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U.S.-Backed Insurgents

Rebel Lobby Becomes New Growth Industry

By DOYLE McMANUS and SARA FRITZ, *Times Staff Writers*

WASHINGTON—When Nicaragua's *contras* recently ran low on funds, they did what any other political cause in Washington does: They turned to a wealthy, well-connected professional lobbyist.

The result was a sophisticated mail appeal—one of those letters disguised to look like a telegram—in which rebel chief Adolfo Calero, likening himself to George Washington at Valley Forge, asked each donor to adopt a contra for \$3.50 a day.

"Our goal is \$1 million in six weeks," said lobbyist Roger Stone, who helped Calero to design the appeal and whose wife's direct-mail firm is managing it. "And we have a good chance of making it."

The mutual interest between *contras* and lobbyists reflects an unexpected result of what has

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become known as the Reagan Doctrine—the President's pledge that the United States should sponsor anti-Communist insurgencies all over the Third World.

With conservatives in Congress taking the lead in promoting aid to anti-Communist guerrillas, in some cases even beyond the bounds of what the Reagan Administration wants to provide, Capitol Hill has become the center of a new growth industry—the Rebel Lobby.

Nicaraguan, Angolan and Cambodian rebels all maintain Washington offices, and the Afghans and Mozambicans say they plan to follow suit. Their representatives cultivate members of Congress, drum up private contributions and angle for positive press coverage of their various causes—just like any other Washington lobby.

Like the once-powerful China Lobby and the long-effective Israel Lobby, the Rebel Lobby is using the pressure of public and congressional support to win the attention of White House strategists and State Department bureaucrats.

Wasting No Time

Nor have the politicians wasted any time in trying to harness this new force. Senate Majority Leader Bob Dole (R-Kan.), among others, has become a loyal ally of the rebels in what many view as an effort to attract conservative support for his campaign for the 1988 GOP presidential nomination.

So far, the rebels seem to be scoring more victories in Washington than on the battlefield. In the last year, the Rebel Lobby has succeeded in reviving military aid for the *contras*, repealing the Clark Amendment prohibiting U.S. aid to the Angolan rebels, persuading Reagan to approve deadly Stinger anti-aircraft missiles for the Afghan and Angolan rebels and winning increases in existing aid programs.

Of course, it helps to have top-notch experts on your side. Stone's firm—Black, Manafort, Stone & Kelly, one of the giants of Washington's influence industry—represents Angolan rebel Jonas Savimbi with an annual retainer of \$600,000 a year, as well as the *contras*.

In addition, the rebels benefit from a strong alliance with conservative groups. A coalition of rebel representatives holds meetings regularly at the Capitol Hill headquarters of the Free Congress Education and Research Foundation, and several rebel groups have offices in a building owned by the Heritage Foundation, a conservative think tank.

In some instances, the rebels' alliance with American conservatives is a peculiar marriage of convenience, particularly in the case of Savimbi, who previously received aid from China and called himself a Maoist.

Still, as the Reagan Doctrine gathers steam, the rebels' lobbying efforts appear to have given the once-lonely guerrilla bands a small but independent power base in Washington—and with it an unusual opportunity to influence U.S. policy deliberations over their destiny:

—During the pivotal House debate over aid to the *contras* in June, Calero was the most visible lobbyist in the Capitol, stalking the marble halls in search of congressmen who might be vulnerable to persuasion. State Department officials say he has also carefully marshaled support in Congress for his own position as leader of the *contras*, making any attempt to depose him more difficult. "He spends more time here than he does in the (rebel) camps," grumbled one who asked not to be quoted by name.

—Angolan rebel leader Savimbi has successfully used conservative supporters, bolstered by Black, Manafort, Stone & Kelly, to push a reluctant State Department away from attempts to negotiate with Angola's Marxist government and toward acceptance of covert U.S. military aid to his guerrillas. In February, he staged a triumphal tour of Washington—and left with new commitments from GOP senators to make sure that the aid includes anti-aircraft missiles. "He does seem to have charisma," acknowledged House Intelligence Committee Chairman Lee H. Hamilton (D-Ind.), a foe of the Angolan aid program.

—Afghanistan's rebels, who are fighting the Soviet army itself, do not need any help in winning a

majority in Congress. "There's no real opposition, so there's not much need for lobbying," said Henry Kriegel, executive director of the Committee for a Free Afghanistan, a group of U.S. supporters. But the Afghan lobby has successfully prompted congressional inquiries into whether the CIA is providing enough aid to the rebels and giving them all the sophisticated weapons that they want.

—The Nicaraguan, Angolan and Afghan groups have even endorsed the idea of U.S. aid to other insurgent movements—in Ethiopia, Mozambique, Laos and Vietnam—in appearances at a series of "contra summits," including one at Savimbi's headquarters deep in the African bush. But several attempts to organize a joint lobbying operation for all the insurgencies have foundered, apparently because their interests are still as different as the countries from which they come.

Efforts Questioned

To be sure, the Rebel Lobby has not been an unqualified success. Savimbi, for example, had hoped to win a congressional resolution of support during his visit, but that effort stalled. And the Afghan rebels, bitterly divided into seven factions, have been unable to agree on a joint representative; three of the guerrilla bands are planning to open their own Washington offices.

Nor have all rebel groups represented in Washington received U.S. assistance. Despite considerable prodding from conservatives, the Administration has so far refused to add the rebels fighting Marxist President Samora Machel's government in Mozambique to its list of those receiving U.S. aid.

And the Nicaraguan contras, for all the support that Reagan has given them, are only now beginning to recover from a major setback suffered more than two years ago when Congress cut off their military aid. Their image in Washington has been severely hurt by reported CIA abuses, as well as by allegations that they have been involved in drug trafficking and misappropriation of U.S. funds.

Some in Congress even question whether Calero's dogged efforts have actually won over any undecided votes for the Nicaraguan rebels.

"I guess you could say they didn't hurt," a key swing voter, Rep. Ike Skelton (D-Mo.), said cautiously. "But it wasn't the main thing. The main thing was the trips that several members made to the area."

Calero acknowledges that much of his work has gone to damage control—convincing skeptical members of Congress that he takes complaints about human rights and other U.S. concerns seriously.

"I'm here to answer questions . . . and to show that we aren't killing babies," he said with a grin.

Calero's Washington operation has itself come under fire from some State Department officials, who complain that he has used it to bolster his own political position at the expense of other, more liberal contra leaders.

Administration officials recently pressured him to put his representative in Washington, a former Nicaraguan diplomat named Bosco Matamoros, under the supervision of the broader contra coalition. Matamoros moved to the coalition's office, but officials say he still works as Calero's personal lobbyist.

Calero is quite pleased that Stone's firm is also at his side. Stone says that, for now, he and his wife are not charging the contras a dime, except for the expenses of the direct-mail operation.

"I'm not doing this because I'm looking for a client," Stone said. "I'm doing it because I believe in it."

Asked if he would ever hire Stone's firm, Calero said, "I don't mind if Roger Stone gets some business out of this one day."

In the war of the lobbyists, Savimbi has won the most sophisticated victory to date.

Last year, Angola's Marxist government hired one of Washington's largest lobbying firms, Gray & Co., to represent its interests. It was a clever, if surprising, choice. The firm, headed by former Dwight D. Eisenhower aide Robert Keith Gray and former George Bush aide Daniel Murphy, boasts an imposing and very capitalist list of corporate and foreign clients.

Then Savimbi's supporters in the GOP went to work, organizing a wave of discreet complaints to Gray, comments to his other clients and, eventually, a picket line outside his building.

A few months ago, Gray quietly pulled out of its contract with Angola.

"They were coming into my office with all these Angolans," Hamilton, the Indiana congressman, recalled. "They wanted me to meet this Angolan leader and that Angolan leader. They invited me to Angola. . . . Then I got a call from some of my friends at Gray & Co. who said, 'We have reassessed the situation,' that they decided that

they had been leading me astray and Mr. Savimbi was really a very marvelous man.

"I did a little checking on it," Hamilton said. "The White House just called Bob Gray up and said 'Get out of this thing.' I don't know what level at the White House did it.

"Many within Gray & Co. came to me and were deeply embarrassed because they had jacked me around for a long time. They themselves think supporting Savimbi is crazy, but Gray called them

in the office one day and said, 'We are cutting out this [Angola] account.'"

Frank Mankiewicz, an executive vice president at Gray & Co. and former aide to Sen. George S. McGovern (D-S.D.), disputed the details of Hamilton's story—but acknowledged that the pressure forced Gray's hand.

"We never got any sense from anyone in the government that there was a problem," he said. "In fact, they welcomed it. . . . We dropped the account because we thought we were becoming part of the issue. We were attracting pickets. . . . It wasn't helping the client to have that much attention focused on us."

Perhaps the best measure of the Rebel Lobby's success is the many impostors now showing up, claiming to be representatives of resistance forces. Just last April, a man who portrayed himself as a contra appeared at a news conference with a congressional candidate in Illinois; it was later learned that he was actually a full-time salesman at a shop in Washington's Georgetown district.

"We call them Gucci commandos," said Rep. Charles Wilson (D-Tex.), a strong supporter of the Afghan rebels who claims that he is often pestered by phony rebel representatives. "These are the so-called freedom fighters and representatives of freedom fighters and self-appointed experts who don't represent anybody."

"Some of them claim to represent the deposed King of Afghanistan—the royalty, the prince. And some of them claim to be Muslim fundamentalists, and they'll come into my office and get down on their prayer rug and all that, and then you find out they're total fakers."

Wilson said the impostors hope to make money for themselves by becoming identified with counter-insurgencies that are now popular in Washington.