

Memorandum on MPLA-FNLA Unity  
From George M. Houser

Virtually no attention has been given in the American press to the possibly historic agreement of unity between the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA), and the Angolan National Liberation Front (FNLA) - also called the Revolutionary Government of Angola in Exile (GRAE), signed on December 13, 1972.

It is premature to speculate on how this unity will work out over a period of time. But it is a momentous achievement that an agreement has been reached between these two movements which have had such a long history of differences and conflicts. It is expected that the unity will speed up the fight against Portuguese colonialism in Angola.

It is not my purpose in this brief memorandum to try to analyze all of the factors which must have entered into making this agreement possible. Obviously the key factor has been the position that President Sese Seko Mobutu of Zaire has taken, since the practical effect of the agreement will be to give the MPLA forces a base in Zaire from which to carry on the struggle against the Portuguese. The MPLA has sought to establish this base for more than a decade without success, and most of us who watched the events leading up to this agreement during the latter half of 1972 were sceptical that it could be realized. Therefore the consequences of this agreement are tremendously important. Problems will by no means be ended with the signing of the agreement, but at least both on the political and the military front, an event of great importance has taken place.

The O.A.U. has made several attempts to bring the two oldest Angolan liberation movements together in the past. None has been successful. At the summit conference of the O.A.U. in 1971, another attempt was planned. The Presidents of four African countries were designated as a committee to try to formulate a plan of unity. This followed the action of the O.A.U. heads of state in withdrawing recognition of the Revolutionary Government of Angola in Exile (GRAE) and only recognizing the political movement designated as the FNLA. The committee was composed of the Presidents of Zambia, Tanzania, Zaire, and Congo-Brazzaville. One of the things which seemed to inhibit this committee from being able to work effectively was the fact that Zaire and the Congo were at political loggerheads. But perhaps one of the things which helped bring these two countries together was the role which their Presidents each played in bringing about the unity of the two Angolan movements.

The first known public event which augured a new and serious effort to achieve unity was a meeting held in Brazzaville on June 9, 1972, on the eve of the '72 Summit Conference of the O.A.U. in Rabat. I was in Rabat myself when the announcement was made, at the Council of Ministers session prior to the meeting of the heads of state, that a conference was taking place in Brazzaville with Presidents Mobutu and Ngouabi (of Congo-Brazzaville) and Holden Roberto and Agostinho Neto, presidents of the two movements. At the heads of state conference in Rabat the following week it was further announced that the first steps towards unity had been taken, and as I understood it, in a rather embarrassed fashion, Neto and Roberto shookhands and even embraced each other as a sign of this new effort. Many sceptics felt that this was probably as far as the effort would go.



The next event which indicated to me that discussions were continuing in an increasingly serious fashion was a conversation with the GRAE student representative in the United States, who told me he had been called to return to Kinshasa to engage in discussions with other representatives of GRAE and spokesmen for the MPLA. Subsequently I received a report that six from each of the two movements had met for a solid week (November 6-13), from early morning until late at night, trying to hammer out the basis for unity. Neither of the presidents of the two movements were involved in these discussions, only the secondary level of leadership. No press, or governmental representatives of either Zaire, Brazzaville, or the O.A.U. were present at these discussions. At the end of a week an agreement was signed which called for the absolute integration of the armed forces of each of the movements, but did not go into the question of political integration.

One of the fascinating aspects of this whole affair is the role of President Mobutu. He has obviously shifted his political line. In November Mobutu announced that he was withdrawing recognition from the Chiang Kai-Shek government and recognizing the government of the People's Republic of China. Then on November 27, leaders from many of the key governments of Africa who were present at the seventh anniversary of Mobutu's succession to power—including the Presidents of Zambia, Tanzania, Congo-Brazzaville, Gabon, Central Africa Republic, and Burundi, and the foreign minister of Guinea; Secretaries of State and Ambassadors of other countries; and representatives of the People's Republic of China—all visited Kinkuzu, the military camp which Zaire has allowed GRAE troops to use for about ten years. On December 10, on the front page of one of the principal Kinshasa newspapers, Elima, there was a picture of this delegation at the military camp, and also a picture of Agostinho Neto of the MPLA in a press conference with Presidents Mobutu and Ngouabi. This in itself was astounding, inasmuch as the MPLA had been forced to leave Kinshasa in 1963 by the government there.

A great deal more needs to be found out about the background to the agreement. However, to summarize very briefly what the agreement is, it consists of establishing three bodies:

The first is called the Supreme Council for the Liberation of Angola, to be composed of members of the United Military Command and the Angolan Political Council - the other two bodies. This Council will be headed by the President of the FNLA and a deputy President will be drawn from the MPLA. It will have ultimate policy-making power on both political and military matters, with its headquarters in Kinshasa.

Second, a United Military Command has been established with its President drawn from the MPLA and its Deputy-President from the FNLA. Six officers chosen by each the MPLA and the FNLA will compose the command. It will be responsible for all military aspects of planning and operation.

Third, an Angola Political Council has been established. Again, the President of this will be drawn from the FNLA and the Deputy-President from the MPLA with six members chosen by each of the movements making up the Council.

Neither movement goes out of existence, although the Revolutionary Government of Angola in Exile (GRAE) ends its operation. Therefore it remains to be seen how the arrangements will work out. An arbitration Commission of the O.A.U. will keep watch on the implementation of the commitments made by each of the two movements. It is to be hoped that the plan will work on a permanent basis, and will speed up the liberation struggle.