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✓ **CORD MEYER**

# Tugging at the rug under Savimbi

**A**s the Reagan administration staggers under the impact of new revelations about its mishandling of the Iranian affair, there is a real danger that some of the president's most promising foreign policy initiatives may be lost in the wreckage and that the baby may be thrown out with the bath water.

For example, a partisan group of congressional Democrats are moving to introduce legislation that if passed would cut off any further aid to Jonas Savimbi's UNITA guerrillas in Angola and would call for U.S. recognition of the Marxist MPLA regime supported by Soviet arms and 36,000 Cuban combat troops.

To counter this threat to President Reagan's covert program of \$15 million in military assistance to UNITA, passed last year by a bipartisan congressional majority, Mr. Savimbi has sent his able secretary for foreign affairs, Pedro Chingunji, to Washington to explain what an enormous difference the American arms and training have made and how vital it is to continue this modest assistance.

On the basis of hard intelligence, State Department officials and Pentagon analysts are in agreement that Mr. Chingunji is not exaggerating

when he stresses the beneficial military, political, and economic effects of the U.S. intervention.

On the battlefield, a combination of brilliant strategy and effective American anti-aircraft and anti-tank weaponry has now removed entirely the danger that a Soviet-directed offensive with Angolan and Cuban troops might overwhelm UNITA's main southern bases. Critical to this outcome has been the success of the UNITA guerrillas in shooting down 41 Soviet planes and helicopters with Stinger missiles, while destroying dozens of tanks and armored cars with anti-tank rockets.

With Cuban pilots refusing to fly low-altitude missions, the Soviet commanders have had to rely on

badly trained Angolan and Ethiopian pilots. Making the most of this opportunity, President Savimbi has launched a guerrilla offensive northward, and both MPLA and Cuban troops have been forced to fall back to defend isolated towns and diamond mines.

Although the Soviets have replaced most of the plane and tank losses, American officials confirm UNITA reports that there are clear signs of bad blood between the Cuban and MPLA troops and even some fighting between them.

Among the Angolan population under the control of President Jose Eduardo dos Santos's MPLA regime in Luanda, there is growing resentment against the special privileges enjoyed by the Russians and the Cubans. Mr. Chingunji also reports that the effect of U.S. aid has been to convince many MPLA leaders that a military solution based on Soviet arms is no longer possible and that a negotiated settlement with UNITA is necessary, combined with the departure of Cuban troops.

**S**tate Department officials take seriously claims by the UNITA leadership that the political tides in Europe and Africa seem to be shifting in UNITA's favor as the result of the American intervention. Mr. Savimbi met with Cabinet ministers on his recent public visit to France, and the leaders of the ruling Social Democratic Party in Portugal are on record as favoring UNITA.

In Africa, the front-line states still publicly support the MPLA and they condemn Mr. Savimbi for trading with South Africa. But in a recent

fact-finding tour, a high-ranking State Department official found this front-line support for the MPLA to be "perfunctory." In at least six other black African states, there is strong backing for Mr. Savimbi's proposal that a coalition government be formed that would invite the Cubans to leave.

Although it is widely accepted that the Soviets and Cubans would have no choice but to pick up their arms and go home, if confronted with an official request by the MPLA regime in Luanda, the fear is that the MPLA government is so penetrated by Soviet and Cuban agents that they would be able to mount a pre-emptive coup to prevent a deal with UNITA.

As both Reagan officials and UNITA leaders see it, there is therefore no alternative but to increase steadily the cost to the Soviets and the Cubans of their occupation of Angola until a face-saving exit becomes the only way out.

Within Cuba itself, perhaps the last straw for the Cuban people may be the news from Radio Marti that the Castro regime's failure to advise, warn, and test has made almost inevitable an AIDS epidemic spread by some of the 300,000 Cuban soldiers who have returned from Africa over the last 10 years.

The epidemic has only begun its course and, as it spreads, the mounting concern of parents and teen-age sons should put irresistible pressure on Castro to cut his losses and get out of Angola.