

Rethinking Angola...

The holiday recess on Capitol Hill provides a welcome opportunity for some hard rethinking on the part of both Congress and the Administration about the conduct of foreign policy in general and United States involvement in Angola in particular.

For their part, President Ford and Secretary of State Kissinger ought to reconsider whether the stakes for this country in Angola are crucial enough to risk a major confrontation with a restive Congress—in order then to risk confrontation in southern Africa with the Soviet Union.

The responsible members of Senate and House, meanwhile, have a breathing space to think once again how far it is prudent to go in arbitrarily tying the hands of the Executive in dealing with perceived threats to the security of this country or its allies—or with festering situations that could become threats in the absence of minimal non-military American action.

The pre-holiday temper of the Senate was demonstrated dramatically when it voted last week by the lopsided margin of 54 to 22 to cut off all funds for covert arms aid to the forces resisting the Soviet-backed Popular Front for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA). Mr. Ford demonstrated his indignation at the Senate's action twice within twenty-four hours with rhetoric reminiscent of the Cold War, the early American involvement in Indochina and the globalistic interpretations of the Truman Doctrine. Mr. Kissinger has now launched his own public quarrel with the Senate action, warning of a domino effect in other countries if American arms aid to the anti-MPLA forces in Angola is cut off.

There are few valid parallels in world politics, and Mr. Kissinger is right in saying that Angola is not Vietnam. Yet, the Administration's words were so intemperate as to revive the question whether the Executive has yet learned anything from the Indochina disaster about the limits of effective American assistance and intervention in remote and extremely complicated conflicts touching only incorrectly on American interests.

The President called the Senate cut-off "a deep tragedy for all countries whose security depends on the United States." But neither he nor Mr. Kissinger has ever placed Angola in that category; nor had either ever suggested even an implied commitment to one side in that African civil war, until Congress began to investigate the extent of secret American arms assistance for the movements known popularly as FNLA and UNITA.

Nor do Messrs. Ford and Kissinger show sufficient awareness of what is surely the gravest long-run danger of all for United States relations with Africa and the entire non-white world: an alliance for intervention in Angola—whether formal or merely incidental—with the perpetrators of apartheid, the white rulers of the Republic of South Africa.

So long as even a thousand white South African soldiers are deployed in Angola, black African governments will tolerate five times that many Cuban soldiers, plus Soviet advisers, even though many African leaders rightly fear the long-term effects of a Soviet penetration of their continent. Confirmation of a South African military presence was the sole reason why usually moderate Nigeria decided to recognize the MPLA regime as the legitimate Government of Angola.

...and Its Implications

By any reckoning, the assertions of Messrs. Ford and Kissinger represent rhetorical overkill. The Senate majority aimed only to eliminate hidden funds from the Defense Department's 1975-76 appropriations bill for covert American activities in Angola. The cutoff will continue to be in force only if confirmed by the House when it reconvenes next month. And it ought to be clear to the Administration at this late date that there can be no more genuinely covert American operations in Angola—nor should there be.

The American experience with legislation that mandates arbitrary aid cutoffs or that ties the Executive's hands in fluid foreign policy situations is an unhappy one, whether the issue has involved denying most-favored-nation trading privileges to Yugoslavia or an end to arms sales to Turkey after its aggression on Cyprus. Yet, the Congress understandably and justifiably intends to play a greater role henceforth in the shaping of foreign policy. There will be no return to the climate in which a Gulf of Tonkin resolution could sail through against token opposition.

On Angola, the resolution proposed by Senator Clark of Iowa and adopted by the Foreign Relations Committee appears to be a sounder approach than efforts to order total, arbitrary aid cutoffs. The resolution would make it all but impossible to carry on covert aid in Angola but would permit the President to offer aid openly if he justified his action to Congress. Either Senate or House, by majority vote, could halt this action within a thirty-day period.

In our judgment, the President should offer such aid only if it were requested as part of a multilateral effort initiated by a sizable group of black African governments. That is the one way the United States can escape the lasting stigma of being even indirectly associated with white-ruled South Africa.

If that kind of black African effort is not forthcoming, the United States should remain aloof from Angola, accepting the short-run risks of Soviet penetration against the long-term possibility based on previous experience—that Moscow will press too hard, as in Egypt, Zaire and most recently Mozambique, and ultimately share with Pretoria both the opprobrium and the hostility sure to be aroused against any white intervenor in the policies of central and southern Africa.

There is still a chance that the Kremlin will back away from this kind of intervention if confronted with the tangible perils to détente, even though at the moment the tide in Moscow seems to be running in just the opposite direction. In calling the Kremlin's attention

forcefully to the dangers of drastically worsened Soviet-American relations, the White House can count on strong backing from Congress and the country.