

Covert-Aid Leaks Stir White House

1-8-76
By William Chapman
Washington Post Staff Writer

The White House reacted angrily yesterday to news accounts portraying secret U.S. involvement in the war in Angola and in the politics of Italy.

White House Press Secretary Ron Nessen refused to confirm or deny that the Central Intelligence Agency is increasing its covert support for non-Communist political parties in Italy by giving them \$6 million.

But he described President Ford as being "angry" at seeing the story in print and said that, whether true or not, the account had undermined the government's conduct of foreign policy.

The Washington Post and The New York Times yesterday carried stories, quoting authoritative sources, describing the covert aid to Italy's non-Communist parties, principally the Christian Democratic Party.

Nessen said there is a "strong suspicion" at the White House that the allegation of CIA funds flowing into Italian politics originated in Congress. CIA Director William E. Colby briefed congressional committees last month on the covert aid. Nessen said the episode raises questions about how to keep Congress "responsibly" informed on intelligence operations.

The White House went further in denying as "totally false" and "irresponsible" a claim by Sen. John V. Tunney (D-Calif.) that American pilots have flown weapons into Angola. However, Nessen did not rule out the possibility that American foreign aid funds may be used to mount operations in Angola from the neighboring country of Zaire.

Tunney said Tuesday that American pilots have been airlifting weapons from Zaire into Angola on U. S.-built C-130 cargo planes. He did not say whether his information showed that they were members of American armed forces or mercenaries.

Nessen said there are no American pilots flying into Angola and that neither American ground crews nor support missions are involved in the airlift. Tunney's assertions he said, are "irresponsible and it does not serve the interests of the

United States to have false allegations made by a U. S. senator."

However, Nessen said it was not possible to rule out the chance that some American "soldiers of fortune" might be involved, though not paid by U. S. government funds. "It is not possible to keep track of every American over there in West Africa," he said.

Similarly, Nessen would not rule out the possibility that some U. S. foreign assistance funds were being used by Zaire to subsidize an airlift operation. "We are giving small amounts of assistance to countries in Africa," he said, "and we can't say how every penny of that money is being spent."

Nessen also said that the White House views with "dismay" the presence of a Soviet guided-missile destroyer and a landing ship for tanks in African waters, apparently headed for Angola. "The presence of the ships is continuing evidence of the Soviet involvement where they have no legitimate business," he said.

Asked if there are U. S. plans to attempt to intercept the ships, he answered, "I certainly haven't heard of any."

The Soviet destroyer, with an accompanying oiler, was reported off the coast of Gabon and steaming toward Angola, some 500 miles from the Angolan port of Luanda. The large landing ship was near the Congo port of Point Noire.

Other official American sources said they saw nothing extraordinary in the presence of either a Soviet destroyer or a Soviet landing ship in the waters near Angola.

These sources said the Soviet landing ship has been operating in the region for more than a year bringing war supplies and presumably men as well from Pointe Noire in the Congo to the region in Angola occupied by the Soviet-backed liberation forces.

These supplies began moving in this fashion while Angola was still under Portuguese rule prior to Nov. 11, 1974, these sources said.