



Article REVIEW

Author's RESPONSE

Piero Gleijeses. "Moscow's Proxy? Cuba and Africa 1975-1988," *Journal of Cold War Studies* 8:2 (Spring 2006): 3-51. doi:10.1162/jcws.2006.8.2.3.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1162/jcws.2006.8.2.3>.

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Published by H-Diplo on 16 June 2007

I appreciate Professor Dominguez's affording me the opportunity to restate the important point I made in "Moscow's Proxy" concerning the sequence of events leading to the November 1975 Cuban intervention in Angola.

I regret that, in Professor Dominguez's opinion, I have "obscured rather than clarified the record." Unfortunately, that is sometimes the effect of following the facts: the truth can be, as they say, stranger than fiction.

As much as I admire Garcia Marquez and envy him (he has talked at length with Fidel Castro while I have dismally failed to interview him in my 14 years of research in Cuba), I do not consider Garcia Marquez an authority on South African policy making. And it is the authoritative South African sources that reveal that this was not a "classic action-reaction process of escalation," as much as Professor Dominguez, or I, or anyone, might want to perceive it as such. I will restate what I said in the relevant footnote in "Moscow's Proxy." For the full references, please consult the article.

Although the South Africans have not declassified any documents on their operation, a South African scholar, F. J. du Toit Spies, was given access to the archives to write an official history of the war which approved by a supervisory committee led by an army general and including representatives from the ministries of defense and foreign affairs and from academia. A member of Spies's supervisory committee, Commander Sophie du Preez, also published a book based essentially on the same documentation. To my knowledge, these are the only two published accounts based on South African documents. (Both are available only in Afrikaans.)

In discussing why South Africa invaded Angola on 14 October, Spies and du Preez *do not mention Cuba* as a factor in South Africa's decision to invade. According to their accounts, *the Cubans did not figure at all* in South Africa's decision-making about Angola until November, more than two weeks after the South African invasion had begun on 14

October. Although Spies and du Preez may not tell the entire story, they would have no reason to hide or minimize South Africa's knowledge of the arrival of the Cuban military. (I avoid the word instructors to find common ground with Professor Dominguez, even though their mission was to serve as instructors and they did not participate in any combat until late October.) Nor would they have any reason to fail to mention any impact that Havana's actions had on the South African government. Further, none of the other important accounts of South Africa's policy in Angola in 1975-1976 refers to the Cubans as a motivation for South Africa's decision to invade.

As Professor Dominguez states, the Cubans had long been involved in Africa and their ties to the MPLA dated back a decade. However, the facts – as surprising and even uncomfortable as they might be – indicate clearly that the South Africans were not “unnerved” (to use Professor Dominguez's term) by the Cuban presence in Angola until early November, after their first clash southeast of Benguela on 2-3 November. This is not surprising. The Americans, too, did not become alarmed by the Cuban presence until November. South African policy toward Angola until November 1975 was not influenced by any Cuban actions. This includes the decision to invade on 14 October.

Thirty years ago, Garcia Marquez wrote a useful (and dramatic) account of the operation. We now have more sources that allow us to write a more accurate and, yes, more complex history of the sequence of events. The South Africans did not intervene because of the presence of the Cubans (whether we call them "instructors" or especialistas" or "military"). This was not a "classic action-reaction process of escalation." The South Africans – by their own authoritative accounts – intervened because the MPLA was winning the war.

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