the withdrawal process were to begin, Castro could reverse course. We believe, nevertheless, that he would like to find an honorable way to withdraw his troops from the war, which has become sufficiently unpopular in Cuba to give him an incentive for supporting a compromise. [redacted]

The Soviets appear now to give at least tepid support to Angola's negotiations but disapprove of the regime making too many concessions. According to a Western diplomatic source, the Soviet Ambassador in Luanda claimed in July that the coming Angolan offensive against UNITA might allow the regime to consider withdrawing some Cubans from Angola, especially if Pretoria agreed to cut off aid to Savimbi. As with Cuba, however, Moscow's enthusiasm for compromise may be limited. [redacted]

[redacted] it has viewed the negotiations with South Africa with skepticism—especially as they have affected SWAPO. [redacted]

Apart from maintaining its basic relationship with Luanda, we believe that Moscow's keenest interest—that for which it would expend the greatest capital—probably would be to seek a Namibia settlement in which SWAPO would come to power unfettered by restrictions imposed by Pretoria. [redacted] 25X1

Prospects

We believe that it is critical to Luanda's negotiating strategy that it achieve some meaningful results in its approaching military offensive against UNITA. In our estimation, at least some military successes are necessary for dos Santos to retain Central Committee support for his negotiating strategy, as well as to convince Moscow and Havana that Luanda is strong enough to permit a phased withdrawal of Cuban troops. Success for Luanda probably means: 25X1

- The large offensives in Cuando Cubango province and the Cazombo salient must hurt Savimbi in his stronghold and interrupt his supply lines to the north. Retaking the towns of Mavinga or Cazombo could be cited as strong evidence of an Angolan resurgence. 25X1
- The smaller sweep operations in central Angola, particularly in the Huambo area, should halt the steady growth of UNITA activity, perhaps even reversing UNITA's recent move into northern Angola. 25X1
- In addition, the MPLA regime probably wants to strike an important psychological and symbolic blow by an air attack against Savimbi's "capital" at Jamba. Savimbi's recent practice of hosting press tours and much ballyhooed hostage exchanges at his headquarters clearly challenges Luanda's sovereignty, and invites retaliation. [redacted] 25X1

While the Soviet and Cuban buildup over the last year clearly has strengthened government forces, we believe that significant changes on the battlefield are possible, but not likely. A critical factor will be the 25X1

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Cuban role. If the Cubans take on a major ground combat role—which we doubt because of the domestic impact of increased casualties—the prospects for success improve significantly. If, on the other hand, the Angolans continue to carry the brunt of the fighting, the military gains—apart, perhaps, from a possible airstrike by Cuban-piloted MIGs against Jamba—probably would be minor and short lived. [REDACTED]

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If bolstered by a successful offensive, we believe Luanda would be prepared—and allowed by Castro—to follow through on a commitment to a phased Cuban troop withdrawal in exchange for South African implementation of UN resolution 435, in the belief that Pretoria's departure from Namibia would sever its logistic ties to UNITA and enable Angola with a declining number of Cuban troops to cope with a weakened insurgency. [REDACTED]

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If the results prove credible, but not decisive, we believe Luanda—probably with tepid support from Cuba and the Soviets—might still be willing to accept a Cuban troop withdrawal in exchange for Pretoria's agreement to implement UN Resolution 435. Under these circumstances, Luanda may also decide to open negotiations with a less-than-defeated Savimbi, something black nationalists within the regime have long sought. [REDACTED]

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If the offensive does not produce the kind of clear-cut military success Luanda appears to expect, dos Santos probably will lose standing, both within his own regime and with his Soviet and Cuban allies. In this case, we would expect Angola's diplomatic offensive to stall as well, as Luanda would become more apprehensive that any movement on Cuban troop withdrawal would leave the MPLA regime too vulnerable to UNITA, which had already taken Luanda's best shot. [REDACTED]

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Appendix

Military Situation

Plans for Offensive

[redacted] the Angolan Army, with substantial Cuban and Soviet encouragement or support, has set in train a major military effort directed against the UNITA insurgents. [redacted] this offensive would be the largest single effort yet made by the Angolans to block insurgent expansion and to reclaim territory lost to UNITA. [redacted]

Two of the six operations in the planned offensive will be directed toward reclaiming insurgent-controlled territory in the east and southeast. [redacted] one force will attempt to recapture the Cazombo salient, taken by Savimbi late last year. The second operation in southeastern Cuando Cubango province will move into the region that has for years been a UNITA stronghold and support base.

To recapture the Cazombo salient, the Angolans, [redacted] have collected four of their eight brigades in eastern Angola at their base at Luena. [redacted]

Recapture of the salient would take back a small portion of the border with Zaire that UNITA now controls and invalidate UNITA's claim to the entire border with Zambia. Moreover, UNITA could be forced to fall back from Luau, which has been under siege since January, and cut back its operations along the Benguela rail line between Luena and Luau. [redacted]

In Cuando Cubango province, three Angolan motorized brigades, [redacted] will move on Savate, Rito, and Mavinga. [redacted]

[redacted] This operation would directly threaten UNITA's well-developed base area in the southeast—we have identified at least 30 insurgent base camps, training bases, and supply

points [redacted]—as well as the supply lines from there to Savimbi's forces operating in northern Angola. Furthermore, Mavinga was the setting for UNITA's highly publicized party congress in 1982, and its loss would be a dramatic embarrassment to the insurgents. [redacted]

It is also likely that the operations in this region will feature airstrikes on Savimbi's headquarters at Jamba in the extreme southeast. Aircraft flying from Menongue or Cuito Cuanavale are within range of Jamba. According to [redacted] however, Savimbi's headquarters is well dispersed and not easy for pilots to identify in the generally featureless terrain. [redacted]

Elsewhere in central and southern Angola, the operations appear directed at improving the security around important roads and transportation links that have been under guerrilla pressure. Moreover, the two operations north of the Benguela may be intended to disrupt UNITA's plans for an offensive of its own in the northwest. [redacted]

[redacted] two Angolan brigades and a SWAPO brigade will operate in the vicinity of Andulo, and in a nearby operation three Angolan brigades will attempt to secure the area near Quibala and Mussende. These areas have been the scene of continuous fighting over the last few years. Mussende and Andulo, [redacted] were captured by the insurgents in mid-1983 but were recaptured by government troops in October and November, the last major government operation in the region. UNITA has also threatened Quibala several times—most recently in June this year. [redacted]

South of the Benguela rail line, two Angolan brigades will operate around Caconda on the road linking Huambo with Lubango, two major garrison areas. We [redacted]

estimates of the extent and disposition of the draw-down in Ethiopia, we believe the Cubans have augmented their forces in Angola since mid-1983 by about 5,000 men for a total military contingent of as many as 35,000 troops. [redacted]

Soviet Arms Deliveries: There was also a major increase in Soviet arms deliveries to Angola after mid-1983. In the first six months of the year, 10 Soviet arms carriers delivered about 6,000 tons of equipment, but in the second half of 1983 thirty ships delivered almost 35,000 tons. In the first six months of this year, 14 Soviet-flag ships delivered about 26,000 tons, fewer than the previous period but still a substantial number. [redacted]

Soviet arms delivered last year included substantial numbers of anti-aircraft weapons, apparently reflecting the concern at that time about the threat from South African air attacks. The Soviets delivered 20 SA-6 air defense missile launchers, 15 SA-3 launchers (sufficient for five SA-3 sites), as well as additional light anti-aircraft guns. Delivery of 12 MI-24 armed helicopters and 22 MI-8 transport helicopters, fulfilling longstanding orders, nevertheless, did improve the government's ability to provide close air support to its troops. [redacted]

Soviet deliveries so far in 1984 have given a substantial boost to the aircraft inventories in Angola, including 14 MIG-23s (two are trainer versions) in January, about 60 MIG-21s since April, and five SU-22 fighter-bombers in August. [redacted]

[redacted] indicated there were about 30 operational MIG-21s in Angola not counting the new deliveries. The first operational deployment of the MIG-23s probably took place in July when one [redacted] Lubango airfield in southern Angola. By late July, 12 of the MIG-21s delivered this year had been assembled. [redacted]

In addition, Soviet deliveries to the ground forces this year have included about 45 medium tanks; 40 armored personnel carriers; 20 scout cars; 60 artillery pieces and other weapons; and probably ammunition, spare parts, and other supplies. Cuba has also delivered weapons, but these may have been for use by

their own forces. East European countries have supplied Angola with ammunition and other military-associated goods. East Germany, for example, has delivered about 1,000 trucks. [redacted]

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Rebuilding Defenses. [redacted] Angolan garrisons since mid-1983 shows that there has been a major effort to improve facilities and defenses at garrisons and provincial centers in northern and eastern Angola (see figure 2). Forces in these areas had been drawn down in the early 1980s when Luanda believed it was threatened primarily in southern Angola and in the central highlands. [redacted]

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Since mid-1983, substantial improvements have been made to provincial airfields at Luena, Malange, Menongue, Huambo, Bie, and Saurimo (see figure 3). Smaller regional airfields at Waku Kungo and, most recently, Cuito Cuanavale have also been improved. The improvements have included protected parking areas for aircraft, additional perimeter defenses, and, in some cases, resurfacing of the runways. In addition to the physical improvements, there were also signs of a concurrent buildup of ground combat units at these airfields and garrisons. Fighter aircraft and helicopters were deployed in small numbers to these airfields beginning in late 1983. [redacted]

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