

How to Assist Moscow in Africa

By Jennifer S. Whitaker

In sending Stinger missiles and other arms to Unita, the Angolan insurgent movement, President Reagan would be joining South Africa in a broad offensive against virtually all its neighbors. Advocates of the policy argue that American military involvement in an African civil war raises the cost to the Soviet Union of supporting leftist regimes like that in Angola. In fact, such involvement would create openings for Moscow while helping lay waste to the region.

As more of the black violence within South Africa hits white targets, that nation's army is stepping up efforts to interdict domestic adversaries by bashing neighboring countries. The theory is that the threat actually comes from without — and it is reassuring to have someone to hit back at. For South Africa's security forces, the growing internal threat is an elusive target, while sanctuaries of African National Congress insurgents in neighboring countries provide concrete military targets, vulnerable to airborne commando raids.

Mozambique, Botswana and Lesotho have not permitted A.N.C. military bases on their territory, but even they are being hit hard. Lesotho's

Government was overthrown in January following a South African blockade; Botswana was invaded by South Africa last June and threatened again early this year. All of this is particularly frightening for Zambia, which does allow the the A.N.C. to maintain headquarters in Lusaka and has as a result become the venue for meetings between South African businessmen and others eager to talk with the A.N.C. Needless to say, all of this is grounds for increasing fear of South African reprisals.

Pretoria's support for insurgent groups in neighboring countries is an even more serious threat to regional well-being and American interests there. In Mozambique, a country whose pragmatic turn to the West was welcomed last fall by President Reagan, the South African-backed Mozambique National Resistance insurgents have shredded the fragile economic infrastructure, uprooting people and spreading famine.

Now, the struggle within Mozambique threatens to spread. Neighboring Zimbabwe, which recently sent 10,000 troops to help fight the Mozam-

bique National Resistance is also fighting an insurgent group that reportedly gets South African aid. Harare was fur-

ther threatened by Pretoria in December after an explosion of land mines just over the border in South Africa — and it feels its military resources stretched thin.

These events raise the specter of increasing Soviet and Cuban involvement in both Mozambique and Zimbabwe. Until now, Zimbabwe has kept the Soviet Union at a distance. But Zimbabweans feel that Western nations are unwilling to arm them

First, side with Pretoria in Angola

against South Africa and are tempted by Soviet arms salesmen hawking Antonov Stol aircraft. Mozambique has until now been determined to avoid dependence on Cuban troops, but with Mozambique National Resistance aggression growing and aid from Zimbabwe concentrated in the border area, it may soon be drawn to bringing in Cubans.

In Angola itself, the unending civil war is consuming wealth and people.

Angola has spent more than a billion dollars on Soviet arms and matériel since the start of 1984. Rather than raising costs to the Soviet Union, the war gives Moscow a lien on the hard currency flowing from Angolan oil.

Instead of siding with South Africa in Angola, America should throw its weight decisively against Pretoria's destabilization of its neighbors. Our alignment with South Africa against Angola undermines our pursuit of a negotiated settlement for Namibia: If a settlement there will not end aid to Unita, the Angolans will not opt for one, or send home the Cubans. Our de facto alliance with South Africa also debases the credibility of our opposition to apartheid, relieving pressure on whites and alienating blacks.

Finally, United States support for anti-Communist insurgencies sets us at odds with every nation in the region apart from South Africa. Before we go any further, American policymakers should calculate the real consequences of this ideological gesture: Aid to anti-Communist insurgents, in Angola or elsewhere in southern Africa, will raise costs to the United States and increase opportunities for the Soviet Union. □