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Open U.S. Aid to Rebel Groups Is Urged

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WASHINGTON, March 31 — The chairman of the House intelligence committee called today for an end to covert United States support for insurgents in Afghanistan and Angola.

The statement, by Representative Lee Hamilton, Democrat of Indiana, came after it was disclosed over the weekend that the Administration had decided to send portable antiaircraft missiles to rebels in the two countries.

Representative Hamilton called for an open aid program that could be voted on by the entire Congress.

The United States has given the Afghan rebels hundreds of millions of dollars in weapons obtained from foreign sources. The approach preserves what officials call "plausible deniability," meaning that American involvement can be officially denied.

In a change of policy, the Administration decided to send the antiaircraft missiles, known as Stingers, to Afghan and Angolan rebels, according to informed sources.

Aid Provided Through C.I.A.

The American aid has been provided through the Central Intelligence Agency and has been treated as a covert operation that can be debated only by the intelligence committees of the Senate and the House of Representatives, meeting in secret session.

Representative Hamilton, who has offered a bill requiring aid to the Angolan rebels to be open, said the full Congress should have a voice on major decisions.

"I don't think it is wise to proceed on these highly controversial foreign policy decisions without the support of the Congress," he said. "This is not a covert action in the ordinary understanding of the term, this is a war. That is the question: 'Should the United States enter into support of one side of the war in Angola?' It is a far cry from the sorts of situations Congress had in mind when it set up the procedure for handling covert actions."

'We Are Playing Games'

Mr. Hamilton scoffed at the argument that American interests were served by the ability to deny formal American involvement.

"We are playing games with ourselves," he said. "It is a contradiction in terms. The President has talked about this, the press writes about it. To say that we can deny we are doing it is a gross deception, it does not fool anybody."

Mr. Hamilton, who is also a senior member of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, said the covert nature of the aid to the rebels tended to squelch public discussion.

Members of intelligence committees are barred from discussing the substance of closed meetings. Mr. Hamilton thus would not discuss the Stinger decision today, even though informed sources said his committee had been notified.

President Reagan has authority to initiate covert programs without approval, but is required to notify the intelligence committees. Objections raised by committee members have sometimes caused the Administration to withdraw or alter covert plans.

Congress can cut off support for a covert program by passing a bill to impose restrictions. Representative Hamilton said he would consider such an approach to Angola if his bill requiring open acknowledgment of American aid were not adopted.

American-Afghan Action, a group favoring aid to the Afghan rebels, today welcomed the decision to dispatch several hundred Stinger missiles. But

Andrew L. Eiva, the group's executive director, said more missiles would be needed to turn the military tide.

He said that as many as four Stinger missiles were needed to shoot down one Soviet helicopter gunship.