SFExaminer DEC 21 1975
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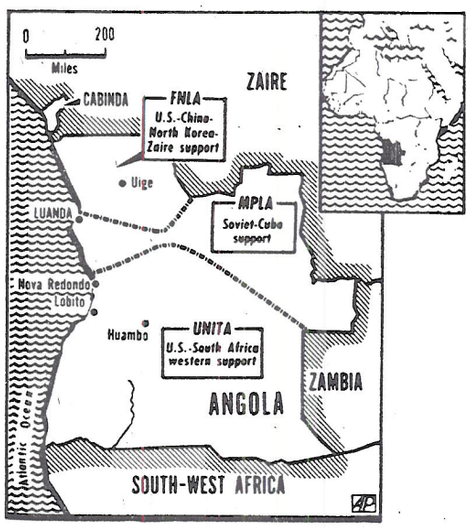
S.F. Sunday Examiner & Chronicle



Angola—growing U.S. involvement is the big fear

By James McCartney
Knight News Service

WASHINGTON — The ghost of the Vietnam War hung over Capitol Hill last week, with a new name but many tragic memories.

The new name was Angola.

But in many ways the script was the same, the fears the same, as they had been in the great legislative battles over U.S. involvement in Vietnam.

Senate doves, appalled by revelations of secret U.S. involvement in the African civil war, wanted to cut off aid to anti-Soviet factions in Angola.

And, as in the final struggles over Vietnam, a Republican administration wanted to continue a U.S. effort aimed at "keeping the Soviets out" of a distant country.

This time, in Angola, the Senate won the first round — less than two weeks after most senators learned that the U.S. had already spent more than $25 million for arms and aid, and the administration wanted more.

The Senate resoundingly approved an amendment forbidding spending of any money in a defense appropriations bill "for any activities involving Angola other than intelligence-gathering."

It took Congress, literally, 19 years to come to a similar decision in Vietnam.

But the Senate vote was anything but a total victory for the doves. It was symbolic only, with no immediate force of law.

By the time the Senate managed to bring the matter to a vote, the House was already preparing to leave town for Christmas vacation, and did not stay to vote on Angola.

This means that the administration can legally continue to spend money on Angola, if it wants to defy the expressed wishes of the Senate.

About $8 million is still estimated to be in the "pipeline," or in reserve Administration funds for Angola.

But as nearly as congressional experts can compute, that's all the administration will be able to spend, openly, in the next several weeks.

That is because Sen. John McClellan, D-Ark., chairman of the Appropriations Committee, said he won't approve any more funds for the CIA in Angola without the consent of the full Senate.

The Administration, however, may be able to find funds elsewhere.

Said one Senate expert. "They might be able to take military aid funds earmarked for other countries, and transfer them, if they wish, and it wouldn't be a violation of any law I know about."

Ford denounced the vote as a deep tragedy and an abdication of responsibility.

In rhetoric hauntingly reminiscent of Vietnam, he asked:

"How can the United States, the greatest power in the world, take the position that the Soviet Union can operate with impunity many thousands of miles away . . . while we refuse any assistance to the majority of local people who ask only for military equipment to defend themselves?"

To many senators, Angola represented the threat of Vietnam all over again.

Said Senate Majority Leader Mike Mansfield, of Montana, summing up the mood: "Vietnam left its scars on me, and on us, which will never, never go away but which must never, never be repeated again."

The Vietnam parallel was also mentioned by Sen. Hubert Humphrey, D-Minn., one of its major political casualties in his 1968 presidential campaign.

"We let this happen in Vietnam," said Humphrey. "I know. I was in this body (the Senate) when we had all too little information. Then I became Vice President and I was surrounded by information.

"Thank God we now have the opportunity to debate this in the open . . ."

The Administration's arguments for its Angola involvement struck many senators as frighteningly similar to words they had heard time and again from both Democratic and Republican administrations seeking to justify Vietnam.

Secretary of State Kissinger said that "the United States will try to prevent one party from achieving dominance . . ."

It was former President Johnson's secretary of state, Dean Rusk, who argued in the mid-1960s that the U.S. objective in Vietnam was to "prevent" a Communist takeover.

The Pentagon Papers, the semi-official history of the Vietnam war, summarized U.S. objectives in Southeast Asia by saying that "the American government, from the Truman administration onward, felt it necessary to take action to prevent Communist control of all of Vietnam."

In both Angola and Vietnam, the fundamental issue has been who is going to control a country that has recently emerged from colonial domination.

Vietnam was a French colony, Angola Portuguese.