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By Edward Neilan

**Angola poses test  
of Reagan resolve**

When the rainy season ends next March on the inhospitable landscape of Angola, a muddy quagmire will slowly dry into loose, sandy soil.

The surface of roadways and of the flat, open land dotted with scrub brush will have hardened enough to support columns of Soviet-built T-62 tanks.

Early in that month, the Marxist MPLA government's troops, backed by Cuban forces and directed by Soviet battle commanders, are certain to launch another offensive against the pro-Western insurgents of the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA) led by Jonas Savimbi.

By then, the Reagan administration will have demonstrated whether the Reagan Doctrine and its vow to help freedom fighters are simply empty rhetoric or a blueprint for American policy and a chance for an indelible entry in the history books by this president.

Democrats and Republicans in Congress, in mounting numbers, are emerging from the Angola debate in favor of turning that rhetoric into policy.

Perplexingly, only the administration — and particularly the State Department — stands in the way.

That analysis, by Heritage Foundation visiting fellow William W. Pascoe III in a recent paper "Angola Tests the Reagan Doctrine," appears to be an accurate assessment of the situation on the ground in Angola and in the snowballing debate here.

Another of those classic inside-the-administration battles is taking shape over Angola among the president's top advisers. Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger and CIA Director William Casey are pushing for substantial covert aid to UNITA. They recognize that since 1976, Angola has been the key to Moscow's strategy for the region, providing a base for

**SWAPO guerrillas to destabilize Namibia.**

Inexplicably, Secretary of State George Shultz — who seemingly spends more time planning redecoration of his suite of offices than in sorting out African policies — is actively opposing bipartisan congressional measures to aid UNITA. He has gone so far as to write House Minority Leader Robert Michel of Illinois asking him to block the legislation.

In the House, legislation asking for \$27 million in humanitarian aid was introduced Oct. 1 and a bill asking for a similar amount in military aid was introduced Oct. 24.

The combat has been fierce in Angola, and Soviet strategists are not likely to accept another defeat such as the one Luanda government forces sustained last September.

Late in the month, the Luanda government claimed that Mr. Savimbi had abandoned his base at Jamba and had withdrawn into neighboring Namibia. The UNITA leader denied this and on Oct. 8 brought Western journalists to the Lomba River to see the remains of a decimated MPLA mechanized column. UNITA had blunted the Angolan offensive 20 miles northwest of Mavinga, a key UNITA stronghold, and had forced the MPLA to retreat.

For the moment, at least, Mr. Savimbi had won.

The latest intelligence reaching Washington suggests that Soviet planners may use a break in the rainy season to launch another attack — probably relying heavily on Soviet MiG-23 jet fighters, SU-22 fighter bombers and MI-24 helicopter gunships — to deal Mr. Savimbi's forces a retaliatory strike. The attack would presumably come on the eve of the MPLA Second Party Congress and be aimed at dissuading some moderate delegates to that congress from voting to negotiate with UNITA.

Support for UNITA is in the national interest of the United States. A display of unanimity on the issue among U.S. government executive and legislative bodies would go a long way toward correcting the image abroad of an American leadership divided on foreign policy.

*Edward Neilan is foreign editor of The Times.*