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Why U.S. Decided to Send Arms to Angola

Paris

Reporters aboard Secretary of State Henry Kissinger's plane were told yesterday that the only choice Washington had in the Angolan situation last summer was to send military aid immediately or see non-Communist forces there collapse.

Intelligence estimates said in mid-July that there would be a collapse in two weeks, so there was no other option but to send arms, newsmen were told.

These further details of U.S. involvement in Angola were provided after it was reported that former African affairs bureau chief Nathaniel Davis resigned in disgust over the Angola decision.

Davis recommended seeking a diplomatic settlement, with publication of secret Soviet intervention in Angola and an effort to gain widespread support against it throughout the world.

Kissinger was understood to have been convinced that there was no time for diplomacy. He was said to feel that there was no reason for the United States to hold back, as Davis urged, because in his view if a great power never does anything anywhere, then it ceases to be a great power.

His view, newsmen were told, was that if the U.S. decided it couldn't intervene because that might provoke the Russians to substantially greater intervention,

it would really mean an abdication by the United States everywhere.

Kissinger did not believe there was any parallel in Angola to the gradual U.S. involvement in Vietnam, and besides it is not certain whether the Soviets will continue to increase their help to the MPLA (Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola) forces, it was said.

Before the mid-July crisis report from intelligence, the source said, the United States gave no military aid to Angolan forces of Jonas Savimbi and Holden Roberto that might have affected battlefield decisions. There was no effort to deny that some U.S. aid did pre-date the

warning of imminent collapse, but the source said that the support the United States sent was not decisive.

It was definitely Soviet intervention that provoked the step-up in American supplies, newsmen were told. Top-policy makers did not consider it inevitable that the Russians would respond with more military support to their side. It was thought that they had several opportunities to seek a settlement once the balance was restored among the rival Angolan forces.

Nonetheless, the Russians did rush in heavy equipment and Cuban soldiers, to aid the MPLA, led by Augustinho Nato, a move

that the United States must consider in the wider context of detente and East-West relations, the source said.

It hasn't yet been decided what conclusions the United States will draw from the Soviet move in terms of further American action, newsmen were told, and what the Russians do next will probably depend on the growing debate in America over the Angolan intervention.

The source denied that responsible Congressmen had not been informed. Six congressional committees and two special intelligence committees have been fully briefed, the official said.

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