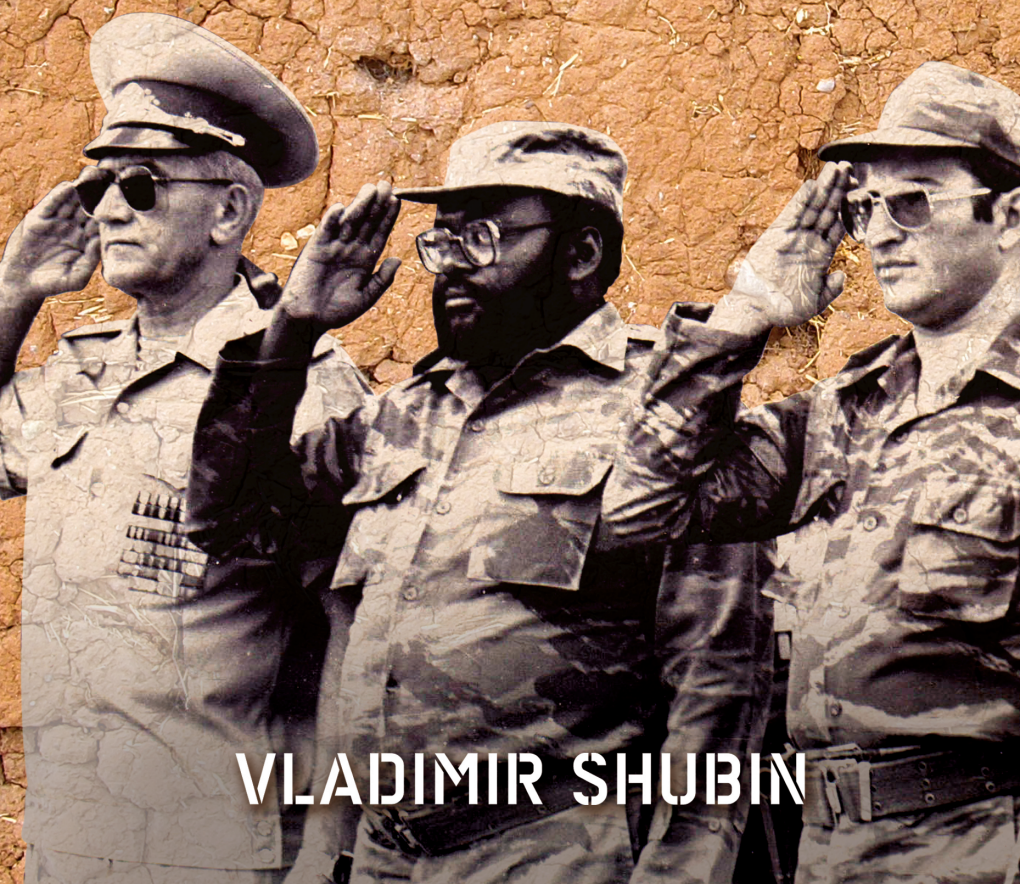


THE **HOT** 'COLD WAR'

The USSR in
Southern Africa



VLADIMIR SHUBIN

The Hot “Cold War”

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*In memory of Colonel Igor Ivanovich Uvarov,
one of the unsung Soviet heroes.*

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*"Treason is knowing how to write, and not writing."
Jose Craveirinha, Mozambican poet.*

List of Abbreviations

AACRLS	Archives of Anti-colonial Resistance and Liberation Struggle (Namibia)
AAPSO	Afro-Asian People's Solidarity Organisation
ANC	African National Congress (South Africa)
ANC	African National Council (Zimbabwe)
APC	armoured personnel carrier
APN	Agentstvo pechati Novosti (Press-Agency Novosti)
CAMCO	Cuban-American Military Council
CANU	Caprivi National Union
CC	Central Committee
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency (USA)
CMEA	
(or COMECON)	Council of Mutual Economic Assistance
CONCP	Conference of the Nationalist Organisations of the Portuguese Colonies
COREMO	Mozambique Revolutionary Committee
CPSU	Communist Party of the Soviet Union
CWIHP	Cold War International History Project
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
FAPLA	People's Armed Forces for Liberation of Angola
FCO	Foreign and Commonwealth Office (UK)
FLS	Frontline States
FNLA	National Front for Liberation of Angola
FPLM	People's Forces for the Liberation of Mozambique
FRELIMO	Front for the Liberation of Mozambique
FRETILIN	Revolutionary Front for an Independent East Timor
FRG	Federal Republic of Germany
FROLIZI	Front for Liberation of Zimbabwe
GDR	German Democratic Republic
GIU	Glavnoe inzhenernoe upravlenie (Main Engineering Department of the GKES)
GKES	Gosudarstvennyi komitet po elonimicheskim svyazyam s zarubezhnymi stranami (State Committee for Economic Ties with Foreign Countries)

GRAE	Revolutionary Government of Angola in Exile
GRU	Glavnoe razvedyvatelnoe upravlenie (Department of Military Intelligence of the General Staff)
GUK	Glavmoe upravlenie kadrov (Department of Personnel, USSR Ministry of Defence)
GVS	Glavnyi voennyi sovetnik (Chief Military Adviser)
IDASA	Institute for a Democratic Alternative for South Africa
JMC	Joint Military Command (Zimbabwe)
KGB	Komitet gosudarsvennoi bezopasnosti (Committee of State Security of the USSR)
Komsomol	Young Communist League (USSR)
MAC	Anti-colonial Movement
MANU	Mozambican African National Union
MCW	military-combat work
MDA	Democratic Movement of Angola
MFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
MFA	Movement of the Armed Forces (Portugal)
MK	Umkhonto we Sizwe (South Africa)
MPLA	Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola
MVT	Ministerstvo vneshnei torgovli (Ministry of Foreign Trade)
NAM	Non-Aligned Movement
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NDP	National Democratic Party (Zimbabwe)
NGO	non-governmental organisation
OAU	Organisation of African Unity
ODA	People's Defence Organisation
OKABON	Otdelnaya krasnoznamyonnaya aviatsionnaya brigada osobogo naznacheniya (Independent Red Banner Special Purpose Air Brigade)
PAC	Panafricanist Congress of Azania (South Africa)
PAIGC	African Party for Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde
PCP	Portuguese Communist Party
PFZ	Patriotic Front of Zimbabwe
PF-ZAPU	Patriot Front – Zimbabwe African People's Union
PGU	Pervoe glavnoe upravlenie (First Main Department of the KGB)
PIDE	International and State Defence Police (Portugal)

PLAN	People's Liberation Army of Namibia
PRA	People's Republic of Angola
PRC	People's Republic of Congo
RENAMO	Mozambican National Resistance
RPG	rocket-propelled grenade launcher
RSAMH	Russian State Archive of Modern History
RSF	Rhodesian Security Forces
SAAF	South African Air Force
SACP	South African Communist Party
SADET	South African Democracy Education Trust
SADF	South African Defence Force
SANDF	South African National Defence Force
SARF	State Archive of the Russian Federation
SIDA	Swedish International Development Agency
SVR	Sluzhba vneshnei razvedki (Foreign Intelligence Service, Russia)
SWAPO	South-West Africa People's Organisation (Namibia)
SWATF	South-West African Territorial Force
TANU	Tanganyika African National Union
TASS	Telegrafnoe agentstvo Sovetskogo Soyuza (Telegraph Agency of the Soviet Union)
TRC	Truth and Reconciliation Commission
UDENAMO	Democratic National Union of Mozambique
UDI	Unilateral Declaration of Independence
UN	United Nations
UNITA	Union for Total Liberation of Angola
UNTA	National Union of Angolan Workers
UNTAG	United Nations Transitional Assistance Group
UPA	Union of Peoples of Angola
USA	United States of America
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
VDV	Vozdushno-desantnye voiska (airborne troops)
VTa	Voennno-transportnaya aviatsiya (Military Transport Aviation)
YCL	Young Communist League
ZANLA	Zimbabwe African National Liberation Army
ZANU	Zimbabwe African National Union
ZANU-PF	Zimbabwe African National Union–Patriotic Front
ZAPU	Zimbabwe African People's Union

ZHP	Zero Hour Plan
ZIPA	Zimbabwe People's Army
ZIPRA	Zimbabwe People's Revolutionary Army

Preface

This book is devoted to the events in Southern Africa in the three decades (1960–90) that in world history are commonly regarded as the years of the “Cold War”. However, just as in many other parts of the globe, the wars that were waged in the region were not cold, but rather hot. This led me to decide on this particular title for the book.

I am sure that a comprehensive history of the events in the region; that is, the history of the liberation struggle and defence of the sovereignty of independent African states, can and should be written by Africans themselves. Fortunately, at long last some serious steps have been taken in this respect in recent years. The South African Democracy Education Trust (SADET) and Archives of the Anti-colonial Resistance and Liberation Struggle (AACRLS) in Namibia have been particularly active in this respect. On a regional level the matter is being tackled in a project initiated by the Southern African Development Community under the patronage of Brigadier Hashim Mbita, former Executive Secretary of the Organisation of African Unity’s Liberation Committee.

The theme of the “Cold War” – the confrontation of the USSR and the USA, the two so-called superpowers, has been examined (and exploited) by academics for many years. Moreover, in recent years its scope has been broadened to include the world “periphery”.¹ However, I believe that too often Moscow’s involvement in Southern Africa, especially the role of the Soviet military, is covered inadequately or even distorted, and in this book I hope to set the record straight.

To do this I did my best to use primary sources. These include documents from Russian official and informal archives and also documents of the African National Congress and South African Communist Party in South African archives. The problem has been that most of the relevant materials, at least so far as the Russian archives are concerned, are still classified. The 30-year law on declassification seems to exist only on paper so I have tried to contact participants in the events in question, both from the USSR/Russia and the Southern African countries. Naturally, in addition to this, I have used the notes, handwritten and sometimes hardly legible, that I

accumulated during the years of the liberation struggle, as well as my memory, as fragile as it may be. Thus I should apologise in advance for any errors that may result from this somewhat imperfect process.

I regard this book as an academic one, but my association with Southern Africa, which began over four decades ago, inevitably makes it somewhat personal. I went to Africa – to Egypt – for the first time in April 1960, while still a student of the Moscow State Institute of International Relations. My life thus became connected with Africa at an early stage. Soon after my first mission to Egypt and after getting my MA in International Relations and Oriental Studies, I was conscripted and had to serve the next seven years as an officer of the USSR Armed Forces. My involvement with the liberation movements in Southern Africa began in January 1967, when, as a crewmember of a Soviet Air Force transport plane, I arrived in Dar es Salaam to bring Mozambican freedom fighters to the USSR for military training.

Later, having left the Soviet Armed Forces and joined the staff of the Soviet Afro-Asian Solidarity Committee in March 1969, I became deeply involved in political and practical support of the liberation movements in Southern Africa, especially as the Committee's secretary from 1972 to 1979. Then, after three years of full-time doctoral studies, I came into the field again, this time as a desk officer of the African Section of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) International Department. I headed this section (renamed into a group) from January 1989.

Lastly, I have to express my gratitude to all the people who in one way or another have made the publication of this book possible, especially: Jan Burgess, editor of the *Review of African Political Economy* who prompted my contact with Pluto Press; Roger van Zwanenberg, chairman of Pluto, above of all for his patience, and his colleagues Robert Webb, Ray Addicott and Tracey Day who formed the editorial team, and Barbara Bradley for turning my Russo-English into a proper language.

Introduction

Despite the distance between Russia and Southern Africa, the first time Russia interfered militarily, albeit indirectly, in the affairs of that region was over a century ago, when about 200 Russian volunteers, among them officers, joined the Boers in their fight against British Imperial forces.

Why were the Russian authorities and the Russian public in general so interested in the developments many thousands of miles away? It would be accurate to say that an obvious reason was human sympathy for the “weaker side”, typical of the Russian mentality. Nevertheless, the “love of the Boers” was also undoubtedly prompted by a strong aversion to Great Britain. The war in South Africa started when Russian-British rivalry, especially in Central Asia, had turned their relationship far from amiable.

Sixty years later history repeated itself in a rather different context: 1960 became known as “Africa Year”. It witnessed the independence of 16 countries on the continent. I spent most of that year and half of 1961 in an African country, Egypt, and returned to Moscow on 10 July 1961. A couple of days later I found myself in a two-storey structure adjacent to a huge grey building with the star on all sides of its tower on the Gogolevsky Boulevard. At that time the big building housed several departments of the Soviet General Staff, and the small one was used by its administrative services, including an accounting section of the Desyatka – the jargon name for the Tenth Main Department of the USSR Armed Forces General Staff, which was responsible for Soviet military co-operation with foreign countries.

Standing at the division between clients and accountants, I saw next to me a stout handsome major general in his late 30s, rather young by Soviet standards. It was none other than Victor Kulikov, who 15 years later became Marshal of the Soviet Union, Chief of General Staff and a little later Commander-in-Chief of the Warsaw Pact United Armed Forces. What really drew my attention was a ticket in his hand, issued by Ghana Airways.¹ For me it was further proof that Desyatka was active not only in Northern Africa (that I knew well from my own experience), but in Sub-Saharan Africa as well.

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In truth this became clear to me even earlier, in late August 1960, when ten Soviet Ilyushin-14 transport planes with Congolese insignia landed in Athens and then Cairo on their way to the Congo. They were going there to help Patrice Lumumba to move his troops to Katanga, which was controlled by separatist Moïse Tshombe. It was the murder of Lumumba in connivance with the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and Belgian intelligence service, the betrayal of the head of a lawful government by the UN command in Congo and the UN's misuse of the Ghanaian troops sent there that brought Ghana's leader, Kwame Nkrumah, closer to Moscow and prompted him to invite Soviet military advisers.

Not only Congo, but also most of the southern part of the African continent became a battlefield again. The first shots were fired by the forces of liberation on 4 February 1961, when an abortive attempt to storm prisons in Luanda took place. It was followed by the "use of violence" by the African National Congress (ANC) in South Africa, Front for the Liberation of Mozambique (FRELIMO) in Mozambique, South-West Africa People's Organisation (SWAPO) in Namibia and Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU) and Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU) in Zimbabwe.

So Russia/the USSR once more had to determine its attitude to the war in Southern Africa. Once again, resembling the days of the Anglo-Boer War, it began rendering its political support and military assistance to the side that in its opinion was fighting for a just cause. In fact, Moscow provided assistance to the anti-colonial struggle in different parts of the world during the entire "Soviet period" of Russian history. Supporting "the struggle of people for national liberation and social progress" was confirmed as one of the aims of Soviet foreign policy in the 1977 USSR Constitution.² It was the USSR that at the UN General Assembly session in 1960 proposed to adopt the Declaration on Granting Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples.

The second evident reason for Soviet involvement also seems to be similar to the "old days": rivalry with another powerful country. This time it was not the British but the USA, Moscow's "Cold War" adversary. Indeed there is a tendency, particularly characteristic of Western academics and politicians, to look at the armed conflicts in Southern Africa (and particularly in Angola) primarily through the distorting prism of superpowers' rivalry during the "Cold War".

Of course the state of USSR–USA relations did play a role in Moscow's decision-making on Southern Africa (just as the Russian-

British confrontation did during the Anglo-Boer War). However, the Soviets did not assist liberation movements and African Frontline States only because of the “Cold War”. To put it in the language of the day: such actions were regarded as part of the world “anti-imperialist struggle”, which was waged by the “socialist community”, “the national liberation movements”, and the “working class of the capitalist countries”. So the Moscow–Washington confrontation was definitely not the only reason for the USSR’s involvement in Southern Africa.

In reality the “Cold War” was not part of our political vocabulary; in fact the term was used in a strictly negative sense. It was considered to be the creation of “war mongers” and “imperialist propaganda”. For us the global struggle was not a battle between the two “superpowers” assisted by their “satellites” and “proxies”, but a united fight of the world’s progressive forces against imperialism. Petr Yevsyukov, who for 15 years was the main conduit between Moscow and the liberation movements in the Portuguese colonies – the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA), FRELIMO and the African Party for Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde (PAIGC) – writes in his memoirs: “The October [1917] Revolution, and then the victory of the anti-fascist coalition in World War Two, decisively influenced the balance of forces in the world in favour of progress, struggle for national liberation, especially in Africa and Asia. The ‘Cold War’ did not stop this process ... Assistance to nationalists from socialist countries, first and foremost the Soviet Union, was a natural reply to their appeal for such help.”³

Although the tendency to see the events in Africa from the 1950s to the 1980s through the prism of the “Cold War” was very strong, in confidential documents Western leaders admitted that the issue was much more complicated. For example, in 1962 President John F. Kennedy told the Portuguese Minister of Foreign Affairs, Alberto Franco Nogueira: “It is evident from what happened to former French, Belgian and British territories in Africa that these pressures stemmed from the basic desires of the populations and were not due to any external agency.”⁴

* * *

This book does not claim to be a comprehensive coverage and analysis of the developments in Southern Africa during the “Cold War”, nor does it consider the theoretical issues of international relations at the

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time. Moreover, I am not trying to argue with numerous books and articles that have been published on the subject. I do disagree on a few occasions in this book, but only if I have found gross inaccuracies or controversies.

I am afraid that this narrative has to be uneven, perhaps even patchy. It depends to a great extent on the availability (or rather non-availability) of archive material, success (or failure) in my search for witness-participants, preservation of my personal notes and the state of my memory. When the relevant archives are finally opened, future researchers will most probably criticise me for my mistakes, but, it is to be hoped, not for my errors of judgement. In any case I am convinced that we should not wait for this "manna" to become available, but rather try to write the history as fully and as truthfully as we can under the circumstances.

Part One

Angola

1

Armed Struggle Begins

When describing the Soviet attitude towards the liberation struggle in Angola and its actions in this respect, we have to rely largely, although not uncritically, on witness-participants, owing to the lack of accessible documents. Yevsyukov recalls in his memoirs:

The term inter-party ties within a framework of my duties meant everything, starting with knowledge and responsibility for all proposals for all-round assistance, including financial ones, made to the CC [Central Committee]. I had to start, so to speak, from scratch, from accumulation of information, knowledge. There were quite enough sources: current information from our embassies, their annual reports, information from the KGB [Committee of State Security of the USSR], GRU [Department of Military Intelligence] of the General Staff, TASS [Telegraph Agency of the Soviet Union], APN [Press-Agency Novosti], correspondents of Soviet newspapers and magazines, material from foreign information agencies and the foreign press. After some time I became the person best informed about the Portuguese colonies.¹

Some contacts between the Soviets and the MPLA leaders were established even earlier. Mario de Andrade took part in the First Conference of Writers of Asian and African countries in Tashkent, the capital of Soviet Uzbekistan, held in 1958. There was also an exchange of letters between him and Ivan Potekhin, chairman of the newly established Soviet Association of Friendship with African Countries, who was a founding director of the Africa Institute in Moscow. In particular, de Andrade, writing on behalf of the Anti-colonial Movement (MAC) – whose members were from Angola, Guinea-Bissau and Mozambique – requested Soviet scholarships for African students, but Potekhin's response hardly satisfied him: "... unfortunately I have to delay my reply to this question because at this time our association does not yet have a capacity to invite young African cadres to study in the Soviet Union".² Anyhow, relations with anti-colonial movements, including the provision of scholarships, soon became a domain of another non-governmental organisation (NGO) – the Soviet Afro-Asian Solidarity Committee.

The first reference to the situation in Angola and other Portuguese colonies in the Committee's archives is contained in the letter of 4 November 1959 sent by Lucio Lara on behalf of the MAC from Frankfurt to the Secretariat of the Afro-Asian People's Solidarity Council (later, "Organisation", AAPSO) in Cairo. Lara suggested organising an international campaign of protest against Lisbon's repressions. The Committee supported the idea and was ready to act through its representative in Cairo, provided that consent from the Soviet Ministry of Foreign Affairs was received.³ It was obtained, and 3 August, the date of the massacre in Guinea-Bissau in 1959, was chosen.

Mario de Andrade came to Moscow again in August 1960 to take part in the International Congress of Oriental Studies, then as guest of the Soviet Writers' Union. During his meetings at the Solidarity Committee, Africa Institute and other bodies he, in particular, spoke about the MPLA's contradictions with the Union of the Peoples of Angola (UPA, headed by Holden Roberto), calling it "rather a racist organisation and due to its ties with the USA, a reactionary one".⁴ As for practical matters, his only request was for "political literature in foreign languages".⁵

Yevsyukov continues: "The International Department knew about the existence of the MPLA from various sources, mainly from press publications, although Portugal was thoroughly hiding the information on the events in Luanda."⁶ According to him the first representatives of the MPLA – Mario de Andrade, who was its president while Agostinho Neto, elected its honorary president in 1960, was in prison and then under police supervision; and Viriato da Cruz, general secretary – came to Moscow "in the second half of 1961", that is, several months after the beginning of the armed struggle on 4 February 1961.⁷ "They both made a good impression as serious people who knew the situation and were candid in their accounts and judgments and 'an important decision to begin multi-sided assistance to the organisation' was taken."⁸

The archive documents confirm that the MPLA leaders came to the USSR on 22 July 1961 at the invitation of the Solidarity Committee. At the meeting in the CPSU headquarters with Nuretdin Muhitdinov, member of the Presidium (Politburo) and secretary of the Central Committee, they raised a number of important issues, such as financial assistance, the provision of arms and the training of party cadres in the Soviet Union in various fields.⁹

Soon US\$25,000 were allocated to the MPLA from a so-called "International Trade Union Fund for assistance to left workers' organisations, attached to the Romanian Council of Trade Unions".¹⁰ It was established in 1950 on the initiative of the Soviet Communist Party to render material assistance to "foreign left parties, workers' and public [non-governmental] organisations, which are subjected to persecution and repression".¹¹

There are many stories about "Kremlin gold", but although Moscow played a leading role in the distribution of allocations, originally only half of the contributions to this fund came from the USSR, with the remainder coming from China, Czechoslovakia, Romania, Poland, Hungary and the German Democratic Republic (GDR). Bulgaria joined later, in 1958. China withdrew in 1962 after the Sino-Soviet split. Initially the fund's board comprised representatives from the Soviet, Romanian and Polish parties, and the decision taken by the Politburo envisaged that "material assistance will be rendered according to unanimous decisions of the Board", whose members were to be appointed annually by the agreement of the contributing parties.¹² However, a paradox is that, unlike during "the time of Stalin", Moscow later became the sole distributor of the fund "according to an old verbal understanding".¹³

Moscow earlier expressed political support for the MPLA at the highest level. In reply to Mario de Andrade's message, Nikita Khrushchev declared: "The patriots of Angola can be sure that the sympathies of the peoples of the great Soviet Union are fully on their side."¹⁴

During his next visit to Moscow, a year later in July 1962, de Andrade was worried by the position of the Congolese government, which was creating various kinds of obstacles to MPLA activities, as well as by the attempts of the UPA to absorb the MPLA into the National Front for the Liberation of Angola (FNLA), which the UPA had created with the Democratic Party of Angola.¹⁵ He said also that MPLA had sent a number of delegations to African countries to explain to them the situation following the creation of the "so-called GRAE", Holden Roberto's "government in exile", in April 1962.¹⁶ De Andrade also had a meeting at the CPSU International Department¹⁷ and most probably again raised the issue of financial support and co-operation in the military field.

Yevsyukov claims that after his escape from Portugal "with the help of Portuguese communists", Neto "immediately flew to Moscow. The negotiations with him ended quite successfully."¹⁸ This is not

very accurate; indeed, the Solidarity Committee immediately invited him via the Soviet embassy in Leopoldville (Kinshasa), and the visit was planned for January 1963, but he could not make it. So Neto apologised to a Soviet diplomat in New York, where he attended a meeting as a petitioner to the UN Committee, and expressed the hope that he could come in late February or early March.¹⁹

The Soviet attitude to the anti-colonial struggle in Angola was opposite to the Western support, be it overt or covert, of Lisbon. Though the Washington administration under John F. Kennedy initially portrayed itself as champion of Africa's liberation, in reality its attitude to developments in the Portuguese colonies was primarily determined by strategic considerations. This can easily be seen from a document by the Foreign Office describing a meeting in 1961 between British and US officials: "The [British] Secretary of State drew attention to the great importance of the Portuguese islands off Africa for Western air communications, and Mr Nitze²⁰ confirmed that the Pentagon was very much alive to these considerations."²¹

Co-operation between Portugal and the leading Western countries took place both on bilateral terms and within the North Atlantic Treaty Organization's (NATO's) structures. It included the exchange of intelligence information, which was sometimes rather implausible. Thus in August 1961 Portuguese Minister of Foreign Affairs Franco Nogueira informed the US embassy that according to Portuguese Army sources, "The main base of the Soviet explosive supplies for sabotage purposes in the east African countries is located in Yemen." He claimed that from there supplies were shipped to the Comoros and finally to Tanganyika and Mozambique.²² Just imagine: a Soviet base in Yemen ruled by a feudal emir, another one in the French-controlled Comoros and finally supplies being delivered to non-existing (in 1961) rebels in East Africa!

However, soon after the first visits of MPLA leaders to Moscow the situation in this organisation began to worry the Soviets. "Reports began coming in about differences which arose between A. Neto from one side and M. de Andrade and V. da Cruz on the other", writes "Camarada Pedro" (Yevsyukov). "The aggravation of relations between them resulted in the sidelining of M. de Andrade from leadership. Meanwhile V. da Cruz, having cut off relations with Neto, left for China ... The break-up of relations between these people caused a rather negative reaction among MPLA members and was beyond our understanding."²³ According to Yevsyukov, when the

post of general secretary was abolished, Neto "in fact remained the single leader of the movement".²⁴

Yet again, this is not the precise story: da Cruz was dismissed from his position before Neto took over from Andrade. Besides, Yevsyukov reduced the cause of the conflict to personal quarrels. However, it seems that, at least as far as da Cruz was concerned, the differences were political. He insisted on the need for the MPLA to come into a rival movement, the FNLA, so that "scores of well-trained soldiers of the MPLA" would teach "the use of arms to thousands of Angolan peasants".²⁵ The influence of "Mao Zedong thought" is quite evident here, and it is hardly accidental that later da Cruz was welcomed in China and got a permanent position there at the Afro-Asian Journalists' Association, which soon became Beijing's propaganda tool in a sharpening Sino-Soviet conflict. He died there in 1973.

2

Zigzags of History

The detailed history of Soviet relations with the Angolan liberation movements and of the military involvement in that country, just as in Africa as a whole, still has to be written. Practically all information on Soviet assistance to freedom fighters, even of a purely humanitarian nature, had for many years been withheld from the public in the USSR and abroad. It was only after almost ten years, in 1970, in an interview with *Pravda*, that the head of the Soviet delegation to the International Conference of Support to the People of Portuguese Colonies, held in Rome, Professor Vassily Solodovnikov, for the first time clearly stated that Moscow was supplying “arms, means of transport and communications, clothes and other goods needed for a successful struggle” to the liberation movements and that “military and civilian specialists are being trained in the USSR”.¹

This conference, attended by 171 national and international organisations, was a great success. Nevertheless, preparing for it was a rather difficult matter. The Italian authorities were not happy at all to have it held in Rome; after all, Portugal was a fellow member of NATO and some details of preparations for the conference deserve description.

To begin with, when a preparatory meeting took place in the Italian capital in March, the Soviet representatives, including myself, could not attend, because visas were only issued to them on the very day of the gathering. However, if the Soviet delegates were to be refused visas, Moscow was not ready to render financial assistance to the conference.

So a decision was taken at the CPSU International Department to send Yevsyukov to Rome in a roundabout way, via Cairo, where a mobilisation committee in support of the anti-colonial struggle had been established at the AAPSO headquarters. However, on the second day of his stay in Cairo a Soviet consul rushed into his hotel room to inform him that cholera had been detected in Egypt and that to avoid getting stuck “Camarada Pedro” had to fly to Rome immediately.

The consul was efficient enough to get him a visa just ten minutes before take-off (a bottle of Stolichnaya vodka presented to his Italian colleague apparently helped), but on his flight to Rome Yevsyukov was worried whether the Soviet embassy in Italy would be informed about the time of his arrival. It was not, but when he finally reached its office, he found a message from Moscow there: the Italian embassy kindly requested Mr Yevsyukov not to deal with political matters while in Rome.

However, as Yevsyukov writes in his memoirs, "... being already in Rome I could not act otherwise but carry out my mission, especially since, strictly speaking, it was not of a political nature".² Indeed, his main task was to receive a guarantee that the Soviets would get visas to take part in the conference. He managed to get a "word of honour" from Lucio Luzzatto, Vice-President of the Italian National Assembly (a leftist Socialist and a leading organiser of the conference) that at worst the Soviets would get visas right at the airport upon arrival.

The worst did not happen; the representatives received visas on time and really enjoyed the conference. Moscow's assistance to its organisers was substantial: we provided air tickets to dozens of delegations and made a financial contribution, though it took a long time for me to cash a cheque for about US\$8,000 in an Italian bank.

Apart from drawing the attention of broad international circles to the struggle against Portuguese colonialism, it resulted in the first ever papal audience for Agostinho Neto; Amílcar Cabral, PAIGC General Secretary; and Marcelino dos Santos, FRELIMO Vice-President in the Vatican. Yevsyukov rightly calls it "a shattering blow to Portuguese colonialism, to the policy of the Portuguese branch of the Catholic church",³ which supported the colonial war: it signified the recognition of the legitimacy of the liberation struggle waged by the MPLA, the PAIGC and FRELIMO.

The conference was especially important for the mobilisation of various political forces in Western Europe to support the liberation movements. For example, Agostinho Neto was invited to Sweden by the Social Democratic Party immediately afterwards, though it took nine more months to take a positive decision on "educational and medical supplies – vehicles were later included – directly to the MPLA" by the Swedish International Development Agency.⁴

These developments, however, were not at the expense of the traditional contact with Moscow and its allies. A very clear statement on that matter was made in Rome by Amílcar Cabral: "We will receive

assistance from everybody. We are not anticommunists. Who wants to help us can help, but don't put any conditions. Don't think we shall leave our old friends for the sake of new ones."⁵

The liberation struggle in Angola was hampered by the existence of liberation movements, rival to the MPLA. The FNLA, headed by Holden Roberto, was formed in 1962; its predecessor, the UPA, began armed action in Northern Angola in March 1961. Then, Jonas Savimbi, former general secretary of the FNLA, founded the Union for Total Liberation of Angola (UNITA), which carried out limited operations in the south-eastern part of the country. Of these organisations only the MPLA took part in preparing for the conference and was present in Rome. However, at one of the sessions a young man tried to come to the platform, shouting pro-UNITA slogans, but was promptly pushed out of the hall.

That was my first "acquaintance" with UNITA. It could have taken place earlier, if not with the organisation (it was founded in 1966), at least with the tendency, personified by Jonas Savimbi, who, after his resignation from the FNLA, visited Moscow in 1964 as a guest of the Soviet Afro-Asian Solidarity Committee, but I only joined this body later, in March 1969. Taking into account the role played by Savimbi in the tragic history of Angola, this visit deserves more attention.

Savimbi's biographers write that he had a meeting with "Soviet leaders", and according to Fred Bridgland his interlocutors in "Eastern Europe" "... were only interested in recruiting new members for the MPLA".⁶ At a time when "sensitive" archive documents are still sealed, it is very difficult to clear up all the circumstances of his visit. As in many other cases we have to rely on reminiscences, but witness-participants often differ in their judgements, though Savimbi definitely did not meet a Soviet leader. Oleg Nazhestkin⁷, a KGB officer who was dealing with Angola in the early 1960s as third secretary of the Soviet embassy in Leopoldville, writes:

When Savimbi began criticising Roberto with an obvious intention of placing himself at head the UPA, our [KGB] officers intensified their work with him to try to 'tear him off' Roberto. A trip by Savimbi to Moscow was organised, where he was received by the First Deputy Head of the International Department of the CPSU Central Committee (CC), R.A. Ulyanovsky.⁸ However, Savimbi was too ambitious: he did not accept the Soviet proposals of uniting all patriotic forces in Angola as a condition of rendering effective support to the Angolan liberation movement by the USSR.⁹

Nazhestkin's last point is hardly accurate: by that time Moscow had already been providing assistance to the MPLA for several years. Besides, Yevsyukov describes the visit in a different way: "During the meeting at the Soviet Afro-Asian Solidarity Committee¹⁰ [and not at the CPSU headquarters, although Ulyanovsky might have taken part in the meeting] Jonas Savimbi tried to make us believe that he was ready to co-operate with A. Neto, that they knew each other well in their youth, but the latter resolutely rejects all proposals on interaction and combining the efforts of MPLA and UNITA in the struggle against colonisers."¹¹ He continues: "However, the question of reconciliation between A. Neto and J. Savimbi was not facing us. This would be beyond our capacity."¹² Yet in another document Yevsyukov names Savimbi among "agents of imperialism" "unmasked" as a result of "time-consuming discussions" at the committee.¹³

Soviet assistance to the MPLA was really versatile. "Camarada Pedro" recalls a fascinating incident. In urgent cases the leadership of the liberation movements, who knew his *nom de guerre* – "Pedro Dias" – and the number of his post office box, could send him a letter by ordinary international mail. Once, a letter came from Agostinho Neto, who complained about the shortage of cartridges for Soviet-made Tokarev pistols and asked for them to be sent urgently. "To confirm his request and to avoid a mistake he enclosed a cartridge in the envelope. This was probably the only case in the history of the postal service."¹⁴

According to available (or, rather, accessible) archive material, financial assistance to the MPLA increased steadily: from US\$25,000 in 1961 to US\$145,000 in 1966 and US\$220,000 in 1973.¹⁵ A lot of civilian goods – foodstuffs, clothes, etc. – were supplied as well. The MPLA members who were operating in Cabinda or lived in Congo-Brazzaville expected a ship to bring supplies to Pointe-Noir, just as later those on the eastern front or in Zambia expected one to come to Dar es Salaam. However, this reliance on assistance from the Soviet Union and other friendly countries had a negative effect too: it produced a culture of "non-production", in particular because the bulk of the MPLA members were from the urban population and not exactly fond of farming.¹⁶

Assistance to the MPLA in Angola, as well as to other liberation movements, was co-ordinated by the CPSU CC through its International Department, while several government bodies were also involved in it. An important step was a trip by a group of Soviet officials to Tanzania, Zambia, Congo (Brazzaville) and Guinea (Conakry) in early

1967 at the decision of the Central Committee. Yevsyukov writes: "... an urgent necessity arose to evaluate the state and prospects of this [anti-colonial] war, to try to study the situation on the spot, if not inside these countries [Angola, Mozambique and Guinea-Bissau], then at least from the territory of the neighbouring states" to help the CPSU CC "to determine the line on our co-operation and policy in the region".¹⁷

The members of the group were Petr Manchkha, Head of the International Department's African Section; Yevsyukov; Gennady Fomin, Head of one of the African Departments of the Soviet MFA; and Vadim Kirpichenko, his counterpart in the KGB, future lieutenant general and First Deputy Head of the PGU (First Main Department) – Soviet political intelligence. The trip resulted in "the Politburo's decision on our future policy towards African countries, in particular, on our all-round support to the militant nationalists in the Portuguese colonies".¹⁸

Yevsyukov's story is supported by the memoirs of Kirpichenko, who describes how, apart from discussions with the leaders of the movements and of adjacent independent African states – Tanzania, Zambia, Congo, and Guinea – the group looked for other sources of information as well. He gives interesting detail. When the group was in Congo, its members met a Soviet doctor who worked in the MPLA military hospital in Dolisie, next to the Angolan border. He told them that wounded militants were coming there regularly, implying that some action did take place. The doctor also told them that "commanders and commissars worked well in the units and the military discipline was not bad".¹⁹

It should be underlined that although the move towards Marxism by the leaders of the liberation movement was welcomed in Moscow, it was not regarded as a precondition for Soviet assistance. I recall how Professor Ulyanovsky said to us, members of the Soviet delegation to the above-mentioned conference in Rome: "We don't request ideological loyalty from the liberation movements."

Let us look now at the most crucial periods of Soviet-Angolan relations. Unfortunately, as was mentioned above, we have to rely primarily on "oral history" and written memoirs, which have begun to appear in Russia during the last decade.

In particular, the Angolan part of the memoirs written by Karen Brutents, former Deputy Head of the CPSU International Department, who was a member of the Soviet delegation to the MPLA Congress in December 1977 (he later became Gorbachev's adviser in the

Presidency) is of interest. He believes that Angola became “one of the key points of the USSR and USA rivalry in the ‘third world’. In the context of its irrational logic Angola occupied a place completely disproportional to its significance and the confrontation there (just as the events in the Horn of Africa) noticeably influenced Soviet-American relations as a whole, the destinies of the détente.”²⁰

Brutents continues:

Our support to the MPLA was dictated not so much by ideological, as [others] often think, but rather by pragmatic considerations: it was the only national movement ... which waged a real struggle against colonisers. The relative role of the ideological linkage is testified to by the fact that at a particular time the CPSU CC Politburo even took a decision to recognise the MPLA's competitor, the FNLA headed by H. Roberto, who was later proved to be connected with the CIA. Only bureaucratic delays and especially protests by some African leaders and the Portuguese left prevented its realisation.²¹

However, “Camarada Pedro” tells a rather “tragicomical” story that hardly confirms that this was a well-thought-out “pragmatic” decision.²² Nikita Khrushchev, then both the CPSU First Secretary and Soviet Prime Minister, heard about the formation of the GRAE while on holiday in the Crimea and got angry that the USSR had not yet recognised the new government.

This “government”, though it was recognised by a number of African countries, was a failure. This is well illustrated by “an assessment of the present situation in Angola and a forecast of the likely trend of developments”, sent from the British Consulate in Luanda to the embassy in Lisbon and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office in London:

Holden Roberto's “provisional government in exile” is regarded here [by the Portuguese authorities in Angola] as rather a poor joke, as well as it may seem unless other nations start recognising it. News of the struggle between the UPA and MPLA has been greeted with satisfaction; but while it is clearly to the interest of the Portuguese that the Kilkenny cats should waste their energy fighting each other it would be awkward if the conflict were to result in the demise of the one and the unchallenged supremacy of the other. The Minister of Overseas Territories himself seems to fear that the weakening of UPA might bring MPLA to the top. I have no evidence of any intention to negotiate with either side.²³

However, bypassing the CPSU International Department (the body which dealt with the MPLA and the liberation struggle in Angola in

its various aspects) the Soviet governmental decision was urgently taken. Moreover, it happened while MPLA leader Agostinho Neto was visiting Moscow and the Deputy Head of the Department, Dmitry Shevlyagin, was instructed to tell Neto "in a suitable form" about the recognition at the very last moment (the official information was to be published the next day). According to Yevsyukov, an eyewitness, "the discussion ... went in a way, pleasant for the MPLA leader, all his requests were met". It was coming to an end when Shevlyagin informed him that the Soviet government was studying the question of possible recognition of Holden Roberto's government. "I translated Shevlyagin's statement word for word", Yevsyukov writes. Shevlyagin's statement "sounded ... like a death sentence for A. Neto, who did not expect such an end to the meeting. Shevlyagin's final words, alleviating the blow, were meaningless."²⁴

Yevsyukov who accompanied Neto, continues: "On the way to the hotel I was feverishly thinking how to save the situation. I knew well who Holden Roberto was and understood even better that we had made a mistake, betraying our friends ... The only man who could correct the situation and save the MPLA was Alvaro Cunhal, General Secretary of the Portuguese Communist Party."²⁵ Fortunately, Cunhal happened to be in Moscow as well and Yevsyukov suggested Neto call him immediately and ask him to interfere. "Camarada Pedro" who, by the way, spoke perfect Portuguese, went up to Cunhal's room and briefly explained the situation to him.

Cunhal, a hero of the anti-fascist struggle in Portugal, enjoyed high prestige in the USSR. So, "the next day and on the following days no information on our recognition of the [Roberto's] government appeared in *Pravda* and it couldn't appear". On the contrary, *Pravda* published an article written by Yevsyukov's immediate superior, Veniamin Midtsev, and its content was so contrasting that the US embassy even phoned the Soviet Ministry of Foreign Affairs to find out who its author was.²⁶

But perhaps Khrushchev should not be blamed too much. Having visited Leopoldville, a special mission of the newly-founded Organisation of African Unity (OAU) Liberation Committee, comprising representatives of Algeria, Congo-Leopoldville, Guinea, Senegal, Nigeria and Uganda, unanimously recommended that all African or external aid to Angolan liberation fighters be channelled through the FNLA exclusively and that all independent African states accord diplomatic recognition to the GRAE. This choice was largely caused by da Cruz's defection; he and a small group of his supporters

demanded to “withdraw all authority” from the movement’s steering committee, to constitute a new leadership of the MPLA and to join the FNLA.²⁷

Such a recommendation allowed Roberto to launch a diplomatic offensive. Dmitry Dolidze, then General Secretary of the Soviet Solidarity Committee, met Holden Roberto at his request in Nairobi, on 17 December 1963, during celebrations of the independence of Kenya. Alexander Arkadaksky, an official of the CPSU African Section, was present at the discussion as well.²⁸ Roberto was interested in the recognition of his organisation by the AAPSO. He claimed that he was not against union with the MPLA, but only if the latter agreed to unite under the leadership of UPA (this term was still used), which allegedly controlled 75 per cent of the Angolan territory.²⁹ Underlining the recognition of his organisation and his government by the OAU Liberation Committee and twelve African states, including Algeria, he even accused Neto of being “an agent of Portuguese colonisers who was let out of prison with the intention to use him to split the national liberation struggle in Angola”.³⁰

Roberto was planning to visit China and when he was asked whether he wanted to make a stopover in Moscow, the FNLA leader expressed his readiness “to come to the USSR to establish ties with the Soviet Solidarity Committee at any time”, provided he was given a ticket: “I am a poor man and don’t have money to pay for the fare.”³¹ Dolidze stated that Roberto was “nervous, guarded, mistrustful”; nevertheless, apparently influenced by the position taken by the Africans, in particular by his Kenyan hosts, he proposed maintaining contact with Roberto and even inviting him to the USSR as a guest of the Solidarity Committee.³²

Roberto’s “overture” did not bring any results, but the problems in the MPLA’s relations with Moscow were not over. They deteriorated when Neto signed an agreement with Roberto on 12 December 1972 on the creation of the joint body, having agreed to the second role in its leadership, the Supreme Council of Revolution. This step, according to Yevsyukov, “completely disoriented MPLA members and supporters, as well as us”.³³ Indeed, in contrast to the earlier period, the FNLA had by that time become weaker both inside and outside Angola. In 1965 the OAU retreated from its previous position and its Liberation Committee began to distribute its assistance (as limited as it was) to MPLA as well, and then in 1971 the OAU “formally withdrew” the recognition it extended to GRAE in 1963.³⁴

However, it would be wrong to say that the Soviets had not been informed about a forthcoming agreement between the MPLA and FNLA. The "reconciliation" between Neto and Roberto was announced in Brazzaville on 9 June 1972 under the auspices of Presidents Marien Ngouabi and Mobutu. Soon after, in late August 1972, a delegation of the Soviet Afro-Asian Solidarity Committee visited Congo-Brazzaville. The fact that the delegation included "Camarada Pedro" shows that its mission was connected more strongly with the situation in Angola than with the "host country". Quite significantly, during their discussions with the Soviets the Congolese officials spoke about their support to the liberation struggle in Angola, but did not make much difference between the MPLA and FNLA/GRAE. It looked as if they wished to get rid of the danger caused by the MPLA's presence and stop the use of Congolese territory for attacks against the Portuguese in Cabinda.

The delegation felt that the idea of unity between the two organisations – the MPLA and FNLA – took a concrete form, though these two sides had different interests. In principle Neto and Roberto, as well as their "hosts", Ngouabi and Mobutu, had already come to an agreement, yet "nobody knew" what form the unity would take – a front, joint headquarters or a co-ordination council. Mobutu insisted in particular that the MPLA headquarters should move to Kinshasa, otherwise he would not allow the movement to use the territory of Zaire. The Soviet delegation also noticed a rise in disagreements within the MPLA, as some prominent members, such as former President Mario de Andrade, were distancing themselves from its leadership.³⁵

Pascoal Luvualu, then a member of the MPLA leadership and head of the trade union organisation UNTA³⁶, visited the USSR in late September 1972. At a meeting at the Solidarity Committee he underlined that the expected "merger of actions" of the two movements should not "change the attitude to the MPLA and material, moral and political support to it".³⁷ He insisted that friends of the MPLA should not recognise the FNLA even after the expected agreement, because though "Holden Roberto represents nothing",³⁸ the MPLA leadership was evidently concerned that he would try to receive assistance from the "fraternal [to MPLA] countries".³⁹

At that period MPLA delegations were sent to a number of friendly countries. Their mission was rather difficult, if at all possible: according to Luvualu, while talking about the alliance with the FNLA, the leadership of his organisation nevertheless sought "to prepare the

recognition of the MPLA as the only representative of the fighting people of Angola".⁴⁰

When Alexander Dzassokhov,⁴¹ who led the discussion from the Soviet side, asked Luvualu, whether the Soviets should continue trying to isolate Holden Roberto and criticise him, as had been done at the January 1969 international conference on Southern Africa in Khartoum, or consent to a compromise "to assist your efforts", Luvualu insisted that "the friends should not go for a compromise, Holden has lost the confidence not only of the people, but even of his entourage." The continuation of Moscow's attitude to him would "force him to make concessions". Luvualu explained that an alliance with Roberto was Mobutu's condition for the MPLA's presence in Zaire. Rather optimistically Luvualu expressed the hope that the "MPLA would be in the centre of the alliance".⁴²

Dzassokhov assured Luvualu that the Soviets would "orient themselves according to the MPLA's actions". Underlining that every organisation should itself determine its attitude in the international arena, in particular to social democrats and China, he nevertheless mentioned that at the AAPSO conference in Cairo in January 1972, the MPLA had distributed "thousands" of booklets about Neto's visit to China "as if the MPLA lives only by ties with Beijing". Luvualu's reply was hardly acceptable: "This was done because information on ties with other countries had not yet been prepared."

For several years another sensitive point in discussions between MPLA and Soviet representatives was the persistent delay in convening the organisation's (first ever!) congress. It may look strange to some readers, but it was Moscow ("totalitarian", "authoritarian", whatever you name it), which pushed this matter, while Neto and his supporters were not in a hurry, probably as they were not sure about its possible outcomes. According to Luvualu, a relevant commission continued its work and a congress would be convened "as soon as it becomes possible".⁴³

Later, at the celebrations of the 50th anniversary of the Soviet Union on 22 December 1972, the MPLA was represented by Floribert "Spartacus" Monimambo, then a member of its top body, the Political and Military Coordinating Committee. At the discussions with the Soviets he underlined that the MPLA, in spite of the agreement with the FNLA signed on 12 December, remained the leader of the national liberation movement in Angola. He tried to convince us that the MPLA had managed to stop the Portuguese offensive on the "Eastern Front", which was primarily of a "psychological nature"