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Mondlane and Che Guevara

In 1965, Mondlane still hoped that Portugal would agree to a negotiated settlement. He continued to regard the United States as a conduit for pressure on the Portuguese, despite improved US–Portugal relations under the Johnson administration.

In March, Mondlane was reassured of American interest in his organization in the wake of a misunderstanding between Frelimo and State Department officials in New York. Mondlane had instructed the Frelimo delegation to meet the officials in Washington, but when the State Department suggested New York as a venue, its members cancelled the meeting. Informed of the developments, Mondlane asked the American Embassy in Dar es Salaam to confirm urgently the situation as he was under great pressure within Frelimo to issue a public statement condemning the US Government. The State Department responded promptly, asking the Dar es Salaam post to assure Mondlane that there was no change in US policy on seeing Frelimo representatives, and that it had no previous information about the members of the delegation in question, and especially whether they had the Frelimo leader's blessing. The State Department missive added: ‘We normally prefer to look to Mondlane himself for discussions on Frelimo matters.’

At the State Department’s African Bureau, Mondlane continued to count on Mennen Williams’ support. Williams strongly objected in June 1965 to attempts by members of the Johnson administration to review US policy on Portugal and her colonies. He saw proposals contained in the Second Draft of the National Policy Paper on Portugal, as unacceptable to the African Bureau. ‘I take strong exception’, he said, ‘to the proposal permitting Portugal to purchase US military equipment without restrictions on its use so long as there is evidence that

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Communist arms, training and/or personnel are being supplied to the nationalists.’ Williams added:

This and other similar statements, including mention of the possibility of direct US military support of the Portuguese and even participation with the Portuguese against frontier infiltrations, run in the face of long established policy and the public stance we have taken in the United Nations and in the United States over the last four years.96

Williams also objected to giving official encouragement and incentives to US investments in the Portuguese colonies, advising that this should only happen when the Portuguese publicly accepted a program of self-determination.

During Robert Kennedy’s 1965 tour of southern and eastern Africa, Mondlane discussed the Mozambique situation with the former American attorney general and other US Government officials in Dar es Salaam in July. Mondlane confided to Wayne Fredericks that if Portugal agreed to a plebiscite over the future of its colonies, its terms were less important than the political process that it would set in motion. Accordingly, Mondlane conceded that eventual independence of Mozambique did not need to form part of the plebiscite. For him, a single choice between maintaining the status quo of Mozambique as a Portuguese overseas province or becoming a member of a Lusophone commonwealth would in fact be a significant step forward.97

In August, the State Department made new proposals to Portugal to resolve the colonial dispute. Primarily, the United States wanted Portugal to publicly accept the principle of self-determination at some specific time in the future. Secretary of State Dean Rusk told the Portuguese foreign minister that for the United States self-determination implied the availability of all options. And the US ambassador to Portugal, George Anderson, told Salazar in October that if the people of Portuguese Africa were ‘to be given a chance freely to express themselves and to state their preference with regard to their future status, the United States Government would accept the outcome and would be prepared to support it’. Anderson noted that the new proposals differed from others in the past in that they ‘offered to Portugal an opportunity to draw upon the resources of the United States and other NATO allies for the influencing of moderate African states and particularly those contiguous to Portuguese Africa’. The envoy went on to cite to Salazar Secretary of State Rusk’s suggestion that Portugal provide its friends ‘a flag around which to rally’.