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The African leaders Kissinger ignored

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WASHINGTON — Secretary of State Kissinger's move to foster a moderate black government in Rhodesia carefully avoided contact with the very leaders who will hold the trump cards in forthcoming negotiations.

These men are the radical nationalist leaders. They have overshadowed the older, more moderate leaders in three of the most crucial areas: Their command of military forces, popular support and backing by other important African leaders.

Yet none has been included in the early negotiations to try to establish an interim government in Rhodesia.

The key radical leaders include:

—Robert Mugabe, leader of the leftist political party, ZANU, and major representative of most of the Zimbabwean guerrilla fighters based in neighboring Mozambique. Mugabe, a former teacher, was imprisoned by the Ian Smith regime for 11 years for political activities.

—President Samora Machel of Mozambique, instrumental in creating the Zimbabwe People's Army in 1974 in an effort to unify the guerrilla

factions. He probably has more influence with the guerrillas than any other outsider.

—Methodist Bishop Abel Muzorewa, leader of the militant faction of the Rhodesian African National Council, a coalition of nationalist groups. Some say he has the strongest popular backing of all black Zimbabwean leaders.

—The high command of the Zimbabwe People's Army, composed of 18 leaders of ZANU and ZAPU, the oldest and most important African political parties in Rhodesia.

—President Agostinho Neto of Angola. Like Machel, he's wary of American attempts to help structure Africa's future. U.S. relations with Neto's MPLA-led government have been strained since Angola's civil war.

Kissinger concentrated instead on "moderate" and non-aligned politicians and on Prime Minister Ian Smith, leader of Rhodesia's white minority government.

The only nationalist leader Kissinger met was Joshua Nkomo, considered a moderate both at home and abroad. He came to prominence as one of the original nationalist agitators in the late 1940s, but had lost most of his following by early 1976 when he

negotiated unsuccessfully on his own with Smith.

A devout Christian, Nkomo stresses peaceful negotiation and non-violent protest as the road to black majority rule in Rhodesia. Guerrilla leaders branded him a traitor after his talks with Smith.

Yet in proof of the Midas-touch quality of a Kissinger visit, when Nkomo returned to Salisbury Sept. 25 after the meeting, he drew a larger crowd than the popular, radical Muzorewa attracted five days later.

The radical leaders Kissinger shunned have called for an immediate transfer of power. That's a rejection of the British-American proposal for a two-year transition period.

"We are talking about majority rule in four to six weeks, when with the formation of an interim government the powers of the government of Rhodesia will be passed on to the majority," said Tanzania's President Nyerere.

The militant leaders also have stressed that they won't allow the structure of the interim government to be determined by whites. And they have rejected Smith's proposal that the ministries of defense and law and order remain in white hands during the transition period.

Samora Machel, president of Mozambique and the strongest outside influence on the guerrillas



In addition, the radical leadership is committed to some form of African socialism. They are believed to be neither pro-Soviet nor pro-Chinese, but to want some form of national planning to restructure the white-dominated capitalist economy.

Kissinger's avoidance of the radical leaders appears to be in keeping with his intentions for a Rhodesian settlement. Diplomats aboard Kissinger's plane said he "is aiming for the emergence of a belt of friendly pro-western states from Namibia, on the south Atlantic seaboard, through landlocked Botswana to Rhodesia."

Some observers point out that even if Kissinger had invited these leaders to talk, they might have refused out of fear of losing credibility with their peers. All Zimbabwean radical leaders have denounced Kissinger's involvement in the Rhodesian crisis.