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Book Note

George, Edward. 2005. *The Cuban Intervention in Angola, 1965-1991: From Che Guevara to Cuito Cuanavale*. London: Frank Cass Publishers. xiv + 354 pp. ISBN 0-415-35015-8 (hardback). Price: £65.00.

by Bjørn Møller (9 May 2006)

This is a comprehensive and detailed historical account of the Cuban intervention in the Angolan civil war from around 1975 to 1991. Cuba supported the MPLA first against FAPLA and, later, against UNITA and its strange group of supporters which included Zaire, South Africa, China, and the United States. Even though this war contained many elements of greed (diamonds for UNITA, oil for the ruling MPLA), the author finds Cuba's motives to have been predominantly political. This applied both to the Cuban regime as such, which actually took the revolutionary (and tier-mondist) ideology associated with the legacy of Che Guevara seriously, and to the troops, most of which volunteered for the mission out of ideological fervor and desire for adventure, but generally not for economic reasons. Nor would any such economic ambitions have been fulfilled as the bulk of the rank-and-file only received regular (small) rations in return for which they had to face the region's most formidable fighters, the South African Defence Force (SADF). A bonus system was gradually introduced for the Cuban troops, but certainly not attractive enough to explain why young people volunteered when all they could hope for upon their return (if they were not killed in action) was an electric fan (*sic!*). The author does document some elements of a war economy, such as a drug smuggling operation in which personnel from the Cuban ministry of the interior were involved, as well as a few other minor scandals, but nothing that would make the deployment economically beneficial.

Besides providing this account of the war, the work also covers in considerable detail the various peace initiatives that eventually led to a withdrawal agreement of Cuban and other foreign troops from Angola which, in turn, opened the gates to an even more destructive civil war, one driven to a much larger extent by greed. The author also records the feelings of Cuban veterans whose involvement abroad had made them "miss the train" of a galloping black market economy in their homeland, leaving them marginalized and often destitute. As if that was not enough, these veterans "witnessed the Dos Santos government – once proudly Marxist-Leninist and an outspoken champion of internationalism – degenerate into an elite cryptocracy whose venality far exceeds Batista's government of the late 1950s" (p. 284). This development is also described in the articles by Manuel Ennes Ferreira and David Gold in the first issue of *The Economics of Peace and Security Journal* (Vol. 1, No. 1, pp. 25-29 and 49-52, respectively).

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