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Carter: Unaware of Angola Aid Bid

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President Carter said yesterday he had no prior knowledge of a visit his director of central intelligence, Adm. Stansfield Turner, paid this spring to Sen. Dick Clark (D-Iowa) to discuss possible covert aid to rebels in Angola.

The Turner-Clark meeting convinced the senator, who is chairman of the subcommittee on African affairs, that the Carter administration was seriously considering covert aid through France to rebels fighting against Angola's Marxist government. Carter said yesterday, however, that he had never intended to send weapons to Angola, directly or indirectly.

The Washington Post first reported on the Turner-Clark contacts in late May, but yesterday's press conference was the first in which the president was asked about the incident. In effect, Carter washed his hands of it.

At first he said "there was never any plan put forward to send backdoor weapons to the [Angolan] rebels because that would have been in violation of the American law," a reference to a legislative rider authored by Clark forbidding aid to any Angolan faction.

"I don't believe any responsible person in my administration would have violated the so-called Clark amendment," the president said.

Pressed further by Martin Schram of Newsday, who noted that Turner presented a written plan to Clark outlining a program of covert arms aid to Angolan rebels, Carter said he "didn't have any idea that the CIA director had even talked to Sen. Clark about it."

Carter said he understood that Turner had only gone to Clark to discuss "what involvement would be possible in Angola... within the bounds of the law."

It was reported in May that Clark felt the administration was looking for ways to avoid or overcome the

constraints of the Clark amendment by seeking his approval for the plan.

According to Turner in later testimony, a committee of the National Security Council authorized his visit to Clark. The idea of exploring aid to Angolan rebels to try to tie down Cuban troops now supporting the Angolan regime was encouraged by Zbigniew Brzezinski, Carter's national security adviser, according to administration officials.

Responding to another question yesterday, Carter again defended Brzezinski, asserting that Brzezinski's critics sometimes pick on him, "insinuating I am either ineffective or incompetent or ignorant, that I don't actually make the decisions, but that my subordinates make them for me."

"I make the decisions, and I want to be responsible for those decisions once they are made," Carter said.