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MOSCOW'S RESPONSE TO THE DIPLOMATIC CHALLENGE IN SOUTHERN AFRICA

Summary

Recent Soviet commentary reflects strong concern that Pretoria's agreements with Angola and Mozambique threaten to weaken the USSR's position in these key southern African states and undermine its efforts to support SWAPO and the ANC. Moscow's attention has focused much more on Angola than on Mozambique because the Soviets have a greater investment of resources and prestige in Luanda and a greater ability to affect developments there.

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There has been no visible sign of Soviet pressure on Angola since the cease-fire with South Africa was signed in February. This suggests that Moscow, while probably uncertain over Luanda's ultimate aims, recognizes the utility of the cease-fire to shore up the MPLA's worsening military position as well as Angola's

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This paper was prepared by [redacted] the Foreign Policy Issues Branch, Policy Analysis Division, Office of Soviet Analysis in response to a request from Frank Wisner, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs. It was coordinated with the Office of African and Latin American Affairs and the National Intelligence Officers for Africa and the USSR. Comments and queries may be directed to the Acting Chief, Policy Analysis Division, [redacted]

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[redacted]

continuing need for Soviet and Cuban military assistance. Moreover, the Soviets probably view any radical moves as premature given their belief that South Africa is not willing to relinquish its hold on Namibia. [redacted]

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The Soviets will use their influence in Luanda to try to obstruct any new moves which would jeopardize their position in Angola. In the past, they have hinted at their willingness to replace Angolan President dos Santos, if he failed to protect Soviet interests. If the Soviets believed Luanda was moving toward a Namibia package that included a Cuban troop withdrawal, they would bring pressure to bear and perhaps even try to promote a coup by the MPLA hardliners. [redacted]

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Given the risks and uncertainties inherent in a coup and MPLA determination to resolve the Namibia question, however, we believe that the Soviets would ultimately accede to Luanda's wishes. Moscow would continue to work behind the scenes to maintain the influence of MPLA hardliners, sustain suspicions of United States and South Africa, and help the MPLA to carry on the struggle against Pretoria in other ways. [redacted]

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Soviet Interests in Southern Africa

1. Since the mid-1970s, the USSR has sought to gain an important regional role by strengthening the power base of the socialist-oriented regimes in Angola and Mozambique, cultivating black African support for Moscow's position on broader international issues, and supporting insurgents who seek to overthrow the white minority regimes in South Africa and Namibia. Angola is the key to these objectives because it provides the USSR with the access to influence the region's national liberation movements and the potential to exploit instability in neighboring Zaire. [redacted]

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Moscow's Response to the Recent Agreements

2. Soviet commentary has focused on the Angolan-South African cease-fire along the Namibian border. No mention was made of the nonaggression pact between Mozambique and South Africa until the day it was signed. An authoritative Pravda article on 5 March urged "extreme vigilance" upon the frontline states in their dealings with the US and emphasized that peace in the region could not be achieved without eliminating the white minority regime in Pretoria. [redacted]

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Angola

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3. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] Moscow has mounted a press campaign designed to raise doubts about US motives for brokering the talks between Angola and South Africa and Pretoria's motives in agreeing to the cease-fire. TASS and Izvestiya have repeated allegations that the United States and South Africa are engaged in a duplicitous game intended to alleviate the burden that military operations are imposing on Pretoria and to provide Washington with an election year foreign policy "success." [REDACTED]

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4. Despite Moscow's uneasiness, there is little evidence of a strong Soviet effort to stop the Angolan-South African dialogue. While castigating Washington and Pretoria, Soviet media have not condemned the Angolan-South African agreement itself. [REDACTED]

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5. The Soviets may feel there currently is little reason to dash the talks with South Africa. The recently concluded cease-fire and South African withdrawal from southern Angola have diminished the security threat to the MPLA government--Moscow's most important regional client; indeed, the worsening military situation prompted the Soviets to send record levels of arms in 1983. If the cease-fire holds, moreover, the Angolans and Cubans could focus all of their energies toward the UNITA insurgency. The Soviets may have misgivings about temporarily leaving SWAPO in the lurch, but preserving the regime in Luanda is a more important short-term priority. [REDACTED]

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6. The Soviet reaction to the Angolan-South African dialogue notwithstanding, Moscow's overall position on Namibia remains unchanged. The Soviets continue to call for a unilateral withdrawal of South African forces from Namibia and implementation of UN 435. They also continue to criticize any formula which links Namibia to the Cuban troop presence in Angola, stating that the Angolans and Cubans can consider the issue of a troop withdrawal only after Namibia is independent and the security threat to Angola is eliminated. Havana and Luanda reaffirmed their opposition to the linkage formula during President dos Santos's recent visit to Cuba. [REDACTED]

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Mozambique

7. In contrast to the publicity accorded the Angolan cease-fire, Moscow only belatedly acknowledged the security accord between Mozambique and South Africa. We believe the delay reflects Soviet displeasure with Machel.

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8. Machel's rapprochement with Pretoria clearly undercuts Soviet interests and prestige; it tarnishes Maputo's revolutionary credentials and opens up new opportunities for Western inroads in Mozambique. More importantly from Moscow's perspective, it diminishes the already limited capabilities of the African National Congress and thus obstructs the USSR's long-term objective to undermine the white minority regime in Pretoria.

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9. The Soviets evidently tried to dissuade Machel from his rapprochement with Pretoria, reportedly alternating the threat of oil cutbacks with offers of free oil in an effort to do so. Moscow, however, never has been willing to make aid commitments commensurate with Maputo's economic needs. The issue of economic aid has long been a source of friction in Soviet-Mozambican relations.

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10. The Soviets nonetheless have acquiesced in Machel's policy shift, at least partly because they have less at stake in Mozambique as compared to Angola. Soviet prestige, for example, is not linked to the survival of the Machel regime, whereas it was a Soviet and Cuban intervention that brought to power--and sustained--the MPLA in Angola. Moreover, the Soviets would have difficulty obstructing Machel in any event because they do not have the degree of access and influence they enjoy in Luanda.

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11. Nonetheless, Moscow clearly has not written off Mozambique. President Machel was accorded high-level attention at the Andropov funeral in mid-February; the Pravda account of his meetings with Politburo member Tikhonov and Deputy Foreign Minister Il'ichev noted that prospects for further development of bilateral relations were favorable.

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Soviet Prospects and Options

12. Given the deep-seated nature of regional tensions, the UNITA threat, and Moscow's belief that South Africa remains unwilling to relinquish Namibia, the Soviets probably view the current talks as unlikely to lead to a Cuban withdrawal from Angola. Recent public statements by pro-Soviet MPLA hardliners Lucio Lara and Paulo Jorge suggest that some in Luanda see the current cease-fire and South African withdrawal as an end in itself and that no decision has been reached on any steps beyond a cease-fire. We believe Moscow may share this assessment. [REDACTED]

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14. Nonetheless, Machel's about-face in Mozambique probably has heightened Moscow's sensitivity to the possibility that developments in Luanda could also evolve in a way damaging to Soviet interests. Should the Soviets become suspicious about dos Santos's ultimate aims in dealing with Pretoria, they are likely to exert direct pressure on him, as they have done several times in the past. [REDACTED]

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15. The Soviets would react more strongly if the cease-fire was the first step toward a Namibia settlement that included a phased-withdrawal of the Cubans. With the Cuban combat troops gone, the Soviets would lose much of their leverage in Luanda. It is true that if UNITA were actually cut off from its South African supply lines and the MPLA concentrated its military efforts solely on UNITA, Angola would continue to be dependent on the USSR for additional military support. Moscow, however, would hardly be sanguine about such a strategy given Luanda's inability to defeat UNITA in the past, when it had up to 30,000 Cubans to bolster its cause. [REDACTED]

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16. In the event dos Santos assembled a coalition which was prepared to move on the US Namibia package and reconcile with UNITA, the Soviets could:

- Use disinformation and propaganda and active measures to exploit Angolan fears that Pretoria and the US are colluding to force a UNITA-MPLA coalition government (or even worse, a UNITA seizure of power) in Luanda.*
- Press SWAPO to step up its activities inside Namibia in hopes of turning Pretoria sour on a Namibia settlement.
- Encourage or promote a coup in Luanda, in hopes that a successful power-grab by pro-Soviet hardliners would result in a more confrontational approach toward South Africa and the SWAPO issue.

Disinformation might succeed, given the historical suspicion and distrust between Pretoria and its Black African neighbors. On the other hand, it would probably be ineffective if both Luanda and Pretoria were determined to reach a settlement. The Namibian insurgents would welcome additional Soviet arms support to step up their activities; Moscow, however, would have difficulty supplying SWAPO without its traditional Angolan conduit. Even if a pro-Soviet coup succeeded, it might further split the party and weaken the military, with the attendant effect of strengthening the position of Savimbi and his UNITA insurgents. [REDACTED]

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17. These options, however, fail to take Angola beyond the basic dilemmas that prompted it to respond to South African overtures in the first place. If the USSR succeeded in destroying the recent gains, South Africa could resume its pressure on Luanda by re-entering southern Angola and stepping up aid to UNITA, which, in turn, would create a security crisis much like the one which prompted Moscow to send record levels of arms to Luanda in 1983. Moscow may be prepared to up the military ante--as it warned the South Africans last November--in part

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because Luanda's oil earnings have minimized Soviet and Cuban financial costs in Angola. The Soviets are unlikely, however, to pick up the economic assistance burdens as the Angolan economy becomes a total shambles. [REDACTED]

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18. We believe that if the Angolans resolve their internal debate on Namibia and decide to proceed with the US package settlement--even one which led to a reconciliation with UNITA--the Soviets would try to dissuade them, but would ultimately bow to Luanda's wishes. The Soviets presumably would seek strong assurances that Luanda would retain its leftist political orientation and its close bilateral ties to the USSR. In that case, Moscow would continue its military assistance relationship to maintain a stake in Angola. [REDACTED]

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19. Moscow probably would seek to put a positive face on such a settlement, noting Luanda's continued leftist orientation, US recognition of the MPLA (albeit in a coalition with UNITA), and the honorable intentions of the Cubans, claiming that they had eliminated the South African security threat and then left when requested to do so. Moscow might go so far as to claim that the Namibia settlement represented a victory for the Cubans and the MPLA. While continuing to cultivate Luanda, the Soviets would turn their attention to independent Namibia--presuming a SWAPO electoral win--in pursuit of new opportunities for influence and penetration. [REDACTED]

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20. There is some slight evidence that the Soviets may be positioning themselves for such an eventuality. In December, for example, officials from the Africa Institute and the Foreign Ministry told a visiting US academic that a military solution was not possible in Angola and that peace could only succeed with the formation of a coalition--though both officials had doubts about Savimbi's role in such a scenario. Increasing candor in the Soviet press about Angola's precarious economic condition seemingly suggests that Moscow recognizes that the MPLA may take some dramatic steps to resolve an increasingly untenable position. [REDACTED]

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21. In comparison to Angola, Moscow's future options in Mozambique are much more limited as a result of Machel's dramatic about-face in his dealings with South Africa. Still, the friendly reception accorded Machel during his February trip to Moscow reflects the USSR's desire to maintain a role and presence in Mozambique. We believe the Soviets will try to sustain the military assistance relationship--as they have in Tanzania and Guinea--despite the recent setback to their interests. It is unlikely, however, that they will make new economic assistance

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commitments while Machel continues to accommodate Pretoria. Moscow, for example, has shown little sympathy for Mozambique's plight during the current drought; in contrast, the Soviets have highlighted recent food aid commitments to the Sandinista regime in Managua. [redacted]

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Containing the Problem

22. Elsewhere in southern Africa, Moscow will try to foment and exploit new tensions to undermine South African diplomacy and to sustain the long-term struggle against white minority rule in Pretoria. Toward this end, the Soviets will try to channel additional assistance to SWAPO and the ANC wherever possible. Moscow, for example, could try to use its diplomatic presence in Botswana to facilitate efforts to support the ANC. [redacted]

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Impact of Soviet Moves on the Soviet-Cuban Relationship

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24. We believe Havana would ultimately bend to Moscow's wishes on the Angolan situation, whether it be to send additional combat troops or to disengage from Angola entirely. Although tensions and differences could emerge if, for example, Castro felt the USSR had sold out in Angola or used the Cuban troop issue as a pawn in the bigger game of US-Soviet relations, the Soviet-Cuban relationship would remain largely unchanged because Havana's economic and military dependence upon the Soviet Union is so great. [redacted]

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