

THE NEW YORK TIMES, TUESDAY, JANUARY 6, 1976

NYTimes JAN 6 1976

Either Way It Comes Out Quagmire

IN THE NATION

By Tom Wicker

Gerald Ford and other backers of American intervention in Angola insist that the situation there should be judged on its own merits, and not by reference to what happened in Vietnam. Either way it comes out quagmire.

There is, for example, Mr. Ford's turn to diplomacy after the Senate frustrated his request for funds for military assistance to one of the contending factions in Angola. American officials have been traveling Africa to urge, and Mr. Ford himself has called for, "an immediate cease-fire, an end to all outside intervention and a government of national unity, permitting the solution of the Angolan problem by the Angolans themselves."

This sounds fine, and is much preferable to shipping over more American arms and mercenaries, maybe eventually a few American military "advisers," and who knows what after that. But the basic proposal—"a government of national unity" formed by the contending factions—probably won't work, and for much the same reasons that the United States could never get the North Vietnamese and

the Vietcong to participate in "free elections" with the South Vietnamese.

In the first place, the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola, which has received substantial assistance from the Soviet Union and a troop contingent from Cuba, is more effective than either of the two factions that have formed an uneasy coalition backed by the United States. The Popular Movement's armed forces are better equipped, trained and motivated and its leadership is better. So far as can be ascertained, it has more popular support among Angolans—not least because it holds out hope of more efficient government—and it is not distracted by the tribal and personal animosities that hamper the effectiveness of the coalition forces. It is reported of the latter, moreover, just as was true of the South Vietnamese army, that they are callous and contemptuous of the rights and property of the civilians for whose support they are supposedly contending.

Why should the Popular Movement, therefore, give up its advantage and form a national-unity government with its rivals—even if there were more

political unity among all three factions than there evidently is? Why should the Popular Movement believe that the United States, having sought to arm its opponents—and having already provided them about \$30 million in arms—is seeking anything now but another way to prevent their defeat?

Why should the movement believe in the integrity of "a government of national unity" proposed by the backers of its opponents, any more than the Vietcong and the North Vietnamese believed in the integrity of the "free elections" so often touted by the United States?

The Popular Movement, moreover, has already received diplomatic recognition as the legitimate Government of Angola from more than forty nations, including the Soviet Union and many African states. It is not at all clear that these governments would extend the same recognition to a coalition government including fac-

tions not now recognized by anyone. In any case, the Popular Movement could hardly be expected to give up such a head start toward sole power.

The major reason for the movement's widespread international support is not, however, its domestic authority. It is rather that the other side is backed by the racist regime in South Africa, which has unwisely sent troops to aid the same coalition the United States has supported. Having the immense political advantage of not being backed by South Africa is reason enough for the Popular Movement not to enter a coalition with the factions that do have such backing.

Finally, as made clear in a striking report by Michael Kaufman of The New York Times, the United States has virtually no moral standing in Africa to act as a peacemaker in Angola because of the stubborn American support of the Salazar-Caetano regimes in Portugal. When these regimes were fighting a lengthy colonial war to retain possession of Angola and other African territories, the Soviet Union supported the Popular Movement's liberation struggle—while the

United States, with an eye to its air base in the Portuguese Azores, backed the white colonists.

In these circumstances, the only sensible American policy is to use the channels of détente—and the implicit threat of closing them—to get the Soviet Union to live up to its stated policy of ending all foreign interference in Angola, while Washington works—as it is doing—to get the hated South Africans out too. That could clear the way to "the solution of the Angolan problem by the Angolans themselves." And if that should result, as is probable, in the Popular Movement coming to power, the United States would be in better position to offer its friendship and assistance, thus to some extent countering Soviet influence in Luanda.

But instead, White House circumlocutions and Mr. Ford's remarks in his interview with the National Broadcasting Company suggest that the United States probably is financing the training of mercenary forces to fight the Popular Movement. If so, Washington has learned nothing, either from Vietnam or the last 15 years in Africa.