Chapter IV

THE END OF RAPPROCHEMENT
Chapter IV

The End of Rapprochement

Two developments in the mid-1970s seriously jeopardized the prospects of US-Cuban rapprochement. First, the Cuban sponsorship of the Puerto Rican independence movement in such international organizations as the United Nations and the Movement of Non-aligned Countries and more specifically Cuba's hosting of an international conference of Solidarity with the Independence of Puerto Rico in Havana in September 1975. Second, and from the American point of view more offensive development, was the commitment of Cuban troops in Angola in support of the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA). These Cuban initiatives were instrumental in bringing the secret talks between US and Cuba to an abrupt end. Thus in December 1975, President Ford said:

I want to be on record as forcefully as I can say, the actions of the Cuban government to involve itself in a military way in Angola ends as far as I am concerned any efforts at all to have friendlier relations with Cuba.\(^1\)

The Cuban response, interestingly, was equally vehement. Castro asserted that Cuba would continue to aid the MPLA and the Puerto Rican independence movement even at the cost of continued hostility of the US, or as he put it "even if there are no relations with the United States for a

---

hundred years." Thus, after a brief interlude in the conciliatory zone, the pendulum of US-Cuban relations swung back to the grey areas of hostilities.

In this context, the cardinal questions that come to the fore are--what were the overriding factors, if any, that impelled Cuba to undertake these initiatives even at the risk of jeopardizing the rapprochement efforts which were at a crucial stage? Or did Cuba's initiatives at all represent a departure from its earlier policy? If not, what was its role in these episodes? And irrespective of the merits of the Cuban actions, what were its overall implications for US-Cuban relations?

In attempting to answer these questions, the present chapter essays to show the continuity, since 1959, in Cuba's policy towards the independence movement in Puerto Rico and the MPLA in Angola. In the 1960s, Cuba's support for these movements had produced few tangible results and had therefore attracted scant attention. The success of the two movements during the 1970s on account of certain changes in the regional and international environment, however, helped to heighten international interest in Cuba's role in Puerto Rico and Angola. Highlighting the changes, the chapter seeks to clarify that it was neither Soviet pressure nor unbridled Cuban romanticism but rather a realistic assessment of its own interests that had prompted Cuba to support the two movements.

In fact, far from frustrating the emerging rapprochement with the US, Castro had hoped that Cuba's role in Angola, while increasing its leverage with the Soviet Union, might even promote the normalization of its relations with the United States. It is for this reason that Castro while explaining Cuban actions in Angola repeatedly stressed its independent role. The US, however, for reasons of its own as discussed in the last section of the

chapter, chose to emphasize an entirely different perspective on Cuba's role in Angola.

Puerto Rico and US-Cuban Relations

It is but a fact that since the early nineteenth century, Cuba has championed the cause of the Puerto Rican independence. Both the Caribbean islands fought simultaneously for their independence from Spain. But whereas Cuba was granted political independence following the Spanish-American War of 1898, Puerto Rico was incorporated into the United States. From 1898 to 1952 Puerto Rico remained a territory of the US, and its ruling machinery was considered an agency of the US federal government. Following a referendum in 1952, the island was conferred a commonwealth status—a position in between statehood and territorial status. The island's government therefore has the quasi-sovereignty of a state government but is subordinate to the federal government. It also lacks voting representation in the US House of Representatives and the Senate.

Puerto Rico's peculiar status within the American federation has led to a continuing debate in the island over its relationship with the US. Domestic opinion in the island is sharply divided between those supporting a federal statehood and complete independence. Political parties in the island are also divided on the same lines. The US has always contended that the island's status as a commonwealth is an expression of the will of the Puerto Rican people. Besides, it has consistently maintained that the political status of the


4. While Puerto Rico participates in the nominating conventions of both the Republican and Democratic parties, residents of the island cannot vote for either the President or the Vice-President of the US. Their exclusion from participation in the national elections is justified on the grounds that Puerto Rico is not subject to federal taxation and there is no precedent for "representation without taxation".
island is an issue of domestic concern only to the US and Puerto Rico and has therefore opposed any external interference including that of international organizations such as the UN.

Cuba, on the other hand, contends that Puerto Rico is a colony of the US. To substantiate the contention, it cites US Supreme Court verdict which held that Puerto Rico belongs to but is not a part of the United States. Moreover, on the basis of the 1960 UN General Assembly resolution 1514(XV), the Cuban government has consistently sponsored and supported the international attempts to "liberate" Puerto Rico from the United States.

Cuban support for Puerto Rican independence over the years has essentially been political and principled. Since the early 1960s Cuba has maintained a close relationship with the Puerto Rican Socialist Party (PSP), formerly the pro-independence movement. It has permanent delegation in Havana and in 1966 its chief representative, Narciso Rabell Martínez, was named to the permanent secretariat of the Organization of Solidarity with the Peoples of Asia, Africa and Latin America. The PSP has participated in almost every international conference sponsored by the Cuban government. There has also been a constant interaction between PSP members and Cuba.

In addition, since the beginning of 1960s Cuba has actively sponsored Puerto Rican independence in two international forums—the United Nations and the Movement of Non-aligned Countries. The Cuban delegates have


6. This resolution asked the UN to take “immediate measures to transfer all power to the people of territories which were held in trust and not autonomous. However, with the proclamation of the Puerto Rican Commonwealth in 1952, the US maintained that the island was no longer a dependent territory and in November 1953 the General Assembly approved resolution 748(XIII) which removed Puerto Rico from the list of non-governing territories. Since then the UN debates on the island have revolved around the question of whether resolution 1514(XV) applies to Puerto Rico.
often served as conduits in transmitting information and documents from supporters of independence on the island to the UN.

Contrary to American perceptions, there had been no perceptible increase in Cuban effort or support for Puerto Rican independence during the 1970s. The only difference was that unlike in the earlier decade, the Cuban efforts to place the question of Puerto Rico on the UN agenda succeeded owing to a shift in the membership of the Decolonization Committee. In 1972, Ricardo Alarcon Queseda, Cuba's permanent representative to the UN was successful in getting the Decolonization Committee to consider the "colonial case of Puerto Rico". In August 1972, the same committee passed a resolution recognizing "the inalienable right of the people of Puerto Rico to self-determination and independence in accordance with General Assembly resolution 1514(XV) of 14 December 1960.7 Throughout the 1970s therefore the Puerto Rican issue was kept under continuous review mainly through Cuban efforts.

The real success of Cuban support came in 1975. In March that year, the meeting of the Coordinating Bureau of the Non-aligned countries held in Havana issued a statement which urged "the United Nations to recognize the Puerto Rican National Liberation Movement as the legitimate representative of its people and [asked] that the Committee of 24 [the Decolonization Committee] study seriously and positively the proposal of sending a mission to visit the aforesaid territory under colonial administration".8 This statement formed the core of a resolution on Puerto Rico submitted to the Decolonization Committee by Cuba in August. Further, in September, an international conference of Solidarity with the Independence of Puerto Rico was held in Havana, which apparently was timed to coincide with Cuba's

7. UN Doc. A/AC. 109/PV. 942.

initiative on Puerto Rico at the United Nations. By doing so, Cuba had perhaps hoped to whip up international support for its efforts to gain recognition for the Puerto Rican National Liberation Movement. Contrary to Cuban expectations, however, the Decolonization Committee voted eleven to nine with two abstentions to postpone further consideration of Puerto Rico until 1976.

While the Cuban efforts were unsuccessful, it should also be borne in mind that Cuban support for Puerto Rican independence apart from being largely rhetorical, was never unconditional. A number of statements made by Cuban officials at the time are illustrative of the point. For instance, immediately following the preparatory meeting for the conference, held in Havana in March 1975, its presiding officer, Juan Marinello, president of the Cuban World Peace Council and a member of the Communist Party of Cuba, made the following statement:

If we take it that the case of Puerto Rico has entered a new phase linked to an international situation which in many aspects is favourable to it, it is our duty therefore to bring about the broadest possible solidarity, a real true solidarity aimed at the real and immediate liberation of the Puerto Rican nation. However, every demonstration of good will, will be welcomed with joy because it will form a part of the task we are engaged in.9

Two conclusions can be drawn from this statement. First that Cuban support was linked to international considerations. And secondly, that the issue was negotiable.

In fact, there is evidence to suggest that Cuba did not want Puerto Rico to become an issue of contention in its bilateral relations with the US. According to Cuban specialist Abraham Lowenthal, Carlos Rafael Rodríguez

had revealed to him that Cuba had not particularly wanted to host the Solidarity Conference.\(^\text{10}\) In addition, President Dorticos' speech at the end of the conference is itself revealing in this respect. He said:

> In some official and semi-official declarations there has been an attempt to show the Puerto Rican problem and Cuban solidarity as a significant impediment to US-Cuban relations. The Cuban Revolutionary Government cannot accept involvement in the Puerto Rican cause and our unyielding duty of solidarity with it as a controversial bilateral issue between the United States and Cuba.\(^\text{11}\)

### Cuba in Africa

Cuba's controversial involvement in Angola was the second issue that led to the sudden disruption of normalization of relations between Cuba and the United States. What Cuba called an act of solidarity was interpreted by the United States as an act of intervention at the behest of Moscow. Cuban commitment of troops to Angola was seen as a major departure in its foreign policy. It was pointed out that never before had a Latin American government committed troops outside the Western Hemisphere. This, however, was incorrect, for Cuba had not only supported revolutionary movements within Latin America since the early 1960s but Cuban troops and military advisors had been in the African continent since 1963. They were involved in guerrilla training as well as in actual combat. Hence Cuban military participation in Southern Africa should not be seen as a radical

---


departure in its foreign policy but as the continuation of an established practice of assisting revolutionary movements wherever they occur.\textsuperscript{12}

International solidarity has always been an essential part of Cuban revolutionary ideology as also a consistent revolutionary practice.\textsuperscript{13} It stems from principles deeply rooted in Cuban political history, Marxist-Leninist theory, and in the national interest of the country. Since the individual and collective experience of the Cuban guerrillas during the 1950s had exposed them to the importance of external support for revolutionary movements, Cuba had always been committed to its duty of international solidarity.

According to the principle of international solidarity, imperialism, as a world system with an international policy of counter-revolution, had to be fought on a world scale. The duty of the people who had already gained independence was to give the necessary aid, in any form required, to the liberation movements in Asia, Africa and Latin America. This was the only true solidarity. This principle had remained an unaltered foundation of Cuban foreign policy. Above all, the principle was dictated by Cuban national interest. During the 1960s, Cuba extended support for revolutionary movements in the Third World, particularly in Latin America, primarily to ensure its own survival by breaking the circle of isolation imposed upon it by the United States. In fact, having learned from the Missile Crisis experience that Soviet security guarantee alone could not insure their survival, the Cuban leadership had become even more convinced that the only way to protect their own revolution was to help the other Third World states follow Cuba's revolutionary path. Henceforth, international solidarity was seen as a


strategy not only for countering US hostility but also for negating Cuban fears of Soviet abandonment.

It was for this reason that even during the years of peaceful co-existence, the Cubans had developed their own policy of "integral co-existence" to ensure that the struggle of the developing countries against colonialism and neo-colonialism was not sacrificed in order to achieve peaceful co-existence between the two super powers. The war in Vietnam had offered the Cubans the opportunity to put this principle into practice. They were the first in the communist world to offer to send volunteers to fight side by side with the Vietnamese. As the war escalated, the Cuban leadership became more convinced of the need to link up all the Third World struggles and battles. In that context, Che Guevara had gone to Africa and attempted to work out a continental strategy with the Afro-Asian Solidarity Organization. The main purpose of the Tricontinental Conference of January 1966, too was to promote revolution in the Third World. To that end the Organization of Solidarity with the Peoples of Asia, Africa and Latin America was created with its headquarters in Havana.

Even after 1968, when Cuban foreign policy was redefined and with it some facets of internationalism, commitment to international solidarity was continued even though the methods to implement it were changed. It is against this background that Cuban activities in Africa in the period before 1975 must be reviewed.


As part of a strategy to counter its diplomatic and economic isolation in the Western Hemisphere during the 1960s, Cuba sought to expand its relations with other "progressive" regimes in the Third World, particularly with governments whose revolutionary experience matched Cuba's. In Africa, Cuba developed close relations with two such countries: Kwame Nkrumah's Ghana and Ben Bella's Algeria. It was with the latter that Cuba developed particularly close relationship. Even before Algeria's independence, Cuba had aided the Algerian National Liberation Front with military and medical supplies. After Algeria became independent in 1962, a Cuban military mission was established which remained there until the overthrow of Ben Bella in 1965. More importantly, in 1963, in the wake of the Algerian-Moroccan border war, Cuba came to Algeria's aid with both arms and a battalion of combat troops—the first deployment of regular Cuban troops abroad.

The principle initiative in developing Cuba's involvement in Africa, however, appears to have been Che Guevara's, who in 1964 undertook an extended tour of the continent, visiting virtually every "progressive" country in Africa—Algeria, Ghana, Guinea, Mali and the United Arab Republic. A recognition of the extent of the African struggle against colonization encouraged Che to see not only the possibility of a Cuban participation in revolutionary activity but a legitimate leadership role in the development of a Third World movement of non-aligned nations. In fact, even on this trip, Che's overall objective was to counter USSR's withdrawal from involvement in sub-Saharan Africa by enlisting Ben Bella's support for the formation of a Union of Third World nations. Led by Cuba and Algeria, this union would be aimed at combating imperialism and colonialism, first in the

16. The first Cuban military mission in Africa was established in Ghana in 1961 and remained there until Nkrumah's ouster in 1966.


130
Congo-Leopoldville and then throughout Africa. Of course, Che's efforts to build a Third World anti-imperialist alliance ended in a failure.

Notwithstanding the failure, a second instance of Cuban involvement occurred in Congo-Leopoldville which was orchestrated once again almost entirely by Che Guevara. In summer of 1965, Che arrived in Congo-Brazzaville at the head of about 200 veterans of the Cuban guerrilla struggle to fight against the Congolese regime of Moise Tshombe. The enterprise, however, was again a failure. And although the debacle did not cause the Cubans to withdraw from the African scene, it prompted a change in Cuba's African policy. Henceforward, no regular forces were sent to aid insurgents. Havana, instead, opted for a more moderate position: to help consolidate revolutionary governments already in power and to give assistance to African guerrillas without deployment of regular troops. If some men were assigned to the guerrillas, they were to provide training rather than engage in actual fighting.

Cuba thus began providing fairly large military missions for friendly governments—missions intended also to act as palace guards protecting those governments from their own military institutions. The Cuban force performed such a function in Congo-Brazzaville where its number was increased to about one thousand in early 1966. It not only served as a presidential guard for Alphonse Massemba-Debat but also trained a militia—the Civil Defence Corps—to act as a politico-military counter-weight to the Congolese army. In June 1966, the Cubans together with the militia thwarted an attempted coup. Nevertheless, Massemba-Debat under domestic political pressure gradually reduced the Cuban force to about 250 over the next two years. When he was deposed in August 1968 by Manen Ngouabi, the Cuban mission was withdrawn, except for the instructors at the MPLA training camps on the Cabinda border. A similar Cuban mission was established in Guinea in 1966 at the request of President Sékou Touré and played a key role in defeating a mercenary invasion of Guinea in November 1970. The mission remained in Guinea throughout the 1970s.
An important activity of the Cubans which spanned this entire period was the assistance provided to independence movements fighting the Portuguese colonialism in Africa. The available evidence suggests that Cuba established ties with the African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde (PAIGC), the Mozambique Liberation Front (FRELIMO) and the MPLA in 1961. Of the three organizations, Cubans paid the most attention to the PAIGC in the 1960s. In the 1970s, however, they shifted their attention to the MPLA. Cuban support to these movements comprised of training, imparted either in Cuba or in some friendly African country, weapons as well as financial assistance, and political support in international bodies. At times Cuban medical or military personnel were permitted to join such movements, but strictly in an unofficial capacity. In addition, during the 1960s, Cuba also provided assistance to guerrillas in Senegal, Malawi, Mali, Eritrea and Tanzania.

In conclusion, it may be pointed out that although Cuban activities in Africa prior to 1975 were varied and dispensed throughout the continent, they remained, at best, modest. Cuba's overall objectives were to promote national liberation movements and to help defend existing "progressive" regimes and movements. And within the context of the 1960s, Cuban-African relations were only of minor importance to Castro. These relationships were more important to the Africans than to Castro, because Cuba's attention was focused on other parts of the world. Castro was personally more interested in Latin American revolutions than that of Africa or Asia. Understandably, his first visit to Africa was only in 1972, even though a number of African leaders had already visited him during the 1960s. However, Cuban activities in Africa in the 1960s were not without significance. For, the experience Cubans gained of working in African politics and society and the personal contacts they established with revolutionary groups, especially in Portuguese Africa, stood

them in good stead when, following the changes in the international climate, global attention was focused on Africa in the mid-1970s.

Revolutionary Solidarity in Angola

Cuba had developed strong links with the MPLA in Angola as early as the early 1960s. Its military assistance programme to the MPLA began in 1965. The MPLA President, Agostinho Neto had conferred with Che Guevara in Congo-Brazzaville that year after the unsuccessful attempt to overthrow Tshombe's government in Congo-Leopoldville, but part of Guevara's guerrilla force had remained in Congo-Brazzaville to establish training camps for the MPLA. From this point onward, Cuban support for MPLA, consisting mainly of arms and training programmes, had been fairly constant and uninterrupted. The MPLA had participated as the Angolan delegation to the Tricontinental Conference held in Havana in 1966, and President Neto along with military commander Endo visited Cuba the same year. Shortly thereafter, MPLA students and guerrilla recruits had started arriving in Cuba for education and military training.

Cuba's preference for the MPLA over its rivals--Holden Roberto's National Front for the Liberation of Angola (FNLA) and Jonas Savimbi's National Union for the Total Liberation of Angola (UNITA)--is not difficult to guage. Apart from being the oldest liberation movement in Angola, the MPLA was by far the most ideologically sound. In contrast to the FNLA and UNITA's espousal of primitive ideological mixture of racialism and tribal populism, the MPLA from the outset adhered to a staunchly anti-imperialist, multi-racialist and pro-socialist ideological position. At the same time, the MPLA drew almost all of its foreign support from the socialist bloc and from the former members of the progressive Casablanca group within the Organization of African Unity (OAU)--the countries with which Cuba shared the closest affinity. Both Nkrumah and Ben Bella were staunch supporters of the MPLA. Besides, as a member of the Conferência das Organizações' Nationalistas das Colónias Portuguesas (CONCP), the MPLA benefited from
its association with the two strongest members—FRELIMO and PAIGC—both of which received Cuban assistance.

Hence it is hardly surprising that Cuba chose to aid the progressive, anti-imperialist MPLA over the pro-Western, anti-communist FNLA and UNITA. However, neither the continuity of Cuba's revolutionary principles nor its long standing links with the assistance to the MPLA can fully explain Cuba's decision to send regular troops to Angola. To comprehend the complete picture, it is essential to place the Cuban move in its proper context, showing a set of interacting agents that include the internal situation in Angola, the Portuguese policy in Angola and the role of the Zairean and South African governments.

Crisis erupted in Angola soon after the Marcello Caetano dictatorship in Portugal was brought to an end by a military revolt on 25 April 1974. Fighting broke out between the three major political movements—the UNITA, the FNLA and the MPLA—that had fought for independence since the 1960s. At the same time the Portuguese colonials, too, unleashed a wave of terror inside Angola to avert independence.

Finally, under OAU pressure, Neto, Roberto and Savimbi met in Portugal in January 1975 to sign the Alvor Accords to ensure peaceful transition to independence. The Accords established a tripartite transitional government that would lead to Angolan independence on 11 November 1975. It also called for the unification of the three separate armies during the transition. The uneasy peace established at Alvor was, however, short-lived as the conflict between the three liberation movements rapidly became internationalized.

Immediately after the Accord, the US "40 Committee" authorized an increase in covert aid to the FNLA.²⁰ In March 1975, an emboldened FNLA launched an attack on the MPLA offices in Launda and expelled the MPLA from the northern territories under its control. Later that month, the conflict was further internationalized when 1,200 troops from Zaire entered Angola to fight alongside FNLA.

The MPLA responded by seeking additional aid from both the Soviet Union and Cuba. The Soviets stepped up their flow of arms and after a meeting between Neto and Cuban Comandante, Flavio Bravo, in May, Cuba agreed to provide several hundred instructors to open four military training camps for MPLA recruits. According to most accounts, 230 Cuban instructors arrived in Angola in June.²¹

After a brief respite, fighting between MPLA and the FNLA/Zaire-UNITA coalition once again intensified in early July. As the MPLA gained an upper hand in the fighting, it appeared that November would bring an independent Angola with an MPLA government. The vulnerable positions of the pro-Western forces in July prompted a further intensification of international interventions. On 17 July, the US "40 Committee" authorized a massive expansion of arms aid to both the FNLA and UNITA, as well as a programme of covert action by the CIA.²² On 20 July, the FNLA joined by the right-wing


²¹ See Marcum, n. 18, p. 273. García Márquez, however, maintains that the first delegation of instructors arrived in early October. n. 12, p. 124.

²² Known as "Operation Feature", the covert programme included recruitment of mercenaries, the use of CIA personnel as military advisors in both Zaire and northern Angola, and $32 million in armaments. See John Stockwell, In Search of Enemies: A CIA Story (New York, 1978).
Portuguese military and secret police launched an offensive aimed at capturing Luanda before 11 November. As fighting in the north intensified, South African troops crossed the Namibian border on 9 August and took up positions a few miles inside Angola. Shortly thereafter, South Africa opened training bases for both FNLA and UNITA in Namibia and southern Angola.23

These escalations once again led the MPLA to ask its allies for additional aid. Unlike the Soviets, the Cubans proved to be more responsive. A military delegation headed by Raúl Díaz Arguelles visited Luanda in late August and several hundred additional Cuban troops left for Angola shortly thereafter.

Fighting was intense throughout September and early October 1975. But the MPLA with its Cuban advisors and Soviet arms was holding its own against FNLA and the Zairean troops in the north. In the south too, the MPLA made significant advances against the UNITA.

Probably as a consequence of its allies' declining prospects in the fighting, South Africa intervened directly in the Angolan civil war on 23 October. Under the code name "Operation Zulu", some 5,000 South African troops launched an armoured assault from Namibia. Faced with a desperate military situation, the MPLA on 4 November asked for Cuban troops to defend Luanda, and on the following day the Cubans agreed. One battalion was airlifted immediately to Angola with the objective to hold Luanda until reinforcements arrived.24

---

23. See Marcum, n. 18, pp. 266-69.

24. The official explanation from Havana regarding its commitment of troops to Angola was that they were there "at the request of a sovereign government, an independent government, which had the same rights and same attributes as any other sovereign state". Their presence in Angola was therefore legal.
The invasion by South Africa and the consequent arrival of Cuban troops sealed the fate of FNLA and UNITA.25 The South African intervention compelled the other African nations to lend support to the MPLA as a way of attacking the former's apartheid policy. Besides, the large scale induction of Cuban troops turned the tide of fighting in favour of the MPLA. From November 1975 to March 1976, between 18,000 and 36,000 Cubans arrived in Angola.26 By mid-December the South African advance in the south had been halted, and the MPLA-Cuban forces had gone over to the offensive against the FNLA-Zairean forces on the northern front. About this time, the US Congress voted to stop all further aid to the FNLA or the UNITA, which in turn prompted the South African troops to withdraw.27 Without South African military support and US financial backing, the anti-MPLA forces were unable to hold ground for long. After a series of dramatic advances in early 1976, the MPLA-Cuban alliance considerably consolidated their position. By mid-February 1976, the military confrontation was, for all practical purposes, over and the MPLA government was recognized as the legitimate government of Angola.

The above account makes clear that despite Cuba's long-standing ties with the MPLA, the degree of its involvement in Angola until the mid-1970s remained relatively limited. Decisive Cuban involvement in Angola came only in the wake of the crisis becoming increasingly internationalized. Besides, it was the West, especially the US that initiated the internationalization of the Angolan conflict by increasing its aid to the FNLA

25. For details on the fighting during this period see Nelson P. Valdés, "Revolutionary Solidarity in Angola" in Mesa-Lago and Blasier, eds., n. 10, pp. 102-8.

26. Figures given in Leo Grande, n. 12, p. 20. The article gives both Western intelligence estimates and Cuban estimates of the number of Cuban troops and military advisors in Angola between 1975-1980.

27. Livingstone and von Nordheim, n. 20.
in the hopes of promoting a military solution that would exclude an effective MPLA role in the coalition government outlined at Alvor. Then too, Cuban involvement remained essentially reactive: each increase in aid came only at the request of the MPLA in response to escalations by the MPLA's opponents—domestic and foreign.

Despite Cuba's essentially reactive role, the US government charged that the Cubans had intervened in Angola at the Soviet behest to serve the Soviet ends. In other words, the Cuban in Angola were the "surrogate soldiers" of the USSR or as Senator Edward Kennedy put it, "The Gurkhas of the Russian Empire". General S. Brown of the US Air Force wrote "through the employment of the surrogate Cuban force in Angola, the Soviet Union recently has been successful in expanding its influence in Africa at a relatively low cost and risk."28

The facts, however, do not support such a theory. Instead, the evidence indicates that prior to the summer of 1975, there was little collusion between Cuban and Soviet resistance programmes. But as the civil war became increasingly internationalized and the compatibility of their policies became clear, they began coordinating their actions.29 They did not, as often alleged, hatch a plot to intervene in Angola as an opening move in a joint offensive against Western influence in Africa. In fact, it may be here recalled that over the years Cuban and Soviet policies towards Africa had often stood in marked contrast to one another. This was true, for instance, of the late 1960s when Cuba was pursuing a militant but limited policy based upon its ideological attraction to "progressive regimes" and national liberation movements.

---

28. This has been the official US government view as represented by Kissinger. See US Senate, n. 20, p. 90.

The USSR, on the contrary, was reorienting its policy from ideological considerations and towards geo-political strategies. As a result, Cuba was openly critical of the Soviet behaviour. In the case of Angola specifically, the divergence of perspective had led to differences in applied policy. Thus, while Cuban cooperation with Neto and the MPLA was continuous since 1966, the Soviet aid to the MPLA was halted twice—in 1963-1964 and 1972-1974.

In fact, for a brief period the Soviets even courted favour with Daniel Chipenda, the leader of a rebel faction that broke away from the MPLA in 1973. There is also evidence to suggest that the decision to commit troops on a large scale in 1975 was also taken on Cuba's own initiative and not at the Soviet behest. Castro himself has outrightly denied that the decision to intervene in Angola was taken by the Soviet Union. In his major discussion on Angola on April 1976 he said:

Cuba made its decision completely on its own responsibility. The USSR...never requested that a single Cuban be sent to that country. The USSR is extraordinarily respectful and careful in its relations with Cuba. A decision of that nature could only be made by our own party.

Indeed, Gabriel García-Márquez, in his quasi-official account of Cuba's role in Angola, goes as far as to suggest that the Soviet Union was not even consulted until the decision to intervene had been made. The Soviet sources too have confirmed that the Cuban decision was an independent one, and in

30. On one such occasion Che Guevara had delivered a scathing attack on Soviet trade policy to the Afro-Asian Peoples' Solidarity Organization describing it as nearly indistinguishable from the policies of the capitalist countries. See Bonachea and Valdes, eds., n. 17, pp. 350-62.


early 1976 even US Secretary of State, Henry Kissinger voiced his opinion to that effect.33

In fact, the Soviet Union, apprehensive that a confrontation with the West in an area of low Soviet strategic priority might have repercussions in policy areas of greater strategic importance, was hesitant to make a major commitment in Angola. Therefore, it heeded to MPLA's request for military advisors only in November 1975 even though the request had been made as early as August. Even so, the Soviet role remained primarily that of an arms supplier.34 It was the Cubans who, along with MPLA commanders, planned the conduct of war. Even Soviet logistical support for the Cuban intervention seems to have had its limits. Despite the urgency of the situation in November, the initial airlifts of Cuban troops to Angola was in converted freighters and obsolete commercial aircrafts. Subsequently too, when the Soviets did fly Cuban troops to Angola, these services were intermittent.35

The point to be stressed here, therefore, is the fact that Cuban intervention in Angola does not seem to have been made at the behest of the Soviet Union. It is possible that their interests eventually converged in the Angolan crisis.36 To have identical interests on a given issue, however, does not

33. García-Márquez, n. 12, pp. 128. New York Times, 5 February 1976 reported the following comment from a Soviet official: "We did not twist their arms. The Cubans wanted to go in...They are more radical than we are". Kissinger's views are reported in the same article.

34. Stevens, n. 31, pp. 143-45. On the factors involved in the Soviet decision to intervene, see Valenta, n. 29, pp. 19ff.

35. This is not to suggest that Soviet support to Cuba in its Angolan venture was insignificant. For, it is doubtful whether Cuban operations would have been successful in the absence of Soviet logistical support.

necessarily mean that one country is subordinate to another. In fact, the coincidence in policy may be due to entirely different reasons. The US charge that Cuban intervention was dictated by the Soviets, therefore, is not tenable.

Instead, numerous other factors must be taken into consideration to explain Cuban decision. While Angola's political fluidity and the blatant intervention by South Africa and Zaire created the right context for Cuban involvement, there were also certain incentives that motivated Cuba. Politically speaking, the situation in Angola presented Cuba with an excellent opportunity to increase its influence in the world, particularly among the socialist and Third World countries. The "co-relation of forces" on a world scale, the Cubans felt, was tilting in their favour. Following the April 1975 US debacles in Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia, American power appeared on the decline. At the same time, the Watergate scandal had greatly undermined the American political system. All these events were interpreted as meaning that if the US was confronted with a major foreign policy crisis, it would not be able to do much about it.

Even the option of covert operations during this period was under attack in the American Congress and the media. At the same time, the situation in Africa held promises. In Angola, for instance, there was no established authority to contend with. Elsewhere in the region, there were many governments that shared much with Cuba; Cuban policies were more benignly received than in the Western Hemisphere; and Cuba appeared to have more to offer to countries whose level of economic and social development was well below its own. In addition, the projection of South Africa as the principal enemy provided the Cubans with a solid rationale for

action. Politically, this became its greatest advantage before the Black African audiences.38

The existence of several radical nationalist movements, moreover, held out the possibility that the success of liberation struggle in Angola might alter radically the nature of the regimes in southern Africa. With Angola on the West, controlling the Benguela railways, and Mozambique and Tanzania on the East, the government of Zambia was certainly imperiled. Similarly, Zaire surrounded by Angola, the Peoples Republic of Congo and Tanzania was also vulnerable. A defeat of South African forces in Angola would definitely give encouragement to the struggles inside Zimbabwe (Rhodesia), Namibia (South West Africa) and Azania (South Africa) itself. Thus, it is reasonable to conclude that one consideration in Castro’s decision to go into Angola was the prospects of a victory the MPLA afforded to Cuba in terms of its prestige and influence in the Third World.

Regaining the position of revolutionary vanguard of the Third World, which Cuba had lost because of the process of institutionalization and increased Soviet influence in Cuban affairs during the early 1970s, was important for both domestic and foreign policy purposes. Internally, after a long line of failures in various areas, Cuba needed a tangible success that would be a mobilizing force. Given the fact that the process of institutionalization had produced a certain wear in the revolutionary consciousness of the Cuban population, its leadership perhaps hoped that an offensive external defence of the revolution might bring additional domestic legitimitization. Besides, as an important part of the Cuban population is Black, Cuban support in favour of a Black African country against South Africa could also have strengthened the nationalist sentiments and contributed to national cohesion within Cuba. It was no accident, therefore,

38. The case of Nigeria is most revealing in this regard. One of the most important and consistently pro-Western country of sub-Saharan Africa, Nigeria explicitly praised Cuban and Soviet aid to the MPLA in its struggle to defeat South Africa.

142
that the Cuban expedition was called "Operation Carlotta" after a Black woman slave who had led a slave rebellion.39

More importantly, Cuba hoped to gain a two fold bargaining advantage in its foreign policy from its Angolan involvement. On the one hand, it hoped to enhance its position vis-a-vis the Soviet Union by becoming an indispensable element in the latter's Africa policy. On the other hand, Cuba could also gain bargaining power vis-a-vis the US. Its African card could become a useful trump in overcoming problems and resuming diplomatic relations with the US. Castro hinted as much when reacting to President Ford's statement that Cuba's involvement in Angola jeopardized the prospects of rapprochement. He stated:

It is odd that the President of the United States, Mr. Ford, should threaten us with that. Before, when we did have relations, they cut them off; when there was a sugar quota, they cut it off; but now they have nothing else to cut off, and now they cut off hope. This could be called the "the hope embargo" on the part of the President of the United States."40

Some observers believe that Castro was trying by these words to tell the US that if the latter hoped to exercise any kind of influence over Cuba, it had better have relations with Cuba. In either case, Cuba hoped that because of its commitment to liberation movements, it could count on the support of many Third World countries to solve its own problems of independence. Concretely, this would mean that Cuba could negotiate more favourable and new accords with the Soviet Union and simultaneously resume trade relations with the US, thus ending its exclusive dependence on the Soviet Union.

39. It is for this reason that Castro often asserted that Cuba was not only a Latin American nation but a Latin-African nation as well. See Granma Weekly Review, 28 March 1976.

40. See Taber, ed., n. 2, p. 77.
Cuban intervention in Angola also held out the prospect of satisfying certain institutional needs of the Cuban regime. Militarily, it provided the Cuban armed forces with a new rationale for its existence: readiness to participate in front-line overseas combat.41 This was particularly significant for, it came at a time when the prevailing roles of the military in terms of national defence and economic production had been greatly reduced as a result of the decline in the credible threat from the United States as well as the shift toward a more efficient economy in civilian hands. The Angolan war, however, marked the first time the Cuban armed forces were formally committed to front-line overseas combat as part of their military mission. Although Cuba had supported revolutionary movements in many countries in the past, combat roles for internationalist solidarity had been open to military personnel as individuals rather than institutional actors. With the Angolan intervention, the armed forces, henceforward, came to have an institutional stake in the continuation of an activist foreign policy.

Additionally, the Angolan war also provided Cuba the opportunity to upgrade the quality of its armed forces. The African campaigns provided the first combat test for them, from which they emerged victorious. Besides, as part of the war effort, the USSR resupplied the Cuban army with new and costly aircrafts, heavy weaponry and other military equipment.

The Angolan involvement also helped Cuba to accrue economic benefits.42 The clearest benefit was that Cuba increased its leverage with the USSR in bargaining for material rewards in the second half of the 1970s. In


fact, in view of the overwhelming Cuban economic dependence on the Soviet bloc, it has been argued by some that Cuban decisions regarding Angola responded in part to its needs to reciprocate, consolidate and extend vital Soviet economic and political commitments. While such an interpretation can be questioned, there is no doubt that the Angolan involvement served to cement further the relations between the two allies. In strictly economic terms, the post-Angola pacts with Moscow resulted in the following benefits to Cuba: a phenomenal increase in Soviet trade, subsidies, credit and technical aid; introduction of an adjustment trade mechanism that balances the value of most Cuban exports with the value of some Soviet imports, thus significantly reducing trade deficits; assurance of Soviet oil supplies until the end of 1985; and perhaps, setting the base for the renegotiation of the Cuban debt in 1986, either deferring it again or partly or totally cancelling it.\footnote{See Granma Weekly Review, 14 March 1976 and 25 April 1976.}

Other benefits were less clear-cut. For example, the possibility of Angola becoming an oil supplier for Cuba remained dim because Cuba buys oil from the USSR at a subsidized price while Angola needs to sell its crude at best possible price.\footnote{In 1979, for instance, Gulf and Texaco signed contracts for crude purchases and drilling expansion worth over $440 million with Angola. New York Times, 23 October 1979.} Cuba could save on freight if the USSR were willing to pay the differential price for Angola's oil, but this has not materialized. Similarly, Africa did not offer a significant opportunity for diversification of Cuba's foreign markets because, with the exception of very few commodities, Cuban and most African economies are not complementary. In the area of surplus labour, Cuba's exportation of workers to Africa probably absorbed most of the overt unemployment in 1978 but the subsequent stabilization of Cuban

\footnote{See Granma Weekly Review, 14 March 1976 and 25 April 1976.}

\footnote{In 1979, for instance, Gulf and Texaco signed contracts for crude purchases and drilling expansion worth over $440 million with Angola. New York Times, 23 October 1979.}
troops abroad impeded further absorption. Nevertheless, Cuba has accrued substantial earnings from charges for its civilian services, particularly to oil-rich countries. In this respect, special mention must be made of Cuba's construction projects in countries like Libya and Angola. The hard currency thus earned has helped to reduce the huge deficit in Cuba's balance of payments, to service Cuba's debt with the West and to pay for imports from market economies.

Thus, while the interactions of revolutionary principles and objective political conditions in Angola provided the context for action, the above mentioned benefits provided the incentives, which together explain why Cuba intervened in Angola. This is not to suggest, however, that there were no costs involved. Apart from significant military and economic losses, the major cost in political terms was the disruption of its normalization of relations with the US. It would therefore, be pertinent to examine the calculations that might have entered Cuban decision to intervene even at the risk of jeopardizing its rapprochement with the US, which only recently had been painstakingly initiated.

The major gains that Cuba hoped to derive from a resumption of relations with the US were essentially economic. More specifically, Cuba hoped to benefit from the sale of primary products (mostly sugar and nickel), tourism, access to technology, freight savings and lower prices for imported food and spare parts. However, it is likely that given the fact that even during the period of increased mutual understanding and co-operation in 1974-1975, negotiations between US and Cuba had never gone beyond the exploratory stage and progress toward the resolution of outstanding bilateral issues had

45. For a discussion of the impact of exportation of labour surplus on unemployment in Cuba in the second half of the 1970s, see Carmelo Mesa-Lago, The Economy of Socialist Cuba (Pittsburgh, Pa., 1980), pp. 108ff.

46. For a full discussion of this topic, see Mesa-Lago, "The Economics of US-Cuban Rapprochement", in Blasier and Mesa-Lago, eds., n. 10, pp. 200-9.
been slow, Cuba's earlier euphoria about its rapprochement with the US had by this time largely disappeared.

In any event, even before Africa, Cuba's potential gains from US trade appeared small and far-off. Collapsing world sugar prices after 1974 had led Cuba to revise its ambitious shopping list of the earlier years which included industrial technology and consumer goods. That list was now reduced to a few priority items: medicines, lubricants, agricultural machinery and spare parts. Indeed, the introduction of sugar substitutes had greatly reduced the attractiveness of US sugar market even during periods of high prices.

The prospects for other Cuban exports to the US also remained dismal in the absence of most-favoured-nation status. It was similarly predicted that Cuba's potential earning from regular tourism would be minimal since revolutionary Cuba was not the place for recreational vacations. Above all, since sales of Cuban sugar and nickel to the US would be at world market prices, the large price subsidies paid by the USSR would be forfeited to the extent that exports were diverted from potential markets. In sum, significant limitations and uncertainties as regards potential gains to Cuba existed even prior to the issue of Africa which may have therefore minimized the cost of African decisions in Cuba's calculations.

Further, the gain of increased Soviet assistance as a consequence of Cuba's involvement in Africa far outweighed the loss of benefits to Cuba from trade with the US. The cost-benefit analysis probably reflected the more palpable


and immediate economic benefits and larger long term potential pay-offs, obtainable through political connection with the USSR than from the market contact with the US. Not surprisingly, in 1977 Castro declared; "No material benefit, whatever its nature or magnitude, would make us betray the trust placed in us by Angola...Cuba's solidarity with the peoples of Africa is not negotiable." 49

While Cuban involvement in Angola even at the cost of incurring US hostility is thus explained, the American role during the Angolan crisis remains rather dubious. An examination of the role of the US seems to indicate that it was more interested in raising the spectre of Soviet-Cuban intervention in Angola than in addressing itself to a solution of the crisis. 50

In the post-Second World War period, the US paid scant attention to Africa as it considered the area relatively stable and secure in the context of the Cold War. Allied with European colonial powers in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and assured of easy access to facilities and raw materials of the area, the US remained indifferent towards the freedom movements of the region. In its opinion, moves towards independence at that time were premature and would only bring more harm to the region. Such a policy was of course, accompanied by the ritualistic chant of its support for orderly movements towards self-government.

Such a policy was continued with little modification until 1974 when the Marcello Caetano regime in Portugal was overthrown by the Armed Revolutionary Forces which then decided to end the Portuguese colonial rule. All these years the US extended only verbal support to the liberation


movement in Angola. Instead, concrete support—both military and economic—had been extended to the Portuguese government, on the grounds that Portugal was a NATO ally and that access to naval and air base facilities in Portuguese Azores was essential to the US. Influenced by such government actions, American corporations had evinced keen interest in investing in Angola. For instance, Gulf Oil had invested $200 million in the oil-rich Cabinda enclave.

In late 1969, on Kissinger’s insistence the National Security Council (NSC) was directed to survey a full range of options available to the US in regard to its policy toward southern Africa, including Angola and Mozambique. From the draft proposal (NSSM 39) submitted by the Inter Agency Group for Africa, the Nixon administration chose the option of a "tilt" toward the Portuguese colonial regimes without any open identification with it. Specifically, the policy was to be one of "selective relaxation of (US) stance toward White regimes" using that device to induce the latter to move towards "liberalization" in respect to Black demands. Thus, only "liberalization" of colonial policy was thought of and complete freedom was not even contemplated. The US foreign policy experts who felt that the Whites would continue ruling southern Africa for a long time were therefore taken by surprise when the Caetano dictatorship in Portugal was overthrown.51

With the outbreak of civil war in Angola, the US played a significant role in internationalizing the conflict.52 In July 1974 the CIA began to increase

51. The Kissinger Study on Southern Africa (Nottingham, 1975).

covert funding to the FNLA. Then in January 1975, barely a week after the Alvor Accords, the US "40 Committee" met and decided to provide $300,000 to the FNLA. While not enough to affect the situation in material terms, it was a sign of continuing support by the US even after the Alvor Accords. More importantly, it encouraged Roberto to make a bid for power despite the Accords. It also led to the first external intervention with foreign troops when regular Zairéan troops entered Angola in July in support of the FNLA.

The American perspective on the Angolan civil war was framed with little attention to the political situation within Angola or even the broader African context. Initially, covert assistance was provided to the FNLA, not because of comparable Soviet assistance, but because the American leadership believed that the FNLA would win. In fact, so convinced was the American leadership that it even stymied the efforts made by the Portuguese and the OAU to promote a coalition government for Angola by undermining the Accords through its covert aid to the FNLA. The administration even rejected the views of the Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs, Nathaniel Davis, that a major diplomatic effort should be made involving all powers, to bring about a political solution. Instead, disregarding Davis's opposition of a direct or indirect US military intervention in Angola, Kissinger pressured the CIA and the "40 Committee" to develop the option of covert action. As a consequence of the proposals developed by these

53. FNLA leader, Holden Roberto had received funds through the CIA from 1962-1969. Although during Nixon-Kissinger "tilt" he was deactivated, he remained on CIA payroll receiving a sum of $10,000 per annum. New York Times, 25 September 1975.

54. See Davis, n. 52, pp. 111-16. Davis resigned as Assistant Secretary after only four months in office following the rejection of his recommendations. The first and well informed account of the action of the "40 Committee" surfaced some six months later. See New York Times, 14 December 1975.
agencies, the Ford administration authorized $32 million to the anti-MPLA forces between July and November 1975.55

It is interesting to note that throughout this period the administration considered competition with the Soviet Union in Angola normal behaviour under detente. Hence, it made no reference to foreign interference in Angola until the latter half of 1975. On the contrary, from the spring of 1975, the US had been assisting Zaire in its intervention and had not objected to South African intervention since August. Kissinger's first reference to interference in Angola came only on 23 September 1975 when he remarked that "events in Angola have taken a distressing turn, with widespread violence. We are most alarmed at the interference of extra-continental powers who do not wish Africa well".56 But on this occasion, Kissinger neither identified the extra-continental powers nor the nature and extent of their interference. In November, however, he referred specifically to both the Soviet Union and Cuba. At this time, Kissinger also voiced the idea that United States regarded this outside interference as "a serious matter" and "as far as the Soviet Union is concerned, not compatible with the spirit of relaxation of tensions".57 In late November 1975, in his first comprehensive reference to the Soviet-Cuban role in Angola, Kissinger said:

We cannot ignore...substantial Soviet build-up of weapons in Angola, which has introduced great power rivalry into Africa for the first time in fifteen years...US cannot be indifferent while a outside power embarks upon

55. This sum did not include the additional military equipment, alleged to be $16 million. For discussion of the way the CIA disbursed the funds, see Stockwell, n. 22, pp. 206-12 and 263-68; and Stephen R. Weissman, "CIA Covert Action in Zaire and Angola: Patterns and Consequences", Political Science Quarterly (New York), vol 94, summer 1979, pp. 283-84.

56. Department of State Bulletin (Washington, D.C.), vol. 73, p. 574.

57. Ibid., p. 777 and vol. 74, p. 69.
an interventionist policy...nor can we ignore the thousands of Cubans sent into an African conflict."^58

This change in US policy towards the end of 1975 had been warranted by the reversals suffered by the FNLA and the growing possibility that Soviet-Cuban backed MPLA government might gain power in Angola. It was only then that US policy shifted to demanding participation of the FNLA and UNITA with the MPLA in the coalition government. Until then the US had not been interested in a coalition government.

It is not difficult to impute motivations to Kissinger's silence on external interference until the latter half of 1975.^59 In light of the fact that both the Soviet Union and Cuba had for long had links with the MPLA and that their serious involvement in the Angolan crisis came only as a reaction to intervention by other powers such as Zaire, South Africa and the US itself, it would perhaps not be incorrect to suggest that Kissinger waited for a sizeable Soviet-Cuban involvement in Angola to create an American stake there before raising the spectre of foreign intervention. Such a strategy, Kissinger might have calculated, would afford him an opportunity to pin the "interventionist" label on the Soviet Union. This, in the post-Vietnam era of revulsion against American intervention, would then become an advantage to be exploited. At the same time, it would help to counter West Europeans' complacency with regard to Soviet threat or capability to project its military power in any part of the world. Besides, Soviet-Cuban involvement would alarm the African countries, especially those adjacent to states already receiving Soviet aid. These countries would then become more receptive to co-operation with the US.

^58. Ibid., vol. 73, pp. 843-44.

^59. It is worthwhile to note that the administration's charges about extra-continental interference came only after the Chinese wound up their training programme for the FNLA in Zaire.
Such an interpretation perhaps explains why the US raised the spectre of Soviet-Cuban involvement in Africa in such alarming terms, inspite of the fact that direct American economic and strategic interests in Angola were minimal. Nor for that matter, did the US especially object to the MPLA; it did not oppose the coming to power of the similarly leftist FRELIMO in Mozambique. In fact, Kissinger's real concern was not Angola at all but only Soviet initiatives there and the possible strategic benefits it may accrue thereof. In his words:

Angola represents the first time that the Soviets have moved militarily at a long distance to impose a regime of their choice. It is the first time that the United States has failed to respond to Soviet military moves outside the immediate Soviet orbit.60

Given the international environment of detente and the post-Vietnam domestic milieu of disillusionment with American intervention abroad, Angola presented the US with the ideal opportunity to once again assume the offensive in international politics on the pretext of checking Soviet-Cuban advances in the Third World. However, while this explains US policy in Angola, it does not account for the American disruption of normalization efforts with Cuba. On the other hand, the fact that the US used the pretext of the Cuban involvement in Angola to break off its talks with Havana seems to suggest the US marginal interest in rapprochement with Cuba. Such an argument is further confirmed by the fact that, whereas the Angolan affair represented an offence serious enough to discontinue efforts towards an accommodation with Cuba, detente with the Soviet Union was continued. In fact, while other conditions for rapprochement were subsequently deemphasized, disagreement with Cuba over its African policy was cited as the principal factor as to why chances for normalization seemed unlikely. Cuban involvement in the Angolan civil war, said President Ford, "destroys any opportunity for improvement of relations between the United States and Cuba".

60. Ibid., vol. 74, p. 209.
To conclude therefore, Cuba’s involvement in Angola although representing a qualitative escalation of Cuban military assistance, was nevertheless, in line with Cuba’s decade long policy of assisting progressive liberation movements in Africa. Cuba had developed such a policy in the 1960s not at Soviet urgings but rather as a reminder to the Soviet Union to live up to the principles of proletarian internationalism at a time when Soviet support for Cuba seemed tenuous. Fearing that a weakening of Soviet commitment towards revolutionary movements might presage diminishing Soviet support for Cuba, Castro had used proletarian internationalism as a strategy to expand Cuban influence in the Third World in order to increase Cuba’s bargaining leverage with Moscow. This was particularly true of the late 1960s when efforts were made to revitalize a continental revolution in the Western Hemisphere. The death of Che Guevara and the collapse of the Bolivian foco had, however, delivered a setback to such a strategy, leading not only to increased Soviet influence over Cuban affairs but also to a concomitant loss of Cuban autonomy.

It is in this respect that Castro saw in Angola an opportunity to exercise an independent initiative in foreign affairs. Not only did the international situation in the mid-1970s seem propitious but the intervention by Zaire and South Africa and the MPLA invitation gave him legal justification and political incentive to send troops. The internationalization of the civil war also led to a convergence of Cuban-Soviet interests in Angola. In Castro’s calculations, therefore, Cuban action in Angola might not only further the revolutionary cause in southern Africa but also expand Cuban latitude for independent action by increasing its leverage with both the super powers. By extending Cuban influence and prestige in Africa, Cuba would become a more privileged ally of the USSR. Cuban initiative in Angola might also illustrate to the US the cost of ignoring Cuba and thereby give a fillip to the normalization process underway. Thus, although the US sought to project Cuban actions in Angola as a joint Cuban-Soviet offensive against the Western forces in southern Africa, Cuba’s involvement was prompted more by realistic assessment of its own interests in order to increase its autonomy in international affairs.