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Savimbi may request assistance from U.S. for rebels in Angola

By Michael Sullivan
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MAVINGA, Angola — With the repeal of the Clark Amendment, which barred American support to his UNITA guerrilla movement, Jonas Savimbi says he will ask Washington for aid to support his insurgency.

Mr. Savimbi, dressed in camouflage uniform with a Soviet-designed assault rifle slung over his shoulder, spoke to journalists here after a recent heavy offensive by government forces. He said UNITA, the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola, turned back the offensive with the help of record quantities of aid sent by some African and Arab states.

Mr. Savimbi said he is talking to U.S. officials about the possibility of obtaining American aid in the future.

"I am making an effort to make my case known," Mr. Savimbi said. "The sympathy is there, I can assure you."

He said UNITA officials have visited Washington recently to sound out the administration and Congress on the possibility of receiving assistance, which he said would be similar to the aid UNITA is receiving from South Africa — "humanitarian, material and moral."

The United States was prohibited from aiding Mr. Savimbi's UNITA movement under the Clark Amendment, which was repealed earlier this year. As soon as the repeal took effect at the beginning of October, Rep. Claude Pepper, a Florida Democrat, introduced a bill to give \$27 million in humanitarian assistance to UNITA — the same amount given to the contras in Nicaragua.

[A State Department official said yesterday that while American officials maintain contact with UNITA, "we have not received any official request for aid." The spokesman, who declined to be identified, said the United States believes the conflict in Angola should be resolved through negotiations, not force.

[UNITA's secretary for foreign affairs, Jeremias K. Chitunda, said in Washington that while the group would be happy to receive the humanitarian assistance proposed by Mr. Pepper, he believes the United States should supply military assistance as well.

["The whole concept of giving humanitarian aid appears to underlie a sort of defeatist attitude," he said.]

In his briefing here, Mr. Savimbi said the recent government offensive against UNITA, called the strongest challenge the movement has seen in its 10 years, was aimed at more than destroying the organization. He said the attack, commanded partly by Soviet officers, was intended to dissuade the United States from getting involved in Angola in the face of a stepped-up Soviet commitment in the country.

"It is my conviction the Russians wanted to test the will of the West," Mr. Savimbi said of the latest offensive. UNITA claims it beat back the attack, evidently aimed at capturing the move-

ment's headquarters at Jamba in southeastern Angola. It brought journalists on a tour here earlier this week to back up its claim.

The journalists met with a captured Angolan MiG-24 pilot, who spoke fluent Russian and supported claims of increased Soviet involvement in Angolan military operations.

Though Mr. Savimbi said he will seek American support, he said he believes the Gulf Oil facilities in Angola's oil-rich Cabinda Province are "legitimate targets." In any strike at the partly American-owned facilities, he said, UNITA would "be careful not to hurt the Americans."

Mr. Savimbi said he "sent some feelers to Gulf" about the oil company's operations in Cabinda, but that the company did not want to talk to him.

The bearded 51-year-old guerrilla campaigner was upbeat during his briefing, held in a recently dug bunker camouflaged by fresh-cut thatch and branches. Dressed in a camouflage uniform and cap in addition to the assault rifle slung over his left shoulder, Mr. Savimbi carried a pearl-handled Colt revolver on his right hip.

While openly acknowledging increased support from South Africa, Mr. Savimbi was adamant that no South African soldiers had been involved in the recent fighting.

"I want to deny" reports of South African military involvement, he said. "We did not need it. We did not request it. South Africa was not prepared to give it.

"It is not troops I needed, I will not ask for troops. . . . My troops are far better," he said.

The Swiss-educated rebel leader was equally adamant that the South African Air Force was not used in defeating the government offensive, which UNITA says it turned back late last month at a battle along the Lomba River northwest of Mavinga.

"I never asked for South African air support," Mr. Savimbi said, saying he doubted the South Africans would provide him with any.

But he said that since the latest attacks were launched in July on two fronts — against the towns of Cazombo and Mavinga — UNITA has received stepped-up direct support not only from Pretoria, but from Arab and black African states. He said he has also received assistance from West European countries that used other nations as intermediaries.

Aid has poured in in the past four weeks, he said, giving UNITA "more sophisticated weapons than in 10 years" of previous fighting.

Most of the new weaponry has been in shipments of 23mm anti-aircraft guns, anti-tank weapons, cannons and mortars, half of which came directly from South Africa.

"South Africa brought the other weapons [from other countries] to us," Mr. Savimbi said, without revealing which countries sent him support.

At Mavinga, aid that was kept from the

eyes of visitors before was no longer hidden. Journalists were given South African army rations, and crates for 81mm mortars were openly visible.

It appears that the increase in weapons helped UNITA turn the tide against government forces in the battle at Lomba River.

Mr. Savimbi was sharply critical of increased Soviet support for the government of Eduardo dos Santos, and he saw the latest fighting as an indication of more-direct Soviet involvement in Angola.

Intelligence sources have said the latest offensive was directed and coordinated by Soviet officers commanding air and ground operations, and UNITA claims to have killed at least nine Soviets and 38 Cubans in the latest fighting.

The journalists were allowed to talk to a captured Angolan MiG-21 pilot, Francisco Matamba, who confirmed that Soviet pilots now are flying combat missions in Angola to support the Angolan army.

The 22-year-old second lieutenant said he was shot down Oct. 3 near the Lomba River while covering the retreat of a heavy Angolan armored column that had been mauled by UNITA. A major consid-

eration appeared to be keeping any Soviet officers directing the column from being captured by UNITA.

Lt. Matamba, his right arm in a sling because he was injured while parachuting from his MiG, said he had trained three years in the Soviet Union and flew 45 combat missions, 20 of which were against Mavinga. Mavinga has been bombed by MiGs for several weeks, although there appears to be little if any damage to UNITA positions and no damage to the airstrip.

Lt. Matamba said MiG-23 fighters from Lubango and four Su-22 ground attack fighters from Luanda had been moved to Menongue to support the current offensive. The MiGs, he said were flown by Cubans, Russians and Angolans, while the Su-22s were piloted by Angolans and Soviets.

There were, he said, at least three Soviet MiG-21 pilots based at Menongue, as well as Soviet radar operators.

Concerning South African air involvement, Lt. Matamba said radar operators "told us South African planes had been seen," but that he had never seen any himself.

Washington Times staff writers in Washington contributed to this report.