

F572 & A.D.

Secretary of State Henry Kissinger is getting himself further and further out on a limb over those 13,000 Cuban troops in Africa. First, he warned Havana and its sponsors in Moscow not to use the Cubans to intervene on behalf of the black guerrillas fighting against Rhodesia's all-white Government. Then he reiterated the United States' intention to "do nothing" to support that minority Government. Now he says those two stands are not contradictory—but that may be the saw you hear in the background.

"We are certain that the American people understand and support these two equal principles of our policy—our support for majority rule in Africa and our firm opposition to military intervention," Mr. Kissinger said in a news conference in Texas (two-gun country where Ronald Reagan will pose a strong challenge on grounds that the Kissinger-Ford policy abdicates military superiority to the Communists).

But the real question is not whether the American people understand Mr. Kissinger's policy, but whether it is understood by Prime Minister Ian Smith of Rhodesia, the black guerrillas opposing his Government and the black governments of Africa. The danger is that they will deduce—quite logically—that if Mr. Kissinger can say so forcefully that "the United States will not accept further Cuban military interventions abroad," he is prepared to take some action somewhere, in Africa or in this hemisphere.

Mr. Kissinger's warnings to the Cubans, therefore, no matter how hedged with statements of opposition to Mr. Smith, may well be interpreted as, in effect, tacit support for the Smith Government against one major threat to it—Cuban intervention in the guerrilla war. And since Mr. Smith already is adamantly opposed to negotiating toward majority rule in Rhodesia, the Kissinger statements must

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tend to reinforce his view that he really need not negotiate, since in the final analysis, the white powers cannot afford to let white Rhodesia be wiped out in race warfare.

Thus, Mr. Kissinger may be making Cuban intervention in Rhodesia more likely. Aside from whether Fidel Castro might be tempted to challenge the Kissinger edicts, anything that strengthens Ian Smith's obduracy and increases his black opponents' fears of a long, slow, costly guerrilla war is likely to lead the more quickly to a black call for Cuban help.

In that event, Mr. Kissinger's swaying limb would be near the breaking point. Not only is Congressional support of an American military response to Cuba in Rhodesia highly doubtful but actual American military support—arms or men—for the Smith Government against majority rule (even if supported by the Cubans) violates Mr. Kissinger's stated policy as well as common decency. The reaction among black Americans, particularly those large numbers of them in the armed forces, should be another sobering consideration.

Action in this hemisphere is not much more promising. There is no evidence that Americans are willing to back military action against Cuba; and Mr. Castro long since showed that he is willing and able to defy economic and political sanctions.

So if the Cubans are invited into the Rhodesian struggle and the United States proves unable to prevent it, Mr. Kissinger's limb will have been sawed through, dropping him right into his own nightmare: "If leaders

around the world [as he put it in Texas] come to assume that the United States lacks either the forces or the will to resist while others intervene to impose solutions, they will accommodate themselves to what they will regard as the dominant trend."

Maybe so, and no one will be more responsible than Henry Kissinger, maker of empty threats, who could not have found Africa on a four-color map before he perceived it as an arena of big-power rivalry, and who persists in looking at it as a chessboard of global politics rather than as a continent with its own problems, political and economic necessities and human rights and aspirations.

Among those last are the hopes of more than six million blacks in Rhodesia, now dominated and exploited by about a quarter-million whites. Mr. Kissinger cannot seem to understand that they and the black governments that back them put first things first—they care more about support for majority rule than about the politics of Cuba or anyone else willing to help.

So a better and less risky way to guard against Cuban intervention in Rhodesia would be to take a vigorous and forthright stance against the Smith Government and for majority rule, using every reasonable form of pressure to speed a peaceful solution; because the longer Mr. Smith can hold out, the more likely is the Cuban intervention Mr. Kissinger fears.

As for his Texas declaration that "the United States cannot acquiesce indefinitely in the presence of Cuban expeditionary forces in distant lands for the purpose of pressure and to determine the political evolution by force of arms," what does Henry Kissinger think American troops were doing in Vietnam? Or the C.I.A. in Laos? Or the Air Force in Cambodia? Is there one law for the United States and another for Cuba?