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Bickering on Angola

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In the face of the Senate's overwhelming vote against further covert American arms assistance to two of the three factions in Angola's civil war, the Ford Administration would have been well advised to give priority to repairing its relations with Congress. Instead, it seems determined to continue the arms shipments by going beyond the \$9 million that Secretary Kissinger said last week was still available for arms aid to Angola.

Such an attitude, in defiance of a measure supported by more than 70 percent of the Senators present, including more Republicans than voted against it, is not the way toward better cooperation between the Executive and Congress on foreign policy; nor is it the way to persuade the House to reverse the Senate decision.

Soviet penetration of an important country of southwestern Africa, through vast arms supplies, military advisers and use of some 5,000 Cuban soldiers, is obviously a cause for concern. But of far greater concern to most black African governments at present is the participation in Angola's civil war of about 1,000 white South African troops.

The Senate majority appears to have grasped what Mr. Kissinger is reluctant to acknowledge: that it would be disastrous for this country's relations with black Africa and all of the non-white world if Washington accepted even informal collaboration with the white rulers of South Africa in the effort to check by force the Soviet-backed Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola. Congress is also reluctant to accept Administration rhetoric that seems to imply almost a global obligation for the United States to block any Soviet probe outside the Soviet world, whether or not major American interests are threatened.

The best route open to the United States on Angola is to bring home concretely to Soviet leaders—in terms of trade, grain shipments and other benefits of détente—the perils of persisting with their African intervention. As for the Cuban troops, it is clearly up to those Latin American governments that have restored relations with Havana to warn Fidel Castro that exporting his revolution to Africa is as hazardous as exporting it in this hemisphere.

Only in response to a multilateral effort initiated by responsible black African governments, and with strong backing from the Congress, should the United States undertake a substantial support role in Angola. William E. Schauffele Jr., the new Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs, should have a clear idea about the chances for such an African initiative when he returns early in January from a brief trip to the continent—particularly if he is able, as the State Department evidently hopes, to expand his itinerary beyond the four Francophone countries and Zaire, which constitute his current schedule.