18 October 1985

MEMORANDUM

TO: Southern Africa Advocacy Mailing List

FROM: Ralston Deffenbaugh

RE: Possible US Military Alliance with South Africa in Aiding UNITA in Angola

Dear Friends:

In our last mailing to all of you, we asked that you contact your Senators to urge their support for the South Africa Sanctions Bill in South Africa. I want to take this opportunity to thank you for your good response to that appeal. The Senate passed the Sanctions Bill by a surprisingly large, indeed overwhelming majority. The Bill would have been adopted by both Houses of Congress (after a conference report) if President Reagan had not taken the wind out of the sails by adopting sanctions by Executive Order on September 9. While the President's sanctions are in many respects unsatisfactory, they do represent a change in administration policy. It remains to be seen over the winter whether the sanctions and words of warning from the United States, the European Community, and other nations will have the desired effect on South Africa. Let us join the churches and people of South Africa in praying for a change of heart among South Africa's rulers so that meaningful and honest negotiations may begin for justice and peace and an end to apartheid.

I am writing at this time to bring a rather complicated but urgent and dangerous matter to your attention. This is the real possibility that the United States might resume military and/or "humanitarian" assistance to the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA). The situation is described in the attached story from the Washington Post of October 16. Also enclosed is a U.S. Lutheran statement on the issue.

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UNITA has been fighting a war against the Angolan government since Angola attained its independence in 1975. Students of the Angolan liberation struggle say that UNITA was an authentic liberation movement, one of three fighting against Portuguese colonial rule. At the time of Portugal's withdrawal from Angola, in 1974-75, the three parties were unable to reach agreement among themselves and fought over who would assume power. UNITA was one of the two groups that lost. During that struggle, the Angolan civil war became a foreign battle ground, with South African, United States, and Chinese assistance going to UNITA and to the other losing party, the FNLA, and with Soviet and Cuban assistance going to the victorious party, MPLA. US covert assistance to the losing parties was stopped in 1976 by the so-called Clark Amendment, through which Congress opposed US military alliance with South Africa in Angola. In a surprise move, the Clark Amendment was repealed by Congress in July 1985.

In the ten years since UNITA lost the Angolan civil war, it has become more and more dependent upon South Africa. UNITA's base is a short distance north of the Namibian border and UNITA's communications with the outside world are through Namibia (which South Africa occupies in violation of international law). UNITA forces are supplied and its military efforts are paid for by South Africa. The close collaboration between the South African military and UNITA's is underlined by the fact that a number of commando raids against major Angolan facilities which were claimed by UNITA have in fact turned out to have been the work of South African commandos. The most recent of these was an attack against the American-owned Gulf Oil facility in the Cabinda enclave of northern Angola, where a white South African commando was captured in an unsuccessful attempt to blow up the oil facilities.

US aid to UNITA could only be administered through close collaboration with the South African military and would have to be provided through Namibia. The United States is under an international legal obligation not to recognize South Africa's rule over Namibia. Aid to UNITA would defy these international obligations of the United States and would be a grave setback toward the efforts for independence for Namibia. Perhaps more seriously, aid to UNITA would mean close US alliance with South Africa at a time when our country is trying to express its abhorrence for the apartheid system of South Africa. American soldiers and government officials would be working side by side with the same South African military and security forces who have been killing persons in the South African townships and in the bush of northern Namibia.

We urge you to write to your Senators and Representatives, and especially to Rep. Thomas P. O'Neill (D-MA) and Rep. James Wright (D-TX) urging them to oppose House Bill HR 3472, introduced by Rep. Claude Pepper (D-Florida), which seeks $27 million in "humanitarian" assistance for UNITA, as well as any US assistance to UNITA, overt or covert. It would be a grave blow to the morality and image of United States foreign policy if the US were to ally itself with South Africa. It would further brutalize the civil war in Angola. It would also mean yet another delay in the long-suffering struggle of Namibians for independence.

Thank you all for your response to this request.
Statement on U.S. Assistance to Rebel Forces in Angola

October 16, 1985

The United States government is currently considering a variety of proposals to provide assistance in some form to the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola, known as UNITA. We believe that such assistance, either "humanitarian" or military, covert or overt, can in no way serve the interests of the people of Angola, Namibia, South Africa or Mozambique, nor can it serve U.S. interests.

The assistance will further polarize and brutalize the civil war in Angola, and clearly make the current Angolan government, which has taken bold steps towards an independent foreign policy in recent years, even more dependent upon military assistance from the Soviet bloc.

The assistance will ally the United States with South Africa, which is the primary supplier of arms and support to the UNITA forces and which has conducted large-scale military operations in Angola in support of UNITA. The effects of this alliance serve no good purpose:

--It will send an unequivocal signal to the White electorate of South Africa that the United States supports it in what they view as a strategic war for survival in southern Africa, thus voiding every U.S. effort to convince them to end apartheid and bring justice to their country.

--It will identify the U.S. with the continuing South African occupation of Namibia, which South Africa sees as necessary for its support of UNITA, and could require the U.S. to use South Africa-occupied Namibia to provide U.S. assistance. Further, it will finally kill five years of U.S.-led negotiations concerning Namibian independence and the presence of Cuban troops in Angola, a negotiation which required the U.S. to convince the Angolans of our good faith, not of our desire to see the Angolan government overthrown.

The assistance will severely damage U.S. rapprochement with Mozambique, which is undergoing a similar civil war against South African supported rebels. President Machel, who recently visited Washington, of necessity will have to reassess U.S. involvement in the region.

The assistance will ally the U.S. with an allegedly "pro-western" military group with a long history of serious human rights violations, ranging from the kidnapping of foreign nationals for use in prisoner exchanges with the Angolan government to reports of UNITA participation in the brutal South African occupation of Namibia.

On behalf of the Lutheran Church in America, The American Lutheran Church and the Association of Evangelical Lutheran Churches, we call on our government to immediately reject any requests for U.S. assistance to UNITA.
The Reagan administration is in the midst of a major policy review to decide whether to resume U.S. military aid to noncommunist guerrilla fighting against the Marxist government, according to congressional and intelligence sources.

The review has touched off an acrimonious interagency debate that pits the administration's global strategists, intent upon showing U.S. resolve against the growing Soviet and Cuban military role in Angola, against its "regionalists," who fear U.S. aid to the guerrillas will end U.S. efforts to negotiate a peaceful settlement to the dispute over Namibia, or Southwest Africa.

The debate takes place amid administration preparations for the Nov. 19-20 summit between President Reagan and Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev, and a number of policy-makers are arguing that now is the time for Washington to send a strong message to Moscow about the U.S. resolve not only to help noncommunist guerrilla forces in Angola but elsewhere in the world.

In addition, they are arguing that Gorbachev is behind recent efforts by Soviet-allied governments in Afghanistan, Nicaragua and Ethiopia to exert pressure in those countries and that the United States must respond to bolster its position going into the summit.

At least two National Security Council-sponsored meetings have been held, the latest last Friday. In addition, special National Intelligence Estimate, a quick in-depth study by the various branches of the intelligence community, is being prepared to determine the Soviet role, intentions and prospects in Angola, according to intelligence and congressional sources.

An administration official said Congress is likely to touch off an still-debated debate this week to whether to resume U.S. aid to the noncommunist forces, referred to as "the contras," in Nicaragua.

A debate over U.S. policy toward Angola took place in 1975-76 after it was discovered that the CIA was secretly funneling more than $50 million in military and other assistance to two rebel factions, one of them UNITA, which were then locked in a three-way civil war and power struggle ultimately won by the new ruling Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA). In January 1976, Congress passed the Clark amendment, which was sponsored by Sen. Dick Clark (D-Iowa), banning any further covert military aid to Angolan rebels.

That amendment was repealed by Congress last July, opening the way for the debate now going on inside the administration over whether to resume aid to UNITA.

Supporters of a renewed American involvement on the side of UNITA say there may be less congressional opposition this time because of Soviet and Cuban involvement in Angola and the fact that the United States has never had diplomatic relations with the Marxist Angolan government. In addition, State Department efforts to negotiate a solution to the Namibia dispute, or a withdrawal of Cuban troops from Angola, have been unsuccessful.

Opponents of such a policy say an open U.S. alignment with UNITA will inevitably draw Washington into a closer alliance with white-rulled South Africa, UNITA's most important source of support, and undermine the administration's efforts to pressure Pretoria to reform its apartheid system. South Africa is presently the main supplier of arms and the conduit for other outside military aid to UNITA.

Rep Claude Pepper (D-Fla.), chairman of the House Rules Committee, introduced a bill earlier this month authorizing the U.S. government to provide up to $27 million in humanitarian aid only to UNITA, and Sen. Steve Symms (R-Idaho) is "seriously thinking" about sponsoring a similar bill in the Senate, according to an aide.

"We're waiting for word from the White House," an aide to Pepper said. "We feel there will be significant developments in a matter of days."

Savimbi has asked the United States for military aid, though he has not submitted any written request to Washington yet, according to Jeremia K. Chitunda, UNITA foreign affairs secretary.

Chitunda said in an interview that UNITA's top priority right now was antitank and antiaircraft weapons to counter the Angolan government's Mig fighters, Hind helicopter guns, and tanks recently supplied by the Soviet Union.

He said $50 million in military aid would be more useful than $100 million in humanitarian aid. "Humanitarian assistance is just a way of evading the issue," he added.

Chitunda asserted that the Soviets had delivered $2 billion worth of arms in the past 18 months, but U.S. intelligence sources said it was more like $1 billion worth since January 1984.