

In Angola, the Cold War's still hot

The fiercest battles of the 15-year old Angolan civil war have been raging in recent months, culminating in a series of violent clashes around the shattered town of Mavinga, whose vital airstrip commands the remote region known as the Land at the End of the World.

Enthralled by the current climate of international detente, the outside world has almost completely ignored these battles between the forces of the communist regime in Luanda, known as FAPLA, backed by Soviet and Cuban advisers, and the UNITA anti-communist guerrilla army of Jonas Savimbi. We should pay attention, for the latest fighting poses disturbing questions about long-term Soviet strategic policy.

I was with Savimbi's troops in this southeastern corner of Angola, an infernally hot, trackless waste of scrub, sand, acacia trees and thorn bushes where large herds of elephants still roam and wild animals attack one's camp at night. Here, in one of Africa's least-known places, I saw the lightly armed UNITA troops fighting a long guerrilla war against communist troops equipped with some of the Soviet Union's latest weapons.

The war in Angola was supposed to have ended more than a year ago. South Africa, which was backing Savimbi with arms, air cover and a small number of mechanized troops, agreed to pull out of southern Angola and grant neighboring Namibia full independence. In return, Cuba agreed to withdraw its 50,000-man foreign legion in Angola that included a full armored division and squadrons of warplanes. The Soviets also vaguely promised they would withdraw most of their 3,000 military advisers and cut \$2.3 billion in annual support to the Marxist regime in Luanda.

The Americans, who were giving UNITA modest sup-



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port through Zaire, breathed sighs of relief, stopped most of their aid to Savimbi and forgot about Angola.

But the war went on. In spite of a series of peace talks, the communist forces kept mounting heavy assaults on the Mavinga region that were intended to push on to Savimbi's main base at Jamba. Some Cuban forces were withdrawn but Soviet military aid kept flowing into Luanda.

The latest offensive was an all or nothing attempt by six FAPLA brigades to take Mavinga and its airstrip, from where they could launch the final attack on Jamba. Cuban troops and Soviet advisers were reportedly heavily involved in the recent fighting, as were Cuban-piloted MiG-23s, MiG-25s and Hind helicopter gunships. Cuban artillery may also have played a key role.

FAPLA forces came within six miles of Mavinga, forcing its UNITA defenders to blow up the airstrip when it looked like the besieged town would fall. As of now, the campaign seems to have stalled, probably having used up its supplies. When resupplied, and providing the rains hold off, FAPLA may resume its offensive, the most successful of the long Angolan war.

It appears the Soviets and Cubans have taken advantage of western inattention to launch this latest attempt to crush the anti-communists. This, while promoting

peace talk and speaking loudly about a settlement. Interestingly, Moscow has used precisely the same strategy in Afghanistan. First, under the Geneva accord signed with the U.S., the Red Army pulled out Afghani- stans. The war, everyone said, was over. The credulous Americans cut way back on their aid to the Afghan anti-communist resistance. Moscow, however, has kept sending \$350 million a month in arms to the Afghan communist regime, more than 10 times what the U.S. was giving the mujahedin.

Reliable reports say there are some 30,000 Soviet troops in action in Afghanistan, dressed in Afghan army uniforms. Similarly, a large number of Cubans is reported to be wearing Angolan army uniforms.

Simultaneously, the Soviets have mounted an intensive propaganda and diplomatic effort to convince western public opinion that the existing Marxist regimes in Luanda and Kabul are really decent social democrats fighting to save their countries from, respectively, "fascist puppets of South Africa" or "fanatical, anti-American Moslem fundamentalists."

The liberal press, particularly the New York Times, has eagerly echoed such agitprop.

The long talks I had with Jonas Savimbi in Jamba convinced me that he is one of Africa's most brilliant and effective leaders. Most of Africa would not be in the mess it is in if there were other leaders like him. But because Savimbi accepted South African aid in the so-far successful effort to to save southern Africa from becoming a Soviet satellite, he is being damned by the western press and shunned by its leaders. He has been virtually abandoned and left to fight alone against Soviet-supplied tanks and helicopter gunships.

The Cold War is still raging deep in the Angolan bush.