# CHAPTER NINE

# FAILURE BY INTERVENTION: ANGOLA

THE OCCASIONAL tribal conflicts that have followed independence in Africa are among the least surprising developments of recent times. What is really surprising is that full-scale civil war has broken out only where it has: Nigeria, Chad, Zaire, Angola, Ethiopia, Uganda, Rwanda, and Burundi.

Still more remarkable are the cases of progress, however tentative. Several were visible in the early 1980s. Nigeria with its new democracy was foremost. To be sure, oil wealth gave Nigeria a big advantage over other countries, but Nigeria's original problems ran deeper than most, too.

For a while, Kenya appeared to blossom with a new freedom and unity under President Daniel Arap Moi, after the death in 1978 of autocrat Jomo Kenyatta. Kenyatta had led the country at independence in 1964, and ruled it ever since, parceling out its dwindling resources among his family. The simplistic U.S. press treatment that designates countries as being on our side or their side—"pro-Western" or "leftist"—resulted in far too good a reputation for Kenyatta, who was adjudged to be on "our" side. His corrupt government's bias toward his own Kikuyu tribesmen, and even more toward his own family, was ignored over the years.

Even the Mau-Mau, which Kenyatta helped organize, was romanticized in retrospect into a legitimate independence movement. That the Mau-Mau killed hundreds of times more blacks than whites, that it spent most of its time in tribal purges, and that largely because of the Mau-Mau, Kenya's

independence from England was delayed until more than a year after neighboring Tanzania's and Uganda's, all were ignored in the romanticization. The Kikuyu were a plurality of the country; Kenyatta's popularity among the non-Kikuyu majority was a public relations myth.

Because of an earlier gesture to minority tribes, Arap Moi, a non-Kikuyu, happened to be vice-president when Kenyatta died. He early on tried to display impartiality toward tribe, and to appeal for national unity. The non-Kikuyu majority was delighted, and the Kikuyu, still the most prosperous and holding on to the best land, accepted him. Originally expected to be a fill-in president, he stayed on. Everyone seemed to benefit.

1982, however, saw arrests and crackdowns by Arap Moi against political opponents and literary figures, raising questions of whether he was reverting to the repressive tactics of his predecessor. At least, so far, there were no murders of political rivals.

But the CIA has long had a hand in Kenyan politics, putting this candidate or that on the payroll. The best-known payee so far made public was Tom Mboya, who gained a reputation as a "liberal reformer" in the Kenyatta government until someone murdered him, presumably on orders from Kenyatta, who was getting plenty of U.S. taxpayer money himself. Now, in the early 1980s, the U.S. had an obvious growing interest in Kenya. With Afghanistan occupied by the U.S.S.R., and Iran in near-anarchy, the U.S. reached a deal with Kenya in 1980 to use bases on the Kenyan coast. This would allow the U.S. to maintain a naval presence near the Persian Gulf to protect U.S. shipping.

Considering the importance of the sea traffic, the volatility of the region, and the overt threats already made by such countries as Iran and Iraq, the U.S. desire for use of a port in this instance seems legitimate. And Kenya could benefit from the capital improvements, rent, and jobs. But, likewise considering the history of abuse of such installations, many Kenyans expressed concern over having a foreign military presence in their country. Some openly opposed it. One can only hope that the U.S. did not become so shortsighted as to bribe Arap Moi into client status and encourage him to suppress his political opponents, as we have encouraged other clients to do. The readiest example of the perils of such a course is Iran itself, where U.S. meddling created the very crisis that now sends us in search of a Kenyan port.

NEWLY democratic Zimbabwe, formerly Rhodesia, handled its first episodes of intertribal strife with restraint, if not aplomb. A large cache of Soviet-supplied guns and other weapons was found early in 1982 stored on a farm owned by Joshua Nkomo. Until 1980, Nkomo had led one of the two political movements whose guerrilla fighters were instrumental in winning majority rule and independence. The guerrillas defeated an army assembled by the

white minority government of Prime Minister Ian Smith, which included thousands of mercenaries, many of them from the U.S.

But Nkomo had lost the first election for national leadership to Robert Mugabe, the leader of the other major black independence army. Mugabe's group found its basic support among the majority Shona tribe. Nkomo's group was mainly supported by the minority Ndebele tribe. Mugabe had appointed Nkomo minister of the interior in an effort to achieve national unity. But with guns as evidence of Nkomo's disloyalty, Mugabe ousted him from his cabinet post. Nkomo's loyalists did fight with Mugabe's government troops off and on in 1981 and 1982. The rebellion was suppressed; the fighting killed several hundred people, but never turned into a full-blown civil war.

What was encouraging was that Mugabe didn't inflate the episode with excessive repression. Nkomo denied knowing the guns were on his property, and renounced rebellion. He and Mugabe met to try to stop the fighting. The country seemed at least temporarily in equilibrium if not unity. Nor did Mugabe institute some sweeping Marxist design as the U.S. foreign policy establishment had predicted. Instead, he appeared to be sincerely seeking the fairest, least retributive way of undoing the economic imbalances caused by a history of racially discriminatory laws that had prevented blacks from acquiring property competitively with privileged whites.

Of course, it's still way too early to assume that Mugabe will go along with the democratic spirit and risk his power in a free debate or election. Nkomo complains that Mugabe is preparing to create a one-party state, as so many other African leaders have done. But the signs in Zimbabwe are still among the most hopeful in Africa, and Mugabe would have to lurch pretty dramatically to become more dictatorial than our socialist friends, say, Nyerere in Tanzania, or Kaunda in Zambia, let alone more dictatorial than Mobutu, or the white South Africans, or the king of Morocco—or any previous Zimbabwe–Rhodesian government.

The Zimbabwe story is especially instructive because the U.S. came within a hair's breadth of intervening against Mugabe. In fact, the U.S. shaved that hair many times, but never intervened quite so overtly that Mugabe can't ignore it, now that he, like most Third World leaders, wants commerce with the world's richest country.

For many years, despite official U.S. nonintervention, U.S. power seemed to weigh hypocritically in support of racist Rhodesia, and against the Zimbabwe revolution. The U.S. took no action when units of Mobil, Texaco, and Standard Oil of California shipped oil into Rhodesia in violation of U.N. sanctions against the white government, even though the U.S. had publicly pledged to uphold the sanctions.

The U.S. took no action when its citizens fought for the white government as mercenaries in apparent violation of the Neutrality Act. Many of these Americans were veterans of CIA covert operations in Southeast Asia, Zaire, or Angola, which gave some Africans the dangerous notion that the fighters

were still employed by the U.S. government (and one of the sad things about the U.S. record of intervention abroad is that we can never be completely sure that they *weren't* employed by the U.S. government).

Of course, consistent legal action by the U.S. in such cases would have been difficult and of questionable efficiency. Oil and mercenaries are both fungible commodities, and to police the trading of them in distant lands through the welter of intermediary agencies employed to keep them secret would tax the resources of justice. Even prosecution of the cases that became obvious would have burdened a few hapless culprits, who were pursuing what seemed to them a fair commerce, with a political weight that more properly belonged on the shoulders of the whole U.S.

The real problem was that the United States would not lend its moral weight, its example, to the simple propositions that Zimbabwe, like any country, should be independent, and that its adult residents, regardless of race, should have an equal say in determining its leaders and its laws. The moral weight of the U.S. on this issue might have been decisive—simply making clear that the Ian Smith government had no major country it could turn to for support.

Instead, the U.S. continued to dangle the hope that if Smith could make cosmetic changes, could find a black front man, the U.S. would back him in his war against the Mugabe–Nkomo forces. And so for more than a year the world witnessed a charade, successful only in Washington and Salisbury, in which the white Smith claimed to be running Rhodesia in a triumvirate with two black stooges who, in the eventual real election against Mugabe and Nkomo, couldn't collect 10 percent of the vote between them. U.S. politicians, preoccupied by a fear that Mugabe and Nkomo were somehow Russians in disguise, cheered the charade on, while Zimbabweans seethed.

Throughout the fifteen-year struggle for majority rule in Zimbabwe, the U.S. would not assert in a believable way that it considered racist rule by the 5 percent white minority to be repugnant. The reason it would not do so is that it still sought to determine *by itself* who would rule Zimbabwe and how. We would be willing to see Zimbabwe independent of its entrenched white colonialists, all right, but never independent of *us*.

That is why the U.S. clung to the notion that racist rule in the reality was less objectionable than communist rule in the mere possibility. Not only was this notion generally unpopular throughout the world, but the whole concept of a communist scare on which it was based was largely phony. Once more, the U.S. was operating on a misunderstanding of the situation.

The U.S. refused to see that Mugabe was a popular leader of the Shona people who dreamt of leading a unified Zimbabwe. He had taken money and arms from communist bloc countries because they were the only ones offering such help, and he had been understandably grateful to them for it. But he could not have given Moscow a permanent lien on his country's independence even if he had wanted to, and there's no reason to believe he did.

Still, the U.S. government treated Mugabe as the agent of an international communist conspiracy that threatened Washington. It regarded Nkomo as much the same, though maybe as not quite so bad. Nkomo's army trained and hid out in Zambia, a neutralist country with stong commercial ties to the West, while the evil Mugabe camped his men in Mozambique, whose government was outspokenly leftist.

In fact, there was a most logical reason for the affinity between Mozambique and Mugabe (besides the simple justice of his campaign for majority rule). That reason was tribal, or national, loyalty. When the Portuguese and British drew the boundary between Mozambique and Rhodesia, they drew it neatly down the middle of Mugabe's Shona people. Half were put in one country, half in the other. U.S. policymakers feared that Mugabe's soldiers and the Mozambicans were *comrades*, but avoided the far simpler and less sinister explanation that they were *brothers*—which was quite literally true in the minds of Africans, who believe in extended families.

By 1982, Mugabe, now in power, was accusing Nkomo of plotting with the Soviets against his government. Apparently, Mugabe was not a friend of the Soviets at all, but, in their opinion, their enemy. He had emerged as a pragmatist who was trying to keep efficient white-run farms in operation while still providing fields for landless victims of racial discrimination. He was visiting Washington and trying to arrange the best economic deals for his people. Mugabe may yet emerge as a tyrant, as Smith was (more than 95 percent of his people were effectively disenfranchised), and as so many other African leaders are. But so far, by creating a popular, peaceful, pragmatic free-trading government, Mugabe has significantly advanced U.S. interests.

Through its inability to recognize what was happening, the U.S. almost lost this asset. It nearly delayed the victory of the revolution until, in desperation, Mugabe might have been forced to mortgage more and more of his future to the Soviets in order to continue fighting. Had that happened, the toll in blood would have gone far beyond the estimated 6,000 lives the Rhodesian war finally cost. It took the British to expedite the settlement by which Smith backed down and fair elections were arranged. This took place during difficult, protracted negotiations in London. The U.S. watched nervously, and acted as if it was doing the world a favor by not objecting.

The U.S. official most helpful in advancing this settlement, which would seem a solid U.S. foreign policy victory, was U.N. Ambassador Andrew Young. For his trouble, Young was laughed out of office, the foreign policy establishment unable to recognize his prescience in this and many other matters. Skillfully using a sympathetic press to spread its message that Young was unfit, the establishment seized upon Young's political artlessness in the face of impromptu questioning. Under the right circumstances, this artlessness could come off as charming, but in the wrong circumstances it was made to sound silly, and on a few too many occasions it actually was. (For

example, Young's comments that Britain was racist, and that Cuban troops contributed a desirable stability in Angola, made sense only in the context of a complex intellectual discussion that wasn't nearly as portable as the comments themselves, which were rather jolting in isolation.) Still, Young was one of the few U.S. foreign policy officials in recent years who could consistently see foreign situations through the eyes of the people involved, rather than seeing them through the distorted lens of the cold war, and a few *mal mots* would seem a small price to pay for him.

As it turned out, the Zimbabwe settlement was successful even *in* a cold war context. Judging from their support of Nkomo, the Soviets obviously considered the Zimbabwe settlement a setback, though that is not the kind of thing that tends to get reported in the U.S. press. The European press reported that the Soviet clandestine services officer in charge of the African sphere was removed and demoted right after Mugabe's election, though this couldn't be confirmed.

Mugabe's triumph certainly wasn't a Soviet victory. What's relevant, though, is whether it was a Zimbabwean victory. The jury is still out on that, but the arrow is pointing up.

WITH a successful negotiation of the war in Zimbabwe, the logical next step was to settle a similar situation in Namibia, and then move on to the one truly explosive international issue in Africa, the single issue that the U.S. might not find duckable: majority rule in South Africa. Feelings about the current racist government in South Africa run so high throughout the continent that continuation of the present course could lead to large-scale war. Such a war would confront the U.S. with fundamental humanitarian issues in the midst of great loss of life, would disrupt access to important resources and markets in many countries (Nigeria and its oil, for example), and could even touch off a nuclear holocaust (South Africa apparently has nuclear bombs, and Nigeria, on the other side, has made noises about trying to build them).

So far, the U.S. won't even officially recognize the progress in Zimbabwe, much less capitalize on it by acknowledging the legitimacy of similar majority rule movements in Namibia and South Africa. Ironically, the person in all the world most capable of mediating these issues successfully would probably be Andrew Young, and not just because he is a black diplomat from the world's mightiest country. His value comes largely because what he tries to bring to issues is not the United States's raw power, but the correctness of the United States's fundamental beliefs, which include a decent tolerance for people doing things their own way.

In both Nigeria and Zimbabwe, the leaders and programs that have met this initial success were chosen by Africans—and were not imposed by the U.S.

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POSTCOLONIAL African conflicts clearly are not manifestations of a capitalist-communist struggle for world domination. Yet the cold war view had prevailed time after time, from the Congo in 1960 to the persistent conflict in Angola. The view serves no one except professional soldiers and their suppliers. It is not only ludicrous, it's dangerous.

"The Soviet intervention in Angola was probably the single most important development in shifting U.S. foreign policy consensus [away] from support of détente," says a 1979 book, *Implications of Soviet and Cuban Activities in Africa for U.S. Policy*. The book was put out by the prestigious Georgetown University Center for Strategic and International Studies, and its five coauthors include Chester A. Crocker, who was appointed assistant secretary of state for African affairs in the Reagan administration, and Roger W. Fontaine, who is also close to the Reagan team.

The book also says, "Few international developments in recent years have been as disturbing to the United States as the new Soviet political and military offensive in Africa. It is there that the U.S.S.R., for the first time, demonstrated to the world its ability and willingness to act as a decisive and assertive global power."

If so, we have only our own interventionism to blame. In the case of Angola, once again, the accepted wisdom that rationalizes our interventionism is cluttered with misunderstandings and deceits. The United States meddled early and deep in Angolan affairs, almost certainly earlier and deeper than the Soviets did. If we had followed a noninterventionist policy while openly offering friendship to those who shared our principles, such as national independence and one-man, one-vote democracy, there is every reason to believe we would have a friendly regime in Luanda, Cuban troops wouldn't have come in, and the Soviet foot would be out of the door.

THE territory that was later called Angola may have been the first colony in black Africa. Portuguese explorers reached it in the 1480s. They found three tribal nations: the Kongo, whose kingdom stretched north through what later became Zaire and the country of Congo (Brazzaville); the Mbundu along the coast around what is now Luanda, who fought the Portuguese until nearly the 1600s before succumbing; and the Ovimbundu, who lived inland to the east and south, where the best farmland is, and who also rebelled frequently against foreign rule.

These three tribal nations—the Kongo, the Mbundu, and the Ovimbundu—got along only a bit better than the British, French, and Spanish did. That is to say there was a history of fighting, especially after the Mbundu retreated inland onto Ovimbundu territory to escape Portuguese slavers. It was not until the latter part of the twentieth century, however, that Dr. Henry Kissinger and other political scientists discovered that the real reason the

Mbundu, the Ovimbundu, and the Kongo had been fighting off and on for the past 500 years was that the Mbundu were "Marxist" and the Ovimbundu and Kongo were "pro-Western." It was that discovery, constantly rereported in the press, that led the U.S. to intervene. Unfortunately, we jumped in on the side of the Kongo and Ovimbundu, at just the point in history when their rivals, the Mbundu, were geared to prevail.

The Portuguese, as colonizers, had been almost as bad as the Belgians. (The U.S. seems to pick the worst heritages to try to maintain, probably because these heritages understandably inspire the angriest, and therefore the most alarming, rebellions.) For a long time, the Portuguese saw Angola mainly as a slave farm. According to estimates accepted by George Houser in a history of Angola that he wrote as a pamphlet for the American Committee on Africa, a proindependence group, *3½ million* Angolans were shipped as slaves to work in the Portuguese colony of Brazil, another *3½ million* died in transit, and a million more were sent to North America. Even conservative estimates allow that 4 million Angolans may have been carted off. These are staggering figures.

When the Portuguese finally got around to developing Angola itself, they set up coffee plantations on which Angolans, mostly Ovimbundu, worked for a pittance. They also recruited 100,000 Angolans a year, many of them against their will, to work in South Africa's mines. For this work, South Africa paid Portugal a hefty fee, and the miners not much at all (from Mozambique, about 300,000 people a year were shipped off to these mines).*

While Angola is not quite the fountain of riches that Zaire is, it is well endowed with oil, iron ore, diamonds, manganese, and a few other minerals. It certainly has the potential to feed itself and still raise coffee and cotton as export crops. Its 7 million people (1980 estimate) could be well off.

After World War II, the Portuguese government, a dictatorship, discovered that its African colonies provided an ideal dumping ground for Portugal's own poor and unemployed. In Angola and Mozambique, these Portuguese ne'er-do-wells could live like kings, grabbing land and exploiting forced

*These figures are from *A History of Postwar Africa*, by John Hatch (Praeger Paperbacks). The Angolan history in this chapter comes from half a dozen books and scholarly articles, added to longtime personal observation and periodical-reading. Probably the most respected formal history of Angola is the two-volume work by John A. Marcum, *The Angolan Revolution* (MIT Press, 1969).

It is regrettable that so many secondary sources had to be referred to, but the author hasn't visited Angola. Beginning in 1966, with the Portuguese, and continuing through 1981, I have filed innumerable visa requests and been turned down on every one of them. I even accepted an invitation to be sneaked into territory held by Jonas Savimbi's UNITA guerrilla group without authorization from the Angolan government, but UNITA changed the arrangements unacceptably after I arrived in Kinshasa for the trip. An important rule in the news business is that you don't allow someone to keep you from writing about him simply by his refusing to talk to you. The same should go for countries.