

**A Film by
Jihan El-Tahri, 2007**

Fidel Castro and 500,000 Cubans took part in the African wars which ended colonialism. This little-known story began in the 1960s when Che Guevara fought in the Congo. His mission failed, but Cuban continued helping African revolutions. Amilcar Gibril's rebellion in Guinea Bissau dealt a serious blow to the last colonial empire, but it was the scale of Fidel Castro's military involvement in Angola that would change the face of the continent.

April 1974

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In 1974, the Carnation Revolution in Portugal brought down the dictatorship. Guinea-Bissau was the first colony to be granted independence and Mozambique quickly followed. Angola was the empire's gem from where most of the colonial wealth had come. Ending colonial rule there was not going to be simple. Augustino Neto of the MPLA had since the early 1960s firmly allied his movement with the Eastern Bloc. Like Lumumba and Amilcar, his struggle against colonialism had quickly won Cuban military support. When Che Guevara had toured Africa in 1964, he met the Angolan revolutionaries of the MPLA in Brazzaville. In the famous secret meeting, the MPLA leader Augustino Neto had asked for Cuban support. Che promised that military instructors would be dispatched.

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It was not just six instructors who came from across the ocean to train the MPLA. A whole division of Cuban fighters arrived with orders to stand by in support of the socialist government in Brazzaville, and join in other guerrilla actions when necessary.

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The MPLA was one of the armed liberation movements based in Brazzaville. It's leader, Augustino Neto, a medical doctor by training and a well-known poet, had already obtained some equipment from the Soviets and the other Eastern Bloc allies, but it was the physical presence of trained instructors that the MPLA needed most. The MPLA desperately needed to score visible victories against the Portuguese colonial army and consolidate its position against its local Western-backed rivals.

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Resuming guerrilla activities heralded a new dawn for the Angolans. The massive Cuban engagement alongside the MPLA in 1965 was only a precursor of things to come. However, for ten more years, the war continued with little territorial gains.

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The Angolan liberation struggle had been more complex from the start. Other than Neto's MPLA, Angola had two other rival anti-colonial movements. Holden Roberto's FNLA was based in the north of the country and received arms and training from the US mainly via Mobutu in Zaire. Jonas Savimbi's UNITA was based in the south and they too got American support which was mainly channeled through Apartheid South Africa.

The world was divided West and East. Those who were supported by the USSR, they were not welcome by Americans; therefore, vice versa. But the Angolans, to get weapons, to get diplomatic support, to get political support, they had to join one side. This brought a division among Angolans. We were passing all the time accusing each other, and then losing time keeping our fighting internal, instead of fighting against colonialism.

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The three Angolan liberation movements were locked in a vicious circle. On the morning of April 25th, 1974, unexpected events in Portugal finally broke the stalemate. The Carnation Revolution took them all by surprise.

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Nobody was prepared for a coup in Portugal. All of a sudden like that we were fighting for our independence, of course, but a coup d'état to topple the dictatorial regime in Portugal? Frankly speaking, nobody was waiting for it. On the Portuguese side there was a problem of who to talk to for the independence of Angola.

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Independence was within reach if only the three movements could agree to sit around the same table and decide the destiny of their country.

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It was the first time the three of us got together, so it was natural that people were a bit suspicious of one another because we had never met.

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First of all, there was the question of whites, blacks and mestizos. In Angola, you had some brothers of ours who did not look at a mestizo man the same way he looked at a black man. In the MPLA group there were many colors, so Savimbi himself, and more so FNLA, they did mistrust the mestizos, the coloreds. And some stories asked, "Are these people not going to sell us to the Portuguese?" And it was a very, very difficult moment for everyone, for fifteen minutes or so, to convince everyone that that was not true. These people were Angolans like ourselves, that we should trust them and we should go to Portugal united.

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President Kenyatta brought a tree. He said, "This is the unity tree for the three of you." Each one Savimbi, Holden and President Neto they all grabbed the tree and planted it together. This is our unity tree and we swear that from here we are going to respect the unity among the three of us when we go to Portugal and negotiate for our independence.

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After months of mediation efforts, the three delegations flew to the Portuguese town of Alvore to negotiate terms of independence.

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To go to Alvora, everyone was afraid. What will the Portuguese do? Maybe they will arrest somebody. Maybe they will kill somebody? And when we arrived there the leaders didn't want to eat, didn't want to touch anything to eat. They said, "No, you are the young boys. You are the first to eat. When I see one of the boys dying, I will know that it was poisoned."

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Distrust was toward the Portuguese, and distrust was also among ourselves.

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All of us went to Penina Hotel. The first problem that occurred in Penina was the way the Portuguese put us. The ground floor was the place for the conference. The first floor was UNITA. The second floor was FNLA. The third floor was the MPLA. The last floor was the Portuguese. We didn't like this structure. People were just thinking there was plotting, plotting, plotting. We thought that during the night maybe MPLA was negotiating with the Portuguese government. So much news, so many rumors were circulating. "Hey, my friend, you were sleeping while they were negotiating." This was a very bad atmosphere.

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The FNLA and UNITA that their local opponent, the MPLA, would be favored by the new leftist Portuguese regime, but it soon became obvious that the Marxist captains simply wanted to end the bloody chapter of colonial wars. For a week they sat around the negotiating table hammering out Angola's transition to independence.

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We said first of all, "When are we going to be independent?" And the date of November 11th was proposed by... He said the 11th of November was Armistice Day and we should be independent on that day.

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Let's be frank. The three liberation movements participated in the struggle for independence. There is unanimity but who would be the first president? There was no agreement.

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After we had agreed with all that, the Portuguese said, "Gentlemen, we are almost at the end of our agenda, but we still have a problem to solve." And all of us asked what problem we had to solve. And they said, "The Cabinda issue." Some in the MPLA ranks jumped. President Augustino Neto said to the Portuguese, "Gentlemen, this is an Angolan issue. Leave the Cabinda issue to us. We know how to solve it. Cabinda is an internal problem. Don't bring it here. It is not in the agenda. Leave it to us."

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Cabinda was the trophy that everyone wanted to grab. This oil-rich strip of land had no physical borders with the Angolan mainland, and its distinct history made its status at the time of independence open for interpretation. But if there was one thing the three rival liberation movements could agree on it was that Cabinda should remain an integral part of Angola's national territory.

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Cabinda became the Kuwait of Africa as far as oil is concerned, so it was just normal, so to speak—it was not normal, but so to speak it was normal that leaders near and far beyond the neighborhood became very interested to get that particular piece of land for its oil. The Americans were already there. Only the Americans were already there.

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The Alvorá agreement vaguely outlined the transition, but the shaky deal did not provide a solid basis to overcome the years of mutual hatred. It needed no more than a spark to revive the fighting.

The three leaders wanted to be heads of state before elections. They did not want to wait November 11th. Each one brought its own army.

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Each faction tried to gain control of the capital. Whoever held Luanda on the night of November 11th would be officially recognized by the outside world as the legitimate government of Angola. As the fighting intensified, the superpowers stepped in to fan the flames. This was no longer a civil war in the far corner of Africa. The crisis quickly turned into a full-blown superpower confrontation where Angola was no more than the battlefield.

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This struggle in Africa broke out after Vietnam. The United States was highly sensitive at the time to the fact that it had been driven from the field in Vietnam and our opponents, namely Moscow, would take advantage of this period of American weakness or the perception of American weakness to secure geopolitical gains elsewhere. If the MPLA achieved power with its strong connections to the Cubans and to the Russians, you would see the first serious penetration of the East Bloc into African affairs. We regarded that as a strategic threat. We provided arms and financing to hire mercenaries, provide trainers, provide weaponry to Roberto's armed elements. Through Mobutu that equipment and funding was put before the FNLA.

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Not only the Americans were keen to contain the possible Soviet influence in the region. To the south of Angola, apartheid South Africa was eyeing developments with concern.

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Communism as far as South Africa was concerned was a real threat, a threat in the sense of dictating, taking over the whole of the country. We couldn't have that situation here in South Africa, that they could come through and instigate and plant the ideology of Marxism here in Southern Africa. And that meant we are the next target. We are the cherry on the cake.

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Namibia lay as a buffer zone between South Africa and Angola. This vast, arid country had been a German colony, but with Germany's defeat in the second world war, the United Nations handed over administration of the territory to its closest neighbor, South Africa. The white government felt that the strategic threat to its own survival started at the Namibian border. Although legally they had no right to move troops into Namibia, the apartheid regime got a clear signal that their intervention would be welcome.

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The Americans invited us to come and assist, so we did assist and by doing what we did, a lot of equipment came.

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We had to retreat to the Namibian border and it was where UNITA met the South Africans for the first time.

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I was the one who received the generals from South Africa and I remember the commander of the troops telling me clearly, "Who are you?" and I said, "I am George the representative of UNITA. "I don't know? You are not MPLA?" I said, "No, I'm UNITA." He said, "I'm afraid I didn't receive orders to find UNITA here. We came to defend the FNLA and to fight against the communists and so on and to arrive in Luanda to

put the FNLA in power. But here is UNITA!” They stopped to phone Pretoria to ask what they could do with the troops of UNITA here.

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That phase was the phase of guns and money. If you don't have guns and money you don't have power. You can have dreams, but if you have no guns and no money, you have no politics.

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Savimbi's fortunes started to turn when the South Africans came in—the army of South Africa accepted to train UNITA soldiers. They said, “We cannot just give you our weapons without giving you the knowledge of how you can fight these people. They opened camps on the border between Namibia and Anglola.

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The scheduled date for independence was approaching fast. With US logistical support, the FNLA troops, accompanied by soldiers from Mobutu's regular army advanced from the north. UNITA soldiers, along with the South African army, moved up from the south. The MPLA, despite receiving consignments of Soviet weapons, suddenly felt itself at a disadvantage.

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This was not to be another covert operation like those Cuba had conducted in Africa throughout the 1960s. Fidel had decided to engage overtly in Angola. Cuba's elite special forces were dispatched along with 35,000 foot soldiers to help Neto's men. Operation Carlotta guaranteed that Cuba would play a major role on the Angolan battlefield.

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We were worried about Cuban involvement because at that stage the talks about the limitation of strategic weapons were taking place. There was talk about Brezhnev's visit to the United States, which never took place, by the way, after this episode.

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My assumptions then were that the involvement of the Cubans was Russian-driven. It took me years to reach a different conclusion that the Cubans played to bring the Russians in in support. That news reached Washington in the summer of 1975 and I remember it was treated with considerable concern. This was the first time foreign military forces had been introduced onto the continent of Africa since the colonial period back at the turn of the century. First time! We felt that at that point it was necessary to face this Cuban issue head on, square on.

37:16

Cuba is a red flag in the United States because anything that Cuba does we hate, so when they sent troops to Angola, we had no choice but to say this is the end of détente, even though the Soviets really were not responsible. To see Cubans operating anywhere outside of Cuba was something that we considered a defeat for the United States.

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All the pieces were in place for a final showdown. It was only a week until November 11th and all the warring parties were converging on Luanda. It seemed that the new nation would be strangled at birth. The final clash took place at Kifongondo only thirty miles from the capital.

42:45

We had the guns and they were outgunned by the Soviets guns of a similar caliber, and we had a problem with our vehicles. Our vehicles weren't made for mud, and therefore we got stuck. We got stuck with a lot of armored cars there, so we realized there's something big coming. We had better do something about this situation, and there wasn't really anything that you could do.

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The MPLA won the decisive battle at Kifongondo, and on the night of November 11th, 1975, 400 years of Portuguese colonialism ended. Augustino Neto was recognized as Angola's first president.

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The fighting did not stop with the declaration of independence. The United States did not recognize Neto's presidency and was more adamant than ever to dislodge his Soviet-backed government. Additional armament was desperately needed to reinforce the MPLA's two local opponents, but Henry Kissinger's team found itself in a dilemma, one that threatened to compromise the strategic objective of the entire clandestine US operation in Angola.

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Kissinger recognized the strategic threat. The funds available to conduct a campaign of support for those fighting against both the MPLA and the Cuban intervention were rapidly being exhausted. You needed Congressional approval for additional funds to carry the effort forward. All of this context began creating its own political backlash in the United States.

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The idea was oh, no, this is another Vietnam starting in Angola. You start out with small actions supporting guerrillas. The guerrillas get into trouble, then you send special forces, then you send an army, and the Clark amendment was passed with that idea in mind: that we're getting into another Vietnam quagmire in Angola, so let's cut it off at the beginning.

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US clandestine operations abroad since the 1960s became the theme of an aggressive Congressional investigation. Senator Dick Clark tabled an amendment concerning the specific case of Angola.

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It would be a mistake for us to become involved in this kind of civil war in Africa.

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The amendment demanded that the US administration stop ongoing clandestine support to the Angolan rebel movements.

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We knew it meant only one thing: that previous funds would be cut for assisting any of the parties in Angola. That would include FNLA and UNITA and that was the end of it. We could not alone do the war there. So if the Americans are withdrawing, that leaves us in the cold, all by ourselves. Without America in such a situation actively supporting some of the... movements, it would have been a very, very difficult task—with the whole world at the same time against us on the issue of apartheid.

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The Clark amendment was voted in and the United States was forced to halt all its activities in Angola at least for the moment.

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My prime minister made a speech in parliament and gave the Americans hell because the Clark amendment came through and they turned around. They said, “You invited us, and now you’re walking out on us. Shame on you.” At that stage we realized we had to leave. We couldn’t stay there.

48:09

It meant that we were conceding Angola to the Soviet bloc, and this important oil-producing country was now a part of the Soviet bloc. It was a big defeat for the United States.

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Once the US supplies dried up, the MPLA managed to contain its local rivals. The South African army also withdrew from Angola, but it continued to arm and train Jonas Savimbi’s UNITA rebels.

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Augustino Neto had won the first round in the battle for independence, so he invited Fidel Castro to celebrate the victory his army had helped win.

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It was a moment of glory for Cuba. Since the 1960s Fidel had supported no less than 17 African revolutions, but none of his ventures had been as successful as this. African leaders competed to express their personal gratitude.

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For three weeks Fidel toured the continent where he was treated as a hero of African independence. Cuba’s internationalist policy had finally borne fruit.

50:09

In the late 1970s, Angola no longer made international headlines, but Augustino Neto had not yet managed to end the civil war. Jonas Savimbi’s forces continued the guerrilla attacks from the south of the country, so Neto requested that a Cuban contingent remain in Angola to help the national army. In 1979, Neto died before seeing his country attain true and stable independence. It was his disciple, the young Marxist ideologue of the MPLA, Jose Edouard dos Santos who would now have to confront the coming battles.

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Less than a year after Neto’s death, Ronald Reagan was elected president of the United States. His vision of the Cold War was to alter the course of events in southern Africa.

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Leonid Brezhnev helped to elect Ronald Reagan—there is no question about it—by his behavior. And then you also had Iran. It wasn’t just the hostage-taking. It was the inability to rescue the hostages, which looked like we didn’t quite know what we were doing. Not great moments for either American diplomacy or American arms. You might put it that way.

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Reagan felt, as a strong cold warrior, that he wanted to do everything possible to counter the Soviet Union. There was this feeling that we wanted to do to them what they did to us. And it wasn't just Africa. It was the entire world. And he saw Angola was a perfect place because there were Soviet advisors, Cuban troops, a government that was very pro-Soviet. He said, "How can we counter the Soviets there? Make life difficult for them the way they made life difficult for us in Vietnam.

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The broad message was that America is back. We were going to engage in a more robust diplomacy in which the use of power—in all its elements, not just military, but diplomatic, strategic, economic—was going to be used.

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Reagan wanted the Cubans out of Angola, and US policy in Southern Africa had to concentrate on achieving this objective. The American plan was to propose to the African leaders something they desperately wanted and in return link that offer to the withdrawal of Cuban troops from Angola.

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I guess I was inspired more than anything else by the conversation I had with Julius Nereere, then president of Tanzania. He said, "Mr. Crocker, the southern Africa process must begin in Namibia. That's where you must focus your efforts. That's where you must start your efforts. Namibia is the key." He didn't want to really hear a lot about Cubans in Angola. He recognized ultimately that we were serious about that Agenda, but he said begin in Namibia.

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Since 1975 South African troops had conducted the war in Angola from Namibian territory, but when South Africa pulled out of Angola, its troops remained in Namibia. SWAPO, Namibia's liberation movement, regarded the apartheid government as colonizers and demanded their immediate withdrawal. Their case won support in 1978 at the UN when Resolution 435 unanimously demanded that South Africa evacuate its troops from Namibia and grant it full independence, but South Africa refused to withdraw, and SAWPO in turn decided to intensify its armed struggle from its military bases in neighboring Angola. The MPLA had chosen to follow Cuba's internationalist policy. It offered its territory as a safe haven for neighboring liberation movements fighting against the white-dominated regimes.

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The apartheid regime felt besieged, but they were reluctant to conduct another full scale invasion of Angola. The alternative was obvious. Jonas Savimbi and his UNITA rebel army, which South Africans had continued to arm, needed the proper means to eliminate the border threat and ultimately rid them of the incumbent Marxist regime in Angola.

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We had to sell to Savimbi. Savimbi was fighting a war, and he was fighting the Soviet Union plus the Cubans, and we had to sell him as a product. He had to go to the White House. He had to meet the president of the United States, then that would have elevated him amongst his own people and we needed him to be in that position, but it's not a question of picking up your phone, and phoning President Reagan and getting the OK. It requires planning.

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We used the Christian religion to portray Savimbi and what he was doing in Angola to salvage all the damage done by the MPLA towards the Church. We made videos of Dr. Savimbi and we showed them in America, and that video changed the attitude toward Savimbi. Because of that we got him through.

56:57

Jonas Savimbi was, like much of Africa, willfully misunderstood by American politicians. If you know nothing about a place, you feel free to paint it with your own fantasies, and for many Americans, Africa was the land of Tarzan, or Shaka Zulu, or some other romantic, preposterous figure, and Jonas Savimbi fit in that category. For the right wing, he was a sort of Robin Hood. For the left wing, he was a diabolical monster.

57:31

He was a very charismatic personality with a good speaking voice, with a tremendous amount of self-confidence. He was a kind of physical leader. Some people would say “warlord,” but he could also sit across the table and engage in an extremely impressive, erudite conversation in six different languages. This was a very accomplished personality. And his very facility with cross-cultural communication made him effective internationally.

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He was able to visit the evangelical people in Texas and Mississippi and Louisiana and get their support, and this, as you know, is very strong Republican territory. They started saying, “Here is the true anti-communist, the man who can beat the Soviets in Angola.” And Reagan got caught up in all of this and treated him like a hero.

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Repealing the Clarke Amendment untied America’s hands, and it was then that a new chapter in Angola’s civil war started in earnest.

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When he won the total support of the United States—I don’t say partial support—total support of the United States, I think he was not prepared himself for such a victory. Not just many weapons. All support. All necessary support. UNITA was already a state inside a state.

59:12

Jamba [spelling?] had two hospitals, a high school, from primary to high school. You could finish high school in Jamba and go university in Portugal and be number 1. There was an army barracks. They could hold probably fifteen battalions. The running of the war was from Jamba, with sophisticated communications, transportation, fuel, airport, everything was in Jamba. It was self-contained, protected by French missiles put there by South Africans.

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Savimbi got the international recognition he sought, and became Reagan’s new best friend. UNITA became the most sophisticated liberation movement to date, but Savimbi wanted more.

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Reagan said, “My friend, what can I do for you today?” and Savimbi said, “Mr. President, I did not come here to ask for money. I did not come here to ask for military uniforms or boots, or even medicines.” And Reagan said, “So what do you want, my friend? Say what you want. You don’t want money. What on earth can I give you to help you?” And Savimbi said, “Mr. President, this time I came here to ask you for the

Stingers.” When he said “Stingers,” Casey stood up and said, “Mr. President, this is a restricted weapon. Even our friends in Saudi Arabia do not have it.” Then Reagan sat for a few seconds like this, then looked at Casey and said, “The man wants Stingers. Give him Stingers.” Like that. “The man wants Stingers. Give him the Stingers.”

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We weren't that enthusiastic about the Stingers, but basically he made a very good military argument. He said, “If I can neutralize the Angolan Air Force, and if I can neutralize their tanks, that's all I need in order to complete my ability to stalemate the war.” That was their objective. It was not defeat of the MPLA. It was negotiations.

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While the CIA was busy strengthening Savimbi's military power, Chester Crocker's team at the State Department was struggling to sell their peace process that aimed to get Cuban troops out of Angola in return for South African departure from Namibia.

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Do the South Africans go first, or do the South Africans wait for the Cubans? You can imagine the kind of discussions we had with this interesting cast of characters. The South Africans said we may consider implementing resolution 435, once all the Cubans have gone home. “Thank you very much,” we said to foreign minister Botha, but that won't sell. By the same token, the Angolans said, “Of course, once the South Africans have gone home, there's no problem. We don't need Cubans. It's not an issue, so why do you have to negotiate it? It stands to reason. It will just happen.” So we'd say to the Angolans, “Try selling that in Pretoria.”

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Six years of shuttle diplomacy, and very little had been achieved. Time was running out, and Reagan's second term as president was coming to an end. The warring parties wanted to negotiate, but each had to fortify its position before sitting at the negotiating table. The MPLA forces asked the Soviets for help to crush Savimbi's stronghold once and for all.

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They decided to go for Jamba. That was the cultural capital of UNITA, it was their political capital, if you like. They were sentimental about it and it was their mainstay during the years when they barely succeeded to survive, so if they had taken Jamba, Savimbi and UNITA would have been gone. So the Soviet Union poured the biggest—after Afghanistan in any case, if not as much as Afghanistan—poured in weaponry to go one last time for Jamba.

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You had the Soviet doctrine coming through loud and clear. You don't stop. You attack. You attack. You attack. You do the same thing. You go into hiding every day, but you couldn't kill unless you come. That's what happened. First of all, they threw in the 21st battalion. It got a hiding. Then they threw in the 59th battalion. It got a hiding. Then they threw in 47 battalion. It got a hiding. Then they withdrew.

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The Angolan troops and their Soviet advisors were routed at the Lumba river. The Soviets left behind a litter of burned-out vehicles and discarded equipment. Over 2,000 Angolans died in this battle alone. To make matters worse, part of the army was encircled.

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It gave defense minister Magnus Milan and his colleagues in the SADF exactly what they wanted. This was a fiasco for the Soviet-Cuban-Angolan side, militarily—a fiasco. They didn't lose but they lost hardware, they lost prestige, they lost the initiative. It reinforced the stalemate and Magnus Milan and other South Africans kind of advertised what they had done and said, "Look how great we are. We have destroyed this offensive and we have put them back in their place, and we're going to stay here until the job is done.

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The Cubans could not stand by and watch their allies being crushed. They felt they had to listen to the Soviets when it came to military advice—until the Lomba river fiasco and the initiative of Fidel Castro coming forward and saying the Soviets don't know how to fight in African wars. We do.

As in 1975, the decision to send additional Cuban troops was not discussed with Moscow. In November of 1987, Russian-Cuban relations were more tense than ever. The rise of Mikhail Gorbachev to power had visibly changed Soviet priorities regarding the Third World.

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It became more and more apparent to us that there were serious problems between the Cubans and the Russians. They feared Gorbachev and Reagan's coming to agreement. The Russians, for their part, began to—because they couldn't afford it—cut back on the level of subsidy to Cuba, thus giving the Cubans even less reason to be beholden to them. And Angola in this context became even more important to the Cubans even as the Russians came to see it as an embarrassment and an obstacle to better relations to the United States. It was at that point that the Cubans made the decision to basically double the forces they had in Angola. Basically, if you wanted to find out how many Cubans there are you started counting baseball diamonds from satellites. You could look down and...

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Cuban army regulations required a baseball field for every certain number of troops, so when they build a baseball field, so when they built a new one, a baseball field, you knew there was an addition of troops. When they closed a baseball field you knew some had left.

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Massive Cuban reinforcements were flown in to rescue the trapped MPLA forces. The final confrontation between the Cuban, Angolan and South African took place around the tiny village of Quito Cuanavale.

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If you see this type of air traffic, you've got to think. You've got to say, "What the hell is going on?" They started hitting us. We knew where the operation headquarters were. We knew where the anti-aircraft were, and the artillery, and we opened fire.

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Then all of a sudden the focus moved to the far west, and that is perhaps where Castro started to come in. He moved troops right over to the western side—about as far as Denmark is from England across the ocean.

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The whole effort was conducted by Fidel Castro by telephone from Havana. He was the commanding officer. How you can do a thing like that, I wouldn't know. I mean it's impossible. It gave us a problem from our side

because we didn't know him. We didn't know his way of thinking, what type of personality he was. Because that's what you've got to know in war. You've got to know the chap on the other side as well as you know yourself. You must know his strong points and his weaker points. That's how you're successful. Otherwise you're not.

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The battle raged on costing an estimated 25,000 lives. All sides claimed victory without managing to stop the war. The combat at Quito Cuanavale lasted six months and became Africa's largest battle since WWII.

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The South Africans could not prevail militarily in Southern Africa. They would reach their limits. But by the same token the Russians and the Cubans also could not prevail because the South Africans would raise the price for them. So we saw there was a long-term strategic stalemate. There was no way South Africa was going to put Savimbi in power in Angola, and there was no way the Cubans were going to drive South Africans out of Namibia.

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Stalemate on the battlefield was exactly what Chester Crocker needed to revive the peace talks. The only way out was a negotiated solution between governments, and that, by definition, excluded Jonas Savimbi, but before Crocker knew it, the Cubans came up with a surprise.

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I was in the National Security Council and I got a call from Peggy Delaney, the daughter of Rockefeller, and she said, "I'm here in Cuba at some sort of meeting of NGOs and Castro called me in and gave me a message.

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The basic message was that this diplomacy is missing a critical ingredient. That missing ingredient is direct, physical Cuban participation. If there were to be Cuban participation, this diplomacy would be more realistic and it would have better prospects for success. And the Americans' continued refusal to talk directly to the Cubans and to include them in the negotiating process was an obstacle. It would be difficult to imagine a more direct hint.

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So this led to a major dilemma. Do you sit at the same table as the Cubans? Chester Crocker of course wanted to, but he knew that sitting at the same table as the Cubans was politically very dangerous inside the United States, so he went to see George Shultz who very courageously said, "I authorize you to meet with the Cubans, but you must talk only about Angola and Namibia. If they bring up the US trade embargo or anything like that, refuse to talk about it.

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The meeting took place at the presidential palace in Luanda. The Cubans had finally earned their place at center stage.

1:18:05

We knew they were next door because we had been briefed, and at a certain moment we said, "Let's try. Let's see if we can make this work. Invite your Cuban friends to join this process so that they don't have to sit in the next room with earphones. They can actually be here at the table. So in came the Cubans and they were just as pleased and as proud as you could imagine. They were smiles from ear to ear. They were delighted.

1:19:10

The air became heavy for some of the non-smokers in the room. Risquet, a very jolly fellow, with a sort of rotund presence, very outspoken, and most of his interventions took a minimum of twenty minutes. When we challenged him once as to why he couldn't make a short statement, he had an answer for that. For years and years Cubans have lived on words. When Cubans were making cigars in factories where all the workers were assembled at their tables rolling, there would be somebody who'd be reading. And they would be reading long, long excerpts from literature or poetry, and this created, I guess you could say, long-winded leadership. Risquet was somebody who had worked in a cigar factory obviously. You could just tell.

1:19:55

He was constantly talking, accusing us of imperialism and being bad guys, so clearly his instructions were not to start substantive negotiations but just to sort of establish a presence there. So we were not too pleased with that but we felt that this was the way the communists work, you see. They try to wear you down until you get to the point...

1:20:53

At last the South Africans, Angolans, Cubans and Americans sat to discuss concrete steps to end the war, but the fighting at Quito Cuanavale continued, and every victory or loss altered the givens at the negotiating table. The next meeting held in Cairo would make or break the peace process.

1:21:19

Now the South Africans were absolutely thrilled to be able to get into Cairo officially. I mean think about it. These people had been isolated for years. What an inducement. In fact, at the end of these negotiations, a great inducement for the South Africans to behave well was the sense that it was helping them to achieve respectability and contacts and to reach out into parts of Africa where they had been completely unwelcome.

1:22:18

When ministers get around a big table in a major capital like Cairo they really can't help themselves. They just can't resist microphones. They just go from bad to worse. And Risquet managed to say things about Cuba's heroic contributions to African stability and development and Cuba's intention to see to it that peace would come when there was an end of apartheid, and when there was an end of this and an end of colonial rule in Namibia.

1:22:48

It was a meeting almost of emotional hatred. Mr. Risquet, he started by launching a vicious attack on us, saying you've always been imperialists, racists, capitalists, causing trouble wherever you went, etc., etc...

1:23:14

At that point, Pik Botha and Magnus Milan [SP?] just went after the Cubans, and it was very dramatic. I heard a forty-minute speech from Pik Botha about the Boar War and about how long it would take before the Cubans would drive the South African forces out of southwestern Africa. It was basically a test of manhood—a lot of testosterone in the atmosphere, I think, is the way to put it.

1:23:42

Well, Pik Botha was usually half drunk, even during the day, and he was... but the thing is with Pik Botha and his colleagues, they were talking back to South Africa because they were worried that P.W. Botha, the prime minister, at any moment could cut off these talks and say, "We're never going to give up Namibia," so it was

very delicate for them, so they had to show back to Pretoria that they were being very tough. It was just posturing, I think.

1:24:18

It was difficult amongst conservative, right wing voters. They thought I was betraying the country. There mere fact of negotiating with Cubans... you know, Cuba and Fidel Castro in the mind of most whites, not blacks, in this country was very close to a diabolical figure. And here Pik Botha, the foreign minister, is dining and wining with these representatives. Even members of my family said to me, "You're not going too far?" There was an idiomatic expression: if you are dining with the devil you need a tremendously long spoon.

1:26:50

He's not going to make any statement. He's just looking for a cigar.

1:26:56

It seemed the talks were headed for total breakdown, but later that night, an unexpected turn of events opened a new window of opportunity.

1:27:10

We went for a drink in this pub of the Cairo hotel. There were some Cubans, including Mr. Risquet. Then we had a drink together and I said to him, "Has it ever occurred to you that we could both be winners?" And he chuckled in his drink and he said, "What do you mean?" I said, "To put it in simple terms, if we carry on with this war, we will both be losers. If you withdraw your troops on the basis of having given Namibia its independence, your leader, Fidel Castro, can claim that he won. You claim a victory of a greater nature—namely the freedom of the people of Namibia you have achieved. And I say to the white voters of South Africa I got rid of the Cuban troops in Angola, and our war is also ended. That makes us both winners." And suddenly I could see a total, dramatic change in his whole attitude.

1:28:22

After the Cairo meeting, a ceasefire at Quito Cuanavale was implemented, but it wasn't easy to clinch the final deal. Having South Africa show its goodwill by at least releasing the legendary prisoner, Nelson Mandela, became a sticking point.

1:28:43

The whole world was descending on us. Apartheid was viewed as a prime evil. The release of Mr. Mandela was demanded. I knew that we had to reduce the tension to be able to release Mr. Mandela and the other political prisoners. If we could not do so, the only way to relieve the tension in Southern Africa was to come to an agreement and end the war in Angola.

1:29:24

By forcing the South Africans to trade the independence of Namibia for the Cuban withdrawal, that in the end justified everything to Castro. He could think of himself as having been the father of Namibian independence and the man who ended colonialism in Africa. Cuba, in fact, demonstrated a level of responsibility in its behavior and maturity in its judgment that, arguably, should have been recognized by the United States as an important gesture deserving some response, but the politics of this, that is the politics of relations with Cuba are poisonous in the extreme, so in the end, Cuba, which acted responsibly and should have been acknowledged for doing so, got no such acknowledgment.

1:30:24

On December 22nd, 1988, almost one month to the day before the end of President Ronald Reagan's presidency, peace accords were signed in New York. The parties simultaneously signed documents granting Namibia's independence and ensuring the withdrawal of Cuban troops from Angola.

1:30:47

That day at the headquarters of the UN where we were the pariah, the skunk of the world, here I am at last and I am being received with courtesy, with friendliness, also by the African ambassadors, also by the whole world, seeming to say we were worthy, welcoming us.

1:31:12

It was just a very moving event. Unfortunately, there was a need to make speeches, and some of the speeches were not great. And at one point, the Cubans felt once again they had to stand up and say, "We won. We won." That forced Pik Botha and Magnus Milan to say, "You want to go outside and settle this?" They actually had that kind of exchange before the signing took place. It was rather amusing to watch. After the event, George Schultz turned around and looked at me and said, "Those are some characters you've been working with."

1:31:45

The withdrawal of 450,000 Cubans was scheduled to take place over thirty months, ending thirteen years of Cuban military presence in Angola. A month short of the deadline, the last Cuban soldier left the African soil. With him ended the epic of Cuba's military support for African revolutions.

1:32:30

The total number of Cuban casualties remains one of the island's best-kept secrets, but military historians agree that at least 10,000 Cubans died in Angola.

1:33:50

When Castro agreed to leave Africa, he simultaneously pulled out of Central America and he ceased to export the revolution and he began to concentrate, as he has done ever since, on soft power, on building Cuba's prestige with its exports of doctors of medicine rather than with its exports of combat, engineers and soldiers.

1:34:24

The battle to liberate Africa from colonialism had been won. But the war conducted in the name of real independence is still being fought. Revolutionaries like Che Guevara, Patrice Lumumba, Amilcar Cabral and Augustino Neto are today icons all over the continent. Their words still echo in African shanty towns as inspiration to follow if Africans are to change their lot. The means to achieve true independence may be different today, but this objective has never changed.

