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Foreign and Commonwealth Office

London SW1A 2AH

26 March 1980

Dear Michael,

The situation in Angola

Thank you for sending me, with your letter of 18 March, a note of a conversation between Professor Hugh Thomas and Dr Jonas Savimbi. As Professor Thomas has taken the trouble to send you this note, you may like to have the department's comments.

Savimbi stated that UNITA controlled two Angolan provinces and had established an administrative infrastructure in those provinces. This contrasts with Mr Patrick Cosgrave's assertion in the 'Times' of 4 February that Savimbi controlled "two thirds" of Angola. There are 17 provinces in Angola, and Moxico and Cuando Cubango are the most sparsely populated ones. It is moreover difficult to reconcile Savimbi's claim to have the entire infrastructure of a state in those provinces with his admission that he does not control either the main roads or the larger towns.

We were interested to see Savimbi's estimate of Cuban strength in Angola. Our own estimates are substantially lower; we believe that there are about 19,000 military and 6,000 civilian personnel from Cuba in Angola. We have no evidence of any current disagreement between the Russians and the Cubans on future policy towards Angola; the present tensions in Luanda appear to arise more from a struggle for power between black Angolans and those of mixed descent.

Savimbi has referred on other occasions to the plans for a meeting between him and Neto before the latter's death, and to his poor opinion of dos Santos. Although it is true that dos Santos studied chemical engineering in the Soviet Union and married a Russian woman, our information is that he has, for some time, been separated or divorced from her. We believe it is too early to judge whether dos Santos is moving Angola towards a closer association with the Soviet Union; despite fears that he would prove less helpful than Neto on Namibia, the policy of dos Santos has so far not diverged discernibly from that of his predecessor.

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It is clear that the Angolan Government and UNITA have reached a military stalemate, and neither is at present in a position to defeat the other decisively. This implies that there will eventually have to be a political settlement, and Savimbi has on other occasions declared himself in favour of a negotiated solution. Meanwhile, Savimbi's efforts to drum up support in Western countries seem likely to increase Angolan suspicion of the West, and could result in the strengthening, rather than reduction, of the Cuban presence in Angola.

yours ever

Roderic Lyne

(R M J Lyne)
Private Secretary

M O'D B Alexander Esq
No 10 Downing Street
London

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Centre for Policy Studies

8 Wilfred Street · London SW1E 6PL · Telephone 01-828 1176 Cables: Centrepol London

Private

Feb 28, 1980

Dear Michael

I thought I shd. let you have a brief note on a talk I had last week with Jonas Savimbi. I don't suppose for a minute he told me anything that he did not tell others. I have not passed on the contents of this note to anyone else & I have no copy of it.

Yours ever
Hugh.

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Private

29 Ladbroke Grove
London W11 3BB
01-727 2288

A talk with Jonas Savimbi, London, February 17, 1980

I had a talk with Jonas Savimbi at the Metropole Hotel, Edgware Road, at breakfast-time on Sunday February 17. Most of the time there was no one else present, though for part of the time his London representative Tony Fernandes was there too. I saw Savimbi on the suggestion of Hugh Fraser but I did so in my capacity as the historian of Cuba.

Savimbi said that UNITA controlled two Angolan provinces, Moxico and Cuando Cubango, though the main roads were in the hands of the Cubans. So were the larger towns. UNITA, he said, had the entire infrastructure of a state in those provinces, including schools and hospitals.

He estimated the Cubans in Angola at 34,000, of whom 28,000 are soldiers, 6,000 civilians. The Cubans in Angola had been white to begin with; now they are mostly black. Many black Cubans had been in touch with him. He thought that there were some signs of disputes between Russia & Cuba as to how proceed in Angola. The coup in May 1977 (in which the Cubans apparently protected Neto's regime) was a sign of that.

He thought that had Neto lived, he (Savimbi) would have been able to make an arrangement

/with

him. He had arranged to meet Neto in Dakar in December 1979; but he had died. Savimbi spoke of Neto as being essentially an Angolan patriot! at least in the making.

He had no time for Eduardo Santos whom he claimed to be unpopular. Russian educated, with a Russian wife. It was no surprise to him that the Russians had been allowed by Santos to begin work on an ~~satellite~~ for observatory for satellites at the southern Angolan town of Mossademes: Neto had always opposed that. Santos had also reinstated several pro Soviet ministers whom Neto had dismissed.

He thought the East German advisers were concentrated on help to SWAPO in the south except though, the East Germans were running the Angolan cryptography, & that had made things more difficult for UNITA.

Savimbi hoped that when Rhodesia is properly settled — he was optimistic — he could get some help from the West, particularly from us. He wd. like help to be given to him publicly, to impress other Africans. He said that it was "Ok to help the Afghan rebels if the aim is to tie down the Russians & prevent them from doing the same elsewhere. But they will never leave". He hoped to be allowed to appear here publicly in April or so, & perhaps give interviews.

Savimbi seemed to me to be quick, well-informed generally, resourceful and not at all bitter about 1975. His English is fluent. He appeared to me more like a good general than a politician. We had no talk about his political ideals. Perhaps that "dog in the night time" indicates something. I would not venture to say. Hugh Thomas Feb. 28, 1980

Angola

27 March 1980

With your agreement, I forwarded to the Foreign Office a copy of your note to me of 28 February and its enclosure about your talks with Jonas Savimbi. You may be interested to see the Foreign Office's comments, of which I enclose an abstract.

M O'D B A

Professor Hugh Thomas



Angola.
File 10

10 DOWNING STREET

From the Private Secretary

18 March 1980

THE SITUATION IN ANGOLA

I enclose a note, forwarded to me somewhat belatedly, of a conversation which took place last month between Professor Hugh Thomas and Mr. Jonas Savimbi of the UNITA Movement in Angola. I doubt that there is much in this note that will not already be familiar to the Department. But it may be of some interest.

Professor Thomas knows that I am sending you a copy of this note.

M. O'D. B. ALEXANDER

R. M. J. Lyne, Esq.,
Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

cc



File B

10 DOWNING STREET

From the Private Secretary

18 March 1980

Further to your note of 13 March,
I enclose a copy of your record of your
talk with Mr. Savimbi!

M. O'D. B. ALEXANDER

Professor Hugh Thomas.

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8 Wilfred Street · London SW1E 6PL · Telephone 01-828 1176 Cables: Centrepol London

Submit with file,

Paul

March 13, 1980

Dear Michael,

Please do send a copy of my note about Savumbi to the Foreign Office. wd. you mind sending a copy to me too, since I forgot to have one made!

Yours ever

Hugh

Michael Alexander Esq

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WAP

Prof. Hugh THOMAS
Dr. Savimbi

7 March 1980

I should have acknowledged earlier your manuscript note to me of 28 February covering an account of your conversation with Mr. Savimbi on 17 February, which has been read with much interest here. Would you mind if I sent it over to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office?

M. O'D. B. ALEXANDER

Professor Hugh Thomas

BK