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U.S. aid to rebels in Angola to resume

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Aid from the United States to anti-communist rebels in Angola may resume within weeks as State Department resistance to American involvement in the southern African bush war crumbles under a conservative assault.

The State Department seems ill-equipped to further resist the pro-aid forces in the Pentagon, the CIA,

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the National Security Council and conservatives in Congress.

"State is pretty well isolated in the administration. Patience [with negotiations] is running out and one must assume State will re-evaluate its position," says one congressional source.

Congressional and administration sources say the first installment of money and arms for the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA) of Jonas Savimbi could be flowing down secret channels controlled by the Central Intelligence Agency as early as February.

Estimates of the size of the initial package differ, but one published re-

port said it could be worth between \$8 million and \$15 million. Congressional sources said it would probably include anti-aircraft and anti-tank missiles.

The plan could be derailed if the State Department's veteran southern Africa peace negotiator, Assistant Secretary Chester Crocker, produces an 11th-hour deal to remove Cuban forces fighting for Angola's Marxist government under President Eduardo dos Santos, the sources said.

But Mr. Crocker has been struggling for a peace agreement in-

volving Angola, South-West Africa (Namibia) and South Africa for five years. Success in the next month appears remote.

Says a source at the State Department: "We are beginning to get the feeling that even State's opposition is weakening considerably."

A scenario for peace pursued by Mr. Crocker has linked withdrawal of an estimated 35,000 Cuban troops from Angola to independence for neighboring Namibia, which is ruled by South Africa in defiance of the United Nations.

Mr. Crocker met Angolan officials in Zambia last month and reported South Africa and Angola were interested in renewing talks. But nothing firm was announced and conservatives scoff that the Crocker process had seen many false dawns.

"Crocker has stalled for five years. I think he sympathizes with the communist government," says Howard Phillips, chairman of the Conservative Caucus.

UNITA and Mr. Savimbi have become rebels with a cause worth supporting for American conservatives determined to roll back what they regard as a worldwide communist assault on freedom.

A "fact sheet" published by the American Security Council last week bemoaned the withdrawal of U.S. aid from Mr. Savimbi's forces in 1975 after a row over America being allied in the war with UNITA's main

backer, South Africa. A law banning aid to UNITA was repealed last July.

"U.S. support would effectively relate the Angolan struggle to the ongoing worldwide process for freedom and justice in Afghanistan, Nicaragua, Indochina, Ethiopia and elsewhere," the council says.

Conservatives brush aside State Department arguments that support for UNITA would ruin the U.S. role as a mediator in southern Africa as well as its reputation among African states deeply offended by South Africa's apartheid racial policies.

They say that while apartheid is deplorable, South Africa remains a key U.S. ally in the fight against Soviet communism and that UNITA is on the front line.

Officials say the Soviet Union has pumped \$2 billion in military aid into Angola in the past 18 months.

Congressional sources say U.S. assistance would probably include Red Eye and Stinger anti-aircraft missiles as well as anti-tank rockets.

"Savimbi needs something adequate to deal with 500 tanks, 100 MiGs and 40 Hind helicopters," says Mr. Phillips. "I hope we will give him enough."

He says that "something less than \$100 million" would probably be adequate.

"It's a top priority in foreign policy for conservatives," according to a spokesman for another conservative group, the Committee for the Survival of a Free Congress.

State Department sources say even if the aid were to be covert, news inevitably would leak out. The best they could hope for, one says, was that it would be "deniable."

"It may be public knowledge, but as long as we can say 'no' or 'no comment' that's different. It maintains certain options," says one.

But congressional aides question whether that might not be too sophisticated for southern Africa's political cauldron.

"As soon as news of American support for UNITA is out, Luanda will cut off negotiations, charge the State Department with hypocrisy and step up military action against the UNITA-South African-United States threat," one predicts.