

SAVIMBI

The Career of a Counter-Revolutionary

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'Savimbi is an enigma, a man on whom one can stick many labels, brilliant, charismatic, affable, inflexible, generous, compliant, machiavellian, opportunistic, a false nationalist, a Marxist, pro-Western and socialist.'

... ..

'Without him it is doubtful whether [UNITA's guerrilla war] could have been carried on'

'In African societies it is the chief who leads the people, said Jaka Jamba.* Savimbi is the chief. If he died I don't know what would happen to UNITA.'

(From Leon Dash, *Savimbi's 1977 campaign against the Cubans and MPLA* [Munger Africana Library Notes, California Institute of Technology, 1977]. Retranslated from Portuguese).

The career of Jonas Malheiro Savimbi, with its particular historical ups and downs, is that of a man in whom imperialism succeeded in combining an agent and a political ally. But interest in the study of this controversial personality does not lie only in this theoretical insight. In fact, according to all indications, UNITA as well as its leader has today merely given its name to **one** of the fronts through which South Africa intervenes politically and militarily in the independent states of southern Africa.

* Spokesman for UNITA in Luanda after 25 April 1974. Aide-de-campe to Savimbi. According to *Expresso*, he was a corporal who deserted from the Portuguese army on 16 June 1960, and changed his name from Evaristo Eco-lela. He was also the liaison between UNITA and the director of PIDE/DGS in Luso, António Rolim.

In reality, Savimbi's case history is a basic reference point for the analysis of the contemporary 'total strategy' of counter-revolutionary warfare which Pretoria has conceived for the sub-continent. This strategy includes the greatest possible interlinking of lines of force. Seen in this light the case of Savimbi shows such interlinkage in the following concrete steps. Firstly, it is seen in the attempts to reinforce the internal processes of class struggle in neighbouring countries with artificially fostered conflicts, so as to give anti-government forces more room for manoeuvre. The so-called 'ethnic reactivation' elevates such a phase of the class struggle, distorted in this manner, to a 'counter-revolutionary civil war' — the intervention of trained units recruited along ethnic lines and sent into action in the name of a nationalist front organisation which can be used as a tool. Such an organisation may already be conveniently in existence or of necessary it can be set up.

As the question of Namibian independence enters its final phase, Pretoria has begun to accelerate the integration of UNITA into South African military units. Such units are destined to put into action the attempt to destabilize Angola and simultaneously to police a future independent Namibia. It therefore becomes clear that the strategy of the counter-revolution in Angola is no longer decided in that country itself, but in Pretoria. Although Angola is the best known example, it bears repetition to point out that it is not the only one. In 1980 the South African Republic made various interventions — less serious and less prolonged, admittedly — in Zambia, in support of anti-Kaunda and anti-UNIP forces.

In January 1981, when he returned from Salisbury [now Harare] after signing a cooperation agreement on security measures, the Mozambican Minister of security, Major-General Jacinto Veloso, left no doubts about where the centre of the counter-revolution in the sub-continent is located. Veloso stated **'that in his conversations with the Zimbabwean authorities, both sides had reported that the major source for the planning, promotion and support of threats, attacks and subversion against the People's Republic of Mozambique and the Republic of Zimbabwe, is the racist apartheid regime of South Africa.'**

Indeed, at the time of writing in 1981, five thousand black Rhodesian soldiers were being given political and military training by the Republic of South Africa in special 'counter-

insurgency' camps in the Transvaal. This operation was intended eventually to provide support in action for anti-Zanu forces. The soldiers, who had previously belonged to Bishop Muzorewa's military forces, were almost all Shindebele-speakers, and put into effect the apparently 'ethnic' disturbances and uprisings inside Zimbabwe.

In Mozambique, on the other hand, through the capture of members of the self-styled 'Mozambique National Resistance', it is known that former collaborators with Portuguese colonialism, such as the Flechas [Arrows], and the GE's [Special Groups], as well as local reactionaries, are being recruited for military training in bases also situated in the Transvaal.

In all these cases, therefore, it is a question of armies of black soldiers trained, led and commanded by white south African officers who are experts in 'counter-insurgency'. In this way South Africa takes all possible precautions to ensure that her direct military interventions in independent African states shall be conveniently camouflaged. South Africa wants to avoid a repetition of the catastrophic political and military consequences of her first invasion of Angola.

In the context of this strategy, Savimbi is the prototype of a more successful type of key figure. He has personal charisma and, relatively speaking, UNITA had at least formerly put down roots in the south of Angola. Through a retrospective analysis, and through an updating of the facts of his career, at a time when UNITA seems to have found a certain amount of favour with the new United States administration, we can discover and perhaps anticipate the development of similar agents and organisations in the foci of counter-revolution. Apartheid wants to consolidate the counter-revolution and see it victorious in a southern Africa under its patronage and its domination.

AFTER THE 25TH OF APRIL: LOOKING FOR A LOST CREDIBILITY

The coup d'etat of 25 April 1979 overthrew the Caetano regime, and the new power-holders announced the decision to begin the process of decolonisation in their overseas territories.

On 29 April, the military junta which ruled the country published its first decrees. On the same day, General Antonio de

Spinola, President of the Junta of National Salvation, received the leaders of the political parties, notably representatives of the Portuguese Democratic Movement (the MDP), which included communists and progressive catholic sympathisers. The meeting lasted almost two hours and was described as **'cordial'** ⁽¹⁾. There was **'almost complete'** agreement on **'domestic questions'**. Spinola promised to speed up the **'dismantling of the Fascist apparatus'** of the Portuguese state ⁽²⁾. On the other hand, a disagreement arose over the colonial question.

The representatives of the political parties — namely, the progressive catholics — were in favour of an **'immediate cease-fire and the opening of conversations with the national liberation movements'** ⁽³⁾, while Spinola accepted the principle of self-determination, but argued that **'It [was] necessary not to confuse self-determination with independence'** ⁽⁴⁾. The question of the need for **'waiting periods to prepare for this self-determination'** was raised. Without such preparation, Spinola insisted, it **'[would] not have any meaning'** ⁽⁵⁾.

The head of the junta stated that the people of Portuguese Africa would have two choices:

1 — To maintain links with Portugal, perhaps in a federation. This would signify, according to Spinola, that his policies had been just and had succeeded.

2 — To choose complete independence. This choice would mean, on the contrary, the failure of the policy that he intended to pursue, and moreover his eventual resignation.

Spinola proposed that, **'starting immediately'**, his project should be **'guaranteed by a solemn promise'** of the military junta and of the political groups that had been called on to govern the country.

(1) *Le Monde*, 2 May 1974.

(2) *Ibid.*

(3) Portuguese Socialist Party, 'Communique', 29 April 1974.

(4) Interview with Professor Pereira de Moura, leader of the MDP/CDA, by the author. Pereira de Moura was asked by the Armed Forces Movement (MFA) to lead the first Provisional Government of Portugal, but Spinola refused to accept him.

(5) *Ibid.*

While General Spínola was trying to win over the 'antifascist' in Portugal with his federalist theses, General Costa Gomes, the junta's number two, set off at the beginning of May on an African tour. He was to try to get the feel of the situation, and to try to put into effect the federal option, which he described as **'the most satisfactory solution'**, and as **'the dream of my youth'** ⁽⁶⁾.

In returning to Lisbon, however, he did not attempt to hide his scepticism over the future of Guinea-Bissau and Mozambique as **'Portuguese'** territories, arguing that **'the situation [there] has deteriorated politically, economically and militarily'** ⁽⁷⁾. On the other hand, it was certain that **'Angola [would] stay Portuguese ... and multi-racial.'** ⁽⁸⁾

The junta chose a new Commander-in-Chief for Angola, to put its 'Luso-African projects' into practice. He was General Franco Pinheiro, who had a good knowledge of the country and had become a leading expert in counter-insurgency. ⁽⁹⁾ He received precise orders from Costa Gomes: he was to **'prosecute the war against the guerrillas who refuse to accept the ceasefire and who refuse to present themselves as legalised political parties'** ⁽¹⁰⁾ — legalised, that is, by the Portuguese, as a precondition for the beginning of the referendum process.

Nevertheless, the Chief of the General Staff of the Portuguese army had reason to show optimism. The **'pacification'** process was off to a good start.

On 28 April — only three days after Caetano's overthrow — Dr. Jonas Malheiro Savimbi, president of the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA), was to be found somewhere in Moxico province, in the company of a messenger from the Portuguese Military Information Police (PIM), the Rev. Father Antonio de Araujo Oliveira ⁽¹¹⁾. Savimbi told Oliveira that he was prepared to **renew** his links with Lisbon, in return for **public recognition** of his movement.

(6) Costa Gomes, *Sobre Portugal: Diálogos com Alexandre Manuel* (Lisboa: Regra do Jogo, 1979), p. 38.

(7) Henry Kamn, writing from Nampula, *New York Times*, 13 May 1974.

(8) *Interview in the South African weekly To the Point*, 24 May 1975.

(9) João Franco Pinheiro, *Natureza e fundamentos da guerra subversiva* (Lisboa, Estudos de Ciências Políticas e Sociais, 1963).

(10) Costa Gomes, press conference in Luanda, *Diário de Notícias*, 5 May 1974.

(11) *Diário de Luanda*, 29 April 1974.

General Franco Pinheiro ordered the declarations of the nationalist leader to be tape-recorded and broadcast over the national radio in Luanda. Savimbi preached **'gradual decolonisation, because the Angolan people are not yet ready for independence...'** He also let it be understood he would support Spinola's federal projects.

The UNITA president, who had formerly laid claim to a **pure and simple 'anti-revisionist Marxism'** ⁽¹²⁾, now publicly abandoned Chairman Mao's old clothes, as well as the slogan of a **'Black socialist republic'** in Angola. Now he tried to give the impression that he was a credible statesman and a moderate capable of governing the country.

This rather clever operation mounted by the army's special services (DGS/PIM) came as a pleasant surprise to most of Angola's 500,000 'pequenos brancos' or poor whites, traumatised as they were by the unexpected downfall of the metropolitan government, and fiercely opposed to the Marxist policies of the MPLA. Here was a 'clever Negro' that they thought they could trust. Savimbi, a name previously known only to a few insiders, became, in the blinking of an eye, a legend, the 'harbinger of peace', able to provide the settlers with a new destiny.

Spinola and his generals had won the first battle. More than anything else they wanted to prevent a tide of retornados — the thousands of colonists who might return to Portugal, like their Mozambican counterparts, abandoning everything they owned. The junta thought that they had found the man of the hour in Savimbi, a man open to dialogue with this fourth **'tribe'**, which **'maintains links of affection and identity with Portugal, which any responsible Portuguese government is obliged to take account of and to respect.'** ⁽¹³⁾

At any rate this was the only point on which the military left wingers of the MFA, the old 'fascist' generals, and the 'civilian' ministers of the new regime were in agreement.

(12) Unpublished letter to *Le Monde*. Years later, in an interview with Dominique de Roux: **The struggle in Angola is between two sides: the ideology of Marxism, foreign to Africa, and the national independence of Houphouët-Boigny, Senghor, Kaunda, and all the wisdom of the tribal chiefs', The Citizen** [Johannesburg], 16 November 1976.

(13) Almeida Santos, in an interview in the Lisbon weekly *Expresso*, [early] October 1974.

Some days later, on the 14th of June 1974, the Portuguese armed forces signed an 'official' ceasefire in Moxico. The Commander-in-Chief, General Franco Pinheiro, returned to Lisbon that evening. He was given the go-ahead by Spínola himself, for an operation which was, logically, to give Jonas Malheiro Savimbi a 'credibility' which he lacked both in national, and indeed in international affairs.

It was General Silvino Silvério Marques, Governor-General of Angola in the transition period, who removed the possibility of **'dialogue with those who refused it and who condemned the referendum'**. Silvério Marques was an old imperialist who had governed Angola with a rod of iron under Salazar in the early 1960s, and who felt that **'the non-communist [i.e., without the MPLA] evolution of the former Overseas territories is possible and indeed natural'** ⁽¹⁴⁾. It was to UNITA that hopes, very naturally, turned. Savimbi was called to participate in the government that Silvério Marques was never to have the time to form, because meanwhile the MFA in Angola had demanded and obtained his removal from the colony ⁽¹⁵⁾.

REFLECTION ON A NOT TOO DISTANT PAST

The Eastern Front had been opened by the MPLA in March 1966 in the Province of Moxico, bordering on the Republic of Zambia, and fighting had spread rapidly into the interior of the country by the end of the 1960s. The MPLA began to prepare to cross the mighty river Kwanza. Their target was the rich central plateau of Bié, a densely populated region which is the granary of Angola. Talk in military circles in Lisbon was of the alarming possibility of **'the MPLA's soon reaching the [Atlantic] ocean'** ⁽¹⁶⁾.

In 1970 the guerrillas increased the number of attacks by more than sixty per cent in comparison with the previous year, resulting in twenty-five per cent more Portuguese casualties ⁽¹⁷⁾.

(14) Silvino Silvério Marques, **Portugal: e agora?** (Lisbon: Ed. Templo, 1978), p. 179.

(15) *Ibid.*, p. 139.

(16) Costa Gomes, *op. cit.*, p. 32.

(17) Gerald Bender, **Journal of Comparative Politics** 4 (3) 1972.

This rapid development of the guerrilla struggle was a serious threat to colonial domination: all the more since the overwhelming majority of the Portuguese soldiers were by no means 'motivated' to fight the enemy, and felt no identification with the **'transcendent importance of this national crusade'**, in the words of a report to Lisbon by General João de Almeida Viana, Commander-in-Chief of the forces of occupation.

How was defeat to be avoided? Marcelo Caetano appealed to Francisco Costa Gomes, a rather unorthodox general who had already taken part, in early 1961, 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 armed forces in Angola was a longtime advocate of **'total war'** against the insurgents, because military operations were only **'one of many ways to fight the enemy'**.⁽¹⁸⁾ The general was a cultured man: he was no stranger to the wars of Vietnam or of Algeria, so he knew how to use, in the fine tradition of counter-guerrilla warfare, 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. São José Lopes, Costa Gomes' intimate 'friend' of long standing. 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)'**.

Since 1968-1969, in fact, the DGS had maintained extra special relations with Savimbi's UNITA guerrillas, who had been active in Angola since 1965. Savimbi had deserted from Holden Roberto's FNLA, together with some 'friends', in July 1964, publicly accusing Roberto of being a Bakongo 'tribalist' in the service of American imperialism, and for this reason 'incapable' of developing a real struggle to liberate the country. Afterwards he approached the MPLA with a proposal to integrate his group of dissidents in the organisation. However,

(18) Interview in the Angolan magazine *Prisma*, April 1971.

negotiations collapsed because Savimbi was already demanding that he should participate in the leadership of the movement. He wanted to represent the people of the central-southern region, namely the Ovimbundu, the largest ethnic group in Angola, numbering over two million. The MPLA refused categorically to accept this condition.

Savimbi therefore set up his own organisation, UNITA, with the support of Angolan refugees in Zambia. He bypassed the MPLA, opening a front in eastern Angola. Badly equipped, denied the support of a rear base by President Kaunda, UNITA's campaign against the occupiers in the vast semidesert region stagnated after a few spectacular successes. In the meantime the MPLA, which had prepared itself patiently, made rapid progress. The two organisations reached no understanding, and confronted each other in unequal armed clashes which marginalised the men of UNITA. They survived thanks to discrete assistance provided by the DGS, which was perfectly well aware that **'UNITA hates the MPLA more than it hates the Portuguese'** ⁽²⁰⁾ and could thus be an **'objective ally'** against a common enemy, the movement of Dr. Agostinho Neto.

Meanwhile São José Lopes was sending his information regularly to his immediate superiors in Lisbon.

Caetano himself followed these developments with great interest ⁽²¹⁾. Savimbi announced in one of his communiques that he agreed with the Prime Minister's 'reformist' policies and that the foresaw gradual autonomy for the overseas territories, within Portuguese sovereignty. The UNITA leader rejected, however, 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 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.

A 'secret' agreement was signed in the middle of 1971, after an exchange of letters and contacts with Savimbi and his representatives, which resulted in the **'suspension of military**

(20) Silva Cunha, *O Ultramar, a nação e o 25 de Abril* (Coimbra: Atlântida Editora, 1977).

(21) Marcelo Caetano, *O 25 de Abril e o Ultramar: três entrevistas e alguns documentos* (Lisboa: Verbo, 1976).

activity' ⁽²²⁾, with a view to 'finding a definitive solution in the spirit of Caetano's proposals'. ⁽²³⁾

Both UNITA and the Portuguese armed forces were able to confirm that 'the MPLA was the main obstacle to peace, not only in the Est, but in the whole territory of Angola' ⁽²⁴⁾. The UNITA leader affirmed that, as a consequence 'the weakening of the MPLA forces in the interior of Angola until they are liquidated' was a priority task 'to be accomplished by the joint efforts of the Portuguese armed forces and UNITA'.

Thus,

1 — the Portuguese armed forces

- a) authorised UNITA to keep the region of Alto Lunge-Bungo, in the neighbourhood of Lyuso, under its control;
- b) promised to protect this UNITA 'pocket' and to 'keep the fighting away', at the same time making an effort to promote the well-being of the African population in terms of food supplies, medicine, school materials, and so forth.

2 — UNITA promised

- a) to provide guides for the armed forces in joint-actions in previously agreed sectors;
- b) to order its cells abroad to exert pressure on African governments — especially Zambia - to change their policy towards Portugal.

The 'rehabilitation' of Jonas Savimbi and the 'investment' in UNITA in the fight against the MPLA was a brilliant move by the Portuguese strategists of the counter-guerrilla war. The 'neutralisation' of guerrilla sanctuaries in neighbouring countries was a necessary condition for victory over the liberation movement. According to Portuguese forecasts, UNITA pressures would force Zambia to reverse its policy of logistical support for the MPLA by 1973.

(22) Costa Gomes, op. cit., p. 32.

(23) **Expresso**, 17 November 1979; 24 November 1979; and 30 November 1979.

(24) Letter from Savimbi to General Luz Cunha, dated 26 September 1972. This was published in **Afrique-Asie**, 3-21 July 1974.

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

RETURNING TO UNITA

As the only organisation recognised by the colonial authorities after the fall of Caetano, UNITA quickly found an opening in the white community. These put substantial financial resources at its disposal. Savimbi's immediate objective was, nevertheless, to establish himself among the blacks south of the river Kwanza, in the ethnic zone of the Ovimbundu, which had never been touched by the guerrilla war.

By the end of July, the young captains of the 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 Holden's FNLA and Neto's MPLA.

Vice-Admiral Rosa Coutinho, one of the members of the junta, was called upon to reestablish control in Angola, where the situation was deteriorating dangerously after the emergence of clandestine armed organisations among the white colonists. There had been serious clashes between these 'ultras', who advocated a Rhodesia-style independence, and the black population of the musseques or townships. Supported by young MFA elements and backed up by trustworthy military units from Portugal, Rosa Coutinho moved rapidly to neutralise the 'new subversives', dealing a final blow to their hopes of establishing 'white power' in Angola.

For the Portuguese High Commissioner, it was the ambiguities and ambitions of Mobutu's Zaire which constituted the main threat to the process of 'peaceful decolonisation' from then on. The FNLA was simply an armed wing of Mobutu.

It was necessary, therefore, to '**rehabilitate and Angolanise**' ⁽²⁵⁾ the FNLA, bringing it into a common front with the other two movements, in order to discuss with Portugal the way in which power was to be transferred, with no intermediaries.

Rosa Coutinho, then, '**encouraged**' the charismatic Jonas Savimbi to serve as the link between the two estranged movements. Savimbi was perfectly aware that a military confron-

(25) Remarks made to the author of this article by Rosa Coutinho on the eve of his nomination.

tation with his rivals, the MPLA and the FNLA, which were better armed than UNITA, would hardly help him to consolidate his positions.

The president of UNITA went to Kinshasa to convince the Zairean head of state of his 'good faith'. There he signed a peace treaty with Mobutu's protégé, Holden Roberto.

Rosa Coutinho took it upon himself to 'push' the MPLA — which he had 'helped' out of isolation — into reaching an understanding with UNITA. For the High commissioner, an agreement with this organisation was the '**minimum**' necessary to '**begin the decolonisation process in Angola**'.

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 recognised the three nationalist movements as 'unique and legitimate representatives of the Angolan people'. A week later, in January 1975, negotiations with Portugal began in Alvor.

A four-party transitional government, made up of UNITA, the MPLA, and the FNLA, with representative of the colonial power, had to organise elections to choose a Constituent Assembly within one year.

Jonas Malheiro Savimbi had won the second round and hoped to consolidate his positions, all the more since the majority of the white population had joined UNITA immediately after Alvor. Various observers estimated that UNITA would gain a majority with between 40 and 45 per cent of the vote in eventual elections. Such a result was unacceptable to the MPLA, with an estimated 35 to 40 per cent. They had from the very beginning defined their political line in terms of opposition to '**systems**' — anti-imperialist and anti-tribalist. The 'federal' project of UNITA would consolidate the hegemony of the Ovimbundu and thus threaten the unity of the country.

With less than 20 per cent of the vote, the FNLA, supported by the minority Kikongo speakers and a tribalist organisation par excellence, was hardly likely to accept the rules of the electoral game, especially as they disposed of an army much better equipped than the guerrillas of either the MPLA or of UNITA.

Was there a way out of the impasse?

Agostinho Neto proposed that they should all 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 the unity of the country. Holden Roberto, who wanted

undivided power, had already occupied the north of the country with the support of the Zairean army and the connivance of the 'ultra' officers in the Portuguese army. He launched an armed operation to expell the MPLA from the capital, even while his electoral campaign was still coming to its climax.

UNITA, which stayed 'neutral' in Luanda, openly prepared to go onto the offensive in the centra-southern zone of the country. Their target was the MPLA, which had undermined UNITA's solid ethnic support, by setting up active cells of militants among the Ovimbundu in urban centres.

Thus there was no possibility of arriving at a peaceful agreement. From then onwards, armed struggle and new alliances outside Africa were the order of the day.

Savimbi understood that the Lisbon government, weakened by internal struggles and debilitated by the effort of war, was in no condition to help him to realise his ambitions.

A long time before, the American administration had chosen Holden Roberto as its favourite. Helping the president of the FNLA, according to the CIA, would allow the US to set up in Angola **'the most stable and the most secure of governments'** ⁽²⁶⁾.

The People's Republic of China tried to send a substantial consignment of arms to UNITA, but this ended up embargoed in Dar es Salaam.

But Savimbi thought he had found a solution. Long before Alvor, he had made discrete overtures to Pretoria.

Talking to the Luanda correspondent of the South African daily The Star, he warmly praised 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'** ⁽²⁷⁾.

By taking this position on Namibia, the leader of UNITA made a complete volte-face. His organisation had always

(26) Roger Davis, **'The proxy war in Angola: pathology of a blunder'**, New Republic, January 1971.

(27) **Star Weekly**, 3 May 1975.

been an 'historical' ally of SWAPO until the very eve of 25 April. ⁽²⁸⁾

After the coup in Portugal, South Africa received an '**assurance of goodwill**' from the rulers in Lisbon ⁽²⁹⁾. In turn, Pretoria undertook not to interfere in '**the Internal affairs of Angola**' ⁽³⁰⁾. Nonetheless, in September 1975 the South African army penetrated a dozen kilometres inside Angola, in order, so they claimed, to protect the dam at Calueque on the Cunene river, which had been supplying water to Namibia for six months. Even so, the South African government had not yet decided to intervene on a massive scale to set up the client state, friendly to its Namibian ambitions, which it wanted to see installed in Luanda.

WHY DID SOUTH AFRICA INTERVENE IN ANGOLA?

On this occasion, the regime in the Republic of South Africa justified its intervention as a gesture designed to safeguard the Ovambo workers at the dam, who were threatened by the guerrilla activities of SWAPO. Nevertheless, South Africa officially reconfirmed to the new rulers in Lisbon that it would not interfere in the internal affairs of Angola.

In fact, Pretoria had not yet decided whether or not to intervene militarily in the Angolan question...

In the seat of the government of apartheid, a silent struggle took place between the advocates of direct intervention, and those who would not mind seeing a government with MPLA participation installed in Luanda, the equivalent of which had already happened in Samora Machel's 'Marxist' Mozambique.

While the Minister of Defence, P.K. Botha, and the Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces, General Magnus Malan, did not hide their desire to neutralise the SWAPO pockets and bases in Angola ⁽³¹⁾, the policy was opposed by General

(28) The Namibian Ovambo people, the most important ethnic group in terms of support for SWAPO, have strong ties with the Cuangana people of southern Angola.

(29) Interview with Costa Gomes, **To the Point**, 24 May 1975.

(30) **Jornal Novo**, 19 April 1975.

(31) J.H.P. Serfontein, **Namibia?** (Fokus Suid, 1976). In this important book, the author reveals for the first time the antecedents and the secrets of the conflict between Botha and Van der Berg.

Hendrick Van der Burgh, the heavyweight chief of the security service (BOSS) and the architect of **'detente and dialogue'** advocated by Prime Minister John Vorster. He was supported in this by the fact that since May 1975 the Angolan Ovambo had made it known that they would not submit to the new authorities in Luanda. So, in Van der Bergh's view, the clever policy for Pretoria would be to support the formation of a kind of Bantustan — Greater Ovambo — which would include all the Ovambo speakers of Angola and Namibia and serve to put a brake on SWAPO's ambitions.

This was the position which appeared reasonable to the Prime Minister, a warm advocate of the policy of opening a dialogue with moderate African states. Nonetheless, the rapid unfolding of events was to persuade Vorster to change his opinion.

After the defeat in Vietnam, the US Secretary of State, Henry Kissinger, had made no secret of the fact that the United States wanted to show its determination and resolve to resist 'Soviet expansionism' all over the world. On the other hand it was certain — according to his collaborators and confidants in the State Department — that **'Breshnev would not sacrifice ten years of detente for an African client state'** ⁽³²⁾. Kissinger wanted to expell the 'pro-Soviet' MPLA from the corridors of power, if necessary by force of arms. Nonetheless, the majority of his colleagues in the State Department, as well as most senators, were in favour of a diplomatic solution, and opposed the adventure.

What to do? Kissinger found the answer: the Republic of South Africa was a friendly country whose strategic interests in the stormy region of southern Africa were not much different from those of the United States. A discrete South African intervention, supported by the CIA and 'guaranteed' by the moderate Africans in the OAU, would be enough to lance this communist boil — that is, the MPLA — in Angola.

It was not a simple operation. Kissinger was well-informed about South Africa. He was familiar with the positions of General Van der Bergh — relations between the CIA and BOSS were excellent ⁽³³⁾. Kissinger ordered General Brent Scow-

(32) **Time**, 22 January 1976.

(33) **Newsweek** 17 May 1976.

croft, his successor in the National Security Council in the White House, to take charge of this delicate question.

The Israeli secret service, the MOSSAAD, was well established in the apartheid state, and was ordered to make the necessary contacts instead of the CIA, which was already too compromised with BOSS. Vorster was ready to listen to Kissinger's arguments, but had not yet decided to put an end to the debate between his Minister of Defense, Botha and the old General Van der Bergh.

It was then that President Mobutu, who had for a long time maintained discrete and fruitful relations with Pretoria, came on the scene.

Jonas Savimbi had visited the Zairean Head of State a little earlier to ask for substantial help in fighting the MPLA, which was regaining strength. Mobutu had already decided to intervene militarily in northern Angola in support of the FNLA, and recommended him to his South African 'friends'.

The UNITA president, who had already met representatives of the South African General Magnus Malan in Paris in March 1975, travelled to Ruptu, a Namibian frontier town, in early September of the same year.

In conversations with the South African Prime Ministers closest advisors, Savimbi assured them that an eventual South African intervention in Angola in support of the FNLA and UNITA would be supported by the moderate states in the OAU, namely Zaire, Zambia and Ivory Coast⁽³⁴⁾.

Assured of the support that he could count on receiving from 'moderate' Africa, and encouraged by the 'weighty' American Secretary of State, Vorster gave the green light to his Minister of Defense to go ahead with direct action in Angola.

Mobutu's intervention with the South African government, to persuade them to support the FNLA and UNITA, had been decisive⁽³⁵⁾.

On 23 October 1975 a motorised column of between 1,000 and 1,500 men entered southern Angola. A second column went into action on 15 November, with air cover provided by Alouette III helicopters and Puma aircraft. A third column in-

(34) Revealed in the pro-Government Afrikaans newspaper **Rapport**, 15 February 1976.

(35) Franz-Wilhelm Heimer, '**Decolonisation et legittimite politique en Angola**', *Revue Française d'Etudes Politiques* (126), June 1976: 65.

tervened 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 the capital Luanda.

On 11 November — the date appointed by the Alvor Agreement — the MPLA proclaimed Angolan independence and appealed to socialist Cuba, which had always supported the movement, for help. Fidel organised an airlift to transport an expeditionary force of thousands of men. They reinforced FAPLA, which succeeded in stopping the invaders at the gates of the capital. The South Africans were thrown into confusion by the firepower of the T-54 tanks and by the SAM-7 missiles used by their adversaries.

Severely condemned by African public opinion and 'forgotten' by Kissinger despite his promise to associate himself with the adventure, Vorster decided in early March 1976 to withdraw his troops from Angola. However, he fiercely criticised his American 'allies' for their passivity and 'defeatism', the inheritance of their defeat in Vietnam ⁽³⁶⁾. 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. On 8 February 1980 Jonas Savimbi declared in an interview with the Portuguese weekly 'O Pais': **'A guerrilla campaign cannot exist in Angola, cannot survive with only external assistance. It must have something special, something genuine, of its own.'**

The South Africans, nevertheless, held the UNITA leader in high esteem and were not about to abandon him. He still had a few resources: although they were unable to stop the FAPLA offensive, the UNITA leaders had succeeded in occupying the **high plateaus**, urging the people of the area to abandon their homes. So thousands of peasants took up the guerrilla campaign in the inaccessible forests, waiting for the eventual return of their leaders. Savimbi had considerable room for manoeuvre in the area, all the more since he was able to send before his firing squads those 'assimilated' Ovimbundu, who were suspected of MPLA sympathies.

Could he make an accommodation with the peasantry, introduce new policies, bring them a breath of fresh air? Could

(36) **The Star** [Johannesburg], 6 January 1976.

he destabilise the 'mna Marxist' Angolan regime? Finally, could he serve as the tool for the establishment of a bufferstate in the south to stop SWAPO? These were the questions which the apartheid leaders were asking as they looked at their other projects.

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' very quickly went into action against so-called 'strategic' targets. Bomb attacks disrupted the Benguela railway, devastated the trade routes and destroyed food crops, especially in the provinces of Huambo and Bié.

At the same time, these 'new terrorists' acted as 'guides' for the South African forces, exercising 'the right of hot pursuit' in the border zones in search of SWAPO bases.

Savimbi could thus claim 'brilliant' victories. The Benguela railway practically stopped functioning, having lost twenty of its 25 ultra-modern diesel locomotives. Food production was paralysed in what had formerly been the granary of the country, and supplies ceased to reach the towns and cities...

This 'selective terrorism' disagreeably surprised the MPLA, which needed time to adapt to the new situation. Certainly FAPLA was better equipped, and was ready to reply blow for blow to the incursions of the counter-guerrilla campaign. But it was a 'patient' political campaign which was to assure the MPLA of another victory over UNITA, a policy of open dialogue and mobilization with the population, a policy of total exclusion of any kind of tribal reprisal.

By the end of 1979 the peasants, fleeing from the frontier zones, were returning en masse to their homes. They had ceased to believe in UNITA.

At the beginning of 1980, the Caminhos de Ferro de Benguela (CFB) slowly became active again, transporting valuable Zairean manganese and Zambian copper to the Atlantic port of Lobito. Forecasts for 1981 were excellent — 70,000 tonnes per month; for 1982, 96,000 tonnes, practically equal to the 1973-74 figures of 100,000 tonnes per month.

Savimbi seemed to have lost the support of 'his' people. But he still enjoyed residual support among the southern populations, which enabled him to make incursions and to mount isolated attacks from 'bases' situated in occupied Na-

mibia. These attacks against isolated and undefended towns were a form of 'urban terrorism' against the very Ovimbundu and Ovambo that he claimed to be defending.

Between the end of July and the middle of October 1980, South Africa launched 22 attacks against the south of Angola. The damage caused by these raids amounted to more than £40 million.

What do the South Africans want?

'They want to establish UN!TA inside the country, before they begin to talk to SWAPO about the future of Namibia', Lucio Lara, secretary-general of the MPLA, told me.

How long can they maintain the present situation?

With the independence of Namibia on the horizon, that question does not seem difficult to answer.

'If [Savimbi] wants to save his skin, I'd advise him to choose freedom with his bosses — that is, outside Namibia', Sam Nujoma, president of SWAPO, told me. 'Perhaps in South Africa, because it's hard to distinguish the UNITA gangsters from the forces of occupation in our country.'