

The Strange Career of Dr. Savimbi

Dr. Jonas Malheiro Savimbi by turns has claimed to be an authentic revolutionary and nationalist leader of Angola. But this "revolutionary" has also collaborated with Portuguese colonialism. Today, he and the movement he heads, UNITA, pretends to be a legitimate nationalist force. But this "nationalist" movement depends on military and material aid from South Africa and the CIA.

By Aquino de Bragança * *Translated by Colin Darch*

South Africa's expansionist strategy embraces multifold and treacherous tactics, having the aim of sharpening internal struggles in neighbouring countries with artificially fostered conflicts, to destabilize the governments and strengthen anti-governmental forces. This strategy takes concrete form in the intimate link between Pretoria and Jonas Savimbi, the chairman of the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA).

A policy of "ethnic reactivation" promotes internal struggles, transforming them into a "counterrevolutionary civil war", using the intervention of trained units, recruited along ethnic lines and fighting in the name of a nationalist front organisation. Such an organisation may conveniently already exist, or if necessary, one can be created.

As the question of Namibian independence enters its final phase, Pretoria has accelerated the integration of UNITA into South African military units. Such units, now being used to destabilize Angola, are also intended to "police" a future independent Namibia. The leadership of the counterrevolution in Angola is not in that country itself, but in Pretoria.

Although Angola is the best known example, it is not the only one. Up to 1980, the South African Republic had intervened a number of times, although with less determination, in Zambia in support of forces opposing President Kenneth Kaunda. More serious, the self-styled "Mozambique National Resistance" (MNR), grouping former colla-



Savimbi by Arab

borators with Portuguese colonialism and local reactionaries, receives military training, support and direction at bases located in the Transvaal. Similarly, black Rhodesian soldiers have received political and military training by the Repub-

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lic of South Africa in special counterinsurgency camps in the Transvaal. These soldiers, who previously belonged to Bishop Muzorewa's military forces, are almost all Shindebele-speakers. They have been responsible for the ostensibly "ethnic" disturbances and uprisings inside Zimbabwe.

In all these cases, armies of black soldiers are trained, led and commanded by white South African officers who are experts in "counterinsurgency". At the same time, South Africa takes all possible precautions to ensure that her direct military interventions in independent African states are camouflaged. Pretoria wants to avoid a repetition of the catastrophic political and military consequences of its first invasion of Angola.

Savimbi Plays Key Role for Pretoria

In the context of this strategy, Savimbi is a key figure. He has personal charisma and, relatively speaking, UNITA had at least formally put down some roots in southern Angola. Through a retrospective analysis of his career, we can discover and perhaps anticipate the creation of similar agents and organisations in other countries of the region. Apartheid wants to consolidate the counterrevolution and see it victorious in a southern Africa under its patronage and its domination.

After the coup d'état of April 25, 1974, in Portugal, the new leaders announced the decision to begin the process of decolonisation in their overseas territories. On April 29, the military junta which had taken power published its first decrees. The same day, General Antonio de Spínola, president of the Junta of National Salvation, received the leaders of the political parties, notably representatives of the Portuguese Democratic Movement (the MPD), which included Communists and progressive Catholic sympathizers. There was almost complete agreement on domestic questions (concerning the dismantling of the fascist apparatus of the state); however, a disagreement arose over the colonial question.

The representatives of the political

parties were in favour of an immediate cease-fire and the opening of conversations with the national liberation movements. While accepting the principle of self-determination, Spínola argued that "it was necessary not to confuse self-determination with independence."

The head of the junta stated that the people of Portuguese Africa would have two choices: either to maintain links with Portugal, perhaps in a federation, or to choose complete independence. According to Spínola, this second choice would mean the failure of the policy which he intended to pursue. While General Spínola was trying to win over the antifascist leaders in Portugal to his federalist theses, General Costa Gomes, the junta's number-two man, set off in early May on an African tour, to try to get the feel of the situation and the prospects for federation. On his return, he did not hide his scepticism over the future of Guinea-Bissau and Mozambique as "Portuguese" territories, arguing that "the situation [there] had deteriorated politically, economically and militarily." On the other hand, he considered it certain that Angola would stay "Portuguese... and multi-racial".

The junta chose a new Commander in Chief, Gen. Franco Pinheiro, to put its "Luso-African" projects into practice. He received precise orders from Costa Gomes to "prosecute the war against the guerrillas who refuse to accept the ceasefire and who refuse to present themselves as legal political parties"—legalized, that is, by the Portuguese as a precondition for the beginning of the referendum process.

On April 28, only three days after the overthrow of Caetano, Dr. Jonas Malheiro Savimbi, the chairman of UNITA, was somewhere in Moxico province, in the company of a messenger from the Portuguese Military Information Police (PIM), the Reverend Father Antonio de Araujo Oliveira. Savimbi told Oliveira that he was prepared to renew his links with Lisbon, in return for public recognition of his movement. General Franco Pinheiro ordered Savimbi's statements to be tape-recorded and broadcast over the national radio in Luanda. Savimbi preached "gradual decolonization, because the Angolan people are not yet ready for independence," letting it be understood that he would support Spínola's federal projects.

The UNITA leader, who had formerly claimed to be an "anti-revisionist Marxist," now publicly abandoned Chairman Mao's old clothes, as well as the slogan of a "black socialist republic" in Angola. Instead, he tried to give the impression of being a cred-

ible statesman and a moderate, capable of governing the country.

This rather clever operation mounted by the Portuguese Army's special services (DGS/PIM) came as a pleasant surprise to most of Angola's 500,000 "pequenos brancos", or poor whites, traumatised by the unexpected downfall of the Caetano government and fiercely opposed to the Marxist policies of the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA). Here was a "clever Negro" whom they thought they could trust. Savimbi, a name previously known only to a few insiders, overnight became a legend, the "harbinger of peace," able to provide the settlers with a new destiny.

Spínola and his generals had won the first battle. The junta thought that they had found their man in Savimbi. This was the only point on which the military leftwingers of the Armed Forces Movement (MFA), the old fascist generals and the civilian ministers of the new regime were in agreement.

On June 14, 1974, the Portuguese armed forces signed an "official" cease-fire in Moxico. The Commander in Chief, General Franco Pinheiro, returned to Lisbon where he received the go-ahead from Spínola for an operation designed to give Savimbi a "credibility" which he lacked, both nationally and internationally.

In March 1966, an eastern front had been opened by the MPLA, in the province of Moxico, bordering on Zambia, and fighting had spread rapidly into the interior of the country by the end of the 1960's. The MPLA began to prepare to cross the mighty river Kwanza, with their target the rich central plateau of Bie, a densely populated region which is the granary of Angola. In 1970, the guerrillas increased the number of attacks by more than 60 percent in comparison with the previous year, causing Portuguese casualties to mount by 25 percent. This rapid development of the guerrilla struggle was a serious threat to colonial domination, especially since the overwhelming majority of the Portuguese soldiers were by no means motivated to fight.

How was defeat to be avoided? Marcelo Caetano appealed to Francisco Costa Gomes, a rather unorthodox general who in early 1961 had already taken part in a palace coup to overthrow Salazar. On a number of occasions, he had also made known his disagreement with the way Portugal's African wars were being conducted. The new commander in chief of the Portuguese armed forces in Angola was a longtime advocate of "total war" against the insurgents, because military operations were

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only "one of the many ways to fight the enemy". The general was well versed in the wars of Vietnam and Algeria, so in the fine tradition of counter-guerrilla warfare, he knew how to use extra-military techniques. These included defoliants, which would destroy most of the food crops, especially cassava, the staple of the Angolans living in the liberated zones, forcing them to seek refuge in Zambia. These measures were accompanied and reinforced by the techniques of counter-subversion, coordinated until that time by the DGS, under the sinister Dr. Sao Jose Lopes, Costa Gomes's intimate friend. This put at the general's disposal a precious dossier of letters, classified "Top Secret" and headed "Operation Madeira (Subject UNITA—possible rehabilitation of members of)."

Portugal's Special Relations With Savimbi

In fact, since 1968-1969, the Portuguese DGS had maintained special relations with Savimbi's UNITA guerrillas, who had been active in Angola since 1965. Savimbi had deserted from Holden Roberto's National Front for the Liberation of Angola (FNLA) in July 1964, publicly accusing Roberto of being a Bakongo tribalist in the service of American imperialism. Afterwards, he approached the MPLA with a proposal to integrate his group with dissidents in their organisation. However, negotiations collapsed because Savimbi demanded to participate in the leadership as representative of the Ovimbundu people of the central-southern region, the largest ethnic group in Angola, numbering over two million. The MPLA refused to accept this condition. Savimbi then set up his own organisation, UNITA, and opened a front in eastern Angola. Badly equipped, UNITA's campaign against the occupiers in the vast semi-desert region stagnated after a few spectacular successes. In the meantime, the MPLA, which had prepared itself patiently, made rapid progress. The two organisations remained in disagreement and confronted each other in unequal armed clashes which depleted the ranks of UNITA. The latter survived, thanks to discreet assistance provided by the Portuguese DGS, which was perfectly well aware that "UNITA hates the MPLA more than it hates the Portuguese" and could thus be an "objective ally" against a common enemy, the movement of Dr. Agostinho Neto.

(The second part of this article will appear in the February issue.)

The Strange Career of Dr. Savimbi. II

Claiming to be a revolutionary nationalist, Dr. Jonas Malheiro Savimbi is actually South Africa's intimate ally and his UNITA is an essential instrument of Pretoria's military destabilization campaign against Angola. This concluding installment shows how his ambitions led him to make UNITA a virtual branch of the South African armed forces.¹

By Aquino de Bragança *

Prime Minister Caetano himself had taken a special interest in the efforts of the DGS (the Portuguese Army's special services) to help Savimbi. The latter indirectly acknowledged this aid by issuing a statement expressing agreement with the prime minister's "reformist" policies and that he foresaw gradual autonomy for the overseas territories, within Portuguese sovereignty. However, the UNITA leader rejected the label of a "common collaborator." He wanted a special status for himself "as soon as the MPLA [was] eliminated" from the Angolan political scene.

For Gen. Costa Gomes, therefore, the question of Savimbi was a priority. He ordered his adjutant, Brigadier Bettencourt Rodrigues (an excellent "operator"), to reopen contacts with UNITA and to coordinate the struggle against the common enemy (the MPLA). A secret agreement was signed with Savimbi in mid-1971, which resulted in the "suspension of military activity."

Thus, the Portuguese armed forces authorized UNITA to keep the region of Alto Lungue-Bungo, in the neighbourhood of Luso, under its control and promised to protect this UNITA pocket. UNITA promised to provide guides for the armed forces in joint actions in previously agreed sectors and to order its representatives abroad to exert pressure on African governments—especially Zambia—to change their policy towards Portugal.

The "neutralization" of guerrilla sanctuaries in neighbouring countries was a necessary condition for a Portuguese victory over the liberation movement.

Thus, everything seemed to be proceeding according to plan in Angola, when the coup d'état of April 25, 1974 overthrew the regime of Dr. Marcelo Caetano.

Because of its "recognition" by the colonial authorities, after Caetano's fall, UNITA quickly found support in the white community in Angola, which put substantial financial resources at its disposal. Nevertheless, Savimbi's immediate objective was to establish himself among the Blacks south of the Kwanza River, in the ethnic zone of the Ovimbundu, previously untouched by the guerrilla war.

"Angolanizing" FNLA and UNITA

However, by the end of July 1974, the young captains of the Armed Forces Movement (MFA) had seized the initiative again in Lisbon and had forced Spínola to accept the principle of direct negotiations with those who had actually conducted the armed struggle against the occupier, namely Roberto's FNLA and Neto's MPLA. Vice-Admiral Rosa Coutinho, a member of the junta, was directed to reestablish control in Angola. For the situation was deteriorating dangerously because of the emergence of clandestine armed organisations among the white colonists.

Supported by young MFA elements, Adm. Coutinho moved rapidly to neutralize the "new subversives," dealing a final blow to their hopes of establishing "white power" in Angola. For the Portuguese High Commissioner (Coutinho), from then on the ambitions of Mobutu's Zaire constituted the main threat to peaceful decolonization. The FNLA was essentially a wing of Mobu-



Jonas Savimbi : South Africa's henchman.

tu's armed forces. It was necessary, therefore, to "rehabilitate and Angolanize" the FNLA, and bring it together with the MPLA and UNITA to discuss with Portugal the transferral of power.

Rosa Coutinho then encouraged Jonas Savimbi to serve as the link between the two other movements. Savimbi was well aware that he needed to avoid a military confrontation with the MPLA and the FNLA, which were both better armed than UNITA. He therefore went to Kinshasa where he signed a peace treaty with Mobutu's protégé, Holden Roberto.

Encouraged by his successes, Savimbi then went to appeal for Mzee Kenyatta's good offices in an attempt to "reconciliate" Holden Roberto with Agostinho Neto. An agreement reached in Mombasa recognized the three movements as "unique and legitimate representatives of the Angolan people." A week later, in January 1975, negotiations began with Portugal in Alvor. A four-party transition government, made up of UNITA, the MPLA and the FNLA, plus a representative of the colonial power, was to organise elections to choose a Constituent Assembly within one year.

However, in the jockeying for position after Alvor, UNITA proposed a federal system that would consolidate its hegemony over the Ovimbundu. This was unacceptable to the MPLA, which had an anti-tribalist as well as anti-imperialist line.

Was there a way out of the impasse? Agostinho Neto proposed that all should withdraw provisionally from the elections, which would line them up as rivals. UNITA, the MPLA and the FNLA must present a "minimum common programme" to consolidate the independence and unity of the country.

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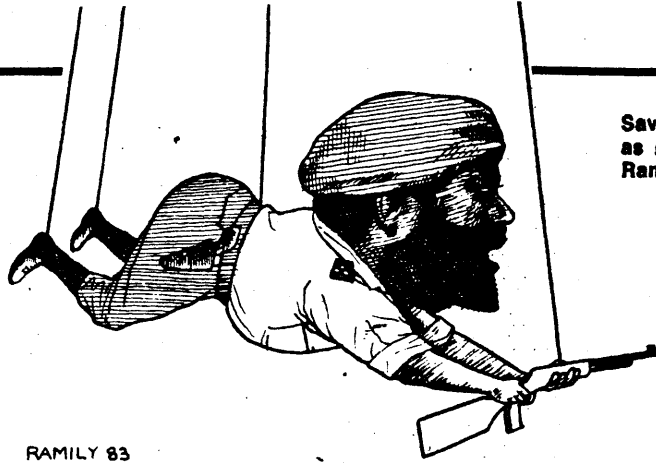
However, Holden Roberto, who sought undivided power, had already occupied the north with the support of the Zairean Army and the connivance of the "ultra" officers in the Portuguese Army. He launched an armed operation to expel the MPLA from Luanda, even while continuing his electoral campaign. UNITA remained "neutral" in Luanda but openly prepared to go on the offensive in the central-southern region against the MPLA. From then on, a peaceful agreement was out of the question. Armed struggle and new alliances outside Africa became the order of the day.

Well before these events, Washington had chosen Holden Roberto as its favourite. Savimbi himself recognized that the Lisbon government, weakened by internal struggles and debilitated by the war effort, was in no condition to help him. However, Savimbi thought he had found a solution. Long before Alvor, he had made discreet overtures to Pretoria. Speaking to the Luanda correspondent of the South African daily "The Star" on May 3, 1975, he went on to praise Vorster as a "responsible man" and took a position "against armed struggle to liberate Rhodesia or Namibia", concluding that "it would be realistic for Angola to cooperate with South Africa, even though we are opposed to the evil of apartheid."

Despite a verbal undertaking by Pretoria with Lisbon not to intervene in Angola, in September 1975, the South African Army penetrated a dozen kilometres inside Angola, ostensibly, they claimed, to protect the dam at Calueque on the Cunene River which had been supplying water to Namibia. Nonetheless, Pretoria was still wavering over its policy toward Angola.

After the American defeat in Vietnam, the U.S. Secretary of State, Henry Kissinger, had made no secret of wanting to show determination and resolve to resist "Soviet expansionism" all over the world. Kissinger wanted to expel the "pro-Soviet" MPLA from the corridors of power, if necessary by force of arms. However, the majority of his colleagues in the State Department, as well as most American senators, were in favour of a diplomatic solution and opposed the adventure. Thus Kissinger turned to the idea of South African intervention, supported by the CIA.

At this point, President Mobutu, who had for a long time maintained discreet and fruitful relations with Pretoria, reentered the picture. Mobutu had already decided to intervene militarily in northern Angola in support of the FNLA and now he recommended Savimbi to his South African "friends."



Savimbi
as seen by
Ramilly.

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In early September 1975, the UNITA president went to Ruptu, a Namibian frontier town, where he assured close advisers of Vorster that an eventual South African intervention in Angola on behalf of the FNLA and UNITA would be supported by the moderate states in the OAU, namely Zaire, Zambia and the Ivory Coast. Thus assured of support from moderate Africa and encouraged by Kissinger, Vorster gave the green light to his minister of defence to go ahead with direct action in Angola.

Refuge in Namibia

On October 23, 1975, a motorized column of between 1,000 and 1,500 men entered southern Angola. A second large column went into action on November 15, and a third intervened in December. The South African troops advanced 700 kilometres into Angola and "liberated" vast areas in order to install their protégés, the FNLA and UNITA. In the north, "liberated" by the Zairean Army, the FNLA, supported by a group of Portuguese mercenaries, advanced on Luanda.

On November 11—the date appointed by the Alvor Agreement—the MPLA proclaimed Angolan independence and appealed for aid from Cuba, which had always supported the movement. Prime Minister Fidel Castro organised an airlift to transport an expeditionary force of thousands of men to reinforce the MPLA's FAPLA (Popular Armed Forces for the Liberation of Angola), which succeeded in stopping the invaders at the gates of the capital.

Severely condemned by African public opinion and abandoned by Kissinger, who was refused funds for the adventure by the U.S. Congress, Vorster decided in early March 1976 to withdraw his troops from Angola. At the same time, UNITA and the FNLA suffered a complete defeat and practically disappeared from the Angolan political scene. Savimbi and his staff took refuge in Namibia.

The South Africans, nevertheless, held

the UNITA leader in high esteem and were not about to abandon him. Pretoria had already set up training camps for anti-SWAPO Ovambo at Ondangwa, Changwera and Kandu, in southern Angola. These camps sheltered Angolan refugees. They were trained by South African officers, experts in counter-insurgency, and later transported by helicopter to UNITA's old areas of influence and to the zone running alongside the Benguela railway.

These new UNITA "fighters" quickly went into action against so-called strategic targets. Attacks disrupted the Benguela railway, devastated the trade routes and destroyed food crops, especially in the provinces of Huambo and Bie. Savimbi claimed brilliant victories.

The FAPLA was capable of replying militarily. But it was a patient political campaign which assured the MPLA of another victory over UNITA, a policy of open dialogue, a policy of total exclusion of any kind of tribal reprisal. By the end of 1979, the peasants who had followed UNITA were fleeing from the frontier zones and returning en masse to their homes. Savimbi had lost the support of "his" people. But he still enjoyed residual support in the south, enabling him to make incursions and to mount attacks against isolated and undefended towns, a form of urban terrorism against the very Ovimbundu and Ovambo that Savimbi claimed to be defending.

Since the occupation of southern Angola by South African troops in August 1981, Savimbi's men have received important logistic support from them, which has permitted UNITA to extend its destabilization activities to the regions north of the Benguela railway. There is a complete symbiosis between Pretoria and UNITA in the southern part of the country. Attacks often are launched jointly. Pretoria and Savimbi are fighting one and the same war, although the strategy and objectives are designated by Pretoria.

How long will Africa and the international community permit the apartheid government to continue such acts?

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