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Special National Intelligence Estimate

Soviet Military Support to Angola: Intentions and Prospects

Key Judgments

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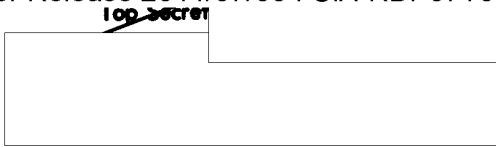
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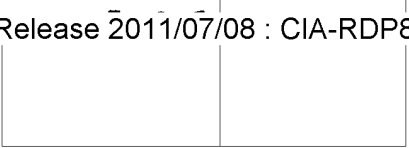


SNIE 71/11-85/W/S

**SOVIET MILITARY SUPPORT
TO ANGOLA: INTENTIONS
AND PROSPECTS
KEY JUDGMENTS**



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KEY JUDGMENTS

We believe that the improved performance of the Angolan Army against UNITA insurgents this year probably reflects in part an increased Soviet role in the planning and direction of the recent offensive as well as the effects of large amounts of Soviet arms delivered since 1983. Although comprehensive evidence is lacking to substantiate UNITA and South African allegations of this expanded role in the recent offensive, we believe that this upgrade in Soviet military activity is logical on the basis of the failure of the Angolan Armed Forces (FAPLA) to perform credibly in offensives over the last 9 years.

The probable increase in Soviet military involvement in the Angolan war should be kept in perspective. We believe it represents:

- A logical expansion of the long-established advisory role played by the 1,000 to 1,200 Soviet military advisers in Angola.

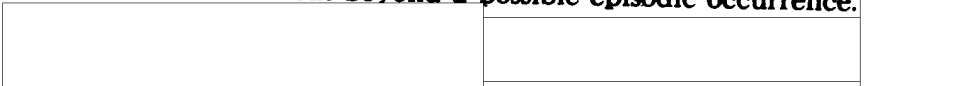


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The increase probably amounts to greater involvement of Soviet advisers in planning operations as well as more demanding supervision of FAPLA-executed combat and logistic operations.

- A sense of impatience with Cuban and MPLA surrogates and clients, who for 9 years have failed to inflict a serious reverse on UNITA, which until recently had been increasingly successful in the field.
- A Soviet judgment that the risks and costs of an increased role in the planning and direction of the offensive were low.
- The determination of the present Soviet leadership to continue to protect the Soviet investment in Angola's Marxist-Leninist regime.

The enhanced Soviet role does not represent, in our view, a takeover of the direction of the counterinsurgency effort, nor is it intended to gain some short-term advantage in East-West negotiations. We do not believe allegations of actual Soviet—particularly pilot—participation in combat beyond a possible episodic occurrence.



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During the recent offensive, the Angolan Army was able to penetrate insurgent-held territory, overcome UNITA forces in battles, and take positions defended by insurgents—goals it had largely failed to achieve in previous offensives. The Angolan Army attacks were halted by UNITA counterattacks and unprecedented South African airstrikes. Angolan Army military gains, however, do not presage the demise of UNITA—which is far from beaten—but they will improve the government forces' morale and heighten Luanda's confidence that it can, over the long run, handle the UNITA challenge.

Although the chances of a Soviet-South African confrontation rose during the offensive, we do not believe the Soviets attempted to interdict South African aircraft. The Soviets seem to have underestimated Pretoria's willingness to use its airpower to halt the Angolan advance. They apparently chose not to challenge the South Africans, judging that perhaps they did not have air supremacy.

FAPLA will probably use the next few months to consolidate its gains, rest its troops, and prepare for next year's operations. The Soviets will assist them in assessing the results of the recent offensive, implementing necessary changes, and improving training and recruitment. Moscow is also likely to replace weapons lost by Luanda, provide additional arms aid, including air defense weapons intended to deter South Africa from future activity over Angola, and may provide additional advisers.

The political relations between Moscow and Luanda are not likely to constrain current or projected Soviet military assistance. While differences exist between the MPLA leadership and the USSR and periodically flare up, we have not seen these differences affect the military relationship. The MPLA is likely to continue to pursue the military option against UNITA over the next 12 months, thereby enhancing this relationship.

We believe the preferred Soviet counter to South African air involvement will be a southward and eastward expansion of the integrated air defense line running from Namibe to Menongue. This combination of modern surface-to-air missiles, antiaircraft artillery, radars, and airfields with high-performance fighters has already had a deterrent effect on South African operations. As a result, we expect to see continued improvements around Cuito Cuanavale in southeastern Angola as this area is incorporated into the air defense network, perhaps to include the permanent assignment of advanced fighter aircraft there.

We believe the extensive Soviet advisory involvement will continue as Luanda renews its offensive against UNITA in the spring or summer of 1986. Luanda may well again target Mavinga, and it may also

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attempt to retake UNITA-held areas of Moxico Province. Moscow, which believes its essential interests are served by Luanda's continuing military dependence on the USSR, will probably perceive no need to intervene directly in the conflict and risk a wider war, as long as FAPLA is doing reasonably well, and it may counsel the Angolans to forgo operations near the Namibian border to avoid provoking South Africa.

If the government forces do directly threaten UNITA's survival, the South Africans are likely to respond with airstrikes and possibly commit some of their unconventional or reconnaissance forces. Angolan pressure on Moscow for more direct assistance would be certain to increase. We believe the USSR would prefer to avoid direct confrontation with South Africa, but the Soviets would consider taking a more direct role in operations if they believed the South Africans posed an immediate threat to the viability of major FAPLA units. We believe the Soviets would countenance use of Cuban-flown combat aircraft to defend against expanded South African air operations. Beyond episodic actions, however, we do not believe Moscow would allow Soviet pilots to become regularly engaged in combat operations.

UNITA could abandon semiconventional warfare and rely more on guerrilla tactics, as the South Africans are advising. Such actions could at least reduce the effectiveness of FAPLA's next offensive and might set the stage for a UNITA reversal of this year's losses. A more active Cuban role in air and ground operations and increased Soviet advisory involvement in coordinating counterinsurgency operations would become more likely in this eventuality.

The Soviets will seek to gain propaganda advantage from Luanda's military successes and will continue their efforts to discredit UNITA as a puppet of South Africa and imperialism. Moscow is likely to seek to isolate Angola from substantive discussions in East-West diplomacy, repeating its assertion that the United States and the USSR have no vital interests there and that southern African questions should not be allowed to complicate more important issues in the bilateral relationship.

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