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U.S. Sends Envoys To Bolster Policy In Southern Africa

By Reed Kramer
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With negotiations for Namibian independence from South Africa stalled over the issue of Cuban troops in Angola, the Reagan administration has undertaken a series of high-level diplomatic contacts designed to salvage its southern Africa policy.

The contacts include an unpublicized visit to Africa in September by Central Intelligence Agency Director William Casey; Assistant Secretary of State Chester Crocker's trip to Paris and London last month; a coming African tour by Vice President George Bush and a meeting between Secretary of State George C. Shultz and South African Foreign Minister Pik Botha later this month.

The trips by senior officials are designed to win support for U.S. policy by offering both political and economic inducements. The vice president's good-will journey to seven African nations, focusing on economic issues, is the flip side of Casey's security-oriented consultations, while Crocker's European talks centered on breaking the Namibian deadlock.

According to State Department officials, Foreign Minister Botha and Shultz will be discussing both Namibia and bilateral issues when they meet in Washington this month.

Administration strategists believe that visible progress toward ending the impasse over Namibia, also known as South-West Africa, is necessary to protect U.S. interests in the region and to blunt rising criticism from both conservative Republicans and foreign governments.

"There's stirring on the left and stirring on the right," said one State Department official. "The Europeans are saying, 'If you guys hadn't interposed the Cuban issue, Namibian independence would move forward.' And our own right wing believes that we haven't taken UNITA into account."

The future of UNITA, the pro-Western guerrilla movement fighting the Angolan government, was raised in a secret letter last month to National Security Adviser William Clark by members of the conservative Republican Steering Committee. Signed by a dozen senators from the 30-member group that is chaired by North Carolina's Jesse Helms, the letter expressed concern about the impact on UNITA if the United States reaches agreement with Angola's Marxist leaders and normalizes relations.

A committee aide said the senators' fears were reinforced during a visit to Washington last week by former white Rhodesian leader Ian Smith.

"He is pretty negative about the way things worked out [in Zimbabwe, formerly Rhodesia], and that's having an impact on people's perceptions of how carefully negotiated a Namibian settlement has to be," the aide said.

He said the group also faults administration spokesmen, particularly Crocker, for "over-optimistic" statements on the progress of the talks.

"The senators are asking, 'Why attach the president's prestige to a negotiating process that seems to be doomed?'" he said.

The concern of Western allies was publicly expressed earlier this month by French Foreign Minister Claude Cheysson, who said his government's opposition to linking a Namibian settlement and Cuban withdrawal from Angola is shared by West Germany and Canada. The three nations along with Britain and the United States make up the Contact Group, which has spearheaded independence negotiations for the past six years.

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Among African leaders there is suspicion that the United States is abetting South Africa's foot-dragging. Shehu Shagari, president of oil-rich Nigeria, recently warned that he will join "front-line" states in southern Africa to increase pressure on Washington.

"We believe a Namibian settlement should be taking place now," agreed Tanzanian Foreign Minister Salim Salim, after a meeting last month with Secretary of State Shultz.

"I don't understand why problems between the United States of America and Angola should be causing this delay," said Mozambican Foreign Minister Joaquim Chissano in a telephone interview after his talks with Shultz. "The United States has told us the two issues are not linked."

But while carefully avoiding formal linkage, the administration continues to insist on a Cuban pullout as part of a Namibian settlement. In a confidential letter sent in August to Tanzanian President Julius Nyerere, chairman of the "front-line" states, Reagan said that to set a Namibian independence plan into motion, "we will need a credible Angolan commitment for a parallel framework of Cuban withdrawal."

Citing continuing exchanges with the Angolans and the Contact Group, and Bush's visit to Nigeria, Zambia and Zimbabwe, a senior State Department official told reporters yesterday that talk of a stalemate in the Namibia negotiations is "grossly inaccurate."

Crocker and other Reagan advisers say a resolution of both the Namibia independence issue and the Cuban troop pullout is necessary to achieve regional stability, and they see stability as the most effective barrier to expanding Soviet influence.

Although the CIA refuses to comment on Casey's trip, U.S. sources say he consulted intelligence chiefs of key African countries such as Nigeria, Zaire, Zambia and Mozambique.

In South Africa, he reportedly met with Prime Minister P.W. Botha, and Foreign Minister Pik Botha as well as Defense Minister Magnus Malan and top military officers.

During those talks, South Africa urged that the current negotiations be broadened to encompass the issue of infiltration across its borders by the African National Congress, an outlawed organization that enjoys wide support among blacks. In exchange for a ban on an ANC guerrilla presence in surrounding countries—including Angola, where the movement has important training facilities—South Africa hinted it would curb its own military actions against neighboring states, U.S. sources said.

American officials are treating the ANC question warily, saying privately that while there is sympathy in Washington for South Africa's security problems, the United States cannot afford to "touch" the issue at this critical point in the Namibia talks. Instead, Washington is addressing Pretoria's concerns by improving bilateral relations. It is relaxing restrictions on exports to South African government entities including the military and police.

The United States has reassured South Africa that it will not recognize the Angolan government until Cuban troops leave. In eight meetings with Angolan officials—the most recent between Secretary of State Shultz and Angolan Foreign Minister Paulo Jorge on Oct. 5—the United States has pressed for the phased withdrawal of the estimated 15,000 to 20,000 Cubans.