Cold War Liberation

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From the Barrel of a Gun


On October 14, 1964, Nikita Khrushchev was ousted from his position by senior members of the Politburo, which was led by Leonid Brezhnev. The organizers of the palace coup—all of whom were Khrushchev’s protégés—were unhappy with his leadership style and his domestic and foreign policy. They criticized Khrushchev for trying to find accommodation with the United States, spoiling relations with communist leaders like Mao Zedong, Cuba’s Fidel Castro, and Romania’s Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej, and decried his nuclear brinkmanship during the Cuban Missile Crisis. Overall, the coup signified a conservative turn in Soviet foreign policy, with the new collective leadership initially adopting a more confrontational stance with the United States over the Vietnam War.¹

Most scholarly accounts have argued that Soviet policy in Africa became much more pragmatic and disinterested in revolution after Khrushchev’s departure.² Relying on new archival documents, this chapter demonstrates that rather than disengaging from Africa, Moscow in the mid-1960s redirected its energies to develop relations with the security and military services of its African allies. The mid-1960s saw a revision of Soviet foreign policy as a result of the “coup contagion,” which led to the downfall of the first generation of Africa’s post-independence leaders: Patrice Lumumba in Zaire (1960), Abbé Fulbert Youlou in Congo-Brazzaville (1963), Ben Bella in Algeria (1965), Kwame Nkrumah in Ghana (1966), and Modibo Keïta in Mali (1968). The Soviets believed they underestimated the role of armies and thus increasingly used supplies of arms and training to strengthen relations with key African allies, drawing the military and intelligence services into deeper involvement on the continent.

The chapter also shows how the Soviets became the key supplier of military equipment and training to Lusophone nationalist movements. By 1965, the Soviet Union would replace Czechoslovakia as the key provider of arms, cash, and training to the PAIGC—an alliance based on close personal connections
and ideological affinity between Cabral and his Soviet liaisons. Moscow also started providing arms and training to Neto’s MPLA. However, the extent of Soviet involvement would be limited due to the MPLA’s logistical problems after their expulsion from Zaire. The Soviet relationship with FRELIMO once again proved particularly complex. Although Moscow supplied arms and material support for the organization, the Soviets were continuously distrustful of president Mondlane. In 1966–1968, FRELIMO plunged into an internal crisis, culminating in Mondlane’s assassination in Dar es Salaam in 1969. The Soviet intelligence services closely followed FRELIMO’s rivalries through a variety of clandestine sources, eventually adopting a rather critical view of its leadership. Still, the Soviet military held high hopes that their training programs would win African revolutionaries over to their side. As the oral histories in this chapter will show, African soldiers saw Soviet military technology as a symbol of modernity and a practical tool of their own liberation.

As the anticolonial wars began, the strategy of guerrilla warfare also became a contested subject. In Guinea-Bissau, Cabral opted for a “cautious approach” toward military operations in order to limit casualties. The MPLA suffered from logistical and supply problems in eastern Angola and Cabinda, while FRELIMO’s guerrilla operations were hampered by an internal crisis. New evidence shows the Soviet military were frustrated by the lack of progress and, in the case of the MPLA, believed that Neto was not doing enough to forge broad political alliances. Thus, this chapter recovers the role of military strategy in understanding how the relationship between the Soviets and the Lusophone nationalist movements developed and evolved in the 1960s.

**Of Coups and the Military: Soviet Policy in Africa after Khrushchev**

The collective leadership that took over from Nikita Khrushchev was well aware that early Soviet optimism about a quick revolutionary transformation of the African continent was premature. In the late 1950s, Moscow believed that by following the “Soviet model of development” and benefiting from Soviet assistance and advice, newly independent African countries would achieve fast economic growth and move toward socialism. The unpublished “Polianskii report” that the collective leadership had prepared as a record of Khrushchev’s policy failings criticized his policy in Africa. Leaders like the Guinean president Sékou Touré, argued the report, reaped the benefits of Soviet aid but gave little in return. This did not mean scaling down commitments to revolutionary movements around
the world, but being more careful about choosing friends based on class and political affiliation.4

In practical terms, there were many continuities with the pre-Khrushchev period. The cadres at the International Department and its Africa desk—the head of department Boris Ponomarev, his deputy Rostislav Ulianovskii, the head of the Africa section Petr Manchkha, and Petr Evsiukov—all stayed at their posts. The International Department probably became even more prominent after Khrushchev’s departure since Brezhnev preferred a collegiate decision-making style and increasingly left each department to make decisions in their own domain. Once Khrushchev was ousted, the CC CPSU approved the construction of a large training facility for mainly African revolutionaries at the village of Perevalnoe in Crimea, Soviet Ukraine. In addition to Perevalnoe, the Soviets also continued to provide specialized military training at multiple locations, including at Skhodnia, near Moscow, as well military academies such as the naval academy at Poti, a seaport on the Black Sea in Georgia.5

Meanwhile, the “coup contagion” in Africa stimulated a discussion about policy implications. In consultations with his Czechoslovak colleagues in late April 1966, the Soviet deputy foreign minister Iakov Malik stated that the socialist countries faced a double bind. On the one hand, they had to overcome the general distrust of “whites” and the “flawed perception” that the world was divided into the “rich North” and “poor South.” On the other hand, they had to face the continuous assault of the “neocolonial and imperialist” forces, which exploited internal problems in newly independent states. Malik highlighted that Moscow would “no longer support the megalomania” of African leaders, but he also cautioned against being “overly pessimistic.” He argued that the socialist countries should become more attuned to what was happening with the army and police and continue cooperation, especially in the military sphere. His Czechoslovak colleagues agreed.6

The KGB shared a similar view. As KGB Chairman Vladimir Semichastnyi admitted to his Bulgarian counterparts on March 18, 1966, the security services had underestimated the value of clandestine work among the military forces in Africa. From then on, he continued, Africa should become a more important focus for the intelligence services.7 The Soviets believed the coups represented a temporary setback and that socialist countries should strengthen alliances with African military and the security services.8

Not all Soviet allies shared a similarly optimistic assessment. The situation in Africa became a hotly debated topic during the first coordination meeting of solidarity committees from the Warsaw Pact countries in June 1966. The
challenge came from the head of the Polish Solidarity Committee, Lucjan Wolniewicz, who questioned whether African countries would “ever join the socialist camp” since the Cold War enabled them to take advantage of both sides. He also lambasted the leaders of liberation movements based in Dar es Salaam for their “bourgeois lifestyle.” Dmitrii Dolidze of the Soviet Solidarity Committee pushed back. Although one could witness a “slowdown in revolutionary progress” in Africa, one could not generalize, and “progressive” organizations like the Angolan MPLA had a “big future.” While Wolniewicz’s skepticism made sense in view of Poland’s overall limited involvement in Africa in the 1960s, a number of Eastern European countries also started to move away from unaffordable commitments in the Third World.

One country seeking to limit the costs of involvement in Africa was Czechoslovakia. Although Prague was among the first to pursue an active Africa policy since the 1950s, by the mid-1960s, many among the bureaucracy were starting to reevaluate their commitments. The main reason was economic. While the economy grew at an impressive rate after World War II, Czechoslovakia experienced a significant downturn in the early 1960s and shortages of foreign cash. As a result, Czechoslovakia increasingly focused on ways to make a profit, especially on arms sales. In June 1968, at the peak of a period of the liberalizing reform known as the Prague Spring, the Ministry of Foreign Trade actually proposed far-reaching reforms aimed to place the Czechoslovak arms trade on sure economic footing free from political constraints.

The lively debates stimulated by the Prague Spring ended abruptly after the Warsaw Pact invaded Czechoslovakia to crack down on liberalization in August 1968. As Soviet tanks rolled into Prague, thousands of Czechoslovak citizens protested the invasion. Many Czechoslovak intelligence personnel supported the Prague Spring, and some defected from their posts following the intervention. In response, Czechoslovak authorities withdrew embassy staff for “debriefings” and momentarily reduced overseas commitments.

The intervention in Czechoslovakia was a public relations disaster with long-term consequences for the communist movement, but in Africa, official reactions were mixed. Mali’s Modibo Keïta voiced his support, while others—like the president of Congo-Brazzaville, Alphonse Massamba-Débat—maintained a calculated silence. Zambia’s Kenneth Kaunda and Tanzania’s Julius Nyerere openly condemned the invasion. In a private conversation with the Soviet ambassador to Guinea, Alexander Startsev, President Sékou Touré reacted to the justification for the invasion “with understanding.” Using the invasion as a point of comparison, Touré chastised the Soviet government for not doing more to
support the North Vietnamese and suggested the socialist countries dispatch troops to Vietnam to “end the imperialist war.”

The public reaction to events in Czechoslovakia was particularly dramatic in Tanzania. On August 23, TANU’s Youth League led anti-Soviet protests in Dar es Salaam, vandalizing the grounds of the Soviet embassy in the process. These events were indicative of growing Chinese influence in Tanzania, with militants in the Youth League finding inspiration in the “Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution.” In 1968, the Youth League spearheaded a number of policing campaigns, including “Operation Vijana,” which were designed to eliminate all signs of “imperialist behavior” and dress. Their practices elicited comparisons with the “Red Guards” of the Chinese Cultural Revolution.

Elsewhere in Africa though, the Cultural Revolution prevented Beijing from capitalizing on events in Czechoslovakia. While China had been an active player in Africa since the early 1960s, the Cultural Revolution ushered in a period of self-imposed diplomatic isolation, as Beijing recalled many of its ambassadors and scaled down overseas commitments. The Chinese also started to pursue more aggressive anti-Soviet tactics in the Third World, pressuring African liberation movements to break contact with Moscow. In response, the Soviets launched their own campaign to counter the Chinese, including in international forums. In 1965, attendees at the fourth AAPSO conference in Winneba, Ghana, agreed to hold the subsequent, fifth, conference in Beijing. The decision risked completely sidelining the Soviets from the AAPSO, and the Soviet Solidarity Committee mobilized its contacts to reverse the decision.

One such contact was Amilcar Cabral. At the meeting of the AAPSO Presidium in Nicosia, Cyprus, on March 15, 1967, Cabral was one of the delegates who successfully pushed for the motion to reverse the decision made at Winneba. The Nicosia meeting also purged the AAPSO of pro-Chinese liberation groups. In response, China de facto withdrew from the organization. Cabral’s role at Nicosia and his unwillingness to cease contact with Moscow angered the Chinese, and relations between the PAIGC and Beijing broke down.

China then proceeded to channel funds toward splinter organizations: FLING in Guinea-Bissau, UNITA in Angola, and COREMO in Mozambique. Only FRELIMO received Chinese support, mainly because of Mondlane’s close relationship with Tanzania’s Julius Nyerere, who continued to obtain substantial assistance from Beijing.

In January 1969, the AAPSO hosted an International Conference in Support of the Peoples of Portuguese Colonies and Southern Africa in Khartoum, Sudan. The Soviet Solidarity Committee, the primary sponsor of the event, hoped that
it would help revive the AAPSO after China’s withdrawal and improve Soviet public relations after the invasion of Czechoslovakia. Although countries like Zambia and Tanzania refused to participate, the conference still drew representatives from fifty-six countries and twelve international organizations. The conference also bolstered the prestige of the Soviet-backed liberation movements, including the MPLA, FRELIMO, and PAIGC, since they were declared the only “authentic” representatives of the liberation struggle in their respective countries.

On February 19, 1969, the deputy of the CC CPSU International Department, Rostislav Ulianovskii, spoke about his impressions of the conference to the Presidium of the Soviet Solidarity Committee. Ulianovskii argued the Vietnam War showed African revolutionaries that it was “impossible to defeat imperialist racism” without Soviet military assistance. He also pointed to positive developments in the liberation movements. In particular, leaders like Eduardo Mondlane and Agostinho Neto had come to understand the utility of scientific socialism and the value of the Soviet approach to questions of ethnicity and race. Thus, the conference demonstrated that Soviet influence in Africa had increased.

By the late 1960s, the Soviets believed they had managed to restore their prestige in the Third World. The collective leadership that took over from Khrushchev shared much of the same commitment to proletarian internationalism, and there was no bureaucratic overhaul, ensuring many continuities. The Soviets continued to be preoccupied with challenges on the “right” and “left,” especially those emanating from China. The most significant change involved the reevaluation of the importance of African army and security services. Starting from the mid-1960s, the Soviets sought to strengthen their alliances with African allies by providing weapons and military training. The discussion below will explore the dynamics of military cooperation with the PAIGC, MPLA, and FRELIMO.

The War Begins: Czechoslovak Advisers and Soviet Instructors for Cabral’s Guerrillas

On January 23, 1963, the PAIGC launched its armed struggle by attacking the Portuguese garrison at Tite, in southern Guinea-Bissau. The official PAIGC narrative, now firmly rooted in the literature, credits the PAIGC leadership with preplanning the attacks. Among the small group that was involved in the attacks was Dauda Bangura. He was an early convert to the nationalist cause whilst working as a mason in Bissau, and part of the first group to go to China for military training in 1960 before being dispatched to mobilize the population in the southern
Guinea-Bissau province of Tombali (see map 5.1). In my interview with him in 2019 Bangura claimed that the order to fire the “first shots” did not come from the PAIGC in Conakry; the decision was instead taken on the local group’s own initiative. Once Cabral heard about the operation, Bangura recalled, he authorized the beginning of guerrilla war. In a detailed study of Cabral’s correspondence, Julião Soares Sousa confirms Bangura’s account. The attacks on Tite were not planned, and Cabral was not even present in Conakry at that time.

Nonetheless, preparations for armed action had been ongoing since 1961, with Czechoslovakia the one actor that was actively involved. In 1961, the StB decided to support Cabral’s bid for dominance over the nationalist movement. Some of the measures included the StB helping the PAIGC design and spread anti-war propaganda among the Portuguese garrisons, assisting in infiltrating one of its Senegal-based rivals, and shipping arms to Conakry. However, in December 1961, the Guinean authorities detained a shipment of Czechoslovak arms, and thus, no armed action was possible—a cause of growing concern for Prague. During a conversation with Cabral on October 13, 1961, his new StB contact in Conakry, code name “Václavie,” pressed Cabral to engage in “acts of sabotage” in Guinea-Bissau in order to gain access to Portuguese weapons, positively influence
world opinion, and show the Guinean authorities that the party could still obtain matériel without their permission. The StB also feared the PAIGC could lose momentum in competition with local rivals if they further delayed hostilities.

Cabral disagreed. He argued that “sabotage” could only alarm the Portuguese, pushing them to reinforce their military presence, which would make it harder to launch guerrilla action. Instead, Cabral insisted that he engage in diplomacy to find an alternative route for weapons via Algeria or Morocco. In the end, both sides agreed that Cabral would draft an “action plan” in order to proceed with the new, active stage of armed action.25

When Cabral secured a route to smuggle arms via Morocco in December 1962, the StB decided to deliver another shipment of weapons. The new load of Czechoslovak arms was signposted for “Operation BETA,” which involved 150 men attacking a Portuguese military post at Bedanda. The StB also dispatched a military expert, Major František Polda, who was to provide logistical advice on the ground.26 While Operation BETA was later canceled, Czechoslovak weapons clandestinely reached Conakry via Morocco. One shipment contained thirty-two machine guns, 100 pistols, hand-held grenades, and ammunition.27 The machine guns would be distributed among the first recruits who joined the PAIGC.

One of those young recruits was Sae Breia Na Nhakpba. He was twenty years old in December 1961 when PAIGC guerrillas came to his village to mobilize people. Among them was Domingos Ramos, a charismatic commander who apparently convinced the villagers to join the struggle. In most cases, the process involved moving the whole village to the bush under the control of the guerrillas. Young people would be organized to patrol villages, make shelters, and recruit others while simultaneously receiving basic military and political instruction from more experienced combatants. Sae Breia recalled that by the end of 1962, he had received his first patchanga (machine gun). Armed with the new weapon, he would patrol the villages and talk to people, convincing them to join the fight. The message was for Africans to follow the example of Guinea and take back their land from the colonizers. The weapons served as “encouragement” to show that they had the means to fight the Portuguese army.28 This example is not to say that the process of mobilization was always voluntary, and at least some young people joined the struggle to protect their families from guerrillas.29

Once armed attacks against the Portuguese began in January 1963, the rebellion quickly spread. The center of the uprising was southern Tombali province. The province bordered on Guinea, and Cabral’s guerrillas had reasonably easy access to Tombali by land and sea. Another advantage was the province’s lush,
subtropical climate, which meant dense vegetation provided cover for guerrillas in hit-and-run attacks. By the end of the year, the Portuguese minister of defense General Manuel Gomes de Araújo confessed that the PAIGC had gained control over a significant portion of Guinea-Bissau.\(^{30}\)

In early 1964, the guerrillas mounted a concerted resistance against a large-scale Portuguese operation to retain control over the island of Como. The fight over the rice-growing marshy island in southern Guinea-Bissau saw the Portuguese deploy 3,000 ground troops to the island, backed by aerial support. Both sides suffered casualties, and the Portuguese eventually withdrew, having lost the support of the local population. The PAIGC declared Como a “liberated area,” which was a significant psychological victory since it showed the insurgency could not be easily crushed.\(^{31}\)

While the battle over Como was in full swing, Cabral faced a major challenge to his authority. By 1964, reports had emerged that many regional military commanders were abusing the civilian population for personal gain. Although the PAIGC stood for a modernizing platform, these regional commanders often used deep-set beliefs to attack local rivals. Witchcraft was a common charge, and people accused of being *fusuru* (sorcerers) could be attacked or killed, especially since these were often accompanied by accusations of espionage and betrayal. Some guerrillas used their status to take away girls and women and subject them to sexual violence.\(^{32}\) Another problem emerged when some local commanders refused orders from Conakry to extend the war into the Fula-dominated Gabú region of eastern Guinea-Bissau.\(^{33}\) To resolve these issues, Cabral called an all-party meeting at Cassaca in February 1964.

The so-called Cassaca Congress became a turning point in the history of the PAIGC. Insubordinate military commanders were ordered to attend, and those who refused were arrested and imprisoned. Some were allegedly executed. The Congress also pledged to establish a network of essential social services for the civilian population—basic health facilities, “people’s stores,” and bush schools—in order to harness support from the population and effect socio-cultural transformation in the countryside. Another set of measures included putting the guerrillas under centralized control. Cabral set up the *Conselho de Guerra* (War Council), which would supervise all military operations. The Congress also approved the establishment of a regular armed force, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of the People (FARP; *Forças Armadas Revolucionárias do Povo*).\(^{34}\) To support the decisions taken at Cassaca, on May 26, 1964, Cabral appealed directly to Nikita Khrushchev, asking for “urgent assistance” in terms of matériel, goods, and large-scale training to support a “new stage” in the liberation struggle.\(^{35}\)
After the Cassaca Congress, Czechoslovakia remained important to the PAIGC. One role it played was advisory. In September 1964, Czechoslovakia dispatched an StB officer, František Polda (codename “Peták”), to counsel Cabral in Conakry. Polda’s task was to organize the FARP general staff and train recruits, especially in intelligence and security matters. Naturally, he would report back on his conversations with Cabral and share his opinions about the military situation and political developments in the organization. He was also to provide advice on operations. Polda was actually well known as Cabral’s adviser at PAIGC headquarters in Conakry and often instructed groups of young recruits.

As the anticolonial war unfolded, the Czechoslovak Ministry of the Interior increasingly took on the role of providing security and intelligence training for Cabral’s guerrillas. In August 1961, eleven men arrived for training at the Felix Dzerzhinsky Central School (Ústřední Škola Felixe Edmundoviče Dzeržinského) in Prague to receive generalized instruction in “guerrilla warfare” and “sabotage.” From 1963 onwards, though, Prague would offer training solely in security and counterintelligence. Czechoslovak instructors taught the recruitment of agents and collaborators, operative techniques like wiretapping, the basics of investigation and interrogation, and the fundamentals of criminalistics. The graduate of the 1963 course, Otto Schacht, soon became the head of PAIGC security.

While Prague offered instruction in intelligence and security, the Soviets started training the bulk of the armed force, the FARP. The first group of recruits from Guinea-Bissau arrived in June 1964 for a six-month training course in Leningrad. However, it was only after the construction of specialized facilities at Perevalnoe in 1965 that the Soviet training program for the PAIGC—and other African liberation movements, including the MPLA and FRELIMO—truly expanded. While early courses could accommodate no more than several dozen men from each organization, Perevalnoe was a large training facility that could host several hundred men at the same time. Its secluded location off the main road between Simferopol, the capital of Crimea, and Alushta, a famous vacation destination on the Black Sea, was to protect the guerrillas’ identities and limit unsupervised contact with the local population. Other measures included flying recruits to Simferopol with several transit stops and driving them to the school on a special bus with drawn curtains.

Outside of the extra secrecy, Perevalnoe functioned like a regular Soviet military school. Trainees’ daily lives were governed by the strict rules of military discipline and hierarchy. They woke up at a specific time, marched to the
canteen in a military formation, and observed rank. Soviet instructors (many of them World War II veterans) delivered training under three principal specializations: artillery, mines and explosives, and anti-aircraft defense. The leadership of the liberation movements selected trainees for particular specializations and reviewed performance reports. Those in anti-aircraft defense initially practiced how to operate Soviet heavy machine guns (KPVT and DShK) designed to hit low-flying targets—Portuguese aircraft—at close range. Military training became closely tied to the provision of Soviet arms since new systems would have to be first introduced to by guerrillas at Perevalnoe.

Soviet instructors also devoted much time to so-called “political training.” These involved informal “cultural events” ranging from outings to popular tourist sites and model communal farms to film screenings. The formal political training classes included an introduction to Marxism-Leninism, the history of slavery and colonialism in Africa, and discussions of current events. In many internal reports, Soviet instructors heralded the political training program as a success, reporting that exposure to the combination of discussions and sightseeing tours convinced the cadets of the benefits of the socialist system.

Memoirs show that at least some Soviet instructors believed in the transformational impact of training programs on the cadets. One political instructor who arrived at Perevalnoe in 1966, Iurii Gorbunov, wrote that he witnessed how training in the USSR turned the cadets, often “shy and illiterate people,” into men who became convinced of the “righteousness of their struggle.” Overall, Gorbunov’s memoirs are tinged with a certain paternalism toward common soldiers, also evident in other similar recollections.

It is difficult to evaluate whether military training in the USSR actually had such a significant impact on the trainees, as Gorbunov suggests. Sae Breia was among the first group of twenty-five recruits to go for military training in the USSR in June 1964. He recalled that the time he spent in Leningrad was transformative because what they learned about slavery and the Russian Revolution made them angry and even more convinced they should fight the Portuguese. Some trainees from Guinea-Bissau also seemed impressed by the Soviet system of communal farming. The screenings of World War II films, with their stories of personal sacrifice—showcasing the role of the USSR in the defeat of Nazism—were also memorable for many cadets.

At the same time, the majority of the trainees at Perevalnoe had already shared ideas about social justice they derived through their own experiences and peer-to-peer teaching at “centers for revolutionary instruction” established by the PAIGC in Guinea-Bissau. When those men arrived at Perevalnoe, many saw their
classes as a continuation of their studies. To some, staying at Perevalnoe was revelatory in other ways. The Cape Verdean João Pereira Silva arrived at Perevalnoe in 1971. As he recalled in 2017 his experiences in Perevalnoe exposed to him hierarchies inherent in the Soviet system. Still, he argued that training forged group solidarity through discipline, thus bridging regional divides. Although trainees’ experiences of Perevalnoe differed depending on their prior experience, level of education and pre-conceived ideas, the majority appreciated the skills they acquired, which they could put to use upon their return to Guinea-Bissau.

The extent of Czechoslovakia’s involvement with the PAIGC during the early stages of armed struggle was extraordinary. Prague was the first to offer a comprehensive assistance package to the PAIGC and, as we know now, pushed Cabral to proceed with “acts of sabotage” to maintain dominance over its local rivals. Nonetheless, Cabral resisted StB’s “advice,” and it is clear that the initiative for armed action came from local activists rather than being dictated from abroad. As the war progressed, Perevalnoe increasingly became a critical contact zone for interaction between African revolutionaries and their Soviet instructors. Nevertheless, the Czechoslovaks retained a vital function as the providers
of security and intelligence training. Moscow and Prague hoped that arms and training would allow the FARP to put mounting pressure on the Portuguese to negotiate. However, the prospect of a quick military breakthrough would prove fleeting.

Enter Cuba: Fidel Castro, Amílcar Cabral, and the Debates over Military Strategy in Guinea-Bissau

The years following the Cassaca Congress were exceptionally fortuitous for the guerrillas in Guinea-Bissau. Having secured training and military support from the Soviet Union and Czechoslovakia, in 1965, Cabral planned to move to a new stage of the war to eliminate Portuguese fortified posts. The leadership had also decided to start armed struggle on the Cape Verde archipelago. As Cabral conveyed to Czechoslovak Minister of the Interior Josef Kudrňa during a visit to Prague in May 1965, he had decided to expand operations across the whole country and start liquidating the garrisons. Prague believed that prospects of a breakthrough were good and allocated $1.85 million worth of arms to the PAIGC in 1965. The Soviets also contributed additional arms to support the plan.

Cabral also obtained support from Cuba. In late 1963, the Argentinean-born revolutionary Ernesto “Che” Guevara visited Conakry as part of his Africa tour to find volunteers to join the Simba rebellion in Zaire. Although Guevara failed to convince Cabral to support his venture, he was impressed with the PAIGC. Back in Havana, Guevara pressed the Cuban leader Fidel Castro to provide military training for Cabral’s men, especially Cape Verdeans, since he believed conditions for armed struggle in the archipelago were good. Castro agreed. In July 1965, a handful of Cape Verdeans journeyed to Cuba for military training.

Guevara’s trip to Conakry set the stage for Cabral’s first trip to Havana to participate in the Tricontinental Conference and the founding of the Organization of Solidarity with the People of Asia, Africa and Latin America in January 1966. At the conference, Cabral made a passionate speech on revolution in Africa, emphasizing the role of the “petite bourgeoisie” as the vanguard in the national struggle. The speech impressed Castro, and after several days of conversations with Cabral and a trip to the Escambray mountains, the Cuban leader pledged to send military experts who would provide support for FARP. Cuba also provided goods—sugar, cigars, uniforms, and transport vehicles. As Cabral’s right-hand man Aristides Pereira recalled, donations from the socialist
countries would contribute to the PAIGC’s internal economy, as they would sell excesses of goods like Cuban sugar and Soviet diesel in Guinea for cash.57

Although the FARP had become much better equipped and supplied than at the beginning of the war, by 1967, it became clear there would be no easy victory against the Portuguese. The PAIGC faced a particular problem in expanding its operations in the Gabú region in Eastern Guinea-Bissau. One reason for these difficulties was that the region was dominated by the Fula. While the Balanta generally provided the bedrock of support for the PAIGC in the south, the Fula were often resistant to the nationalist drive, and many had been co-opted to serve in the Portuguese army. The Fula saw the Portuguese had much more advanced weapons than the PAIGC, recalled Dauda Bangura, and thus did not believe it would be possible to defeat the colonial power.58

The Portuguese counter-insurgency strategy compounded these difficulties. When the first attacks began, the Portuguese launched a major propaganda campaign in the east, urging the local Fula population to flee to so-called “protected villages.” When the war escalated in 1966, the majority of the population fled to such villages near Portuguese posts at Madina de Boé and Beli. In the eastern Gabú region, the guerrillas thus could not rely on the local population to provide food or shelter and often faced shortages of basic necessities.59

Much of FARP activity in Gabú focused on the Portuguese post at Madina do Boé. Located close to the border with Guinea, the fort blocked the guerrillas’ access to the eastern hinterland. When the PAIGC launched a major attack against Madina do Boé on November 11, 1966, the operation failed tragically, resulting in multiple casualties. Cabral was particularly distraught by the death of Domingos Ramos, who was hit by a mortar shell during the failed operation. Ramos was a charismatic leader and an effective mobilizer who became the commander of the eastern front after the Cassaca Congress. He was also Cabral’s close friend.60

The disaster at Madina do Boé made Cabral rethink his military strategy. As he informed the head of the Africa desk at the StB, Josef Janouš, on February 13, 1967, the operations in the Gabú region would continue, but these would have to be much more carefully planned to avoid significant losses. He also shared his objections to Cuba’s advice to launch a number of large-scale operations, including an attack on the capital, Bissau, since these could lead to significant loss of life, which would be demoralizing and harmful to the movement’s prestige.61

While Cabral preferred a war of attrition to avoid high casualties, the Cubans argued in favor of more extensive operations. However, as Piero Gleijeses has noted, the Cubans never tried to impose their opinions on Cabral, who possessed ultimate authority on military strategy.62
New documents show that the Soviets and Czechoslovaks were also concerned about the lack of military progress in Guinea-Bissau. In November 1966, the Soviets and their Czechoslovak counterparts gathered to discuss the war in Guinea-Bissau. They acknowledged that the guerrillas’ morale was low, and their military reconnaissance was lacking. As a result, the operations resembled a “war game” rather than an actual “armed struggle.” The solution was to “work out a strategic and tactical plan” for the PAIGC in consultation with the Cubans and then “choose and teach a few qualified men” who could carry it out.\(^{63}\)

Although the full details of the plan are unclear, the Czechoslovak adviser František Polda believed FARP should be organized into larger military units capable of “preplanned” military operations. His Cuban interlocutors in Conakry agreed.\(^{64}\) During a conversation with Cabral and Aristides Pereira in Conakry on March 5, 1967, Polda stressed that by establishing larger military units, the FARP would be able to destroy the Portuguese forts and ultimately win the war. Cabral pushed back, arguing that the commanders did not yet have the proper training.\(^{65}\)

Polda remained wedded to his advice, Cabral’s opposition notwithstanding. On February 8, 1968, he pressed Cabral to intensify ongoing attacks at Madina do Boé. Cabral again argued for caution since the FARP lacked anti-aerial defense and feared retaliatory bombings; he hoped that the new 122mm mortars he had obtained from the USSR would lead to a breakthrough. In a tense exchange, Polda countered that the liberation struggle increasingly resembled a “war game,” to which Cabral replied that was precisely part of the “psychological warfare” to put pressure on the Portuguese. In a clear sign of disagreement, Polda responded that history would judge Cabral as a “great political strategist” but a “poor military commander.”\(^{66}\)

In 1968, a group of thirty Cape Verdean recruits arrived for advanced weapons training in Skhodnia, near Moscow. The majority of the men in the group—Pedro Pires, Silvino da Luz, Olívio Pires, Osvaldo Lopes da Silva, Antonio Leite, and Júlio de Carvalho, among others—had arrived in Moscow from Cuba, where they had been undergoing training for a clandestine mission to launch an armed struggle in Cape Verde. However, in 1967, the plan was abandoned because the leadership decided it was high risk.\(^{67}\) In Cuba, military preparation involved “basic guerrilla training,” while in Skhodnia, the group learned to operate advanced artillery, including 120mm mortars. Once they returned to Guinea-Bissau, the Cape Verdians were deployed in the mortar units that engaged in attacks against Madina do Boé. The FARP finally seized the fort in February 1969.\(^{68}\)
Unlike trainees at Perevalnoe, who were subject to strict military discipline and political instruction, the Cape Verdeans enjoyed a sense of political autonomy at Skhodnia, opting out of compulsory political classes. In fact, the group included men of varied persuasions. Júlio de Carvalho recalled he was inspired by the Cuban Revolution. Silvino da Luz was influenced by the Chinese model of peasant-based revolt during their time in training. However, most seemed to share an appreciation of Soviet military technology. Pedro Pires, the head of the group, recalled with hindsight: “Every guerrilla, from South America to Africa, passing through Asia, used this weapon. The great weapon of the guerrillas was the automatic machine gun AK of the Kalashnikov [AK-47]. That is the great contribution of the Soviet Union to the national liberation struggles.”

Meanwhile, Cabral continued to seek additional advanced weapons from the Soviet Union. Petr Esviukov recollected that the GRU’s chief Petr Ivashutin acted as a champion of Cabral’s struggle. In his memoirs, he described at least one occasion when Cabral came to Moscow with his second wife, Anna Maria, with a request for additional heavy weapons. Ivashutin believed the Soviets should help, but the minister of defense, Marshal Andrei Grechko, rejected his request. Ivashutin and Esviukov thus agreed that the former would introduce Cabral and Anna Maria to Grechko at a state reception, hoping a personal interaction would reverse the decision. The plan succeeded. Esviukov recalled that Grechko was quite “excited” and in a “good mood” during the state reception. He greeted Cabral in a friendly way and promised to approve his request for arms. Although Esviukov does not provide a date, the anecdote shows that by the late 1960s, the Soviet Military and the GRU were heavily involved with the PAIGC.

It is more challenging to determine Soviet views about Cabral’s military strategy. Osvaldo Lopes da Silva became an artillery commander on the eastern front after finishing military training in the USSR in 1969. In an interview from 2017, he argued that the Soviets were always more “in tune with us than the Cubans,” advising them to “proceed with your own strength.” However, some archival documents indicate the Soviet military and GRU were also critical of the lack of military progress. In August 1969, Aleksandr Predvechnov (most likely of the GRU) relied on Cuban assessments to claim that “so-called liberated areas” were little more than hard-to-reach, swampy, or forested parts of Guinea-Bissau with “minimal importance.” Predvechnov also criticized Cabral’s strategy of relying too much on acquiring advanced weapons from the USSR to boost morale. Instead, he advised that FARP should focus on carrying out a number of “significant operations” to destroy Portuguese garrisons after
acquiring new heavy weapons from the USSR. Such a strategy would allow the PAIGC to launch a “realistic propaganda campaign” to strengthen confidence and boost morale.74

The new weapons that Predvechnov referred to was Grad-P (Partisan), a system that the Soviets made available to the FARP in 1969. A lightweight version of the BM-21 “Grad” weapons system, Grad-P was developed in the 1960s for the North Vietnamese where it was known as 122mm DKZ-B rocket launcher. The weapon soon became a popular means of guerrilla warfare because of its transportability and ability to withstand humid conditions. The offer of Grad-P was significant, since unlike the heavy machine guns from World War II that had dominated Soviet deliveries before that, Grad-P could be operated individually and was lighter than a mortar. In 1969, a group of recruits went to Perevalnoe to train how to operate Grad-P.75

To sum up, the lack of military progress in Guinea-Bissau led to the emergence of debates over military strategy. Cabral was well aware that the guerrillas might have claimed vast “liberated areas,” but the Portuguese still commanded the skies. He thus wanted to move cautiously and continuously pushed the Soviets to provide additional weapons systems, including anti-aerial defense. It is not fully clear how the Soviets evaluated such a strategy, but there are indications that Prague, Moscow, and Havana shared similar criticisms of Cabral’s tactics. In 1968, Polda was recalled to Prague. While it is unclear whether this move was connected to the Prague Spring or any disagreements with Cabral, debates about military strategy would continue. In the meantime, similar conversations about military strategy in Angola would emerge in the mid-1960s.

Searching for Alternatives: The MPLA and Guerrilla War in Cabinda and Southeast Angola, 1964–1970

Back in west-central Africa, the MPLA faced tremendous logistical challenges in starting military operations in Angola. Having lost access to Zaire in 1964, Neto and his followers crossed the Zaire River from Léopoldville to the neighboring Congo-Brazzaville. From their new base in Brazzaville, the MPLA had three main options. One included starting guerrilla operations in Cabinda, an Angolan enclave that bordered on Congo-Brazzaville. The party could also smuggle men and weapons across Zaire to northern Angola, but it was a treacherous path where the guerrillas risked capture by Mobutu’s troops. The final possibility involved moving the center of operations to southeast Angola. The MPLA tried all the three options with varying degrees of success.
After the move to Brazzaville, Agostinho Neto first attempted to start operations in Cabinda with Cuban support. The relationship between the MPLA and Cuba was forged after Che Guevara’s talks with Neto in early 1965 in Brazzaville. The Cubans provided protection for Massamba-Débat’s government in Congo-Brazzaville and also advised Neto on military strategy. In May 1965, after the first Cuban advisers arrived in Brazzaville, MPLA guerrillas ventured across the border to Cabinda and engaged in minor hit-and-run skirmishes with the Portuguese patrols. As was the case in Guinea-Bissau, the MPLA leadership disagreed with the Cuban advisers about the need to launch larger-scale operations to attack Portuguese forts. One such MPLA-Cuban operation, entitled “Operation Macaco,” involved a plan to engage about one hundred guerrillas and a few pieces of 75mm artillery in an attack on the Portuguese fort of Sanga Planicie in northeast Cabinda. The MPLA did not want to proceed, arguing that the proposed size of the unit was too large and the operation too risky. The Cubans insisted. However, only two days after entering Cabinda, the Portuguese ambushed the column, causing the guerrillas to disperse in a panic.

Neto was also keen to restart operations in northern Angola—the heartland of the rebellion in 1961. However, that involved trekking almost 400km through thick jungle and across Zairean territory. What was even more perilous than the journey itself was the attitude of the Zairean authorities. In November 1965, the powerful chief of the Zairean army, Colonel Joseph Désiré Mobutu seized power in a bloodless coup d’etat. While Mobutu’s predecessor, Moïse Tshombe, was hostile to Roberto as he collaborated with white minority regimes to crush the Simba rebellion, Mobutu ramped up support for the FNLA. That involved denying the MPLA access to northern Angola via Zaire.

In 1966–67, the MPLA dispatched three expeditions of about 100 men each to northern Angola via Zaire, but only the first expedition reached its destination. The others were apprehended by the Zairean authorities, arrested, and imprisoned. Many of those men and women were never seen again. By June 1967, the MPLA had run out of weapons and realized the futility of the enterprise. The Cubans, who provided the training for the columns, ended their support for the MPLA in June 1967. Havana claimed their mission in Congo-Brazzaville was over, but there was clearly no love lost between the two sides. Fidel Castro was critical of the MPLA’s performance, while Neto resented the Cubans’ attempts to take charge of operations in Cabinda.

Starting in 1966, the MPLA began to infiltrate southeast Angola from a new base in Zambia. Bordering Angola to the west, Tanzania to the east, and Southern Rhodesia (Zimbabwe) to the south, Zambia had become independent on
October 24, 1964. Zambia’s first president, Kenneth Kaunda, was initially reluctant to allow liberation movements to operate from Zambia since the country was landlocked and relied on neighboring Southern Rhodesia to transport its copper. However, things changed after November 11, 1965, when Southern Rhodesia announced a Unilateral Declaration of Independence (UDI) to preserve white minority rule. In opposition to the UDI, Kaunda allowed liberation movements to open offices in Zambian territory. In early 1966, the MPLA started transferring recruits from Congo-Brazzaville to Zambia to prepare for a campaign in southeast Angola.

The MPLA faced significant challenges when trying to launch an armed struggle in southeast Angola. Most weapons for the liberation movements in Eastern Africa arrived at the port of Dar es Salaam in Tanzania. Then, they had to be transported on a long journey to Zambia. Moreover, Zambia initially refused to allow arms that were transported from Tanzania. Beyond the logistical challenges, Jonas Savimbi’s UNITA had reemerged as a rival to the MPLA in southeast Angola. Savimbi was an Ovimbundu, an ethnic group that dominated southeast Angola. He and his organization, UNITA, thus gained local followers and support from the Zambian authorities. As the MPLA’s representative in Lusaka, Anibal de Melo, complained to Soviet ambassador Sergei Slipchenko, the Zambian authorities wanted to strengthen UNITA, presenting it as the most effective liberation movement in southeast Angola. Only in October 1966 did Lusaka lift an unofficial ban over the movement of men and arms across the Zambia-Tanzania border. According to Slipchenko, Kaunda reacted against the Portuguese soldiers launching a cross-border raid across the Angola-Zambia border yet remained reluctant to support the liberation movements wholeheartedly.

The Soviets were initially quite optimistic about the MPLA’s prospects. Soviet financial assistance jumped from $50,000 in 1963 to $100,000 in 1965, and Moscow began providing the MPLA with weapons. In a conversation with the Polish delegation on the sidelines of the Twenty-Third Congress of the CPSU on April 2, 1966, Petr Manchkhara argued that Neto was a “doctor and a Communist” who commanded authority among the “progressive forces” in Africa. He confirmed that Moscow had fulfilled “all of the MPLA’s requests” for assistance which included, uniforms, medicine, equipment for the printing press, hospital equipment, cash, and arms via Dar es Salaam. In 1966, financial assistance to the MPLA increased to $145,000. Soviet journalists also started to support the MPLA’s effort to construct its image as the only liberation movement dedicated to armed struggle in Angola.
In 1965, Mikhail Domogatskhikh, a journalist with the Soviet daily *Pravda*, traveled to Cabinda, accompanied by MPLA guerrillas. He came back with field notes that he published in a series of articles in *Pravda* between May and June 1965. He was followed by Tomas Kolesnichenko, one of *Pravda*’s leading foreign correspondents, known for his lively writing style and flair for adventure. In early 1966, Kolesnichenko published a series of reports for *Pravda*, in which he depicted scenes from the “liberated areas” and featured conversations with popular guerrilla commanders, like the MPLA’s Hoji Ya Henda. These romanticized reports from the “liberated areas” served several purposes. They helped the liberation movements construct heroic metanarratives of anticolonial struggle for international consumption. By invoking the struggle for justice and socialism in faraway lands, they were also meant to validate the socialist experiment and increase the prestige of the Soviet Union.84

The journalist who became the most frequent Soviet reporter on anticolonial struggles in the Portuguese colonies was Oleg Ignatev, who also worked for *Pravda*. Ignatev’s interest in Guinea-Bissau in particular was shaped by a close personal relationship that he developed with Amílcar Cabral, whom he first met in November 1965. Upon Cabral’s suggestion, Ignatev ventured to Guinea-Bissau for the first time the following year. He became a regular visitor to Guinea-Bissau, returning in 1968 to shoot a film about the PAIGC, followed by trips in 1970 and 1973. Ignatev also went to Angola and Mozambique and would often serve as a go-between for the leadership of the liberation movements and Soviet officials, providing firsthand information about developments on the ground.85

Although the MPLA was lauded in the press, the Soviets became increasingly critical about the lack of military progress in Angola. The Soviet embassy in Congo-Brazzaville argued in February 1967 that the MPLA had failed to win over the local population in Cabinda since the majority of guerrillas had come from around Luanda and northern Angola. As a result, the Portuguese managed to co-opt Alexander Taty, a former member of Roberto’s FNLA and a Cabinda native who had organized the local people to resist the MPLA. Since the MPLA had moved its center of operations to southeast Angola, only 250 guerrillas remained active in Cabinda, mainly engaging in hit-and-run attacks across the border from Congo-Brazzaville.86

The Soviet embassy in Tanzania also criticized the MPLA for a lack of political work among the population in southeast Angola. In particular, the movement needed to develop “clear and attractive slogans” to pull different groups, especially the peasantry, into fighting the Portuguese. The MPLA’s famous
rallying cry, “Vitória ou Morte!” (Victory or Death!) simply was not enough to gain support among the local population. The people needed to have a clear understanding of the benefits of independence. As for military operations, the embassy acknowledged the logistical problems of moving guerrillas and weapons via Zambia. The MPLA had experienced leaders and organizers who were united around Neto, the embassy continued, but military operations were still scattered. There was little coordination of military operations and no radio contact between small groups of guerrillas.87

It is not clear where the embassies obtained information about military developments. For the most part, the Soviets had to rely on conversations with different MPLA representatives and, most likely, Cubans who were closely involved in guerrilla operations. In general, access to what the Soviets termed “reliable information” about military progress would become an important issue for Moscow and would often determine the level of assistance. In late 1966, Zambia’s permission to transfer arms across the border opened up new opportunities for the anticolonial campaign in southeast Angola.
In early 1967, an intradepartmental Soviet team set off for Congo-Brazzaville, Zambia, and Tanzania to investigate the situation on the ground. The mission included: Genadii Fomin, the head of the Third African Department at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs; Vadim Kirpichenko, the head of the Africa desk at the KGB’s First Directorate; and Petr Evsiukov and Petr Manchkha from the International Department. Kirpichenko recalled that their primary focus was Angola, and their task was to “find anybody” who had firsthand evidence of military operations. Apparently, at the MPLA’s main base at Dolisie in Congo-Brazzaville, they met a Soviet doctor who confirmed that guerrillas had been arriving at the hospital on a daily basis. Kirpichenko also recalled that Neto made a good impression since he did not exaggerate the MPLA’s achievements and had realistic expectations of Soviet assistance.

The trip was, in many ways, a turning point because it confirmed that the MPLA was actively engaged in armed struggle. As Fomin shared with the GDR’s consul at Dar es Salaam, Gottfried Lessing, the Soviet delegation was impressed by the “unity and political clarity” of the MPLA’s leaders. In addition, the opening of the new route for weapons to reach Angola through Tanzania and Zambia created possibilities for increasing pressure on the Portuguese in southeast Angola. As Petr Evsiukov recalled, the Politburo decided to provide “all-around support to the militant nationalists in Portuguese colonies” following the trip.

In 1968, the bulk of MPLA cadres and their families would be airlifted from Congo-Brazzaville to Tanzania on Soviet planes.

However, Soviet relations with Neto soon grew strained. Starting in 1965, Neto started receiving assistance from Yugoslavia, which he preferred to the countries of the Eastern Bloc because of its nonaligned status. Yugoslav assistance was modest at first, but in January 1968, Belgrade decided to increase its financial contribution to $15,000 and started shipping arms for the MPLA. In October 1968, Neto met the Yugoslav leader Josip Broz Tito. The two discussed military strategy in Angola, and Tito strongly criticized the Soviet intervention in Czechoslovakia. Initially, the Soviets did not seem to have a problem with Neto’s relationship with Tito. However, when Neto continued his connection to Belgrade even after Yugoslavia openly criticized the Soviets for the invasion, Moscow allegedly suspended assistance to the MPLA. As Jovan Čavoški has discovered, the Yugoslavs stepped up their support in response, providing more than $270,000 in aid, including arms, medicine, and cash.

Relations with Neto in 1969 indeed appeared rocky. When the MPLA’s Aníbal de Melo met Ambassador Slipchenko in Lusaka on September 4, 1969, he shared his frustration about his recent trip to Moscow. While meetings at the
CC CPSU were generally friendly, Melo said that he and Neto were “shocked and surprised” about the attitudes of the two Soviet military experts who first “interrogated” them about the progress of guerrilla warfare in Angola and, in the end, made accusations that the MPLA did not have any active military operations, despite extensive Soviet assistance. Melo also insisted that the Soviets were also misinformed about the activities of UNITA and Jonas Savimbi, who had “betrayed the MPLA.” Slipchenko, in turn, reassured Melo that the Soviets had not “turned away” from the MPLA but instead wanted to make sure they understood the scope of military operations to provide adequate assistance and advice.93

Neto and Melo were right to detect the Soviets’ frustration with the lack of military progress in Angola. In a note for the CC CPSU from June 1970, the KGB made a scathing critique of the MPLA’s progress in southeast Angola, arguing that the efficacy of armed action had decreased. The MPLA’s leadership had “underestimated the value of underground work” in big cities like Luanda, and they had no clandestine cells in urban areas. The MPLA was further hindered by “tribal” tendencies in southeast Angola, which were exacerbated by arbitrary attitudes toward the local population. The KGB also argued the MPLA leadership was wrong to avoid any contact with Savimbi, who had acquired substantial support in the southeast.94 In effect, the Soviet evaluation of progress in southeast Angola mirrored their view of what the Cubans believed went wrong in Cabinda: the MPLA had failed to mobilize the people because they did not have an appropriate strategy. As a result, the MPLA was losing out to its local rivals.

Soviet relations with the MPLA at least partly revolved around disagreements over military strategy. Although we do not know how often the Soviets consulted with the Cubans, their general assessments of Neto’s military strategy in Cabinda were similarly critical. The Soviets believed that the MPLA was not doing enough to embed themselves in the local population. Although Moscow was well aware of the MPLA’s logistical limitations and increased support in 1967, new documents show that the Soviet military was quite critical about what they perceived as a lack of military progress. While the full extent of Soviet conversations with Neto is not available, the evidence we do have suggests that the relationship was often conflictual and that military and political strategy was subject to much debate. Personalities mattered since, in contrast to Cabral, Neto never really established a close relationship with his Soviet liaisons. As we will see, the Soviets also developed a skeptical view of the FRELIMO leadership.
Mondlane’s Diplomacy of Liberation and China’s Influence in Tanzania

In late 1964, the Portuguese authorities woke up to another front in the colonial war: Mozambique, East Africa. The first attack claimed by FRELIMO took place on September 25, 1964, when a number of guerrillas attacked the post of the chefe do posto (colonial administrator) in the small town of Chai in Cabo Delgado, a northern Mozambican province bordering Tanzania. The chefe do posto was killed, along with six other men. As FRELIMO’s president Eduardo Mondlane admitted in his 1968 book, The Struggle for Mozambique, in 1964, FRELIMO had only “250 men trained and equipped” who engaged in hit-and-run attacks against the Portuguese. Two years later, Mondlane claimed, the insurgency spread into the sparsely populated Niassa province, and the size of FRELIMO’s army had reached 8,000 men.95

While Mondlane argued that armed action was the only option because the Portuguese were not ready to accept self-determination, he knew he could no longer delay violent action because of pressure from activists, the Tanzanian authorities, and local competitors. In June 1964, a rival organization, MANU, had staged an attack in the northern Cabo Delgado province and killed Father Daniel Boorman. Although the murder of the popular Dutch missionary did not elicit local support and led to massive repercussions against MANU, Mondlane realized that FRELIMO had to take the initiative.96

Once FRELIMO started its campaign in late 1964, Mondlane engaged in hectic diplomacy to obtain further military support from the socialist countries. In April 1965, he toured southeastern Europe, receiving weapons and financial assistance from Czechoslovakia and Bulgaria.97 Mondlane also requested additional financial support from Moscow. The Soviets provided weapons and ammunition, as well as medical supplies and other types of humanitarian assistance.98 However, Soviet support remained limited and included no cash—in contrast to the MPLA and the PAIGC. At a meeting with Soviet embassy staff in Dar es Salaam on March 16, 1965, Mondlane claimed that “eighty percent of Mozambicans” had been equipped with Soviet weapons, but FRELIMO also required financial assistance.99 However, the Soviets continued to deny such requests because of Mondlane’s connections to Washington.

In 1966, the CC CPSU International Department refused Mondlane’s bid to attend the Twenty-Third Congress of the Party in Moscow. As Rostislav Ulianovskii explained the decision in an internal memo, Mondlane received
From the Barrel of a Gun

regular cash handouts from U.S. organizations and was connected to the government in Washington. Furthermore, Mondlane “lacked trust” from the leaders of the MPLA, the PAIGC, the South African Communist Party, and FRELIMO’s deputy president the Reverend Uria Simango. Allegedly, the head of the KGB’s First Directorate, Aleksandr Sakharovskii, also supported Ulianovskii’s decision to deny Mondlane an invitation to the Congress. The Soviet ambassador in Dar es Salaam was thus instructed to find an excuse to politely refuse.100

The special mention of Uria Simango in Ulianovskii’s memo is telling. Born in 1926 to a peasant family in Sofala province, central Mozambique, Simango was educated by Protestant missionaries in Mozambique and Southern Rhodesia and was ordained as a Church of Christ pastor in 1956. After Simango was elected vice president of FRELIMO in 1964, he became involved in diplomatic missions to socialist countries.101 Toward the mid-1960s though, Simango became unhappy with what he saw as the role of “whites”—more specifically, Janet Mondlane, João Ferreira, Fernando Ganhão, and Jacinto Veloso—who joined the movement, working in Dar es Salaam in various roles, including as teachers at the Mozambique Institute.102 Ulianovskii’s memo seems to suggest that the Soviets considered Simango to be more trustworthy than Mondlane.

The Soviets distrusted Mondlane because they were worried that the U.S. funds he was receiving were tied to the CIA. In fact, Moscow took Mondlane’s contacts with Washington seriously, especially since they believed British influence in Tanzania was still strong. As the KGB argued in early 1966, the conservative wing in the Tanzanian government wanted to eliminate “progressives” like Oscar Kambona, and it was likely that a right-wing coup in the country was imminent.103 Rumors around Mondlane and his private fortune continued to circulate, and in 1965, the Soviet journalist Mikhail Domogatskhikh was approached by two separate Mozambicans who complained about Mondlane’s unwillingness to engage in armed struggle and issued a warning about his close contacts with U.S. officials.104

At the same time, the Soviets worried about growing Chinese influence in Tanzania, which became increasingly prominent after the revolution in Zanzibar. After Tanganyika and Zanzibar signed an act of union in 1964, a number of Marxist politicians, among them Abdulrahman Mohammed Babu, moved from Zanzibar to the mainland and joined Julius Nyerere’s cabinet. Babu’s diplomacy paved the way for Nyerere’s first highly publicized visit to China in February 1965, after which Beijing committed to training Tanzania’s army and investing
in development projects. In 1967, Beijing announced that it would construct a railway linking the copper mines of landlocked Zambia to the port of Dar es Salaam and committed a $401 million, interest-free loan to finance the project. China also became an essential source of assistance to FRELIMO and other liberation movements in Dar es Salaam, providing small arms, cash, and training for guerrillas in Tanzania.105

China’s influence in Tanzania extended beyond developmental assistance. A longtime proponent of “African socialism,” Nyerere was inspired by the Chinese revolution. On February 5, 1967, he outlined a radical development program based on collective hard work, agrarian transformation, and an anti-imperialist stance that he termed *ujamaa* (“brotherhood” in Swahili). In the words of Priya Lal, the Cultural Revolution and Nyerere’s *ujamaa* “shared imaginaries” such as a dedication to self-reliance, discipline, hard work, and commitment to rural transformation. As Beijing flooded Tanzania with propaganda materials and Mao Zedong’s ideas spread widely via a network of bookstores and the radio, many urban intellectuals were inspired by China’s transformation.106 Since FRELIMO was deeply embedded in Tanzanian politics, China’s influence was prominent among the members of the anticolonial movements based in Dar es Salaam.

One such member was a FRELIMO military commander named Samora Moisés Machel. Born in 1933 in southern Gaza province to a wealthy peasant family, Machel received his primary education at a mission school before training and working as a nurse at the hospital in Lourenço Marques (Maputo). After attracting attention because of his outspoken views on Portuguese colonialism, he fled to Dar es Salaam in 1963. From there, he was dispatched for military training in Algeria. In 1965, he was sent on a mission to open a new front in Niassa province. He was also responsible for training recruits at a base in Nachingwea, where he became quite popular with the rank-and-file recruits. In Nachingwea, Machel was first introduced to Mao Zedong’s ideas by Chinese instructors who worked at the camp. As Machel often claimed, his Marxism resulted from his own experiences of colonialism and racial discrimination. His interest in Mao’s ideas of collectivism and solidarity with the peasantry also did not necessarily mean he supported China’s racially-based definition of anti-imperialism.107

It is not clear whether the Soviets understood such details. In his memoirs, Evsiukov wrote of Machel in hindsight as someone who was a “naturally talented leader”, but also of someone who “lacked education.” Evsiukov also believed that Machel embraced “leftist extremism,” often speaking favorably about China’s Cultural Revolution and admiring Joseph Stalin.108 The Soviets closely
monitored China’s aid to FRELIMO and the so-called “pro-Chinese” sentiments among the leadership and Mozambican trainees at Perevalnoe. Naturally, it was not always easy for the Soviets to establish exactly who was “pro-Chinese” since the Mozambicans were inspired by a variety of African, Third World, and European “socialisms,” often rooted in their own experiences. As Elizabeth Banks has argued, Machel adopted an “explicitly European and Soviet form of socialism” after independence.\footnote{109}

Mondlane tried to play on Soviet sensibilities during his trip to Moscow in November 1966. In conversations with Soviet interlocutors, he acknowledged the achievements of Soviet socialism in Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan and complained about China’s “anti-Soviet tactics,” especially the way they played out at international conferences. However, FRELIMO could not openly express their attitude toward China, he continued, because they could not alienate their hosts—the Tanzanian government—which had a close relationship with Beijing.\footnote{110}

To an extent, Mondlane’s tactics worked. As Dmitrii Dolidze of the Soviet Solidarity Committee argued in a conversation with an East German diplomat on November 26, Mondlane showed he was positively inclined towards the USSR because he had been “pushed to the left by the progressive forces.” Although Mondlane was “not entirely our man,” Dolidze continued, the people around him were “quite in order.”\footnote{112} However, not everyone was fully convinced. As Genadii Fomin shared with Gottfried Lessing in Dar es Salaam in February 1967, Mondlane did not seem to have “political clarity” and exhibited “opportunist tendencies” during his trip to Moscow. The Soviet Union would continue to supply weapons to FRELIMO, but in a “limited way.”\footnote{113}

By 1968, the Soviets believed Mondlane had “moved left” in terms of his views, but they would never trust him completely. They seemed to have developed a more favorable view of Simango and maintained clandestine sources within FRELIMO, who informed the Soviets about internal developments. As we will see, the juxtaposition of the pro-U.S. and pro-China lines within the organization would continue to preoccupy the Soviets, as they tried to make sense of the crisis that would thrust FRELIMO into internal turmoil in 1966–70.

FRELIMO in Crisis: The View from Moscow

The crisis that enveloped FRELIMO in 1966–69 consisted of an interconnected series of intraparty conflicts, culminating in the murder of Eduardo Mondlane in 1969. Since FRELIMO’s inception in 1962, conflicts inside the organization
had been defined by struggles between “northerners,” predominantly Makonde rank-and-file members, and “southerners,” mestiço-assimilado elites epitomized by such figures as Eduardo Mondlane and Marcelino dos Santos. The north-south divide also correlated with the growing ideological rift between capitalist and socialist modernizers inside FRELIMO. Debates around race, class, and ideology were closely intertwined with rivalries over access to political power. The crisis was further complicated as warring factions sought supporters in TANU, Tanzania’s ruling party. The Soviets acted mainly as observers in this process as they tried to untangle the shifting political alliances to determine which “side” reflected their interests.

The first rumblings of a crisis began in 1966. On October 10, Filipe Magaia, FRELIMO’s first chief of defense and security, was killed while crossing a river after nightfall with a group of guerrillas inside Mozambique. Although FRELIMO claimed Magaia’s death was an accidental shooting, it quickly became a subject of controversy. Earlier that year, Magaia had allegedly criticized the leadership in Dar es Salaam for not heeding advice from the military commanders and for releasing boastful war communiqués that threatened the guerrillas’ safety, leading to mounting casualties. Rumors thus spread that Magaia was murdered, a victim to a plot concocted by the “southerners” to
centralize their power over the military. In a move that seemed only to give credence to the rumors, Samora Machel, born in southern Gaza province, became the new chief of defense.\textsuperscript{114}

Mondlane’s deputy, Reverend Uria Simango, secretly encouraged such rumors because he too resented the dominance of southern \textit{mestiço-assimilado} elites and wanted to replace Mondlane as president. One of Simango’s allies was Mateus Gwenjere. A Roman Catholic priest, Gwenjere joined FRELIMO in Dar es Salaam in 1967 and started teaching at the Mozambique Institute. He caught Mondlane’s eye due to his intelligence and was dispatched together with Simango to speak at the UN General Assembly. According to John Marcum, Simango and Gwenjere bonded in New York over what they believed was the racial nature of Portuguese colonial rule. Simango also shared his discontent with what he described as a power grab by the southern “mulatto-assimilado” group in the leadership.\textsuperscript{115}

In March 1968, tensions exploded into the open when students at the Mozambique Institute openly rebelled against FRELIMO’s leadership. The Mozambique Institute was a key project envisioned by Mondlane and his wife, Janet, to educate and train cadres for a future independent Mozambique. However, by 1967, it had become clear that educational priorities had given way to the needs of the revolution when FRELIMO required students to attend a military preparation course at the Nachingwea camp during the school holidays. The students, mostly Makonde from northern Mozambique, saw these changes as an imposition forced on them by the “southerners.” With Gwenjere’s support, students spoke out against the leadership and campaigned to remove the white professors from the institute. The standoff ended on March 5, 1968, when the FRELIMO leadership entered the students’ dormitories and made sure they were arrested and dispatched to one of the refugee camps in Tanzania.\textsuperscript{116}

However, the most formidable challenge to Mondlane’s leadership was a regional rebellion led by Lázaro Nkavandame. A Makonde entrepreneur from Cabo Delgado province, Nkavandame initially joined FRELIMO because he became frustrated that the Portuguese were hindering his efforts to set up an agricultural cooperative in the north. When FRELIMO appointed Nkavandame the head of the civil administration in Cabo Delgado province in 1965, he continued to modernize Makonde agriculture based on the “free British capitalism” model he had experienced in Tanzania. Nkavandame was also responsible for FRELIMO-administered stores and trade in Cabo Delgado province, amassing a small fortune in the process. While FRELIMO’s narrative always depicted Nkavandame as a “chief” who stood against progress, new research portrays him as someone who represented the rising class of rural African capitalists.\textsuperscript{117}
The conflict came to a head in 1968 when FRELIMO decided to centralize its structures in the Cabo Delgado province. Fearing he would be sidelined, Nkavandame allied with Mateus Gwenjere to replace Mondlane with Uria Simango. On at least two occasions in May, Nkavandame’s supporters entered FRELIMO’s offices in Nkrumah Street, Dar es Salaam, and engaged in physical altercations with Mondlane’s supporters. Then Nkavandame and Gwenjere called for FRELIMO’s Second Congress to be convened and elections for new leadership. Nkavandame hoped that if a FRELIMO Congress could be held in Tanzania, he could amass enough support. However, Mondlane managed to undercut his opposition by holding the Congress in Mozambique in late July 1968. Nkavandame refused to attend, and Mondlane was reelected president. In an explicit statement of its revolutionary direction, the Congress asserted that the struggle stood for the “construction of a new society free from the exploitation of man by man and confirmed the basic principles of racial and gender equality.”

The crisis in FRELIMO was closely entangled with Tanzanian politics. Many Tanzanian politicians were of Makonde origin, like Nkavandame and the majority of rank-and-file recruits. Although Mondlane received strong support from Nyerere, Makonde Tanzanians often found common cause with those who opposed the FRELIMO president. Mondlane admitted as much in a series of conversations with Arkadii Glukhov, counselor at the Soviet embassy at Dar es Salaam, with whom he shared that Nkavandame and Gwenjere had received support from the Chinese and also “middle-ranking Tanzanian officials” who shared their “anti-white” line.

The key figure who opposed Mondlane was Lawi Sijaona. A minister of state for refugees in the office of Vice President Rashidi Kawawa, Sijaona was a Makonde like Nkavandame and shared his dislike for Mondlane on racial grounds. As a chairman of the TANU Youth League, he was inspired by Maoist rhetoric and spearheaded the protests against the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in August 1968.

Mondlane seemingly emerged victorious from the Second Congress, but the conflict continued. At a meeting in Mtwara, Tanzania, in August 1968, Nkavandame and other Cabo Delgado leaders charged FRELIMO with executing military and civilian leaders who had opposed the leadership in Dar es Salaam. Nkavandame then issued orders to border committees to bar FRELIMO from entering Cabo Delgado. When Paulo Kankhomba, FRELIMO’s deputy chief of operations, defied the ban and entered the province in December 1968, he was killed, allegedly by local Makonde militants. Gwenjere then pressed for new
From the Barrel of a Gun

presidential elections. Once again, Mondlane managed to undercut the opposition. He persuaded the Tanzanian authorities to place Gwenjere under house arrest and suspended Nkavandame from his post. Nyerere’s support for Mondlane undoubtedly allowed him to overcome opposition at crucial moments in the crisis. In the meantime, the Mozambique Institute was closed to avoid further conflict in the wake of the students’ revolt.\textsuperscript{121}

The Soviets received information about FRELIMO’s internal politics through a variety of sources. One of the KGB’s Mozambican contacts was Joaquim Chissano. A native of southern Gaza province like Mondlane, Chissano had participated in the student activist organization NESAM before pursuing a degree in medicine, first in Portugal and then in France. In 1962, he joined FRELIMO in Dar es Salaam. In 2016, the declassification of the Vasilii Mitrokhin archives in Cambridge led to the revelation that it was Chissano whom Mitrokhin and Christopher Andrew described as the “KGB confidential contact” codenamed TSOM. These (rather limited) records show that Chissano started collaborating with the KGB after receiving training in the USSR in 1965. In 1970, the KGB even tried to “promote” Chissano to the status of an “agent,” but the International Department rejected the idea to avoid jeopardizing their official relationship.\textsuperscript{122} Chissano denied he was ever a “spy” but confirmed exchanging information with the KGB for the benefit of FRELIMO.\textsuperscript{123}

While recent revelations about Chissano’s contacts with the KGB made quite a furor in the press, in reality, the Soviets had many sources of information about developments in the Mozambican liberation movement. They had regular conversations with the top leadership, especially with Mondlane, Santos, Simango, and Chissano. The Soviet intelligence services also cultivated clandestine contacts inside FRELIMO and, very likely, the Tanzanian government.\textsuperscript{124} In October 1968, one such “trusted source” of the GRU submitted a full report on the situation inside the organization after the Second Congress and the August meeting in Mtwara. The source detailed the tense exchange between Mondlane and Nkavandame, noting that Simango was playing both sides in the standoff between the two men. The report also described the close connections between Lawi Sijaona and Nkavandame. However, there were no suggestions in the report that Mondlane’s life was in danger.\textsuperscript{125}

On the morning of February 3, 1969, Mondlane picked his mail at FRELIMO’s offices at 201 Nkrumah Street in Dar es Salaam before driving to the house of his American friend Betty King. As he sat down to work and opened his mail, Mondlane was instantly killed by a parcel bomb, hidden in a book bearing a stamp from Moscow. As the investigation discovered, the stamp was a forgery, and the
batteries in the detonators had been manufactured in Japan and sold by a firm in Lourenço Marques. The assassination had clear signs of Portuguese involvement, and evidence pointed to the so-called Aginter Press, a clandestine network of sleeper agents who fought against Portugal’s enemies in Africa. Local collaboration was also likely, and most people pointed to Sijaona and Mondlane’s key critics, including Nkavandame, Simango, and his ally Silvério Nungu. Although Sijaona was very likely involved, there is little evidence to suggest that either Simango or Nungu played a role. As George Roberts has argued in his detailed reconstruction of the various theories, the plan was most likely concocted by the Portuguese and executed with African collaboration. Still, Mondlane’s murder remains unsolved.126

The Soviets did not seem to have any unique insights into the identity of the perpetrators. In a note on developments in FRELIMO after the murder, the KGB’s deputy chairman Nikolai Zakharov argued that Mondlane’s foreign policy, which included maintaining relations with both socialist and capitalist countries, had been sharply criticized by Algeria, Cuba, and especially China. Moreover, Mondlane had angered some among the Tanzanian establishment by maintaining a relatively independent stance since many of them still hoped to create a federation between Tanzania and Mozambique. With Mondlane gone, continued Zakharov, it was very likely the Chinese would intensify attempts to influence the organization leadership.127

The Czechoslovak intelligence service also tried to comprehend the mystery behind Mondlane’s murder. In an overview of the situation in FRELIMO from February 1969, the StB declared that Mondlane’s assassination was part of a wider trend of “political murders” to target the late president and his supporters. The men who potentially profited from the murder were Simango, Silvério Nungu, and Lázaro Nkavandame. The PIDE must have been involved as well as “elements in the Tanzanian government,” in particular Lawi Sijaona. Overall, the StB described Mondlane as a “capable organizer” who was an anti-imperialist, influenced by Marxism, stating that his murder was a “huge loss” for FRELIMO.128

The report was clearly informed by information from Czechoslovak intelligence officers on the ground. One of them was Dr. Zdeněk Kirschner, an StB officer codenamed “Vilim.” Kirschner had arrived in Dar es Salaam in 1966 and worked undercover, teaching civics at the Mozambique Institute. In his role, he had established friendly relations with the teachers at the Institute and FRELIMO’s leadership. The StB had sources inside FRELIMO and even considered developing a special clandestine relationship with Marcelino
dos Santos (whom they codenamed SLAO) and his wife, Pamela. They decided against pursuing the relationship, citing Pamela's friendly relations with Betty King, who was allegedly close to Bill Sutherland—the American Friends Service Committee representative in Dar es Salaam and Mondlane’s close friend—who the StB suspected was a CIA agent.\footnote{Kirschner was recalled to Prague in October 1968 and subsequently “released” from his duties at the StB due to his opposition to the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia. He was nonetheless commended for his work in Dar es Salaam.} The report shows the StB had a much more favorable evaluation of Mondlane than their Soviet counterparts. Although the documents do not reveal any explicit disagreements with the Soviets, differences were not uncommon.\footnote{Kirschner was recalled to Prague in October 1968 and subsequently “released” from his duties at the StB due to his opposition to the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia. He was nonetheless commended for his work in Dar es Salaam.} Meanwhile, Mondlane’s assassination intensified the power struggle within FRELIMO. In April 1969, Uria Simango, Samora Machel, and Marcelino dos Santos established the Council of the Presidency. Although Simango expected to occupy Mondlane’s position after his death, he was forced to share power with the others. For about six months, the triumvirate managed to keep the appearance of unity. In July 1968, Simango and Chissano went to the Soviet Union. Once again, financial assistance was on the agenda, and Moscow allegedly approved the provision of at least a portion of the requested $100,000 in cash.\footnote{Kirschner was recalled to Prague in October 1968 and subsequently “released” from his duties at the StB due to his opposition to the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia. He was nonetheless commended for his work in Dar es Salaam.} However, the power-sharing arrangement did not last. In November, Simango released a pamphlet, “Gloomy Situation in FRELIMO,” in which he accused Machel and Santos of usurping power, eliminating political rivals, and plotting to kill him. He also criticized the late Mondlane for allowing the Portuguese to dominate the Mozambique Institute and accused his widow Janet of conspiring with the CIA to infiltrate the organization. Simango denied he was racist at the time, as did his biographer Ncomo, who argued the vice president wanted to prevent FRELIMO’s domination by southern elites.\footnote{Kirschner was recalled to Prague in October 1968 and subsequently “released” from his duties at the StB due to his opposition to the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia. He was nonetheless commended for his work in Dar es Salaam.} Although such a narrow focus on ethnicity has been challenged, the crisis exposed differences between those like Mondlane and his allies, including Santos, who championed a cosmopolitan nationalism, and others like Simango, who defined the struggle in racial terms.\footnote{Kirschner was recalled to Prague in October 1968 and subsequently “released” from his duties at the StB due to his opposition to the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia. He was nonetheless commended for his work in Dar es Salaam.}

Moscow closely followed these power struggles. In a lengthy analysis of the triumvirate in July 1969, Petr Ivashutin argued that FRELIMO was a weak organization, rooted in the “peasant masses,” with little experience of armed struggle, and riven by intra-ethnic tensions. He described Simango, Santos, and Machel as “petit-bourgeoisie” who mistakenly shared the “pseudo-revolutionary” Maoist concept of popular partisan warfare. The only significant difference between the two factions was their attitudes toward white Mozambicans. Uria
Simango exhibited a more “racist and pro-Chinese line,” while Samora Machel’s faction seemed more interested in developing relations with the USSR. At the same time, Ivashutin acknowledged that the nationalist movement in Mozambique was important because of the country’s location, bordering Southern Rhodesia and South Africa. Therefore, he proposed countering Chinese propaganda and dispatching a Soviet military adviser who could influence the course of guerrilla warfare.\textsuperscript{135}

Ivashutin’s mentioning of South Africa is noteworthy, since the end of Portuguese rule opened up possibilities for the ANC to use Mozambique as a launching pad for operations in South Africa. From the GRU’s perspective, it also allowed for the possibility of expanding its signals intelligence capability. After independence in 1975, the Soviets did indeed prioritize southern Mozambique in their defense strategy they developed for FRELIMO, with an eye toward developments in Pretoria.\textsuperscript{136}

As the conflict entered its final stage, Simango tried to win Moscow to his side. In a conversation with Arkadii Glukhov in Dar es Salaam on September 25, Simango outlined familiar arguments about the dominance of southerners in leadership positions. He also argued that Janet Mondlane was dangerous because she was a “white American,” and the CIA could continue to exercise control over the movement through her. His friend Silvério Nungu had already been eliminated, continued Simango, and he was next on the hit list.\textsuperscript{137} After the release of “the Gloomy Situation” in November, Simango approached the Soviets again with an explanation. He never wanted to make the criticisms public, but the inaction of the Tanzanian authorities left him no choice. Once again, he charged FRELIMO’s leadership with corruption, “tribalism,” and political killings. As for his attitude toward race, explained Simango, he was never against whites in the organization; he only resented foreign influence.\textsuperscript{138}

By this point, the GRU did not trust any member of the FRELIMO leadership. In an overview of the situation in October 1969, the GRU’s Aleksandr Predvechnov argued that neither Simango, nor Machel, nor Chissano, nor Santos were “consistent friends of the Soviet Union.” While Simango was looking to improve relations with the USSR, the GRU doubted his intentions. In a striking passage, Predvechnov argued that FRELIMO had always been determined to lock Soviet influence out of the organization. He relayed the suggestions of “trusted sources” who insisted that Filipe Magaia and Paulo Kankhomba—FRELIMO military commanders allegedly close to the USSR—were assassinated by those who feared the strengthening of Soviet influence over the movement. Predvechnov described Simango as a more
generally “acceptable figure,” since the others were openly sympathetic to China. In an evaluation of developments inside FRELMO one month later, Ivashutin mirrored Simango’s assessment of Janet Mondlane, arguing the CIA could use her close relationship with Machel to influence internal politics. Although Ivashutin did not think that Simango had a clear political affiliation and that his influence was on the decline, he predicted that an internal party struggle would continue.

In the end, Ivashutin overestimated Simango’s strength. Shortly after the publication of “Gloomy Situation in FRELIMO,” Simango was suspended from the Presidential Council and deported from Dar es Salaam. In May 1970, the Central Committee expelled him from the party and declared he would be subject to “the people’s justice.” However, by that time, Simango had already fled Tanzania and later joined a rival splinter organization, COREMO. After Mozambique became independent in 1975, FRELIMO brought Simango and other critics like Nkavandame back to Mozambique. In May 1975, they were subjected to a show trial at Nachingwea, forced to confess to betrayal, dispatched to a “re-education camp,” and subsequently executed. After Simango fled in 1970, Machel was appointed president and Marcelino dos Santos the vice president. Machel would come to dominate FRELIMO until he died in a plane crash in 1986.

Conclusion

The Soviet view of developments in Africa was fundamentally ideological. Moscow believed the African military was a neocolonial institution, prone to Western influence and outright meddling. They were also concerned about the challenge posed by China, especially in East Africa. The Soviets thus attempted to correct what they considered their mistake of underestimating the role of African militaries in politics. They thus drew in allies by ramping up assistance and making new clandestine contacts with the eventual goal of extending the reach of Soviet navy and signals intelligence. At the same time, military training was meant to earn loyalty from young soldiers and convince them of the attractiveness of the socialist system. Thus, the Soviet military was increasingly drawn in as officials became involved in advising, training, and providing military supplies to allies.

The level of assistance depended on the vastly different dynamics of the Soviets’ relationships with Cabral, Neto, and Mondlane. By the mid-1960s, the Soviets had developed a close relationship with Cabral, based on his personal associations with men like Evsiukov. Moscow was committed to facilitating a
military victory in Guinea-Bissau and therefore continued to supply increasingly sophisticated weapons, training, and cash to the PAIGC. Since military advisers wanted to enable victory, heated disagreements emerged about guerrilla strategy. Although many details of these discussions are still unclear, Soviet, Czechoslovak, and Cuban advisers shared at least some criticisms of Cabral’s military strategy. Still, Cabral managed to resist pressure and used contacts with Soviet liaisons to obtain new weapons systems. The majority of Cabral’s guerrillas experienced Soviet modernity mainly during their time in military training. As interviews with trainees have indicated, the full extent of their exposure to Soviet realities is difficult to separate from a variety of influences and ideas that soldiers were exposed to before coming to the USSR. However, Soviet military technology, rather than ideology or organizing principles, seemed to most significantly impact rank-and-file soldiers, who felt that weapons equaled liberation.

The dynamics of guerrilla warfare also underpinned the Soviet relationship with the MPLA. Although we do not have the exact figures, it seems that the provision of arms was initially limited, mainly due to logistical challenges. Although Moscow did ramp up assistance to Neto after 1967, the Soviets became critical of the MPLA’s campaign in Cabinda and southeast Angola. Fundamentally, the Soviets did not believe the MPLA was doing enough to create a truly broad movement and often questioned the efficacy and scope of military operations. Criticisms of this kind fed into their rocky relationship with Neto, who looked to Yugoslavia and elsewhere for alternative sources of military support. The new evidence does not shed light on any disagreements between the International Department and the Soviet military or the KGB and the GRU on the MPLA’s progress. It is very likely, though, that the Soviet military played an important role in shaping views of developments on the ground, which contributed to the complicated relationship Neto had with Moscow.

Military strategy played less of an essential role in Soviet views of FRELIMO in the 1960s. The documents reveal a strikingly bleak view that the Soviets and especially the GRU developed of their relationship with the Mozambicans. The GRU had multiple sources inside the organization but still struggled to come to grips with its factionalism, becoming convinced the leadership was fundamentally anti-Soviet. On the one hand, the Soviets distrusted Mondlane because of his contacts in Washington and feared CIA influence. On the other, they resented what they believed was growing Chinese influence, which meant that even initial allies like Marcelino dos Santos were not seen favorably. Although a Soviet cadre like Evsiukov clearly respected Mondlane, the GRU seemed to buy
into the misguided narrative of his critics that the CIA could exert influence over the movement via his wife, Janet.

The GRU initially saw Machel as a popular yet amenable figure who could be influenced by Mondlane’s widow. As the crisis within the organization deepened, the Soviets were being pulled in different directions, as various factions all sought support from international patrons. Nevertheless, the GRU argued that the Soviet Union should increase its (rather limited) military support for FRELIMO to strengthen its foothold in the organization. Once Machel centralized power in 1970, the Soviets would proceed to court him with offers of new assistance packages for the guerrilla campaign.

The full story of cooperation between Prague, Havana, and Moscow is still buried in the archives. The level of Czechoslovak involvement with liberation movements such as the PAIGC, in particular, was extraordinary, and there clearly existed cooperation between advisers on the ground and those at higher levels. This collaboration did not preclude differences of opinion, and the StB evaluations of Mondlane point to one such example. The Soviet intervention in Czechoslovakia in 1968 did not seem to impact its relations with the nationalist movements in any significant way. The most considerable effect was on Czechoslovakia itself. By the mid-1960s, Prague was already seeking to limit its commitments to anticolonial movements for fundamentally economic reasons, and the events of 1968 only accentuated the trend. The evidence available shows that Havana, Prague, and Moscow were broadly aligned in terms of their view of the guerrilla struggle in the Portuguese colonies. As the next chapter shows, the often-heated discussions of military strategy would continue. However, the Soviets would have to square the ever-intensifying demands of the anticolonial movements with their burgeoning détente with the United States.