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 Clayton Fritchey

Angola and U.S. Politics

The issue in Angola, says Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, "is not whether it represents a vital interest to the United States." Obviously it doesn't. Dr. Kissinger also concedes that the Angolan situation is not threatening enough to warrant our armed intervention, or even military assistance on a major scale, as in Vietnam.

Why then, in the words of President Ford, is the Senate cutoff of further Angolan funds a "deep tragedy"? Since the administration's determination to continue somehow its involvement in Angola is self-defeating diplomacy, it must be concluded that it is motivated by other considerations, such as domestic politics.

As Mr. Ford and Kissinger continue to shake their fists at both Congress and the Russians, and mutter vague threats of unspecified retaliation, it becomes clearer that they feel an urgent need to put on a show of "standing up" to the Soviets, especially to protect themselves from charges of being soft on detente.

It won't appease Ronald Reagan, though, for the former California governor has already made it clear that his anti-detente views are going to be a centerpiece in his presidential campaign against Mr. Ford. The administration's present complaint that Moscow's intervention in Angola is a betrayal of detente will simply be proof to Reagan that Mr. Ford and Kissinger have been wrong all along in trusting the Russians.

Up until Angola, the administration consistently maintained that Moscow had faithfully lived up to detente, despite charges to the contrary by the Republican right wing. Dr. Kissinger may get some momentary satisfaction out of berating the Soviets, but for the long pull he is playing into the hands of his conservative critics.

So far, Moscow has taken the administration's emotional reaction pretty much in stride. On the whole it has been content to rebut the claim that it has violated detente by giving aid to the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA), one of the three tribes currently fighting each other for control of the country since its liberation from Portugal.

The Soviet position has been restated by *Izvestia*: "Some in the world," it says, "would like to convince us that the process of detente in the world, and support of the national liberation struggle, are incompatible. Similar things have been maintained before, but in vain. The process of detente does not mean, and never meant, the freezing of the sociopolitical status quo."

It is only fair to note that Moscow has always taken this stand, both before and

after detente was agreed upon in Moscow three years ago in negotiations between Chairman Brezhnev and former President Nixon. Dr. Kissinger at first seemed to share the Soviets' limited definition of the agreement, but more recently appeared to be easing away from it under pressure from the Republican and Democratic cold warriors.

His statements, however, have not always been consistent. Last June he was asked how he reconciled Soviet behavior in Vietnam, Portugal and the Middle East with detente. He said, "Vietnam was not caused by the Russians" and that it had "its own dynamics" of which Soviet "actions were only a part." The revolution in Portugal "was not caused by the Soviets," but by the "internal dynamics of Portugal itself."

As to the Middle East, he said he "would not be surprised if in Moscow they made the same argument and said that we have been using detente to improve our position." Dr. Kissinger today could also say that Moscow did not cause the civil war in Angola.

Regardless of how Kissinger now defines detente, the United States itself has not hesitated to intervene in many places around the world, including Angola, when it saw fit. Detente did not restrain Nixon's covert efforts to overthrow the duly elected government in Chile in 1973.

On the very eve of the formal signing of detente in Moscow, U.S. planes bombed Haiphong and, in the process, hit Russian ships. Many thought Moscow would cancel Nixon's visit, but the Russian leaders saw the bombing as irrelevant to their restricted concept of detente, and they have hued to this position ever since.

There is nothing new about Moscow's aid to Angola. For 15 years it has been helping the black insurgents to liberate Angola from white Portugal. The United States, until recent months, kept out the civil war because it was supporting the antidemocratic Lisbon government. Now, in coming to the aid of the National Front in its struggle with the Soviet-backed MPLA, Washington finds itself arm in arm with South Africa, the last stronghold of white supremacy in Africa.

Dr. Kissinger accuses Russia of escalating its assistance to the MPLA this year. Russia, in turn, accuses Washington of secretly doing the same for the National Front. Whatever the truth, we seem to be backing another loser. In opposing the MPLA, the administration is alienating the group that has already been recognized as the government of Angola by more than 30 nations, including most of the key African countries.