

SECRET

NEO/LA

R98

27 July 1977

INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

Activities of the Cuban Military in Angola

From March 1976 to June 1977

KEY POINTS

Cuban combat forces in Angola during the past 15 months have been heavily involved in joint operations with government forces in attempting to extend the regime's authority throughout the countryside.

-Operations undertaken include the attempted opening of the Benguela Railroad and the protection of important elements of the Angolan economy, such as the oil industry in Cabinda and the coffee-producing regions of the north.

-Despite these efforts, the overall security situation has deteriorated throughout major portions of the countryside.

The Cubans have not succeeded in converting the Angolan military forces (FAPLA) from an insurgent force to a conventional military force, and they are not optimistic that they will be able to do so in the near future.

This memorandum was prepared in the Office of Regional and Political Analysis and coordinated within CIA. Questions and comments may be addressed to

25X

25X

SECRET

SECRET

-The Cubans are disillusioned with the capabilities and potential of FAPLA.

-Growing security requirements are hampering Cuban participation in the training of FAPLA.

Havana's broad-based Angolan involvement has tested a wide range of Cuban military capabilities.

-A large number of regular and reserve personnel have gained valuable combat experience in conventional and counterinsurgency operations.

-Cuba's civil airline and its expanding merchant fleet have contributed heavily to the military effort by carrying out efficient transatlantic logistics operations.

The Cuban military presence has recently been augmented by upwards of 5,000 men (raising the total Cuban presence in Angola to as many as 18,500), and it may well increase even further given the expansion of anti-government insurgency and the continuing ineffectiveness of FAPLA.



Introduction

Since early 1976, when UNITA and FNLA military forces ceased to pose a conventional military threat to the MPLA and the South African expeditionary group withdrew from southern Angola, Cuba has maintained a large military presence in Angola. Cuba's armed forces have performed a wide range of duties in the region, highlighted by a primary role in security activities and a major effort to create an effective Angolan army. On a lesser scale, the Cubans have been involved in creating an embryonic Angolan airforce and navy. The greater than anticipated responsibility for internal security stems largely from the ineptitude and corruption within the Angolan military and police services.

There are a number of additional aspects related to the Cuban presence in Angola. Cubans are providing training, limited amounts of hardware, and logistic support to SWAPO insurgents operating from southern Angola into neighboring Namibia. Similar aid is reportedly being channeled to ZAPU. Moreover, despite official Cuban denials, the Cubans were involved in the preparations for the Kantangan attack against Zaire in March 1977. In addition, Cuban military personnel are gaining combat experience in both conventional and counterinsurgency operations.

FAPLA/Cuban Counterinsurgency Efforts Against UNITA

The initial FAPLA/Cuban drives against UNITA in May and June 1976 were aimed at extending their control beyond the urban centers of Bie (formerly Silva Porto), Huambo, and Luena (formerly Luso), located along the Benguela railroad, and preventing UNITA from disrupting traffic on this vital transport link. A joint FAPLA/Cuban force of 5,000 to 6,000 men using T-34 tanks and armored cars reportedly participated in these efforts. Close air support was afforded by Soviet-supplied aircraft piloted by Cubans.

--	--	--

25X1

The use of aircraft became increasingly important for counterinsurgency operations in southern Angola. Fighter aircraft from regional airbases such as Luena and Menongue (formerly Serpa Pinto) bombed and strafed suspected enemy concentrations or positions prior to ground force attacks. The persistent ambushing of government convoys and the lack of adequate surface transportation routes increased the importance of air operations ferrying FAPLA/Cuban troops and resupplying isolated garrisons. As a result, Soviet AN-12 (Cub) transports were dispatched from the USSR to Angola to help move supplies from Luanda to airfields in the interior. This was in addition to the use of AN-26s which were already in Angola's air inventory.

By July the focus of counterinsurgency operations had shifted farther south with the emphasis on attempting to clear UNITA from Cunene Province. In August a second offensive, dubbed "Operation Kakauenga," was initiated farther eastward in Cuando-Cubango Province. These operations continued into the fall, with the additional objective of establishing base camps and operational zones for SWAPO insurgents along the Namibian border.

Despite the Cuban-FAPLA actions, Jonas Savimbi's UNITA forces demonstrated a continuing ability to disrupt the Benguela Railroad and to counter the FAPLA/Cuban effort to pacify those areas that have traditionally supported his movement. From late September through November, UNITA actually went on the offensive and forced government and Cuban troops to evacuate eastern Moxico Province, including a withdrawal from the garrison at Lumbala (formerly Gago Coutinho) to Luena. N'Giva (formerly Pereira de Eca) was attacked and reportedly held for three days in mid-November by UNITA before being recaptured by FAPLA/Cuban forces following intense artillery shelling and air raids.

Cuban and government efforts to open and secure the Benguela Railroad reportedly have been largely ineffective, and portions of the 600-mile line remains inoperable. Furthermore, major garrisons such as Huambo and Luena have come under frequent rocket attacks by UNITA. Several non-UNITA sources have echoed Savimbi's claim that the joint FAPLA/Cuban offensives have been ineffectual. A [redacted] who spent six months with UNITA states that most of Angola along the Benguela Railroad and to the south, with the exception of the major towns,

25X1

SECRET

is under defacto UNITA control. He maintains that UNITA's force is well armed and disciplined and enjoys the support of the bulk of the population in these regions.

Because of the failure to neutralize UNITA opposition or open the Benguela and southern railroads, FAPLA/Cuban forces have been unable to extend the effective authority of the MPLA government to the countryside. Their failure to check UNITA has resulted in deteriorating morale among those members of Havana's expeditionary force stationed in the south. Extended tours of duty and growing friction with the Angolan populace are additional factors contributing to the lowering of Cuban morale.

Cabinda--Keeping the Oil Flowing

Cabinda, with its refinery and offshore oil wells, poses a particular problem for its FAPLA/Cuban defenders. The focus of Cuban military personnel in the exclave has been on ensuring the continued operation of the Gulf Oil Company facility, the main source of foreign exchange for the government. The bulk of FAPLA/Cuban forces are deployed in defensive positions in and around Cabinda City and the refinery 10 kilometers north of the city. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] artillery and tanks guarding the approaches of the city. In April 1977, [REDACTED] 12 revetted hard-stands had been added at the airfield on the outskirts of Cabinda City. This development suggests that fighter aircraft may soon be sent to Cabinda.

Beyond Cabinda City and the Gulf installation, FAPLA units, generally in company strength and with Cuban advisers, are posted at isolated garrisons within the heavily forested interior of the exclave.

Despite repeated claims by FLEC that it controls more than two thirds of the province, much of the territory is probably not controlled by either side.

Most of FLEC's operations are limited to ambushes, shelling of garrisons, and mining of roads. An exception was the isolation of the government forces at Dinga for several days before Cubans could reinforce the garrison in early

SECRET

SECRET

May of this year. By late May and June, the government, aided by about 1,800 additional Cuban troops was attempting to regain the initiative in the exclave. Two towns occupied by FLEC were recaptured, and FLEC was driven from its provisional headquarters near the Zairian border. These setbacks reportedly have been compounded by FLEC's internal dissension and dwindling amounts of military supplies.

FNLA--Harassment in the North

In the spring of 1976, remnants of the FNLA army operating from the densely forested region of northern Angola and Bas-Zaïre Province in Zaïre, continued to resist FAPLA/Cuban efforts at pacification. The goals and tactics of the FNLA appear to mirror those of UNITA and FLEC. The primary objective of FNLA was to prevent the MPLA from extending its control: tactics employed included ambushing of FAPLA/Cuban convoys on roads in the north, attempting to sabotage the coffee economy in the Uige Plateau, and restricting the movement of FAPLA/Cuban elements to urban areas.

As in the south, the vulnerability of military convoys to ambushes has compelled the FAPLA/Cuban command to use transport aircraft to resupply its troops. An additional supply line was established by using former Portuguese landing craft to move equipment from Luanda to the port at Sovo, (formerly Santo Antonio Do Zaïre) at the mouth of the Zaïre River from where supplies were sent to various FAPLA and Cuban units. The major airbase in the north is the former Portuguese facility at N'gaze. As was the case at Huambo, revetted hardstands capable of accommodating fighter aircraft were identified for the first time in April 1976.

Evaluating Counterinsurgency Campaigns

The largest counterinsurgency campaigns undertaken by the FAPLA/Cuban forces have been against UNITA. These offensives failed to reach their basic objective and in early 1977 encountered strong opposition, leaving government forces largely restricted to a defensive posture within garrisons. In northern Angola, the attempts to eradicate the remnants of the FNLA

SECRET

SECRET

have been equally unsuccessful. Favorable terrain conditions and the ability to take sanctuary in Zaire have aided the FNLA insurgents. Only in Cabinda has the FAPLA/Cuban military effort achieved its more limited goal of defending the Gulf facilities from sabotage and ensuring the continued operation of this vital installation. Even here, however, the FAPLA/Cuban presence is largely confined to urban areas.

Developing Angola's Security Capabilities

A second objective of Cuban military personnel in Angola is the conversion of the MPLA military from an insurgent force to a conventional military institution. An agreement reportedly was reached between Castro and Neto in March 1976 calling for an expanded training role for Cuban military personnel in Angola. In the largest undertaking, the Cubans are providing the FAPLA ground forces with basic training for NCOs and officer candidates and are instructing personnel on the array of weapons provided by the Soviets, ranging from small calibre arms to heavy equipment such as tanks and rocket launchers.

While limited numbers of Angolans are sent to Havana for specialized instruction, most training is conducted within Angola at former Portuguese military installations [redacted]

[redacted] Soviet-type motorized rifle obstacle courses and a training aid commonly seen at army facilities throughout Cuba have been observed at numerous military installations throughout Angola. Other more conventional training aids, such as small-arms firing ranges and driver-training courses, have also been observed.

Limited reporting suggests that the results of the Cuban training program have been far from satisfactory from Havana's point of view. The majority of FAPLA recruits, drawn from the unemployed masses of Angola's urban centers, are illiterate and poorly motivated. Cubans complain that the typical FAPLA soldier lacks the ability and motivation to acquire even rudimentary military skills, let alone the proficiency to operate and maintain sophisticated military hardware. A second problem has been the increased demand for the use of Cuban military personnel and Soviet-supplied hardware in the campaigns against opponents of the MPLA government.

SECRET

Very few details are available on the training of pilots and support personnel of the FAPLA air arm. Although some pilots are sent to the Soviet Union for instruction and others are being trained by Nigerians, Cuban pilots, when not engaged in combat missions, are helping to train Angolan pilots, primarily at the Angolan international airfield at Luanda where the majority of the aircraft and helicopters of the airforce are based.

The airforce training program is probably on a small scale and is not expected to meet with any major success. The remarks of various Cuban officials indicate their belief that Cuban advisers/pilots will be needed for a long period and that there are few Angolans who possess the skills needed to become pilots.

The Cubans have also given specialized training to Angolan security personnel, including those responsible for protecting President Neto, and they have helped maintain law and order in Luanda and other regions of Angola. In addition, the Cubans have reportedly participated in efforts to restore Angola's economy. Cuban military personnel, for example, participated in the coffee and sugar harvests in northern Angola and in attempts to reestablish order in the diamond production area in the northeast.

Assisting Black African Nationalists: The SWAPO Connection

Cuban military personnel in Angola have also given direct support to the insurgent forces of SWAPO that are operating from southern Angola against Namibia. SWAPO defectors have claimed that Cuban cooperation increased following Sam Nujoma's visit to Havana in October 1976. During October and November, joint FAPLA/Cuban/SWAPO offensives were launched in an attempt to remove UNITA elements and the local populace from regions in southern Angola contiguous to the Namibian border. The purpose of these campaigns was to create "safe areas" where SWAPO base camps could be established for training and for preparing for operations into Namibia.

A training and logistics base was reportedly established in the south-central area of Angola, approximately 240 kilometers north of the Namibia border. The decision to create a base so far from the border probably reflects a genuine Cuban

respect for the combat ability of the South African armed forces and concern over potential South African retaliation against SWAPO facilities. The main logistics, supply, and training base for SWAPO was set up at Jamba, which is located on a spur of the southern railroad that connects with the port of Mocamedes. Military equipment for SWAPO is delivered by ship to Mocamedes, moved by rail to Jamba, and then trucked to N'Giva for distribution to base camps along the Namibian border. Basic training and weapons training has reportedly been conducted at Menongue, another MPLA-held city on the southern railroad.

A number of base camps from which SWAPO units infiltrate Namibia were established closer to the border.

--	--	--

25X1

Testing of Cuban Military Capabilities

The Angolan episode, viewed solely in a military context, has provided counterinsurgency and conventional combat experience for both regular and reserve personnel of the Cuban armed forces. The amount of equipment and manpower committed to this venture has probably far surpassed the original estimate of officials in both Havana and Luanda. As a result, Cuban capabilities, ranging from transoceanic movement of men and hardware to combined-arms operations in an unfamiliar environment, have been thoroughly tested.

The initial challenge of transporting Havana's expeditionary force across the Atlantic to Angola was met successfully by Cuba's merchant marine and the national airline--Cubana--fulfilled difficult assignments, on time and without accident. Between May 1976 and April 1977, at least 12 vessels were involved in convoy activities and conducted 23 voyages. There was a surge in military shipments in May 1977, when six ships loaded arms, vehicles, and troops at Mariel, and sailed for

Angola. (The time spent in loading these ships in Cuba was markedly less than had been the case previously.) Charter Cubana airline flights using Bristol Britannia and IL-18 (COOT) aircraft were begun as early as September 1975. Carrying capacity was expanded dramatically by employing leased Aeroflot IL-62 aircraft: 155 flights were made between Havana and Luanda from January 1976 through early June 1977. Finally, regularly scheduled Cubana airline service began in June 1976 on a weekly basis using Bristol Britannias.

Although Cubans have previously served in an advisory capacity elsewhere on the African continent, Angola provided the first large-scale battle-testing of regular Cuban armor, artillery, and infantry units. The combat scenarios have ranged from the conventional combined-arms offensives to counterinsurgency search and destroy patrols. Cuban pilots have not engaged in air-to-air combat, but have furnished close air support to FAPLA/Cuban ground forces. Perhaps the greatest challenge has involved logistics. A severely damaged communications and transportation network coupled with harassment of surface routes in certain regions by insurgents has complicated the supply effort. Certain isolated garrisons rely solely upon aircraft for supplies.

Summary

Castro apparently underestimated the Cuban manpower and resources that would be required to maintain and support the Neto regime in Angola after the civil war. While Cuban manpower and firepower proved decisive in gaining victory for the MPLA in conventional warfare, Havana's efforts to counter the insurgency threat of FLEC, FNLA, and UNITA have not had corresponding successes. An anticipated reduction in Cuban combat forces and a gradual replacement of troops by civilian advisers has been scrapped due to a deteriorating security situation. Havana's troop strength, in fact, has increased by as many as 5,000 men since May, raising the total number of Cuban civilian and military personnel to as many as 18,500.

Increased Cuban participation in maintaining security has also been made necessary by the mediocre performance by FAPLA and other Angolan security personnel. The prospect for improved performance by FAPLA, resulting from Cuban and other

Communist countries' training programs, appears slim in the near future. As a result, the need for continued participation by Cuban personnel in military and security matters will continue for an indefinite period.

25X1

Approved For Release 2006/01/03 : CIA-RDP79R00603A002700040005-7

Approved For Release 2006/01/03 : CIA-RDP79R00603A002700040005-7