

the MPLA effort to capture power upon the departure of the Portuguese, which had been scheduled for November 11.

Three Cuban ships with men and an assortment of weapons and other equipment arrived in Angola in early October. The Cuban merchant ship "Viet Nam Heroico" arrived on 4 October, and two more ships arrived within a week. But before the Cubans could establish their camps and train a large force of MPLA troops, the military situation grew worse for Cuba's allies. South African troops began to advance north toward the capital and the FNLA closed in from the north toward MPLA-held territory.

The Cuban government then decided to send a battalion of special forces (650 men) to Angola by air to support the MPLA and the Cuban troops that had arrived in October. The battalion was transported by air in thirteen days, starting on 7 November 1975. The Cubans used old Bristol Britannia turbo-prop airplanes, making refueling stops in Barbados, Guinea-Bissau, and the Congo before landing in Luanda. Preparations began for sending thousands of additional troops by sea and air. These would include at least one artillery regiment and a battalion of motorized troops.

The troops were carried in Cuban merchant ships, fishing boats, and an assortment of airplanes. The logistics, although fairly primitive, were effective enough to transfer large quantities of men and materials. Commercial airplanes and small cargo vessels were often overloaded in the effort to carry large numbers of troops quickly to Angola. Considering that Cuba had never been involved in an operation of this type, this was a creditable operation. But the key to success was the ambivalence and the lack of direction of the United States on the Angolan situation. Cuba would not have been able to intervene in Angola had the United States taken a strong stand and prevented Cuban troops from leaving their home island.