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Secret letter to Shultz Asks Arms for Savimbi

Senators Seeking Commitment on Angola

By Patrick Tyler
Washington Post Staff Writer

Late last week, Senate Majority Leader Robert J. Dole (R-Kan.) wrote a classified letter to Secretary of State George P. Shultz attempting to secretly clarify one of those nuances of foreign policy that leaders are often loath to put in writing.

The letter, a copy of which was made available to The Washington Post, demonstrates the intricate pulling and tugging between the Senate's conservative wing and the Reagan administration over the most effective way to support the anticommunist "freedom fighters" President Reagan has identified in a growing list of Third World countries.

The administration last month notified the House and Senate intelligence oversight committees that it plans to give covert assistance to Angolan guerrilla leader Jonas Savimbi, who last week completed a tour of Washington and New York to seek U.S. support for his fight against the Marxist gov-

ernment of Angola. The notification was by secret presidential "finding" under the National Security Act.

In late January, Shultz asked Senate leaders to give the administration an expression of support so the Central Intelligence Agency could proceed with the covert aid. Dole obliged by drafting a resolution urging U.S. support for Savimbi.

No such expression of support is required by law, but shrewd political instincts persuaded Reagan's national security advisers of the need for what some call "political cover" before they involved the United States in another CIA-backed paramilitary operation against a foreign power.

Despite the appearance of support for Savimbi in the upper reaches of the administration, a number of Savimbi's strongest supporters in the Senate suspected that other members of the administration would like to derail the covert operation, and last week they expressed their doubts to Dole.

Their chief concern was that the

administration would lend only moral support or some form of military assistance that fell short of Savimbi's critical needs: antitank and anti-aircraft weapons to fight Soviet armor.

At a private lunch with Savimbi Feb. 5, Dole and a group of senators, most of them conservatives, developed a strategy to lock the administration into a commitment to give Savimbi what he says he needs.

The following letter, classified "secret" by Dole's staff because it implicitly refers to the pending covert operation, according to Republican Senate sources, is a gambit that is believed to have paid off for Savimbi.

Republican sources said this week that the White House and State Department are considering redrafting the president's secret "finding" for transmission to the Senate, but this time the presidential document would specifically call for providing Savimbi with lethal weapons to combat Soviet-built tanks and to shoot down Soviet-built assault helicopters.

The letter was signed by senators Dole, John Heinz (R-Pa.), Steve Symms (R-Idaho), William V. Roth Jr. (R-Del.), Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.), Orrin G. Hatch (R-Utah), Robert W. Kasten Jr. (R-Wis.), Pete Wilson (R-Calif.), Jeremiah Denton (R-Ala.), James A. McClure (R-Idaho) and Phil Gramm (R-Texas).

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READING BETWEEN THE LINES

This paragraph acknowledges that the administration's goal is to use paramilitary pressure to force the Marxist regime to negotiate the withdrawal of all Cuban troops and Soviet advisers from Angola in return for South Africa's withdrawal of forces from Namibia.

This paragraph states the senators' belief that supplying arms is the way to help Savimbi and suggests that the administration needs to get specific on this point. This paragraph, according to sources, is the reason the letter was classified. For U.S. senators to openly discuss the provision of lethal weapons to rebel forces in a sovereign nation might violate not only Angola's national sensibilities, but also those of neighboring Zaire and Zambia, through which CIA aid would have to pass to reach Savimbi.

Finally, the senators make a subtle, politically artful proposal. They say they are willing to provide what has been called the "political cover" the administration wants for the CIA operation, but only if the administration states in concrete terms (through some private channel) that the assistance will include antitank and antimissile weapons. They also raise the threat that the Senate would go ahead openly to provide Savimbi with antiarmor weapons if assurances are not forthcoming.

BOB DOLE
KANSAS

UNITED STATES SENATE
AGRICULTURE, NUTRITION AND FORESTRY
FINANCE
HEALTH

United States Senate

WASHINGTON DC 20510

February 6, 1986

The Honorable George P. Shultz
Secretary of State
Department of State
Washington, D.C. 20520

Dear Mr. Secretary:

With the imminence of a new Communist offensive in Angola, it is imperative that the United States begin immediately to provide concrete assistance to the Angolan democratic resistance forces, under the leadership of UNITA and Dr. Jonas Savimbi.

■ Such assistance is needed to achieve the goals we all seek in Angola -- an end to the massive Soviet and Cuban troop presence and a negotiated political settlement. We understand that the President wishes to provide such assistance, and it would be consistent with your own public statements of the need to provide "effective" aid to the democratic resistance.

■ To meet the threat posed by the Communist offensive, such assistance must include defensive weaponry effective against the massive, modern weaponry provided to the MPLA by the Soviet Union, such as tanks and attack helicopters.

■ If you believe it would be useful, we are prepared to introduce and seek speedy passage of a Senate resolution of support for UNITA. We would do so, though, only on the firm assurance that it was part of, and not a substitute for, an overall strategy to provide vitally needed aid to the democratic resistance on a timely basis. Absent such an assurance, we are prepared to press for Congressional action to initiate a program of effective material assistance to UNITA.

Sincerely yours,

BOB DOLE
United States Senate