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Aide Details U.S. Misgivings on Angola

Covert Military Operations Were Mounted in 1975 Despite the 'Longest of Odds'

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One of Henry A. Kissinger's principal aides during the Angola crisis of 1975 reports in a forthcoming magazine article that the Ford administration mounted covert military operations in Angola despite a strong conviction by the officials most directly involved that the effort would fail and ultimately damage American interests abroad.

Providing the first public account by a high-level insider of the policy battle over Angola, Nathaniel Davis writes in the fall issue of the quarterly journal *Foreign Affairs* that Kissinger and President Ford seemed to believe during both the final weeks of Vietnam and the Angola crisis "that it was better to roll the dice against the longest of odds than to abandon the competition against our great adversary," the Soviet Union.

Kissinger "saw Angola as part of the U.S.-Soviet relationship, and not as an African problem," argues Davis, who served as assistant secretary of state for African affairs under Kissinger from March to July 1975, when he secretly resigned because of his differences with Kissinger and Ford.

Asked for comment, Kissinger said that he was "astonished that a serving ambassador would publish such a one-sided and distorted view of events and that the State Department has cleared such a piece, it is not conducive to nonpartisan foreign policy."

Quoting from two highly classified memos that he prepared during the intense policy debate, Davis portrays himself and other senior officials as arguing that Angola had to be treated as a diplomatic-political problem that could be solved in an African context.

The account by the career diplomat—which was cleared for publication by the State Department at Davis' request—appears only a few months after the same kind of policy battle over responding to Russian actions in the conflicts of Ethiopia and Somalia and of Zaire's Shaba Province surfaced inside the Carter administration.

Although partial accounts of the 1975 Angola policy struggle and Davis' resignation were eventually leaked to reporters, Davis himself had sought to keep them secret until now. His account, entitled a "Memoir," is his first effort to explain publicly the painful dilemma he felt the Angola crisis represented for him.

It is an account filled with strong suggestions of manipulation of the bureaucracy and the press not only to preserve secrecy but also to improve the chances for getting presidential acceptance of covert operations.

Davis draws a number of parallels between the dangers of covert involvement in Angola and initial U.S. involvement in Vietnam. He states that Kissinger seemed to share fully those perceptions, but eventually overrode them to go more deeply into Angola.

"I believe the secretary is right in his conviction—if I understand his views—that if we go in, we must go in quickly, massively and decisively enough to avoid the tempting, gradual, mutual escalation that characterized Vietnam during the 1965-67 period," Davis wrote in a memorandum on July 12, 1975. "... If we are to have a test of strength with the Soviets, we should find a more advantageous place."

Davis wrote the memorandum to head off a Central Intelligence Agency covert operations proposal for Angola ordered up by the administration in April. He urged Kissinger and Ford instead to adopt the "diplomatic option" developed at the same time by a high-level interagency task force on Angola, which suggested that the administration work with Portugal and a few key African countries to reduce the flow of arms to the three warring black nationalist factions.

The task force included senior representatives from the CIA, Defense Department, National Security Council and other agencies involved in African policy. Davis writes that the task force "in its great majority" favored the diplomatic option and opposed the covert intervention, which "would commit U.S. resources and prestige in a situation the outcome of

which was in doubt and over which we could at best exercise limited influence."

But the task force diplomatic recommendation was rewritten on instructions from the National Security Council staff to give equal weight to two other options, a complete hands-off policy or military intervention, according to a report of the House Select Committee on Intelligence that was published in February 1978 and which Davis quotes with evident approval.

Davis suggests he was also bureaucratically outflanked at the crucial July 14 meeting of Kissinger's highly secret "Forty Committee," a high-level review body for covert actions. Davis asked to be present at the meeting to argue his case, but he notes that he "was not invited" to the meeting. It ended with an order for further study of the covert operation plan.

Within a week, Ford had approved a \$6 million guns-and-cash operation for the Angolan forces of Holden Roberto and Jonas Savimbi, according to the House Intelligence Committee report. A month later, the figure had gradually escalated to \$14 million, and reached \$32 million before the Senate legislated an end to the covert support on Dec. 19.

Davis, who has served at lower level posts since his break with Kissinger, is currently state department adviser at the Naval War College. He describes his opposition entirely on pragmatic grounds. He suggests at several points that he did not disagree with Kissinger's concern over Russian moves in Africa and he sidesteps the question of his own views on the principle of covert action in such situations.

In the July memo he submitted to Kissinger through Undersecretary of State Joseph J. Sisco, Davis argued that the CIA proposal "grossly underestimates the risks of disclosure abroad" because of the operation's high visibility. The CIA had instead stressed the danger of leaks in Washington and the need to restrict information to Congress, Davis notes.

The Russians, Davis argued, would quickly know of the American support for the Roberto and Savimbi forces

and could easily increase their supplies to their client, the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola. He described the Roberto and Savimbi forces as having serious military weak points, and noted that Savimbi was reported to be receiving South African assistance, a link that would cause problems with African opinion.

In a section that gives a broader scope to the CIA proposal than has previously been officially confirmed, the July 12 memo noted that "the CIA paper envisages covert CIA-organized military training, organization, orientation and leadership," along the lines of CIA activities "in the Vietnam highlands and elsewhere in East Asia."

Davis resigned immediately after Ford approved the covert option, and was offered a job as ambassador to Switzerland. He paints the period that followed his resignation as a difficult time of feeling that he could not talk about his resignation without disclosing the covert operation.

The article discloses that Davis and Kissinger aide Lawrence S. Eagleburger deliberately scheduled Davis to be on vacation on July 28 when the Senate Foreign Relations African subcommittee began hearings at which Davis should have testified. When The Washington Post discovered the resignation a month later, Davis acquiesced in what he now calls "a cover story" that he had quit because of the frustration of "working against too many psychological obstacles" from African and congressional opposition.

The secret Angola operation first came to public notice on Sept. 25 in a New York Times report that reported that both "East and West," including the United States, were pouring millions of dollars covertly into Portugal and Angola. Davis writes that he is still puzzled why that particular report "had so little impact in the United States," but suggests that it was because the story's sources put the main emphasis on the political activity in Portugal rather than the military operation in Angola and because it "emphasized Soviet actions in support of the leftists in Angola."

Staff researcher Jane Freundel contributed to this report.