ANGOLA

Kissinger Sees Need of Covert Role

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To Secretary of State Henry A. Kissinger, the attempt by Congress to block secret funds for use in the Angola warfare strikes at the heart of his East-West strategy.

To his critics in Congress, Kissinger is years out of touch with what is politically or morally tolerable in the United States.

Kissinger maintains that without the capacity to use covert force, or the threat of it, to check Soviet expansionist thrusts around the

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world, the United States will be paralyzed in its ability to conduct a double-track detente policy: conciliation and toughness, as the situation demands.

In private, last-ditch attempts to convince his critics that the cutoff of money for Central Intelligence Agency operations in Angola undermines total U.S. strategy with the Soviet Union, Kissinger argued:

"We have to be extremely tough—even brutal—when they (the Soviets) step across the dividing line."

In the Angolan furor, one key question is whether the Soviet Union or the United States first stepped over the ill-defined dividing line between what is bearable and what is intolerable, in the global competition between Washington and Moscow, which continues despite U.S.-Soviet detente.

The U.S.-Angola record is

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by no means as pristine or straightforward as the United States officially contends.

Publicly, the Ford administration insists that it was the "massive introduction" of Soviet arms supplies to the Marxist-oriented Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA) that triggered retaliatory, covert U.S. support to the opposing anti-Communist factions in Angola.

In private, however, American officials concede that secret U.S. funds and political support to the anti-MPLA forces helped to prevent the MPLA from controlling events in Angola when the former Portuguese African colony gained its independence Nov. 11.

In fact, by early November, this U.S. (and South African) backing was so effective, military experts agreed, that only major Soviet intervention could stave off a defeat of the MPLA by the American-supported National Front for the Liberation of Angola (FNLA) and the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (Unita).

Within a few weeks, however, the continuing Soviet rush of arms into Angola for the MPLA, and most importantly, the continuing introduction of an estimated 4,000 to 4,500 Cuban advisers and officers into the MPLA army reversed the tide of battle.

The dispute over who had stepped over the dividing line the most became a chicken-and-egg clash between the United States and the Soviet Union.

The distinction Kissinger has sought to draw is that it was the Soviet Union that "escalated" the conflict, from low-level input to massive input.

On the contrary, the Soviet Union claims the United States, first with money, and South Africa, with troops, plus China, with its support to the anti-MPLA forces, blocked the "natural evolution" of a coalition government in Angola.

The Soviet Union, of course, wanted the MPLA to emerge on top. The United States was trying to prevent that, in response, American sources say, to cries of alarm from neighboring Zaire, Zambia and many more African countries than dare to admit openly their fear of a Marxist-dominated Angola.

Secret American financial support to the anti-Communist factions in Angola in early 1975 preceded the massive introduction of Soviet arms. U.S. officials nevertheless insist that the two forms of involvement are not comparable.

The Ford administration, as revealed in the past two weeks, was deeply divided last summer about major covert American involvement in Angola in multimillion-dollar arms shipments, while the Soviet input of arms was expanding. Kissinger took the lead in rallying support from the CIA and other agencies against his specialists in the State Department's African Bureau to push through the venture.

The National Security Council's Forty Committee on intelligence operations abroad reportedly recommended a major U.S. arms commitment to Angola at least three times during the summer to the President before he agreed.

In the U.S.-Soviet competition to reinforce opposing clients in Angola, the United States, in effect, won the first round; the Soviets won the second.

After the tide began to turn against U.S.-backed forces in late November, it was the United States that first "went public," with Kissinger publicly reinforcing his private warnings to Soviet Ambassador Anatoliy F. Dobrynin that the escalating warfare could jeopardize the larger stakes for U.S.-Soviet detente.

Not surprisingly, the Soviet Union countercharged that the United States was sending arms and men into Angola to frustrate the national will of the Angolan people.

Detente, the Soviet Union underscored, in no way precludes Soviet support of "the national liberation struggle" around the world, and in Angola, only the MPLA represented the legal government.

In urgent pleas to the Senate in the last few days, Kissinger has argued that the United States must not blind itself to this double-track of cooperation and competition with the Soviet Union.

Without the capacity to confront the Soviet Union with secret use of force or the threat of force, Kissinger insists, every "test of will" between the United States and the Soviet Union will be turned into an open conflict, or an admission of American weakness.

The United States, he argues in private, is being deprived of its ability to operate effectively on either policy track with the Soviet Union.

On the conciliatory side, he contends, the Ford administration is being hamstrung by demands to be tougher with the Soviet Union on terms for nuclear strategic arms negotiations or on conditions for trade.

At the same time, Kissinger protests, in situations such as the Angola dispute, the administration is being castigated for being too tough.

Under these conditions, Kissinger maintains, crisis-management is becoming impossible for U.S. strategists.

To his critics, however, Kissinger is yearning for a return to "blank-check" authority that is gone forever, buried in the agony of Vietnam, the rubble of Watergate.