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Brazil: black and white, and red all over

Angola's oil and the need to be on the winning side in former Portuguese Africa have led President Geisel to stand firm on his recognition of the MPLA, despite Cuban intervention and strong pressure for change from within the Brazilian armed forces.

Brazil's recognition of the MPLA government in Luanda last November was a bold stroke. It seemed to have gone sour when the FNLA, backed by the United States, and UNITA, supported by the South Africans, were knocking at the gates of Luanda with their war almost won. The build-up of western objections to 'Cuban and Soviet intervention' on the side of the MPLA gave the plotters

against President Ernesto Geisel an additional issue for their campaign. Pressure on Itamaraty in December was such that foreign minister Antônio Azeredo da Silveira downgraded the mission in Luanda by replacing the Brazilian chargé d'affaires, Ovidio de Andrade Melo, who has the rank of minister in the foreign service and would be an ambassador if his name had not found its way on to a black list in 1964, with a more junior diplomat. The new chargé d'affaires was a first secretary, Afonso Celso de Ouro Preto.

In December, in the presence of Geisel, Admiral Ibsen de Gusmão Câmara made a speech in which he warned of the grave consequences which could flow from a 'Soviet victory' in Angola. With their eyes on the South Atlantic sea lanes, it seemed to many Brazilian military planners that they should be on the side of the South Africans rather than the Cubans or the Soviet Union. The Brazilian intelligence apparatus began to release secret reports showing that the Cubans had been supplying guerrillas in the Amazon region with arms and technical advice. 2x

Pressure only diminished in January, with the sacking of General Ednardo D'Ávila Melo (see past two weeks' issues) and the improved performance of the MPLA. The 'good reason' for Brazil's somewhat surprising line in Angola is that Itamaraty always recognises the holders of the instruments of power and the guarantors of order in any country as the legitimate government. The fact that the MPLA held the capital, Luanda, was evidently decisive. In addition, there seems little doubt that Brazil was fully aware of the extent of the Soviet Union's commitment to the MPLA, and judged correctly that the Russians were not going to allow their protégé to lose.

The 'real reason' for Brazil's stand is that neither Geisel nor Itamaraty have given up the old dream of playing an important role in post-colonial Portuguese Africa. Most importantly, Geisel hopes Petrobrás will have a part to play in the exploitation of the Cabinda oil field. This latter point had already been discussed with the MPLA before recognition. Furthermore, good relations with President Samora Machel of Mozambique depended on recognition of the MPLA.

In Brazilian eyes now, the South Africans and the United States quite simply backed the wrong horses, on the basis of superpower rivalry rather than an appreciation of African *realpolitik*. There is no doubt that Brazil will still be viewed with some suspicion by the newly liberated Portuguese territories, but Geisel and Azeredo da Silveira between them have at last produced a coherent African policy, which places Brazil in the same camp as Nigeria and firmly opposed to South Africa. This has more to do with the politics of oil than with Brazil's oft-proclaimed distaste for South African racism.