

Defeat on Angolan Aid

Defying a last-minute plea from President Ford, couched in global cold-war terms, the House of Representatives has voted even more emphatically than the Senate did last month to end covert American arms aid to two factions in Angola's civil war. The message from Capitol Hill seems clear: Congress will no longer sanction what might become an open-ended commitment to a remote conflict where no United States interest has been established except that of thwarting the Soviet Union.

By rhetorical exaggeration and intimation that a covert intervention in an African quagmire was no business of Congress, the President and Secretary Kissinger succeeded only in magnifying the Administration's defeats in Senate and House. Mr. Ford was at it again yesterday, warning Speaker Albert that the failure of the United States to "take a stand" in Angola would "inevitably lead our friends and supporters to conclusions about our resolve" in other problem areas.

At no time, however, has any Administration leader specifically condemned the intervention in the Angolan fighting of white soldiers from South Africa, an omission that has aroused suspicions of collusion between Washington and Pretoria throughout black Africa. And at no time has the Administration seemed aware of the grave dangers for this country's future relations with the non-white world of any collaboration with South Africa.

This aspect troubled Congressmen familiar with Africa and cognizant that many black governments believe South Africa's intervention to be even more dangerous for them than the much greater involvement of Cuban troops and Soviet "technicians." But the vote of 323 to 99 in the House reflected mostly the convictions that the Administration had not established any vital American interest in Angola and had not demonstrated how additional American aid could further a peaceful resolution of the civil war.

The days of automatic Congressional majorities for overseas operations of this sort are clearly over. If it learns from its defeat on the Angolan issue, and accepts a larger role for Congress in the shaping of foreign policy, the Administration should find no insuperable obstacles to cooperation on Capitol Hill, as Speaker Albert made clear yesterday.