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ON PAGE A25WASHINGTON POST  
12 June 1986P Lee H. Hamilton

# Angola: Open Talk, Covert Aid

The president talks openly about providing covert assistance to rebels of the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA), who oppose the Angolan government. But this policy cannot succeed or be sustained without the support of Congress, and at present the president's controversial plan does not have congressional approval.

Concern about a U.S. role in the Angola conflict dates from 1976, when CIA involvement in that war led Congress to pass the Clark Amendment prohibiting U.S. assistance to military and paramilitary groups in Angola. Last year Congress repealed the Clark Amendment. The administration supported this repeal as a means of restoring the president's flexibility in foreign affairs, but it neither proposed nor supported funding for UNITA at that time. It has since changed policy.

Under the law the president must notify the House and Senate intelligence committees of planned covert actions. The committees' approval is not required for the president to proceed with covert actions. The administration apparently decided to move forward with a plan to provide UNITA and its leader, Jonas Savimbi, with covert assistance this year despite Congress' reservations on this issue.

My principal objection to this plan is a procedural one. Covert authority is intended as a necessarily secret tool in support of existing policy, not a means to change policy in secret. In Angola the administration seems to be using its covert action authority to change policy dramatically and avoid public or congressional debate. Aiding UNITA is funding a war, one of the powers of Congress enumerated in the Constitution. The president should not be able to circumvent a public debate in Congress on a significant foreign policy decision by calling this aid by a different name.

Moreover, no serious effort has been made to preserve the secrecy of this policy change. The president, the vice president and other officials have confirmed it and disclosed details about the number and types of weapons to be provided. This action is no longer "covert" under any reasonable definition of that term. If the administration can talk about covert action openly, so should members of Congress.

We need to resolve this procedural issue so that important, substantive questions can be debated. How will aid to UNITA serve U.S. interests? How will it affect Angolan dependence on Soviet and Cuban support, possibilities for a negotiated settlement in Namibia and U.S. credibility as an honest broker in southern Africa? How will it be viewed in black Africa? How will it affect substantial U.S. commercial ties with Angola?

These questions should not be avoided by simply notifying a handful of members on the intelligence committees. They are among the most serious issues for U.S. policy in Africa today. They deserve to be weighed by Congress as a whole. Legislation will soon come before the House which would restrict temporarily the president's authority to conduct covert action in Angola and require open acknowledgment and congressional approval of any proposal to aid UNITA.

The purpose of this bill is to strengthen U.S. policy in Angola, to ensure that it reflects American values and interests. Debate in Congress can help answer many of the questions concerning aid to UNITA and generate the political backing the president will need if he is to sustain any policy in Angola over time.

American foreign policy is most successful when the president and Congress cooperate. While the president needs flexibility in the implementation of foreign policy, Congress has a constitutional role to play in its formulation and review. That role must be respected if we are to have a sustainable policy in Angola that reflects U.S. interests.

The writer, a Democratic representative from Indiana, is chairman of the House intelligence committee and ranking member of the Foreign Affairs Committee.