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Aid to Savimbi's UNITA: How Much Is Enough?

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As usual, my good friend Jeane Kirkpatrick rose above the foggy bottom of Washington doubletalk and succinctly stated the essence of the problem: "Savimbi needs *real* weapons," she told a crowd at a recent dinner in honor of Dr. Jonas Savimbi.

I couldn't agree more. Pap resolutions, photo sessions, receptions and Band-Aids are not enough for Angola's freedom fighters, known as UNITA (the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola). Savimbi and his 60,000 fighters need *real* anti-tank weapons and *real* anti-aircraft weapons and they need them *now*.

How Should We Assess How Much Aid Is Enough?

The question is, how should UNITA supporters assess how much aid is enough? Before we can answer that question, we must come to grips with a more fundamental issue: enough for what? Enough to win a military victory, enough to pressure the MPLA (Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola) regime to negotiate or enough to simply ease the consciences of Washington bureaucrats?

A useful baseline is to compare UNITA's needs today to its needs in 1975—the year the MPLA's military buildup began and the only year the United States has sent aid to Angola's freedom fighters.

At that time, there were two anti-Marxist groups fighting in Angola, UNITA and the FNLA (National Front for the Liberation of Angola), the once dominant freedom fighter group which is now a relatively minor player in the Angola war.

In January 1975, UNITA, the FNLA, the MPLA and the Portuguese signed an agreement providing a framework for establishing Angola's independence from Portugal. Under the terms of the accord, known as the Alvor Agreement, an interim coalition government composed of all four groups was to run the country until free elections could be held in October.

Alvor Agreement Abrogated by MPLA

As we now know, the elections were never held because the MPLA

gated the Alvor Agreement, opting for armed take-over instead of democratic rule. Just three months after the signing of the Alvor Agreement, Cuban troops were sent to the MPLA's guerrilla camps for training.

Tragically, U.S. policy in 1975 was not aimed at enabling UNITA and the FNLA to win a victory against the MPLA, but at harassing the Soviets in order to avoid an easy victory against the Communist-backed MPLA.

Then-CIA Director William Colby reportedly advised the NSC that the CIA would have to spend \$100 million to ensure a victory in Angola. But our 1975 Angola program was not \$100 million or even \$50 million. It totalled only \$27 million (which is equivalent to \$35 million in 1985 dollars).

UNITA's foreign minister, Jeremias Chitunda, says that UNITA received no more than \$2-\$3 million worth of weapons from the U.S. in 1975 because most of the assistance "vanished somewhere in the pipeline."

According to Chitunda, with the exception of the LAWS (light anti-tank weapons), the arms we sent to Angolan freedom fighters 10 years ago were not adequate.

The former head of the CIA's Angola Task Force, John Stockwell, who is, incidentally, a bitter critic of UNITA, reports in his book *In Search of Enemies* that the rifles we provided to the anti-MPLA forces in 1975 were obsolete World War II semiautomatics — "no match for the AK's the MPLA was getting." Here is one grim scenario: On Nov. 11, 1975, a small force of 1,500 men, including FNLA fighters, two Zairian battalions and 100 Portuguese Angolan commandos, stood helplessly in an open valley not far from Luanda as Cuban/MPLA forces fired salvos of 122-mm. rockets at them.

Ten Years of Fighting Without Any U.S. Aid

Stockwell writes that "CIA observers estimated that 200 rockets rained on the task force as it broke and fled in panic, scattering across the valley in aimless flight, abandoning weapons, vehicles and wounded comrades alike. Survivors would call it *Nshila wa*

Stockwell notes that if we had provided the anti-Communist forces with C-47 gunships in the fall of 1975, they could have completely broken the MPLA. Instead, as a result of the 1976 Clark Amendment which prohibited aid to Angolan freedom fighters, the heroic UNITA guerrillas have fought for 10 long years without one dollar of U.S. aid.

Fortunately, the defeatist attitude symptomatic of U.S. foreign policy in the 1970s is on the wane and is being replaced by a new, positive outlook known as the Reagan Doctrine which says that we must "not break faith" with those who are fighting for freedom.

Congress reaffirmed its support for the Reagan Doctrine by repealing the Clark Amendment last year and by passing the 1984 Tsongas resolution stating that it would be indefensible to provide Afghan freedom fighters with only enough aid to fight and die but not enough to advance their cause of freedom.

And President Reagan reiterated his firm commitment to assisting freedom fighters in his recent State of the Union message in which he said that "America will support freedom fighters in Afghanistan, Angola, Cambodia and Nicaragua with moral and material assistance, in the belief that the freedom fighters have not just a right to fight and die for freedom, but a right to fight and *win* freedom."

As policymakers assess UNITA's needs today, we need to be sure that we send Angola's Freedom Fighters *enough* real bullets, *enough* real anti-tank weapons and *enough* real anti-aircraft weapons.

If \$35 million worth of military hardware was not enough to offset the MPLA in 1975, a much smaller amount surely would not be enough today.

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**\$2 Billion in
Soviet Military Hardware**

In the last 18 months alone, the Soviet bloc has poured some \$2 billion worth of military hardware into Angola. Savimbi reports that the MPLA arsenal includes 200 jet fighters, over 1,000 tanks—including T-34's and T-62's—and 160 helicopters—including MI 18's, MI 25's and the destructive Hind helicopter gunships which are known as "flying tanks" because they are equipped with anti-tank missiles and can drop bombs.

At the end of 1975, the MPLA was backed by 6,000 to 10,000 Cuban troops and 400 Soviet "advisers." According to unclassified State Department reports, today there are at least 35,000 Cuban military personnel in Angola and 1,500 Soviet East bloc "advisers."

It is time to quit talking and start sending UNITA anti-aircraft weapons and anti-tank weapons. UNITA anticipates another MPLA offensive in the early spring; it is imperative that the U.S. send the Angolan freedom fighters effective support as quickly as possible.

In addition to our moral obligation to help UNITA, it is vital to our national security interests that we do not let the Soviet bloc get a firm foothold in Angola. As Dr. Savimbi has stated, "UNITA is the key to Angola, Angola is the key to southern Africa, and southern Africa is critical to the West."

According to press reports, Savimbi has said that he needs "100 to 200" anti-tank and anti-aircraft missiles which he estimates would cost between \$50 and \$60 million—a small price to pay compared to what is at stake. At the very least, we should send UNITA 100 U.S.-made Stingers, 100 U.S.-made improved TOW anti-tank weapons and sufficient ammunition for their present weapons in preparation for the expected April offensive. In assessing how much aid is enough for Jonas Savimbi's freedom fighters, policymakers must not repeat the mistakes of 1975. This time, we cannot afford to be penny-wise and pound-foolish. ■

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USA calendar

In the news this week:

FRIDAY — Former CIA Director William Colby speaks at symposium on international terrorism at Tufts University in Medford, Mass.