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House committee votes 22-18 to prohibit covert aid to rebels in Angola

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WASHINGTON — The House Foreign Affairs Committee voted yesterday to prohibit covert aid to anti-government rebels in Angola and to require the president to obtain congressional approval for any openly acknowledged aid.

The 22-18 vote, the first public action by Congress to restrict U.S. aid to the Angolan rebels, followed an earlier closed-session vote by the House Intelligence Committee to approve the legislation, which is sponsored by Representative Lee Hamilton, D-Ind., the intelligence panel chairman.

The fate of the Hamilton plan in the full House is uncertain, and it faces an uphill fight in the Senate, where Majority Leader Robert J. Dole, R-Kan., has sided with conservatives who strongly support the aid.

Covert aid to the rebels was initiated earlier this year by the Reagan administration under procedures that prevent intelligence oversight committees in Congress from blocking the aid.

The administration is thought to be supplying at least \$15 million in covert military aid, including sophisticated Stinger missiles, to the rebel forces of Jonas Savimbi, leader of UNITA (Union for the Total Independence of Angola), which is fighting against the leftist government of Angola.

"I think we're seeing the death knell of covert activity," said Representative Henry J. Hyde, R-Ill., a supporter of aid to UNITA. He accused Democrats of engaging in po-

litically inspired "Reagan-bashing."

Mr. Hamilton, who said he opposes the aid, said his measure was designed to assure proper congressional involvement in such a controversial decision. He said it was a "sham" to claim the aid must be kept secret, because the president and other administration officials have spoken openly of the assistance.

Representative Howard D. Wolpe, D-Mich., chairman of the Africa subcommittee, said the only reason the Reagan administration wants covert aid is "to evade scrutiny" by Congress. He said the administration's plans could eventually involve as much as \$20 million in Stinger missiles alone.

The covert-aid plan is the first since Congress banned any assistance to Angolan rebels in 1976. Last year, Congress repealed the ban but did not specifically authorize funds for aid to the rebels.

Representative Mark E. Siljander, R-Mich., said the committee vote yesterday was an attempt "to reverse the decision to repeal" the aid ban. He attempted a procedural maneuver to prevent a vote on the Hamilton proposal yesterday, but the committee eventually went ahead with the vote anyway.

Mr. Hyde contended that conducting a public debate of a covert aid program was "like sitting on a soufflé."

Mr. Wolpe countered that the entire U.S. aid program for UNITA was "bizarre" because Mr. Savimbi "has been portrayed as an anti-communist freedom fighter and advocate of Western capitalism but is, in fact, an avowed Maoist."