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U.S. Weighs Angolan Rebel Aid

Resumption Is Urged To Show Resolve Against Communism

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The Reagan administration is in the midst of a major policy review to decide whether to resume U.S. military aid to noncommunist guerrillas fighting Angola's Marxist government, according to congressional and intelligence sources.

The review has touched off an acrimonious interagency debate that pits the administration's global strategists, intent upon showing U.S. resolve against the growing Soviet and Cuban military role in Angola, against its "regionalists," who fear U.S. aid to the guerrillas will end U.S. efforts to negotiate a peaceful settlement to the dispute over Namibia, or Southwest Africa.

The debate takes place amid administration preparations for the Nov. 19-20 summit between President Reagan and Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev, and a number of policy-makers are arguing that now is the time for Washington to send a strong message to Moscow about the U.S. resolve not only to help noncommunist guerrilla forces in Angola but elsewhere in the world.

In addition, they are arguing that Gorbachev is behind recent offensives by Soviet-allied governments in Afghanistan, Nicaragua and Ethiopia against noncommunists fighting in those countries and that the United States must respond to bolster its position going into the summit.

At least two National Security Council-chaired meetings have been held, the latest last Friday. In addition, a Special National Intelligence Estimate, a quick in-depth study by the various branches of the intelligence community, is under

way to determine the Soviet role, intentions and prospects in Angola, according to intelligence and congressional sources.

At issue is whether the United States should provide either military or humanitarian aid to the noncommunist National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA) led by Jonas Savimbi, whose guerrillas fighting in southern Angola have recently been under heavy pressure from the Soviet-supplied and Cuban-aided forces of the Marxist government. A subsidiary question is whether this aid should be provided through covert or overt U.S. channels.

Earlier this month, sources said both the CIA and Pentagon seemed to favor covert military aid similar

to the assistance being given to the rebels in Afghanistan.

Also being studied is the possible imposition of a trade embargo, affecting either U.S. exports to Angola, the importation of Angolan oil, or both, a step being urged on the administration by conservative Republican groups like the Conservative Caucus and the American Security Council.

According to government sources, the Central Intelligence Agency, the Pentagon and the NSC staff all strongly support military aid—perhaps even covert assistance—while the State Department is said to be just as vehemently opposing any shift from the current U.S. policy of no assistance at all.

"We still don't think providing arms is the way to do it," said a State Department spokesman, adding, "We think negotiations is the way out." He was referring to U.S. efforts to resolve through negotiations the twin problems of the withdrawal of Cuban troops from Angola—now said to number as many as 35,000, up 5,000 from last year—and independence for South African-administered Namibia.

An administration decision to ask Congress for overt assistance is likely to touch off another bitter debate there similar to the one over U.S. aid to anticommunist forces, known as the "contras," in Nicaragua.

A debate over U.S. policy toward Angola took place in 1975-76 after it was discovered that the CIA was secretly funneling more than \$30 million in military and other assistance to two rebel factions, one of them UNITA, which were then locked in a three-year civil war and power struggle ultimately won by the now ruling Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA). In January

1976, Congress passed the Clark amendment, which was sponsored by then-Sen. Dick Clark (D-Iowa), banning any further covert military aid to Angolan rebels.

That amendment was repealed by Congress last July, opening the way for the debate now going on inside the administration over whether to resume aid to UNITA.

Supporters of a renewed American involvement on the side of UNITA say there may be less congressional opposition this time because of Soviet and Cuban involvement in Angola and the fact that the United States has never had diplomatic relations with the Marxist Angolan government. In addition, State Department efforts to negotiate a solution to the Namibia dispute, or a withdrawal of Cuban troops from Angola, have been unsuccessful.

Opponents of such a policy say an open U.S. alignment with UNITA will inevitably draw Washington into a closer alliance with white-ruled South Africa, UNITA's most important source of support, and undermine the administration's efforts to pressure Pretoria to reform its apartheid system. South Africa is presently the main supplier of arms and the conduit for other outside military aid to UNITA.

Rep. Claude Pepper (D-Fla.), chairman of the House Rules Committee, introduced a bill earlier this month authorizing the U.S. government to provide up to \$27 million in humanitarian aid only to UNITA, and Sen. Steve Symms (R-Idaho) is "seriously thinking" about sponsoring a similar bill in the Senate, according to an aide.

"We're waiting for word from the White House," an aide to Pepper said. "We feel there will be significant developments in a matter of days."

Savimbi has asked the United States for military aid, though he has not submitted any written request to Washington yet, according to Jeremias K. Chitunda, UNITA foreign affairs secretary.

Chitunda said in an interview that UNITA's top priority right now was antitank and anti-aircraft weapons to counter the Angolan government's Mig fighters, Hind helicopter gunships and tanks recently supplied by the Soviet Union.

He said \$50 million in military aid would be more useful than \$100 million in humanitarian aid. "Humanitarian assistance is just a way of evading . . . the issue . . .," he added.

Chitunda asserted that the Soviets had delivered \$2 billion worth of arms in the past 18 months, but U.S. intelligence sources said it was more like \$1 billion worth since January 1984.