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Angola: Prospects for MPLA-UNITA[®] Reconciliation

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An Intelligence Assessment



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*ALA 85-10017L
February 1985*

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Angola: Prospects for MPLA-UNITA Reconciliation

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An Intelligence Assessment

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This paper was prepared by
Africa Division, Office of African and Latin
American Analysis. It was coordinated with the
Directorate of Operations. Comments and queries are
welcome and may be addressed to the Chief,
Regional Issues Branch, ALA,

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[Redacted]

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**Angola:
Prospects for MPLA-UNITA
Reconciliation** [Redacted]

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Key Judgments

*Information available
as of 28 January 1985
was used in this report.*

In the last two years, UNITA's military successes have forced the Marxist MPLA regime in Luanda to consider whether to end the fighting through negotiations. Although the MPLA has maintained a rigid public stance opposing them, [Redacted] considerable ferment continues within the party supporting national reconciliation. Many in the regime apparently view reconciliation as a device that at once would end the civil war, lessen Angola's dependence on the Soviet Union and Cuba, and open the country to greater Western aid. [Redacted]

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The internal pressure for negotiations has long existed, however, and does not yet appear to have reached a critical mass sufficient to overcome opposition. We are unsure of the magnitude of the opposition to talks, but it appears to come from mulatto-led hardliners who persist in the belief that UNITA can eventually be defeated in the field despite the failure of a much ballyhooed regime offensive in 1984. Moreover, the mulattoes and a sufficient number of their black supporters in the party, military, and government appear to believe that a compromise with UNITA, especially one that enhances the stature of UNITA's charismatic leader Jonas Savimbi, could rapidly lead to an UNITA takeover and their own physical demise. [Redacted]

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In weighing the question of reconciliation, the regime is aware of the keen interest in the subject among its allies and adversaries. [Redacted]

[Redacted] the Soviets and Cubans have finally come to grips with the scale and long-term nature of the UNITA problem, but they do not appear to have budged from their staunch opposition to talks. On the other hand, the MPLA has been repeatedly advised to negotiate by various African leaders, by countries in both Eastern and Western Europe, and by South Africa. We believe that Pretoria is an especially strong booster of reconciliation because it assumes Savimbi would quickly dominate the regime once he gained entry. [Redacted]

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For its part, UNITA claims that it remains willing to negotiate with the MPLA, but just what Savimbi would accept in a compromise is unclear. His demands probably have grown following his rapid expansion into northern and eastern Angola over the last two years. [Redacted]

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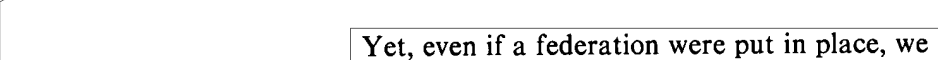



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The prospects that the MPLA leadership would initiate reconciliation talks any time soon with UNITA are, we believe, slim. The overwhelming problem for the MPLA of Savimbi's popularity, which stands in sharp contrast to its own popular disfavor, appears insurmountable. Were he removed from office, however, the prospects that Luanda would consent to talks would increase. If talks do occur, we believe they might come under several circumstances:

- The regime may see negotiations—aimed primarily at a cease-fire—as a needed tactical pause that would allow Luanda to regroup its forces and, perhaps, assassinate Savimbi. 25X1
- President dos Santos, who  has occasionally been said to favor talks, may become convincing enough to sell the MPLA leadership on negotiations as a tactical maneuver or as a way to reduce Angolan dependence on the USSR and Cuba.
- There is the outside chance that a coup of disgruntled officers, perhaps acting in the wake of embarrassing military setbacks, might overcome the almost inevitable opposition of the Soviets and Cubans to a coup and replace the current leadership and then sue for peace.  25X1

Even if talks should occur, the prospects that they will lead to peace are poor. Savimbi's demands in any power-sharing scheme—say, for example, the interior portfolio—are likely to be more than the MPLA will be able to stomach. A somewhat more likely form of settlement would be a federation that granted UNITA control of much of the southern half of the country; 25X1

 Yet, even if a federation were put in place, we believe it would only be a short time before the civil war resumed, with both parties seeking total power.  25X1

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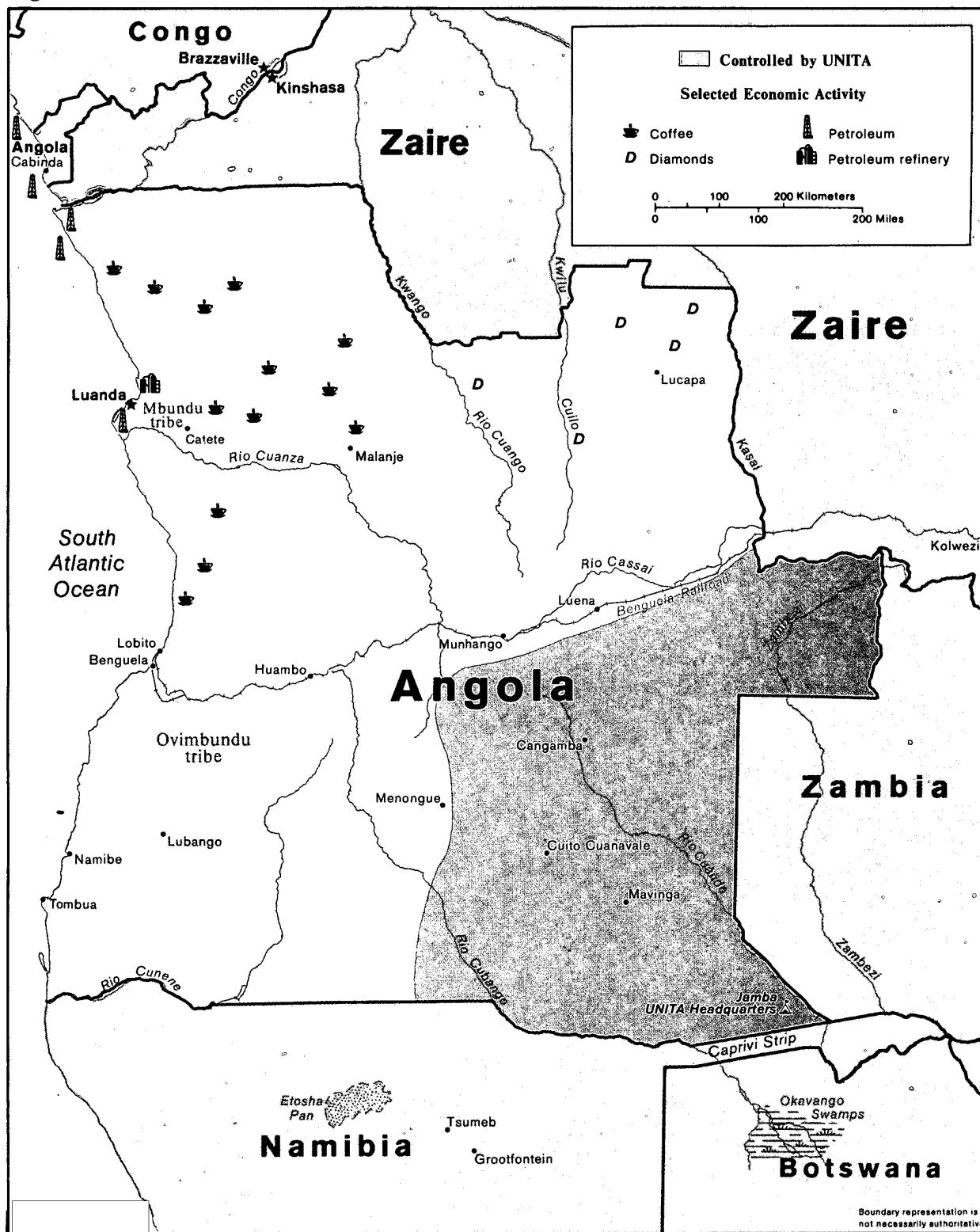
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Figure 1



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**Angola:
Prospects for MPLA-UNITA
Reconciliation**

Introduction

The question of reconciliation with the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA) has long been a contentious issue in Angola's ruling Marxist party, the Popular Movement for the National Liberation of Angola (MPLA). To some in the regime, negotiations with the insurgents hold the potential for an end to a civil war that has plagued the country since independence in 1975,

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With peace, they hope, Luanda could reduce its dependence on the Soviet Bloc and Cuba and obtain greater aid from the West. To hardliners in the party, talks with UNITA would at a minimum only enhance the insurgents' status and possibly lead to the party's rapid loss of power and the personal demise of its leaders.

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The reconciliation issue, although not yet placed on the bargaining table, also appears to be emerging as critical to the prospects for ongoing regional negotiations. Some Western observers argue, for example, that, without a reconciliation agreement, the MPLA could not agree to a substantial Cuban troop withdrawal. Others believe that South Africa will not agree to withdraw from Namibia until UNITA's equities have been protected in a reconciliation agreement.

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This paper reviews briefly the military setting that would condition any talks between the MPLA and UNITA, the ambiguities in their respective stances toward negotiations—emphasizing the evidence for division on the issue in the MPLA—and the external pressure on both sides to talk. It assesses the chances that negotiations will occur and, if they do, the possibility for their success, the two most likely settlement scenarios, and the implications for the United States.

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Military Setting¹

For about six years after the end of the Angolan civil war in 1976, UNITA was confined largely to the

[Redacted]

southeastern corner of Angola, which it used as a base to stage a low-level insurgency in the central highlands, the home of Savimbi's Ovimbundu tribal group. In late 1982, however, Savimbi, most likely with heavy logistic support from South Africa, began expanding his area of control and now dominates almost the entire southeastern quadrant of Angola,

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His area of influence—territory where insurgents have self-sustaining underground organizations—now extends northward to another third of the country. UNITA guerrillas have also demonstrated an ability to stage hit-and-run operations in much of the rest of Angola.

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Savimbi's guerrillas also have increased the number of raids on economic targets and acts of sabotage in large population centers. In August 1983, for example, UNITA captured Cangamba, the first Angolan- and Cuban-manned fortified garrison to fall to the insurgents. UNITA subsequently has laid siege to an increasing number of well-defended outposts, conducted sabotage operations in or near Angola's largest cities, ended any hope of resuming large-scale coffee production, shut down most diamond production, and now for some time has threatened publicly to disrupt the country's vital oil industry in Cabinda.

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The MPLA and its Cuban and Soviet backers responded to UNITA's expansion—which, until 1984, had been accompanied by repeated South African incursions into southern Angola—with a significant military buildup. Luanda has acquired advanced early warning radar systems, sophisticated anti-aircraft missiles and artillery, 18 MIG-23s, about 60 more MIG-21s, at least 24 MI-25 attack helicopters, at least eight SU-22 ground attack aircraft, and a wide variety of support equipment.

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The number of Cuban military personnel in Angola has increased to a total of approximately 35,000. MI-25s are flown by Cuban pilots and Angolan copilots. Cubans also fly MIG-23s and some of the MIG-21s.

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The Soviets maintain Angolan aircraft and naval vessels and also fly a fleet of AN-12 transport aircraft that provides logistic support to Cuban and Angolan forces. [redacted]

with the MPLA, as did Savimbi in a speech later in the month. Savimbi, however, added that, following "such a significant evolution on the battlefield," UNITA now preferred the Angola problem to be solved "in the context of peace for the whole of southern Africa." [redacted]

From August through October 1984, the Popular Armed Forces for the Liberation of Angola (FAPLA) conducted an ambitious offensive against Savimbi, designed, we believe, to cut off his supply line to the north and deal a punishing blow to his home base in the southeast. One major thrust, [redacted]

We doubt that Savimbi and his senior advisers have fully sorted out the position they might take in negotiations, but we suspect they will no longer be satisfied to settle for the role of simply a regionally and ethnically based political force. Savimbi appears to take seriously his claim to represent a broad-based opposition movement to the MPLA and, in our view, will insist on being a key actor in any regional settlement. [redacted]

[redacted] was a sweep from the Angolan concentration near Munhango on the Benguela railway toward the southeast; if successful, the move would have cut UNITA's area of control in half. A second push, from the embattled town of Cuito Cuanavale, was supposed to recapture Mavinga and then move on UNITA headquarters in Jamba. [redacted]

The combat phase of the offensive apparently began in mid-September. We believe Angolan forces were able to make brief penetrations into UNITA-controlled territory but found further progress blocked. Government forces abandoned the overall offensive in mid-October, [redacted] and pulled back to their garrisons. Government sweeps through other parts of the country also wound down in October. [redacted]

MPLA's Stance on Negotiations

The MPLA has opposed negotiations with UNITA unambiguously in almost all of its public statements. When the Angolan Ambassador to Portugal, a member of a moderate faction in the MPLA, publicly suggested in 1982 that talks might be desirable, he was soon recalled and the government repudiated his statement. Before and since then, President dos Santos and others have stated adamantly and often that they would not negotiate with the "South African puppets." [redacted]

During and after the regime's offensive, the insurgents conducted several offensives of their own. [redacted] they have staged further dramatic sabotage operations, including twice cutting off power and water to Luanda. By the end of the year, both sides appeared to be preparing for still more intensified conflict in 1985. [redacted]

The regime's public front, however, masks an ongoing muted debate over the wisdom of talking to the insurgents. [redacted]

UNITA's Views on Negotiations

UNITA has long maintained publicly that it is willing to negotiate with the MPLA, but only on equal terms. Since breaking out of its base in the southeast, its demands appear to have increased, although precisely what they are is not clear. [redacted] in mid-November, an UNITA official abroad reiterated UNITA's willingness to talk

[redacted] Although the negotiations proved brief and fruitless, competing factions in the MPLA have since continued to argue the wisdom of talking to UNITA, [redacted]

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of the faction's attitude was the view expressed by some of its members [redacted] that the "Europeans"—a derisive reference to both whites and mulattoes in the regime—should go "home" (meaning Portugal) and let the Africans settle their problems.²

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[redacted]

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The Catete faction's influence declined precipitously in the early 1980s—we are unsure it continues to exist—but many of its ideas still appear to have appeal at senior levels of the MPLA. According to press accounts [redacted] President dos Santos has deprived some, although by no means all, of the faction's key leaders of their party and government posts and, in some cases, sent them into internal exile or diplomatic posts abroad. Dos Santos, however, has also diminished the powers of the hardline mulatto faction on the left, according to press sources [redacted] and has subsequently built up his own core of followers, including former members of the Catete faction. Some of the members of his group—[redacted] suggests dos Santos himself—continue to be interested in a rapprochement with UNITA. [redacted]

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[redacted]

[redacted]

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[redacted]

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[redacted]

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Those Favoring Talks

[redacted] the group within the party that has most ardently championed negotiations has been the "Catete faction"—a loose collection of black nationalist "moderates," most of whom were born in the town of Catete near Luanda. In the early 1980s, [redacted] the faction was openly hostile to Moscow, Havana, and the hardline mulattoes who held key party, government, and military positions. A major element in the informal Catete platform was a negotiated settlement with UNITA, [redacted] the group also favored strong ties with the West. Typical

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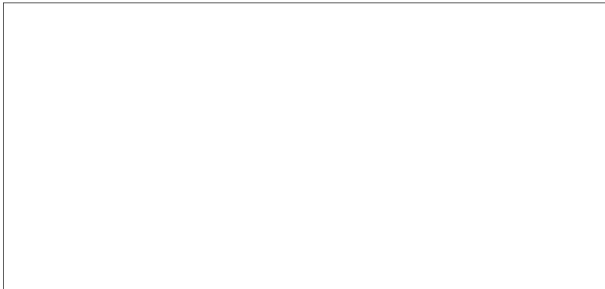
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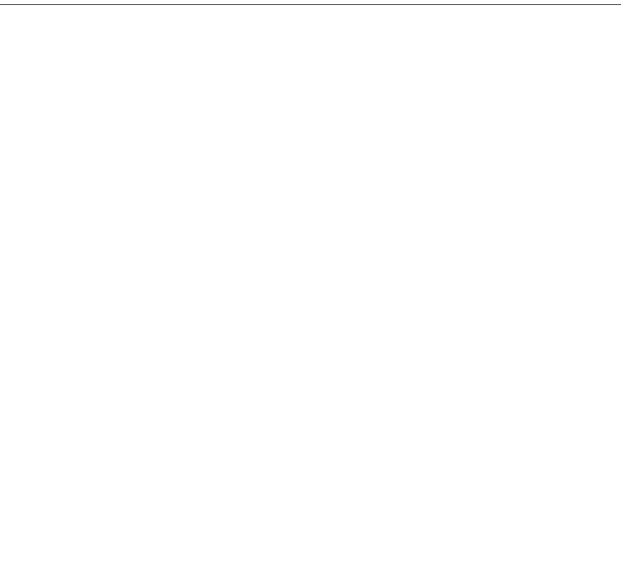
Earlier Talks

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MPLA-UNITA relations are largely a saga of bitterness, mutual recrimination, and struggle. Each side has accused the other of selling out its rival to the Portuguese during the anticolonial struggle (we suspect both charges may be accurate), and there are rumors that the MPLA executed UNITA's negotiators in 1975 when the struggle escalated into civil war. [redacted]



After the MPLA's victory, the new regime found that, while one of its rivals—the Front for the National Liberation of Angola—began to fade into oblivion in the north, UNITA would not go away. [redacted]



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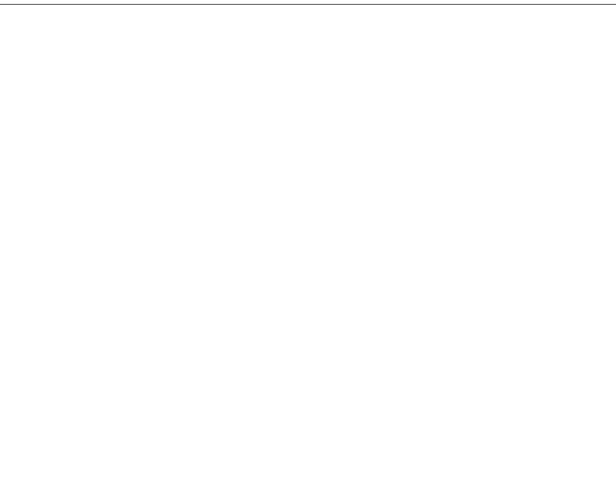


The government, [redacted]

attempted as early as April 1976 to negotiate with the insurgents and offered to incorporate UNITA officials into the government—with the exception of Savimbi and two other top leaders. By early 1978, Neto was said to be interested in reconciliation even with Savimbi, [redacted]



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there has been growing sentiment for talks with UNITA, but backers of negotiations cannot decide how to deal

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with the charismatic insurgent leader. Moreover, [redacted] there is a broad consensus within the party that his potential popularity, even among the Mbundu who dominate the Luanda area, frightens the leadership, which is aware of its own unpopularity. In our view, many in the party who might otherwise be willing to negotiate with UNITA balk at the prospect of dealing with its leader.



Figure 3. Lucio Lara, key MPLA hardliner, opposes reconciliation. [redacted]

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Opposition to Negotiations

Despite some sentiment within the MPLA for reconciliation efforts, those in the party who oppose talks under any condition short of total surrender by UNITA still appear to have the upper hand. [redacted]

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[redacted] the opposition is led by at least three important mulattoes:

Reporting on the views of other important figures in the regime toward reconciliation has been mixed.

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- *Lucio Lara*, a Politburo member and the party's chief ideologue, has long been identified as a leader of a faction determined to fight on against UNITA and to continue full support for the insurgent activities of the South-West Africa People's Organization (SWAPO). [redacted]

[redacted] Lara emphasized the need for total victory over UNITA in late 1982, and [redacted] he still strongly opposes reconciliation.

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- *Henrique Carvalho "Onambwe" Santos*, alternate Politburo member and Minister of Industry, also is staunchly opposed to negotiations. [redacted] Former de facto boss of the secret police, he is, [redacted] hated and feared by many in the regime. Given his extensive association with Soviet Bloc security services in the past, we suspect—although there is no evidence to confirm it—that he does their bidding, either for pay, or by inclination, or both.

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- *Paulo Jorge*, who lost his job as Foreign Minister in late 1984 but still retains his seat on the Central Committee, also has strongly opposed talking with UNITA. [redacted] In May 1984 he said that UNITA was a military problem, not a political issue. Although the MPLA Central Committee occasionally discussed the possibility of reconciliation, he dogmatically asserted that the leadership was largely united on its decision not to talk with UNITA and the outcome was always the same. [redacted]

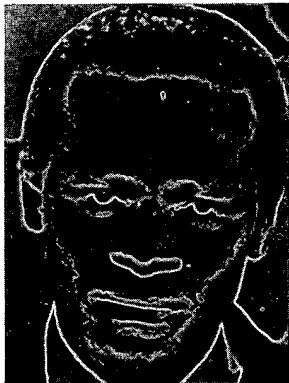
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Although there are occasional rumors of talks occurring in Lisbon or in other European capitals, there is no credible evidence available to us that indicates talks are under way or that the MPLA has decided to begin them.

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[Redacted]

[Redacted]

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[Redacted]

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On balance, however, we believe he is likely to resist negotiations until he is convinced that Angola's continuing military buildup will not lead to a decisive victory against the insurgency.

[Redacted] we believe, in fact, that the regime may be planning another major military push against the insurgents. The government may try to cut the insurgents' supply line to the north through increased ground operations along the central portion of the Benguela railway. Similarly, according to public statements by UNITA officials, the insurgents plan to increase pressure on Luanda and other major cities and to expand operations in the northern part of the country. We doubt, however, that either side will strike a decisive blow against the other in 1985.

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Recent Moves

[Redacted]

[Redacted] the party leadership may have reached a temporary compromise on the issue of negotiations in mid-1984. Several key party leadership figures, including "Kito" Rodrigues, argued for opening of negotiations with UNITA at a Central Committee meeting in June, while others, including Lara, Jorge, and "Onambwe" Santos, balked, [Redacted]

[Redacted] Minister of State Security and Politburo member "Dino Matross" Paulo reportedly broke the deadlock by proposing that talks take place only if UNITA agreed to cease all hostilities and to integrate with the MPLA. The Central Committee then accepted the "compromise"—in effect a call for UNITA's surrender—but postponed action until after the then-forthcoming military offensive to determine if there was an UNITA left with which to deal. [Redacted]

External Advice and Pressure

A review [Redacted]

[Redacted] over the past year indicates that the MPLA has considered the reconciliation issue with the benefit of considerable foreign advice—much of it

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Intraregime agitation for talks with UNITA continued during and after the offensive of August-October 1984. An amorphous group of officers in FAPLA known as the Young Captains personally lobbied dos Santos to open talks with UNITA, [Redacted]

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[Redacted]

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25X1 unsolicited. In our view, most foreign observers recognize, however, that the subject is sensitive in Luanda and that, if it is broached, it must be discussed with considerable discretion. The advice, in addition to pressure, has come from various quarters. [redacted]

South Africa

25X1 Pretoria has been the most forceful advocate of reconciliation. Of all outside powers, it has been Savimbi's chief backer since the late 1970s. [redacted]

25X1 [redacted] we believe most key officials in the South African Government are determined that Savimbi eventually will take power in Luanda. Savimbi's triumph would at the same time eliminate one of the regimes most hostile to Pretoria in the region and serve as part of a ring of "moderate" buffer states surrounding Namibia. To the South Africans, Angolan national reconciliation offers a possible shortcut for Savimbi's taking power, a goal they believe he would eventually gain in any event by fighting to the bitter end. [redacted]

25X1 [redacted] South Africa considers at least two reconciliation scenarios acceptable for achieving its objectives. One option would be for Savimbi to join a coalition government. [redacted] such a position would allow him eventually to outmaneuver his MPLA adversaries either through a coup or peaceful competition. The chief risk in this course of action would be that Savimbi might be assassinated in a hostile, Mbundu-dominated Luanda. We doubt, however, that many in Pretoria believe that this is a realistic option. [redacted]

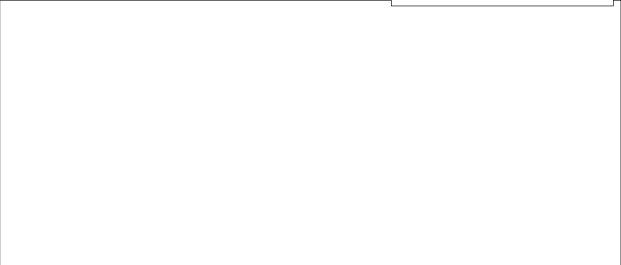
25X1 A second alternative possibly acceptable to Pretoria would be a de facto partition of Angola—something UNITA still publicly rules out—in which UNITA would dominate the lower half of the country and serve as a buffer between a Marxist northern Angola and an independent Namibia. In such a scenario, Pretoria might calculate that Savimbi would be in a good position to press for total victory over the north once he established a secure base in the southern half of the country. [redacted]

25X1 South Africa has pressed for UNITA-MPLA reconciliation in a variety of forums. [redacted]

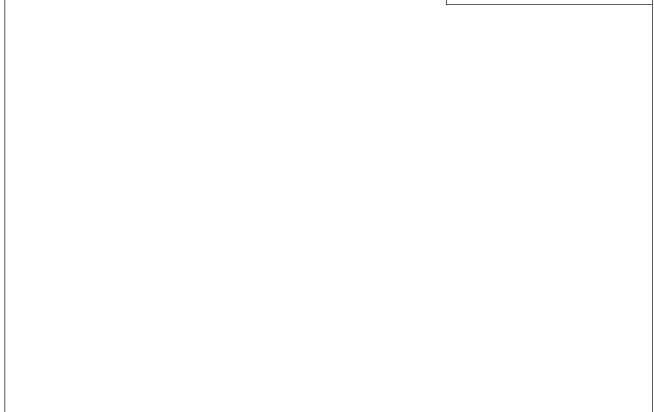
[redacted] we believe it has attempted to enlist other African states as mediators, urged the United States to press for reconciliation, and, we believe, has recommended negotiations directly to the Angolans. The importance South Africa attaches to reconciliation suggests, at a minimum, that many in Pretoria, in order to protect Savimbi's interests, believe that a regional settlement should not occur without reconciliation. [redacted]

Other Negotiation Boosters

[redacted] dos Santos also has received advice from his Frontline colleagues and other African leaders to negotiate his party's differences with UNITA. The most ardent promoters of reconciliation appear to be the *Zambians*, who had ties with UNITA before Angolan independence and whose border with Angola is controlled by the insurgents. Since the abortive MPLA-UNITA talks in 1981-82, [redacted]



Countries in both Eastern and Western Europe appear to support reconciliation as well. [redacted]

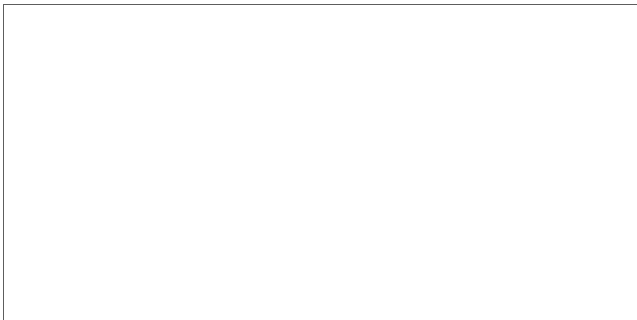


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Soviet and Cuban Opposition

Moscow is still apparently adamant that there be no compromise with Savimbi. In early 1984 a Soviet foreign affairs official told a US diplomat that UNITA's strength was illusory and would vanish if South African aid were cut off. He asserted that a coalition government with the insurgents would be out of the question so long as Savimbi controlled UNITA; were someone else in control, there was a possibility for some power sharing. In June, another Soviet official expressed [redacted] Moscow's determination to see the struggle through without compromise with UNITA; this is the line customarily taken by Soviet propaganda. [redacted]



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Prospects

The prospects for the MPLA leadership initiating reconciliation talks with UNITA are, we believe, slim. The overwhelming problem for the MPLA of Savimbi's potential popularity with the masses appears insurmountable so long as he heads UNITA. The basic assumption of many of the MPLA's top leaders appears to remain that, if Savimbi comes to Luanda alive and not as a prisoner, he will succeed in taking over the government. Consequently, reconciliation is tantamount to suicide. [redacted]

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The Soviet position softened somewhat—at least briefly—in the wake of Luanda's failed offensive in late 1984. A Soviet ambassador in southern Africa, after returning from a trip to Moscow and Luanda in October, told [redacted] that his superiors might have begun to credit UNITA with greater staying power and popularity. He said that the MPLA would be unable to defeat the insurgents militarily, and that Moscow believed there was no alternative to a negotiated settlement. [redacted]

In our view, most MPLA hardline leaders also believe they can avoid talks through a military victory. Hawks such as "Iko" Carreira are still seemingly enthralled by the military hardware FAPLA continues to acquire and, we believe, assume that it will eventually prove decisive against UNITA. Because their confidence evidently has not been shaken by the failure of FAPLA's offensive in 1984, it is difficult to determine when they will come to grips with what, in our view, is the reality of UNITA's slow but unrelenting expansion. [redacted]

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More recently, however, Moscow has reverted to its familiar hard line of opposing reconciliation under any circumstances other than UNITA's surrender. A Soviet diplomat made this point forcefully to a US official in late December, and we have no reason to doubt his sincerity or that it reflects his government's policy. [redacted]

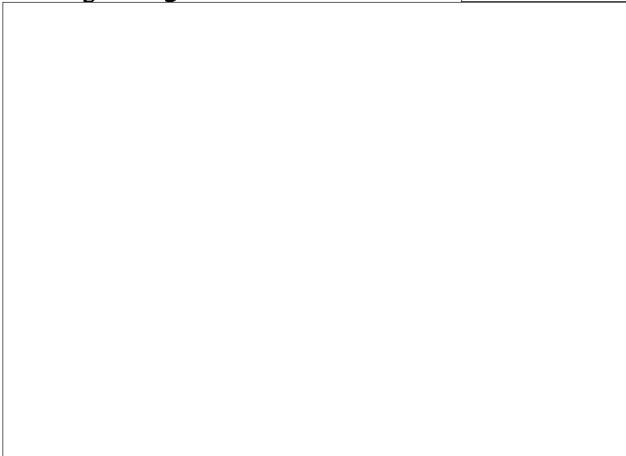
There have also been signs that Cuba might be looking on negotiations more favorably. [redacted]

The hardliners, moreover, appear to have solid external backing. There is no convincing evidence that either Moscow or Havana is willing to endorse talks with UNITA at this time. Like the regime's top leadership, the Soviets and Cubans seem to believe that the MPLA could not compete with Savimbi in a nonviolent political contest. They also appear willing to allow Luanda to continue the fight. [redacted]

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Finally, [redacted] the regime's actions so far convince us that those within the

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MPLA who are said to be willing to deal with UNITA—even under Savimbi—lack sufficient clout to force the government into talks. [redacted]

How Talks Might Occur

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Although the prospects for negotiations in the next year or so do not appear bright, they cannot be ruled out. If they were to occur, we believe they might be conducted under several possible scenarios. [redacted]

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Tactical Reasons. If the MPLA feels more hard pressed militarily—for example, large units begin to defect in the field or major towns fall and remain in UNITA’s hands—Luanda might stall for time by seeking talks leading to a cease-fire. This option might be especially attractive if it seemed likely to expose Savimbi to an assassination attempt. It would offer, however, the disadvantage of giving tacit recognition to Pretoria’s “puppets” and allow them to regroup as well. [redacted]

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A Move by dos Santos. Over the past few years dos Santos has indicated [redacted] his intense desire to lessen Angolan dependence on the Soviets and Cubans, [redacted] and a deal with Savimbi would be a giant step in this direction. Although he has, in our judgment, gradually enhanced his influence within the party—and thus increased his ability to make important decisions—we doubt he has the power alone to force through a controversial decision to seek reconciliation. Even so, one tactic he might try would be to sell the idea of negotiations to the Central Committee as an ostensibly tactical maneuver—and then proceed to negotiate seriously. Alternatively, he might eventually amass enough support in the party to force approval for talks on their own merits. [redacted]

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Coup d’etat. This is perhaps the most unlikely scenario, but it cannot be ruled out. Discontent among the Young Captains and other groups within FAPLA might lead to a forceful move against the widely unpopular ruling clique, particularly in the wake of a series of setbacks in the field or intensified terrorist activities affecting the major cities. Cuban troops already have saved the regime from a coup attempt in 1977, however, and they might do so again if the coup were led by moderates. [redacted]

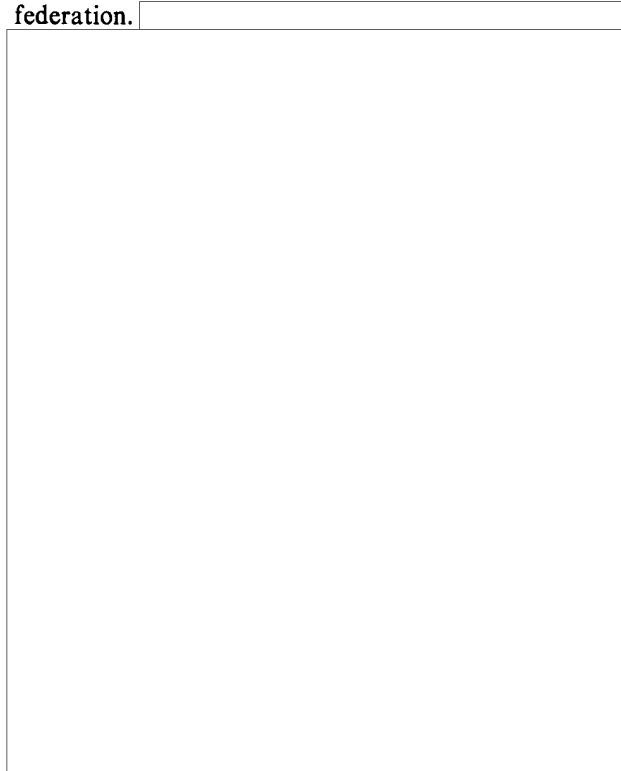
Settlement Scenarios

Were serious talks to occur, we doubt they would prove fruitful. UNITA probably would be willing to make concessions if it were granted a recognized role in the government, but it is likely to insist on a major role unpalatable to the MPLA. The MPLA, which has seen its dream of running a one-party state emerge in the mid-1970s and then recede in the 1980s in the face of UNITA’s expansion, still finds the prospect of power sharing repugnant. Moreover, the historical enmity between the leaders of the two parties, which dates from preindependence rivalries, suggests that even discourse through well-intentioned intermediaries would be rancorous and probably unproductive. The chances of a coalition government being created or—if it were—lasting more than a few months or involving real power sharing thus appear to be remote. [redacted]

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A more likely outcome to negotiations is partition or federation. [redacted]



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Secret**Implications for the United States**

In our view, reconciliation between UNITA and the MPLA could potentially unlock doors that so far bar the regional settlement Washington seeks in southern Africa. Without the UNITA insurgency and the threat of further South African incursions, Angola's need for Cuban troops recedes. Moreover, a government of national unity would undoubtedly attempt to reduce its political and economic dependence on the Soviet Bloc and Cuba and turn more to the West for technical assistance and aid. In addition, were the MPLA regime leavened by an UNITA presence or were UNITA to have uncontested control of southern Angola, South Africa most likely would feel more secure about turning Namibia over to a SWAPO regime, which Pretoria probably would view as potentially less radical if surrounded by non-Marxist neighbors.

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In the absence of an MPLA-UNITA rapprochement, the prospects for a regional settlement diminish. Although South Africa has not made reconciliation in Angola an explicit condition in negotiations for Namibian independence, most senior South African officials, in our view, believe that Luanda will not agree to an acceptable formula for Cuban troop withdrawal. Moreover, we believe that some of these officials will not support a regional settlement that does not fully protect UNITA's equities—a position that may rule out any proposal acceptable to an MPLA regime under seige from UNITA.

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