

IN THE NATION

By Tom Wicker

Gerald Ford should take care lest his premature announcements of the decline of the United States should tend toward self-fulfilling prophecy. Now that the House has joined the Senate in refusing to finance further military assistance to a so-called "pro-Western" coalition in Angola, President Ford has virtually invited the world to regard this as evidence that the United States is no longer willing or able to protect its interests or those of its allies.

This judgment might better await a threat to some more certain American interest and some more stable ally than any yet identified in Angola. In fact, the only real justification for aid to the Angolan coalition yet put forward by this Administration is the cold-war rationale that Soviet intervention on the other side must be countered.

"I believe," said Mr. Ford, "that resistance to Soviet expansion by military means must be a fundamental element of United States foreign policy." Does he mean in each and every instance? And by military means alone? If so, it will be news to Eastern Europe, and states an American policy of armed confrontation wherever and under whatever conditions of advantage the Soviets may choose.

The Ford Administration, moreover, has consistently pictured the Soviets as having opened the present phase of heavy foreign intervention in Angola by beginning — together with Cuba — massive assistance to the Marxist Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (M.P.L.A.). In fact, the evidence suggests that it was the C.I.A.'s sudden infusion last January of renewed aid to the National Front for the Liberation of Angola (F.N.L.A.), a C.I.A. client since the Kennedy Administration, that pro-

voked or evoked the current massive flow of Soviet aid and Cuban troops in support of the M.P.L.A.

It was certainly the Administration's effort to provide aid to the "pro-Western" coalition both secretly and massively that turned an already suspicious Congress—which well remembered the Tonkin Gulf episode and the war that followed—into a hostile Congress. Had Mr. Ford and Secretary Kissinger openly and fully educated Congress and the public on the vital interests they now claim to be at stake in Angola, they might have found much more support. They did not do so, it has to be suspected, because no such interests really exist.

Mr. Kissinger himself has stated that to have sought \$28 million—the amount rejected by House and Senate—was part of the Administration's error. A smaller amount, to finance a smaller effort, might have slipped past Congress more easily—although a smaller expenditure still would have been a waste of money. But just as it did in seeking \$250 million more in aid for Cambodia last spring, when no amount of money could have retrieved the situation, the Administration succeeded only in dramatizing to the world its lack of support in Congress for such intervention.

As far as damage to real American interests in Africa is concerned, any policy that resulted, however briefly, in *de facto* alliance with racist South Africa—as the Ford Administration policy did—could only compound the harm done long ago by the Nixon

Administration's support of Portugal against the liberation movements in its African colonies. At least Congress has put some kind of an end to the entanglement with South Africa. It has gone far to avoid what could have been a deep and damaging American involvement in a little-understood war—and on the losing side at that—and that is more in the nation's interest than lethal game-playing with the Soviet Union.

For a clearer—if still by no means sufficient—understanding of the Angolan struggle, I am indebted to the Rev. Lawrence Henderson, for many years a missionary in Angola, now representing the United Church Board for World Ministries in New York.

In an interview, Mr. Henderson conceded that the M.P.L.A. might be more effective, efficient and capable of devising government programs because of its Marxist doctrines and disciplines, but primarily because it numbered in its leadership so many Portuguese-trained civil servants from the former colonial regime. But precisely this factor, he pointed out, had hampered its efforts to develop broad-based support in Angola; and while the M.P.L.A. might be more "effective" in a Western sense, once in power, it would either have to govern by force and repression, or seek the kind of coalition with the other factions that it has so far shown no willingness to do.

Even so, Mr. Henderson described the F.N.L.A. as weak, incompetently led, mostly an exile organization; and he said the third faction, UNITA, which had more popular support than the others, lacked a dynamic program or the leadership to devise one. Mr. Henderson expects the M.P.L.A., with its Soviet-Cuban backing, to win power in Angola no matter what the United States now may do.