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UNITA's covert support hotly debated

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Supporters and opponents of military aid to anti-Marxist rebels in Angola squared off yesterday as they debated a bill that would force the Reagan administration to turn covert military support of Jonas Savimbi's UNITA forces into overt aid.

During a rare open session of the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence, Democrats and Republicans questioned four experts, who had differing views on the covert paramilitary support program and also the proposed legislation.

The administration has begun funneling up to \$15 million in covert military assistance to Angolan rebels, according to U.S. officials.

Chairman Lee Hamilton, Indiana Democrat, who was among the eight Democrats sponsoring the bill, opened the session by asking the experts whether aid to Mr. Savimbi should be open or secret and what U.S. policy toward Angola should be.

The House bill, introduced jointly in the intelligence and foreign affairs committees last month, calls for "openly acknowledged" administration military support to Angola in fiscal years 1986 and 1987. It would require any aid to be approved by a joint resolution in Congress.

Ranking minority member Bob Stump, Arizona Republican, said he strongly opposes the bill since it curbs executive branch authority to initiate covert action.

"Just eight months ago, Congress repealed the decade-old Clark Amendment that prohibited covert aid to groups in Angola," Mr. Stump said. "The bill before us . . . is just the Clark Amendment all over again, and it would be a grave mistake for Congress to enact it into law."

Richard E. Bissell, editor of the Georgetown University Washington Quarterly, testified before the panel that he opposed the bill since "it has the potential for damaging U.S. foreign policy."

"I am opposed to [the bill] not only

because I support U.S. aid to UNITA, but because I'm also certain its passage would set back the U.S. search for peace and progress in the region for some years to come," said Mr. Bissell, a former State Department official who has written extensively on southern Africa.

Ending aid to the Angolan rebels would undermine U.S. policy since it might be interpreted by pro-Western African states as "one more major case of American perfidy and inability to stay the course," he said.

Two of the experts opposing U.S. aid to UNITA testified in favor of the bill because it would limit aid to Mr. Savimbi's forces.

Richard M. Moose, assistant secretary of state for African affairs during the Carter administration, stated that he opposed aid to Mr. Savimbi's forces because it provides a pretext for further Soviet and Cuban involvement in Angola.

He called South Africa the "greatest source of instability" in southern Africa and said that covert action had been "abused" because military deliveries to UNITA had not been kept secret, thereby undermining U.S. prestige.

"A great deal of bad policy has been made in secret," said Mr. Moose, now a New York investment banker.

Pressed by Rep. Dick Cheney, Wyoming Republican, as to whether he favored U.S. covert action any place on the African continent, Mr. Moose said he favored covert action against South Africa because of its apartheid policies of racial segregation.

Massachusetts Institute of Technology Professor Robert Rotberg testified in favor of the bill and railed against South Africa's "hegemony" over the region.

"UNITA is a proxy force for South Africa," Mr. Rotberg stated.

He said U.S. support for Mr. Savimbi's forces "enhances . . . the legitimacy and the prestige of a Soviet Union that was faltering in southern Africa."

Rep. Henry Hyde, Illinois Republican, challenged Mr. Rotberg's assertion, noting that Carter administration officials once said that "the Russians can't last six months" in Angola and that the Cuban troops were "a stabilizing influence."

Mr. Hyde said that the Soviets have supplied \$2 billion worth of aid to the Marxist regime in Luanda and that since 1975 the number of Cuban soldiers in Angola has risen from 9,000 to 45,000.

In questioning how long the United States should withhold covert aid in hopes of negotiating a Cuban troop withdrawal, Mr. Hyde asked, "Should we hold off until there are 100,000?"

Dimitri K. Simes, a Soviet emigre who specializes in Soviet studies at the Carnegie Endowment Institute for International Peace, attributed the idea of supporting UNITA to "the genius of Ronald Reagan," who, he said, has succeeded in forcing the Soviet Union to re-evaluate its policy of foreign adventurism.

The failure of Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev to speak out forcefully in support of so-called national liberation movements during the recent Moscow Party conference indicated a lessening of Soviet support in such places as Africa, he said.