

**1998****Interview with Robert W. Hultslander, Last CIA  
Station Chief in Luanda, Angola****Citation:**

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**Summary:**

CIA station chief in Luanda, Hultslander gives his perspective on the US involvement in Angola. In his interview he explains what the US knew about liberation movements prior to the outbreak of Civil War, his opinion on the CIA covert action program IAFEATURE, the Cuban presence in Angola and his assessment of the leading factions in Angola; MPLA, UNITA and FNLA.

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Robert Hultslander served as the last CIA station chief in Luanda, Angola from July 1975 through to the evacuation of U.S. personnel in early November 1975 as MPLA troops moved to take power over rival factions in the Angolan civil war. As part of his research for *Conflicting Missions*, in 1998 Piero Gleijeses sent a set of questions and drafts of sections of the book to Mr. Hultslander regarding CIA analysis and operations in the Angolan conflict. Hultslander's responses, sent via fax, along with the questions, which have been reconstructed for the purpose of this posting, are excerpted below.

Background: I had had no experience in Africa prior to my selection as Chief in Luanda, in July 1975. I was serving in [another] country, and had very little time to "read in" prior to assuming the Angola command in August. I had less than one week with the Angola Task Force in Washington, and spent two days on my way into Luanda with officers involved in the Angolan program. My mind was not clouded by many facts, and I had few preconceptions prior to hitting the ground. Since I would not be directly involved, I also had only rudimentary knowledge of our covert action program. I volunteered to remain in Luanda after Angolan independence (November 11, 1975), although the Consulate was ordered to close. Initially approved at the highest levels of State and CIA, Kissinger, afraid of a potential hostage situation, decided on the day of the last refugee flight, November 3, 1975, that every American diplomat had to leave Luanda immediately. I strongly disagreed, and pointed out that the MPLA desperately wanted to keep an official U.S. presence, and would protect anyone who stayed behind. I lost the argument. The Consulate's convoy to the airport departed without me; I arrived by motorcycle only minutes before the flight left for Lisbon, I was only in Angola a few days over three months, but continued to follow events from Lisbon for over three years.

QUESTION: What kind of knowledge did the CIA have of the Angolan liberation movements prior to the outbreak of the civil war?

An Agency office was established in Luanda in 1964, chiefly to report on various African Liberation movements. (Since Angola was a Portuguese colony, Lisbon had provided coverage, routinely.) This office was closed in 1967, mainly as you suggest, "to humor the Portuguese" and the Agency was forced to rely on "off-shore" coverage, mainly from Kinshasa, Lusaka, and Lisbon. Responding to the worsening crisis following the Portuguese Revolution, the Agency decided to send a few officers to Luanda on temporary duty in March 1975. I followed as quickly as possible, arriving in early August to the best of my knowledge, the bulk of the CIA's reporting in 1974 and 1975 did in fact come from Kinshasa. Holden Roberto was well known to the US Government which enjoyed good access to Roberto and his chief lieutenants, facilitated by his father-in-law, Zairian strongman Mobutu. On the other hand, we had little contact with UNITA (or Savimbi) until UNITA emerged as the third major power player. Also, as you mention in your study, Savimbi was not trusted because of his Chinese communist contacts and his flirtation with Maoist philosophy. The Luanda Consulate reported in June 1974 that Savimbi was ideologically sympathetic to Maoism. The Lusaka Embassy also reported Savimbi was pro-Chinese and a racist. The CIA took issue with these reports, and argued that Savimbi was a nationalist exploring various means to gain assistance for his own liberation movement, The Luanda Consulate subsequently modified its critical reporting on Savimbi, but continued to believe that he was paranoid and self-pitying.

QUESTION: What was your own assessment of Agostinho Neto and the MPLA? UNITA and the FNLA?

I came to share [U.S. embassy Consul General Tom] Killoran's assessment that the MPLA was the best qualified movement to govern Angola. Many of its leaders were educated at the University of Coimbra and, a few at Patrice Lumumba University in Moscow. Although many outwardly embraced Marxism, they were much closer to European radical socialism than to Soviet Marxist-Leninism. Lucio Lara, a mulatto

intellectual, was probably a convinced communist (in the old, Cold War sense). Agostinho Neto, the undisputed leader of the MPLA, however, was more moderate. A protestant minister, he was married to a Portuguese, and had many close Portuguese friends. His trusted doctor, and unofficial advisor, Armenio Ferreira, was Portuguese and lived in Lisbon. Other senior MPLA leaders were impressive: Lopo do Nascimento, Paula Jorge, Nito Alves, Carlos Rocha, and Iko Carreira were smart political operatives. Chieto and Dangereux were good military commanders, etc. In addition, the MPLA was the least tribal of the three movements. Neto and most of the top cadre were Mbundu, but the MPLA welcomed many different tribes, unlike the FMLN (Bakongo) and UNITA (Ovimbundu). Despite the uncontested communist background of many of the MPLA's leaders, they were more effective, better educated, better trained and better motivated. The rank and file also were better motivated (particularly the armed combatants, who fought harder and with more determination). Portuguese Angolans overwhelmingly supported the MPLA. Unfortunately, the CIA's association with the FNLA and UNITA tainted its analysis. As is frequently the case when intelligence collection and analysis are wedded to covert action programs, objectivity and truth become victims of political expediency. I believe this was the case in Angola. No one wanted to believe the Consulate's reporting, and Killoran's courageous and accurate analysis was ignored. He sacrificed his career in the State Department when he refused to bend his reporting to Kissinger's policy.

In the interest of candor, I must admit that Killoran and I were frequently at loggerheads over what I initially perceived as his MPLA bias. The briefings and orientation I received prior to arriving in Luanda emphasized the communist orientation of the MPLA, and convinced me of the urgent need to stop the MPLA from taking power. I fully agreed with the U.S. policy objectives as articulated to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in December 1995. Since the MPLA was receiving Soviet assistance, I believed that we had no choice but to counter with our own assistance to its opponents. It was only after three months in Luanda, that I realized what was really happening....

I had little direct contact with UNITA. My knowledge of this movement is rudimentary, and thus not worth your consideration. As you are aware, UNITA had little presence in Luanda, either politically or militarily, during the time I was there. I was deeply concerned, nevertheless, about UNITA's purported ties with South Africa, and the resulting political liability such carried. I was unaware at the time, of course, that the U.S. would eventually beg South Africa to directly intervene to pull its chestnuts out of the fire.

I admit that I developed a bias against the FNLA and its leaders, which I never tried to hide. Its ties with Mobutu merely added to my assessment that this organization was led by corrupt, unprincipled men who represented the very worst of radical black African racism. My personal experience only served to reinforce my opinions. I was disgusted by the briefings I received in Kinshasa, and my meetings with FNLA leaders and contacts. As an aside, which underlines my assessment: our senior FNLA contact in Luanda tried (unsuccessfully) to use our sensitive facilities to transport stolen goods.

**QUESTION:** What was your opinion about the CIA covert action program codenamed IAFEATURE?

Simply put, I was opposed to the covert action program in Angola because I was convinced it would not succeed, and would badly damage our ability to work in the future with moderate elements throughout Africa. We were not prepared to spend the necessary resources to assure victory. Or more fairly put, we should have realized that our adversaries (Moscow and Havana) were more determined and much better positioned than we. And, they did not have a hostile Congress controlling the purse strings. Nat Davis said it succinctly in his notes to Sisco on July 12, 1995: Kissinger was determined to challenge the Soviet Union, although no vital US interests were at

stake. We held bad cards, as Davis argued. I like your conclusion, "To `pass' when no vital interests were at stake and the cards in one's hands were bad could be seen, therefore, a sign of maturity, not of weakness. But it was not Kissinger's style: his United States must play, and win," How sad! [...]

Instead of working with the moderate elements in Angola, which I believe we could have found within the MPLA, we supported the radical, tribal, "anti-Soviet right." You write that, "Kissinger feared that an MPLA victory would have destabilizing effects throughout southern Africa." Of course the opposite proved true; it was our policies which caused the "destabilization:" [...]

(Comment: I did my best to argue the U.S. Policy position and defend the covert action program during my all night session with [Senator] Clark at Killoran's Luanda residence. My heart was not in it, however, and I finally admitted that I personally thought our support of Roberto and Savimbi would prove disastrous. This position, as you can imagine, caused me problems with my own superiors, and infuriated Kissinger.)

QUESTION: What evidence did the CIA station have of a Cuban presence in Angola?

I agree with the history as you present it, and with your conclusions regarding the assistance provided by Cuban forces, which I believe did not arrive in any numbers until after we departed. [...] Although we desperately wanted to find Cubans under every bush, during my tenure their presence was invisible, and undoubtedly limited to a few advisors. We knew they were on the way, however, and I believe we knew about the Britannia flights through Brazzaville in early November. [...] You may be interested to know that [after we evacuated] a senior Cuban officer, believed to be the DGI Station Chief, took over my beach apartment and confiscated all my possessions, including several month's supply of food and my African art collection. ...Since I probably was known to MPLA intelligence, I assume this ironic twist of fate was not coincidental.