

Angola and the Schism in Washington

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Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, Dec. 18—In this city there is almost always a gap in judgment between executive branch experts and analysts and their policy-making superiors. But the current gap over Angola appears to be particularly wide.

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The experts on Africa believe that the Administration's involvement in the Angolan civil war will cause long-term damage to American interests in Africa. But Administration policy-makers, such as Secretary of State Henry A. Kissinger and his top aides, are equally convinced that if the United States is to retain any influence in Africa and any credibility in Moscow, it has no alternative but to support the Angolan groups fighting the movement aided by the Soviet Union.

Having lost their internal debate with Mr. Kissinger, the experts—through private conversations and through leaks to reporters—took their case to sympathetic members of Congress. This set in motion the Congressional debate over whether to cut off the covert supply of American funds and arms to Angola.

Middle-level officials tend to focus on what is possible and consistent with their country or area expertise. High officials tend to base their decisions on what they think is necessary, given broader diplomatic and domestic political concerns.

But there is almost always an overlapping of views or a school of thought among the experts that the policy-maker uses to justify his actions.

On Angola, the disagreement is exceptionally wide: over American stakes in that conflict, over the dangers of even indirect American association with South Africa and over whether it makes any sense to speak of either side as winning or losing in what is a tribally-based war.

Mr. Kissinger has stated privately that if the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola prevails, African leaders will look upon Moscow which supports that movement, as the only superpower that counts on their continent.

The Secretary is said to base this judgment on the contention that key African leaders, such as President Mobutu Sese Seko of Zaire and President Kenneth D. Kaunda of Zambia, urged the initial American involvement. Failure to respond to these entreaties, in the Kissinger view, would have been read in Africa as a sign of American weakness.

Beyond that, Mr. Kissinger

has often argued that Soviet leaders must not be led to think that American will to meet world commitments has been dissipated by the Vietnam war and the Watergate scandal. If Soviet leaders believe that, he has argued, they will be emboldened to take higher risks elsewhere.

Those administration officials who disagree that spy the balance of power in Africa does not hinge on the fate of Angola. To them, the record is clear that African states have thrown off whatever outside power has attempted to embrace and control them.

They contend that China, which has done the least of the three major powers to get involved in Africa militarily, is probably the most respected there.

Some experts also say they believe that Soviet leaders will see the United States as weak only if American prestige is committed where it cannot be delivered. In any event, they say they oppose an approach that continues to define United States interests solely in terms of what the Soviet Union does.

On Mr. Kissinger's instructions, Administration officials have been telling Congressional committees of their concern not only about the Russians, but also about dangers to

black-white relations and South Africa if the popular movement wins in Angola.

The experts insist, however, that this is an even more illusory and dangerous rationale. They say the evidence all pointed to growing African resentment of Moscow until South Africans forces intervened in Angola.

"Having failed to condemn this intervention," one analyst said, "now makes our biggest problem overidentification with South Africa, and this is an issue on which all Africans can unite against us."

High Administration officials feel that it has become impossible for the President to pursue a consistent policy on Angola because it has become impossible to tell what Congress will and will not support.

Yesterday the House International Relations Committee voted to permit President Ford to continue indirect aid as long as he kept Congress informed. Today the Senate voted to bar future covert aid.

The high officials concede that it would have been difficult for lawmakers who knew months ago about United States activities in Angola to stop them. But the officials state that the lawmakers neither tried nor even expressed serious opposition.