

Director of Central Intelligence

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Special National Intelligence Estimate

Angola: Short-Term Prospects for UNITA

Key Judgments

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SNIE 71-86W

February 1986

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THE NATIONAL FOREIGN INTELLIGENCE BOARD CONCURS.

The following intelligence organizations participated in the preparation of the Estimate:

The Central Intelligence Agency, the Defense Intelligence Agency, the National Security Agency, and the intelligence organization of the Department of State.

Also Participating:

The Assistant Chief of Staff for Intelligence, Department of the Army

The Director of Naval Intelligence, Department of the Navy

The Assistant Chief of Staff, Intelligence, Department of the Air Force

The Director of Intelligence, Headquarters, Marine Corps



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**ANGOLA: SHORT-TERM
PROSPECTS FOR UNITA**

KEY JUDGMENTS

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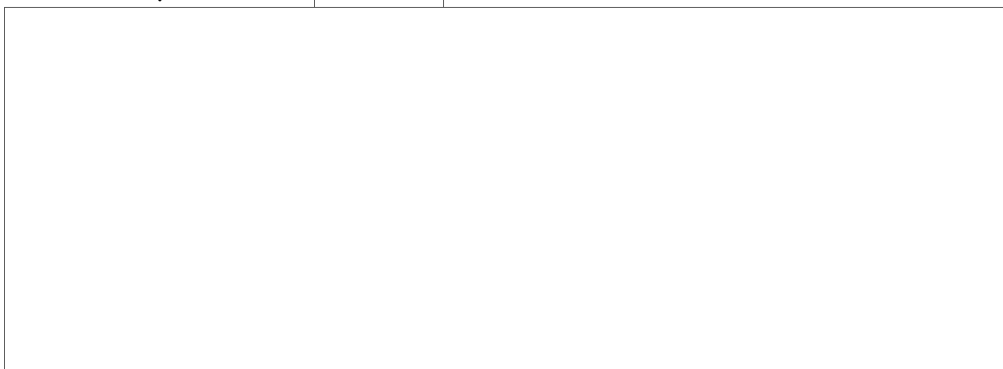
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SCOPE NOTE

We have addressed the significant augmentation of Soviet and Cuban support to Angola and prospects for the future Soviet and Cuban roles in Angola in two recent publications.¹ Neither specifically analyzed the prospects for UNITA (National Union for the Total Independence of Angola) in depth. Given the considerable Community and customer interest in this subject, this Estimate looks at the remainder of 1986 from the perspective of UNITA's prospects. It updates the judgments contained in these two previous publications, with which it is essentially consistent.

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KEY JUDGMENTS

The military campaign for the remainder of 1986 is unlikely to alter the military picture profoundly in favor of either UNITA or the MPLA (Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola). [redacted]

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The Angolan armed forces (FAPLA) are preparing another major offensive, expected to begin after the rainy season ends in April, which will be the dominant factor in the military situation for most of 1986. We expect FAPLA to advance along two axes with the UNITA-held town of Mavinga as a major objective. Because of logistic, terrain, and weather constraints, the offensive may well be slow in developing. UNITA has been making extensive defensive preparations, bringing in additional troops, and ambushing the government's supply convoys. Although the full extent of the FAPLA attack has not yet been discerned, it will be at least comparable to the 1985 effort (about 10,000 men). [redacted]

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Key Variables

We see four key variables setting the parameters of military action:

- UNITA tactics and strategy.
- FAPLA weaponry and performance.
- The South African role in combat.
- The level of Soviet/Cuban support to FAPLA. [redacted]

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Most Likely Outcome

Although these factors are volatile and interrelated, it is our judgment that the most likely outcome will be a relative standoff, with tactical gains and losses on both sides throughout the year. [redacted]

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UNITA claims to be prepared for the forthcoming FAPLA offensive, and Savimbi has declared that UNITA will utilize a mobile, fluid defense to blunt it. UNITA is also undertaking harassment attacks around the area of FAPLA buildup to try to delay the offensive from forming and is planning new endeavors in northern Angola. We believe that FAPLA's 1985 gains resulted from the fielding of improved weaponry and improved performance because of Soviet training and increased Soviet direction as well as from UNITA's underestimation of

[redacted]

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its opponents. FAPLA's close air support and greater use of armored vehicles will continue to give UNITA problems in 1986 but will probably not prove a decisive advantage in the overall campaign. It remains to be seen whether UNITA, with better preparation and reversion to a more mobile defense strategy to which UNITA is more accustomed, can reestablish its overall superiority in terms of basic troop combat capability and offset the improved FAPLA performance.

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We expect the Soviet involvement in military support to FAPLA to approximate 1985 levels, albeit with possible new surges in military equipment deliveries once the major campaign begins.

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The Cuban role also will probably remain similar to 1985, although we envision more Cuban-piloted air sorties in support of the offensive, and we anticipate that Cuban-piloted MIGs would attempt to react more aggressively to any South African air intervention, raising the potential for direct air combat.

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We cannot judge how the tactical gains and losses will play out in the major campaign in the southeast. Although Mavinga could fall, we believe the major FAPLA offensive in the southeast will probably be contained short of Jamba. UNITA will also continue, if not step up, its activity in northern Angola. We believe, however, that there is a heightened risk that the Cubans and South Africans could be drawn into direct conflict.

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We see two tactical possibilities that would have some impact on UNITA's overall prospects:

- Should FAPLA garner even limited battlefield successes, such as the temporary capture of Mavinga or other towns in the southeast, it will reinforce the MPLA policy of seeking a military solution to the UNITA insurgency, much as the capture of Cazombo by FAPLA did in 1985. Such successes would be flaunted by the MPLA as "major victories," not only bolstering FAPLA-MPLA morale but also damaging UNITA's prospects in the eyes of many international observers. Moreover, it would be tactically significant if FAPLA could not only take but hold Mavinga, and to a lesser degree Lumbala N'guimbo or Cangamba, where there are airstrips. This could enable FAPLA to interdict UNITA supply lines to the north and provide sites for supporting air attacks deep into UNITA's heartland.

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— On the other hand, should UNITA stop the FAPLA offensive short of Mavinga, avoid the loss of other major towns, and inflict new losses on FAPLA elsewhere, this could revive doubts among some MPLA leaders as to the efficacy of a military solution, as happened in 1983-84. We do not believe that such doubts would have a payoff this year in terms of changing MPLA policy regarding talks with UNITA or the MPLA's making meaningful concessions on Cuban troop withdrawal. We see the prospects for UNITA-MPLA talks in 1986 as virtually nil and the likelihood of meaningful MPLA concessions on Cuban troop withdrawal, a requisite to advance the negotiations, as remote. Should UNITA blunt the offensive without losing major towns and make gains elsewhere, this would heighten UNITA morale and raise the estimation of UNITA's prospects in the eyes of many international observers. UNITA's prospects in 1986 for gaining additional external support appear quite modest, however.

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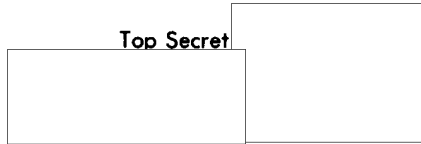
Alternative Outcomes

The volatility of the key variables leads us to envision two alternative outcomes, which we consider less likely but possible:

- **Greater FAPLA threat scenario.** If FAPLA produces unexpected successes in its campaign and also provokes extensive South African air or ground interventions in combat, Washington would share the effects of widespread condemnation of the South African intervention, which the Soviets would quite likely succeed in associating with the United States. Although we envision any such South African intervention as immediately successful in blocking a FAPLA advance, the intervention—especially using air assets—would increase the risk of air combat with Cuban-piloted MIGs. The intervention might also compel the Soviets and Cubans to increase support to FAPLA, including increasing equipment deliveries and taking more measures to negate the effects of South African intervention. This scenario would create the framework for heightened prospects of subsequent Cuban-South African military clashes—both within and beyond the time frame of this Estimate. The Soviets might well deliver nonspecific private or public warnings to Pretoria or Washington should South African intervention seriously threaten FAPLA's prospects.
- **Greater UNITA success scenario.** Should UNITA do better than expected in blunting the impending FAPLA offensive and

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gaining successes elsewhere, including recapturing ground lost in 1985, the Soviets and Cubans would face tough choices as to how to retrieve the fortunes of FAPLA. We believe in this circumstance a new surge of Soviet military deliveries would occur, and the Cubans might well be forced to utilize the 21,000-man Cuban ground force in Angola to bear at least selectively some of the brunt of fighting UNITA.



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