

CHRISTIAN SCIENCE MONITOR
30 January 1986

OPINION

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Why should the US back Jonas Savimbi?

THE newest new thing in Washington these days is Jonas Savimbi.

A number of Washington politicians, including Democratic Congressman Claude Pepper of Florida and Republican Congressman Jack Kemp of New York, are pushing to persuade the Reagan administration to put up money for a major campaign of United States support for Mr. Savimbi and his guerrilla movement in Angola.

Jonas Savimbi was in Washington this week as part of the campaign to organize money and guns for his war on the government of Angola.

Mr. Savimbi and his cause are not new. He has been a colorful feature in Angola politics since 1961. First, he sided with Holden Roberto, who was backed, more or less, by the US Central Intelligence Agency as a possible successor to Portuguese rule in Angola. The Soviets in those early days picked as their candidate an outfit calling itself the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola, or MPLA.

The Holden-Savimbi group started its operations from the Congo, now called Zaire, as a guerrilla force operating against the Portuguese government still controlling Angola. These two men had a breakup in 1964. Savimbi formed a new organization calling itself UNITA, National Union for the Total Independence of Angola.

By 1975, when the Portuguese decided to get out and grant independence, Savimbi was in the field with a substantial irregular army fighting against the Soviet-supported MPLA.

The Soviets pulled a fast one. Washington woke up one day to discover that Moscow had organized a major airlift of Cuban troops to Angola to fight alongside the MPLA. Henry Kissinger was then secretary of state. He asked for money from Congress to back

the Roberto and Savimbi forces. Congress at that time was in no mood for any foreign adventures and said no.

Mr. Kissinger warned of dire consequences, should the MPLA win with Soviet and Cuban backing. Congress declined to worry. The MPLA won. The Cubans (25,000) and Soviets (500) are still there, but so are several American and other Western commercial companies. The bulk of Angola's trade is with the West. The US is the largest customer, taking much Angolan oil. Portugal is the largest supplier. The

refineries that ship the oil to the US are policed by Cuban soldiers.

The arrangement has been satisfactory to the Western commercial interests handling most of Angola's exports and imports, but there is a political anomaly. The Angolan government does most of its business with the West but is supported by Cuban and Soviet troops.

The continued existence of this anomaly has caught the attention of the frustrated and disappointed "new conservatives" in the Reagan constituency. They are the most unhappy people in Washington. Their champion has spent more than five years of his presi-



Jonas Savimbi

dency building US military power, hence the ability to pursue a forward and interventionist foreign policy. What have they got to show for it?

From their point of view nothing, except for tiny Grenada.

True, Mr. Reagan has just had a double carrier task force parading up and down the Libyan coast to impress (it is hoped) Muammar Qaddafi. True, some think that the military buildup is the reason Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev is beginning to talk seriously about arms control. But if you come down to actual real estate, what has Mr. Reagan taken from the Soviets with all his new guns?

The answer is still Grenada, a speck of an island in the Caribbean with scarcely 100,000 people on it.

These new conservatives want action, and in a lot of places. To them, Angola is an excellent place to start, because Jonas Savimbi is there with a force in the field, fighting against the MPLA and its Cuban backers.

But what would be the result of helping Mr. Savimbi, who is already supplied and subsidized generously by white South Africa? Answer: US aid to Mr. Savimbi would probably be answered by more Soviet aid to the MPLA and a consolidation of popular support in Angola for the MPLA.

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