

January 29, 1976

Letter, Jorge Risquet to Fidel Castro, Luanda

Citation:

"Letter, Jorge Risquet to Fidel Castro, Luanda", January 29, 1976, Wilson Center Digital Archive, Archives of the Cuban Communist Party Central Committee, Havana
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Summary:

Risquet to Fidel Castro, Luanda on his meeting with Neto regarding weapons delivered by the Soviet Union to Angola to help arm Cubans coming to fight for Angola

Original Language:

Spanish

Contents:

Translation - English

Commander-in-Chief,

Regarding the Cuban weapons delivered by the USSR in Luanda:

We have explained the situation clearly to President Neto, who understood it perfectly without expressing any doubts.

1. "Furry [Colomé][1] and I spoke with Neto alone the day after Furry's return [from Moscow where he had gone to report to Fidel Castro, who was attending the Twenty-fifth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union], and we informed him of your decision to send more troops, fully armed, in order to amass the forces necessary both fully to accomplish the goal of freeing the country from the South African and Zairian invasions and also to be in a position to counter any possible increases in their forces.

We told him [Neto] that some of the new Cuban troops will arrive by boat with their weapons and the rest will come to Luanda by plane, where they will pick up weapons that the Soviet Union is going to send for them.

We explained to him that this will allow us to avoid the unnecessary time, expense and risk of having the Soviets send these weapons to Cuba and then having to transport them to Angola with the troops.

Neto understood and approved without any qualm or hesitation.

2. Three days later, the Soviet general [head of the Soviet military mission in Angola] told us he too would like to inform [Neto], on behalf of the USSR, about the delivery of the Soviet weapons to the Cubans in Angola. We agreed that the most appropriate way would be that he, Furry, and I meet again with Neto alone. And so we did. The general explained in some detail what weapons were being sent.

Neto raised no objection whatsoever, wrote down the most important weapons, said that he would inform the Political Bureau of this increase [of men and arms], and appeared very satisfied with it, as an additional guarantee to counter whatever the South Africans, the Zairians and the Imperialists might do.

In this meeting, Furry itemized some of the men and materiel that were coming aboard the Cuban ships. He spoke of a regiment.

3. Nevertheless, taking into account the concern you expressed in your cable of yesterday, in the meeting that Oramas[2] and I had today with the president to discuss other matters (SWAPO, Katangans, etc.), I returned as if in passing to this matter, and I gave him a list of the weapons that will be arriving on future Soviet ships and that are for the Cuban troops.

I added that all the weapons that had arrived in Soviet ships (the 73 tanks, the 21 BM-21s, etc.) so far, as well as the ten MIG-17s, belonged to the People's Republic of Angola.

[I stressed] that the MIG-21s that were coming in the AN-22 planes as well as the weapons that were arriving in the Soviet ships and that were enumerated in the list that I had given him were acquired by Cuba in the USSR and delivered to Cuba by the USSR in Luanda.

We told him that the Cuban troops, with all these weapons, would remain in Angola for as long as it took and for as long as he considered necessary, and that we would

take care of the training of the Angolan personnel, so that they would be able to operate the tanks, the planes, Katyushas [rocket-propelled grenade launchers], mortars, cannons, etc. And that if the weapons delivered to the PRA [People's Republic of Angola] were to prove insufficient for the future Angolan army, the USSR would always be ready to provide what was required, etc., etc.

That is, our conversation was absolutely brotherly and without the smallest misunderstanding or reproach. However, we wanted to be absolutely clear--and we left the list as written evidence--so that there could be no misunderstandings, now or in the future.

We consider this matter to be totally clear and settled. Let me know whether you believe that this task has been accomplished or whether you think it is necessary to do something more about it.

Greetings,
Risquet

[Source: Archives of the Cuban Communist Party Central Committee, Havana.]

[1] "Because of the growing scope of our help to the MPLA," on 25 November 1975 the first vice-minister of the armed forces, Abelardo Colome Ibarra, had flown from Cuba to Angola to become the head of the MMCA. ("Síntesis," 23-24.)

[2] Oscar Oramas, a senior foreign ministry official and former ambassador to Guinea Conakry (1966-73), had arrived in December 1975 to serve as Cuba's first ambassador to Angola.