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Pondering Covert Aid in Africa

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White House strategists for at least two months have attempted to develop a plan to permit the United States to funnel sophisticated arms and funds clandestinely to African guerrilla forces fighting Soviet-backed Cuban troops in Angola and Ethiopia.

This objective is an underlying motive, according to authoritative sources, behind the frustration expressed by President Carter to congressional leaders on Tuesday. Carter complained about restrictions on White House ability to help beleaguered friendly governments resist communist aggression.

"That was just the tip of the iceberg," one knowledgeable source said yesterday in referring to the accounts that reached the public.

Visible now is the new Western aid and air-rescue mission to Zaire in the wake of the border-crossing from guerrillas into Zaire's rich copper belt.

That double operation has been launched with unpublicized apprehension by some officials inside the Carter administration that it is, as one put it, "a first step into the quicksand—on the Vietnam model." Others strongly disagree, insisting that in Zaire the Carter administration is involved only in "aid and humanitarian" objectives.

But apart from what is happening around Kolwezi there is a web of strategic concern especially preoccupying Carter and his national security affairs adviser, Zbigniew Brzezinski.

Brzezinski, who left Washington yesterday for China, is described by informed sources as at least as "obsessed" with the Soviet-Cuban projection of military power into Africa as was former secretary of state Henry A. Kissinger over Angola in 1975-76.

To Brzezinski, what is at stake is a fundamental test of the validity of American-Soviet detente, and he

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is determined to do anything he can to thwart the Russians' Cuban "mercenaries" or surrogates in Africa.

In Peking, Brzezinski evidently will encounter similar attitudes. China has its own anti-Soviet involvement and stake in Africa. The New China News Agency reported from Peking yesterday that in a meeting between Chinese Foreign Minister Huang Hua and Zaire's ambassador to Peking, "The ambassador informed him of the grave situation of the renewed invasion of the Shaba region engineered by the Soviet Union and executed by Cuban mercenaries," and that Huang replied that China will "firmly support" Zaire in its "just struggle to repulse the Soviet-Cuban mercenaries . . ."

Where Brzezinski and Huang will go from there is an open question.

According to sources in Washington, Brzezinski wants the United States to shake free from the Vietnam war-inspired curbs on presidential power enough to permit U.S. aid for clandestine operations in Africa "to pin down the Cubans" and limit their ability to stretch into other adventures—notably in Rhodesia.

One concept is to furnish sophisticated U.S. weapons, and money, to the supporters of the major guerrilla war that has been continued in Angola since 1976 by Jonas Savimbi's United Front for the Total Independence of Angola. Savimbi's UNITA covertly receives support from a consortium of nations, as well as South Africa.

The nations involved all deny this, when they publicly address the subject at all. The size of "the consortium's" investment is reported by some

sources to be in the "\$30 million to \$40 million range." One Washington source said yesterday "that figure is too high," and other sources put the investment in guerrilla warfare at closer to \$20 million.

Another concept that has been pushed behind the scenes is to encourage greater covert assistance by Saudi Arabia and other wealthy anti-Marxist nations to the various liberation fronts fighting in Ethiopia's Eritrean Province. Ethiopia this week launched a major offensive to crush that secessionist movement, claiming it has support from the Soviet Union, Cuba, East Germany and other communist nations.

The extent to which President Carter completely shares these perceptions attributed to Brzezinski about what must be done to resist the Soviet-Cuban thrust in Africa is not clear—even to some of the most senior administration officials.

There is burgeoning concern at the top of the administration, (as in Congress) about the scope of Soviet-Cuban adventurism in Africa, among Secretary of State Cyrus R. Vance, Defense Secretary Harold Brown and others, even including many of the pro-Africanists who were dismayed by Kissinger's fixation on the superpower struggle in Africa.

But what is in profound dispute behind the scenes inside the administration is what the United States should, or can, do about it. One large fear is that the Carter administration, through preoccupation with Soviet African ventures, may end up jeopardizing the strategic nuclear arms limitation negotiations just as Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko is due

in the United States for near-climactic negotiations.

In many respects, the internal struggle of 1975 over clandestine American support to anti-Marxist factions in Angola's civil war is being repeated—but this time more in the open, forced there by the limitations imposed on Angola by Sen. Dick Clark (D-Iowa), chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations subcommittee on Africa, and others.

"Let the Cubans have their Vietnam in Africa," one senior administration official pungently said yesterday. "There is no reason for us to get panicked and plunge into the quicksand with them."

This is a predominant view across the State Department, and it is reported to be shared as well by many officials in the Pentagon, and in the Central Intelligence Agency which ran the U.S. venture in Angola that was lopped off by Congress.

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Internal differences over how to thwart the Russians and Cubans in Africa, there is an overriding global issue—the conduct of American-Soviet detente.

In an assessment that could have been uttered by Henry Kissinger — and it was in 1975-76—Brzezinski is quoted in a revealing profile by Elizabeth Drew in the May 1 issue of The New Yorker as saying:

"There is a tendency in America to be traumatized by international difficulties. The generation of the 1950s was always thinking about the failure of the League of Nations... The leadership of the '60s was always thinking about Munich. Now there is a generation worried by Vietnam, with consequences of self-imposed paralysis which is likely to be costlier in the long run."

Brzezinski's determination to show the Carter administration is not "paralyzed" by Soviet-Cuban ventures in Africa led, over the past two months, to probing

attempts behind the scene to seek a way around what he and the president regard as unnecessarily restrictive congressional limitations on covert action abroad, especially in Africa.

Private talks, it was learned, have been held with Sen. Clark, House Speaker Thomas P. (Tip) O'Neill Jr. (D-Mass.), Senate Majority Leader Robert C. Byrd (D-W.Va.) and others on possible routes around the legislative inhibitions.

Last Tuesday, after House Minority Leader John J. Rhodes (R-Ariz.) came out of a White House breakfast reporting Carter's "frustration at having his hands tied" in supporting "friendly" nations, Vance pursued the subject with O'Neill in person, and with Byrd by telephone.

According to reputable sources, Vance, presumably at Carter's direction, specifically concentrated in the O'Neill and Byrd discussions on what might be done about the Clark amendment of 1976. This amendment imposes extraordinary

limits on U.S. aid, "directly or indirectly," to "any nation, group, organization, movement or individual to conduct military or paramilitary operations in Angola unless and until the Congress expressly authorizes such assistance by law...."

Initially, according to several sources, it was Brzezinski's hope that despite the Clark amendment, Congress would agree to turn "a blind eye" to covert U.S. support passed to third countries to help to "tie down" the Cubans in Africa.

Clark is reported to have told Brzezinski, Vance and CIA Director Stansfield Turner and others that as much as he shared the administration's concern about the Soviet-Cuban danger in Africa, they were asking the impossible. As a third party put it "The law is the law and there is not a damn thing Clark or anyone else can do about it."

Wednesday night it was learned

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Clark and the Senate's deputy majority leader Alan Cranston (D-Calif.) met with Vance at the State Department just before the White House state dinner for Zambian President Kenneth Kaunda. None of the participants will discuss that conversation and both Clark and Cranston were in California yesterday on a speaking trip.

Zambia's Kaunda, in the meantime, went on the record Wednesday, soon after he began his talks with Carter, with the comments undercutting administration alarm about the Cuban presence in Africa.

Kaunda, whose nation provides bases for some of the guerrillas seeking to topple white minority rule in Rhodesia, told reporters, "I am not sure there is a single Cuban on the African continent who has not been invited by some member of the continent." The Cubans in Africa, Kaunda said, are "the effect," rather than "the cause" of the turmoil which Kaunda says, and other black African leaders agree, is the prolonged denial of black majority rights notably in Rhodesia and in Namibia (Southwest Africa).

Kaunda is threatening, in desperation, to join in inviting Cuban troops into the Rhodesian struggle if the West fails to respond adequately to black Africa's aspirations. There is no indication that Kaunda has deflected the administration from its goals.

State Department spokesman Tom Reston said yesterday that the department's legal office is studying statutes that limit presidential authority abroad. He said this would "undoubtedly include" the Clark amendment on Angola, and requirements for reporting covert operations that are contained in 1974 legislation known as the Hughes-Ryan amendments.

At the same time, Sen. Bob Dole (R-Kan.) apparently scenting opportunity to capitalize on widening Re-

publican demands on the Carter administration to "stiffen its backbone" against Soviet-Cuban penetration of Africa, has attacked the Clark amendment as "a short-sighted, partisan effort to handcuff a Republican president"—meaning President Ford in 1976—which much be overhauled.

Dole has introduced legislation to make it "absolutely clear" that the 1976 Clark amendment "in no way restricts United States military, paramilitary or nonmilitary assistance to any African country, such as Zaire, for the purpose of defending its territory against internal or external attack."

Clark, reached in California yesterday, said, "I can't believe we want to get involved again in the Angolan civil war." Nothing in his amendment, he said, precludes bonafide U.S. aid to Zaire or any other "friendly nation." To Clark supporters, Dole's proposal and others in the wind are flank attacks that obscure an attempt by the executive branch to roll back congressional restrictions born of the Vietnam experience, which should be faced openly.

At the same time, Carter administration officials last night insisted that there is no connection whatever between their long-term strategy in Africa and the "international rescue mission" for the beleaguered Europeans and remaining Americans caught in Zaire's Shaba province. But that disclaimer left untold numbers of skeptics in Washington.

There is an unusual grouping of people and attitudes inside the administration with pained memories of the failed 1975-76 attempt to checkmate the Russians and Cubans in Africa.

They include the director of the State Department's Policy Planning Staff, W. Anthony Lake, a onetime member of the Kissinger staff at the White House; Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs Richard M. Moose Jr., who, it might be noted, helped to draft the Clark amendment as a Senate Foreign Relations staff member, and Secretary Vance himself