

Mainland China-Angola Relations: Moving from Debacle to Détente

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Beijing's involvement in Angola in the mid-1970s as a testing ground for the People's Republic of China's (PRC's) position toward the superpowers was a disaster for its foreign policy in southern Africa. As it ended up on the side of the United States and regional pariah South Africa, Chinese policy was commonly perceived as lacking an awareness of African intricacies and of being opportunistic. As a result, Beijing was excluded from Angola by a government bitter at the PRC's support for the rivals in its civil war. Only after skillful diplomacy and a change in attitude by Angola toward its ties with Moscow, combined with China's pragmatic foreign policy, was Beijing able to establish linkages with Luanda. Since then, Sino-Angolan relations have become comparatively strong and are likely to develop further as China views Angola as a potentially wealthy and strategic nation slowly emerging from a paralyzing civil war.

Keywords: China; Africa; Angola; foreign policy

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The People's Republic of China's (PRC's) relations with Angola make for an engaging study of the evolution of Beijing's foreign policy toward Africa. Initially nurturing supposedly Maoist guerrilla movements, Beijing moved to all-out support for anti-Soviet organizations—a policy that provoked Moscow into a large-scale commitment to Angola and led to a discrediting of Communist China on the African continent.

With the onset of a more pragmatic foreign policy under Deng Xiaoping and more emphasis on trade and less on ideological correctness or anti-Soviet

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posturing, Beijing has been able to establish ties with the government in Luanda and to build a profitable commercial relationship with the mineral-rich nation. While China's role in the Angolan civil war has been covered previously, overviews of Beijing's involvement in the country from the war of liberation to the present have been lacking. The purpose of this article is to correct this omission and provide the reader with an understanding of the dynamics of the Sino-Angolan relationship—from debacle in the 1970s to détente in the 1980s and beyond.

The Liberation Struggle and Communist China

The PRC's involvement in Angola stretches back to the 1950s and its support for the liberation movements fighting Portuguese colonial rule. The earliest and what proved to be the most successful organization to be formed during this period was the People's Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA) in 1956. Led by Agostinho Neto, the MPLA was the best organized liberation movement in Angola, was nonracial and Marxist in its ideology, and developed extensive linkages with the Soviet bloc. Support of a military nature from Moscow is believed to have dated from the early 1960s after Neto visited the Soviet Union. China also supported the MPLA and provided arms and training; however, after an Organization of African Unity (OAU) mission identified GRAE (see below) as the legitimate Angolan liberation organization, Beijing's attention to the MPLA declined.

The second significant liberation organization was the National Front for the Liberation of Angola (FNLA) led by Holden Roberto. The FNLA was strongly supported by Congo-Kinshasa (later Zaire) and operated from that country. In contrast to the MPLA, the FNLA was perceived as violently anti-white, and Roberto commanded a vicious anti-Portuguese pogrom in 1961 in which nearly 2,000 white civilians were killed. In 1962, Roberto formed an organization called *Governo Revolucionário de Angola no Exílio* (GRAE) which was recognized as the government-in-exile of Angola by the OAU. It was from GRAE that Jonas Savimbi split from (see below). The FNLA was strongly anti-MPLA, but lacked defined ideology and was perceived as being tribalistic in nature. It was also poorly trained and armed and opportunistic in its seeking of military aid. Nonetheless, following the OAU's recognition of GRAE, the PRC took an interest, with Foreign Minister Chen Yi meeting Roberto in Kenya in December 1963. However, because the FNLA was based in Congo-Kinshasa, which at the time recognized the Republic of China

(ROC) on Taiwan and was experiencing a Communist Chinese-supported rebellion, Beijing was refused permission to set foot in the country in support of the FNLA. As a result, contact between Beijing and the FNLA was frozen until 1973.

The third Angolan movement was the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA) formed in 1966 and led by Jonas Savimbi.

UNITA was the main organization targeted by the PRC for support in the late 1960s, as Beijing had been in contact with Savimbi since 1964, when he led a breakaway group from the GRAE in protest at Roberto's autocratic leadership. Visiting mainland China, Savimbi met with both Mao Zedong and Zhou Enlai and underwent military training in the PRC. When UNITA was formalized as a separate organization, cadres were sent to China and UNITA became the only organization mentioned by China in its reports on Angola. UNITA was enthusiastic in its claims to Maoism, extolling self-reliance and people's war in its press dispatches and claiming inspiration from "the creative application of Chairman Mao's proletarian line."¹ However, despite another meeting with Mao in 1967 and further deliberation on future cooperation, the PRC's supplies proved to be disappointing and as a result, Savimbi later asserted that Beijing's support amounted to nothing: "We were expecting aid from the Chinese [but] it did not come."²

The Evolution of Beijing's Role in Angola

With the waning of the Cultural Revolution, Beijing's need for self-professed (however dubious) radical organizations such as UNITA lessened. As a result, because of its increasing prominence in the struggle, the MPLA resurfaced in Chinese press commentaries. In July 1971, an MPLA delegation visited mainland China, and after that date, Beijing funnelled aid through the OAU's Liberation Committee to the organization. The PRC aimed to broaden its contacts with liberation movements in Angola as a means by which it could extend its influence in the country. However, the MPLA experienced a grave military and political crisis in late 1973, when the organization split into sepa-

¹New China News Agency (Xinhua), July 9, 1971, in Foreign Broadcast Information Service, *Daily Report: China* [hereafter *FBIS-CHI*]-71-126 (July 14, 1971): A34.

²Michael Wolfers and Jane Bergerad, *Angola in the Front-Line* (London: Zed Press, 1983), 210.

rate factions. One faction led by Daniel Chipenda believed (mistakenly) that Neto's ties with Moscow were precluding the reception of substantial aid from China. Beijing encouraged Chipenda as a means of weakening the pro-Soviet MPLA, while at the same time slowly beginning to court the FNLA.

A number of factors came into play in this development. First, Beijing was keen to balance the Soviet presence maintained through the latter's support of the MPLA. Recognizing the fact that Moscow had a dominant position with Neto's organization, China hoped to counter this by supporting the next largest movement at that time. Furthermore, the FNLA was promoted because China and Zaire, the FNLA's patron, had undergone a remarkable rapprochement following China and Washington's thawing of relations. In addition, the fact that Tanzania's Julius Nyerere urged China to support the FNLA tipped the balance in favor of Roberto's movement. Nyerere was alarmed at the splintering of the MPLA into factions, which allowed Portugal to move troops from Angola to Mozambique and threaten the liberation war in that country. Keeping Portuguese troops in Angola and away from Mozambique was essential; thus, reconciliation with Zaire and support for the FNLA was reckoned to be prudent.

Post-Coup Developments of 1974

In April 1974, a military coup overthrew the Portuguese government in Lisbon. The coup effectively compelled all the major world powers to determine their foreign policies toward Angola. With the colonial power vacating the scene, both Washington and Moscow desired sympathetic governments to be installed—or at least regimes not overtly siding with the enemy. With the pro-Soviet MPLA in a strong position, Washington increased its support for the rival movements. On its part, China was determined to try and prevent a pro-Soviet government from taking power, and also sided with the anti-MPLA forces.

In May 1974, the first group of Chinese instructors arrived in Zaire to aid the FNLA, and later shipments of arms were delivered to FNLA camps. In addition, China also supplied UNITA and a rival faction within the MPLA. It was initially confident that Neto would be fatally weakened by splits in the MPLA. This, however, provoked Moscow to increase its own supply of weaponry to Neto's faction in late 1974. As one commentator asserted, "The main factor behind the USSR's initial decision to back the MPLA in Angola in early 1975 seems to have been a desire to prevent the Chinese from becoming the

dominant outside power in southern Africa."³ As Portuguese rule collapsed, the situation in Angola became precarious and superpower competition increased. Angola at that time was, in the words of Kenneth Adelman, "an area open and inviting to outside influences," and China's foreign policy in Angola was aimed squarely against Soviet advancement in the country, even if it was through surrogates.⁴

In January 1975, the Alvor peace agreement established a coalition government, and independence was scheduled for November that year. Continuing to hedge its bets, China sent identical letters to all three movements warning them to be on their guard "against meddling by external forces."⁵ However, there was little hope for any reconciliation between the three organizations as each deeply distrusted the others and placed their own factional interests first. As a result, Angola was shortly to descend into a fratricidal battle for domination.

Flare-up of the Angola Civil War

On January 31, 1975, a transitional government made up of the various liberation movements was installed. However, on the next day FNLA and MPLA troops became involved in major clashes in the capital which quickly spread to the rest of the country. In an attempt at mediation, China invited all three organizations to Beijing between late March and mid-July 1975. However, even while these talks were proceeding, the conflict was escalating, with Moscow passing large quantities of arms to the MPLA. In response, Beijing charged that Moscow was "doing its utmost to sow discord among the three Angolan liberation organizations."⁶ By July, a full-scale civil war was taking place, which China characterized as entirely of Moscow's making, charging that "[it] disregarded the various agreements concluded among the three Angolan liberation organizations. . . . [It] deliberately created a split among the liberation organizations, sent in large quantities of arms, supported one organization alone and wantonly slandered and attacked the other two

³David Albright, "Soviet Policy," *Problems of Communism* 27, no. 1 (January-February 1978): 34.

⁴Kenneth Adelman, "Report from Angola," *Foreign Affairs* 53, no. 3 (April 1975): 566.

⁵Xinhua, January 28, 1975, in *FBIS-CHI-75-019* (January 28, 1975): A12.

⁶Xinhua, September 13, 1975, in *FBIS-CHI-75-180* (September 16, 1975): A14.

organizations, and thus provoked the civil war in Angola."⁷ Equipped with Soviet arms and directed by Cuban advisers, the MPLA managed to evict both the FNLA and UNITA from Luanda by July 1975 and, as the Zambians commented, Angola "degenerated into a confrontation between the two superpowers."⁸ By August, the MPLA controlled over eleven of the fifteen provincial capitals, prompting the FNLA and UNITA into an uneasy alliance. Alarmed by the MPLA's success, China attempted to counter by proxy and gave Zaire permission to furnish the FNLA with stocks of Chinese weapons it was storing. However, as the PRC realized that the situation in Angola was spiralling out of control and was far beyond its depth, the PRC military instructors attached to the FNLA withdrew at the end of October. Commentators have since noted that China's withdrawal came after possible assurances by Henry Kissinger that Washington would counter any moves by Moscow in Angola.⁹ According to Soviet information, George Bush, the head of the U.S. Mission in Beijing, met with top Chinese officials in July 1975 to exchange views on the situation in Angola. At the meetings, the PRC and the United States allegedly agreed to "coordinate" their activities in the country. American military support certainly dramatically increased after mid-1975, when the country erupted into open warfare.¹⁰

Pretoria's Entry and Beijing's Humiliation

At this point, the Angola civil war was radically transformed by the entry of South Africa in October 1975. Quickly joining the FNLA/UNITA offensive against the MPLA, the intervention shifted the military balance in favor of UNITA and the FNLA and proved a major setback to the MPLA—until the arrival of further Soviet weaponry and thousands of Cuban "volunteers." The South African intervention, however, embarrassed Beijing and caused great harm to the PRC's prestige in the region.

Pretoria's involvement had the effect of legitimizing the MPLA's usage

⁷Xinhua, November 16, 1975, in *FBIS-CHI-75-222* (November 17, 1975): A18-19.

⁸*Times of Zambia* (Lusaka), July 28, 1975.

⁹Daniel Spikes, *Angola and the Politics of Intervention* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland & Co., 1993), 255.

¹⁰In July, US\$14 million was allocated to aid the FNLA and UNITA by Washington. See Yung-lo Lin, "The U.S.-Soviet Conflict in Angola: A Historical Knot," *Issues & Studies* 26, no. 1 (January 1990): 127.

of Cuban troops and Soviet weaponry in the eyes of many African observers. Conversely, China was caught out on the side of apartheid. As a result, Beijing was discredited and forced to witness a Soviet-sponsored MPLA victory—directly undermining Beijing's foreign policy aims in southern Africa. China's attempt at saving face by withdrawing from the conflict largely failed, with observers asserting that Angola had been a severe misadventure for China. For example, an Indian correspondent commented that "the Angolan war has been an unmitigated disaster to Chinese foreign policy, the core of which is confrontation with the Soviet Union. . . . In fact, so far-reaching have been the repercussions of Angola that they affect Chinese diplomacy far beyond Africa."¹¹ Beijing emerged from Angola with its reputation in Africa severely tarnished, and a pro-Moscow government was installed in Luanda. Such a victory was a major diplomatic triumph for the Soviet Union, and greatly extended its influence and prestige in the region. As one commentator noted, "Angola provided the Soviets with an opportunity to weaken the influence of their two main rivals—China and the United States—by checking the growth of Chinese influence in Africa . . . and by preventing the victory of the Chinese and U.S.-backed forces of the FNLA and UNITA."¹²

China's anti-hegemonic posturing had been exposed as largely rhetorical and incapable of extending to Africa: Beijing had made an error in Angola and suffered for it. As one Chinese official commented, "We made mistakes in Angola . . . because we simplified the issue [and] reacted blindly . . . to the position taken by the Russians."¹³ After its experiences in Angola, China was to become more circumspect in its dealings with other nations in the region.

Within the international system, Angola was a disaster for Chinese foreign policy. With the United States seemingly hamstrung by events in Vietnam (the North Vietnamese had captured Saigon in April 1975), and their failure to effectively stand up to the Soviets in Angola, China's policies in Africa went into crisis. Previously, Beijing had supplied moderate amounts of arms and training to disparate liberation movements and supplemented lack of practical aid with vitriolic rhetoric against the superpowers. However, when this rhetoric was tested, as in Angola, China was shown to be a "paper tiger." This amounted to a crisis for Chinese policy in Africa because rhetoric

¹¹*Hindustan Times* (New Delhi), February 3, 1976.

¹²Jiri Valenta, "The Soviet-Cuban Intervention in Angola, 1975," *Studies in Comparative Communism* 11, nos. 1-2 (Spring and Summer 1978): 20.

¹³Cited in Arthur Gavshon, *Crisis in Africa: Battleground of East and West* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1981), 139.

Second, democratization theories should more carefully discuss the intentions and relative strengths of various domestic actors. While Huntington and Przeworski consider the middle classes and conservatives to be largely homogenous and consistent in their attitudes toward democratization, the Hong Kong case shows that they were clearly heterogeneous and changeable toward democratization over time. The motives and relative strengths of domestic actors, the conservative segments of the middle class, the liberal fraction of the conservative camp, and the politically divided working class should be studied in detail.

Finally, the study of democratic transition should examine the interaction between external actors and various factions within different classes. Huntington separates external and domestic actors and argues that "the processes [are] overwhelmingly indigenous." Like Huntington, Przeworski focuses on the "struggle of the society against the state" in democratization. The Hong Kong case demonstrates that the external actor before the sovereignty change, the PRC, interfered with the transition and interacted with different segments of the social classes. In addition, the Hong Kong case shows that psychological fear can be as effective as the conventional intervention methods suggested by Huntington. In the years after World War II, the PRC did not clarify its opposition to democratization, and this worried government soft-liners who wanted to introduce political reforms. Thus, the different ways of external interference will, to a certain extent, affect the interaction between external actors and other domestic actors.

Conclusions: Prospects for Hong Kong's Democratization

Given the complicated nature of transition politics, i.e., the interaction between five relevant political actors—external actors, government soft-liners and hard-liners, and democrats and conservatives in the political opposition—Hong Kong's future can be argued to be relatively optimistic. First, external actors to Hong Kong after July 1, 1997 such as Britain and the United States may persuade and threaten (if necessary) the PRC to take a more moderate ap-

after July 1, 1997 and is now the sovereign master of the territory. Arguably, foreign countries such as Britain, the United States, and perhaps Taiwan rather than the PRC are currently the external actors.

ready withdrawn to the bush to continue its anti-MPLA struggle. From that date, UNITA was destined to become a major thorn in the MPLA's side, but not a threat to topple the regime. China largely remained aloof from active involvement in UNITA's struggle, although it shared Savimbi's sentiments that Angola was an "occupied country." Only once is China reported to have supplied UNITA: in 1979, when 550 tons of weapons were delivered to the organization. Chinese rhetorical duplicity vis-à-vis South Africa and its desire to combat Soviet hegemonism, however, was exposed by the news that Beijing had channelled the arms through South African-held Namibia.¹⁶ That Beijing should collude with both Washington and Pretoria to aid an organization fighting against Soviet influence in Angola illustrates that China viewed its anti-Soviet crusade to be more important than its oft-pronounced opposition to any dealings with the international pariah of South Africa.

Beijing's Rhetoric Against Moscow's Presence in Angola

On the level of political rhetoric, China's treatment of Soviet involvement in the post-independent MPLA government was scathing and closely tied to its anti-hegemonic posturing and opposition to Moscow's presence in Africa. Beijing continued to place the blame on Moscow for the ongoing civil war, characterizing it as "entirely the result of the fierce contention between the two superpowers, particularly . . . the Soviet social-imperialists."¹⁷ This theme of blaming the civil war on the Soviets—who were cast as those who had sabotaged any chance of a peaceful outcome in the country—was developed as the war drew to a close. According to China, "Differences among the three Angolan liberation movements were . . . normal and could have been reconciled by them through peaceful consultations . . . but the Soviets . . . deliberately created a split . . . sent in large quantities of arms, supported one organization alone . . . and thus single-handedly provoked the civil war."¹⁸ Soviet motives for involvement in Angola were conceptualized by China as part of Moscow's strategic plan and firmly tied to the political significance of southern Africa. Beijing commented: "Angola is a place of great strategic significance. In an attempt to establish its spheres of influence in southern Africa, the Soviet Union has set its mind on placing Angola under its control and

¹⁶*Christian Science Monitor* (Boston), May 31, 1983.

¹⁷Xinhua, November 13, 1975, in *FBIS-CHI-75-221* (November 14, 1975): A7.

¹⁸Xinhua, November 15, 1975, in *FBIS-CHI-75-222* (November 17, 1975): A19.

turning it into an important stronghold in its rivalry with the other superpower over southern Africa . . . thereby . . . strengthening its position of rivalry with the other superpower for world hegemony."¹⁹

The PRC angrily denounced the arrival of Soviet troops into Angola in January 1976, warning that "if the Soviet revisionists are allowed to . . . succeed in their plot, it is hard to avoid the emergence of a second or even third Angola."²⁰ This could be seen as a clear message to the United States to take action and actively resist Moscow's machinations at a time when Washington and Moscow appeared to be drawing closer and leaving China exposed in Beijing's eyes. Concerned with the détente process between the two superpowers, China was eager to expose what it termed the "détente fraud." Such messages reflected the PRC's reliance on the United States to combat Soviet expansionism, as Beijing was well aware that it lacked the capability to forcefully oppose Moscow. Instead, by allying itself to the one power able to resist Soviet machinations—by force if necessary—China was tacitly acknowledging its own impotence, as was so painfully exhibited in Angola.

Gradual Détente Between Luanda and Beijing

Despite Beijing's fierce anti-Soviet polemics, the MPLA government itself was not directly criticized by the PRC, leaving the possibility for future rapprochement between Beijing and Luanda open. China went out of its way to appear neutral toward the MPLA, asserting "all three Angolan liberation movements made contributions" toward independence,²¹ and carefully avoided mentioning the organization when it criticized Moscow's involvement in Angola. If this was designed to woo the MPLA, it initially failed, for Neto remained bitter against China for supporting his enemies in the early stages of the war, and indeed proclaimed that China "was no longer a socialist country."²² China in turn refused to vote in favor of the MPLA government being admitted to the United Nations until there was a "fundamental change

¹⁹Xinhua, November 25, 1975, in *FBIS-CHI-75-229* (November 26, 1975): A3.

²⁰Xinhua, February 4, 1976, in *FBIS-CHI-76-024* (February 4, 1976): A5.

²¹Beijing Domestic Service (in Chinese), November 16, 1975, in *FBIS-CHI-75-223* (November 18, 1975): A19.

²²Agostinho Neto, cited by Thomas Henriksen, in "Angola, Mozambique, and the Soviet Union: Liberation and the Quest for Influence," in *Soviet and Chinese Aid to African Nations*, ed. Warren Weinstein and Thomas Henriksen (New York: Praeger, 1980), 65.

in the situation in Angola."²³ However, openings for reconciliation began to develop as the 1970s drew to an end. Throughout the late 1970s, Sino-Zairian relations had remained excellent, particularly after Beijing aided Kinshasa in bolstering its defenses against invasions from neighboring Angola by Katangese irregulars in 1977 and 1978. However, with the rout of the second invasion and the fading of FNLA activity, Angolan-Zairian relations improved and an accord was signed leading to the FNLA being expelled from Zaire. The rapprochement between Mobutu and Neto meant that the obstacles to China's own reconciliation with Angola were removed, and Beijing began to encourage Neto to develop an independent line vis-à-vis Moscow. China appeared close to normalizing relations in January 1979, when Luanda agreed to talks with Beijing. However, the PRC's hopes were dashed following China's invasion of Vietnam (which Luanda opposed) and Moscow's subsequent intervention in Afghanistan (which Luanda supported). These two issues remained sticking points for the two countries and a stumbling block to normalization. In this climate, Beijing sent aid to UNITA in 1979 as a means by which to keep the Soviets in Angola diverted and as a punishment for the MPLA's criticism of China's war with Vietnam (see above).

China, however, did not give up on reconciliation with Angola. In an attempt to undermine Moscow's position in the country, the PRC began to play up Luanda's independence with regard to the Soviet Union. Thus in January 1980, Beijing commented that Angola's government had signed agreements with Western nations and that this was "an important step for Angola to free itself from the Soviet hold."²⁴ China also emphasized Luanda's remarks that the special relations between Angola and the socialist countries did not mean that Luanda belonged to a bloc, and that Angola's principal trading partners were Western.

With China's "independent foreign policy" emerging in 1982, outright hostility to Moscow was watered down and a more balanced policy with regard to the superpowers was pursued. In this way, Beijing aimed to decrease tension with Moscow and reopen the window of opportunity for normalizing Sino-Angolan relations. This was fortuitous for Beijing, as South Africa's increased attacks on Angolan territory in its search of Namibian insurgents had garnered widespread sympathy for the Luanda regime, particularly among the Third World. This provided China with a clear-cut opportunity to posture

²³Xinhua, November 23, 1976, in *FBIS-CHI-76-228* (November 24, 1976): A3.

²⁴Xinhua, January 17, 1980, in *FBIS-CHI-80-013* (January 18, 1980): 11.

itself as an outraged member of the developing world and once again project itself into the region as an interested party. As a consequence, the PRC came out with explicit support for the Angolan government, and at the same time, asserted that the MPLA government was not a Soviet proxy. For instance, China criticized Moscow for making pronouncements on Cuban-Angolan relations, and asserted that "Angola is not a member of the 'big family' [i.e., the Soviet bloc]."²⁵ By encouraging Luanda's independence, Beijing hoped to undermine Moscow's position in Angola. These developments culminated in 1982, when China announced that it was willing to normalize relations with Luanda.

Diplomatic Relations Established

Initially, negotiations for normalization did not go smoothly, as China's past support for the MPLA's rivals remained a sticking point. On its part, Beijing asserted that it had given assistance to all three organizations, but had ceased once independence had been achieved. This, and the subsequent failure of China to develop ties with Angola immediately after independence, was later glossed over once relations were formalized on January 12, 1983. China's reconciliation with Angola must be viewed within the wider framework of Beijing's desire in the early 1980s to strengthen linkages with Africa so it could project its influence beyond the narrow and limiting confines of the Sino-Soviet-American triangle. Integral to this was a desire to broaden China's economic linkages with the continent and posture itself as a concerned party in the southern African milieu. Beijing began to run articles on the economic difficulties faced by Angola, and quickly sent a delegation to investigate the possibility of a trade agreement. As part of this process, the Chinese Vice-Minister of Foreign Affairs Gong Dafei visited Luanda in May 1983 to express China's desire for closer cooperation with Angola, and in June 1984, the Angolan Foreign Trade Minister Ismael Gaspar Martins visited Beijing to seal a trade agreement.

Beijing linked its policy of reconciliation with Angola to the fact that both countries belonged to the Third World, and needed mutual support. In addition to the trade agreement, China also began to offer a number of aid packages to Angola in order to strengthen ties. In December 1984, a loan

²⁵Xinhua, February 21, 1982, in *FBIS-CHI-82-036* (February 23, 1982): C1.

agreement to promote trade was agreed and in September 1985, port cargo handling equipment was donated. Angola's willingness to enter into relations with China was influenced by Luanda's desire to relieve its domestic difficulties and reinforce its independent position vis-à-vis the Soviet Union. This was related to Luanda's dissatisfaction with Moscow's protection, and Angola's economic dependence on markets outside of the Soviet bloc.²⁶ Indeed, Angola had explicitly stated that despite its special relations with socialist countries, it was not a member of any bloc and desired normalization of relations with the United States. This policy had been pursued as a response to Angolan economic circumstances since at least 1979, but the search for alternative economic partners was given impetus in late 1981, when it became clear that Angola was going to be denied full membership in the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance. It thus became imperative for Luanda to diversify its commercial and political linkages. The agreement on opening up diplomatic relations with Beijing consequently originated as much from Angolan foreign policy dynamics as from Chinese initiatives.

Chinese Rhetoric in Support of the MPLA Government

While China was assiduously courting Angola through a variety of trade agreements and aid packages, Beijing was also active in providing political support to the beleaguered government. In a classic volte-face, Beijing began overt criticism of Washington's support of UNITA, which was still waging an insurgency against the MPLA. Rewriting history with Orwellian gusto, China proclaimed that "the United States has all along stood on the side of South Africa, in order to repel Soviet and Cuban influence in the region."²⁷ No mention of China's role in this affair was made, nor was China's past support for Savimbi mentioned when China continued its repudiation of UNITA, calling its military campaign "a tragedy for the Angolan people" and drawing attention to Pretoria's support for the organization. Instead, China rather brazenly asserted that "UNITA, backed by the United States and South Africa, launch-

²⁶See Jonathan Steele, *The Limits of Soviet Power: The Kremlin's Foreign Policy—Brezhnev to Chernenko* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985). Steele argues that Angolan (and Mozambican) dependence on markets in the capitalist West acted as an effective constraint on Soviet influence in these "client" states. With China economically active, it was thus natural that Luanda should look toward Beijing as another prospective commercial partner.

²⁷*Shijie zhishi* (World Knowledge) (Beijing), 1986, no. 9:12, in *FBIS-CHI-86-106* (June 20, 1986): 14.

ed [the] war against the Angolan government" after independence.²⁸ With the relative thaw in Sino-Soviet relations, China was far more critical of U.S. activities, asserting that Washington's policy of aiding UNITA only served to intensify the contradictions in Angola. At the same time, cognizant of the fact that continued civil war was inimical to China's policies in southern Africa, Beijing began encouraging dialogue and used the lesson of Angola to further its own noninterference agenda by asserting that Angola "proved that the internal affairs of a country cannot be resolved by relying on external forces."²⁹ Chinese rewriting of Angola's history later went to the lengths of agreeing with the MPLA's analysis that Cuban troops had merely been sent to Angola to fight against UNITA—a far cry from when these same Cubans were denounced as "Soviet mercenaries."

Visit by the Angolan President in 1988

On the political level, Angola's President Eduardo dos Santos paid a state visit to China in October 1988. That it took five years for dos Santos to agree to visit China indicated that tensions had existed despite Chinese rhetoric and the playing down of differences. During the visit, dos Santos expressed a desire to give a new impetus to the relations between Angola and China. Interestingly, while visiting China, dos Santos was lectured on the mistakes of the Chinese Communist Party in waging class struggle. As a result of the visit, trade between the two countries picked up, and Angola was rapidly promoted to being one of China's most important African trading partners (see table 1).

The promotion of economic construction and a peaceful end to the civil war, which would allow economic development, was stressed by Beijing during dos Santos' visit. As Deng Xiaoping told dos Santos, "Dialogue is better than confrontation, and relaxation is better than tension."³⁰ This rhetoric, however, contrasted with reports that dos Santos had discussed with China the possibility of buying Chinese arms to fight UNITA. Whether this was accurate or not, dos Santos left China having signed three treaties on closer cooperation with China.

²⁸*Beijing Review* 31, no. 20 (May 16-22, 1988): 10-11.

²⁹*People's Daily*, May 8, 1988, in *FBIS-CHI-88-092* (May 12, 1988): 14.

³⁰Xinhua, October 22, 1988, in *FBIS-CHI-88-205* (October 24, 1988): 11.

Table 1
Trade Between Angola and China, 1980-95

Unit: US\$ million		
	Exports to Angola	Imports from Angola
1980	0.02	—
1981	8.6	0.1
1982	0.6	0.03
1983	0.5	—
1984	4.1	—
1985	3.6	—
1986	1.1	0.1
1987	13.7	—
1988	2.5	—
1989	1.5	0.3
1990	28.9	0.8
1991	7.29	0.1
1992	8.5	29.4
1993	11.2	180.7
1994	12.5	47.9
1995	21.1	136.9

Sources: 1979-1991 *China Foreign Economic Statistics* (Beijing: China Statistical Information and Consultancy Service Center, 1992); and *China's Customs Statistics Yearbook* (Hong Kong: Economic Information Agency), various years.

Post-Tiananmen

Like many other African states, Angola did not react adversely to June 4, 1989. China's Foreign Minister Qian Qichen included Angola on his tour of the region to explain China's position and was cordially received. The Angolan Minister for External Relations Afonso Van Dunem helpfully expressed understanding and support for quelling the "counterrevolutionary rebellion." In keeping with China's focusing on the Third World as a source of friendship to keep out interference in its domestic affairs, Beijing moved quickly to sign three documents on cooperation with Angola. The PRC continued this consolidation process by later signing a cultural cooperation agreement, and granting Angola US\$121 million in credit to buy Chinese-made goods. Beijing officials also met an MPLA delegation in March 1991 to assert that China intended to continue supporting Luanda's economic restructuring. This would have repercussions for Sino-Angolan ties, as Beijing wished to enhance the economic links between the two countries, and bolster its own position, which was particularly important as the Cold War was coming to a close and mem-

ories of the Tiananmen incident were affecting China's position within the international system. As one news agency remarked, "China sees itself as leader of the Third World, but is becoming increasingly isolated ideologically after the fall of communism in East European and African countries."³¹

On the ideological level, China remained as pragmatic as ever, continuing to encourage economic modernization and development in Angola and supporting the holding of multiparty elections in Angola. At this time, China attempted to rationalize the MPLA dropping its previous Marxist appellation of Partido do Trabalho (Worker's Party) by rather bizarrely claiming that the new name "reminds the people of the MPLA's glorious past."³² The fact that the name change was more in line with the MPLA dropping many of its Marxist pretensions was tactfully ignored by China.

That the MPLA effectively renounced Marxism to no adverse reaction from China illustrated the de-ideologizing of China's external relations under Deng Xiaoping. Shortly after Angola was declared "non-Marxist," China agreed to help Luanda build 600 flats and donate US\$183,800 to the country to help in rebuilding. However, as fighting again broke out in Angola following the September 1992 elections, China was wary of taking sides and offered little support to Luanda. Careful of involving itself in a seemingly endless imbroglio from which no outside party would emerge with credibility, Beijing showed great reluctance to even comment one way or the other. Fearful of external powers involving themselves in an area outside of China's practical sphere of influence, Beijing merely asserted that no outside forces should be involved in the conflict and expressed hope that peace could be restored. With China under pressure for its domestic human rights record, the call of noninterference in internal affairs was one that was repeated by China throughout this period. As Qian Qichen told the Angolan Vice Foreign Minister Jorge Chikoty while in Beijing in mid-1995, "Western countries should not use the pretext of human rights to interfere in the internal affairs of developing countries. If the Western countries really care about human rights, . . . they should not interfere . . . [but] should offer more support to developing countries."³³

The theme of noninterference in the internal affairs of countries and the rallying of Third World support for this stance by China marked the foreign policy of the PRC toward Angola in the mid-1990s. Coupled with trade,

³¹Agence France-Presse, Hong Kong, June 3, 1991.

³²Xinhua, May 15, 1992, in *FBIS-CHI-92-096* (May 18, 1992): 18.

³³Xinhua, June 5, 1995, in *FBIS-CHI-95-108* (June 6, 1995): 13.

China was able to offer rhetorical support to the Luanda government, and in return for an economical outlay of aid, was able to count on Angola for support within the Third World and the international system as China attempted to deflect criticism of its domestic policies.

Conclusion

China's involvement in Angola in the mid-1970s was in many ways a watershed for Beijing's policies in southern Africa. Angola was a testing ground for both the PRC and the USSR, and failure by Moscow to support and obtain victory through the MPLA would have exposed the Soviets to criticism as an ambitious power lacking the military muscle necessary to back up its words. As it was, it was China which was opened up to extensive criticism, as it was shown to be a power incapable of physically projecting itself in the region and needing to rely on the "imperialist" United States to pursue Beijing's agenda against Moscow. With Beijing exposed on the same side as Pretoria, China hastily pulled out of Angola, but not before its position was extensively criticized. It was thus left to Moscow to present a *fait accompli* to the world and establish its presence in Angola. China's anti-hegemonic policy was thus shipwrecked on the rocks of Angola's complicated liberation struggle and civil war.

However, since Angola and China have undergone rapprochement, Beijing has become increasingly involved in Angola. Since China sits on the UN Security Council, it is a useful ally to have for war-crippled Angola as it embarks upon recovery, and Luanda will thus avoid China's damaging obstructionist policies that states such as Guatemala and Haiti (who have links with the ROC) have suffered. In addition, trade between the two countries has rapidly developed, for China is well aware that Angola possesses abundant mineral resources such as petroleum, iron ore, and diamonds. As Beijing continues its "socialist modernization" program, links with such potentially economically powerful countries are important. By developing its ties with such a mineral-rich state, China is diversifying its sources and also consolidating connections with a country that does not share the West's fixation with China's domestic policies. It is astute of Beijing to realize this and foster trade with a nation that is a potentially powerful African state so long as peace is maintained. In doing so, China is also extending its credibility as a concerned player in African affairs, projecting its influence beyond its immediate periphery and gaining sympathetic access to a country that is the strategic bridge

between the center and north of the continent and southern Africa. As Luanda's role in the recent overthrow of Zaire's Mobutu illustrates, Angola is emerging as a regional power in waiting, and it therefore suits Chinese policy to build cordial links with such a country. By developing ties now and increasing trade relations hand in hand with political intercourse, it is evident that Beijing has its eyes on the future. In essence, relations are likely to increase apace once Angola establishes permanent peace. By doing so, China is becoming increasingly involved in a country in which previously it had suffered a major foreign policy disaster—a revealing example of China's pragmatic foreign policy since the death of Mao.