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# **KISSINGER, ANGOLA AND US—AFRICAN FOREIGN POLICY**

**THE UNINTENTIONAL REALIST**

Steven O'Sullivan



# Kissinger, Angola and US–African Foreign Policy

Analysing US foreign policy towards Angola during the Ford administration, this book provides an intriguing insight into one of the most avoidable and unfortunate episodes in Cold War history and explores the impact on Henry Kissinger's much vaunted reputation for being guided by realist principles.

Kissinger has dominated political discourse and scholarship on US foreign policy since the 1970s, but although his legacy continues to generate controversy, little attention has been paid to the influence of Vietnam's collapse on the US decision to covertly intervene in the Angolan Civil War. This book argues that Kissinger's concern for personal reputation and US credibility following the collapse of Vietnam led to a harmful and unrealistic policy toward Angola. Exposure of US covert intervention exacerbated domestic and international political tensions and the subsequent showdown between the executive and legislative branches ironically resulted in Kissinger proclaiming a new departure in US–African relations. Thus, it is argued that Kissinger was an 'unintentional realist' rather than an intellectual proponent of *realpolitik*.

Enhancing our understanding of Kissinger, his relationship with both his subordinates and with Congress, and his approach to foreign policy, this book will be of interest to scholars of Cold War history, US foreign policy and all those fascinated by the personality of Henry Kissinger.

**Steven O'Sullivan** graduated with a PhD in History from University College Cork, Ireland in 2014. He also holds a Masters in both International Relations and in Information Systems, as well as Bachelor of Arts in History and Archaeology. His research interests include: US Cold War

Foreign Policy in the Third-World, the Vietnam syndrome and US executive and legislative relations.

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**Steven O’Sullivan**

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**For Frances**  
**This is for you**



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# Abbreviations

AAD	Access to Archival Database (US)
AFM	Armed Forces Movement (Portugal)
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency (US)
CRA	Congressional Review Act
CSCE	Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe
D-	Democratic Party (US Congress)
DCM	Deputy Chief of Mission
DGRFL	Digital Gerald R. Ford Library
DNSA	Digital National Security Archive
DOD	Department of Defense
DOS	Department of State
DOSB	Department of State Bulletin (US)
EXDIS	Exclusive Distribution
FAA	Foreign Assistance Act
FBI	Federal Bureau of Investigation
FLEC	Front for the Liberation of the Enclave of Cabinda
FNLA	National Front for the Liberation of Angola/ <i>Frente Nacional de Libertação de Angola</i>
FOIA	Freedom of Information Act (US)
FRG	Federal Republic of Germany
FRUS	<i>Foreign Relations of the United States</i>
GRFL	Gerald R. Ford Library, Ann Arbor, Michigan
IG	Inter-Departmental Group
IMF	International Monetary Fund
INR	Bureau for Intelligence and Research
JSN	Junta for National Salvation (Portugal)

LOC	Library of Congress
MAP	Military Assistance Program
MPLA	Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola/ <i>Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola</i>
NARA	National Archives and Records Administration
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NBC	National Broadcasting Company
NODIS	No Distribution
NSA	National Security Agency
NSC	National Security Council
NSSM	National Security Study Memorandum
OAU	Organization of African Unity
PCP	Portuguese Communist Party
PDP	Popular Democratic Party (Portugal)
PPS	Policy Planning Staff
PRA	People's Republic of Angola
PRC	People's Republic of China
PSP	Portuguese Socialist Party
R-	Republican Party (US Congress)
SAG	South African government
SALT	Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty
SFRC	Senate Foreign Relations Committee
SRG	Senior Review Group
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
UNGA	United Nations General Assembly
UNITA	National Union for the Total Independence of Angola/ <i>União Nacional para a Independência Total de Angola</i>
UPI	United Press International
US	United States
USDEL	United States Delegation (UN)
USG	United States Government
WHCF	White House Central Files

# Introduction

The Angolan Civil War 1975–1976 provides an intriguing insight into one of the most avoidable and unfortunate episodes in Cold War history. The proxy confrontation between the United States (US) and the Soviets for influence in the country led to a catastrophic escalation of the civil war, much to the long-term detriment of Angolan society. In a wider context, it contributed to a decline in US–Soviet relations, exposed the fractured US political consensus over the lessons of Vietnam and helped damage the reputation of Henry Kissinger as an imperious world statesman. The Soviet Ambassador to the US, Anatoly Dobrynin encapsulated the scenario when he observed “Angola became a cockpit of international ambition far beyond its importance to anyone, not least the unfortunate people of Angola itself”.<sup>1</sup> Indeed the events of the Angolan conflict and the role the US played in its escalation is a prime example of how Henry Kissinger’s lack of regional understanding helped undermine US relations with Africa. The primary purpose of this study is to describe, explain and analyse US foreign policy towards Angola during the Ford administration 1974–1976. It is particularly concerned with analysing Kissinger’s determination with restoring a perceived credibility problem arising from the collapse of Vietnam in April 1975.

While the theme of credibility in US foreign policy is not a new concept, it has become a salient issue in many scholars’ work and indeed in policymakers’ speeches on US foreign policy which continues to this day.<sup>2</sup> Yet as historian Robert J. McMahon stresses, credibility is “an elusive concept that defies precise definition, credibility has typically connoted for American decision makers a blend of resolve, reliability, believability, and decisiveness; equally important, it has served as a code word from America’s image and reputation”.<sup>3</sup> A narrow chronological focus has been adopted in order to illustrate the immediate period in post-Vietnam US

foreign policy and how the conflict compromised US policymakers' decision-making on the Angolan Civil War. Furthermore, this publication emphasizes the political fallout in the US upon exposure of the covert operation and the eventual realization by Kissinger that the US needed a concerted African policy endorsing black majority rule. This ultimately ensured that the political debate had quickly shifted away from Angola by the summer of 1976 and disappeared from the headlines almost as quick as it appeared in late 1975. This was noticed at the time by political scientist William Minter who observed "the focus of the 'crisis' spotlight has moved on, to the white regimes in Rhodesia and South Africa, and policy toward Angola and Mozambique, [...] is likely to settle down into low-key obscurity, becoming routine and uninteresting".<sup>4</sup> However, in a wider context the fallout from the Angolan debacle had already helped undermine Gerald Ford's presidential election chances in November 1976.

The Angolan Civil War has been somewhat overlooked within US Cold War diplomatic history which tends to rank events in Africa as being peripheral to superpower rivalry in the core areas of influence in Europe, the Middle East and Southeast Asia. This mirrors the lack of attention on the Ford administration which has also been unfairly judged to be a mere extension of the Richard Nixon presidency. Yet the Ford administration is worthy of attention in its own right. Gerald Ford, the only non-elected Vice-President and later President of the US had the unenviable task of restoring the US domestic consensus after the scandals that plagued the second term of the Nixon administration. The challenge of manoeuvring within a shattered domestic political landscape was compounded by a series of foreign crises such as those seen in Turkey and Cyprus in 1974 as well as the collapse of Vietnam and US involvement in the Angolan Civil War in 1975 which only exacerbated these tensions. The inability of Ford and his Secretary of State and National Security Advisor, Henry Kissinger, to successfully chart a course through this turbulent period contributed to the election of Jimmy Carter to the presidency in November 1976. This publication stresses that the fluid perceptions of US credibility in the aftermath of the collapse of Vietnam resulted in a divisive US–Angolan policy which ignored the regional and local conditions of the Angolan Civil War in favour of adhering to a traditional Cold War containment strategy. By ignoring the advice of his colleagues Kissinger created a more complicated situation that resulted in a public confrontation between the

Ford administration and Congress over how to incorporate the lessons of Vietnam into US foreign policy. Yet this self-inflicted wound ironically forced the Ford administration to formulate a new US–African policy that was tailored toward black majority rule, an outcome that neither the Ford administration nor Congress had foreseen at the beginning of the Angolan crisis. However, a brief note on the conflict is required at this stage to outline the main narrative of events within which this publication is situated.

The Angolan conflict was an outgrowth of complications arising from the Carnation Revolution of April 1974 in Portugal when the dictatorship of Marcelo Caetano was overthrown and replaced by a series of provisional governments over the next two years. In the immediate aftermath, the controlling military junta, the Junta for National Salvation (JSN) under the command of General Antonio Spínola declared that Portuguese-African territories were to be granted independence over a staggered timeframe. Such a declaration brought to an end over 400 years of colonial rule on the African continent. However, unlike other Portuguese-African territories such as Guinea-Bissau and Mozambique, Angola had three liberation groups with divergent ethnic and ideological backgrounds who vied for control after independence. The *Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola* (MPLA), the Marxist orientated group led by Dr Agostinho Neto, competed with the *Frente Nacional de Libertação de Angola* (FNLA) under the leadership of Holden Roberto. In addition, there was a third movement under the command of Jonas Savimbi, the *União Nacional para a Independência Total de Angola* (UNITA). Despite agreeing to enter into a coalition Angolan government after signing the Alvor Accord in January 1975, the three movements descended into open confrontation which was exacerbated over the course of 1975 as external assistance from the US, the Soviet Union, the People's Republic of China (PRC) and many other countries including certain African states such as Zaire, Zambia and the Ivory Coast helped fuel indigenous ethnic and ideological tensions and eventually resulted in Cuban and South African military engagements in the country on the eve of independence on the 11 November 1975.

## **Objectives**



This publication has two main objectives. It analyses the impact of the fall of Vietnam on the Ford administration and how the perception of a credibility problem became the tool which Kissinger used to manoeuvre the US into intervening in the Angolan Civil War. By examining the fractured domestic political consensus that existed in Washington, DC, this study shows the different interpretations of the lessons the US should incorporate into foreign policy after the Vietnam conflict. In particular it stresses that this was a view held not only by members of Congress but within the executive branch itself. Thereby, this publication addresses a gap in the literature on this topic as it reveals sustained dissent from within the US State Department from high-ranking officials who disagreed with Kissinger's determination to use Angola as a testing ground for regaining credibility in US foreign policy. Specifically, it injects newly declassified primary material to expand the argument that Davis was the main opponent of Kissinger's push for intervention. By doing so this publication shows that the formulation of US foreign policy toward Angola was balanced in favour of non-intervention. It argues that the dissent on Angolan policy was not simply a result of US State Department officials being affected by Vietnam syndrome, or lacking the will to confront the Soviet Union, as has been reported in Kissinger's memoirs. In fact, it was based on the realization that domestic political and public constrictions inhibited US foreign policy at that time and that the US had to be more conscious of where it chose to engage the Soviets in the Third World. However, such was the dominance of Kissinger's position within the Ford administration; he was able to play to Ford's conservative instincts and he ultimately voted to authorize a covert intervention aiding the FNLA and UNITA under the codename Operation IAFEATURE in July 1975.

In addition, this publication stresses that with the Angolan situation escalating beyond control and the eventual widespread exposure of US involvement in the conflict, the conditions for Vietnam analogies within Congress and the US media were inevitable. At the centre of this was a determination by Congress to show that they had learnt the lessons of the Vietnam conflict and to ensure that the events in Angola did not escalate in the same fashion. However, in doing so they succumbed to the same weakness that inhibited Kissinger's logic; the need to restore credibility in US foreign policy. Therefore, the confrontation between the executive and the legislative branches over Angola rarely strayed far from the Vietnam

analogy when it should have focused more on the inadequacies of US–African policy and how that helped create the conditions for the Angolan crisis.

## **Methodology and sources**

This publication is a historical analysis of US foreign policy toward Angola. The logic behind focusing on US policy rather than an international history or post-national history of the conflict is centred on addressing a specific gap in the literature of this event. While there have been many detailed studies on the Angolan Civil War, questions remain over the formulation of US–Angolan policy and how perceptions of post-Vietnam credibility influenced the ultimate decision to covertly intervene. As a result, this book does not engage in depth with the timing and motivations of the Cuban intervention between September and November 1975, nor does it cover the offensive launched by the South Africans codenamed Operation Zulu in October 1975.<sup>5</sup> With regard to Cuban involvement, the archival evidence did not prove that the US had any real warning of Havana’s intentions before they arrived in Angola in large numbers. Indeed, the evidence from conversations between Kissinger and other Ford administration colleagues suggests that this was seen as firmly originating from Moscow rather than Havana. In the case of South African actions, the archival evidence available remains heavily redacted, but this book does demonstrate that the US were not displeased by Pretoria’s decision to invade Angola in late 1975. Therefore, by concentrating on analysing US motivations as opposed to incorporating an international history of events, this publication injects new analysis into US motivations and the influence of Vietnam in the US decision-making process. This is particularly salient in the latter chapters of the book as the executive and legislative branches fought for the ownership of the legacy of Vietnam. As a result, both sides never truly had the interests of Angola at heart. It must be noted that this book does not go into detail on the Pike or Church Committee hearings, instead choosing to retain focus specifically on Angolan and African hearings. This ultimately provides a deeper understanding for future studies on US foreign policy towards Angola and will also help other scholars investigating the topic of a crucial time when US foreign policy consensus

was particularly fragile after the abuses of the Nixon administration and the defeat in Vietnam.

This publication incorporates a multi-archival approach using material amalgamated mainly from the Gerald R. Ford Library (GRFL) in Ann Arbor, Michigan, but also from the US National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) in College Park, Maryland and the Library of Congress (LOC) in Washington, DC. It also utilizes online sources of primary documentation from the Digital National Security Archive (DNSA), the Digital Gerald R. Ford Library (DGRFL), and the *Foreign Relations of the United States* (FRUS) series on southern Africa, the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) Electronic Reading Room, the Congressional Record collection and Wikileaks. In addition, media sources such as the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* have been utilized through the online resources of New York University.

The GRFL holds an extensive collection of primary documentation in relation to Angola ranging from personal memos between departments, letters to Congressional leaders, embassy telegrams, press releases and transcripts of television and radio broadcasts of executive and legislative personnel to cite just a few types of primary documents available. While scholars have previously used documents from the GRFL when documenting the Angolan episode, this publication incorporates the full extent of the GRFL's declassified holdings on Angola which hitherto has not been previously used in extended consideration of this issue. In addition, the DGRFL has also been utilized in order to review minutes from National Security Council (NSC) meetings and memorandums of conversation between Ford, Kissinger, Assistant National Security Advisor, Brent Scowcroft as well as other participants from international leaders to White House cabinet officials who met with Ford and Kissinger during this period to discuss Angola.

In addition, the resources of NARA have been critical in understanding the difficulties within the State Department over how to proceed in Angola. From analysing primary documents from government officials such as Assistant Secretary of State Joseph Sisco, Intelligence and Research Chief Winston Lord and the discussions held at Kissinger's staff meetings, it is possible to gain a deeper understanding of the friction between Kissinger and his subordinates than has previously been discussed in earlier publications of US foreign policy toward Angola. The DNSA provides

further context for this debate through the release of telephone conversations between Kissinger and various political and media figures.

In particular the release of the FRUS volume on southern Africa 1969–1976 has been pivotal in filling in the remaining gaps from the archival information obtained in the GRFL and NARA. This volume contains memorandums of conversations from 40 committee meetings held throughout the Angolan crisis and helps to illustrate one of the core arguments of the publication which contends that the Vietnam syndrome contributed to a much wider base of dissent on Kissinger's Angolan policy than the objections of Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs Nathaniel Davis. Another valuable primary resource is the American Memory online resource through the LOC website which carries interviews with former US officials including former assistant secretaries, ambassadors and heads of units within the State Department such as the Policy Planning Staff (PPS). Furthermore, the CIA Electronic Reading Room provided an insight into how the intelligence agency viewed the Angolan situation, however, most of the files are still heavily redacted. In addition, the information gained from the Wikileaks site has yielded some important information through the release of US embassy telegrams from around the world detailing how the US was not widely perceived as having lost significant credibility in the aftermath of Vietnam. In fact, it helps to reinforce the argument that the credibility issue was something mainly perceived by Kissinger and not the State Department.

Additional material obtained from the LOC has been used to reflect the importance of Congress in the Angolan episode. More specifically, it uses Congressional hearings on Angola and other issues relating to US foreign policy at the time to illustrate how Congress was also affected by Vietnam syndrome in its decision to halt further funding for Angolan operations in December 1975 and January 1976. These hearings shed a light on the tense political climate in the immediate period following US disengagement in Vietnam and the fracture that existed between conservative and liberal elements in Congress over Angola and in a wider context the pursuit of détente. In addition, the hearings afford an opportunity to incorporate testimony from a range of administration officials such as Kissinger, Assistant Secretary of African Affairs William Schauffele, who had replaced Nathaniel Davis by the end of 1975, and Deputy Secretary of State Edward Mulcahy. By also examining the Congressional Record it is possible to

establish a direct narrative on the confrontation between the executive and the legislative branches of the US government over Angola.

In particular, the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* have greatly helped in analysing American journalistic and public perception of US policy towards Angola and the how the confrontational tactics pursued by Ford and Kissinger towards Congress in 1976 did little to persuade the American public that US credibility was really at stake in Angola. These primary sources combined with the large quantity of secondary sources consulted, including books, journal articles and memoirs, ensure a comprehensive analysis of the various factors involved in the US decision-making process to covertly assist the FNLA and UNITA in the Angolan Civil War.

## **Structure**

The publication consists of eight chapters which chart the evolution of US–African policy from one of indifference towards racial equality in the early 1970s to the decision by the Ford administration to fully endorse black majority rule in Africa in April 1976. The Angolan Civil War and the decisions taken by Ford and Kissinger, in the face of substantial internal dissent within the State Department, and later in regard to confronting Congress, were crucial to this new departure in US foreign policy toward Africa.

Chapter 1 gives a brief overview of US–African policy in the Richard Nixon administration. It outlines the importance of the decision to adopt Option Two of the National Security Study Memorandum (NSSM) 39 or “Tar Baby” as it later became known in 1970. In particular it argues that the African Bureau initially had no issue with the policy but quickly expressed apprehension at increased Soviet activity in the region. This was ignored by Kissinger who decided that after the events of the Yom Kippur War in 1973 the US needed to prioritize its relations with Portugal. Yet the advent of the Carnation Revolution in April 1974 provided the opportunity to address the imbalance in US–African policy. Nevertheless, the region remained a low priority in his overall Cold War strategy; Kissinger focused on what he perceived to be the more imminent and dangerous threat of the Portuguese Communist Party (PCP) infiltrating the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). Despite the warnings from the African Bureau about a potential

power vacuum in the sub-Saharan region and the call from Tanzanian President Julius Nyerere for US diplomatic assistance in late 1974, when it came to African issues Kissinger was more concerned with removing the head of the African Bureau, Donald Easum, and replacing him with Nathaniel Davis.

Chapter 2 discusses how Kissinger was confronted by a substantial backlash following the nomination of Davis for Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs in spring 1975 and how his robust defence of Davis is seen as somewhat ironic given that their relationship would become fraught almost immediately after Davis' confirmation in March 1975. Specifically, it argues that Kissinger's attention on the imminent collapse of Vietnam in April 1975 ensured that reports from the US Ambassador to Portugal, Frank Carlucci, outlining Portuguese non-chalance to ensure stability in Angola were overlooked. With the fall of Vietnam and Zambian President Kenneth Kaunda's stinging public remarks on US– African policy during a visit to Washington, DC in April 1975, Kissinger saw Angola as an opportunity to address what he now deemed to be a critical credibility problem facing US foreign policy. Yet this chapter concludes that there was no real credibility problem confronting the US as many foreign states saw US disengagement from the conflict as beneficial in the long term.

Chapters 3 and 4 primarily focus on the debate on Angolan policy in June and July 1975 when Kissinger's eagerness for active options that fitted with his perception of US credibility were countered by dissent from various State Department officials who argued that the Angolan Civil War did not represent a vital US national interest and, therefore, the outcome was inconsequential to the US. Chapter 3 explores in detail the fractured relationship between Kissinger and Davis at this point as Kissinger thought Davis' objections were a result of the Vietnam experience and Davis' previous encounter with scandal during his former position as US Ambassador to Chile in 1973.<sup>6</sup> In particular it argues that Davis' objections were part of a larger opposition to Kissinger's pursuit of US intervention as head of the PPS, Winston Lord, and the Department of Defense (DOD) were also against active US involvement in Angola. It also explores the Zairian influence on US foreign policy at this time as its leader Mobutu Sese Seko ratcheted up the stakes by expelling US Ambassador to Zaire, Deane Hinton, and requesting that the US fund the FNLA and UNITA. Chapter 4 expands further on the disagreement between Davis and

Kissinger and how it resulted in the resignation of Davis. It argues that in July 1975, Under Secretary of State Joseph Sisco and Bureau for Intelligence and Research (INR) head, William Hyland, seriously questioned the need for the US to risk any prestige in Angola. They were joined by CIA Director William Colby who also expressed caution at US involvement. Furthermore, the local realities ensured that US involvement would be quickly discovered and a sudden influx of arms would only exacerbate the Angolan Civil War given the collapse of the Portuguese ability to sustain basic law and order in the country.

Chapter 5 charts the evolution of US intervention throughout the autumn of 1975 where the US was buoyed by some initial success, but was then significantly halted by a counter escalation from the Soviets. It explores the increasing denial by Kissinger that it was a poor decision to get the US involved in Angola and continues to investigate his perception that his subordinates were victims of Vietnam syndrome. Specifically, it shows how opposition to the Angolan programme grew during this period and explores this in more depth than previous publications. The objections of Sisco and Hyland continued and were joined by US chargé d'affaires to Zaire, Lannon Walker and his staff who argued that the US should not continue to be involved in the conflict as the potential domestic political ramifications ensured that the US could not escalate as much as the Soviets could. The discussion subsequently develops the topic by illustrating the eventual realization by Kissinger that the Angolan operation was beyond winning and how he undertook a strategy designed to shift responsibility for the failure onto outgoing CIA director William Colby.

The final three chapters primarily centre on the confrontation between the Ford administration and Congress over Angolan policy in the period covering December 1975 to May 1976, and how Vietnam syndrome dominated this period. It concludes that despite the public damage incurred by the Ford administration, the announcement by Kissinger reorienting US–African policy towards black majority rule in April 1976 was a short-lived success for both the executive and legislative branches. Chapter 6 analyses the exposure of the covert US operation and the subsequent decision by Congress to pass the Tunney Amendment which halted all funding for further aid to Angola in December 1975. Through media articles, Congressional hearings and the Congressional Record, it is shown how significant pressure on Kissinger from both liberals and conservatives

criticizing the decision to get involved in Angola was perceived as a failure to learn the lessons of Vietnam. Yet Congress itself was not unified in its own approach with some believing that the legislative branch was overreaching in its eagerness to banish the memory of Vietnam. Simultaneously the chapter also details Kissinger's plan to obtain an Organization of African Unity (OAU) vote to remove foreign troops from Angola, but argues that this was unrealistic, and the US would have been better served by considering a Tanzanian proposal which would have yielded the same results (this was dismissed in favour of adhering to Cold War perspectives). Chapter 7 argues that Ford and Kissinger's attempts to attack Congress and put them on the defensive in January and February 1976 was flawed, especially since there was mounting evidence that this attempt would be futile. In the aftermath of failed discussions with Soviet Premier Leonid Brezhnev and Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko in Moscow in January 1976, Kissinger and newly appointed African Bureau chief, William Schaufele argued that it was vital that the US stay involved in Angola. However, during a series of Congressional hearings on the issue, the Ford administration was unable to adequately explain its reasoning, with Congressmen and Senators consistently linking the situation with Vietnam. It concludes that Kissinger's inability to successfully articulate a defence of his Angolan policy was mainly due to the fact that the US had no real African policy and, therefore, he was not adequately prepared to make a case which incorporated Angola at the heart of the discussion instead Cold War rivalry.

Finally, Chapter 8 investigates the aftermath of the decision to uphold the Tunney Amendment in January 1976 and how Kissinger struggled to accept defeat and was taken aback at the shift in the European attitude on recognizing the MPLA as the government of the newly established People's Republic of Angola (PRA) in March 1976. At this time, Ford took over the mantle of defending the administration against Congressional opposition, but this only served to create further damage as his lack of detailed knowledge on the issue resulted in contradictory messages. Ultimately Kissinger realized that in order to outmanoeuvre Congress he had to accept some public reversal of policy. On his first trip to Africa in April 1976, he endorsed black majority rule and returned to Washington, DC with his critics now applauding his efforts. However, this in reality was just a public posture by Kissinger, who in private still heavily resented the Congressional



influence on foreign policy and continued to attack them in private. Therefore, this publication concludes that it was somewhat ironic that the flawed decision-making pursued by the Ford administration in Angola resulted in a shift in US–African policy.

- 1 Anatoly Dobrynin, *In Confidence: Moscow's Ambassador to America's Six Cold War Presidents* (New York: Random House, 1995), 360.
- 2 The credibility argument is still a central focus point in US foreign policy, with some debate on the lack of US will to take direct action towards Syria over its alleged use of chemical weapons on rebels and civilians in August 2013.
- 3 Robert J. McMahon, "Credibility and World Power: Exploring the Psychological Dimension in Postwar American Diplomacy," *Diplomatic History* 15, no. 4 (Fall 1991): 455.
- 4 William Minter, "U.S. Policy in Angola and Mozambique," *Africa Today* 23, no. 3, Southern Africa and U.S. Foreign Policy (July–September 1976): 55.
- 5 Coverage of these particular events are excellently described in Piero Gleijeses, *Conflicting Missions: Havana, Washington and Africa, 1959–1976* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2002). For further analysis of South African motivations, one should read Jamie Miller "Things Fall Apart: South Africa and the Collapse of the Portuguese Empire, 1973–1974," *Cold War History* 12, no. 2 (February 2012): 183–204.
- 6 Davis was the US Ambassador in Chile when Marxist Chilean leader Salvador Allende committed suicide during a military coup in 1973. Davis was portrayed in many media and official circles as being involved in the events leading up to Allende's death.

# **1 No cause for concern**

## **US foreign policy and Angola 1969–1974**

### **Introduction**

The Carnation Revolution in Portugal in April 1974 and the subsequent rapid decolonization of its African territories helped change how the landscape of sub-Saharan Africa was viewed in Cold War competition. In the context of Angola, the civil war of 1975–1976 highlighted a particular weakness in US foreign policy towards Africa in the 1960s and early 1970s. Indeed, US ignorance of sub-Saharan Africa ensured a delayed response to the Angolan consequences of the Carnation Revolution. In this setting, the foundation of the Ford administration's defeat at the hands of Congress in late 1975 and early 1976 can be found in the first term of the Nixon administration. In particular, the US attitude towards the region can be seen in NSSM 39 which examined and recommended courses of action for US foreign policy toward southern Africa. The tenuous relationship between the African Bureau of the US State Department and Secretary of State Henry Kissinger is worthy of further investigation. During the Angolan crisis and in his subsequent memoirs, Kissinger has vehemently argued that the African Bureau was filled by officers who held a "siege mentality in which they transmuted their isolation into a claim to moral superiority, casting themselves as the defenders of American idealism".<sup>1</sup> Yet the African Bureau did not initially offer any substantial dissent on the direction of US–African policy. In the aftermath of the Carnation Revolution, the Bureau concluded that the policy of NSSM 39 had actually served the US well. The chapter also illustrates Kissinger's contempt for those who would potentially undermine his authority and prestige. In

particular his Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs Donald Easum who undertook an African trip in late 1974 in order to gain perspective on how US policy was being perceived by African states and initiating a foundation for discussion with potential future leaders of Angola and Mozambique.

By the autumn of 1974, the African Bureau and Kissinger were in relative agreement on US policy toward southern Africa. However, despite a tentative ceasefire being agreed between the Angolan liberation movements, there were signs that Angola could develop into a potential Cold War conflict as external powers jostled for influence within the Angolan liberation leaders. Yet, these signs were ignored by Kissinger in favour of ousting Easum for his attempt to pre-empt future US policy toward the region. His decision to replace Easum with Nathaniel Davis, who had no experience in African affairs, was a signal of how Kissinger intended to further marginalize the African Bureau in 1975. Indeed, Davis was seen as an officer who would not undermine his view of Africa and its relative status as a backwater in US Cold War strategy. Nevertheless, despite Kissinger's intentions, the sudden collapse of Vietnam created the conditions that would ensure that the African Bureau and its new Assistant Secretary would challenge Kissinger over US–Angolan policy as the country descended into civil war.

## **The foundation of failure?: NSSM 39 and the African Bureau**

One of the more striking observations on the plight of Angola in US foreign policy was actually highlighted during the early 1960s in the John F. Kennedy administration. In July 1961, Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs G. Mennen Williams commented that Angola was a test of US commitment to freedom and the US should not be slow to advocate change in the region. In William's view, this risked seeing "Soviet Communism come on the scene as the spurious champion of 'freedom' for Portuguese Africa".<sup>2</sup> It would serve to be a familiar reminder of the balancing problem that the US faced in its policy towards Portugal throughout the 1960s, and one that was never fully addressed in either the Kennedy administration or in the subsequent Lyndon Johnson administration.

With the inauguration of the Nixon administration in 1969 there was little optimism that African issues would be given any priority given the American preoccupation with ending the Vietnam War. In the context of Angola, the most important policy consideration was NSSM 39. On 10 April 1969, Kissinger ordered a review of US–southern Africa policy and an Inter-Departmental Group (IG) was charged with creating a response to NSSM 39. It outlined five options to be considered in order to progress US policy in the region. The preferred choice was presented in Option Two, which advocated a “partial relaxation of American measures against these [white] regimes, together with increased aid for black Africa”, yet this course if adopted meant that the US “would be unable to abandon it if it did not work. Hence, the label given [to] this option by its State opponents: ‘tar baby’ ”.<sup>3</sup> The logic behind such action was based on the premise that “such an American stance could do more – at least in theory – to promote peaceful change within southern Africa than hostile actions which lacked real force and simply made the whites of southern Africa more obdurate”.<sup>4</sup> Such analysis failed to adequately address the long-term future of the region, and instead marginalized it into a short-term fix which mainly attempted to placate American business prospects in the region, and especially in South Africa while simultaneously endorsing the status quo. Critics of the Tar Baby option have claimed

NSSM 39 never confronts the question of how “progress towards majority rule” is actually transformed into majority rule. In fact, the document’s silence on that issue amounts to an admission that Whites will never peacefully surrender more than a qualified franchise.<sup>5</sup>

In subsequent years one of the chief proponents of the NSC’s views on NSSM 39, Roger Morris reflected “it was a disaster, naïve in concept, practically impossible for the government to execute, and thus a ready cover for pursuing the most reactionary and short-sighted U.S. interests in the region”.<sup>6</sup> In addition, historian Zaki Laïdi argues that the policy marked the end of the State Department’s “influence over the determination of America’s African policy”.<sup>7</sup> However, the degree to which the African Bureau had any influence over foreign policy during the administration is contentious. Furthermore, such a statement does not fully cover the multiple

facets of US–African policy during this period and there was no rebellion within the African Bureau over the decision to implement Option Two.

In fact, there was relative alignment between them on Portuguese-African policy objectives. In April 1970 only a few months after Nixon had approved Option Two, both the African and European Bureaus of the State Department advocated that the US should not establish military liaison offices in either Angola or Mozambique as Portugal would conclude the US shared “their estimate of the territories strategic importance to the West [...] when] in fact, U.S. interests in Angola and Mozambique are relatively small and are likely to remain so”.<sup>8</sup> Indeed this “hands-off” approach was repeated in May 1970 when US Secretary of State William Rogers confidently told Portuguese Prime Minister Marcelo Caetano that the US

hoped to have a fairly practical policy in that we were going to assist African nations in economic development and otherwise. We were not as concerned about the extent of communist penetration as some other nations seemed to be, since the danger compared to prior periods seemed to have lessened.<sup>9</sup>

However, by the autumn of 1970, contrary to what Rogers had confidently stated only a few months prior to Caetano, there were early signs that US strategy was actually inviting the Soviets into the region. A report prepared by the INR noted how the Soviets were providing increased aid to the liberation movements in the region to gain influence with the groups. It also warned that the Soviets were trying to sway leaders of independent African states who supported the groups. It highlighted that “the Soviets appear to have become somewhat more bullish in Africa [and] an increased investment at this time would be consistent with what the Soviets seem to have assessed to be an improved climate in Africa”.<sup>10</sup>

Furthermore, Angola stood out as a particularly problematic area for the US to navigate. In September 1970 a report entitled “Angola: Guidelines for Policy”, once again highlighted the fundamental problem of attempting to strike a balance between the whites and the blacks in Angola. In this context, the report criticized US strategy towards Portuguese Africa and highlighted Angola as a case study where it was failing to appease Portugal and the other independent African governments. Instead it called for “an internationally acceptable solution to the Angolan problem would thus

serve our interests by removing an impediment to the realization of more vital US foreign aims, whether in Africa, in Europe, or in other areas of the world”.<sup>11</sup> Yet while this report was critical of the path that NSSM 39 had taken US policy on, it was not calling for a comprehensive African solution which Kissinger would later ridicule the African Bureau for. Rather it shared a similar theme to earlier calls from the European Affairs Bureau for an Angolan solution, not for the good of the blacks in Angola – but in order to improve relations with Portugal and indeed free the US to concentrate on other world issues which aligned more closely with US national interests.

However, there were some signs of increased dissent on the Tar Baby policy in 1971 when African Bureau officials began to come to the conclusion that the Portuguese would not be able to sustain the current African situation in the long term. In fact, the African Bureau were tentatively advocating a move to establish contact with the potential future black leaders in Angola. This is illustrated by an internal memorandum which stated that it was possible that many more African states would gain independence within the decade and recommended the US consider its “current relations with liberation movements [... and how it] will affect our future relations with them as potential independent governments [... but] to a degree this is a crystal ball exercise because the future is obviously unpredictable.”<sup>12</sup>

Despite these timid warnings, the conversation appeared to be happening in a vacuum as there was no shift in US–African policy over the next two years. In the intervening period, National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger was appointed as Secretary of State. Furthermore, the breakout of the Yom Kippur War in October 1973 between Israel and the Arab nations only served to copperfasten Kissinger’s view that the US needed to keep Portugal content in order to secure the landing facilities in the Azores.<sup>13</sup> Kissinger sought to reward the Portuguese for their assistance during the war and began to actively engage in discussions to soften the US arms embargo toward Portugal, especially in relation to US weapons being used by Portugal in their African territories. It was clear that Kissinger prioritized Portuguese relations as they acquiesced to Portuguese pressure to breach the arms embargo, rather than provide money to buy arms on the world market. This decision was taken without any consultation with the African Bureau, or with its new head Donald Easum. It laid down an early

marker for the strained relationship between Kissinger and the African Bureau.

This controversial decision to alter US policy on the arms embargo was held up by bureaucratic delays that Kissinger became infuriated with, and it also alerted Easum to the situation. Despite being new to the role, Easum voiced his concern over the decision to supply Portugal with US arms for use in Africa in return for continued access to the Azores. As Willard De Pree later revealed, Easum knew “the reaction in Africa, among some of our NATO allies, in Congress and with the US public, would be strong”.<sup>14</sup> Kissinger’s response was a precursor to the relationship that would develop with the African Bureau as he strongly rebuked

I told you what our choices are, and there is no sense looking at it only from the African point of view. There is no justification of it from the African point of view. This isn’t done to promote our African policy.<sup>15</sup>

Therefore, it is clear that as early as 1974 Kissinger’s pursuit of reinforcing the traditional Cold War spheres of influence in Europe and the Middle East laid the foundations for the subsequent confrontation between Congress and the executive branch on Angola. In addition, his statement illustrates the lack of importance Kissinger gave to African self-determination, and to any possibility of US–African policy shifting to accommodate such change. Furthermore, it ignored the impact that this strategy was having on the ground in Africa. Indeed, US officials in Africa reported that Kissinger and Nixon’s pursuit of détente and triangular diplomacy with the Soviets and the PRC only served to create the conditions that marginalized Africa. As one US official based in Lusaka remarked

developments in our foreign relations in recent years clearly have made US support of self-determination for African countries remaining under minority rule less plausible. The US should take some measures to restore credibility to our policy and make it at least somewhat effective in encouraging change.<sup>16</sup>

This is an important point in the context of Kissinger’s credibility argument which he used to later defend his actions in Angola. It was the historic

ignorance of US–African relations that helped create a credibility problem in Africa, not the US defeat in Vietnam as Kissinger believed.

While both the Soviet Union and the PRC were engaging the black African leaders in the early 1970s, the US saw no need to compete for influence in the region. Ironically it was an unexpected coup in Portugal in April 1974 which became known as the Carnation Revolution that helped generate the conditions for the US to manoeuvre away from past policy. However, a combination of domestic strife as the fallout from Watergate raged unabated and a lack of understanding of African affairs ensured a lethargic response to the issue of decolonization in Portuguese-African territories. Subsequently, the US found itself reacting to the Angolan crisis instead of demonstrating the political will behind the rhetoric of self-determination. Such an effort would have helped address the credibility issues the US faced in the region after years of relative neglect, but instead the Soviets and the Chinese stole a march on the US in the region. Yet despite this, Kissinger continued to focus on the immediate problem of preventing a communist takeover in Portugal, rather than adopting a wider geopolitical view of its impact outside of Europe. Such a course is perhaps ironic given Kissinger's renowned penchant for nuance in foreign policy matters.

## **The Carnation Revolution of 1974: a lost opportunity**

The overthrow of Marcelo Caetano's regime in Portugal resulted in General Antonio Spínola rising to become the President of the JSN which formed the controlling body of the Portuguese government. Although Spínola represented a faction of centrists and conservatives, others that now vied for positions in the post-coup government leaned toward the left. On one side, Spínola and his supporters were members of the centrist Popular Democratic Party (PDP) and on the other there were junior officers of the Armed Forces Movement (AFM), the Portuguese Socialist Party (PSP) led by Mario Soares and the PCP under the leadership of Álvaro Cunhal. One of the central issues of the new government was to address the concerns of its overseas territories. Spínola advocated an approach which created a form of Portuguese Commonwealth which he felt would serve a dual purpose of solving the black right for self-determination and also ensure that Portugal did not lose access to vital mineral rich resources in Angola. This idea was



controversial as all the Angolan liberation groups rejected any offer less than full independence, and it was also challenged by Portuguese Foreign Minister Mario Soares, who argued against Spínola's policies on the decolonization of Portuguese colonial territories on the basis "the new Portuguese government is for decolonization and not for neo-colonialism".<sup>17</sup> Overall, this was to be the start of a long and divisive political struggle that would characterize the revolution in Portugal for the rest of 1974. Yet the Carnation Revolution provided the US with an opportunity to reorientate its African policy to reflect the fundamental and real changes that were now being seen in southern Africa. Sensing this swing in momentum, the African Bureau initially pushed for more influence on policy towards Portugal and its African territories. On 1 May 1974, African Bureau staff member Julius W. Walker sent a memorandum to Easum urging a break from previous US–African policy and to take advantage of Spínola's intention to decolonize the African territories:

... this is a time of opportunity for the US to stiffen the will of General Spínola to rid Portugal of her African albatross and step into the twentieth century of Europe and the West [...] Portugal's African possessions have been a net debit for the United States in our relations with both Portugal and Africa and have been an increasing domestic burden for succeeding US administrations since the late 1950s.<sup>18</sup>

Former Director of the State Department's Bureau of Intelligence and Research, and later Deputy National Security Advisor in the Ford administration, William Hyland later wrote that the Portuguese coup was "welcomed in Washington because it gave the United States a chance to side with the black majorities in the Portuguese colonies and thus shore up American policy in Africa generally".<sup>19</sup> However Hyland's version of events runs contrary to the evidence. In fact, the only positive Kissinger saw was centred on the potential for the Portuguese to back down from their demand for US weapons to be used in Africa. He stated that

the coup would seem not to have put US interests in danger, and it could possibly provide some near-term benefits for the United States – for example, a possible lessening or end to Portuguese pressure for US weapons for use in the African territories.<sup>20</sup>

However, while Kissinger appeared to welcome this development, the situation in Angola was showing signs of unrest as the freedom movements began to increase civil disorder.

On 3 May 1974, a CIA report outlined the shambolic state the three rival insurgent groups were in by stating all had “serious factional, recruiting, or logistic problems, [and] have failed to gain even minimal territorial control. It seems unlikely that Lisbon will be ready to negotiate with any of these groups in the near future”.<sup>21</sup> Therefore, the focus at the time was centred almost entirely on the Portuguese, with little or no regard for potential interference from the other external forces within Angola. Indeed, the distinct lack of engagement with the Angolan liberation groups caused concern for moderate African states. Throughout the summer of 1974, these states began to urge the US to use their influence to convince the new leadership in Portugal to open a dialogue with the Angolan liberation movements. The sense of urgency stemmed from the belief that if the JSN continued to stall talks while trying to stabilize its internal problems in Lisbon, the Soviets or the South Africans might try to fill the vacuum.<sup>22</sup> At the same time, Portuguese Foreign Minister Mario Soares hoped African states would show patience as the Portuguese created a timeframe for granting independence and the US could use its influence to help achieve this position during the OAU conference in June 1974. It is interesting to note how the US was viewed at this time by both the Portuguese and by the moderate African states. Both sides were urging the US to intervene in the process, albeit in contrasting ways. The Africans wanted to speed the process up and the Portuguese wanted to slow it down. Yet, the US was not in a strong position to exert influence. This was noted by the US Ambassador to Portugal, Stuart N. Scott who observed “the degree to which we [US] could be helpful with African States may have been somewhat reduced by our past history of defending Portugal on the international scene”.<sup>23</sup> However, Kissinger was more concerned with the prospect that the PCP would infiltrate the Portuguese government which could have potentially compromised a member of the NATO alliance.

Although Kissinger’s attention was more orientated toward Portugal’s domestic situation, he did request a report on southern Africa in order to brief the newly inaugurated US President, Gerald Ford in the autumn of 1974. In total, three reports on southern Africa were commissioned during this time, but they were mostly identical and gave no clear vision of how to

proceed with US policy in the region. In particular, it is striking that the African Bureau did not advocate a shift in basic US policy at this time. It noted that developments in the region had “opened the door to far-reaching changes affecting the entire southern African region”, of which the main danger was “the Soviet Union and the People’s Republic of China presumably look upon the developing situation as an opportunity to develop relationships with Angola and Mozambique”.<sup>24</sup> Indeed the African Bureau’s positive assessment of Tar Baby is particularly striking. While the report acknowledged it was an imperfect balancing act which resulted in the loss of some political support in the region, it did allow the US to maintain relationships on both sides.<sup>25</sup> Crucially, it determined that from a “recent re-examination of our policies, we concluded that the delicate balancing act we have performed has served us well in protecting our conflicting interests in black and white Africa”.<sup>26</sup> Therefore, the African Bureau’s position was aligned with Kissinger’s thinking on Africa in this period.

In this context, it is surprising that Kissinger labels the African Bureau as “missionary zealots”;<sup>27</sup> the evidence would suggest that officials in the Bureau were also sceptical of the progress black African liberation groups could achieve at this time. In relation to Angola, African Bureau staffer W. Paul O’Neill sent a memorandum to Donald Easum on 17 September 1974 outlining “we [...] believe that Angola will be the most troublesome problem but do not intend to become involved in supporting any one faction over another [...] and] we will continue to offer encouragement while maintaining a ‘hands-off’ attitude”.<sup>28</sup> So despite Kissinger’s contempt for the African Bureau, it was actually still endorsing the policy of “Tar Baby”. This is interesting as on a wider international stage, Kissinger and US representatives at the United Nations (UN) portrayed a more positive tone towards African self-determination, therefore, running contrary to the ongoing internal analysis advocating the US to remain aloof.

On 23 September 1974, Kissinger told the UN General Assembly (UNGA) in New York,

The United States notes with particular satisfaction the continuing process of change in Africa. We welcome the positive demonstration of cooperation between the old rulers and the new free. The United States

shares and pledges its support for the aspirations of all Africans to participate in the fruits of freedom and human dignity.<sup>29</sup>

Furthermore, US Representative to the UN, Barbara M. White remarked on the complicated conditions in Angola that made it more challenging than other Portuguese-African territories. She noted

the existence of several liberation movements in Angola makes the problem of decolonization in that territory more complicated than it was in Mozambique and Guinea-Bissau. We hope that the movements may resolve their differences expeditiously so that decolonization can proceed and the establishment of the structures of a new self-governing Angola can begin”<sup>30</sup>

Yet such sentiment of hope was swept away as the Angolan situation rapidly deteriorated in November 1974 amidst the first ominous signs that a potential vacuum could emerge once Portugal finally departed the country.

### **Easum's trip to Africa and its consequences**

On 7 November 1974, the US embassy in Tanzania reported that Tanzanian President Julius Nyerere had told US Deputy Chief of Mission (DCM) Gordon R. Beyer of his failure to unite the MPLA factions together or create a common front between the MPLA and the FNLA. The consequences of this was emphasized explicitly by Nyerere who warned that civil war was looming. More importantly he foresaw external competition for influence emerging, chiefly between the Cold War superpowers. Such a stark analysis of the Angolan situation clearly prompted Beyer to reassure Nyerere that he would pass on his concerns about the possibility of Angola descending into civil war and its wider implication for the region.<sup>31</sup> However, Nyerere's warnings may also have been a reaction to the disappointing meeting with Easum a few days previously. Easum was on an exploratory trip to gauge African reaction to events in the Portuguese territories and also to judge their response to US policy of non-involvement in the aftermath of the change of leadership in Portugal.

On 3 November 1974, Easum met with Nyerere and re-iterated that the “US supported rapid and peaceful movement towards independence in Angola and that the US understands that the principal obstacle to effective negotiations between Portugal and the liberation movements”.<sup>32</sup> However, this statement merely repeated the same jargon that Tar Baby had established, which was to try and have the best of both worlds and where the US would continue to remain aloof in the region. Such an attitude betrayed US hopes that Portugal would ensure an orderly transition and bring the Angolan liberation groups to the negotiation table. At the conclusion of the meeting, Nyerere expressed his hope that the US would not remain truant as Portugal withdrew and instead would act more decisively to help Angolan self-determination.<sup>33</sup> His emphasis on the potential for civil war may have been an attempt to force the US to get involved by indicating that the Soviets could gain an advantage in the country. On 22 November 1974, while in Angola to meet US Consul General Tom Killoran, Easum held a meeting with Lucio Lara, who was the MPLA leader Augustine Neto’s closest aide. Despite being Marxist orientated Lara assured Easum that the MPLA had not “mortgaged its independence of action”.<sup>34</sup> Indeed he made it clear that the MPLA was open to any alliance which helped their goal of becoming the first government in an independent Angola. Despite Nyerere’s hope for a full US engagement with the Angolan issue and Lara’s assurances, the US was cautious to get involved in any of the decolonization process in Angola. This was evident through a Congressional question and answer session held on 28 November 1974 which raised the issue of the US role in African decolonization and how it compared with Soviet and Chinese efforts. The State Department outlined that the US had no active role and had not attempted to influence the pace of the changes.<sup>35</sup> In response to Congressional probing, State Department officials repeated the Tar Baby mantra of having

mutually beneficial relations with these countries, we do not believe that we should play an active role. We have thus not attempted to influence either the pace or the mechanics of decolonization, which we believe are best left to those directly concerned – the Portuguese and the Africans.<sup>36</sup>

Therefore, at this point, the African Bureau was not stepping out of line to push for US–African policy realignment to fit the new political landscape in sub-Saharan Africa. Nor was it pushing for greater US involvement in facilitating the Angolan liberation groups to negotiate a peaceful settlement to avoid a civil war and potential Soviet encroachment. However, despite this, Kissinger was incensed by Easum’s trip to Africa and this triggered a period of hostility towards the African Bureau. This would escalate over the following year. So what lay behind such a strong reaction by Kissinger?

The answer can be found in the last days of the Nixon administration when Kissinger sought to create a better “institutionalization” of the State Department to make it less bureaucratic and easier to run. At this time he stated

I welcome different recommendations – it is the only way by which I can learn, and by which I can check my own perceptions [...] so I want as much – I want free discussion with the Department – but I will hold the Assistant Secretaries responsible for the position that the Department takes to the outside world.<sup>37</sup>

Therefore, Kissinger thought Easum’s trip was a deliberate attempt to undermine his authority as chief statesman, and to some extent this was true as Easum later admitted that he undertook the trip in order to gain some attention for the African Bureau as “the bureau was pleased to get his attention—one way or the other”.<sup>38</sup> Historian Daniel Spikes also addresses Easum’s unenviable position with Kissinger arguing

that events taking shape in southern Africa screamed for dynamism and innovation. But whenever Easum pressed African issues in Washington policy forums, ‘where occasional General Idi Amin jokes were much in style,’ it only earned him his boss’s legendary scorn.<sup>39</sup>

However, while Spikes accurately depicts Kissinger’s cynicism of African leaders, the archival evidence would suggest that the African Bureau were not consistently trying to engage in discussion throughout 1974. In the context of Angola, there is little indication to suggest that Kissinger’s pledge to Zairian Foreign Minister, Umba-di-Lutete in August 1974 was acted upon. In response to Lutete’s Angolan concerns, Kissinger told him

“you were wise to have come here. You have succeeded in attracting my attention to Angola, much to the dismay of my colleagues, I am sure. I will do something about it”.<sup>40</sup> Yet the autumn of 1974 did not bring about a focus on Angola, instead Kissinger homed in on Easum for attempting to establish stronger relationships with the independent African states. In an interview many years later, Easum recounted “I think the real issue was that Kissinger didn’t understand Africa, or Africans, and didn’t want to, and didn’t want to be bothered, and thought that somehow I could just keep everything quiet, and wouldn’t bug him”.<sup>41</sup>

Yet Easum’s trip to Africa disrupted this understanding and Kissinger reacted swiftly to ensure this disobedience would be punished. On his return, there was a sense of inevitability within the State Department about Easum’s fate. He later reflected there was a sombre mood within the Bureau awaiting the instructions from the seventh floor. He recalled he was perceived as

guilty of too much attention from the press, too much regard for African opinion, and too much initiative in the policy arena [... and when] Kissinger’s Senior Deputy Robert Ingersoll called me into his office to describe – but not to explain – some personnel changes the Secretary had decided to make.<sup>42</sup>

These changes would result in his sacking as Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs after only 11 months in charge and his redeployment to Nigeria as the new US ambassador. His reaction to the news was instructive, “I was not interested in asking Ingersoll what lay behind these maneuvers [sic]. I knew enough. There would be no trial”.<sup>43</sup> The decision was met with some criticism as Bruce Oudes detected

many observers here [in Washington, DC] were struck by Kissinger’s monumental rigidity in the Easum affair. All he had to do was sit back and slowly gather himself the credit for Easum’s highly professional diplomacy. But, as one diplomat here put it, “there are no little Kissingers”.<sup>44</sup>

With Easum’s departure, Kissinger was now determined that his replacement would be more docile and be kept in line. However, his

surprising decision to appoint Nathaniel Davis only helped to agitate Africans who were frustrated at Easum's sacking. The main reason for their discontent revolved around his lack of experience in African affairs, but also his controversial tenure as the US ambassador in Chile at the time of President Salvador Allende's assassination.<sup>45</sup> The accusations that Davis was involved in the covert destabilization programme that helped overthrow Allende had seriously damaged his reputation and career. It is within this context that Davis entered the African Bureau, where the prevailing wisdom was to keep quiet and perform as Kissinger expected, mainly quietly and out of sight. Such a blatant disregard for African affairs ensured that the US further damaged its credibility amongst African nations in the early months of 1975. As a result, Kissinger found himself on the defensive and his bellicose endorsement of how Davis was chosen to add greater impetus to US–African policy would prove to be a controversial point in light of their subsequent disagreement over US–Angolan policy.

## **Conclusion**

In the midst of this internal reshuffle, the real issues of the Portuguese decolonization of its African territories were somewhat lost. The *New York Times* drew attention to the plight of Angola on 23 October, 1974, carrying one editorial predicting that the country could go two ways by claiming it “could easily become the Brazil of Africa as a racially mixed nation rich in mineral resources with a growing industrial base, or it could just as easily become Africa's Vietnam where death and violence become our only predictable condition”.<sup>46</sup> Such a stark contrast emphasized the real need for substantial development aid in order to help the Angolans transition from Portuguese rule in an orderly manner. While it could be argued that the Portuguese should have been primarily responsible for this endeavour, it was apparent that their domestic divisions and general eagerness to disengage from Africa were creating a potential vacuum for which the Soviets and the Chinese could take advantage of. Despite the October 1974 ceasefire agreements between the MPLA and the FNLA to suspend their attacks on Portuguese troops, their intense hatred of one another meant a fragile peace by the end of 1974. Therefore, Nyerere's predictions of the threat of civil war were becoming more of a reality and this was reflected in



reports by US Ambassador to Zaire, Deane R. Hinton who signed off 1974 by warning that the

PRC, USSR, Portugal, South Africa, Zambia and Zaire to say nothing of whites and various African factions in Angola, may have incompatible ideas re [sic] nature and orientation of future Angolan state. Prime US interest is peaceful transition to Angola at least not hostile to US. But risk of civil war and of stepped-up outside intervention is real.<sup>47</sup>

Therefore, the developments in US–African policy in the 1960s and early 1970s illustrate a consistent lack of US concern about African affairs. While it has been well established that Africa was low on the list for Kissinger and Nixon it should be noted that the African Bureau failed to take advantage of the developments of the Carnation Revolution over the summer of 1974 and its refusal to advocate a different approach in multiple reports over the course of late 1974 resulted in a lost opportunity in Angola. For his part, Kissinger’s own prejudice augmented this failure. Instead his focus switched to clearing out the African Bureau, which in itself is a surprising decision given that the Bureau, besides Easum’s African trip in late 1974, had not created a sustainable challenge to Kissinger’s African policy. His decision to appoint Nathaniel Davis was designed to further nullify any African Bureau attempts to address the imbalance in US foreign policy toward the region. The next chapter will analyse the conflict that Kissinger created between the OAU and the US over the Davis nomination and illustrates that his defence of Davis created dilemmas in US–African policy that were exposed after the collapse of Vietnam in April 1975. Despite receiving warnings of the escalating situation in Angola, it was the perceived credibility crisis post-Vietnam that sparked Kissinger’s real interest in Angola. This would see a dramatic shift from a policy of non-intervention to the pursuit of covert operations in Angola within six months.

- 1 Henry Kissinger, *Years of Renewal* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1999), 800. Kissinger ridiculed the African Bureau claiming that until he started to make changes to it in the mid-1970s, “a special kind of officer seemed to find the African bureau congenial [...] and] provided the ideal sort of environment for the promulgation of a rather inflexible version of Wilsonianism” (ibid).
- 2 Stephen R. Weissman, “CIA Covert Action in Zaire and Angola: Patterns and Consequences,” *Political Science Quarterly* 94, no. 2 (Summer 1979): 277.
- 3 Anthony Lake, *The “Tar Baby” Option: American Policy towards Southern Rhodesia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1976), 128–129.

- 4 Ibid., 126.
- 5 Edgar Lockwood, "National Security Study Memorandum 39 and the Future of United States Policy toward Southern Africa," *A Journal of Opinion* 4, no. 3, African Studies Association (Autumn 1974): 68.
- 6 Roger Morris, *Uncertain Greatness: Henry Kissinger and American Foreign Policy* (New York: Harper and Row, 1977), 111.
- 7 Zaki Laïdi, *The Super-Powers and Africa: The Constraints of a Rivalry, 1960–1990* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1990), 48.
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## **2      The Davis Nomination and the crisis of credibility in US foreign policy**

### **Introduction**

On 15 January 1975, Portuguese officials and the three Angolan liberation groups, the MPLA, the FNLA and the UNITA gathered for a meeting in Alvor, Portugal. The purpose of the meeting was to establish a framework and timeline for the orderly transfer of power to a transitional Angolan government that would oversee Angolan independence.<sup>1</sup> The Alvor Accords were built upon earlier conversations that month which culminated in the Mombasa Accords, where the Portuguese recognized the Angolan liberation groups as legitimate entities and acknowledged that a transition period was necessary. The mood of the Portuguese government and the military at this time was to a certain extent one of relief. While there was glaring inadequacies in the Alvor agreement, such as the expedited timeframe for elections and independence, for the Portuguese it sealed the foundations for a transfer of power to take place on 11 November 1975.<sup>2</sup> It provided a finite solution to the Angolan issue, yet on a practical level it ignored the damaging legacy of centuries of Portuguese rule. The timeline established at Alvor required substantial planning and experience to form an independent Angolan government. This was highly unlikely given that most Angolans were poorly educated and not involved in civil administration. This was deliberate on the part of the Portuguese, who sought to ensure obedience from their Angolan subjects by denying them access to such critical components of running a country.

In this regard, Angola was different from other Portuguese-African territories which were granted independence. This view is captured by political scientist Linda Heywood who observes that

unlike their counterparts in other regions of Africa, where African traditional authorities wielded local power or where members of the educated elite had participated at some level in the government, none of the Angolan nationalists had ever held a responsible position in government, and only a handful had any civil experience.<sup>3</sup>

Therefore, without educated elites or experienced public servants, the bulk of the transition work would need to be completed by the liberation groups. As a result, it was always unrealistic to transition these groups from guerrilla warfare to political parties capable of engaging in elections and running a parliament within nine months of the Alvor agreement. The conditions for an Angolan civil war were already embedded within that agreement, yet the decision by the US and other outside powers to covertly interfere in the process only served to exacerbate and hasten the collapse of the Angolan transitional government. On 22 January 1975, an interagency group chaired by Kissinger to oversee covert actions known as the 40 Committee, authorized \$300,000 of financial aid to the FNLA for political purposes. However, an additional proposal to give \$100,000 to UNITA was rejected as the group were a relatively unknown quantity to the US and was seen as the least likely group to gain power in the aftermath of Angolan independence.

The justification behind this decision to give relatively nominal assistance stemmed from the State Department perceived view that the Soviet Union would not provide significant aid to the MPLA to enable them to overcome their internal difficulties. Despite the Soviets resuming their support to the MPLA in late 1974, it was believed that the MPLA were the weakest of the Angolan coalition government due to their narrow base of support with the Angolan people and their inferior military. Therefore, the US identified the FNLA as the strongest group to support in order to gain influence in the country. This was also helped by the apparent abandonment of key MPLA leadership and military strength around this time, as MPLA leader Daniel Chipenda left the group along with 2000 soldiers to join the FNLA ranks. Yet while the process of Angolan independence had been

initiated and the first stages of covert US assistance was underway, the criticism of Kissinger's decision to replace Donald Easum with Nathaniel Davis as Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs was creating more consternation among the African community. In response, Kissinger was forced to issue a strong public endorsement of Davis' abilities to the OAU, in order to offset any perception that Davis was an official who excelled in covert destabilization efforts.<sup>4</sup> This initial defence of Davis has been largely overlooked in previous publications, but it is an important part of the overall chain of events that led to US intervention in Angola.

Therefore, in this context, this chapter initially focuses on how the Davis nomination dominated the discussion on African affairs in the first few months of 1975 and Kissinger's distraction with Vietnam and his own fading reputation. Yet with Kissinger preoccupied with larger scale problems such as the collapse of Vietnam, communist infiltration of the Portuguese government and the Turkish invasion of Cyprus, his only concern with Africa was to ensure that 'his man' for the African Bureau was selected. However, this determined approach by Kissinger essentially helped create false expectations for both Davis and the OAU. By emphasizing Davis' selection as bringing initiative and imagination to US-African policy, both the Africans and Davis could justifiably imagine that they had Kissinger's full confidence to address African issues.

Developing from this point, the subsequent pressure the US faced is explored as Portuguese control over the Angolan transition process was breaking down, including the Portuguese military refusing to intervene to restore the peace. The US decision to give an initial \$300,000 to the FNLA in January 1975 resulted in the group launching a sustained attack on the MPLA throughout the early part of 1975. This course of action deliberately sought to eliminate the MPLA quickly after the Alvor agreement in order to ensure superiority in the new Angolan government. Yet at the same time UNITA also began to make overtures requesting aid from the US on the basis that they were better suited to govern Angola in contrast to the MPLA and the FNLA who were engaged in violent acts. Although the US was slowly involving itself in Angola in early 1975, it was not until the visit of Zambian President Kenneth Kaunda to the US in April 1975 that serious public pressure was applied on the US to take more notice of the precarious state of the region. Specifically, Kaunda's decision to publicly attack the Ford administration had the effect of forcing Kissinger's attention toward

African concerns. However, as the dust began to settle on the Davis issue and with Kaunda's visit provoking some embarrassment, Kissinger was faced by a much larger and more serious problem when South Vietnam began to disintegrate and fall to the North Vietnamese in April 1975.

This leads onto the final section in this chapter which discusses the US mindset after the collapse of Vietnam and how it provided the catalyst for Kissinger's decision to increase his attention on Angola. Simultaneously it also created the conditions for the rapid deterioration of Davis' relationship with Kissinger and introduced the notion of US credibility into Angolan affairs. Specifically, Kissinger's perception of a credibility problem was not shared by other State Department officials and this was the fundamental problem with his push for Angolan intervention. Although it must be noted that Kissinger had not been impressed with Davis' performance even before Angola became a focal point. In particular he viewed Davis' introductory trips to African leaders with disdain, much as he did with Easum's trip the previous year. Yet it was Kissinger's fear of the repercussions of the US' defeat in Vietnam that led to a deepening rift between the two men as Angola came into mainstream focus in US foreign policy. The inability to definitively break the linkage of US foreign policy and Vietnam resulted in the escalation of events in Angola, much to the detriment of Angolan society.

### **An outstanding officer: Kissinger's defence of the Davis nomination**

The firing of Donald Easum sparked criticism from African nations who felt Davis' appointment was a step backwards. In particular, his link to the overthrow of Salvador Allende in Chile caused great concern in Zambia and Zaire. This is reflected during a meeting between Zambian Prime Minister Mark Chona and Foreign Minister Vernon Mwaanga who told US Ambassador to Zambia, Jean Wilkowski that other African countries were concerned, not against Davis personally but due to the fact that he served in Chile at the time of Allende's overthrow by the military.<sup>5</sup> This was compounded by Zairian criticism when on 21 January 1975, Zairian President Mobutu Sese Seko condemned the US, more pointedly

Kissinger's decision to appoint Davis. Mobutu was especially irate at the decision to remove Easum who he praised as a

great diplomat [who] has a rich experience of Africa [...] we were greatly surprised not only to learn that he was leaving but also – and above all – when we learned that his replacement is the former American Ambassador to Chile at the time of the death of President Allende.<sup>6</sup>

Such veiled criticisms did not go unnoticed by Kissinger who responded by sending the newly appointed US Ambassador to Zaire (Deane Hinton) to reassure Mobutu that “President Ford has every confidence, as do I, in Nathaniel Davis and sees no valid reason for withdrawing his nomination as Assistant Secretary. I consider him an outstanding officer in every sense of the word”.<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, Kissinger faced domestic opposition to his selection as the Congressional black caucus also raised concerns over Davis' suitability for the role. This formed part of a larger problem for Kissinger who resented the increasing influence that Congress had sought to play in the conduct of foreign policy since 1973 with the passing of the War Powers Act and later the Hughes-Ryan Amendment in 1974.<sup>8</sup> These restrictions were a legacy of the Nixon administration, and the legislative branch had slowly been encroaching further on the executive branch's decisions on foreign policy. However, in the context of the Davis nomination, the legislative branch sought to frustrate the Ford administration by opposing the Davis nomination and by visiting Africa to publicly oppose his appointment. Indeed, Congressman Charles Diggs (D-Michigan), Chair of the House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee led the largest delegation of US Congressmen to an African country when they attended the African-American conference in Kinshasa, Zaire in late January 1975.<sup>9</sup>

During the conference Diggs wrote to Ford expressing the dissatisfaction of the Congressional black caucus on the nomination and the danger that the African Bureau could become a diplomatic graveyard for the US diplomatic service by stating “speculation is that Africa continues to be of minimal priority for the US and that AF Bureau will become the dumping ground for retirees and other difficult candidates to assign”.<sup>10</sup> This



observation was also reported by a scholar of US–African relations. Bruce Oudes wrote that the decision to replace Easum was part of Kissinger’s plan

to order a heavy influx into the Africa Bureau of career diplomats with no previous African experience. Since these new faces presumably had no desire to remain involved in African affairs over the long term [... they] could be counted upon loyally and unquestioningly to implement Kissinger’s policy concepts.<sup>11</sup>

However, at the time, Diggs’ remarks drew an immediate response from the Ford administration and Kissinger. In a staunch defence of Davis’ credentials Kissinger proclaimed “Ambassador Davis is one of our leading career Foreign Service Officers with a distinguished record at home and abroad”.<sup>12</sup> In addition, Kissinger directly confronted the concern of a Chilean shadow over African policy by emphasizing the lack of real authority US ambassadors wield stating “ambassadors are not the creators of policy [... the] decisions are made in Washington [...] these decisions may later become unpopular; we cannot, however, stigmatize the ambassador or foreign service officer who did what he was told to do”.<sup>13</sup> While such a remark is based upon fact, it also raises a question as to why Davis followed unethical orders during his time in Chile and whether this would impact his decision to not repeat this mistake when such a difficult situation presented itself again. However, in early 1975, this type of diligent Foreign Service Officer was exactly what Kissinger wanted in the African Bureau.

Furthermore, as Piero Gleijeses points out, Kissinger wanted someone “who didn’t have those sorts of ties to Africanists and to the whole African point of view”.<sup>14</sup> In essence, Kissinger saw Davis as an opportunity to install a disgraced Foreign Service Officer who he thought would be more than compliant to his Cold War views and keep the “missionary” bureau in line. However, Kissinger made a serious political miscalculation on the issue and the African backlash continued unabated for the first three months of 1975. Yet despite this turn of events, Kissinger went on the offensive in his justification of Davis’ appointment. In a series of public opposition announcements on Davis, the OAU passed a resolution in February 1975 condemning the selection of Davis declaring

the Council of Ministers considers it its duty to call attention to [the] fact that, in view of Mr. Davis' well-known past, most especially his implication in "the policy of subversion" in Latin America, the African governments are entitled to wonder what that nomination portends within the framework of American policy.<sup>15</sup>

Such unprecedented action showed the level of unhappiness of a significant amount of African states, but rather systematic of Kissinger's thinking of Africa, the public objection only served to strengthen his resolve. This was illustrated on 25 February 1975, when the *Washington Post* quoted Kissinger stating "to suggest that such a man has a mission to 'destabilize' Africa, a continent with which we have enjoyed excellent relations, and in whose development it is our policy to assist, is unacceptable and offensive".<sup>16</sup> It is clear that Kissinger grew increasingly frustrated by the continuous inference that Davis was chosen to destabilize the region. However, his defence also created false expectations for African nations and for Davis himself. This is illustrated in the Congressional Record where the full response to the OAU is captured. By trying to defend Davis, Kissinger publicly elevated African policy to high importance and misled Davis to believe that he would be heavily involved in future US–African policy decision-making. Neither of which were true. This can be seen in his comments outlining that

Ambassador Davis [...] is a brilliant career officer in our Foreign Service [...] and] the post to which he has been nominated is one which we attach very great importance. Mr. Davis was selected in order to give impetus and inspiration to our African policy.<sup>17</sup>

In addition, Kissinger condemned the OAU for its decision to publicly criticize the Davis nomination rather than privately. He argued that such action was unfair on Davis by stating that the US was

truly saddened to learn of the manner in which the Council has besmirched the reputation of this outstanding man who was selected precisely because we believed that he possessed the breadth of view and the compassionate understanding for a new approach in this vital position.<sup>18</sup>

However, Kissinger's aggressive defence of Davis and criticism of the OAU had the desired effect as the public statements stopped. This was reflected on by OAU Assistant Secretary General Peter Onu who told the US chargé in Ethiopia, Samuel J. Hamrick Jr. that the "OAU statement might have been wrong both in approach and in substance and he deeply regretted its personal implications for Davis [... as in hindsight] quiet diplomacy might have been the best way for Africans to discuss their reservations".<sup>19</sup> While Kissinger's tactics worked to silence the OAU, elements of the African media escalated the rhetoric about Davis' role in Chile and his perceived role as a CIA specialist in *coups d'état*.

Some African newspapers, especially in Nigeria, Ghana and Zambia reacted strongly against the Davis nomination. The *Nigerian Times* (Lagos) printed an editorial that contended

that [the] Davis nomination is not purely [a] domestic issue as claimed by US but is [a] further sign of possible USG intention [to] expose African states to "kind of Operations CIA has perfected and carried out in some Latin American countries".<sup>20</sup>

The theme of Davis being involved with the CIA continued in the *Ghanaian Times* (Accra), a government owned newspaper, which carried headline titles that drew attention to the OAU resolution on Davis as "Africa Objects to CIA Man" and Kissinger's subsequent letter condemning this action, "Kissinger Bitter over OAU Criticism of CIA Man".<sup>21</sup> A more pointed criticism of US– African policy was made in a *Times of Zambia* (Dar es Salaam) editorial which took aim at the Ford administration, arguing

the US persists in reading the African continent backwards [... because] how can an administration which has an inkling of what is going on in the continent take the African job from Donald Easum and give it to, of all people, Nathaniel Davis? [...] did he [Easum] fail to follow the CIA line in policing Africa?<sup>22</sup>

Although the local media stories only provide a snapshot of the African reaction to Davis, they do highlight that Davis was entering into a very hostile environment. Despite the criticisms and media coverage, the US

Senate duly appointed Davis as the new Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs on 11 March 1975.

The entire episode raises some interesting questions, such as what did the debate mean in the context of subsequent events in Angola and what did it say about Kissinger's views on Africa? While Kissinger's defence of Davis was understandable on the point that the nomination was a US domestic decision, his statements are also open to criticism on the basis of subsequent Angolan developments. It exhibited insensitivity to the local issues and concerns for African representation, and in particular his assertion that Davis was chosen to provide substantial input and initiative into African policy which was deceptive. He specifically chose Davis in order to have someone he thought he could control and whose career had pointed towards a quiet efficiency in the midst of controversial policies. Nor would he undermine Kissinger's authority or openly question US–African policy. As Easum later recalled, “Nathaniel Davis [... is] polite, he's bright, he's smart, he's intellectual, he's super careful, cautious, and goes a little slowly”.<sup>23</sup> Such a description met Kissinger's criteria for the African Bureau, as he envisioned no significant problems in Africa in 1975, but the whole nomination process only served to deflect attention away from emerging violent events in Angola as tensions between the FNLA and the MPLA escalated.

## **Portuguese nonchalance and Kenneth Kaunda's visit to Washington**

As the debate over the Davis nomination played out in public, events in Angola were turning more sinister as the FNLA and the MPLA conducted limited but bloody engagements over the course of the spring of 1975. While there had been skirmishes between the two groups since the transitional government was formed on 31 January 1975, the major fighting began in March 1975. While this can be partly attributed to external funds and arms being provided to the groups, there was also a distinct lack of action on the part of the Portuguese to keep the peace. This is illustrated by US Ambassador to Portugal, Frank Carlucci who expressed his reservations about the Portuguese commitment to ensuring a peaceful transition to independence noting “In GOP [Government of Portugal] view both public

and private, [that] January 1975 Alvor Accord outlining framework for Angolan future marked clearcut [sic] break in Portugal's responsibility and obligations in ex-colony".<sup>24</sup> His view was reinforced by the decision on 24 March 1975 by the Portuguese government to issue a communiqué stating that they would only intervene wherever necessary in order to assure indispensable peace and order. However, Carlucci warned that if a civil war broke out before independence in November 1975, the Portuguese would not assume responsibility and would act in strict adherence to the Alvor Accord. He also noted that the Portuguese army in Angola would probably ensure that no action was taken, especially after their past experience in dealing with decolonization of Guinea-Bissau.<sup>25</sup> As the violence escalated throughout March 1975, Carlucci concluded that the disorder and violence in Angola "demonstrates how Portugal neither has the will nor the capability of major military intervention to save the precarious peace in Angola".<sup>26</sup> Yet these reports from Carlucci appear to have had little to no impact on Kissinger's view of Angola at the time and he continued to regard it as a peripheral matter to the events in Portugal itself and the imminent collapse of Vietnam. It must also be noted that by this time the relationship between Kissinger and Carlucci was frayed due to differences over the tactics of US policy towards Portugal.

Yet Carlucci's reports provide an intriguing insight into the Portuguese mentality toward Angola at the time. There was an apathy from military and government officials such as Portuguese Chief of Naval Staff and Revolutionary Council Member, Pinheiro Azevedo, who argued "the three-party coalition was unrealistic and that a civil war would eliminate the weak and pave the way for a one-party state".<sup>27</sup> This attitude was systematic of Portuguese racism and eagerness to dissolve itself of Angolan problems. It was also becoming noticeable, even by the end of March 1975 that the FNLA was being armed and influenced by foreign powers when Portuguese High Commissioner in Mozambique, Admiral Victor Crespo raised suspicions to the US consulate that the Angolan situation was being manipulated by outside influences, including the US. The consulate, not aware of the covert \$300,000 approved for the FNLA by the 40 Committee in January 1975, noted

though Crespo did not specifically name the United States in connection with foreign intervention. Context and tone [...] indicated

[...] he was pointing a finger at us, at least as far as he may think we are behind Zaire's support of FNLA.<sup>28</sup>

Yet despite the early warning that the limited US funding was creating an imbalance in the Angolan situation, the State Department attempted to cover its position when it cabled the US mission to the UN in New York stating that

although [the] GOP is neither able nor perhaps inclined to concentrate much attention on Angola, it has demonstrated its concern [...] to complete decolonization process as peacefully as it can. Since we share Portuguese objective [...] we would not want to be in [a] position to be charged at some later date with obstructing this process or otherwise interfering with it.<sup>29</sup>

However, such statements were a contradiction with US actions as it was actively involved in trying to manipulate the transition process from the very onset of the Alvor agreement. In addition, the premise that the Portuguese were making an effort to ensure a peaceful transition was questionable as reports were emerging of a breakdown between the Portuguese government and the remnants of its African army. This was clear when Carlucci repeated his point on the lack of willpower within the Portuguese armed forces noting "indiscipline is a serious and mounting problem in the Portuguese army and past experience in Guinea-Bissau has indicated that once [...] a colony has been taken, troops will not risk their necks for the sake of law and order".<sup>30</sup> On a political level, Carlucci expressed the view that the Alvor Accord was "Portugal's rather than Angola's ticket to freedom".<sup>31</sup> Nevertheless the Portuguese did manage to engineer a precarious ceasefire at the beginning of April which helped to temporarily ease tensions. At this time, Under Secretary of State Joseph Sisco met with Davis and his African Bureau deputy Ed Mulcahy, and the other members of the African Bureau to review the Angolan situation and report to Kissinger and receive instructions on how to proceed while the ceasefire held.<sup>32</sup> However Kissinger's attention was primarily focused on the dramatic events in Vietnam which ensured Angola was pushed down the list of priorities and was not deemed in immediate danger of a Marxist takeover.

This report was given to Kissinger a week later on 4 April 1975 and while it remains heavily sanitized it shows how US officials perceived the evolving situation in Angola in its early stages and its implication for future US policy. More specifically, it helps shed some light on the timeline and implications of US aid. In his memoirs, Kissinger claims that it is an absurdity to believe that the 40 Committee decision in January 1975 to give the FNLA financial aid of \$300,000 influenced its decision to attack the MPLA. He argues that Soviet documents have shown they planned to arm the MPLA in a major way from December 1974 and that the weapons and equipment began to arrive in Congo-Brazzaville in early spring 1975.<sup>33</sup> However, Kissinger's view has been questioned by historian Raymond Garthoff who explains that while the Soviets did begin to move significant quantities of arms from March 1975 onwards, the initial injection of US aid to the FNLA

encouraged [Holden] Roberto to make a bid for power despite the Alvor Accord [... and this] attempt to seize power was probably the principal blow to upsetting the delicate attempt to get the three groups to share power and compete politically.<sup>34</sup>

However, others such as Fernando Andresen Guimarães interpret the situation differently and argue that

by February and March [1975], US covert assistance could not yet have a significant effect, the burgeoning strength and confidence of the FNLA, as well as the mere rumours that the CIA was backing Holden Roberto, created the impression that the conflict was about to escalate to another more bellicose level.<sup>35</sup>

The truth lies somewhere in the middle, for while the Soviets introduced more heavy equipment and arms in the spring of 1975, the Angolan analysis by Davis, William Hyland and Winston Lord clearly shows that by early April 1975, the MPLA was "inferior to FNLA in military strength [... and] recent clashes in Luanda may have been intended by FNLA as a show of force to impress Portuguese officials and the MPLA".<sup>36</sup>

Furthermore, US Consul General in Angola Tom Killoran reported that the FNLA were not sophisticated enough to make use of their superior

strength and “were forced to action by the constant provocations of MPLA [... however in the recent violence] FNLA came out the loser”. Perhaps the most concerning piece of Killoran’s report is the description of the ineptitude of the FNLA and their ill-discipline, where he outlined “MPLA irregulars seemed on a number of occasions to have the upper hand and the FNLA was reduced to fits of rage and wild assaults on anyone in sight”.<sup>37</sup> Therefore, it is clear that even in early 1975 the FNLA faced serious internal problems and lacked leadership amongst its ranks. Yet in a wider context it was also apparent that neither the MPLA nor the FNLA’s behaviour would inspire any confidence in their leadership of an independent Angola. This is an important point as it was apparent to US officials in Africa that getting involved in Angola would be a serious mistake. Moreover, it was an early warning to roll back US aid to Angola before the stakes were raised any higher. This was highlighted for Kissinger’s attention by Davis, Lord and Hyland in the 4 April 1975 memorandum which argued that “US interests would not be served by an MPLA victory in Angola [... but] do not believe US interests are sufficiently important to justify the political risks of getting more deeply involved”.<sup>38</sup> So, therefore, even before the fall of Vietnam, Kissinger was confronted with analysis that questioned the reliability and effectiveness of the FNLA to win the Angolan elections and provide the country with strong leadership after independence. However, by this stage US actions had already begun to cause a ripple effect.

While Kissinger’s subordinates were flagging the dangers of backing the FNLA, one of the other Angolan liberation groups, UNITA, felt emboldened to tentatively approach the US for assistance. It hoped that the fighting between the FNLA and the MPLA showed the US that both were unsuited to govern Angola after independence. Indeed, UNITA sought to portray itself as the third option, one which could provide a compromise and preserve some level of the status quo. On 24 March 1975, UNITA indirectly requested \$2 million in financial aid from the US through the American embassy in Canada, arguing that it was the only Angolan liberation group that represented the majority of the Angolan population and that it would “guarantee continued white presence and has the capability to save Angola from communist domination through Soviet-and AFM-backed MPLA or Zairian imperialism exercised through FNLA”.<sup>39</sup> Such a statement is striking given the many years the Angolan liberation



groups sought to break free from the shackles of white Portuguese rule. This is further illustrated in the remarks of UNITA emissary Dr Joaquim Fernandes Viera who argued that the group was being marginalized as the MPLA were receiving “unlimited funds from the Soviet Union” and the FNLA were accepting support from Zaire.<sup>40</sup> Viera reported that the Alvor Accord was in the process of collapse as “antagonism between the FNLA and MPLA was mounting almost daily [... and] will lead to a civil war between the two by May [1975].<sup>41</sup> The US political counsellor in Ottawa noted

that the moment was not particularly propitious for the type of US intervention he [Viera] desired given the public attention and criticism that had been generated by similar activities in Chile [in 1973 ...] a sudden acquisition of wealth by UNITA would be likely to raise suspicions and lead to revelation of the source of the funds.<sup>42</sup>

This was especially relevant given the warning by Portuguese Admiral Victor Crespo about Zaire’s ability to fund the FNLA to launch increasingly violent attacks on the MPLA earlier in the month. Yet what is apparent is that the FNLA and UNITA actively sought US assistance which presented the US with a dilemma over how to assist them or whether to deny further aid and risk driving them to covet Soviet support.

Over the course of the spring of 1975, the *New York Times* journalist Charles Mohr reported that in the midst of the fighting between the FNLA and the MPLA, Jonas Savimbi and his UNITA group were emerging as the “political surprise” in Angola. Mohr confidently reported that if the transitional government could survive until independence on 11 November 1975, UNITA would out perform its rivals as “there is a consensus in Angola that perhaps no single liberation movement would win a clear majority in balloting. But there is a growing feeling that Mr. Savimbi and his organization would run well ahead of the others”.<sup>43</sup> Such optimism over the future of UNITA was greatly enhanced when Zambian President Kenneth Kaunda visited the US in April 1975, intent on gaining the attention of Ford and Kissinger on the plight that southern Africa faced as Angola spiralled out of control.

In his memoirs Kissinger states that “only on the rarest occasions does a single state visit change American national policy. Yet [...] Kaunda

managed to accomplish precisely that feat when he came to Washington”.<sup>44</sup> During the 19 April 1975 meeting with Ford and Kissinger, Kaunda attempted to engineer more support for Savimbi by saying that he would be the compromise choice for President of an independent Angola, as neither the MPLA leader Augusto Neto or FNLA leader Holden Roberto would allow the other to preside in that position.<sup>45</sup> In addition he argued that Savimbi possessed statesman attributes which had impressed many African and foreign officials including Portuguese Foreign Minister Melo Antunes, who Kaunda stated had told him “without Savimbi we would not have reached an accord with the liberation movements for the transition of Angola to independence”.<sup>46</sup> However, despite Kaunda’s endorsement of Savimbi, his main argument was centred on his criticism of US–African policy and how it had been consistently placed at the bottom of US foreign policy since 1966 and that as a result issues had arisen from the rapid Portuguese decolonization process that demanded closer attention from the US. He called for a re-evaluation of US–African policy in the region as “events may overtake you and the US could find itself even fighting on the side of the racists”.<sup>47</sup> Noting that US attention was understandably drawn to the imminent collapse of Vietnam, Kaunda nevertheless expressed his expectation that once the political ramifications had cooled, “we hope that when your pressing issues in other parts of the world are resolved, you could have time to pay some attention to southern Africa”.<sup>48</sup> Yet Kaunda was politically astute to realize that in order to spark a reaction in US–African policy he would also have to make an effort to publicly state his views.

His remarks at a State Dinner held in his honour at the White House on 21 April 1975 helped apply pressure on the Ford administration to change its African policy, stating “what gives Zambia and Africa great cause for concern is [...] America’s policy toward Africa – or it is the lack of it, which of course can mean the same thing”.<sup>49</sup> While Kissinger has subsequently credited Kaunda’s private meeting as the instigation of a shift in the US approach to Africa, it was Kaunda’s decision to publicly criticize US–African policy that forced the Ford administration to seriously look at Angola. The tone of Kaunda’s dinner speech was captured in the *New York Times* who quoted Kaunda’s remarks:

can America still end only with declaration of support for the principles of freedom and racial justice? This I submit, would not be enough. Southern Africa is poised for a dangerous armed conflict. Peace is at stake. Urgent action is required.<sup>50</sup>

Yet while Kaunda's visit was timely, it did not spark the instigation of US covert action in Angola that would develop over the summer of 1975. More revealing are Kissinger's remarks during a staff meeting before Kaunda publicly criticized the Ford administration's African policy. During the meeting, Kissinger focused on the future of US foreign policy in the aftermath of Vietnam and in particular the consequences to US credibility. He remarked "I think, in the aftermath of Indochina, we better show that we're not so easily pushed around".<sup>51</sup> One of the first opportunities to enforce this was to involve the US on a larger scale in Angola. In the aftermath of Kaunda's visit, Kissinger ordered an Issues Paper on Angola and requested that the CIA develop a programme of assistance for Savimbi. It also marked the beginning of tensions between Davis and Kissinger as the new Assistant Secretary found himself under personal attack from Kissinger, whose private outbursts were far removed from the strong public defence of Davis only a few months earlier.

## **The fall of Vietnam and its impact on US–Angolan options**

On 1 May 1975, Davis submitted the report that Kissinger requested on Savimbi. Despite the report remaining heavily sanitized, it is clear that Davis wished to explicitly warn Kissinger that Savimbi's willingness to seek help from any outside state would adversely affect any covert operation the US could give him. He argued "the wide knowledge of Savimbi's solicitations and subventions makes me sceptical that US support could long be kept secret".<sup>52</sup> Yet Davis' arguments did not resonate with Kissinger who was adamant that if the US did not support UNITA, the Soviets would fill the void. Therefore, the risk of US covert aid being exposed was not the primary factor for Kissinger – it was a test of US willpower after Vietnam. This rationale exposes Kissinger's weakness of putting too much emphasis on credibility, rather than approaching the situation with a nuanced understanding of the legislative and public

consensus of avoiding operations in Third World countries. Davis concluded that the US had nothing to gain from involving itself in an increasingly likely civil war as he believed “at most, we would be in a position to commit limited resources, and buy marginal influence”, but more importantly

we might find ourselves drawn in deeper very fast, as the fighting produces more intense pressures for arms and ammunition – as well as money. The political price we might pay – as reports of bloodshed and alleged atrocities multiply – would, I believe, exceed the possibility of accomplishment.<sup>53</sup>

Davis’ analysis was based on the reality of the fractured domestic political consensus. He also realized that the Soviets were in a far stronger position than the US in this particular situation as they did not have any constraints placed upon them if Angolan aid had to escalate, unlike in the US. When these factors were combined the Angolan situation could be arguably seen as another potential Vietnam scenario. Despite Kissinger’s subsequent attempts to portray Davis as weak, it is clear that Davis’ analysis was to avoid any further unnecessary entanglements which were helping to undermine domestic support for US foreign policy – and more crucially to avoid situations where the US could not realistically generate a favourable outcome.

In Davis’ view, if US covert aid was exposed it would cause a backlash which would see all aid cut-off and leave the Ford administration exposed to similar charges of secrecy and illegal activities as those levelled at the Nixon administration following the Watergate scandal. Yet Davis’ observations of the fallout from Vietnam were in direct opposition to Kissinger’s perception. Specifically, Davis believed that there was no vital national interest at stake in Angola and that the US domestic consensus was not strong enough at that time to support covertly assisting parties in a Third World civil war. However, in the aftermath of Kaunda’s visit and the collapse of South Vietnam, Kissinger had decided that the US had to start engaging in the next Third World conflict to restore or at least preserve the idea of credibility in US foreign policy commitments. As he became more convinced that action was necessary to ensure this, Angola would become the focal point for his plans.

On 5 May 1975, Kissinger pressed Davis for a paper on Angola as he had decided that the US could not ignore the Soviet aid being given to the MPLA before the inevitable civil war due to erupt in the country. Kissinger snapped “I want to know exactly what our position should be, whom we’re going to support. We’ve got to support somebody. It is total nonsense in a civil war situation to say we don’t have a preference”.<sup>54</sup> In a sense, Kissinger wanted Davis to create a US national interest in the country to justify US involvement and was growing concerned that regional leaders such as Kaunda had the audacity to tell the US to fund their preferred Angolan group without knowing all the facts. He remarked

I have to have an understanding of what the American interest is. We cannot just waffle around about elections when there are three armies and when Kaunda says, “Just pick our guy and we’ll take care of an election for you”.<sup>55</sup>

His level of agitation increased when Davis wanted input to the Angolan paper before it was submitted but would be unable to do so until his two-week African tour was completed. Kissinger responded by firmly telling Davis

I’m not going to read cables every day about Angola and not know what the hell is going on, so you better get me a paper by the end of the day [or] tomorrow. How you do it is your problem.<sup>56</sup>

Therefore, it is clear that the collapse of Vietnam and Kaunda’s visit had helped substantially alter Kissinger’s mindset regarding Angola. Despite being largely ignored over the previous year, Kissinger had now deemed Angola a priority that needed immediate attention and required covert US involvement. Unlike his previous statements to the OAU earlier in the year that Davis was selected to provide “impetus” and “inspiration” to African policy, Kissinger viewed Davis’ cautious approach as resembling Easum’s African thinking in late 1974. It was also becoming apparent that Davis would not follow his Angolan instructions without raising objections.

To make matters worse for Davis, Kissinger thought that any level of caution or unwillingness to endorse a covert intervention should be deemed a sign of weakness or defeatism, and the sort of missionary liberalism that

had ultimately held the US back in South Vietnam. Such a disturbing trend could, in Kissinger's view, turn into a larger problem that would become systemic within the conduct of US foreign policy for the future. Hence the strong reaction from Kissinger towards Davis during the meeting when he remarked

so what are we going to do – go around like a fuzzy old grandmother urging restraint on three parties [... and urge for] restraint on what? [... ultimately] we're going to get stuck with it when it's over in some way. At least, we're going to have a position [...] the position has to be something else than running around asking for restraint.<sup>57</sup>

Yet this remark also appears to be at odds with general US policy towards Africa since Kissinger endorsed the Tar Baby option in 1969. By telling Davis that the US was going to have to deal with Angola after the civil war and that the US needed a concrete position, Kissinger's position is somewhat ironic. For years he neglected African affairs and warnings that the racial struggle would eventually turn in favour of black majority rule and was content not to have a concerted African policy in order to have the best of both worlds between the whites and the blacks. Yet this was not a moment of clarity on Kissinger's part, and recognizing the past failings of US–African policy. Throughout the spring of 1975, Angola was deemed a low-level problem until Vietnam collapsed. The link between the US defeat and the events leading up to Angola in Kissinger's thoughts is unmistakable as it marked a break from US passiveness and ensured that Angola was now tied into the wider context of US credibility in the immediate post-Vietnam foreign policy agenda. Up until this point Kissinger had largely ignored repeated warnings that related to the instability of sub-Saharan Africa after the collapse of the Portuguese empire in April 1974. It is only after the collapse of Vietnam that the credibility argument and the fear of losing the region to Soviet influence began to heavily feature in the Secretary's foreign policy agenda.

On 7 May 1975, Kissinger chaired a staff meeting dedicated solely to analysing the damage to US credibility throughout the world. The main objective for Kissinger was to assess what other countries thought of the US as a result of the failure in Vietnam. While Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs Ed Mulcahy reassured him that in Africa there was

“an amazingly sparse amount of criticism”, the warnings from other regions is instructive from the point that it drew more attention to the toxic US domestic environment in Washington, DC and its impact on US foreign policy more so than on the Ford administration’s will to confront the Soviets. As Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs William D. Rogers informed Kissinger, Latin American states worried less about the actual collapse of South Vietnam but were concerned

that the recent experience with respect to Vietnam [... has cast doubt] about the extent to which we have control over foreign relations in this country, the extent to which there is a fundamental shift in power from the executive to the legislature.<sup>58</sup>

While most of Kissinger’s staff were optimistic that there would be no long-term damage to the image of the US as a result of the collapse of Vietnam, it is clear that Kissinger was more concerned with its impact as he stated “I see more intelligence reports that indicate undercurrents of concern than these oral reports indicate, infinitely more. And I am much more concerned with what they think when we tell them we want something done”.<sup>59</sup> The level of debate throughout the meeting illustrated a fracture of consensus between State officials who believed that US credibility was compromised and those who thought that Vietnam should be removed from dominating the discussion of the future direction of US foreign policy.

This schism was illustrated by Under Secretary of State Joseph Sisco’s assertion that American power was not an issue, but US appetite to confront dangers was weakening. He claimed “it is not a question of anybody really basically feeling that our power has diminished in any way. It is a question of will and intent”.<sup>60</sup> On the same side of this argument was Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific affairs Philip Habib who argued “for twenty years a lot of countries, including Asian countries, have looked up [*sic*] the US shield as impenetrable [... and] they now see the shield as [*sic*] full of holes”.<sup>61</sup> Therefore, it is clear that Kissinger was not alone in thinking that US credibility was affected. However, others such as Policy Planning Chief Winston Lord disagreed with this assessment and advocated a break from linking future decisions with the failings of Vietnam as “I think Vietnam has been magnified by [...] the legislative paralysis [... and] I think we have to separate out Vietnam *per se* from what

has gone just before it in the last few years”.<sup>62</sup> This forms part of a larger argument that overall US foreign policy had been consumed by considerations of Vietnam since the early 1960s; most American politicians saw Vietnam as more important than it really was in US foreign policy. As Assistant Secretary of State for International Organization Affairs William Buffum noted

if there is any common denominator, a perception on the part of most people that Vietnam has loomed overly large in our own eyes. They [other nations] have never viewed it with the same degree of seriousness [as] we have, particularly [in] the third world.<sup>63</sup>

The evidence shows that there were significant amounts of cable traffic in the period before and after the collapse of Vietnam to give weight to the charge that the domestic political situation in the US was far more relevant to foreign states than the question of American credibility. In fact, many countries saw the defeat as relatively positive for the US and indeed themselves as they believed it would mark the end of the US preoccupation with Vietnam.

In Europe, Danish and Swedish media printed editorials astutely commenting that in the aftermath, the post-Vietnam US could benefit from more traditional interests in Europe. The US consulate in Denmark reported that *The Berlingske Tidende* (Copenhagen) thought “the climate of US public opinion has not been well served by the ‘exaggeration’ by US leaders over the ‘loss’ of Indochina and the effect that would have on US credibility in Western Europe”.<sup>64</sup> Furthermore an editorial on 20 April 1975 in the Swedish newspaper *Sydsevenska Dagbladet* (Malmö) argued that the US could now focus more on its real interest in the core frontier of the Cold War as after

10 years of war and 50,000 fallen Americans [America has] fulfilled its obligations as an ally [... and] Indochina has not been a vital interest to the US but Western Europe is [...] therefore the march out of Indochina makes the US a stronger ally, where the American interest is natural and proper for all parties concerned.<sup>65</sup>



This view was also held by Swedish Prime Minister Olaf Palme who told a Social Democratic Party meeting on 19 April 1975 that

in various places, not the least in Western Europe, there are people who assert that [...] the US has lost its credibility [...] but it is exactly the opposite, now that a grim and hopeless from the beginning war is over [sic] [...] there is finally a chance for the US to regain its credibility.<sup>66</sup>

So, there was some level of doubt over US credibility abroad, but it was limited in its scope. Most states still believed that the US would stand firm in Europe and that while Vietnam was a well-intentioned stand against the spread of communism in South-East Asia, it had descended into moral ambiguity as the conflict sucked the US deeper and deeper into the jungles of Vietnam. As a result of having to withdraw, the effects on the US were subject to further interpretation in the European media. The *Berlingske Tidende* (Copenhagen) carried an editorial on 14 April 1975 which raised the point that

the doubt about US credibility is greater in the US than it is in Europe [... so the] the problem is not a failure of confidence by Western Europe in the US. The problem is the shaken self-confidence of the Americans themselves.<sup>67</sup>

This view was also represented in the United Kingdom (UK) media where *The Times* (London) argued that

the result of US failure in Indochina has been a serious loss of confidence – not [...] among America's allies but with the US itself. It is this rather than the fall of Vietnam that could gradually erode America's influence abroad if it is not resolved with [in] a reasonable time.<sup>68</sup>

Perhaps more pointedly, the US embassy in London concluded that while most British officials accepted US assurances that it would defend Europe if attacked

our British friends wonder about our capacity to execute a coherent policy – not because of any lack of will of the Ford Administration but

because of our difficulty in the past few months to find a domestic political consensus to support our foreign policies.<sup>69</sup>

However, despite these encouraging signs over US credibility, the decision was made that action was the best form of assurance. As Ford would later recall, in the aftermath of the humiliating retreat from South-East Asia

in the spring of 1975, our allies around the world began to question our resolve [...] as long as I was President [...] we would not permit our setbacks to become a licence for others to fish in troubled waters. Rhetoric alone [...] would not persuade anyone that America would stand firm. They would have to see proof of our resolve.<sup>70</sup>

The archival evidence suggests that Ford's claims are not fully accurate. While there was some level of concern over US willpower, it stemmed more from the fractured consensus in Washington, DC that had developed over the course of the previous decade. On 13 May 1975, the "Angolan Options" paper was submitted to Kissinger. The report addressed Kissinger's request to expand upon options to actively support one or more of the liberation groups. It outlined the current level of funding the US had given to the FNLA as well as listing various advantages and disadvantages of escalating covert aid to the FNLA, and for the first time it outlined the distribution of covert aid to UNITA. Yet to Kissinger's disappointment the African Bureau recommended that the US should not get covertly involved in Angolan affairs and advocated a continuance of Tar Baby to keep all options open so that "if developments move in a direction contrary to US interests, we should be in a position to reconsider our courses of action".<sup>71</sup> This was swiftly followed by an Issue Paper on Southern Africa submitted on 15 May 1975 which was fundamentally a rehash of the analysis of previous Issues Papers on the region submitted in late 1974. In his memoirs, Kissinger berates such analysis arguing that "when the State Department bureaucracy chooses not to oppose a policy with which it disagrees, it deploys its masterful skills in evasion".<sup>72</sup> On this point, Kissinger is correct; the Issues Paper outlined no options on how to deal with future conflict in Angola and gave him no choices on how to proceed. His anger was

apparent during a staff meeting held the next day on 16 May 1975 when he savagely attacked the conduct of the African Bureau by claiming

we're going to wind up – if we keep piddling around like this, we're going to wind up with a Congo type situation in Angola. And if we keep clucking like an old mother hen with a policy saying, "Maybe we're going to do this; maybe we're going to do that." I've got to know what we're going to do.<sup>73</sup>

His main concern was not that US actions could exacerbate a civil war, but how to react to such a civil war when it erupted in order to be on the winning side.

Yet he wanted to be sure about winning, hence why he insisted upon knowing more about the strengths and weakness of supporting with the FNLA or UNITA, or both. At this time, it was reported that the FNLA were in the stronger position militarily and that UNITA were predicted to win in the elections if the country could avoid a civil war. Therefore, he felt relatively confident about Angola at this stage, but he wished to capitalize on this advantage quickly before an increase in Soviet arms created a stalemate in Angola. His main criticism of the paper was that

the basic point of your memo is it gives me a choice of whose shoulder to weep on. Do we weep with Zaire, with Zambia? It does not define what will really happen if this thing blows up [... and] your prediction is of much less interest to me than a course of action on the basis of foreseeable contingencies.<sup>74</sup>

Simultaneously, Kissinger was tentatively assessing the damage caused to détente by the collapse of Vietnam. When he met Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko in Vienna on 19 May 1975, he tried to convey to Gromyko that the Soviets should not see the situation as an opportunity to seek unilateral advantage elsewhere as such actions only served to undermine détente. However, Gromyko took the opportunity to subtly gauge US and indeed Kissinger's intent towards Angola as he remarked

wherever there are Soviet arms, on the other side there are American arms [... let's] take Africa as an example. There are Soviet arms, but

again, more American arms [... and] when a war starts with the arms of both sides, every time are we to quarrel? Are we to allow that to lead to the heating up of relations?<sup>75</sup>

Kissinger's response was diplomatic but struck a distinctly different tone, hiding his own intentions for Angola, as he told Gromyko

therefore both sides should – on the basis of reciprocity – look carefully at situations where our actions could cause embarrassment to the other [... and] I think both sides should show restraint in situations where indirectly it could lead to problems.<sup>76</sup>

Despite this attempt to influence Soviet involvement in Angola, privately he chastised the African Bureau and Davis for advocating a level of restraint and wanted to maximize US influence in Angola.

Historian Raymond Garthoff has similarly commented “for the period from spring 1974 to the summer of 1975 the United States considered competition with the Soviet Union in Angola normal behaviour under détente”.<sup>77</sup> One of the reasons for this was that Kissinger believed that the US was in a superior position and this was bolstered with evidence from the US consul in Luanda, Angola (Bruce Porter) who cabled to inform Washington, DC that the FNLA had a plan to seize control over Angola by moving all their troops and material from Zaire into the country during June, in addition to obtaining heavy arms with foreign finance and recruiting Portuguese soldiers disaffected by the MPLA. The final objective was “at the end of July [to] attack and annihilate [the] MPLA in Luanda”.<sup>78</sup> With reports that the FNLA were consistently stronger over the first half of 1975, Kissinger felt confident that if he could forge a covert aid programme to assist them, he would be able to halt Soviet expansionism and secure a quick victory for the US in the Third World arena. He felt this would go a long way towards addressing any credibility issues in the aftermath of Vietnam. However, as Piero Gleijeses observes, consistent FNLA attacks had actually hardened the MPLA's resolve to fight a fully-fledged civil war to eliminate their rivals and “at the same time, the military balance was shifting in its favor. The arrival of weapons from the Soviet Union, and [...] from Yugoslavia had greatly reduced or even eliminated the FNLA's advantage in hardware”.<sup>79</sup> As Kissinger's resolve solidified, he ordered

NSSM 224 on Angola on 26 May to fully explore all options to present to Ford in advance of any decision to intervene. Yet as Jussi Hanhimäki points out and what this book helps to expand upon, is Kissinger's search for alternatives was premised by his hunt for courses of action that better suited his penchant for an active response to events in Angola.<sup>80</sup>

## **Conclusion**

The sudden shift in Kissinger's position on Angola in May 1975 was a result of misplaced emphasis on US credibility. The conflict in South-East Asia had come to dominate the foreign policy agenda for so long that Kissinger was unable to separate the impact of Vietnam and US policy towards Angola. In addition, his inability to treat the Angolan Civil War as an indigenous conflict and not as a testing ground for showing that the US still could compete in the Cold War was misguided. This is illustrated by his comments on multiple reports and analysis from Davis and others within the State Department over the course of the first six months of 1975. These warnings should have been considered more closely in order to avoid getting involved in Angola.

Furthermore, the theme of Portuguese nonchalance was omnipresent throughout the spring of 1975 and despite the confident assertions by Portuguese Foreign Minister Melo Antunes that the Portuguese would address the Angolan violence, it was clear that the situation was already hopelessly beyond their control.<sup>81</sup> As US DCM in Lisbon Herbert S. Okun reported

the GOP and the man in the street share the feeling that Angola is a closed book which they would not like to see opened [... and] there is a general agreement [...] that the Portuguese army in Angola will not fight. Nobody wants to be the last man to die as Portugal walks out the door of Africa.<sup>82</sup>

However, such a reality only served to concern Kissinger more as it left a potential vacuum to be filled by the Soviets in the region. As Walter Issacson notes "though complex, even ingenious, in its design, Kissinger's realism began with a simple premise: any event should be judged foremost

by whether it represented a gain for the Soviets or for the West in the overall global balance”.<sup>83</sup> Such an outlook created a schism between Davis and Kissinger over Angolan policy. Despite his strong defence of Davis to the OAU through the early months of 1975, Kissinger never expected Davis to have a serious role in the formulation of policy decisions regarding Africa. Yet as a by-product of his endorsement, Davis felt confident to make suggestions that did not conveniently relate to Kissinger’s Cold War strategy. This clash of views created a tense atmosphere during the Angolan debate in June 1975 when Kissinger dismissed the recommendations made by the NSC Task Force who reported back ahead of schedule on 13 June 1975 and spelled the beginning of the end for Davis as Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs only months after Kissinger staunchly defended him to the Africans.

- 1 The Alvor Accords established the criteria for independence as the following: it appointed a Portuguese High Commissioner to oversee the transition process and

formed a Prime Ministerial Council with a member from each group participating, allotted ministries to the three groups, and called for the drafting of a constitution, established an electoral law and registering voters. The settlement also required pooling 8,000 guerrillas from each movement with 24,000 Portuguese troops

remaining until a phased withdrawal between 1 October 1975 to 1 February 1976. See George Wright, *The Destruction of a Nation: United States’ Policy Toward Angola since 1945* (London: Pluto Press, 1997), 57. The Alvor agreement was built upon an earlier agreement known as the Mombasa Accord which was agreed between 3–5 January 1975 in which the MPLA, FNLA and UNITA agreed to recognize each other “as independent parties with equal rights and responsibilities ... [and] also agreed that an unspecified period of transition was necessary before they would be prepared to take over from the Portuguese”. See Witney W. Schneidman, *Engaging Africa: Washington and the Fall of Portugal’s Colonial Empire* (Lanham: University Press of America, 2004), 197–198.

- 2 Henry Ginger, “Angolans Offer Plan to Portugal: 3 Rebel Groups Agree on Proposals for Talks,” *New York Times*, 12 January 1975, 11.
- 3 Linda Heywood, *Contested Power in Angola: 1840s to the Present* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2000), 187.
- 4 On 25 February 1975, the *Washington Post* carried comments made by Kissinger defending Davis, while the Congressional Record reveals Kissinger’s private letter in full to the OAU on the subject. See Reuters, “On denouncing of New Aide by OAU,” 25 February 1975, the *Washington Post*, in Charles McCall Files 7.1, Box 18, Africa (3 and 4), GRFL. For the latter reference see Edward G. Biester Jr, “Congressional Record,” 26 February 1975, Charles McCall Files 7.1, Box 18, Africa (3 and 4), GRFL: E749 –E750.
- 5 Emtel, AmEmbassy Lusaka, Zambia to SecState Washington, DC, 171401Z, 17 January 1975, To No Distribution (NODIS) (1), NSA Country Files, Africa General, Zambia, GRFL: 2. Chilean President Salvador Allende was a Marxist leader overthrown by a military coup on 11 September 1973, which ultimately led to Allende’s death. Suspicions of US involvement were

widespread, and being the US Ambassador to Chile, Davis was implicated with assisting this involvement.

- 6 Emtel, AmEmbassy Kinshasa, Zaire to SecState Washington, DC, 22 January 1975, 221040Z, JJS Memochrons, RG 59, Records of Joseph Sisco 1951–1976, NARA, Maryland: 2.
- 7 Emtel, AmEmbassy Kinshasa, Zaire to SecState Washington, DC, 23 January 1975, 230210Z, Document No. 268, Vol. E.6, Documents on Africa 1973–1976, Zaire, FRUS: 2.
- 8 Wright, *The Destruction of a Nation*, 58. The Hughes-Ryan Amendment passed in December 1974 was an effort to bring more transparency on covert operations, but in reality it placed Congress in a difficult position as most of the information was given in a closed session and required the Congressmen and Senators not to divulge the information they were given. The Jackson-Vanik Amendment was also passed in 1974 and infuriated Kissinger as it interfered with relations with the Soviets by imposing trade restrictions based on Soviet emigration policy towards Jewish citizens. In addition, the Senate and House Intelligence Committees began investigations into the conduct of the CIA in early 1975 when it established the Church and Pike Committees, respectively.
- 9 Emtel, AmEmbassy Kinshasa, Zaire to SecState Washington, DC, 20 January 1975, 211400Z, Public Library of US Diplomacy, Wikileaks: 1.
- 10 Emtel, AmEmbassy Kinshasa, Zaire to SecState Washington, DC, 21 January 1975, 211415Z, Document No. 23, Vol. E.6, Documents on Africa, 1973–1976, Africa Region, FRUS: 1. Diggs' comment on retirees stems from his statement that Davis was eligible for retirement in April 1975. At the conclusion of the letter, Diggs respectfully called for the President to withdraw Davis from the nomination.
- 11 Bruce Oudes, "The United States' Year in Africa," in *Africa Contemporary Record: Annual Survey and Documents 1974–1975*, ed. Colin Legum (London: Rex Collings, 1975), A89.
- 12 Emtel, SecState Washington, DC to AmEmbassy Kinshasa, Zaire, 21 January 1975, 212332Z, Zaire From SecState NODIS, NSA Country Files, GRFL: 1.
- 13 Ibid. Kissinger also went to lengths to create a justification for the appointment Davis by referring to his Foreign Service experience in Czechoslovakia, the Soviet Union, Italy, Venezuela, Bulgaria, Guatemala and Chile. In addition to this Kissinger pointed to Davis being a member of the Senior Staff of the NSC and the Peace Corp Director for Overseas Operations which included "responsibilities for programs in Africa [...] and took him to urban and rural areas of Nigeria, Ghana, the Ivory Coast, Togo, Dahomy and Niger".
- 14 Piero Gleijeses, *Conflicting Missions: Havana, Washington and Africa, 1959–1976* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 282. Furthermore, NSC staffer Roger Morris later claimed that Davis was an ideal choice as "we knew from Chile ... that Davis was somebody who could follow orders". See Roger Morris, "A Rare Resignation in Protest: Nat Davis and Angola," the *Washington Monthly* 7, no. 12 (February 1976): 26.
- 15 Emtel, SecState Washington, DC to All African Diplomatic Posts, 26 February 1975, 262045Z, Public Library of US Diplomacy, Wikileaks: 2. Another telegram from the US embassy in Ethiopia claimed that Ethiopian Ambassador Mohamed said "that the campaign which eventually led to the OAU's action was initiated by Congressman [Andrew] Young" during the African-American conference in Kinshasa, Zaire in January 1975. See Emtel, AmEmbassy Addis Ababa, Ethiopia to SecState Washington, DC, 27 February 1975, 271446Z, Public Library of US Diplomacy, Wikileaks: 1.
- 16 Reuters, "On denouncing of New Aide by OAU," *Washington Post*, 25 February 1975, in Charles McCall Files 7.1, Box 18, Africa (3 and 4), GRFL.
- 17 Edward G. Biester Jr, "Congressional Record", 26 February 1975, Charles McCall Files 7.1, Box 18, Africa (3 and 4), GRFL: E749–E750. The message was originally sent by Kissinger to all African diplomatic posts on 23 February 1975.
- 18 Ibid.: E750.

- 19 Emtel, AmEmbassy Addis Ababa, Ethiopia to SecState Washington, DC, 27 February 1975, 280739Z, Document No. 26, Vol. E.6, Documents on Africa 1973–1976, Africa Region, FRUS: 1. In another telegram Onu said the OAU’s objection was not toward Davis personally, but instead to draw attention in a constructive way toward US action that might cause difficulties for the US in Africa. See Emtel, AmEmbassy Mogadiscio, Somalia, to SecState Washington, DC, 271035Z, 27 February 1975, NSA Country Files, Africa General, Somalia SDT, GRFL: 2. After the revolution in the country in 1974, Ethiopia became closer with the Soviet Union and its allies, which meant that they publicly supported their international positions and policies over those of the US. Why Onu is critical here is unclear as he must have come to the conclusion that the US would decrease aid to the country in the face of such an alignment. Furthermore, Onu stated that African opinion on current US policies was one of disappointment, as he said that other African countries and he found reports of the US considering abandoning helping Ethiopia very disturbing (ibid.: 4).
- 20 Emtel, AmEmbassy Lagos, Nigeria to SecState Washington, DC, 26 February 1975, 261108Z, Public Library of US Diplomacy, Wikileaks: 1. The telegram noted that the paper was traditionally seen as carrying an extremist view and did not reflect Nigerian government views.
- 21 Emtel, AmEmbassy Accra, Ghana to SecState Washington, DC, 26 February 1975, 261330Z, Public Library of US Diplomacy, Wikileaks: 1. The first title was printed on 22 February 1975 and the second title was carried on 26 February 1975.
- 22 Emtel, AmEmbassy Lusaka, Zambia to SecState Washington, DC, 28 February 1975, 281337Z, Public Library of US Diplomacy, Wikileaks: 2.
- 23 Arthur R. Day and Donald B. Easum, “Interview with Donald B. Easum,” LOC, published 1990, [www.loc.gov/item/mfdipbib000328/](http://www.loc.gov/item/mfdipbib000328/).
- 24 Emtel, AmEmbassy, Lisbon, Portugal to SecState, Washington, DC, 281227Z, 28 March 1975, To Exclusive Distribution (EXDIS) (1) Folder, NSA Country Files, Europe and Canada, Box 11, Portugal, GRFL: 1.
- 25 Ibid.: 2.
- 26 Emtel, AmEmbassy Lisbon, Portugal to SecState Washington, DC, 5 April 1975, 050124Z, Public Library of US Diplomacy, Wikileaks: 1.
- 27 Emtel, AmEmbassy Lisbon, Portugal to SecState Washington, DC, 281227Z, 28 March 1975, To EXDIS (1) Folder, NSA Country Files, Europe and Canada, Box 11, Portugal, GRFL: 3–4.
- 28 Emtel, AmConsul Lourenco Marques, Mozambique to SecState Washington, DC, 28 March 1975, 280940Z, Public Library of US Diplomacy, Wikileaks: 3. Crespo was also a newly appointed member of the Portuguese Revolutionary Council.
- 29 Emtel, SecState Washington, DC to US Mission to UN, New York, 1 April 1975, 011705Z, Public Library of U.S Diplomacy, Wikileaks: 2.
- 30 Emtel, AmEmbassy Lisbon, Portugal to US Mission, New York, 28 March 1975, 281227Z, Public Library of US Diplomacy, Wikileaks: 2.
- 31 Emtel, AmEmbassy Lisbon, Portugal to SecState Washington, DC, 31 March 1975, 311444Z, Public Library of US Diplomacy, Wikileaks: 3.
- 32 Memorandum, Sisco to Kissinger, 28 March 1975, Box 19, 1975 – JJS Memochrons, RG 59, Records of Joseph Sisco 1951–1976, NARA, Maryland.
- 33 Henry Kissinger, *Years of Renewal* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1999), 795.
- 34 Raymond Garthoff, *Détente and Confrontation: American-Soviet Relations From Nixon To Reagan* (Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution, 1985), 506–507.
- 35 Fernando Andresen Guimarães, *The Origins of the Angolan Civil War: Foreign Intervention and Domestic Political Conflict* (London: St. Martin’s Press, 1998), 101.
- 36 Memorandum, Davis, Hyland and Lord to Kissinger, “Angola,” 4 April 1975, Box 22, Angola 1975, RG 59, Records of Joseph Sisco, 1951–1976, NARA, Maryland: 2–3. The memo was addressed to Kissinger but via Sisco. The report also alluded to suspicions by a Portuguese



Revolutionary Council member on 27 March 1975 that the “recent fighting in Angola showed a clear pattern of foreign intervention [... and] his clear intimation was that the US is supporting the FNLA” (ibid.: 8).

- 37 Emtel, AmConsul Luanda, Angola to SecState Washington, DC, 3 April 1975, 030845Z, Box 22, JJS Memochrons, Angola 1975, RG 59, Records of Joseph Sisco 1951–1976, NARA, Maryland: 3. Killoran reported that the FNLA soldiers did not seem to have an objective “other than to kill as many MPLA elements as possible”. As Gleijeses observes, the MPLA had the edge over the FNLA both politically and administratively, two crucial components for success in the upcoming election. He argues that it is not hard to understand that the FNLA would want to use its superior military capability to destroy the MPLA in early 1975 in order to pave the way for FNLA success in the election to be held in November 1975. See Gleijeses, *Conflicting Missions*, 251.
- 38 Memorandum, 4 April 1975, 17.
- 39 Emtel, AmEmbassy Ottawa, Canada to SecState Washington, DC, 24 March 1975, 2420437Z, Section One, Box 22, Angola 1975, RG 59, Records of Joseph Sisco 1951–1976, NARA, Maryland: 1.
- 40 Ibid.
- 41 Ibid.
- 42 Ibid.: 3.
- 43 Charles Mohr, “In Angola’s Political Manoeuvring, a Moderate Gains Support,” the *New York Times*, 24 April 1975, 2.
- 44 Kissinger, *Years of Renewal*, 791.
- 45 Memcon, Ford, Kissinger, Davis, Kaunda, Zambian Foreign Minister Vernon Mwaanga and Zambian Presidential Advisor Mark Chona, Oval Office, White House, Washington, DC, 19 April 1975, 3 pm, Meetings, Box 11, DGRFL: 3.
- 46 Ibid.: 4. Kaunda pleaded for US support for Zambian calls for a diplomatic solution when he stated “our whole position would be weakened if the West and the US do not support our stand” (ibid.: 10).
- 47 Ibid.: 3.
- 48 Ibid.: 8. Kissinger explains in his memoir that as the Angolan crisis developed the Ford administration came to realize that Kaunda’s statement that he and the other southern African leaders were united was suspect as “the unanimity between the four Presidents either dissolved or had been exaggerated by Kaunda to begin with”. See Kissinger, *Years of Renewal*, 796.
- 49 United Press International (UPI), Zambian President Kenneth Kaunda’s Remarks at State Dinner, 21 April 1975, White House, Washington, DC, Box 18, Africa (1), Charles McCall Files, GRFL: 1. Furthermore, Kaunda focused on the failings of NSSM 39 when he argued “a no-policy position may not be a neutral position indicative of a passive posture, but a deliberate act of policy to support the status quo or to influence events in one direction or another at a particular time” (ibid.).
- 50 Kenneth D. Kaunda, “Kaunda: ‘Dismayed’ by America,” 25 April 1975, *New York Times*, 30.
- 51 Secretary’s Staff Meeting, 21 April 1975, 8 am–8.37 am, Box 7, Transcripts of Henry Kissinger 1973–1977, NARA, Maryland: 19.
- 52 Briefing Memorandum, Davis to Kissinger, “Jonas Savimbi,” 1 May 1975, Box 22, RG 59, Records of Joseph Sisco, 1951–1976: 2. The memorandum is heavily sanitized with four attachments that included an INR Informal Assessment, UNITA request for support from the US and an Action Memorandum on Angola all missing. The name of the first attachment has been sanitized. In the report, Davis drew attention to the fact that Savimbi “has discussed aid given to him by others with African colleagues and supporters and we cannot be sure he will be discreet about any relationship with us” (ibid.).

- 53 Ibid.: 3. Davis stated that the opinions expressed were his personal views as opinion within the African Bureau was divided on Savimbi.
- 54 Secretary's Staff Meeting, 5 May 1975, 8.00 am–9.07 am, Box 7, Transcripts of Henry Kissinger, 1973–1977, NARA, Maryland: 45.
- 55 Ibid.: 46.
- 56 Ibid. Davis travelled to five West African countries between 5 May 1975 and 19 May 1975. The build-up of Soviet and Eastern bloc assistance to the MPLA had escalated in spring 1975. This has been the subject of speculation in studies focusing on the Angolan Civil War as some believe it was a response to the \$300,000 the US gave the FNLA in January, while Kissinger and other official US accounts argue that the US responded to a flagrant Soviet infusion of military aid to the MPLA. The truth lies somewhere in the middle as both the US and the Soviet Union had been giving nominal aid to the FNLA and the MPLA for over a decade before the outbreak of the Angolan Civil War.
- 57 Ibid.: 47.
- 58 Secretary's Staff Meeting, 7 May 1975, 8.00 am–8.50 am, 01611, DNSA: 12.
- 59 Ibid.: 23.
- 60 Ibid.
- 61 Ibid.: 25.
- 62 Ibid.: 24.
- 63 Ibid.: 27–28.
- 64 Emtel, AmEmbassy Copenhagen, Denmark to SecState Washington, DC, 18 April 1975, 180739Z, Public Library of US Diplomacy, Wikileaks: 3.
- 65 Emtel, AmEmbassy Stockholm, Sweden to SecState Washington, DC, 22 April 1975, 220800Z, Public Library of US Diplomacy, Wikileaks: 2.
- 66 Ibid.
- 67 Emtel, AmEmbassy Copenhagen, Denmark to SecState Washington, DC, 3.
- 68 Emtel, AmEmbassy London, UK to SecState Washington, DC, 25 April 1975, 251920Z, Section Two, Public Library of US Diplomacy, Wikileaks: 3.
- 69 Ibid. A senior British Minister was also quoted as telling the US embassy “that US domestic troubles could paralyze the US capacity to carry out a world role” (ibid.). In addition to this the Iranians also drew attention to the influence of Congress on foreign affairs as Iranian Prime Minister Hoveyda was worried “that US Congress is trying to take over and run things”. See Emtel, AmEmbassy Tehran, Iran to SecState Washington, DC, 17 April 1975, 171321Z, Public Library of US Diplomacy, Wikileaks: 1.
- 70 Gerald Ford, *A Time to Heal* (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1979), 275. In some ways Ford's attitude was influenced by how he felt states like the PRC viewed the US. There is some insight of the Chinese position in *The Peking Review* which observed that the US media “admitted that US Indochina policy had been a mistake and that it had subsequently lifted a rock only to drop it on its own feet”. See the *Peking Review* 23 (6 June 1975): 20.
- 71 Briefing Memorandum, Mulcahy to Kissinger, “Angolan Options,” 13 May 1975, Box 368, Winston Lord Sensitive Non-China 1975, RG 59, Winston Lord Files, NARA, Maryland: 5. The memorandum was transmitted through Sisco. Kissinger requested the paper on 12 May 1975.
- 72 Kissinger, *Years of Renewal*, 803.
- 73 Secretary's Staff Meeting, 16 May 1975, 8.08 am–9.07 am, 01624, Angola, DNSA: 24.
- 74 Ibid.: 28. Kissinger continued to attack the African Bureau paper by telling Mulcahy “they [African Bureau] have fuzzed up variations of what they're doing. That's all that paper is, and you know it” (ibid.).
- 75 Memcon, Kissinger and Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko, 5.05 pm–6.10 pm, Marble Room, Hotel Imperial, Vienna, Austria, 19 -20 May 1975, Box 1, NSA Kissinger Reports, GRFL: 7.

- 76 Ibid.: 8. In response, Gromyko simply said “in our view, neither side should allow third countries, wherever they may be situated, to shake that line in any measure. Either through direct influence or indirectly” (ibid.).
- 77 Garthoff, *Détente and Confrontation*, 520.
- 78 Emtel, AmConsul Luanda, Angola to SecState Washington, DC, 30 May 1975, 301048Z, Public Library of US Diplomacy, Wikileaks: 1.
- 79 Gleijeses, *Conflicting Missions*, 252.
- 80 Jussi Hanhimäki, *The Flawed Architect: Henry Kissinger and American Foreign Policy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 408.
- 81 Emtel, AmEmbassy Lisbon, Portugal to SecState Washington, DC, 17 May 1975, 170822Z, Public Library of US Diplomacy, Wikileaks: 2.
- 82 Ibid.: 3.
- 83 Walter Issacson, *Kissinger: A Biography* (second edition) (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2005), 656.

# **3      The fallout**

## **Kissinger, Davis and the State Department**

### **Introduction**

The narrative of the US decision to covertly intervene in the Angolan Civil War is well known through the excellent work of historian Piero Gleijeses and by various other historians such as Thomas Noer, Jussi Hanhimäki and the memoirs of Henry Kissinger, Roger Morris, Nathaniel Davis and Raymond Garthoff. In general, most of the Angolan literature that focuses on the events in June 1975 begin with how Kissinger disagreed with NSSM 224, more commonly known as the Davis Task Force report that was given to him on 13 June 1975. Instead Kissinger pushed for active solutions during an NSC Senior Review Group (SRG) meeting on 19 June and again at another NSC meeting on 27 June. Yet there is still a gap to be addressed on the evolution of that decision and how Kissinger systematically undermined attempts to keep the US out of Angolan affairs even before the conclusions of the Davis report were discussed. Furthermore, there is further evidence on how regional actors such as Zaire played on Kissinger's perception of a credibility problem and how such pressure became a crucial element in Kissinger advocating an interventionist approach in Angola.

This chapter explores in detail the increasingly fractured relationship between Kissinger and Davis over the Angolan debate. His objections have been portrayed as being primarily motivated by his own fear past events, specifically in Chile.<sup>1</sup> It has been previously argued that this resulted in Davis deliberately trying to stymie Kissinger's foreign policy agenda. As a result, the narrative has been influenced to depict a weak and self-serving man who feared for his career. In subsequent historical studies and memoir

accounts of events, Davis has been unfairly treated. This is illustrated by Daniel Spikes who argues that Davis believed

that his name would again be tarnished by association with a US covert operation if [...] it became public. In his dread, Davis became paralysed. With his head frozen, the entire task force became immobilized. For weeks the frustrated Secretary of State “repeatedly” requested the task force’s report, while Angola, oblivious to Washington’s bureaucratic meanderings, rushed to its destiny.<sup>2</sup>

Indeed, Spikes views were later added to by Kissinger himself in his memoirs:

Davis’s opposition to a covert operation in principle meant that the issue the President wanted most to address could not be dealt with: whether the national interest obliged the United States to resist the projection of Soviet power in Southern Africa by the only practical means, which were of necessity covert.<sup>3</sup>

However, this is not an accurate reflection of Davis.

First, Angola was not an urgent priority for Ford at this time, in fact the evidence suggests that Ford played little or no part in seeking an Angolan solution. It was Kissinger who at every stage tried to shape the agenda to suit his own preferred course of action. As for Spikes’ charge that Davis became paralyzed, this is also at odds with the evidence. Davis tried to convey the substantial dangers of engaging in Angola and unlike Kissinger who was concerned with the perception of foreign countries, Davis looked toward the shattered domestic consensus and correctly judged that the US Congress and the public would not tolerate another intervention so soon after the collapse of Vietnam. In addition, he was joined by Policy Planning Director Winston Lord, a trusted advisor of Kissinger’s, who voiced similar anxieties about involving the US in southern Africa. Therefore, Davis was not a lone ranger attempting to save his own reputation, nor was he someone who did not have the stomach for covert operations. In contrast, his actions illustrate he was somebody that was strong enough in his view to challenge Kissinger’s absolute authority as he genuinely felt that the US would lose further credibility on the world stage if it intervened in Angola.

Yet there were also local concerns feeding into the situation, such as the Zairian influence on US foreign policy toward Angola. This chapter charts the shift in US position from the start of June 1975, when Zaire requested the US to open up a dialogue with the Soviets to halt the shipments of arms into the country. It also outlines the active and indeed encouraging approach taken by Mobutu, enticing the US to covertly aid Roberto and Savimbi against the MPLA. Specifically, it illustrates Mobutu's manipulation of the situation following the US failure to enter into a dialogue with the Soviets over Angolan arms shipments; he increased the stakes, accusing the US of being involved in a coup against him and promptly expelled the US Ambassador to Zaire, Deane Hinton. His bold decision paid immediate dividends as Kissinger, eager not to lose another ally, sent two US officials to Kinshasa to discuss Angola. Yet Mobutu also had domestic reasons for pursuing such action, as he wished to distance himself from allegations in the African media that he was just a US lackey. However, the whole Zairian episode and Kissinger's eagerness to initially diffuse and subsequently use it to his advantage against those who opposed him on Angola resulted in the US failing to seize upon an opportunity to unite African countries against the Soviets. The conditions were present for Kissinger to engage Tanzania, Zambia, Nigeria and Zaire to apply pressure on Moscow, but they were ignored. Such a diplomatic course of action would have benefited the US in the short and long term as it would have been perceived in African circles as removing the Cold War lens from the region.

Finally, the chapter discusses the NSC memorandum written in response to questions raised by the SRG on 19 June 1975, and shows that the DOD was also against any intervention in Angola. Hanhimäki argues that the NSC meeting on 27 June "was not about Angola. It was about the global credibility of American foreign policy in the wake of the collapse of Vietnam".<sup>4</sup> This analysis is correct, and led by Kissinger the other options were framed in such a way that made them look weak compared with the active option. Kissinger persisted despite CIA Director William Colby's caution that action in Angola could further damage the intelligence agency which was already under severe scrutiny from Congress. However, Ford was convinced that the risk was justifiable in the context of US credibility in the immediate post-Vietnam period. As a result, Colby was ordered to come up with options to actively support the FNLA and UNITA.

## **Tunnel vision: Kissinger and the Davis report**

Kissinger's dismissive views on the conduct of the African Bureau were apparent on 6 June 1975 when he told Ford

my people want to "let the democratic process" work. That is total nonsense. There is none. My instinct is we should work with Mobutu and through him with Roberto [... and] the Soviets are pushing Neto of the MPLA. Kaunda is backing Savimbi. I don't think we want Communists there.<sup>5</sup>

However, there was no mention of the reports given to Kissinger on the ineffectiveness and general incompetence of the FNLA, nor the concern that Savimbi was canvassing all sides in an attempt to compete with the MPLA and the FNLA. Instead the focus was to utilize Mobutu and Kaunda to funnel arms and resources to Angola, which was seen to have two benefits. First, it would counter Soviet arms to the MPLA. *Secunda priori*, it showed Zaire and Zambian leadership that the US was willing to intervene. On 9 June 1975 during a staff meeting, Kissinger repeated his emphasis on the importance of the US–Zairian relationship when he chastised Davis for choosing not to include Zaire in his second African trip. Davis told Kissinger that given Zaire's economic concerns, it would be better for him to delay such a trip until Mobutu had decided if he was going to turn to the International Monetary Fund (IMF) for assistance or try to solve it himself. However, the fragility of Zaire was the least of Kissinger's concerns at this time as he told Davis "I think we have plenty to talk to Mobutu about, including Angola".<sup>6</sup> Kissinger's outlook on the situation emphasized the importance he placed on having influence in the Angolan capital, Luanda, as he complained to Davis "what kind of nonsense is this? They [MPLA] happen to be strong in Luanda". He chastised Davis and the African Bureau's analysis, comparing the events of Zaire in the 1960s by stating

they happen to be strong in Kabinda [*sic*], which is the biggest thing. Where else is the bush? [... and] I've been trying to understand for six weeks what the hell is going on [... and] all I try to understand is when somebody says, "how did Mobutu take over the Congo?" – by taking over the bush or by taking over Leopoldville?<sup>7</sup>

In response, Davis put forward the theory that a political settlement resulting in a division of the country was more realistic as after the dust had settled “a partition of the country is probably more proper”, Hyland concurred stating “they’re [MPLA] not strong enough outside of Luanda and Kabinda [*sic*] [... and] failing a political settlement, a partition – a de facto partition of the country – is inevitable”.<sup>8</sup> However, Kissinger was more focused on the impact of US nonchalance in the region and how Mobutu would perceive such an act. In addition, he wanted to win in Angola, the memory of a compromised solution resulting from the division of a country bore too many similarities to the conflicts in Korea and Vietnam.

Instead Kissinger told Davis

I would like to hear what Mobutu really has in mind because he is one of the chief actors. I know what Kaunda has in mind. And if we can find out what Mobutu really has in mind, then I think we can make a judgement on what, if anything, we should do – whether we should stay out or whether we should throw our weight anywhere.<sup>9</sup>

As a result, Kissinger instructed Davis to visit Mobutu in Zaire on his upcoming African trip as he felt that Davis would endear himself to Mobutu in the process, and, therefore, address the difficult situation that occurred during the nomination process where Mobutu attacked his appointment. Kissinger told Davis “he’ll [Mobutu] think a lot better of you if you go there and have a cold-blooded discussion. Mobutu will love you”.<sup>10</sup> Yet Davis remained unconvinced and only agreed to consider it. Such insubordination was met with a sharp rebuke by Kissinger who told him “Nat, when I want you to go you’re going to go, whether you think it’s good or not”.<sup>11</sup> Ultimately Davis did not visit Zaire on his African trip, most likely due Kissinger wanting to send someone who would actively engage Mobutu in discussing an active solution to the Angolan problem. On 12 June 1975, Davis sent a memorandum to Kissinger outlining the courses of action the US could take if it decided to actively involve itself in the Angolan situation. However, Davis cautioned

I would be delinquent in my responsibility to you if I did not say that my colleagues in this Bureau and I believe that the benefits to us of



embarking on the covert and military assistance actions outlined in these papers would be far from commensurate with the risks involved.<sup>12</sup>

Yet he was not supported by Sisco and Hyland who both disagreed with Davis' assessment, which is surprising as only days previously at a 40 Committee meeting, Sisco recommended avoiding any engagement to Kissinger, telling him it "might be the best course [... if] we can concede; not do anything and let nature take its course [... after all] Angola is not of great importance."<sup>13</sup>

There was some support from the Director of the PPS, Winston Lord, who wrote a memorandum to Kissinger on 13 June 1975, the same day the Davis Task Force submitted its paper on NSSM 224. Lord's argument closely mirrored Davis' objections, specifically relating to the absence of a direct and vital national interest. Furthermore, the chances of success were so remote it also increased the risk another defeat for the US, which would inevitably have an impact on US prestige so soon after Vietnam. Lord told Kissinger

I think it would be a serious mistake for us to try to counter with our own military assistance or covert action program. Such actions – even short of use of US forces – seem to me to be far out of proportion to US interests as they can plausibly be defended to Congress and the American public, much less to foreign opinion, including our allies.<sup>14</sup>

His concerns over the potential damage to US credibility were grounded on the inability to keep US arms a secret as he stated

even with a major effort, we cannot be sure of turning the situation about in Angola [... and] the USSR would seem to command more of the chips than we do. I do not believe we should choose to contest with the Soviets in a place where our interests are so minimal.<sup>15</sup>

Yet Lord also had another valid concern about intervening in Angola, which was "should the fighting get out of hand – as well it may – with massacres of whites as well as blacks, our involvement with any of the participants would be extremely awkward for us". However, there was some contrast

between Davis and Lord, namely the extent that Lord felt the diplomatic and political initiative was not viable as he stated, “that not much is likely to come of such efforts”. Instead he suggested a serious examination of the risks involved, including a call to act through the UN rather than go it alone. He concluded

if we do decide not to get further involved, a UN initiative to restrict outside involvement would prove more embarrassing to the USSR than to us [... so] I do suggest that before you start down any of these paths, the risks involved in these actions be thoroughly examined.<sup>16</sup>

Therefore, the primary evidence shows that Davis’ main objections and rationale for them were shared by one of Kissinger’s most trusted advisors. This is an important point in the context of the Kissinger-Davis relationship. In subsequent years, Kissinger has attempted to alter the image of Davis’ role in his memoirs, portraying him as a man who lost his nerve for covert operations after Chile. In addition, he is depicted as someone who was anxious to avoid further legislative investigations. He suggests that “Davis turned out to be willing, indeed eager, to implement conventional wisdom, which meant non-intervention”, and indeed his view was trivialized as being supposedly influenced by his experience before the Church Committee investigated alleged wrongdoings of the CIA; it was concluded “he clearly had no stomach for covert operations”.<sup>17</sup> Yet Lord, nor others who objected to the Angolan operation, have been singled out by Kissinger for criticism in his subsequent memoirs.

On 13 June 1975, the Response to NSSM 224, also known as the Davis Task Force report was submitted to Kissinger. The report was a comprehensive study of the Angolan situation and outlined three options that the US could pursue; neutrality, diplomacy and active support. The advantages of the neutral option were outlined as keeping the US out of a “risky and expensive involvement in a situation whose outcome would be beyond our control”.<sup>18</sup> This neutral option would also keep the active role open if the US decided to intervene at a later stage and “would not require the administration to expend any political capital to win Congressional support and/or funding for more action programs”.<sup>19</sup> In addition it would allow the US to “counter charges of manipulation and interference and diminish the charges that the FNLA and UNITA are controlled or are

heavily influenced by the United States”.<sup>20</sup> On the negative side, it was deemed that it could cost the US influence with the FNLA and UNITA if they took over Angola, as well impacting adversely on US–Zairian relations.

As for the diplomatic option, the advantages encompassed “shifting competition to the political arena” which would improve the FNLA’s and UNITA’s position, while simultaneously working with Tanzania, Zambia and Zaire to reduce the arms supply and reduce the chance of a big power confrontation. Other strategies included encouraging the Portuguese to take more responsibility in the hope it could gain Congressional or public support. However, such an option had its risks. It was deemed that pursuing this course of action could alienate the FNLA and UNITA by restraining their freedom of action, and “despite assurances of support for peaceful settlement, it is questionable that the USSR or other interested countries would actually cooperate”.<sup>21</sup>

The third option presented was to actively engage in assisting the FNLA and UNITA. The benefits of choosing this course included the dual enhancement of “US political credit with the FNLA and UNITA as well as simultaneously heal[ing] US–Zairian relations”. Yet the disadvantages were considerable and involved committing US resources and credibility to a scenario where the outcome was not favourable and where the US could exercise limited influence at best. It was also seen as potentially increasing Soviet and other external state involvement. The report warned if the US was to get involved and such action was exposed it would “have a negative impact on our relations with other Angolan factions, with other African states, with Portugal, with Socialist and third world countries, and with large segments of the US public and Congress”.<sup>22</sup>

Reflecting on the report a few years later, Davis wrote that the task force, “in its great majority, did favor an effort to achieve a peaceful solution through diplomatic-political measures” as it would shift the attention back towards the political arena and essentially keep the country from experiencing a big power confrontation by recognizing that it was an African problem that required an African solution.<sup>23</sup> However, the report fell short of what Kissinger wanted. In particular he was unhappy with how the African Bureau did not align with his preferred option of intervention. Instead the general consensus within the African Bureau was to avoid getting involved. However, comments made by Kissinger a week after the

report was submitted illustrate just how much of an impact Kaunda and Mobutu's actions had had on Kissinger's rationale to commit US resources to Angola. He told his staff "forget for a moment how important Angola itself may be. I am concerned about the impact of Nyerere and Kaunda and Mobutu when they see we have done nothing".<sup>24</sup> Years later, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs, Ed Mulcahy, revealed the tense atmosphere that enveloped the Davis-Kissinger relationship at this time and how the memory of Vietnam was a central factor in the analysis of whether to engage in Angola:

This represented a departure from the division of power in the world and the Soviets were not supposed take over places in Africa. [... and] we were also conscious of what had happened in Vietnam. Nat Davis as Assistant Secretary was terribly conscious of the dangers of CIA hanky-panky from his days in Chile.<sup>25</sup>

The debate on Davis' motives varies between sources. Historian Thomas Noer argues that "Davis saw intervention in Angola as wrong [... and] Kissinger was appalled by Davis' position and its support within the State Department. He saw Davis and others as prisoners of the Vietnam syndrome".<sup>26</sup> This label was given to those who saw US intervention in Vietnam as fundamentally wrong. Indeed Trevor McCrisken has provided criteria to define when these "prisoners" believed US force was justified, namely where "just cause can be demonstrated, the objectives are compelling and attainable, and sufficient force is employed to assure a swift victory with minimum of casualties".<sup>27</sup> His harshest critic is Daniel Spikes who argues that Davis was more concerned about the potential damage the Angolan episode could do to his career rather than any form of genuine concern that the US was making a mistake by involving itself in the Angolan Civil War. Striking a similar tone to Kissinger, Spikes argues that Davis found himself in the midst of another potential crisis

that could blow up in his face just as easily [... as it did in] Chile. He had miraculously escaped the furore over Chile relatively intact; one more brush with scandal, however, and his carefully nurtured career could be destroyed.<sup>28</sup>

However, former NSC African staff member Roger Morris observed that Davis, far from being naively grateful that Kissinger rescued his career, actively sought to challenge policy that could damage his reputation. He remarked that such an outlook “helps explain in part how and why Davis dissented as the Ford Administration wilfully blundered into a highly visible ‘covert’ intervention in Angola in the summer of 1975”.<sup>29</sup> While it is true that Davis’ reputation was impacted by events in Chile, his actions to challenge Kissinger’s Angolan policy are not directly linked to it. In fact, by openly challenging Kissinger on Angola he knew he was going to be severely impacting his career. As a result, it is not fair for Spikes and others to claim that Davis was a damaged State official. The easy option would have been to agree with Kissinger’s Angolan policy and raise no objections, as this was exactly the type of official that Kissinger wanted in the African Bureau. But Davis chose to speak up and object, not on the grounds of ethics it must be said, but because he understood that Angola was not a place for the US to get involved at that time due to domestic constraints.

However, the pressure from Kissinger to get the US into Angola was unrelenting throughout June 1975. Historian Piero Gleijeses contends that when “the Davis Task force presented its report on June 13th [1975], the CIA alone was in favor [*sic*] of a covert operation. Two weeks later, Davis alone was against it”.<sup>30</sup> Yet to understand Gleijeses’ point, the Zairian context must be analysed. The speed of the Angolan debate shifted dramatically when US–Zairian relations deteriorated during the course of the month, and led to a more assertive approach by both the US and Zaire toward intervention.

## **The Zairian influence on US–Angolan policy**

The conditions for a diplomatic solution were more amiable in early June 1975. During a 1 June meeting, US Ambassador to Zaire Deane Hinton met Zairian Foreign Minister Mandungu Nyati Bula, who suggested that Kissinger initiate discussions with Moscow to halt their arms shipments as “it was in no-one’s interest to produce another Middle Eastern situation in southern Africa”.<sup>31</sup> However, there was another factor. Mobutu was becoming disillusioned with the FNLA at this time due to their poor performance and Roberto’s lack of leadership. He told Hinton on 9 June

1975 that “too many weapons in Angola, too much blood had been spilled and it was time to end the killing [... and he had decided to] cut off weapons for Holden Roberto”.<sup>32</sup> As a result, Hinton reported that Mobutu had “flip-flopped” on Roberto–Savimbi relations again, and speculated that he could be about to visit Moscow in order to discuss the Angolan situation. In light of Bula’s request that the US approach the Soviets to discuss ceasing arms shipments to Angola and Zaire’s agreement with Portugal to halt its own weapon shipments to the FNLA, Hinton argued that the US should get in contact with the Soviets on some level in order to report back to Mobutu on the Soviet reaction.<sup>33</sup> To Kissinger such analysis was appalling as he considered discussion with the Soviets as illustrating the very weakness he was trying to avoid projecting. However, events in Angola were accelerating and on 14 June 1975, an Issues Paper on Angola outlined that the likelihood of an Angolan election was decreasing and, therefore, the US now needed to address its role in the region. The paper stated that “events in Angola will importantly affect both southern and central Africa” as there would be increased intervention with the supply of arms from the Soviets and the Chinese, which could broaden the conflict.<sup>34</sup> Despite this warning, Kissinger was convinced that diplomatic and neutral options were not good enough; the US had to stake a claim in the region before the MPLA grew too strong.

Such analysis only added to Kissinger’s sense of urgency on the Angolan issue and indeed his push for action was evident during a meeting he held with Ford and Scowcroft on 16 June 1975 where he argued “we have been diddling around. We have given Roberto a bit, but he needs weapons and discipline. Kaunda doesn’t have the horsepower. Mobutu is a bloody bastard but he is the only hope”.<sup>35</sup> Yet even more disturbing was Kissinger’s reasoning to get involved in the Angolan situation as he told Ford “we don’t want to see a Communist government in Angola. It is not in our interest to knock off a white regime right now, which is what would happen with a Communist Angola”.<sup>36</sup> But his admission that there was a lack of support for intervening is striking. He informed Ford that “no agency supports doing anything – State [Department], JCS [Joint Chiefs of Staff]”.<sup>37</sup> Kissinger’s tactic of appealing to Ford’s conservative views are evident as well as his attempt to portray himself as battling to control the bureaucracy within the State Department. At this time the stakes were

raised when reports in Zaire emerged of an alleged US-backed coup against Mobutu. Indeed, Kissinger's concerns over the US–Zairian relationship and how Angola was crucial to that relationship were apparent during a meeting on 18 June 1975 when Kissinger informed Ford that

Mobutu has developed an intense dislike for Deane Hinton [... and] developments there are worrisome [...] I am so frustrated. It may be too late. But we can't get any agency to come in with a tough option [for Angola].<sup>38</sup>

However, Mobutu raised the stakes and expelled Hinton from Zaire on 19 June 1975. He wanted the US to address the Angolan problem, and when the diplomatic approach outlined by Bula was not acted upon, Mobutu chose a more radical way of getting Kissinger's attention. In response, Kissinger quickly arranged for former US Ambassador to Zaire, Sheldon Vance and Director of Central African Affairs Walter Cutler to meet Mobutu to address the coup situation as well as to discuss the real issue that was on Mobutu's mind, that of Angola.

On 20 June 1975, Kissinger met with Vance to give him instructions before his visit to Zaire. The meeting is particularly salient as Kissinger admitted regret that he did not focus on the Angolan problem until it had become a regional focal point. He told Vance "I've think we've mishandled Mobutu and the whole area. I have not given too much attention to it, so it's partly my fault".<sup>39</sup> Furthermore, the post-Vietnam credibility issue is evident in Kissinger's thinking as he commented that Mobutu's motives were understandable "if we're letting Angola go, then in essence we're letting him go [... and] if you add to that the whole situation in Vietnam I don't find what he does incomprehensible".<sup>40</sup> Once again his fear of other states perceiving the US as weak in the aftermath of Vietnam comes to the fore when he concluded

if Angola is taken by the Communists, what conclusions can the African leaders draw about the United States [... and] I confess I didn't focus on it early enough. Mulcahy didn't break his back getting my attention though [... and] I'm not in favor of the US involving itself, but in favor of it making it possible for Kaunda or Mobutu to.<sup>41</sup>

So, while he was acutely aware that no direct assistance or troops could be sent, Kissinger wanted to fully utilize the regional states to influence the outcome. This resulted in his explicit instructions to Vance to only discuss intervention and avoid discussion of diplomatic compromises. Indeed, his negative comments on the diplomatic solution are particularly remarkable and clearly highlight that he did not believe in any sort of settlement being reached. Kissinger instructed Vance “don’t dither around and lecture him [Mobutu] in reconciliation. He must be puking when he hears that kind of stuff, I know I do. I know it won’t come about with reconciliation”.<sup>42</sup> The timing of such remarks were also peculiar as they were made just before the Nakuru conference in Kenya which was an attempt to get the MPLA, FNLA and UNITA to recommit to the principles of Alvor.<sup>43</sup> Furthermore, while Kissinger had already written off any hope of an Angolan coalition government, there was criticism of the Ford administration’s foreign policy in the African media.

The tone and language in some of these African editorials is extreme and took particular aim at the Ford administration’s foreign policy in the wake of Vietnam, and especially the rigour with which it was trying to show that it was not a power in retreat. In a particularly scathing attack on Ford and Kissinger, the *Times of Zambia* (Dar es Salaam) stated “America is not a phoenix rising from the ashes; it is a drunken John Wayne shooting indiscriminately at Indians”.<sup>44</sup> Furthermore, the article ridiculed US attempts to publicly reinforce its credibility, especially in relation to the Mayaguez incident and also Ford’s speech during a NATO summit in May 1975. It claimed that Ford and Kissinger were “prancing around like a pair of ‘sick’ comedians [... and] the Mayaguez affair showed what many of us have always suspected about Ford, give him a situation demanding statesmanship and he will react like a football player”.<sup>45</sup> It also took aim at Kissinger but concluded, “maybe America is not retreating into a new isolationism, but it is hardly emerging from the darkness of Kissinger’s Metternich diplomacy either”.<sup>46</sup> In the midst of these media attacks and behind the scenes, Vance quietly met Mobutu on 23 June 1975.

Mobutu immediately drew attention the arms and money from the Soviets and Yugoslavs which he stated were pouring in for Neto. Mobutu outlined a dire contrast claiming that only Zaire and the PRC were assisting the FNLA, but Zaire’s stock of weapons was low, and money was very



scarce. While Mobutu acknowledged that the US could not directly intervene due to domestic circumstances, the US could secretly help Zaire militarily and that could enable Zaire to support the FNLA. Therefore, the modalities of their possible assistance were clearly indicated. In addition, Mobutu played on the fear of the Soviets gaining a foothold in the region by stating “it would be very grave for Zaire if the Soviets controlled Angola as they would if Neto became master of the country”.<sup>47</sup> This message was compounded by the FNLA leader Holden Roberto who met Vance on 25 June 1975. He argued that unless

drastic measures were taken before independence, civil war would result and Soviets could succeed in gaining rich prize in central Africa, if that happens, [... and] it is doubtful that South Africa would be able to sit “with its arms crossed” and would turn the entire area into an even wider battleground.<sup>48</sup>

These conversations set very direct expectations of the US which Vance tried to subtly navigate without committing nor ruling out US assistance. But the primary evidence makes it clear that Mobutu and Roberto played on Kissinger’s fears of a domino effect towards Soviet influence if they were left influencing the course of events through the MPLA. Yet despite Kissinger’s dismissive attitude toward diplomacy, others surrounding him continued to be apprehensive about the interventionist alternative.

During a decisive NSC meeting on Angola on 27 June 1975, NSC advisor for Africa and International Organization Affairs Hal Horan expressed that the US should not rule out diplomacy as there was increasing support among the other African nations for a peaceful solution. He stated:

I recognize that there are limits on what we can do [with diplomacy], particularly with regard to the Portuguese and the Soviets. But there are some hopeful signs that African states are beginning to be increasingly concerned about the situation [... and] the Nigerian Government is becoming increasingly aware of the Soviet supply of arms to the MPLA and does not welcome this destabilizing activity so nearby.<sup>49</sup>

Horan’s views were mirrored by information from the US embassy in Dar es Salaam in Tanzania which reported that Tanzanian Foreign Minister

Malecela remarked at the Nakuru conference that Tanzania no longer supported the MPLA and had denounced the behaviour of all three Angolan liberation groups.

He also took aim at the movements for seeking to invite external influences into Angola's plight and called on them to forget their ideological differences arguing, "if it is a matter of ideology, they should first of all attain their independence and then resolve their differences".<sup>50</sup> Such staunch criticism could have been the first step towards engaging with Tanzania, Zaire and Zambia to apply pressure on the three Angolan groups to reject further aid. It could also have helped create a united front to object to Moscow over their arms shipments and manoeuvred the US into a desirable position of trying to accommodate African diplomacy rather than subjugate the region in Cold War terms. The US could have gained prestige in the region, rather than lose further credibility, as the Soviets would have been seen as the intruders into African affairs. Yet Kissinger's dismissal of diplomatic solutions and a lack of African understanding resulted in a pursuit of an interventionist policy designed to conform to his Cold War spheres of influence outlook.

### **Moving towards intervention: the NSC meeting on 27 June 1975**

On 23 June 1975, a joint NSC and African IG memorandum was submitted to Assistant National Security Advisor Brent Scowcroft. The report was a response to questions raised during a SRG meeting held on 19 June 1975. The report gave a detailed account of the implications for US interests if it pursued a neutral approach in the Angolan conflict, while expanding on the feasibility of the diplomatic and political measures outlined in the Davis Task Force report of 13 June 1975. The diplomatic option highlighted the concerns of the DOD outlining that "Defense questions the wisdom of publicly linking US prestige in confrontation with the Soviets over Angola, which would either reduce our own flexibility to provide aid or culminate in another apparent US defeat".<sup>51</sup> This provides further evidence that it was not just Davis and the African Bureau who were opposed action in Angola. The report also outlined that if the diplomatic effort was not successful, the US could seek to actively engage the situation and support the FNLA

and/or UNITA, although it explicitly warned “we would have to commit US resources and prestige to a situation where the outcome would still be in doubt and over which we can exercise only limited influence at best”.<sup>52</sup> In essence, these conclusions were the same as the ones suggested by Davis; primarily, that a covert operation would be exposed and the fallout that would result in terms of US prestige would outweigh Angola’s intrinsic significance. Drawing a direct link to events in South Vietnam, the report outlined “such exposure might be taken as a signal that events in Southeast Asian have not sapped our determination to protect our interests”, however, “[it would] have a negative impact in our relations with the socialist and third world states, some African states, the MPLA, and with large requests [sic] of the US public and Congress”.<sup>53</sup> Therefore, the inherent dangers of selecting the covert programme were emphasized in a final push to deter Kissinger from choosing it. However, at this time Kissinger was focused on the impact of Vance’s discussions with Mobutu.

On 27 June 1975, Vance met with Kissinger to report back on his discussions with Mobutu, advising him that the US should give substantially more funds to Holden and Savimbi through Zaire. More interesting though was the assertion by Kissinger that “if we do it, we should not do it half-heartedly. Can we win? [... and] my disposition is, if we do it at all, we should try to win.”<sup>54</sup> In light of his later statements in which he portrays the decision to covertly intervene in Angola to attempt to “balance” the situation, the evidence illustrates that he chose Angola in order send a clear message to the Soviets that the US would not be pushed back. It also provided him with further encouragement to push the active option at the decisive NSC meeting on Angola later that day.

While Kissinger wished to win in Angola, he acknowledged that the situation was not ideal and admitted “this is an area where no one can be sure of the judgements”,<sup>55</sup> yet this did not deter him from continuing to influence Ford towards a more active response to events in Angola. He outlined the first two options, neutrality and a diplomatic offensive, but without much fervour as he told Ford “an interagency effort has developed options, none of which I am in wild agreement with”.<sup>56</sup> On neutrality, Kissinger summarized that while there were some advantages, such as avoiding a costly involvement in a situation that may be beyond US control and protecting the US from international and African criticism, the

disadvantages were greater. He predicted that the MPLA would come to dominate Angola and the country would subsequently “go in a leftward direction; and Zaire would conclude we have disinterested ourselves in that part of the world and move towards anti-Americanism”.<sup>57</sup> Similarly, on the option of pursuing diplomatic measures Kissinger precluded his assessment by informing Ford “as for the second course, my Department agrees, but I don’t”, and proceeded to outline that such action would involve the US having to engage in talks with “the Soviets, the Yugoslavs, and others, to lessen arms shipments to the MPLA, get Portugal to exert its authority, and encourage cooperation among the groups”.<sup>58</sup> The fundamental problem with pursuing such action was that it required all three elements to coalesce in order to create a peaceful climate in Angola and its chances were at best minimal as “we must recognize, of course, that our leverage is limited particularly with regard to the Soviets and Portuguese”.<sup>59</sup> However, Kissinger firmly cautioned against such an option by once again appealing to Ford’s conservative foreign policy outlook: “if we appeal to the Soviets not to be active, it will be a sign of weakness; for us to police it is next to impossible, and we would be bound to do nothing”.<sup>60</sup> Yet while such an approach could be seen as weakness, the alternative was far worse if the US intervened and lost. This was at the crux of Davis’ argument. There were no easy options but there were more severe consequences for choosing the riskiest course.

Kissinger saved his enthusiasm for the final option which advocated covert action by supporting the FNLA and UNITA with arms and money. Not surprisingly Kissinger continued his preference to do this through Zaire, arguing that

if we move to arms supplies, it would be best to do so through Mobutu, but we could give some money directly to Roberto and Savimbi [... in the case of Roberto] there is need for money to increase the discipline of his organizations. The agency [CIA] has weapons that it could get [*less than 1 line not declassified*] into Zaire to control the situation with Mobutu as the front man.<sup>61</sup>

In addition, the spectre of Vietnam loomed large during the meeting and especially during the debate on pursuing active engagement. CIA Director William Colby’s warning of disadvantages and Ford’s subsequent dismissal

of such concerns illustrates the schism within the administration on foreign policy toward Third World countries. On the prospect of funnelling aid to the FNLA through Zaire, Colby agreed that this course of action would have an effect in Angola and also potentially smooth US–Zairian relations. However, he cautioned against doing so as the Soviets could ensure a protracted conflict. The result of this would inevitably expose CIA efforts and cause a confrontation with Congress. He emphasised that action

would be matched by the Soviets and there could be increased fighting and there would be no happy ending. I don't think we can put up a large enough sum to wrap it up quickly, and, with CIA's own present exposure, to get away without a great deal of criticism.<sup>62</sup>

Colby was right to be cautious. The CIA was under sustained pressure at this time from Congress, specifically from the Church and Pike Committees. These committees were established to investigate revelations in the media centring on the abuses of power and illegal activities of the CIA. However, Kissinger ignored the domestic consequences outlined by Colby. Instead he castigated Colby and those advocating a diplomatic approach stating that

I am not against diplomacy, but you can do that only if you know where you go if you fail. To launch a campaign against arms supply and not know where you're going afterward is an impotent policy. We would be the first victims of failure.<sup>63</sup>

However, his tactics in Angola mimicked this statement. There was no real agreement of how the US would react if the tide turned, even if it was in their favour. It was a glaring weakness that haunted the Ford administration's Angolan policy from its inception and indeed helped accelerate its eventual downfall in early 1976.

However, the path of covert intervention which Kissinger had advocated throughout June 1975 clearly resonated with Ford as he also dismissed Colby's and Secretary of Defense James Schlesinger's warnings by asserting that once the MPLA gained a foothold it would result in Angola being lost. This decisiveness is surprising given that Ford's lack of knowledge on the specifics of Angola were evident during the meeting, and

perhaps even more so given that renowned conservative Schlesinger had expressed reservations about trying to counter the Soviets in Angola. The rationale behind his argument was that if the US were to act it had to be prepared to win at any cost as a defeat would be detrimental. He pointed out that Roberto was not an effective conduit to deliver a victory in Angola and since this was not a scenario where the US could be confident of winning, he recommended that the US should remain neutral. However, Ford's mind was made up, in no small part due to the influence exercised by Kissinger throughout June 1975. He proclaimed "it seems to me that doing nothing is unacceptable. As for diplomatic efforts, it is naïve to think that's going to happen".<sup>64</sup> The whole meeting is perhaps best summed up by Jussi Hanhimäki who writes: "in the end, there was no real debate. Kissinger had clearly convinced Ford that, in the aftermath of the collapse in Vietnam, Angola was a test case of the credibility of the Ford administration's foreign policy".<sup>65</sup> However, this interpretation is open to debate. While there is little evidence in the declassified records to date to show that Ford and Kissinger discussed Angola at length, there were conflicting views over Angolan policy amongst Kissinger and his staff, the result of which was a sustained opposition to Kissinger's intent to intervene to support the FNLA and UNITA in the Angolan Civil War.

## **Conclusion**

In his insightful account of the Angolan crisis, Gleijeses writes that "the discussion about Angola began very late and ended very quickly".<sup>66</sup> The prolonged debate over Angolan policy stretched out over June and July 1975, yet what is apparent is Kissinger's repeated dismissal of voices of opposition. The option to intervene was heavily pushed by Kissinger at every stage throughout June and the influence of the failure in Vietnam was palpable. On the findings of the Davis Task Force report, Andrew Downer Crain argues it "was actually a realistic assessment of the situation – they recommended the diplomatic option not because they naively thought it would work, but because they realistically recognized that the other options were worse".<sup>67</sup> Yet it was not just the Davis Task Force report that argued against covert action, the DOD and PPS Director Winston Lord also raised concerns at various stages throughout June 1975. Nevertheless, Kissinger

rejected all apprehension of US involvement on the basis that the US would be seen as weak if they did not engage the Soviets in Angola. His thinking is perhaps best summed up by a point made by Kissinger himself in a memorandum presented at the decisive NSC meeting on 27 June 1975 which framed the active role as thus:

In addition to our substantive interest in the outcome, playing an active role would demonstrate that events in Southeast Asia have not lessened our determination to protect our interest. In sum, we face an opportunity – albeit with substantial risks – to pre-empt the probable loss to Communism of a key developing country at a time of great uncertainty over our will and determination to remain the preeminent leader and defender of freedom in the West.<sup>68</sup>

Hal Horan later reflected:

I think he [Kissinger] had a sense that in the post-Vietnam period he was frustrated about the fact that we may as a country look weak and the Soviets look strong. He couldn't really let the Soviets get away with moving into Angola where neither of our interests really were very great [...]. But the problem was, you know, the country was not in an aggressive mood. We were still licking our wounds".<sup>69</sup>

So even by Horan's analysis, Davis' and Lord's views were viable. The problem was not that others saw the US as weak, the real issue was that the domestic consensus was fragmented, and that substantial damage would be done to US credibility if the US intervened in Angola and then had to withdraw again. For his part, Davis has been denigrated by Kissinger as the sole opposition to US action, but the evidence showed he was part of a larger group that disagreed with the way Kissinger was manoeuvring the country into another Third World conflict where no vital US national interest was at stake.

Such tunnel vision from Kissinger resulted in a missed opportunity to engage African states such as Nigeria, Zaire and Tanzania, and Zambia who at various stages throughout June 1975 indicated that they were not content with seeing Angola turn into a theatre of Cold War competition. By ignoring Zaire's request at the beginning of the month, Mobutu decided to

gamble and instigate a risky strategy to get Kissinger's attention. His decision to expel Hinton, another official who questioned the necessity of Angolan action, cleared the path for Kissinger to send in pro-interventionists such as Vance and the new US Ambassador to Zaire Walter Cutler, to assess what role Mobutu was willing to play in the funnelling of arms to Roberto and Savimbi. Yet if Kissinger was truly objective he would have conceded that the US did not have the upper hand in Angola, and realistically could not escalate, nor keep any covert operation under wraps for a significant amount of time. The wisest course of action would have been to engage with African countries in order for them to create a united African front to challenge the Soviets over their arms shipments to Angola. The Davis Task Force report acknowledged that US leverage to coerce the Soviets or the Portuguese unilaterally was limited, but even this report failed to see the benefits of getting the Africans to apply pressure to the Soviets. It would have served a dual function of limiting US involvement which would have been welcomed domestically and it would have increased the prestige of the US in the region by demonstrating to black Africa that the US did not bracket them as Cold War pawns. As a result, the Soviets would have been seen as the aggressors in the region and would come under criticism from the Africans and from the rest of the international community.

Nonetheless, Kissinger in his rigid determination to project US power in the immediate post-Vietnam period consistently undermined any opposition to US action in Angola, and used his unique position of being both Secretary of State and National Security Advisor to influence Ford. As Ford's speechwriter Robert Hartmann later observed "Ford's reliance on Kissinger was almost complete in the field of foreign affairs, and Henry made 'the most of it' ".<sup>70</sup> Such a reliance set the US on course to authorize a covert intervention in Angola by late July 1975.

1 An example of this can be seen in Roger Morris' comments that Davis was

brought back to Washington by Kissinger in part on the basis of his Chile experience, Davis was now, as he dissented on Angola, further pigeonholed as having lost his nerve to judge policy precisely because of his tour to Santiago".

See Roger Morris, "A Rare Resignation in Protest: Nat Davis and Angola," the *Washington Monthly* 7, no. 12 (February 1976): 30. According to one witness Morris spoke to "Kissinger figured from the start that Angola would be one Chile too many for Nat", but as Morris observes



- “the larger tragedy and absurdity of this, of course, was that the Secretary of State somehow could not ‘figure’ that it was also ‘one Chile too many’ for most of us” (ibid.).
- 2 Daniel Spikes, *Angola and the Politics of Intervention: From Local Bush War to Chronic Crisis in Southern Africa* (Jefferson: McFarland and Company, 1993), 154.
  - 3 Henry Kissinger, *Years of Renewal* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1999), 802. Kissinger explains that Angola belonged to a long line of covert military operations such as “Guatemala, the Bay of Pigs, the war in Laos, and the Kurdish operation” which stood out because they were not covert in the classical sense and in the Angolan situation, Congress would be briefed on what was going on (ibid.).
  - 4 Jussi Hanhimäki, *The Flawed Architect: Henry Kissinger and American Foreign Policy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 410.
  - 5 Memcon, Ford, Kissinger and Scowcroft, 9.40 am–10.21 am, 6 June 1975, Oval Office, White House, Washington, DC, Box 12, Meetings, 1974–1975, GRFL: 4.
  - 6 Secretary’s Principals’ and Regional’ Staff Meeting, 9 June 1975, 8.11 am, Box 7, Transcripts of Henry Kissinger 1973–1977, NARA, Maryland: 11. Davis embarked on his second African trip on 14 June 1975 and returned 29 June 1975.
  - 7 Ibid.: 14. A telegram from Luanda, Angola reported that the “MPLA now has its hands on or near all of Luanda’s jugulars”. See Emtel, AmConsul Luanda Angola to SecState Washington, DC, 11 June 1975, 111425Z, Public Library of US Diplomacy, Wikileaks: 3.
  - 8 Secretary’s Principals’ and Regional’ Staff Meeting, 9 June 1975, 15.
  - 9 Ibid.: 16.
  - 10 Ibid.
  - 11 Ibid. US–Zairian relations reached new levels of tension after Mobutu accused the US of being behind a coup to overthrow him in mid-June 1975.
  - 12 Memorandum, Davis to Kissinger, “Angola – Courses of Action,” 12 June 1975, Box 22, Angola 1975, RG 59, Records of Joseph Sisco, 1951–1976, NARA, Maryland: 1. Davis also mentioned that “the CIA representative explicitly disclaimed any judgement on the risks involved in the courses of action outlined in his paper from disclosure through Congressional leaks”. The memorandum was to be sent to Kissinger through Sisco for approval, however, Sisco instructed it to be sent to the Secretary without his signature as he disagreed with Davis’ analysis. INR staffer William Hyland also thought that the memo should not go forward to Kissinger.
  - 13 Memorandum for the Record, 40 Committee Meeting, 5 June 1975, 10 am, Washington, DC, Document No. 106, Vol. XXVIII, 1969–1976, FRUS: 247.
  - 14 Memorandum, Lord to Kissinger, “An Action Program for Angola,” 13 June 1975, Box 22, Angola 1975, RG 59, Records of Joseph Sisco, 1951–1976, NARA, Maryland: 1.
  - 15 Ibid.
  - 16 Ibid.: 2.
  - 17 Kissinger, *Years of Renewal*, 801. The Church Committee was a Select Committee on Intelligence chaired by Senator Frank Church (D-Idaho) which conducted investigations into the CIA and Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) activities in the wake of the Watergate scandal. One of the most controversial episodes during that time-period was the overthrow of socialist President Salvador Allende; Davis came under scrutiny as he was the US Ambassador to Chile at the time of his death on 11 September 1973.
  - 18 Response to NSSM 224, “United States Policy Toward Angola,” 13 June 1975, Box 36, NSSM 224, US Policy Toward Angola (4), US Institutional Files, GRFL: 5. The introduction and summary sections of the report feature in the FRUS volume for Southern Africa; however, the detailed sections of the report containing the pros and cons of each option are annexed.
  - 19 Ibid.: 77.
  - 20 Ibid.: 77.

- 21 Ibid.: 80–81.
- 22 Ibid.: 83.
- 23 Nathaniel Davis, “The Angola Decision of 1975: A Personal Memoir,” *Foreign Affairs* 57, no. 1 (Fall 1978): 112.
- 24 Kissinger, *Years of Renewal*, 800. For a record of Kissinger’s comments see Memcon, Kissinger Sisco, Ambassador Vance, Mulcahy, and Cutler, 20 June 1975, Document 111, Vol. XXVIII, 1969–1976, FRUS: 259.
- 25 Charles Stuart Kennedy and Edward W. Mulcahy. “Interview with Edward W. Mulcahy,” published 1989, [www.loc.gov/item/mfdipbib000843](http://www.loc.gov/item/mfdipbib000843).
- 26 Thomas Noer, “International Credibility and Political Survival: The Ford Administration’s Intervention in Angola,” *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 23, no. 4 (Fall 1993): 775.
- 27 Trevor B. McCrisken, *American Exceptionalism and the Legacy of Vietnam: US Foreign Policy since 1974* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 38.
- 28 Spikes, *Angola and the Politics of Intervention*, 150.
- 29 Morris, “A Rare Resignation in Protest,” 28.
- 30 Piero Gleijeses, *Conflicting Missions: Havana, Washington and Africa, 1959–1976* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 356. A paper outlining the various ways that the US could covertly support the FNLA and UNITA was submitted on 11 June 1975. See Memorandum, “Angola,” 11 June 1975, Document 108, Vol. XXVIII, 1969–1976, FRUS: 251.
- 31 Emtel, AmEmbassy Kinshasa, Zaire to SecState Washington, DC, 2 June 1975, 021125Z, Public Library of US Diplomacy, Wikileaks: 2. Hinton raised the possibility that the Soviets could counter by citing Chinese support for the FNLA, yet Bula

really had no good answers, other than to reiterate his belief that if it were not for the MPLA, Soviet support for them, and the pro-MPLA bias of some members of the Portuguese government, [the] Angolan situation would be obtainable.

(Ibid.)

- 32 Emtel, AmEmbassy Kinshasa Zaire to SecState Washington, DC, 9 June 1975, 090930Z, Public Library of US Diplomacy, Wikileaks: 1–2.
- 33 Ibid.
- 34 Issues Paper on Angola, 14 June 1975, NSA Country Files, Africa General, Angola (1), GRFL: 4.
- 35 Memcon, Ford, Kissinger and Scowcroft, 9.22 am–10.24 am, 16 June 1975, Oval Office, White House, Washington, DC, Box 12, Meetings, 1974–1975 Meetings, GRFL: 2.
- 36 Ibid.
- 37 Ibid. When Ford enquired about the CIA having a plan, Scowcroft informed him “they haven’t a position really”.
- 38 Memcon, Ford, Kissinger and Scowcroft, 9.45 am–10.24 am, 18 June 1975, Oval Office, White House, Washington, DC, Box 12, NSA Memcons, GRFL: 2.
- 39 Memcon, Kissinger, Sisco, Vance, Mulcahy and Walter Cutler, 20 June 1975, Secretary’s Office, Washington, DC, Document No. 111, Vol. XXVIII, 1969–1976, FRUS: 257. Yet Kissinger was also clear in expressing to Vance that he was to follow his instructions, not the advice of the African Bureau: “I don’t really care what AF thinks. I just want you to do what I tell you or there’s no sense in your going” (ibid.).
- 40 Ibid.: 257. Kissinger continued by stating that while the US was interested in addressing the Angolan issue, and acknowledged that Mobutu was applying pressure, he wanted Vance to make it clear that this was not the de facto way of extracting concessions from the US as he said “we

won't be pushed. I won't yield on Davis. He must understand that. Davis will not follow Hinton" (ibid.).

- 41 Ibid.: 259. He continued, "I'm not sure we should go in to achieve a total victory à la Vietnam. What we are going to do is break the psychological back of the non-Neto people, since they see no US support" (ibid.).
- 42 Ibid.: 260. Kissinger also told Vance to not be too forceful as he said "don't push Mobutu. Just tell him we've had a rough year with other preoccupations" (ibid.).
- 43 The Nakuru talks were held between 15–22 June 1975. It resulted in all three Angolan liberation groups recommitting to the principles agreed in Alvor, Portugal in January 1975. However, the fighting resumed within weeks of the meeting.
- 44 Emtel, AmEmbassy Lusaka, Zambia to SecState Washington, DC, 3 June 1975, 031531Z, Box 8, NSA Country Files, Zambia, GRFL: 2. The editorial was published on 1 June 1975. The severe criticism of Kissinger and Ford in the piece resulted in Kissinger requesting the African Bureau to immediately provide him with recommendations on how to respond to the editorial. See NSC Memo, Hal Horan to Scowcroft, "A Zambian Press Editorial Attack on the President and the Secretary of State," 4 June 1975, Box 8, NSA Country Files, Zambia, GRFL.
- 45 Ibid.: 3.
- 46 Ibid.: 4.
- 47 Emtel, AmEmbassy Kinshasa, Zaire to SecState Washington, DC, 23 June 1975, Zaire to SecState NODIS (1), NSA Country Files, GRFL: 2.
- 48 Ibid.: 3.
- 49 Memorandum, Horan to Kissinger, 26 June 1975, Box 36, NSSM 224, US Policy Toward Angola (1), US Institutional Files, GRFL: 2.
- 50 Emtel, AmEmbassy Dar es Salaam Tanzania to SecState Washington, DC, 16 June 1975, 161230Z, Public Library of US Diplomacy, Wikileaks: 1–2. The government owned paper, *Daily News* (Dar es Salaam), also picked up on this story as an editorial was printed stating

the real enemy of Angola is not any of the three liberation movements. It is colonial oppression. If the three leaders see one another as an enemy to be eliminated then the real enemy of Angola would cease to be colonialism. It would be them and their greed for power.

(Ibid.: 2)

- 51 Report, Special Sensitive Memorandum Regarding the Response to NSSM 224, 25 June 1975, Box 36, NSSM 224, US Policy Toward Angola (1), US Institutional Files, GRFL: 8.
- 52 Ibid.: 11.
- 53 Ibid.: 14. It was also suggested that the moderates in Portugal would be embarrassed and that this would cause further tensions between them and the radical elements of the AFM. In addition, it was argued that "if widespread tribal or racial massacres occur (a distinct possibility), our support for one or more of the contending forces could become a significant political issue, with widespread negative domestic and international repercussions" (ibid.).
- 54 Memcon, Kissinger, Assistant Secretary for East Asian and Pacific Affairs Robert Ingersoll, Ambassador Sheldon Vance, Mulcahy, Country Director for Zaire Walter Cutler, 27 June 1975, Secretary's Office, Washington, DC, Document No. 112, Vol. XXVIII, 1969–1976, FRUS: 261. Vance told Kissinger that Mobutu believed "Holden's superiority has disappeared due to the heavy Soviet arms shipments" and that the US had to move quickly if they wished to still compete in the region: "the stuff [arms shipments] should get into the hands of Holden and

- Savimbi in the next month or two” (ibid.: 262). Vance also informed Kissinger that the Soviets could not escalate as fast as the US could due to a lack of a supply network in the region (ibid.).
- 55 Minutes of an NSC Meeting, 27 June 1975, 2.30 pm–3.30 pm, Cabinet Room, White House, Washington, DC, Document No. 113, Vol. XXVIII, 1969–1976, FRUS: 266.
- 56 Ibid.
- 57 Ibid.: 267.
- 58 Ibid.
- 59 Talking Points for Secretary Kissinger, National Security Meeting on Angola, 27 June 1975, NSC Meetings, GRFL: 2. Indeed, there were multiple reports from the US Consulate in Luanda, Angola and from the US Embassy in Lisbon, Portugal outlining how the Portuguese had lost control in Angola throughout June 1975.
- 60 Minutes of a NSC Meeting, 27 June 1975, 267.
- 61 Ibid.: 267–268.
- 62 Ibid.: 268–269.
- 63 Ibid.: 268.
- 64 Ibid.: 269. At the conclusion of the meeting Ford ordered Colby to submit a “re-study aimed at doing something that looks at levels of assistance, the speed and the resources”. The CIA report was submitted on 2 July 1975. The rivalry between Kissinger and Schlesinger is well known, and Kissinger took every opportunity to undercut him when speaking to Ford as illustrated when he told Ford in early June 1975 “Schlesinger says détente results from American weakness, but your [Ford’s] phraseology is correct: that it results from our strength. The change in the last five months is amazing”, and when Ford raised how the Chinese viewed the situation, Kissinger replied “Successes – and failures – feed on themselves. Our conservatives must understand that we are squeezing the Soviets like never before”. See Memcon, Ford, Kissinger and Scowcroft, 9.40 am–10.21 am, 6 June 1975, Oval Office, White House, Washington, DC, Meetings, 1974–1975, GRFL: 2.
- 65 Hanhimäki, *The Flawed Architect*, 412. Hanhimäki also asserts that Ford’s “lack of knowledge of Africa was palpable” during the meeting (ibid.: 411).
- 66 Gleijeses, *Conflicting Missions*, 356.
- 67 Andrew Downer Crain, *The Ford Presidency: A History* (Jefferson: McFarland and Company, 2009), 216. Crain observes that Ford was firm in his conviction that the diplomatic option would not work, but thought it was naïve of Ford to think that Roberto would win and that Savimbi would not be tarnished by his association with South Africa (ibid.).
- 68 Background Paper From Henry Kissinger, Meeting of the NSC, 27 June 1975, 2.30 pm, The Cabinet Room, White House, Washington, DC, NSC Meetings, GRFL: 5–6.
- 69 Charles Stuart Kennedy and Harold E. Horan. “Interview with Harold E. Horan,” published 1989, [www.loc.gov/item/mfdipbib000529/](http://www.loc.gov/item/mfdipbib000529/).
- 70 Robert T. Hartmann, *Palace Politics: An Inside Account of the Ford Years* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1980), 286.

## **4      The approval of Operation IAFEATURE**

### **Introduction**

The pivotal shift in US–Angolan policy occurred in July 1975 when President Ford approved the CIA plan to covertly assist the FNLA and UNITA in the Angolan Civil War on 18 July. The timeline of events is well established in the literature on US–Angolan policy but there is a distinct lack of analysis of the opposition to US intervention in the Angolan Civil War.<sup>1</sup> Most studies refer only to Davis’ 12 July memorandum and to his additional memoranda sent on 14 July and 16 July. However, newly available material illustrates that there was also substantial disagreement with Kissinger’s view in a 40 Committee meeting held on 14 July 1975. This helps to put together a more detailed analysis of the level of discontent that existed within the State Department from other officials who felt that the US was being dragged into another open-ended conflict with no apparent national interest.

Specifically, the fear of Congressional and public reprisal to such a covert operation if exposed was paramount in this debate. Yet this logic was dismissed as Kissinger remained convinced that the US had to compete with the Soviets in southern Africa. However, the rationale for intervention was always unrealistic. There was little chance that American objectives could be met in a country where the favoured Angolan liberation groups were weak and in the case of the FNLA, led by the incompetent individual Holden Roberto. Furthermore, the lack of any vital national interest ensured that when such an operation was exposed, the Ford administration could not make a strong case to justify intervention to the American public or to

Congress. The latter posed a significant problem as Congress was already on the offensive against the executive branch in 1975 with the aforementioned Church and Pike Committees.

This chapter outlines in detail the opposition put forward by Davis' to US involvement in the Angolan situation and the subsequent criticism and questioning of his motives for doing so. In particular it argues that there has been a deliberate attempt to undermine the validity of Davis' attempts to navigate Kissinger away from intervention in Angola. Therefore, it directly argues against views presented by some scholars such as Daniel Spikes who argues that during the summer of 1975

Davis was still busy yanking every bureaucratic string within reach to get himself painlessly off the Angolan hook [... and] in all of Davis's arguments one voice rose above all others – that of a worried bureaucrat desperately trying to bug out of the spook business.<sup>2</sup>

While it is fair to say that Davis' reputation was somewhat compromised due to his previous role in Chile at the time of Allende's overthrow in 1973, his views on the Angolan issue were grounded in a realistic appraisal of both the local situation in Angola and the fractured political climate in Washington, DC. Crucially, Davis recognized that Kissinger had dismissed the domestic mood in post-Vietnam America, and foresaw a situation where all of Kissinger's Angolan objectives would be doomed to fail once any covert operation was exposed. This would ironically contribute to exacerbating the perceived credibility problem Kissinger was desperately seeking to nullify.

This rationale links into the wider point, primarily that Davis was not a lone ranger arguing against Kissinger. While the primary evidence makes it clear that the opposition to Kissinger was never united, many of Davis' objections were similarly raised by Under Secretary of State Joseph Sisco, CIA Director William Colby and the INR Director William Hyland. This section examines the predominance of the Vietnam experience in the mindsets of US officials and their views of covert assistance to the FNLA and UNITA. It shows that the argument against covert intervention in Angola was actually more prominent than the argument for intervention in the discussions leading up to Ford's decision on 18 July 1975. In addition, it explores the peculiar effort made by Hyland in his memoirs to distance

himself from opposing Kissinger. This is in stark contrast to the primary evidence which shows he ultimately shared the same views as Davis and Colby on Angola.<sup>3</sup> Finally, this chapter shows that the risk of exposure was a real danger even in the weeks preceding Ford's decision as newspapers both foreign and domestic began to report levels of US involvement in Angola. Additionally, the situation on the ground in Angola in July 1975 meant that a covert operation was almost futile by the time it was approved. This was especially significant given the sudden Portuguese decision to withdraw all resources to the Angolan capital, Luanda. The unintended result was in effect the creation of a perimeter around the city which in effect protected the MPLA who had successfully expelled the FNLA earlier that month. Furthermore, the breakdown of communication between the upper echelons of the State Department and the US Consulate in Angola ensured that there was a level of confusion which exacerbated regional anxieties. As a result, Mobutu became more agitated with the US for its laboured efforts to intervene as his expectations were high after the Vance discussions at the end of June 1975.

### **A lone ranger? The Nathaniel Davis memoranda**

In the weeks leading up to the Angolan decision, Davis and Sisco tried to persuade Kissinger that Angola was not the right place or the right time to get embroiled in a proxy face-off against the Soviets. In subsequent years Kissinger has portrayed this type of attitude as a weakness. In his memoirs Kissinger recalls that "Davis turned out to be willing, indeed eager, to implement conventional wisdom, which meant non-intervention" and he "clearly had no stomach for covert operations or, in the wake of his experience before the Church Committee, for a new confrontation with Congress".<sup>4</sup> Kissinger has also stated that if the US did not intervene then all of sub-Saharan Africa could have been potentially lost to the Soviet sphere of influence. He claims he argued that African "countries can only conclude that the US is no longer a factor in Southern Africa. We will pay for it for decades. It will affect their orientation".<sup>5</sup> This recollection is even more surprising as it illustrates how Kissinger swiftly escalated Africa from a region of little importance in US foreign policy, to one where the US had to demonstrate its power or risk Soviet domination in the region. The

connection with the events in Vietnam is unmistakable. Indeed, Kissinger admits this in his memoirs when he belittles Davis for not factoring this into his Angolan analysis: “it predates you, Nat, by many months, but coupled with Indochina, it is not a trivial thing which is happening in Southern Africa”.<sup>6</sup> This demeaning attitude was an attempt to prove that Davis was unable to see the nuances of Kissinger’s global Cold War thinking. Yet Davis’ objections were not based on a lack of understanding of the Cold War struggle, but on a more realistic appraisal of where the US stood in the domestic and international arena. In light of a shattered domestic consensus broken by the war in Vietnam and the scandal of the Watergate incident there were constraints on US foreign policy. It was an error by Kissinger to ignore them as those conditions could not be merely dismissed as legislative meddling. Kissinger was correct in his assertion that the Angolan situation predated Davis but so too did the fractured environment in Washington, DC. This is a crucial point in understanding the naivety of Kissinger in the Angolan context. The American public and Congress were seeking a more nuanced approach to foreign affairs to avoid future tragedies like the one that ultimately led to the US involvement in Vietnam. In that manner, Davis’ willingness to express his serious opposition to Kissinger’s Angolan interventionist juggernaut was far more grounded in political realities rather than a fear of covert operations in principle.

On 12 July 1975, Davis wrote a memorandum to Under Secretary of State Joseph Sisco strongly advocating that the US not get involved in Angola. He outlined multiple problems with potential covert action and the sensitivity of such action in light of domestic considerations. Davis’ main criticism revolved around the impracticality of keeping the operation a secret. He argued that

the Soviets will become aware of our decision almost immediately [... and] enjoy greater freedom of action in the covert supply of arms, equipment and ammunition [... and] can escalate the level of their aid more readily than we can.<sup>7</sup>

Therefore, Davis’ position was that such an operation would further damage the US and would only serve to undermine US credibility even further as they could not compete with the Soviets in this particular scenario. In addition, he cautioned the perils of domestic disclosure stating that it was



highly unlikely that the operation would remain a secret when there were multiple numbers of the Senate and Congress who needed to be briefed. The chances of a leak were high and it would certainly result in a public confrontation once the news broke. Davis also displayed good judgement in his analysis of the African context. He pointed to the corrupt nature of many of the African states whose Cold War loyalties were fickle at best. This is apparent in his assertion that the US

must count on the likelihood that the Soviets are intercepting and reading Zaire internal military and political traffic [... and] Zaire, Portugal, Angola, Congo-Brazzaville, Zambia and other neighbouring territories are infiltrated by a wide variety of agents and operatives of every political color – where money can buy many things”.<sup>8</sup>

Therefore, it was only a matter of when it would be exposed and spark the inevitable heated exchanges between the legislative and executive branches. However, a distinction must be made at this point. Contrary to what Kissinger and others have stated about Davis opposing the Angolan operation in principle, he was not against interventionist policies. Instead he argued for selective interventions in which the US held the upper hand to decisively win any engagement against the Soviets.

The memory of Vietnam is evident in Davis’ thoughts as he agreed that if the operation was to be authorized it should be on a large scale to avoid a repeat of another Vietnam. He stated

I believe the Secretary is right in his conviction – if I understand his views – that if we go in, we must go in quickly, massively and decisively enough to avoid tempting, gradual, mutual escalation that characterized Vietnam during the 1965–67 period.<sup>9</sup>

In an effort to frame his argument to Kissinger’s thinking he warned that

unless we are prepared to go as far as necessary, in world balance of power terms the worst possible outcome would be a test of will and strength which we lose [... and] the CIA paper makes clear that in the best of circumstances we won’t be able to win. If we are to have a test

of strength with the Soviets, we should find a more advantageous place.<sup>10</sup>

This is also reflected by Roger Morris who argues that “the central thrust of his [Davis] recommendation was not so much that the policy was mistaken, but that it would ‘get out’ ”.<sup>11</sup> However, Morris contends that Davis’ arguments missed the main political and intellectual point of Kissinger’s Angolan policy: to use the Angolan Civil War as a demonstration to both the Russians and Congress that US “post-Vietnam diplomacy had not lost its fangs”.<sup>12</sup> However, Morris’ views are misguided; Davis’ point was that if the operation was exposed the negative reaction in the American media and public perception would render the whole exercise futile. It would show the Soviets that the US could not effectively compete with them in the Third World and also provide the legislative branch with an opportunity to portray themselves as checking the foreign policy excesses of the executive branch.

In addition, Davis directly questioned the objectives of the covert programme. He disputed the CIA’s claim that arming Roberto and Savimbi would “discourage further resort to arms and civil war [... instead he argued that] so far, the arming of the various factions has fed the civil war, not discouraged it”.<sup>13</sup> In trying to adhere to lessons of the Vietnam experience, Davis wrote:

the [CIA] paper gives us no clear explanation where the courses of action described will take us [...] and rather hopefully expressing the view that restoration of some sort of triangular “balance” [...] will produce a peaceful, negotiated, collective solution (which the record in Angola and experience elsewhere in Africa indicate is most unlikely).<sup>14</sup>

Therefore, Davis foresaw that US involvement would only escalate the Angolan Civil War and produce counter-escalations from the Soviets who had a far greater degree of manoeuvrability in terms of the scale of aid they could provide to the MPLA. In concluding, Davis framed the Angolan situation by realistically asking “how can the US achieve a level of parity with the Soviets when they only are putting in a few tens of thousands of dollars, when the Soviets funnelling millions”.<sup>15</sup> However, his actions were

not having the desired effect and he felt his messages were not making their way directly to Kissinger.

On 16 July 1975, Davis wrote again to Sisco attempting to point out that due to the rapidly changing nature of the Angolan conflict and with South Africa now reportedly involved, “if it were not true before, it seems clear now that it is unrealistic to think in terms of a program that could be both effective and covert”.<sup>16</sup> Furthermore, the domestic concerns that Davis raised were increasingly valid given that there were a series of Congressional hearings being held throughout the summer of 1975. During these hearings Davis testified and manoeuvred around some of the direct questioning about potential US intervention in Angola. On the same day, Sisco, Colby and Hyland were lobbying against intervention during a 40 Committee meeting held to discuss the covert nature of the Angolan operation.

### **Dissenting voices: congress and the 40 Committee**

On 14 July 1975, as part of a series of hearings on US policy towards southern Africa, the Senate Subcommittee on African Affairs discussed US policy towards Angola. In an indication of the low level of importance attached to Africa at the time, only two senators were present, the Chairman of the Committee, freshman Senator Dick Clark (D-Iowa) and fellow freshman Senator Joseph Biden (D-Delaware). Yet the opening statement from Clark warned against playing Cold War games in Angola. He argued that the US should make it clear that it wished for peaceful relations with whatever group took power in November 1975 and that the US should commit that “it will not interfere in determining what the nature of that government will be”.<sup>17</sup> However, Clark also addressed the disclosure of covert action issue when he stated:

many believe that the United States has been covertly supporting one of the liberation movements. A Cold War view of the world might dictate that the United States should give military support to one of the movements. It might be argued by some that this would be the only way to protect American strategic and economic interests [...] but the

US experience in dealing with independent African nations should have taught us that such intervention would be a serious mistake.<sup>18</sup>

Addressing Davis, Clark asked if the US was in any way influenced by the decision of the Soviets and the Chinese to provide aid for the liberation groups. Despite Kissinger's frustration with him and the African Bureau and indeed his own internal dissent on the issue, Davis manoeuvred around the question by merely reiterating that the US was still adhering to the arms embargo to Portuguese territories and that the President was in command of any decision to change that policy.<sup>19</sup> Davis circumvented direct answers to other questions on potential US involvement in Angola, throughout the hearing which frustrated Biden in particular.<sup>20</sup>

At the conclusion of his questioning, when the Delaware senator enquired if the US was supporting one Angolan movement over another, Davis evaded a direct answer, instead pointing out that the Portuguese should take more responsibility for bringing the liberation groups together as a peaceful transition through democratic elections would be the best solution in Angola. This led to a pessimistic response from Biden who commented that

for a man to have that much hope about anything deserves our cooperation on this committee. I think you are an amazing fellow to hope that much. I just hope the Portuguese can decide who owns Portugal, let alone what happens in Angola.<sup>21</sup>

Yet as Davis was testifying and avoiding any disclosure of any details of the Angolan operation on the public record, the 40 Committee were discussing arming the FNLA and UNITA through resupplying the Zairian army who were shipping their own stocks to the liberation groups in Angola.

That this meeting has only been recently declassified is important as it clearly shows the increased level of disagreement on the entire Angolan programme from Sisco, Hyland and Colby. Despite their earlier reluctance to endorse the concerns raised in the Task Force report in June, both Sisco and Hyland now took the opportunity to advocate that the US avoid any commitment to Angola. When asked by Kissinger if he agreed with arming Zaire, Sisco expressed his reservations stating "No. I do not think that our interests in Angola are significant enough to warrant covert action. It is

simply not important enough”.<sup>22</sup> When Kissinger continued to press Sisco by enquiring if he was willing to let Angola go communist, Sisco maintained that the US should be prepared to let that happen as there was no compelling US national interest in the region.<sup>23</sup> Similarly Hyland argued that the FNLA and Roberto had proven to be incompetent and the wrong leadership choice to back in Angola. To some extent Kissinger was surprised at such comments and displayed this by lamenting that the “State is committed to see that nothing happens in Angola”.<sup>24</sup> He also defended Roberto by claiming that there was no way the FNLA could compete when it was not being backed like the MPLA. However, undeterred, Hyland was forceful in his conviction and delivered a withering assessment of Roberto by arguing that “Roberto has constantly lost strength, he is weak [... and] Roberto won’t go into the country; he’s weak [... and] he’s had every opportunity to win over the years and hasn’t”.<sup>25</sup>

Furthermore, Hyland argued that the Africans should take more ownership of the situation as

our biggest asset is that we are not involved militarily. We can go and say to the Africans that we are staying out and Africans can face up to the fact that it is the Communists who are sending arms,

but Kissinger rebuked with “What you are saying is that the Soviets and Chinese should take action, but the US should not. That’s what it comes down to”.<sup>26</sup> Such a statement provides a stark contrast to his private efforts to deter the Soviets only days previously when he told Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko “We shouldn’t compete for the Third World. All they do is kick us around. We’re not competing with you”.<sup>27</sup> This attempt to placate the Soviets stood little chance of success. Despite the relative success of the détente policy, Cold War competition for global influence was still considered fair game by the Soviets and also by the US.

Despite these strong views on the weakness of the FNLA and the blunt assessment that the African nations needed to be more vocal in their condemnation of Soviet interference in Angola, Hyland’s memoirs depict a very different version of events. Instead he condemns Davis, stating that the effects of Chile ensured that Davis was “terrified of having anything to do with another crisis [... which subsequently] coloured his outlook and made him a particularly inappropriate choice to monitor the difficult situation that

was developing inside Angola”.<sup>28</sup> This does not align with the primary evidence which shows there was an effort to convince Kissinger that Angola was not worth risking US credibility for. Comparable with Kissinger’s later criticisms, Hyland denigrates Davis’ views as being heavily influenced by the defeat in Vietnam and by claiming that his calls for negotiation on the Angolan issue were the standard State Department solution to problems. He stated that “It was Vietnam all over again, though in microcosm – warring parties that were struggling for power and killing each other would somehow be brought together and would magically settle their differences”.<sup>29</sup> Interestingly the Vietnam influences were more prevalent at the time in the arguments made by those who supported intervention. Indeed, Kissinger received support from Deputy Secretary of Defense William Clements who agreed that the Soviets had to be confronted as he stated “I don’t believe we should walk away from this. [...] and] we can’t let the Communists just do what they want”.<sup>30</sup> However, this rationalization was hardly a ringing endorsement of Kissinger’s plan. Clements’ views were systematic of the failings with Kissinger’s logic on Angola. Specifically, there was no forethought into what would happen if they tried and failed to combat the Soviet influence. The African reaction to such a scenario was not mentioned in any way and the concept of how that would damage US credibility appears to have been completely ignored. Despite the multiple warnings about Congress and the dire state of the FNLA in Angola, there was an unqualified arrogance that the US would win if it committed to intervening. In a wider context there was also little to no consideration of what the US would actually do if they were successful, just a stubborn adherence to the same containment principle that eventually dragged the US deep into the jungles of Vietnam. The fear of losing to the Soviets was central to Kissinger’s decisions, especially in the immediate period after the defeat in Vietnam.

When Colby admitted that he feared Congressional repercussions if the US went into Angola, Kissinger dismissed this as defeatism and rebuked “I’m scared of losing. Is anyone else?”.<sup>31</sup> This fear of losing was engrained in his perception of US credibility among African states which is interesting as the primary evidence shows that until the US defeat in Vietnam, sub-Saharan Africa was significantly low down in his thoughts. This makes it striking that he suddenly envisioned a domino effect in the region if the Soviets gained influence in Angola. It is clear in his statements that

Vietnam and Angola were directly intertwined for Kissinger he argued “if all the surrounding countries see Angola go Communist, they will assume that the US has no will. Coming on top of Vietnam and Indochina their perception of what the US can and will do will be negative”.<sup>32</sup> It must be acknowledged that Kissinger’s point was valid in the case of Zairian pressure, as Mobutu grew increasingly impatient for US aid. However, this should also be judged on the basis of Mobutu pursuing his own agenda and was not directly the result of questioning US credibility after Vietnam. On 14 July 1975 he voiced his concern “over the lack of US Government support to the FNLA [... and] despite Ambassador Vance’s ‘promise’ to obtain further aid for the FNLA, no US aid has been forthcoming to balance recent Soviet assistance to the MPLA”.<sup>33</sup> Mobutu felt the need to express that he “cannot understand the failure of the US Government to take any action [... and] while the Soviets continue to assist the MPLA, neither Zaire nor Roberto has received ‘even one cartridge’ from the US Government”.<sup>34</sup> This pressure helped maintain the pressure on Kissinger to act. As a result, he advocated that Ford provide additional assistance to Zaire as its political influence within Africa was significant. He positioned Zaire as central to US ability to maintain some level of influence in the region by declaring “our political interests in Zaire are equally significant [as the economic interests ...] importance to the stability and ideological orientation of all central Africa and its growing influence in African councils and the Third World”.<sup>35</sup> Despite pressure from Mobutu and the State Department officials advocating different courses of action, Kissinger asked that the State Department prepare a two-page memorandum to present to Ford ahead of the decision to approve covert assistance.

The paper was given to Deputy of the NSA Brent Scowcroft by Sisco on 15 July 1975. One of the points raised included the observation that other African countries had flirted with Soviet support previously but never became hard line communists willing to follow Moscow’s lead. The paper also put Angola in context by stating that

even the worst case – an MPLA victory – will have a marginal impact on the world balance or on Africa. An MPLA government would be no worse than many governments in West and East Africa that have sought Soviet or Chinese aid.<sup>36</sup>

Furthermore, the controversy associated with the inevitable exposure of US covert intervention would highly damage the Ford administration, both domestically and in Africa. The paper argued that

active intervention on the proposed scale could not be concealed from either the Congress, the general public or African elites; it would prove highly disadvantageous to the US; it would run against a policy of non-interventionism. Even the modest Soviet intervention would not seem to justify a US effort because, unfortunately, our actions would be judged in a different light, and whatever credibility we have built up in Africa would be damaged beyond immediate repair.<sup>37</sup>

The spectre of Vietnam continued to be prevalent in the argument against action. In particular, Sisco outlined how the US should have placed more responsibility on regional states to address the situation in Angola rather than risking being sucked unnecessarily into Third World conflicts. The report stressed that

the US cannot be more African than the Africans. If the Africans have been unwilling to pay the small price in material or financial support necessary to strengthen Roberto and Savimbi, then it is highly questionable that the US should take on this task.<sup>38</sup>

Sisco continued that the US should apply the lessons learnt from the Vietnam experience, especially pointing out the long-term significance of getting involved in a phased basis. He stated:

we must consider the ultimate consequences of embarking on the proposed course of incremental involvement: even a massive program, including major arms supply, would not be decisive, but a phased program is bound to fail and only lead to increasing commitments.<sup>39</sup>

Indeed, this fear of escalating commitment is portrayed by PPS member Willard De Pree who recounts that no-one had a problem with Kissinger wanting to be tough with the Soviets but not to the point of throwing the dice.



As De Pree later recalled, Kissinger's primary rationale was to "send a signal to the Soviets that they must not assume that because we had withdrawn from Vietnam, we were weak and would be relaxing our guard or activities elsewhere in the world, in this case in Africa".<sup>40</sup> He also admitted to a fear that Angola had the potential to become another Vietnam style engagement that would gradually escalate into a more serious foreign policy intervention:

I thought that the decision was a mistake, [... the operation] would quickly become known, [and] would likely prompt the Soviets to step up their aid to the MPLA in reply. We were getting drawn into something that we couldn't see the end of. And we didn't hold a strong hand.<sup>41</sup>

This resembles arguments that were put forward by Davis at the time; De Pree had no issue with being tough with the Soviets but not at the expense of enlarging a civil war that would be detrimental to Angolan society and where the US had no chance of winning. Indeed, he outlined that in general he did not see any issues with how the US confronted the Soviets in other parts of the world, but he believed such policies were wrongly applied in the case of Angola, stating that

I didn't have problems with Secretary Kissinger's policy priorities with respect to the Soviet Union, nuclear war, or the Middle East. It was that he didn't consider what was happening in Africa to be of much importance in and of itself; its importance was as an arena for contesting with the Soviet Union.<sup>42</sup>

As such, opposition from Davis and Sisco and views later expressed by De Pree centred more on the error of turning Angola into a Cold War flashpoint which far outweighed its significance, especially as the region was practically ignored in US foreign policy up until the defeat in Vietnam. Some years later, Deputy Secretary of State for African affairs Ed Mulcahy gave his thoughts on how the Angolan situation was perceived at the time when he specified

we were all cautious. We all knew the lessons of Vietnam. We knew that neither the Congress nor the public would stand for large, extensive involvement in any sort of military ventures [... and] we also recognized – and this was the thing that stuck in Nat Davis’ craw – that it would be impossible in the leaking sieve of Washington to keep the matter secret very long.<sup>43</sup>

Despite all the warnings and attempts to influence Kissinger’s thinking, on 17 July 1975 Kissinger advised Ford that there was no other option but to intervene. What is striking is his admission that the operation would leak to the public from within the State Department itself. Therefore, he willingly acknowledged that this decision would seriously damage the Ford administration. He stated “I think reluctantly we must do something. But you must know that we have massive problems within the State Department. They are passionately opposed and it will leak”.<sup>44</sup> In fact Kissinger sought to use this as an opportunity to purge all members of the African Bureau that sought to challenge his authority. He informed Ford that this would begin with Davis and he would then transfer out staff at lower levels as “we’ll have a resignation from Davis, [and] then I’ll clean out the African Bureau”.<sup>45</sup> Ford expressed no reservations and was fully aligned with Kissinger’s views on the African Bureau and Davis. Indeed, Ford made light of the conflicting positions in the State Department the following day, asking Kissinger “how are your buddies at State?”. Kissinger remarked “I don’t even know if he [Davis] even has the guts enough to quit”.<sup>46</sup> In the midst of ridiculing Davis, the fateful decision was made on 18 July 1975 and Ford approved covert action in Angola, known as Operation IAFEATURE. It is noteworthy that despite his push for intervention Kissinger simultaneously began to distance himself from any potential setbacks. He acknowledged that “it may be too late because Luanda is lost. Unless we can seize it back, it is pretty much hopeless”.<sup>47</sup> However, it must be noted that Ford also misjudged the situation. His lack of aptitude over foreign policy matters has been well established by journalists and historians, but Ford was also guilty of underestimating the challenges of the domestic political environment in Washington, DC. He defiantly stated “if we do nothing, we will lose Southern Africa. I think we have an understandable position. I think we can defend it to the public. I

won't let someone in Foggy Bottom deter me".<sup>48</sup> It must be acknowledged that Ford was very much a traditional Cold War conservative whose natural instincts were to challenge the Soviets at every opportunity. As a result, he did not fully comprehend the dramatic shift in public and Congressional attitudes towards confrontation with the Soviets that was taking place in the aftermath of Vietnam. In terms of the Angolan operation itself, Ford initially approved \$6 million in funding with \$1 million going directly to Mobutu with an additional \$5 million to be available if Mobutu could come up with a feasible way to expand the operation to assist the FNLA and UNITA. With the operation now formally approved, there was growing concern that the US had to ramp up operations quickly.

On 19 July 1975, Secretary of Defense James Schlesinger was quick to highlight the consequences to US credibility if they lost, stating "I think it is important to do enough to succeed. Failing is worse than indifference. Losing gives the impression that if the US backs you, you are a loser".<sup>49</sup> This fear of losing clearly affected Ford who already thought the US should escalate its efforts. He stated "We should do more. We should have done more in Portugal. I notice now that the Soviet Union is openly backing the communists. I think we probably must do more".<sup>50</sup> Once the decision had been made, Ford was never going to change course. By 27 July 1975, an additional \$8 million was approved by Ford, bringing the funding total up to \$14 million by the end of July 1975; the US was now fully involved in the scramble for Angola. As IAFEATURE ramped up, the final Congressional hearings on US foreign policy towards southern African were taking place. It showcases how the Ford administration was now actively deceiving the legislative branch on US actions in Angola. This is illustrated by Mulcahy's testimony when he told Senator Clark and Senator Claiborne Pell (D-Rhode Island) that

it is primarily up to the parties and peoples of southern Africa themselves to bring about a settlement. The role that we [US] can play and are playing is to encourage solutions through negotiations in order to avoid bloodshed that would threaten the peace and stability of Africa.<sup>51</sup>

This was an attempt to maintain earlier reports on actions that Davis had given to the subcommittee earlier in July 1975. However, since then the US

had approved covert assistance to the FNLA and UNITA, and were building up the two groups' military capacity in order to defeat the Soviet supported MPLA. Mulcahy's testimony was deceitful as US actions only stood to increase the bloodshed in Angola and was incompatible with encouraging a negotiated solution as he had outlined to Congress.

In the wake of the decision to approve Operation IAFEATURE, Davis resigned as Assistant Secretary for African Affairs after only four months in office. However, in order not to draw attention to the Angolan programme he agreed to take an extended vacation away from Washington, DC. This marked the end of a tumultuous relationship with Kissinger and Davis over the direction of US–Angolan policy. His determination to avoid unnecessary intervention ensured that his career would be confined to the relative diplomatic backwater of Switzerland. It is ultimately ironic that the man Kissinger defended as being chosen to provide impetus in African policy was swiftly moved on for trying to convince Kissinger that Angola was not important enough to become a Cold War hotspot.

### **Ominous warnings: FNLA weaknesses and Portuguese disinterest**

The danger of media exposure was apparent even before IAFEATURE was approved and increased as July progressed and allegations of US involvement in Angola appeared in the US, English, Soviet and Chinese press. On 28 July 1975, the *Washington Post* carried a piece that referred to the Chinese accusation that Angola was becoming a battleground for Cold War rivalry; while mainly criticizing the Soviets it also drew attention to the US when it stated “the official New China News Agency also made an indirect attack on the United States saying ‘two superpowers’ were both trying to block Angolan independence”.<sup>52</sup> The US embassy in Moscow was also regularly reporting back to Washington, DC during this time on trends in Soviet media coverage towards the US and the link to Angola. The embassy wrote that an article claimed that Chinese actions “allow Washington, for the time being, to remain in the background”.<sup>53</sup> Media coverage was significant enough for George Houser, Executive Director of the American Committee on Africa, to cite a newspaper article in his testimony before the Subcommittee on African Affairs on 29 July, alleging

that a US-made armoured vehicle was being used by the FNLA in recent clashes over the Angolan town of Caxito. He conceded that this was just a report but argued that the issue “is an area for research [... as it is a] fact there has been US military assistance to Zaire, [and] the fact that Zaire has supported the FNLA gives it some credibility”.<sup>54</sup> However, this was not the only problem with US–Angolan policy at the time; the nature of Kissinger’s pursuit of covert action resulted in a breakdown of communication between the upper echelons of the State Department and the US consulate in Angola itself.

This confusion about Angolan policy is evident when US Consul General in Luanda, Angola, Tom Killoran confidently told an FNLA official on 14 July 1975 that “there is no possibility for US aid to the FNLA because of US domestic opinion resulting from our experience in South Vietnam”.<sup>55</sup> A few days later, Killoran met with the FNLA’s Minister for Health, Samel Abridaga about aid for refugee relief and the battle for Luanda. His analysis is revealing as he portrayed the FNLA leadership as being unprepared to govern. He observed that key FNLA figures were “emotional, cunning, contradictory and often unable to think an idea through”.<sup>56</sup> Moreover, he seriously questioned their commitment and ethics. He concluded the US should not provide any funds, even for refugee relief purposes as the FNLA’s reputation and lack of assistance towards Angolan refugees returning from Zaire would “lead a reasonable man to conclude he is either incompetent or dishonest, or both”.<sup>57</sup> Killoran’s views strike a similar tone to Davis’ and Hyland’s arguments about the serious inherent weaknesses of the FNLA. He argued that the FNLA’s leadership was weak, especially Holden Roberto who was described as being a coward. Furthermore, his ability to manage his subordinates was considered “abysmal”.<sup>58</sup> Yet despite his reporting from Luanda, Killoran’s views were never really instrumental in the decisionmaking on Angola. Years later Killoran said he felt that all his reports were ignored and equated it to them falling into a black hole. This perception was corroborated by Robert Hultslander, the CIA station chief in Luanda at the time, when he told Piero Gleijeses that “no one wanted to believe the consulate’s reporting [...] he [Killoran] sacrificed his career in the State Department when he refused to bend his reporting to Kissinger’s policy”.<sup>59</sup> The futility of Killoran’s warnings joined those of Davis and the other officials who had no choice

but to accept that the decision had been made and that the conversation was now over.

Certainly, all grumblings of discontent had practically vanished by 25 July 1975 when the operational details of the programme were being finalized. Although present at the meeting, Davis raised no objections nor contributed substantively to any discussion on the programme. In essence he was a dejected figure whose fight for non-intervention had cost him yet another assignment so soon after Chile. Despite his earlier objections, Sisco was also now on board with the decision to intervene and merely commented, "let's do it fast now that it's being done".<sup>60</sup> But Kissinger's anger had a new focal point as he felt Colby was still dragging the issue out. When informed that Colby was cautioning about ramping up the level of aid to Zaire too quickly, Kissinger rebuked "I don't want to hear about Colby [... you should] tell Colby I want no more crying. It's decided".<sup>61</sup> Yet the operation faced significant difficulties from the outset as the Portuguese control of Angola was disintegrating rapidly. By now, the Portuguese themselves had lost interest in maintaining the peace, despite Foreign Minister Melo Antunes' repeated statements to the contrary.

This was apparent when Teixeira Da Mota, a Portuguese Foreign Ministry Official, told an officer in the US consulate in Luanda that the liberation groups' acceptance of a partition of the country was inevitable; the FNLA should be content with the north of the country and the MPLA should accept that it held control over the capital.<sup>62</sup> In effect, the Portuguese hoped that an acceptance of such an outcome would expedite their departure from the country. Furthermore, on 27 July 1975, the Portuguese High Commander in Angola, Leonel Cardoso, privately recommended a denunciation of the Alvor Accords. The Portuguese had lost all stamina to attempt to control the fighting, borne out of a desire to return home, but also partially motivated by racial bias. The Portuguese position is illustrated by Cardoso's comments to Killoran on his attempts to deal with the liberation groups for nearly a year. Killoran suggested that Cardoso's experiences had made him "fully aware of their meanness and [he] is so allergic to them that he becomes physically ill whenever he see them".<sup>63</sup> Indeed Killoran reported that it was Cardoso's passionate wish "that Alvor will be cast aside and that his calvary [*sic*] will soon be over, for his mission ends when Alvor is denounced".<sup>64</sup> In a wider context Killoran alluded to the racist attitude of

the Portuguese troops in general as he described that they had “built up a [sic] disgust and hatred for the liberation groups as they [the Portuguese] have watched Angola reduced to ruin in a few short months through the ambition, avarice and savagery of the liberation movements”.<sup>65</sup> Therefore, the scene was set for real escalation in the Angolan Civil War as the Portuguese were essentially removing themselves from the situation. At the same time the US had now become immersed in the crisis, and there were early warning signs that US involvement was unlikely to remain a secret for long.

## Conclusion

The decision in July 1975 to covertly assist the FNLA and UNITA was made in the face of significant opposition within the State Department and the CIA. In most of the literature on US foreign policy toward Angola in 1975, the main focus has been on the credibility argument and portraying Davis as the sole opposition figure to Kissinger. However, there were others who strongly objected to intervention as a course of action. The reluctance of Kissinger to admit that the domestic consequences were severe represents a fundamental breakdown of his realist outlook in the wake of US defeat in Vietnam. In later years Davis reflected that

both during the final few weeks of the Vietnam War and during the Angolan crisis of 1975, the Secretary and the President seem to have believed that it was better to roll the dice against the longest of odds than to abandon the competition against our great adversary.<sup>66</sup>

However, just as important is the focus on the opposition to the decision and the reasons behind such objections.

Davis’ concerns have subsequently been attacked by Kissinger and Hyland for being heavily influenced by the events in Chile and Vietnam. Others like Morris and Spikes point to a frightened bureaucrat who was more worried by his own reputation and how he would be perceived by others. Yet, if anything, Kissinger’s determination in the face of stern opposition from Sisco, Hyland and Colby illustrates that he was in fact the one who was more inherently affected by the defeat in Vietnam. He felt he needed a victory in Angola to restore US credibility, but also a degree of his

personal reputation that was in decline in 1975. By ignoring the warnings of Davis and others, Kissinger and Ford helped create the conditions for a domestic confrontation between the legislative and executive branches over the control of post-Vietnam US foreign policy. As IAFEATURE ramped up into August and September, there was a growing uneasiness among State Department officials that the decision was a mistake. The Soviets, undeterred by the sudden increase in arms for the FNLA and UNITA, continued to escalate their aid to the MPLA, all of which only exacerbated the intensity of the Angolan Civil War.

- 1 The literature on the US involvement in the Angolan Civil War at this time focuses mainly on the credibility argument. Historian Jussi Hanhimäki writes “pressure from Zaire and other African countries, as well as Chinese taunts about American ineffectiveness, further increased the perceived necessity to intervene and prove the administration’s credibility in countering Soviet expansionism in the third world”. See Jussi Hanhimäki, *The Flawed Architect: Henry Kissinger and American Foreign Policy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 413. Similar arguments are made in Fernando Andresen Guimarães, *The Origins of the Angolan Civil War: Foreign Intervention and Domestic Political Conflict* (London: St. Martin’s Press, 1998), 161–195; George Wright, *The Destruction of a Nation: United States’ Policy Toward Angola since 1945* (London: Pluto Press, 1997), 57–77; and Raymond Garthoff, *Détente and Confrontation: American-Soviet Relations from Nixon to Reagan* (Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution, 1985), 502–525. These studies reflected the outside pressure the US was under to intervene, yet lack an in-depth analysis of the domestic political concerns raised within the State Department. The only publication that attempts to explore the matter in further detail is Piero Gleijeses’ exceptional work *Conflicting Missions: Havana, Washington and Africa, 1959–1976* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2002), yet his main argument misses the opportunity to show the level of opposition to Kissinger in the run-up to the fateful decision to intervene in mid-July 1975.
- 2 Daniel Spikes, *Angola and the Politics of Intervention: From Local Bush War to Chronic Crisis in Southern Africa* (Jefferson: McFarland and Company, 1993), 168. He argues that “Davis’s antics did not prevent the decision he feared from being taken; instead they only served to bury him deep in the bottomless pit of Kissinger’s legendary contempt for incompetent subordinates” (ibid.: 154).
- 3 For a full account of Hyland’s comments see Memorandum for the Record, 40 Committee Meeting, 14 July 1975, 10.30 am, Document 115, Vol. XXVIII, Southern Africa, 1969–1976, FRUS: 276–281.
- 4 Henry Kissinger, *Years of Renewal* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1999), 801.
- 5 Ibid.: 807.
- 6 Ibid.
- 7 Memorandum, Davis to Sisco, “Angola,” 12 July 1975, Angola 1975, Box 22, RG 59, Records of Joseph Sisco, 1951–1976, NARA, Maryland: 1–2.
- 8 Ibid.: 4. Davis concluded that “the risks of exposure are so great as to make compromise virtually certain” (ibid.).
- 9 Ibid.: 2.
- 10 Ibid.
- 11 Roger Morris, “A Rare Resignation in Protest: Nat Davis and Angola,” the *Washington Monthly* 7, no. 12 (February 1976): 29.



- 12 Ibid. Morris quotes an unnamed high official who told him that “Moving in Angola was necessary to keep the Soviets honest [...] but we also had to find out if we could still run a foreign policy with this Congress” (ibid.).
- 13 Memorandum, Davis to Sisco, 12 July 1975, Angola 1975, Box 22, RG 59, Records of Joseph Sisco, 1951–1976, NARA, Maryland: 5.
- 14 Ibid.
- 15 Ibid.: 6.
- 16 Nathaniel Davis, “The Angolan Decision of 1975: A Personal Memoir,” *Foreign Affairs* 57, no. 1 (Fall 1978): 116.
- 17 Senate Subcommittee on African Affairs of the Committee on Foreign Relations, US Policy Toward Angola, Ninety-Forth Congress, First Session, 14 July 1975, 2 pm–3.15 pm, Room 4221, Dirksen Senate Office Building, Washington, DC, LOC: 235.
- 18 Ibid.: 236. Clark’s views were based on the idea that most African nations pursued a non-aligned foreign policy as they wished to preserve the independence that they had been granted. In addition, he correctly pointed out that the US already lacked credibility in the region due to its past policies which leaned towards supporting the Portuguese throughout the Cold War until the Carnation Revolution in April 1974.
- 19 Ibid.: 244.
- 20 Ibid.: 248–249. In addition, Davis outlined his preference for an African solution to an African problem when he told Biden

Angola is part of the African community and that I perhaps express the hope that the African community itself might interest itself in – I do not mean to say that they have not – but I do think that multilateral interest in the possibility of bringing Angola back to a more peaceful road could be a useful thing.

(Ibid.: 249)

He subsequently repeated this view later in the hearing when he told Clark that in his personal view “some kind of multilateral effort in this regard [asking Soviets and Chinese to halt arms shipments] might be more effective than for us to act alone” (ibid.: 258).

- 21 Ibid.: 251.
- 22 Memorandum for the Record, 40 Committee Meeting, 14 July 1975, 10.30 am, Document No. 115, Vol. XXVII, Southern Africa, 1969–1976, FRUS: 278.
- 23 Ibid. When Kissinger asked if Sisco was prepared to see Zaire potentially fall to the communism, Sisco argued “I’m not so sure that would happen. I’m just not sure that covert action would help”, yet Kissinger undeterred responded “well, we will never know if we don’t try” (ibid.). At the beginning of the meeting, Kissinger asked why Davis was not present and in his own account years later, Davis claims that he asked to be included in the meeting and was refused.
- 24 Ibid.: 278.
- 25 Ibid. Instead Hyland said that Savimbi was the stronger choice while criticizing Mobutu by saying “Mobutu could do more if he wanted to. Roberto has only a rag-tag army” (ibid.).
- 26 Ibid.
- 27 Memcon, Kissinger, Gromyko and DoByrnin, 10 July 1975, 10.15 pm–12 midnight, Soviet Mission, Geneva, Switzerland, Box 1, NSA Kissinger Reports, GRFL: 3.
- 28 William G. Hyland, *Mortal Rivals: Superpower Relations from Nixon to Reagan* (New York: Random House, 1987), 137.
- 29 Ibid.

- 30 Memorandum for the Record, 14 July 1975, 279.
- 31 Ibid.
- 32 Ibid.: 280. Kissinger proclaimed: “if we don’t do something we are going to have a string of countries dependent on the USSR” (ibid.). During a 14 July 1975 Principals’ and Regional’s Staff meeting, Kissinger’s frustration with the bureau was evident when he addressed the issue of the MPLA controlling Luanda by saying “after I was told for six months that Holden Roberto was in great shape!”. When Davis tried to defend the bureau’s analysis by stating that the FNLA still controlled the north of the country, Kissinger belittled its significance and argued “there is no national identity anyway, it has never worked – in any part other than the capital. In what African State has it been possible [to rule], if you didn’t have the capital?”. See Memcon, Secretary’s Principals’ and Regional’s Staff Meeting, 01702, 14 July 1975, DNSA, Angola Search: 43.
- 33 Memorandum, “President Mobutu’s Renewed Expression of Concern Over the Lack of US Government Support to the FNLA,” 14 July 1975, Box 22, RG 59, Records of Joseph Sisco 1951–1976, NARA, Maryland: 1.
- 34 Ibid.
- 35 Memorandum, Kissinger to Ford, 17 July 1975, NSA Country Files, Zaire (1), GRFL: 1. In relation to US economic interests, Kissinger said “Our economic interests in Zaire are large: access to Zaire’s enormous energy and mineral wealth; an existing financial stake of some three-quarters of a billion dollars in investment...and our largest market in black Africa after Nigeria” (ibid.).
- 36 Memorandum, Sisco to Scowcroft, 15 July 1975, Box 22, RG 59, Records of Joseph Sisco, 1951–1976, NARA, Maryland: 1.
- 37 Ibid.
- 38 Ibid.
- 39 Ibid.: 2.
- 40 Charles Stuart Kennedy and Willard De Pree, “Interview with Willard De Pree,” LOC, published 1994, [www.loc.gov/item/mfdipbib000277](http://www.loc.gov/item/mfdipbib000277).
- 41 Ibid.
- 42 Ibid. De Pree ultimately lost his role in the PPS due to his intransigence. He later explained

When I got back to the office I told Win Lord that I was very unhappy with the decision. I thought it was a serious mistake and suggested that another meeting be held to weigh the negative consequences. Win said, Go ahead and put your concerns in a memo and I’ll send it up to the Secretary if you make a good case. So I sat down and wrote a short two-page memo. I showed the memo to Win and Sam Lewis, who was Win’s deputy at the time, and they agreed to send it to Kissinger. This took guts for I was challenging a decision that had been made. I didn’t hear anything for a couple of days. Then Winston called me in and said, look, the Secretary didn’t like that memo. He really thinks that he should have somebody in S/P [Policy Planning Staff] to help him on African issue who is more supportive of what he is trying to accomplish than you seem to be. But, Win said, you’ve done a good job in S/P and I will support

you for an ambassadorial appointment. I think the Secretary will agree to that. So, I considered what was coming up and told Win that I would like Mozambique. The Secretary didn't object. But what a strange way to be nominated as ambassador for Mozambique! It was essentially because I had misgivings about what we were doing in Angola.

(Ibid.)

- 43 Charles Stuart Kennedy and Edward W. Mulcahy, "Interview with Edward W. Mulcahy," LOC, published 1989, [www.loc.gov/item/mfdipbib000843/](http://www.loc.gov/item/mfdipbib000843/).
- 44 Memcon, Ford, Kissinger and Scowcroft, Oval Office, White House, Washington, DC, 17 July 1975, 9.55 am–10.40 am, Box 13, DGRFL: 2.
- 45 Ibid.: 3.
- 46 Memcon, Ford, Kissinger, Scowcroft, Oval Office, White House, Washington, DC, 9.25 am–10.22 am, 24 July 1975, Box 14, DGRFL: 3. Years later Deputy Assistant Secretary for African Affairs Ed Mulcahy stated

Nat stayed on duty only about six months until about Labor [sic] Day when he went on extended leave at his own request to consider his course of action. He differed very strongly with the Secretary over our policy of assisting the non-Marxist political movements in Angola. Nat went on leave for at least a month, maybe 5 weeks, in September and October, came back for about a month, and then was appointed ambassador to Switzerland.

See Kennedy and Mulcahy, "Interview with Edward W. Mulcahy"

- 47 Memcon, Ford, Kissinger and Scowcroft, Oval Office, White House, Washington, DC, 18 July 1975, 9.07 am–10.12 am, Box 13, DGRFL: 3.
- 48 Ibid.
- 49 Memcon, Ford, Kissinger, Schlesinger, Gen. George Brown, Chairman of JCS, Oval Office, White House, 9.45 am, Washington, DC, 19 July 1975, Box 13, DGRFL: 2. Hyland argued "if we do go in, you can't use a program that will fail. That means massive intervention, and I do not think we can stand the heat in Africa", see Memorandum for the Record, 14 July 1975, 279.
- 50 Ibid.
- 51 Senate Subcommittee on African Affairs of the Committee on Foreign Relations, US Policy Toward Southern Africa: Overview, Ninety-Forth Congress, First Session, 29 July 1975, 10.08 am, Room 4221, Dirksen Senate Office Building, Washington, DC, LOC: 475.
- 52 UPI, "China Accuses Soviets in Angola," *Washington Post*, 28 July 1975, A16.
- 53 Emtel, AmEmbassy Moscow, Soviet Union to SecState Washington, DC, 311404Z, 31 July 1975, Public Library of US Diplomacy, Wikileaks: 2. The embassy reported that even though *The New Times* was a relatively low-level weekly publication its "specific accusations of CIA involvement in Angola, and the general anti – American tone of the entire article, are particularly noteworthy at this time when such blatant anti – US diatribes have all but vanished from the Soviet press" (ibid.).
- 54 Senate Subcommittee on African Affairs of the Committee on Foreign Relations, US Policy Toward Southern Africa, Ninety-Forth Congress, First Session, 29 July 1975, 10.08 am–11.40

- am, Room 4221, Dirksen Senate Office Building, Washington, DC, LOC: 500.
- 55 Memorandum, 14 July 1975, NND002023, Document 41, CIA FOIA, Electronic Reading Room: 1.
- 56 Emtel, AmConsul Luanda, Angola to SecState Washington, DC, 19 July 1975, 191137Z, AAD, NARA: 2.
- 57 Ibid.: 3.
- 58 Memorandum, 12 July 1975, 3.
- 59 Gleijeses, *Conflicting Missions*, 357.
- 60 Memcon, Kissinger, Deputy Secretary Ingersoll, Sisco, Deputy Under Secretary Larry Eagleburger, Vance, Davis and Jerry Bremer, 25 July 1975, Document No. 121, Vol. XXVIII, Southern Africa, 1969–1976, FRUS: 292.
- 61 Ibid.: 291.
- 62 Emtel, AmConsul Luanda, Angola to SecState Washington, DC, 22 July 1975, 221624Z, AAD, NARA: 2.
- 63 Emtel, AmConsul Luanda, Angola to SecState Washington, DC, 29 July 1975, 290810Z, Public Library of US Diplomacy, Wikileaks: 2.
- 64 Ibid.
- 65 Ibid.: 3.
- 66 Davis, “The Angolan Decision of 1975,” 123–124.

# 5      **An autumn of discontent**

## The collapse of IAFEATURE

### **Introduction**

Historian Daniel Spikes argues that Kissinger and his loyalists were “pleased with themselves as they watched IAFEATURE bloom into a fully-fledged operation [... and] Washington policymakers sat back and waited for Moscow to cooperate”.<sup>1</sup> Indeed there was some initial success for the FNLA in the weeks after US aid was approved. This emboldened Kissinger to think that even when Congress discovered the operation, they would not threaten to pull the plug. He said confidently,

my view is that they can't touch us on this. I don't see how we can be faulted on what we are doing. We are not overthrowing any government; we are not subverting anyone. We are helping moderates combat Communist domination.<sup>2</sup>

His conviction that Angola was an important place to symbolize that the US was not a power in retreat ignored the problems that inhibited US foreign policy at this time. Primarily, that the negative attitudes of legislative branches and the public to covert operations in principle had the potential to cause detrimental damage to the credibility of the Ford administration in the build-up to the Presidential election in 1976.

The autumn of 1975 was hallmarked by the re-emergence of concerns from Sisco and Hyland, who were now joined by US chargé d'affaires in Zaire, Lannon Walker. Even in its infancy, State Department officials pushed Kissinger to reconsider the plan, fearing the domestic and

international consequences of the covert operation. Yet they were dismissed as the injection of US aid had resulted in some early successes against the MPLA. However, the increase in US aid was always going to have an initial positive result. Once the Soviets saw the impact of IAFEATURE, they would escalate until one side was forced to fold its hand. As a result, the Angolan conflict began to rage as it was now fuelled by substantial foreign aid, essentially removing the local context of Angolan independence and replacing it with a superpower rivalry that outstripped the country's relative significance. The result was an increasing media and Congressional focus on Angola as the US presence became apparent. Simultaneously as the weeks went on, Kissinger was being confronted with the reality that the Angolan Civil War was not going to be a quick win, but he remained undeterred, believing that it was the correct course of action.

The first section of this chapter focuses on the continuing opposition to US intervention in Angola. It shows that Kissinger continued to dismiss concerns relating to Congressional opposition and the threat of being slowly sucked into a quagmire in Angola. Yet the arguments presented by Hyland, Sisco and Lannon Walker outlined the real dangers that would ultimately come back to haunt the Ford administration when the operation was finally exposed. This chapter extends this issue by outlining how Kissinger remained defiant even as the Angolan programme began to slowly unravel in the public domain and his acknowledgment that it was creating a damaging rift between the executive and legislative branches over foreign policy.

The second section discusses opposition from the US embassy in Zaire. The reports of the Angolan conflict beginning to intensify at such speed that the US would have to significantly increase its aid to maintain the competition with the Soviets were concerning. Despite this warning, Walker cautioned against following through, instead he thought the US should establish limits that it would not breach in order to avoid a Vietnam-style escalation. However, this recommendation was overtaken by the introduction of South African troops and subsequently Cuban troops into Angola in October 1975. In addition, the initial gains for US objectives came at a great cost as the media increasingly focused on the fighting and the role of the US became exposed in early September. Even worse, the US was associated with the South Africans despite no evidence to fully corroborate the claim. As a result, the House Committee on International

Relations met to discuss “Disaster Relief for Angola” where the initial form of Congressional objections to the programme were evident. After Angola was granted independence on 11 November 1975, and with the situation spiralling out of control, Kissinger was forced to admit that he had to open a diplomatic dialogue with the Soviets to try and salvage some form of credibility from the Angolan debacle.

Finally, this chapter examines the realization from Kissinger that by November, Angola was effectively lost. In an attempt to deflect blame, he tried to turn the warnings he had received from Colby throughout the autumn of 1975 into evidence of the CIA’s incompetence to persuade President Ford that this was the main reason that the Angolan programme was failing. In subsequent years, Kissinger has heavily criticized Colby’s role in directing IAFEATURE and classified him as being a prisoner of Vietnam syndrome. It is a tactic that he also used to manipulate perceptions of Davis’ objections to the Angolan intervention. This chapter argues that this is not a correct picture of the discussions surrounding US policy in November 1975. While Colby had reservations; they were grounded in realistic domestic constraints in Washington, DC at the time. However, he actually pushed for the means to compete with the Soviets where possible and argued that American technicians and trainers were needed to ensure any level of success. Yet this course of action was rebuked by Kissinger whose own fears of Vietnam and the domestic climate affected his own Angolan policy.

## **The re-emergence of opposition to Kissinger’s Angolan strategy**

In the weeks after the decision to approve Operation IAFEATURE, Hyland raised concerns over the potential for criticism from the DOD about turning a civil conflict into a bloodbath.<sup>3</sup> He saw that the US would be accused of escalating a local war, resulting in significant civilian casualties and that Angola as a newly independent state would be completely destroyed by the civil war. In such terms, Kissinger’s test of will with the Soviets could only result in damage to US credibility in a region where US attitudes had been under examination by Africans for some time. Instead of helping the Africans to diplomatically challenge the Soviets to halt their aid to the MPLA, the US was beginning to be sucked into another quagmire which

raised questions about the morality of US foreign policy toward Africa. On 8 August 1975, the same day that Hyland urged caution, Sisco wrote a memorandum to Kissinger advising a demarche to the Soviets on Angola. It advised that the US should in strong terms tell the Soviet Ambassador to the US, Anatoly Dobrynin that the US found Soviet military support of the MPLA and Neto “dangerous and unacceptable [... and] neither of our countries has important interests involved in that remote and marginal area”.<sup>4</sup> Sisco’s main concerns had not changed from the summer of 1975. He still believed that Angola was not worth the risk and that the US should attempt to solve the issue directly with the Soviets rather than in the bush in Angola. Yet Kissinger was encouraged by the early successes of IAFEATURE. However, despite Kissinger’s optimism, concerns over the decision to intervene began to emerge in Zaire.

On 10 September 1975, US DCM in Zaire, Lannon Walker cabled Washington outlining how the Angolan Civil War had increased Mobutu’s confidence significantly. Specifically, he warned that Mobutu believed he could now accomplish his own personal objectives in Angola, such as claiming the oil-rich Cabinda province. These warnings help build out the rationale for why Mobutu pushed so hard for US intervention. Far from any concern of Soviet influence, he was attempting to use US aid to manoeuvre Zaire out of a perilous economic situation. Walker references this when he stated

Mobutu [has] unilaterally increased aid to the FNLA, thinking he would have US backing [... and] when the US did provide military and economic support, Mobutu’s vision grew – thought that the US would help him impose his kind of solution in Angola and Cabinda and ‘use our money and influence to fill his \$400 million deficit too.’<sup>5</sup>

In Walker’s estimation, Mobutu’s actions would soon make it impossible to maintain the pretence of non-US involvement. He feared Mobutu would seek to dramatically escalate things, sending battalions and moving the Front for the Liberation of the Enclave of Cabinda (FLEC) into Cabinda and “demand a vastly increased program of support to the FNLA, UNITA, FLEC and even then, he is likely to send the FLEC into Cabinda”.<sup>6</sup> Despite these concerns over Mobutu’s personal aims, Walker expressed there was a real danger that Mobutu’s actions would expose the entire covert operation.



He added:

in any event, the profound degree of Mobutu's commitment of arms and men may well become known, and also possibly our support [...] and if the scenario develops like this, will the Congress go along when it comes to replenish the agency's reserve funds?<sup>7</sup>

These questions about Congressional support tied into Walker's overall evaluation and indeed fear of the US over-committing itself in the region. In a damning assessment, Walker expressed deep reservations on US policy to support Mobutu. His main concern was that

Mobutu believes we can and will support him all the way. And I don't think we can [...] and] if it turns out we can't, I predict that he will have fatally overcommitted himself; he has wrecked his economy, alienated literally every power center in Zaire and survived thus far by sheer political genius and force of will. The Angolan war, if it evolves as described above, could destroy him.<sup>8</sup>

In a wider context, Walker foresaw a clear danger, primarily that Mobutu would ultimately drag the US into the region. He strongly proclaimed that

the international and domestic US repercussions are obvious. And from the point of view of our own interests, I do not believe that we should continue to allow Mobutu or the rhythm of the war in Angola to pull us into an untenable position.<sup>9</sup>

Yet Walker's apprehension differed to that of Davis, Hyland and Sisco who primarily argued that Angola was not a vital interest and could exacerbate an already fragile domestic political environment. Walker's assessment was focused on the ability of Mobutu to manoeuvre the US into a regional conflict and how the US could lose credibility by being in partnership with him. However, to Kissinger, Walker's views were at best naïve and displayed a lack of resolve to counter the Soviets by focusing too much on the African context. Specifically, Walker warned that the US had to judge the local situation more astutely and not be pressured into action too quickly by threats from Mobutu. He outlined that "the lesson is that while

Mobutu knows that we have done very well by him, he also believes [...] that we can and will do much more. All he has to do is pull the right strings”.<sup>10</sup> Like the other voices of opposition, Walker did not object to the principle of confronting the Soviets, but he recognized that regional and American domestic realities meant that there was little room for error in Angola. In order to be successful, the US needed to set strict guidelines to maintain a level of control over local actors such as Mobutu. If not, the situation could escalate to the point where US credibility in southern Africa would be damaged significantly further.

The strong warnings of Walker’s report were evident during Kissinger’s staff meeting on 11 September 1975, but its findings were dismissed as more preaching from the African Bureau. However, in his new position as Acting Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs, Edward Mulcahy concurred that “Mobutu is moving to a quantum escalation of his involvement in the Angolan war”.<sup>11</sup> However, this threat of escalation did not concern Kissinger. In fact, he welcomed Mobutu’s intensification of Zairian involvement. In a separate meeting held later that day, he made it clear that the issue was no longer up for discussion from members of the African by sarcastically remarking “is our missionary Bureau going to keep its mouth shut on the subject or are we going to advise Mobutu?”<sup>12</sup> Yet despite the marginalization of the African Bureau, the fallout on the Angolan decision was still an ongoing situation for Kissinger. This halting of the initial progress of IAFEATURE resulted in gloomy accounts on the situation in Angola, including from Kissinger who lamented “we’ve blown it basically”.<sup>13</sup> With the tide beginning to turn, Colby informed Kissinger in mid-September that direct US training was required to balance the situation

Yet despite his eagerness, Kissinger was wary of the dangers of direct American involvement. Colby made it clear that Zaire, the FNLA and UNITA needed direct American assistance in order to train uneducated Angolans to use the weaponry being placed at their disposal. This was a high-risk strategy in post-Vietnam American foreign policy, one which Kissinger wholly recognized as he admitted, “I’m worried about US training involvement, what with the spectre of Vietnam”.<sup>14</sup> He felt that such a constraint was a significant handicap on US ability to respond to the Soviets in the Third World, but he never fully accepted these constraints remarking, “I fail to see the rationale that Soviets can but we can’t – that we

have no moral right to respond to the Soviet intrusion in Angola!”<sup>15</sup> In addition, further concerns on Congressional influence were raised during the 40 Committee meeting. Both the Director of Office of Central African Affairs William L. Cutler and Deputy Secretary of Defence for Security Assistance Lieutenant General Howard M. Fish felt that aid to Zaire would be affected if Congress found out about the operation. However, Kissinger lamented what he perceived as a defeatist attitude stating “the Americans’ masochism is beyond all help. The Soviets gave maximum aid and turned a minor movement into a dominant one”.<sup>16</sup> Kissinger believed that his colleagues felt afraid of Congress, but he acknowledged that the Angolan policy could only go so far. Specifically, he rejected the idea that the US should commit to direct training as he would be accused of initiating another Vietnam-type engagement. This is evident when he observed “if we send in Americans, there will be the cry that we are starting another Vietnam and I’ve been on the Hill all week explaining that we are not doing that in the Middle East”.<sup>17</sup> It further illustrated his frustration at the constraints after the collapse of Vietnam and the intelligence investigations of the CIA on Capitol Hill. Yet despite his criticism of Colby for reacting too slow to events, Kissinger’s refusal to acquiesce to Colby’s request to send American trainers into Angola illustrates a fundamental problem with IAFEASURE. Particularly, there was a desperate need to educate the FNLA, UNITA and Zairian troops on how to use the weapons being supplied to them. Both Hyland and Fish also acknowledged this fact when Hyland remarked that equipment levels were sufficient, and Fish highlighted that training was the problem.<sup>18</sup> However, Kissinger knew that it would be a step too far to send US trainers. So, while he has criticized Colby for being influenced by Vietnam syndrome, Kissinger himself made tactical decisions influenced by Vietnam which undermined his own Angolan policy. His decision-making also displayed no regard for African autonomy; the southern African region was seen in strictly Cold War terms and the danger of escalating beyond boundaries of sovereignty was increased as his Angolan policy was breaking down.

One of the most disturbing factors that emerged from a 40 Committee meeting at the end of September was a complete disregard for the territorial rights of Angolans. It was revealed that Mobutu was considering invading the oil-rich Angolan enclave of Cabinda. Despite the apprehension raised by Sisco, Ambassador Sheldon Vance and CIA African Division Chief Jim

Potts that such a move would destroy any relationship with the FNLA and UNITA, Kissinger's reaction illustrated his ignorance of African sovereignty. In a highly controversial statement, Kissinger approved Mobutu's plan to annex Cabinda just to ensure it did not fall into the hands of the MPLA. This violation of Angolan sovereignty was deemed acceptable in order to maintain good relations with Zaire and offset any concerns that Mobutu may have had about US credibility if the US lost. This is reflected in his statement that

Cabinda has a lower priority than Angola. But, it would be better to take it than let it go to the MPLA [... and] this could be a blow to the US, Cabinda's loss on top of Angola. If Angola is going down the drain, then Mobutu should take Cabinda.<sup>19</sup>

Remarkably Hyland endorsed such a scenario on the basis of maintaining a good relationship with Zaire as "if we don't help Mobutu on Cabinda – something that is close to his heart [... and] he is going to wonder what kind of friends we are".<sup>20</sup> Therefore, the credibility argument remained evident throughout Angolan policy but it was beginning to evolve into more something more sinister, where the fundamental principles of international relations could have been violated to justify maintaining good relations with a regional dictator. In a wider international context, Kissinger's perception on how the US was impotent was illustrated when he responded to Colby's suggestion that the US consult with the Chinese to apply pressure on the Soviets. He told the committee

we look like pitiful characters. Angola is as far away from the Soviets as they can get, so we go to the Chinese who are also as far away from China [sic] as they can get – all because we can't do anything.<sup>21</sup>

With the situation becoming increasingly unstable Kissinger decided that drastic action was required as the US had to win in Angola. The result was to approve the training of "Angolans by Americans outside of Angola [... and the recruitment of non-American trainers/advisors for service in Angola".<sup>22</sup> Yet despite this action, two weeks later the situation was so grave that he reluctantly made a play for Chinese support. In his book, *The Flawed Architect*, Jussi Hanhimäki argues that Kissinger was eager to offset

the perception of weakness but was left exasperated by the Chinese refusal to get drawn in any further in the Angolan situation.<sup>23</sup> When Kissinger met Chinese Foreign Minister Ch'iao Kuan-hua at the UN General Assembly meeting on 28 September 1975, he outlined that the US was attempting to balance the situation in an attempt to create the conditions for a negotiated settlement. However, his attempts were rebuffed, much to his disappointment. Simultaneously, Kissinger was also trying to manipulate the public perception of events in Angola. In an address to the OAU delegates at the UN on 23 September 1975, Kissinger remarked that events in Angola had taken a distressing turn which had resulted in widespread violence. He claimed the US was

alarmed at the interference of extra continental powers who do not wish Africa well and whose involvement is inconsistent with the promise of true independence. We believe a fair and peaceful solution must be negotiated, giving all groups representing the Angolan people a fair role in its future.<sup>24</sup>

Yet privately the US was increasing its efforts by sending trainers to Zaire and introducing mercenaries into the conflict. Nevertheless, despite the decision to escalate US involvement external events were outpacing the US efforts.

## **The demise of IAFEATURE: congressional unrest and the South African presence**

A report compiled by the staff in the US embassy in Kinshasa, Zaire bore similar warnings previously relayed to Kissinger especially in relation to the risk of counter-escalation from the Soviets. Indeed, the report directly confronts this fact and its implications for IAFEATURE stating that

The Soviets, aware of these constraints on US action and lacking similar restraints on their own – presumably have factored this perception into a determination to outlast and outbid us in Angola. Baldly stated, then, the present policy offers only the slimmest chance of success.<sup>25</sup>

From analysing the primary evidence, two recurring themes emerge. First, the realization that Angola could not be won unless the US was prepared to risk a full military engagement. Second, the need for setting realistic expectations with Mobutu in relation to US commitment. It is clear that US embassy officials believed the US had already harmed its reputation in the region with its covert efforts. Furthermore, it was predicted that the dire chances of its success would inflict a further blow to US credibility as an ally. The report concluded:

For Africans, and the Third World generally, another ‘climb-down with honour’ – this time in Angola – would vitiate our credibility as an ally as well. Unless, then, we are prepared to escalate to the point (whatever that may be) of certain victory, we had better set our limits and devise an alternative to the present policy.<sup>26</sup>

However, within a few days of the report, the stakes in Angola were dramatically raised with the introduction of South African and Cuban troops into Angola to fight on the behalf of UNITA and the MPLA, respectively.

The South Africans launched an offensive into Angola on 14 October 1975, with a programme codenamed Operation ZULU and over the course of the month introduced “up to 3,000 troops of the South African Defense Force (SADF) cooperated with a simultaneous UNITA drive to the capital from the south”.<sup>27</sup> However, the intervention of the South Africans provided Kissinger with great optimism that the US could win in Angola. The primary evidence provides an intriguing Angolan perspective too as it shows that UNITA leader Jonas Savimbi was separately courting the South Africans as he believed that the US was not providing enough aid. Cable traffic shows that Liberian President William Tolbert told US officials in Monrovia, Liberia, that

Savimbi said US aid was too slow and that he hoped that some other channels could be worked out for funnelling US aid other than the sole Zaire channel [... and] Savimbi said he had made contact with South Africa for help since he felt they could cooperate in a common effort against the common enemy of communism even though UNITA deplored apartheid.<sup>28</sup>

Kissinger believed that with South African assistance the FNLA and UNITA would triumph in Angola and give the US a much-needed victory to dispel any uncertainties about American power. To this end he had great reason to be optimistic. The South Africans made an initial impact and quickly changed the Angolan situation, driving northwards towards the Angolan capital of Luanda in the hope of reclaiming it from the MPLA in time for Angolan independence on 11 November 1975.

By 3 November 1975, with the whole Angolan outlook changing, Kissinger told Ford “on Angola, we are doing amazingly well. All the ports but Luanda are surrounded”.<sup>29</sup> He buoyantly proclaimed to Ford that US foreign policy was in great shape and signalled a major success for the Ford administration as “coming out of a total debacle in Vietnam and six months later we have recovered as a world leader”.<sup>30</sup> This optimism could also be attributed to Kissinger’s need to portray a positive image in the aftermath of Ford’s decision to remove Kissinger as National Security Advisor at the end of October. Yet, this euphoria fails to point out the real reason why the situation in Angola had significantly changed; the intervention of South African troops. However, as stories of US involvement began to take hold in the media, the association with the South African intervention would only serve to harm US foreign policy in both the domestic and international arenas. There had been sporadic reports as early as August that the US was supplying arms into Angola. However, these stories had not generated sustained traction in the US media until the South African intervention. The *New York Times*, at this time not aware of the South African presence in the south of Angola, was reporting that although the political and economic stakes in Angola were tempting, the US should refrain from getting entangled as the “bitter experience of intervention in a complicated civil war in Asia, [... should serve as a warning to] avoid involvement in this equally complex civil war in Africa”.<sup>31</sup> In an interview years later, the impact of South African intervention was recalled by Mulcahy. He commented that by October 1975 it was well known that the US was helping the non-Marxist movements in Angola. Despite French, British and other Western nations’ involvement, it was the US that received the most attention. He remarked that “The thing that hurt us all the way through, of course, was the South Africans. We were in the same boat as the South Africans. That’s what really hurt us especially in Africa”.<sup>32</sup> In addition,

Congress was also growing more concerned about the allegations in the US media and abroad that the US was involved in the Angolan Civil War.

On 5 November 1975, the House of Representatives Committee on International Relations met to discuss disaster assistance to Angola. The level of media attention on Angola and reports of US involvement had been steadily growing throughout the autumn. One of the main considerations for the Chairman of the Committee, Congressman Charles Diggs (D-Michigan) was to ensure that funds for disaster assistance in Angola would not be utilized either directly or indirectly to help the FNLA or UNITA. In Diggs' opinion, the need for relief aid was significantly increased by the involvement of outside powers involvement in the Angolan Civil War. Therefore, he felt an examination into US policy was needed in order to ascertain if the US was partly responsible for the level of destruction in the country. It was a very pertinent point as it correlates directly with the implications of Kissinger's policy. Mainly, its contribution to the destruction of Angolan society by enabling an exacerbation of the Angolan Civil War, in the deluded hope that such action would restore a perceived loss of US credibility. When Diggs and Congressman Stephen Solarz (D-New York) confronted Mulcahy with questions surrounding assistance to the FNLA and UNITA, he neither confirmed nor denied the allegation. In effect, his silence was a quiet acknowledgement that the US was involved in some capacity to influence events in Angola. This was a pre-planned action ordered by Kissinger who instructed Mulcahy "to duck all questions, even in Executive session, on Angola and refer the question to the CIA".<sup>33</sup> This did not go unnoticed as Solarz mused:

you take the position that we have no particular interest in the success or failure of any one of these factions but you have no comment to make on the allegations that in spite of that judgement we may be helping one or more of the factions.<sup>34</sup>

The committee also heard from the Director of the Washington Office on Africa Edgar Lockwood, who drew attention to the growing evidence of US intervention in Angola. He cited the imbalance of coverage on US foreign policy towards Africa and other parts of the world, arguing that interfering in any country's affairs was wrong. He stated "critics of US foreign policy cite US intervention in Indochina and Latin America [as too invasive] but



criticize US policy toward southern Africa as merely an absence of interest or absence of positive concern”.<sup>35</sup> Therefore, the initial foundations for Congressional objections were beginning to take shape in early November 1975 as Congressional frustration with the lack of forthcoming information from the executive branch was building. This was aided by testimony from African experts such as Lockwood whose views aligned with the legislative branches’ determination to learn from the mistakes of US foreign policy since the 1960s.

On 6 November, Sisco and Colby testified before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee (SFRC) in an executive session. There was little doubt that some members of Congress were agitated by the US position on Angola. During his testimony Sisco defended Kissinger’s Angolan policy stating that

outside interference has had a radical change in the balance of power among the three movements – a balance which had previously offered hope for a compromise [... and as a result] there would be grave consequences for the security and stability of Zaire and Zambia if Angola were to fall into the hands of a communist party.<sup>36</sup>

Yet the fear of a domino effect in the sub-Saharan region were unfounded. There was no evidence to suggest that Angola was a crucial entry point into the region for the Soviets. Nor was it apparent that it was actively seeking to expand its influence in the region if the MPLA emerged victorious. Yet Sisco drew on the credibility argument favoured by Kissinger by arguing that there was a need to show strength after Vietnam. He stated that it was

important to the credibility of our policies throughout the world not to permit such a power play by the USSR to go totally unchallenged [... by showing that] the United States, despite recent reverses in Southeast Asia and our preoccupations at home, is still able to react when a power – the Soviet Union in this instance – moves to upset the international political environment.<sup>37</sup>

Despite the stoic arguments in defence of US policy it was clear that the exposure of IAFEATURE and inevitable confrontation with Congress was imminent even before Angola became an independent state.

On 11 November 1975, the MPLA declared independence as the government of the PRA, while the FNLA announced their own government for the Democratic Republic of Angola, and UNITA established the Social Democratic Republic of Angola.<sup>38</sup> Angola became an independent state but without a functioning government and in the grip of a civil war that had become an internationalized battleground. On 13 November 1975, Kissinger was informed by Mulcahy that the FNLA were retreating. It was now clear that the only credible group was UNITA, albeit with substantial South African assistance. Mulcahy outlined “militarily the situation goes well for the good guys [UNITA ...] still picking up territory, particularly in the south side of Luanda. The FNLA, however, on the north side took a real pasting”.<sup>39</sup> This defeat was also reported by the *New York Times* journalist Michael Kaufman who wrote that the MPLA “repulsed an attack from the north and had in fact advanced halfway to the stronghold of their major opposition”.<sup>40</sup> However, there was further bad news for the US in mid-November 1975 when it became clear that the Soviets were introducing MIG aircraft into Angola. This appears to have caught Kissinger by surprise as he admitted “that will change the situation completely”.<sup>41</sup> Such a revelation meant that the US would have to overtly intervene to combat the Soviet escalation. Kissinger’s deflation was shared by Hyland who concurred “that is the end of it. Five airplanes will rip it right open [...] and] if the Soviets and Cubans intervene that blatantly, I think it is a totally different ball game”.<sup>42</sup> To some extent Kissinger was certain that the Soviets were not prepared to escalate their involvement to such an extent, despite the warnings he received from Davis during the summer. Journalist and African specialist Colin Legum provides a perceptive analysis of the Soviet actions after Angolan independence, observing that Moscow felt completely free to escalate as it was legitimately supporting the new ‘sovereign’ MPLA government in Luanda and because of the intervention by the South African army.<sup>43</sup> With IAFEATURE floundering and the gradual encroachment by Congress, Kissinger expressed his frustration when he stated “I believe our behavior [sic] has been cowardly and totally insensitive to the real Constitutional purpose. There is a rift going on between the legislative and the Administration that will ruin our foreign policy”.<sup>44</sup> Interestingly, he blamed Colby for helping to give momentum by handing over documents to the investigating committees. Yet he accepted

no responsibility for his own contribution to that rift. Although specifically warned that IAFEATURE would result in a confrontation, he pushed for the active option at every opportunity.

## **In search of a Plan B: the options confronting the Ford administration**

On 14 November 1975, the 40 Committee convened again to discuss the deteriorating events in post-independence Angola. In contrast to previous meetings, Colby outlined the new Angolan landscape by stating that “the number of Cubans there is a new factor and the possibility of air support being introduced creates an entirely new picture”.<sup>45</sup> In order to combat this he outlined that significant additional funding and political manoeuvring would be required, such as “sending Redeye missiles; a crash effort on the political front; keep the South Africans involved; work on the Soviets to get out – a direct approach”.<sup>46</sup> At the same time he pushed for a negotiated African-led solution as “we can’t get them to go in and do anything. They talk about it, and they say they are willing but nothing has been done [...] and] we need to stir up the African countries and get them involved”.<sup>47</sup> Yet such a suggestion would have been dismissed by Kissinger who already had sought to quash such thinking as early as August 1975 when he rebuked members of the 40 Committee stating that “the Africans aren’t going to get together in a coalition [...] that’s a pipedream”.<sup>48</sup> Furthermore, in light of the change in events since then newly appointed National Security Advisor Brent Scowcroft and Colby both agreed that even if African nations could be induced to act, the presence of MIGs meant that the US was “in a no-win position – just buying time”.<sup>49</sup> The 40 Committee struggled for solutions that would give the US more time to respond to the Cuban intervention. It had finally reached the point of no return and the warnings of Davis, Sisco, Hyland, Lord and Walker among others over the course of the previous months were coming true. It had been a self-fulfilling prophecy and the uneasy consequences were now emerging.

In desperation for alternatives, CIA African Division Chief Jim Potts informed the committee that the South Africans were requesting funding for mercenaries. Yet Colby was quick to raise the danger of such a collaboration. It was too politically sensitive in his opinion, and he stated

that “the problem is, if we get more South Africans we get more political trouble”.<sup>50</sup> Others such as Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs, Robert S. Ingersoll, however, staunchly refused to accept the limitations of the US in the immediate post-Vietnam era. He endorsed the South African approach and proclaimed “now is not the time to let down; get the dollars and move ahead”.<sup>51</sup> The meeting provides further evidence of the slippery slope that the US had descended on as their reliance on the South Africans is apparent. Nevertheless, it also illustrates that Colby believed that an African based solution in Angola was a better solution than expanding beyond acceptable limits that could be justified to Congress. This opposition did not go unnoticed by Kissinger who continued his attacks on Colby by generating the perception that he was sabotaging US– Angolan policy.

On 19 November 1975, Kissinger told Ford that “the trend is against us in Angola. I think we should appeal for a cease-fire to the OAU and the Soviet Union. Colby is blackmailing us”.<sup>52</sup> In his memoirs, Kissinger criticizes the role Colby played in the execution of Operation IAFEATURE. He argued that the best approach was to spend the

allocated funds as early as possible in order to bring about a rapid and significant change in the situation on the ground and to intimidate Soviet escalation. But Colby porated the funds made available [... and] we wasted the crucial two months before Cuban forces arrived in large numbers.<sup>53</sup>

However, this contradicts the primary evidence. In fact, Kissinger was initially very pleased with the efforts of Colby and the CIA and remarked during a 40 Committee meeting held on 8 August 1975 that “my friends at State have been going around weeping about this. They’d like strict neutrality. I think you’ve [Colby] done damn well in a short time”.<sup>54</sup> Yet when it was clear that all was lost in November, Kissinger sought to apportion blame elsewhere for the defeat and told colleagues “the tide is turning. This hero at the CIA has already so informed the White House and has probably been briefing the committees to that effect”.<sup>55</sup> When Mulcahy outlined that Colby was pushing for diplomacy, Kissinger hit out “that g.d. [sic] CIA does not push us! The CIA does their work and we handle

diplomacy. All we want to know is the cost of covert actions”.<sup>56</sup> However, Colby’s actions were merely a result of the realities he faced in Washington, DC at the time, where the CIA was being thoroughly scrutinized by Congress in the wake of Watergate and the Chilean debacles.

This is an important point as the primary evidence shows that the Congressional investigations were inflicting damage to the perception of US power. Indeed, State Department officials felt that the hearings on Capitol Hill were exposing the internal divisions on US foreign policy for the rest of the world to see. These views were highlighted by Hyland who heavily criticized the work of the Church Committee. In particular, he took exception to the relentless pursuit of details on CIA covert actions and operations. He felt that such details would be extremely damaging and could “be used by every anti-American everywhere in the world to just paste us. It is another self-inflicted wound”.<sup>57</sup> His views were shared by Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs William Rogers who envisioned damage to US credibility in Central and South America. He argued that the outcomes of the Church Committee were

going to hurt in Mexico, all over the Caribbean. It is going to hurt in Venezuela, in Columbia, in Chile, Brazil – they are going to say “what kind of country is this? How can you do business with people like this who spill their guts all over the place?”<sup>58</sup>

Interestingly Rogers also commented on how it would impact US–African relations. He drew attention to the CIA plot to kill Patrice Lumumba in the 1960s and how such information was damaging to other African countries’ perceptions of the US. He also linked this to Angola by arguing that the work of the committee helped the MPLA propaganda against the US. His views are illustrated when he stated that

the idea that the CIA under a vague Presidential order was trying to kill Lumumba – Americans, not mercenaries – and that Lumumba was killed, but not by Americans is going to get totally lost in the propaganda. And the MPLA and all these Communist groups in Africa are going to have a field day saying “See what happens when you let the Americans in? You see what Mobutu is really like?”<sup>59</sup>

It was in this atmosphere that Colby was trying to manoeuvre in, both to acquiesce to Congressional oversight while simultaneously trying enforcing Kissinger's Angolan policy. Despite Kissinger's negative views on Colby, he did begin to realize that the situation was starting to spiral out of control. As a result, he began to make overtures to the Soviets in an attempt to de-escalate the situation. He began by sending a message through Soviet Ambassador to the US, Anatoly Dobrynin by suggesting "we ought to find a way of cooling down Angola. It isn't worth undermining our relations over" and suggested that both countries "support the OAU in a ceasefire".<sup>60</sup> It is somewhat ironic that Kissinger was forced to retreat to the diplomatic option he ridiculed Davis and the African Bureau for advocating only a few months previously.

On 21 November 1975, during another 40 Committee meeting on Angola, Colby made it clear that the large Cuban presence made it impossible to win in Angola through covert means.<sup>61</sup> While outlining the potential countermeasures he warned, "these are big operations. The scope and size are such as to make one question whether we should attempt it".<sup>62</sup> One of the potential options to avoid any direct US operations was to support the South Africans. It is clear this was a sensitive issue, one which Colby, Sisco and Scowcroft all agreed was not worth the price. Colby displayed the most cautious sentiment outlining that "they'd like to get their troops out, and hire mercenaries [... but] they don't have the money to do this and have turned to us. I think this is political dynamite. The press would be after us".<sup>63</sup> However, Sisco was not as concerned, instead he advocated a position where a lack of US discouragement could embolden the South Africans to stay involved. He argued, "I do not favor [*sic*] giving any support to the South Africans [... but] we would not want to discourage them, but leave them to their own devices".<sup>64</sup> There is a degree of controversy over whether the US secretly encouraged the South Africans to intervene in Angola. It is fuelled by contrasting statements by US and South African officials whose recollections cannot be fully verified as the complete primary evidence remains classified. The option of not discouraging the South Africans became more appealing in the light of another warning from Colby on the full impact of the Cuban intervention. Specifically the expedited timeline by which the MPLA would overwhelm any remaining FNLA and UNITA forces.<sup>65</sup> It was also clear that Scowcroft

was beginning to have concerns about whether the Angolan crisis was worth the additional US spending and tried to frame the situation in simplistic terms by arguing, “what we come down to is this; Do we quit now or stay in the ball game?”.<sup>66</sup> In response Colby pushed for a political option to get the other African states involved: “let’s go full tilt to see we can get the Africans to act”, yet Scowcroft remained sceptical commenting that “the diplomatic option is fine, but to expect anything to come of it until the Soviets see the results of what they are putting in, is unrealistic”.<sup>67</sup> One of the other options provided was to request additional funding from Congress to continue the Angolan operation. While others were anxious over the potential political backlash, Scowcroft remained composed and acknowledged that the issue had received little attention so far. He noted “we’ve really had modest flack on this so far [... and] maybe we can’t do anything more but let’s at least give the President the options”.<sup>68</sup> It is clear that personalities played an important role in how information was analysed and presented to Ford for approval, especially in the case of Kissinger and Scowcroft. Historian David Schultz also draws this distinction noting that “whereas Kissinger consistently presented his personal views, Scowcroft sought to provide the President with a variety of opinions and dissenting viewpoints prior to giving his own advice”.<sup>69</sup> However, by the end of November 1975 and with his options decreasing, Kissinger grew frustrated by a lack of Soviet response to his earlier overture to Dobrynin and began warn the Soviets that their actions in Angola threatened détente between the two superpowers.

On 22 November 1975, the US sent a formal message to the Soviets demanding they halt their supply of arms to the MPLA. It specified that “the conduct of the Soviet Union in this matter has now surpassed all bounds of restraint, and has additionally placed it in serious conflict with the majority of the members of the Organization of African Unity”.<sup>70</sup> However, by linking Angolan policy to détente, Kissinger only served to escalate the stakes and confirm that the US could not match the Soviet efforts in Angola. He demanded

that the Soviet Union discontinue the efforts it is now making to escalate the fighting in Angola, to give public support to the efforts of the O.A.U. to promote a cease-fire and the subsequent initiation of peaceful negotiations among the three Angolan movements and to

issue an appeal to all nations to cease their intervention in Angola's internal affairs would work.<sup>71</sup>

However, his protests were dismissed by the Soviets who rejected the accusation that their Angolan policy was inconsistent with détente. They also disagreed that their policy angered the OAU. Despite the setback, this was the start of an effort by the Ford administration to seek a diplomatic solution to end the hostilities in Angola without losing credibility. As illustrated by the 40 Committee meetings during November 1975, the US position in Angola was becoming increasingly untenable and as a result the US attempted to open two diplomatic channels in a last-ditch effort to avoid defeat.

The US tried a multilateral diplomatic approach to get African states to support their position. On 25 November 1975, the US asked for help from the French who still held some influence in their former African colonies. In a message to French President, Giscard d'Estaing, Ford outlined how the US hoped

to work closely with you and we hope that your government can play a key role in developing African support [... and] I urge your government to use its influence to persuade other governments, especially in Africa, to restrict overflight and landing rights for Soviet aircraft en route to Angola with cargoes of arms and other military equipment.<sup>72</sup>

The message also contained perceptions of how the US viewed Soviet motives for intervening in Angola. Yet, these reasons are strikingly similar to American motives for intervening and maintaining their support for the FNLA and UNITA. The message stated that after formally recognizing the MPLA as the legitimate government of Angola, "the Soviets have publicly staked their prestige on the outcome [... and] Moscow seems to believe that there is more to be lost by backing down than by pressing on with its present policy".<sup>73</sup> This is almost a parallel for US motives, as they had publicly committed themselves to a pro-FNLA/UNITA policy. On 28 November 1975, Mulcahy told Kissinger that defeat was almost a foregone conclusion without the continuation of South African assistance remarking that "if they pull out of the South, the MPLA will wrap it up".<sup>74</sup> However,



Kissinger took more interest at sniping at Davis and Colby during the meeting. He issued newly appointed African Bureau chief, William Schaefele an abrupt warning to depart from his predecessors' mentality when he stated "I want an aggressive, strong, affirmative action from your bureau. Your predecessors kept the facts from me for three months. If we had moved in March [1975], we would have stifled it".<sup>75</sup> The primary evidence proves that this is not an accurate account of what happened in the early months of 1975. No information was being hidden from him over the situation in Angola during this time. Davis and Lord tried to bring Angola to his attention in March, but he was firmly preoccupied with the dramatic and accelerated downfall of South Vietnam. Another important point which Kissinger failed to articulate is the intended outcome in Angola even if the US was not constrained by Vietnam and budgetary problems.

Such a lack of direction would come to hurt the Ford administration's efforts to defend its Angolan policy to Congress in early 1976. By the end of November 1975 even the concept of what was a victory in Angola was unclear. Indeed this was acknowledged in a memorandum from Sisco to Scowcroft which outlined that even if the Soviets and the Cubans halted their support for the MPLA and its leadership agreed to a political compromise, and the OAU successfully negotiated a ceasefire, the FNLA and UNITA would still need military assistance.<sup>76</sup> Therefore, even in a best case scenario the State Department felt that there was no way to exit Angola without appearing to lose credibility. This is an important point. At no time was there ever any concise vision of what to do if the US covert operation was successful. There was no discussion of a long-term commitment towards Angola or the region in the event that IAFEATURE was successful. This was a particular failing of Kissinger's strategy, one which he never fully came to terms with even when pursuing a confrontational stance with Congress to provide further funding to continue operations. In fact, it served to fuel those in the Congress who used the Vietnam analogy to justify their opposition.

As a result, the Ford administration continued to stumble on a one-dimensional path, requesting a substantial increase in Angolan aid for the FNLA and UNITA to \$60 million from Congress. However, there were no illusions that securing additional aid was an uphill task. Sisco acknowledged this fact stating that "there will be strong opposition to any further funds being allocated. We believe early consultation with key

members of Congress are [sic] essential – in particular Senator Clark”.<sup>77</sup> It was an ominous precursor to the developments between the executive and legislative branches over Angolan policy that was to unfold in December 1975.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, Kissinger critically misjudged the Angolan situation due to his inability to assess the situation outside of the Cold War norms. Despite his proclivity for solutions on a global level, he is guilty of letting personal objectives override his realist outlook during the Angolan crisis. The situation demanded a more nuanced regional approach to confront the complexities of the Angolan Civil War, but Kissinger could not detach from viewing it in bipolar Cold War terms. In addition, the need to re-establish a level of personal credibility after the setback in Vietnam compounded this error in judgement. In the case of Angola, instead of engaging with the MPLA whose allegiance to the Soviets was questionable, Kissinger reverted back to staunch Cold War stereotypes. One of the biggest failures in Angola was the inability to see the Angolan liberation groups as anything but pro-West or pro-Soviet.

Therefore, Kissinger’s search for credibility after Vietnam was counterproductive to its aim. In Angola, Kissinger’s lack of regional understanding and his refusal to listen to colleagues who did comprehend the situation led to further failure. As historian and Angolan specialist John Marcum observed, the cooperative relationship that existed between the US and the Portuguese throughout the Angolan insurgency had a negative impact on how the liberation movement leaders viewed the US. In addition to this, he stressed that the MPLA should not have been identified as an enemy just because it was somewhat hostile to US economic and political intentions.<sup>78</sup> Consequently Marcum believed that the US did not need to choose sides in the conflict. As such he felt that Angola provided the US with an opportunity to practise a more inclusive foreign policy rather than defining situations into Cold War constraints. Marcum stated that the US

should declare its readiness to establish relations based on the principles of mutuality of interest with whomever [sic] ends up

governing Angola [... and by doing so] It could prove to itself and the world that it did learn something from Vietnam.<sup>79</sup>

However, Kissinger was convinced that withdrawing from Angola without gaining any negotiation on Soviet and Cuban aid to the MPLA would be perceived as another loss for the US. He thought such a defeat would potentially risk alienating the other black African states. Yet he underestimated the resolve of black African leaders who were not prepared to enter into a form of neo-colonialism and be dominated from Moscow or Washington, DC. In addition, the covert programme initiated by the US, allied to allegations that they colluded with South Africa, only helped to fuel African scepticism of US motives in the region. By the beginning of December 1975, with funding for Operation IAFEATURE nearly depleted, the Ford administration was forced to deal directly with Congress to continue Angolan assistance. It ensured a tense battle between the legislative and executive branches of government for the right to conduct foreign policy. Even worse it ensured that the Angolan episode became a very public affair which further tainted the US image abroad and contributed to a perception of the US in decline.

- 1 Daniel Spikes, *Angola and the Politics of Intervention: From Local Bush War to Chronic Crisis in Southern Africa* (Jefferson: McFarland and Company, 1993), 174.
- 2 Memorandum for the Record, 40 Committee Meeting, Kissinger, Sisco, Colby, Hyland and Scowcroft, 11 am, 8 August 1975, Document No. 123, Vol. XXVIII, Southern Africa, 1969–1976, FRUS: 295.
- 3 Ibid.: 297.
- 4 Memorandum from Sisco to Kissinger, 8 August 1975, JJS Memcons, Box 19, RG 59, Records of Joseph Sisco, 1951–1976, NARA, Maryland: 1. According to Sisco, “even if your demarche does not produce the results we wish, your position will be ‘on the record’ and should prove helpful with the Congress” (ibid.).
- 5 Emtel, AmEmb Kinshasa, Zaire to SecState Washington, DC, 101550Z, 10 September 1975, Zaire to SecState NODIS (2), NSA Country Files, GRFL: 1. Furthermore, “in the face of economic disintegration on the home front, Mobutu is transfixed by the Angolan war and none of the essential steps needed to put the economy back together are being taken” ibid.: 2). Zaire’s debt was a direct development from Mobutu’s “Zairianization” of economic and agricultural sectors in 1973–1974. Under this policy, Mobutu gave foreign-owned stores and plantations to “acquirers” who were mostly politicians and ranking bureaucrats. According to Michael Schatzberg, these acquirers “quickly ravaged the firms they acquired, with catastrophic effect on the economy”. See Michael Schatzberg, *Mobutu or Chaos? The United States and Zaire, 1960–1990* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1991), 36.
- 6 Emtel, 10 September 1975, 2. The collaboration between the US and Zaire was still being denied at the end of September 1975.
- 7 Ibid.: 3. Walker raised concerns about US assistance to Zaire, especially considering its commitment to Angola which would only increase the \$400 million aid package. As

in these circumstances and as the facts of the Angolan war move into the public domain, will the tenuous alliance of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the consultative group and the private banks be willing to finance some of the costs of the war? Will the Congress buy the \$20 million program loan, an essential part of our assistance package? Will the Congress approve an increase for our share of the growing pie?

8 Ibid.: 3. (Ibid.: 2)

9 Ibid. Perhaps Walker's view was influenced by events in South-East Asia, as in later years historian Sean Kelly conducted an interview with Walker who compared the Angolan situation with Vietnam. According to Kelly

more than just weapons were flown into Kinshasa by the CIA. Lannon Walker [...] looked out of his office window one morning and was reminded suddenly of Saigon – his last post before going to Zaire. The embassy parking lot seemed to be filling up with pastel – coloured Ford Pintos [...] and] he quickly found out that the CIA intended to play by its own rules in Angola – as it had in Vietnam.

See Sean Kelly, *America's Tyrant: The CIA and Mobutu of Zaire – How the United States Put Mobutu in Power, Protected Him from His Enemies, Helped Him Become One of the Richest Men in the World, and Lived to Regret It* (Washington, DC: The American University Press, 1993), 216–217. Kelly interviewed Walker on 3 May 1988 in Dakar, Senegal.

10 Emtel, AmEmb Kinshasa, Zaire to SecState Washington, DC, 121130Z, 12 September 1975, Zaire to SecState NODIS (2), NSA Country Files, GRFL: 2. Mobutu held a

mistaken belief that our commitment is open ended ... I repeat my recommendation [...] that Mobutu must be told just what he can expect from us in the way of support. If we can make him understand the limitation of our assistance, he may then make more realistic decisions.

(Ibid.: 2)

In addition, the idea that Zaire manipulated the US in order to get what it wanted was reported in a Paris based weekly news bulletin called the *International New Press Agency* who carried an article on 23 October 1975 claiming that former US Ambassador to Zaire Deane Hinton was

sacrificed on altar of US foreign policy and there never was any Central Intelligence Agency involvement in any plot [...] relations between (Hinton) and Mobutu reached a record low ebb. To repair damage, US decided to send back to Kinshasa [a] man who made their policy in Zaire work so well.

- See Emtel, AmEmbassy Paris France to SecState Washington, DC, 242023Z, 24 October 1975, Public Library of US Diplomacy, Wikileaks: 1–2.
- 11 Memorandum from Mulcahy to Bremer, 11 September 1975, Box 19, RG 59, Records of Joseph Sisco, 1951–1976, NARA, Maryland: 2.
  - 12 Memcon, Secretary’s Staff Meeting, 11 September 1975, Transcripts of Henry Kissinger, 1973–1977, NARA, Maryland: 27.
  - 13 Memorandum for the Record, 40 Committee Meeting, Kissinger, Sisco, Colby, Hyland, Cutler, Potts, Fish, Nelson, and Scowcroft, 9 am, 13 September 1975, Document No. 127, Vol. XXVIII, Southern Africa, 1969–1976, FRUS: 312.
  - 14 Ibid.: 307. Kissinger’s ire was in response to Colby informing him that the CIA was sending in weapons that were out of date, mostly World War II material. In response to Colby’s fears, Kissinger snapped “there would be great uproar about CIA not doing anything to block the Communist takeover of an African nation” (ibid.: 306).
  - 15 Ibid. Kissinger’s point on morality was in response to Sisco’s comment that the perceptions of the US would be critical if the operation was exposed as “we are supporting Mobutu who is intervening in a war, publicly. As our role becomes more exposed, how far are we going to go?” (ibid.).
  - 16 Ibid.
  - 17 Ibid.: 308. Assistant to the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Lieutenant General W. Y. Smith agreed that no American trainers should be used, not even in Zaire (ibid.: 309).
  - 18 Ibid. Hyland remarked “they are not losing because of a lack of equipment” and Fish concurred “Training is the problem” (ibid.).
  - 19 Ibid.: 310–311.
  - 20 Ibid.: 311. Kissinger told Colby “let’s arm and train Cabinda forces and see if we can get something going”.
  - 21 Ibid.: 312.
  - 22 Rob Roy Ratliff, Executive Secretary, Memorandum for the Record, 15 September 1975, Summary of 40 Committee Meeting on Angola, held on 13 September 1975, Box 22, RG 59, Records of Joseph Sisco, 1951–1976, NARA, Maryland: 1.
  - 23 Jussi Hanhimäki, *The Flawed Architect: Henry Kissinger and American Foreign Policy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 417.
  - 24 Raymond Garthoff, *Détente and Confrontation: American-Soviet Relations from Nixon to Reagan* (Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution, 1985), 521. Kissinger’s remarks were given at a dinner entitled “The United States and Africa: Strengthening the Relationship” on 23 September 1975. See DOSB, Vol. 73, 13 October 1975: 571–575.
  - 25 Emtel, AmEmb Kinshasa, Zaire to SecState, Washington, DC, 110955Z, 11 October 1975, Zaire to SecState NODIS (2), NSA Country Files, GRFL: 2–3.
  - 26 Emtel, AmEmb Kinshasa, Zaire to SecState, Washington, DC, 110955Z, Section Two, 11 October 1975, Zaire to SecState NODIS (2), NSA Country Files, GRFL: 1.
  - 27 Hanhimäki, *The Flawed Architect*, 414. South African troops initially advanced into Angola in August 1975 in order to protect the Kunene dam, which was a joint Portuguese-South African venture. See Robin Hallett, “The South African Intervention in Angola, 1975–76,” *African Affairs* 77 (July 1978): 357.
  - 28 See Emtel, AmEmbassy Monrovia Liberia to SecState Washington, DC, 221655Z, 22 October 1975, Public Library of US Diplomacy, Wikileaks: 2. There is no declassified information available at present to investigate whether the Ford administration had prior knowledge or indeed encouraged Operation ZULU before it was launched
  - 29 Memcon, Ford, Kissinger, Scowcroft, Oval Office, White House, Washington, DC, 9.20–10.13 am, 3 November 1975, Box 16, Meetings, GRFL: 2.

- 30 Ibid.: 4. Seeking approval of his efforts, Kissinger noted: "what you have done is remarkable. Also, Martinique, Vladivostok. All of these have been dumped in because of domestic politics" (ibid.).
- 31 "Civil War in Angola," *New York Times*, 3 November 1975, 34. The article stated that the MPLA were attributing these reverses to mercenaries from South Africa and at least six other countries supported by the CIA. Yet, the argument was balanced out as the MPLA was reported to have 3000 Katangese guerrillas in their ranks.
- 32 Charles Stuart Kennedy and Edward W. Mulcahy, "Interview with Edward W. Mulcahy," LOC, published 1989, [www.loc.gov/item/mfdipbib000843/](http://www.loc.gov/item/mfdipbib000843/).
- 33 DOS Memorandum, PW to Sisco, "SFRC Testimony on Angola," 27 October 1975, Angola 1975, Box 22, RG 59, Records of Joseph Sisco 1951–1976, NARA, Maryland: 1.
- 34 House Committee on International Relations, Disaster Assistance in Angola, Ninety-Forth Congress, First Session, 5 November 1975, 3 pm–5 pm, Room 2255, Rayburn House Office Building, Washington, DC, LOC: 9–10.
- 35 Ibid.: 19. He added,

Such an interpretation is incorrect, US intervention in Angola has already become as costly and as dangerous as its involvement in Chile only a few years ago. Surely the tragic lessons of Chile should teach us to oppose immediately and vehemently every sign of covert or overt intervention in the troubled political affairs of another country.

- Lockwood called on the Ford administration to end its intervention in Angola and urged Congress to use whatever powers it had at its disposal to enforce this if ignored as "the United States can live with whatever party comes to power in Angola. We see no real reason for the present hardlining [*sic*] posture of Secretary Kissinger" (ibid.: 21).
- 36 SFRC Testimony, 6 November 1975, Angola 1975, Box 22, RG 59, Records of Joseph Sisco, 1951–1976, NARA, Maryland: 3–4.
  - 37 Ibid.: 4. Sisco had already communicated with Kissinger on how he would approach the Committee: "I will proceed from the explicit assumption of our involvement in Angola but will try to limit my remarks to explaining and justifying the policy considerations of our involvement". See DOS Memorandum, Sisco to Kissinger, 29 October 1975, Angola 1975, Box 22, RG 59, Records of Joseph Sisco 1951–1976, NARA, Maryland: 1.
  - 38 Kaufman wrote that the PRA could expect to be recognized by the Soviet Union, Cuba, Poland, Czechoslovakia, East Germany, Yugoslavia, Mozambique, Guinea-Bissau, Guinea and the Congo. In comparison, the Democratic Republic of Angola would be recognized by Zaire, while UNITA government, the Social Democratic Republic of Angola may receive support from France, China and South Africa. See Michael T. Kaufman, "Portuguese Quit Angola as the Civil War Goes on," *New York Times*, 11 November 1975, 1. By 18 November, the PRA had received additional recognition from Somalia, North Vietnam, Brazil and Algeria. See Christopher S. Wren, "Soviet Spurs Support to Luanda and Restores Ties with Uganda," *New York Times*, 18 November 1975, 6.
  - 39 Memcon, Kissinger, Hyland, Ingersoll, Lord, 8 am, 13 November 1975, Box 9, Transcripts of Henry Kissinger, 1973–1977, NARA, Maryland: 29. Media reports at the time state that the MPLA was on the defensive, to such an extent that they ceased reporting military developments around the country. Also, it is clear that the Portuguese were beginning to withdraw from positions before 11 November, as Portuguese troops were reported to have abandoned the airport and the port in Luanda after exchanging fire with the MPLA. See Michael T. Kaufman,

- “Luanda is up Front in a War of Nerves,” *New York Times*, 7 November 1975, 2. Also, the report of Mozambiquean troops was confirmed in the media as 250 veteran Mozambiquean troops were to help the MPLA in their struggle with the FNLA and UNITA. See “Mozambique Move in Angola Forecast,” *New York Times*, 13 November 1975, 6.
- 40 Michael T. Kaufman, “Angola Movement Claims a Victory,” *New York Times*, 9 November 1975, 18.
- 41 Memcon, Kissinger, Hyland, Ingersoll, Lord, The Secretary’s Staff Meeting, 13 November 1975, 8 am, Box 9, Transcripts of Henry Kissinger, 1973–1977, NARA, Maryland: 29. The criticism of the FNLA and UNITA continued during another staff meeting held on 19 November 1975, as Hyland said “the UNITA column, has not done much in the last several days. The FNLA is still bogged down north of Luanda and doesn’t seem to be able to do much, ever since it got a bloody nose” (ibid.: 10). He continued “I think the Russians may overplay their hand in Africa – when you have Amin kicking them out, and a number of Africans that were supposed to recognize immediately hanging back, saying they want to see what the OAU does” (ibid.).
- 42 Ibid.
- 43 Colin Legum, “Angola and the Horn of Africa,” in *Diplomacy of Power/Soviet Armed Forces as a Political Instrument*, ed. Stephen S. Kaplan (Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution, 1981), 596.
- 44 Telcon, Kissinger and Attorney General Edward Levy, 13 October 1975, 7.02 pm, Document No. C18090660, FOIA State: 2.
- 45 40 Committee Meeting, 14 November 1975, 3 pm, Washington, DC, Document No. 137, Vol. XXVIII, Southern Africa, 1969–1976, FRUS: 337.
- 46 Ibid.
- 47 Ibid.: 338. Colby referred again later in the meeting to the situation being “a big African problem, and we ought to get them to take action”. Scowcroft dismissed this: “I’m not sure that an African political effort will work either”. Colby tried to persist with the African initiative “because all of Africa wants them out”; Scowcroft again added “I don’t see that being worth much”. In the end, Colby acknowledged “I can’t contest that” (ibid.: 339).
- 48 Memorandum for the Record, 8 August 1975, 297.
- 49 Ibid.: 338. Despite this statement, the Deputy Secretary of Defence for Security Assistance, Lt. General H. M. Fish, asked: “Are we willing to put in 50 CIA officers for leadership?” This attracted a sarcastic remark from the Joint Chief of Staff, General George Brown who said “General, did you ever hear of Laos?” In addition, Kissinger was relieved with the NSA position as Ford sought to mark his own authority in the wake of perceptions that he was not in full control of his administration. He fired Secretary of Defense James Schlesinger who had a tense relationship with Ford and Kissinger, but he sought to lessen any criticism of that decision by reducing Kissinger’s dominance of the foreign policy apparatus.
- 50 Ibid.: 341.
- 51 Ibid. He was joined by Potts who commented, “we want to try to keep South Africans in the game”. However, NSC Senior African Staffer Hal Horan warned that the South Africans had their own interest and, therefore, the US had to approach such collaboration cautiously (ibid.: 342).
- 52 Memcon, Ford, Kissinger, Scowcroft, Oval Office, White House, Washington, DC, 19 November 1975, 9.15 am, Meetings, GRFL: 3. Kissinger believed that Colby was deliberately giving more details to the Congressional committees about the Angolan operation to try and prevent the operation from escalating any further.
- 53 Henry Kissinger, *Years of Renewal* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1999), 813.
- 54 Memorandum for the Record, 8 August 1975, 294. This contradicts Hyland’s memoirs as according to him, “NSC officials and Senior State Department officials found it ‘maddening how inept the CIA was at finding and dispatching military equipment’ into Angola”. See

William G. Hyland, *Mortal Rivals: Superpower Relations from Nixon to Reagan* (New York: Random House, 1987), 141.

- 55 Memcon, Kissinger, Ingersoll, Sisco, Mulcahy, Jerry Bremer, Ambassador Buffum, Washington, DC, 19 November 1975, Document No. 138, Vol. XXVIII, Southern Africa, 1969–1976, FRUS: 343. Kissinger continued by dismissing Colby's suggestions at the previous 40 Committee meeting on 14 November 1975 as "It really is a sign of the amateurs at work. Diplomacy is no alternative to what he's doing" (ibid.).
- 56 Ibid. Kissinger added "I think Colby will leak that he's urged a diplomatic effort so we'd better do something" (ibid.).
- 57 Memcon, Kissinger, Sisco, Hyland, Mulcahy, Lord, 8 am, 19 November 1975, Box 9, Transcripts of Henry Kissinger, 1973–1977, NARA, Maryland: 28. Hyland subsequently replaced Brent Scowcroft as Deputy National Security Advisor a few days later.
- 58 Ibid.: 32.
- 59 Ibid.: 34.
- 60 Telecon, Soviet Ambassador to the US Anatoly Dobrynin and Kissinger, 20 November 1975, 6.12 pm, DNSA: 3.
- 61 Memorandum for the Record, 40 Committee Meeting, Washington, DC, 12 pm, 21 November 1975, Document No. 139, Vol. XXVIII, Southern Africa, 1969–1976, FRUS: 347. Journalist David Binder also reported that there were 3000 Cuban troops in Angola. See David Binder, "Cuba is Said to Have Sent 3,000 to Aid Soviet-Backed Angolans," *New York Times*, 21 November 1975, 1.
- 62 Memorandum for the Record, 21 November 1975, 348.
- 63 Ibid.
- 64 Ibid. Scowcroft agreed with Sisco: "We do not want to discourage them". This outlook was helped by the committee's refusal to accept proposal where American technicians would be sent into Angola (ibid.: 350). Authors Michael Wolfers and Jane Bergerol quote Senator Barry Goldwater [R-Arizona] as stating "there is no question [...] that the CIA told the South Africans to move into Angola and that we would help with military equipment". See Michael Wolfers and Jane Bergerol, *Angola: In the Front Line* (London: Zed Press, 1983), 8. It is important to note here that both did not footnote this information to say when Senator Goldwater is supposed to have made these remarks. However, former President of South Africa from 1989–1994 F.W. de Klerk argues "when Angola had become independent in 1975, South Africa had been asked by the United States and several moderate African countries to come to the aid of UNITA and the FNLA, the anti-communists in the country". See F. W. de Klerk, *The Last Trek: A New Beginning – The Autobiography* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999), 58. This builds on the remarks of the South African Defence Minister at the time of the Angolan Civil War P. W. Botha who stated

I knew of only one occasion in recent years when we crossed a border and that was in the case of Angola, when we did so with the approval and knowledge of the Americans. But they left us in the lurch [...] and] they encouraged us to act, when we had nearly reached the climax, we were ruthlessly left in the lurch,

17 April 1978, Republic of South Africa, House of Assembly Debates, Pretoria, COL 4852 in Piero Gleijeses, *The Cuban Drumbeat: Castro's Worldview: Cuban Foreign Policy in a Hostile World* (New York: Seagull Books, 2009), 27–28.

- 65 Memorandum for the Record, 21 November 1975, 350.



- 66 Ibid. In addition, the media reported that the Chinese had ceased training and giving aid to the FNLA and UNITA. A Ford administration official was supposed to have said the reason for the Chinese pull-out was “to avoid the stigma of superpower involvement in African struggles, a stigma that the Russians are now acquiring in Angola”. See Binder, “Cuba is Said to Have Sent 3,000 to Aid Soviet-Backed Angolans,” 1.
- 67 Memorandum for the Record, 21 November 1975, 350.
- 68 Ibid. Even the media had commented that there were “no serious objections” during Colby’s briefings to six Congressional subcommittees over several months. See Leslie Gelb, “US, Soviet, China Reported Aiding Portugal, Angola,” *New York Times*, 25 September 1975, 1. Furthermore, even Sisco began to see the options narrowing, “I see broad alternatives – a position where we admit defeat or we opt for stabilization at this cost”. See Memorandum for the Record, 21 November 1975, 351.
- 69 David F. Schultz, *Brent Scowcroft: Internationalism and Post-Vietnam War American Foreign Policy* (New York: Bowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2011), 50. The Halloween Massacre is the name the press gave to the decision by President Ford to remove key personnel from his cabinet such as the dismissal of James Schlesinger as Secretary of Defense and the elevation of Donald Rumsfeld to that position from being the White House Chief of Staff on 31 October 1975. The CIA chief, William Colby was also informed that he would be replaced as CIA director by the end of 1975. The position would eventually go to George Bush Sr. who was serving as US Liaison Officer to the PRC.
- 70 Message from the US Government to the Soviet Government, Undated, Document No. 140, Vol. XVIII, Southern Africa, 1969–1976, FRUS: 354. This message was also called for by some in the media who argued that “Washington might privately remind Moscow that the durability of détente may well depend on the willingness of the superpowers to refrain from meddling in such trouble spots”. See “Civil War in Angola,” 34.
- 71 Message from the US Government to the Soviet Government, Undated, 354. The Soviet government replied on 28 November 1975. It rejected all US claims about Soviet personnel being in Angola and that it angered the OAU. The Soviets also dismissed that their Angolan policy was not consistent with bilateral US–Soviet relations. See Message from the Soviet Government to the US Government, Undated, Document No. 142, Vol. XVIII, Southern Africa, 1969–1976, FRUS: 358–360.
- 72 Message from President Ford to French President Giscard d’Estaing, Washington, DC, 25 November 1975, 0200Z, Document No. 141, Vol. XVIII, Southern Africa, 1969–1976, FRUS: 357. In addition, Ford stated that the US believed that “there is a substantial anti-Chinese character to the Soviet move”. The message also referred to the Soviets allowing the Cubans “to act as their surrogates in many support roles” (ibid.: 356).
- 73 Ibid.: 356–357. The US even tried to present their involvement in Angola as successful. The French were told that the original US motive to support the FNLA and UNITA was to prevent a massive MPLA victory before 11 November 1975, now “that has been achieved and we now believe the political dimension should be given more emphasis” (ibid.: 357).
- 74 Memcon, Kissinger, Sisco, Schaufele, Mulcahy, Bremer, Washington, DC, 28 November 1975, Document No. 144, Vol. XVIII, Southern Africa, 1969–1976, FRUS: 363.
- 75 Ibid.: 362. Kissinger also criticized Davis’ predecessor and US Ambassador to Nigeria Donald Easum during the meeting, “has Easum come in bleeding about Angola?” Mulcahy informed Kissinger that Easum wanted to tell the Nigerians about South African involvement (ibid.: 363).
- 76 Memorandum, Sisco to Scowcroft, “The Department of State’s Comments on the Working Group Memorandum on Angola,” 24 November 1975, Angola 1975, Box 22, RG 59, Records of Joseph Sisco 1951–1976, NARA, Maryland: 1.
- 77 Ibid.: 2.
- 78 House Committee on International Relations, 5 November 1975, 21–22.



## 6 Humpty Dumpty politics

### Kissinger, Congress and the Vietnam legacy

#### Introduction

The major political ramifications of IAFEATURE began in earnest in December 1975 when the Ford administration and Congress clashed over the conduct of US–Angolan policy. This was fuelled by media exposure of Kissinger’s role in limiting any opposition to his plan and his fury with the State Department for leaking information to the press. Furthermore, media reports began to emerge indicating that the US were collaborating with the South Africans in Angola. Such stories contributed to further concerns over the morality of US foreign policy in the Third World. In particular, this chapter explores the effect of the Vietnam legacy on US policy towards Angola and how it permeated into a wider discourse on the future of American foreign policy toward peripheral zones of Cold War competition. In his memoirs Kissinger attempts to portray the events of December 1975 as tragic, claiming that the Ford administration was pursuing careful diplomacy with the Soviet Union and moderate African states. He stresses that it was proving successful until Congress intervened and halted all funding for operations in Angola.<sup>1</sup> This assertion has been challenged in recent times by historians such as Jussi Hanhimäki and Piero Gleijeses. Both have questioned Kissinger’s assessment that Congress “exploded” the Ford administration’s design by asking whether an additional \$28 million would have made the crucial difference between winning and losing Angola.<sup>2</sup> In addition Gleijeses points to the Congressional opposition against sanctioning further aid on the grounds that they feared another Vietnam. Yet there is a lack of detail outlining how that opposition was

organized. Indeed, the opposition in Congress was not entirely unified with liberals, conservatives and moderates all differing on what Angola meant to US national interests. It is within this fractured environment that this chapter illustrates that December 1975 was crucial not only to US– Angolan policy, but also to the wider debate of executive and legislative relations post-Vietnam and how US foreign policy should be conducted in the future.

First, it explores how Kissinger was targeted by conservatives such as Senator Strom Thurmond (R-South Carolina) and Senator Jesse Helms (R-North Carolina). They advocated a tougher economic policy towards the Soviets, believing it would force them to withdraw aid to the MPLA. This was balanced by the liberal argument forwarded by Senator Dick Clark (D-Iowa), Senator Ron Dellums (D-California) and Senator Joseph Biden (D-Delaware) who expressed concern that the US was being sucked into another quagmire resembling the origins of American participation in Vietnam. While both sides shared the view that Angola was not a vital national interest for the US, they proposed different responses to the crisis. Indeed, Ford and Kissinger found themselves increasingly politically isolated as the emergence of the Reagan conservatives and the Democratic liberals began to polarize. Such divisiveness led to a substantial separation in Congress over its role in the shaping of foreign policy. This is illustrated when liberals such as Senator John Tunney (D-California) introduced an amendment to the Defense Appropriations Act of 1976 calling for significant limitations on future US foreign policy by citing a wish to avoid another Vietnam. This included blocking any future attempt by the executive branch to conduct paramilitary or covert operations where the US had no vital interests. The debate widened to include academic analysis on Angolan policy from distinguished scholars such as Earl Ravenal and Robert Weinland, who criticized the failure of American policymakers to learn from the tragic experience in Vietnam.

Second, this chapter examines the mounting pressure on Kissinger when the media exposed his role as the primary architect of the covert operation in Angola. The disclosure that Davis resigned in protest of US–Angolan policy and how Kissinger was trying to marginalize the African Bureau resulted in further accusations of secrecy around Angolan policy being raised in the media and in Congress, leaving little doubt that Kissinger was the main architect of the Angolan programme. This emboldened his critics who claimed that he was a lone ranger who wielded too much control over

the direction of foreign policy. These leaks infuriated Kissinger who lashed out at the conduct of the State Department on the Angolan leaks. This highlighted once again the difficult relationship between the African Bureau and Kissinger – and the failure to reshape it to his will. However, despite the media exposure and internal disputes the consensus in Congress was also split as there was a degree of apprehension from the moderate elements of both the Republicans and the Democrats that the liberal agenda was too aggressive. This is highlighted by moderate Democrats and Republicans such as Senate Minority Leader Robert Griffin (R-Michigan) and Senate Appropriations Chairman John McClellan (D-Arkansas) who argued that curtailing the executive branch's options in Angola would result in a counter-productive policy that would damage the US in the long term. In the midst of this confusion, Kissinger continued to believe that he was right to involve the US in Angola and that a victory was in sight until Congress deprived him of the opportunity to get the Soviets to the negotiating table. He genuinely believed that the Soviets would not risk losing détente over such a minor incident. However, there is clear evidence from the CIA that the Soviets were determined to hold out in Angola and would continue to escalate knowing that the US could not match them due to Congressional restrictions.

Finally, this chapter looks at Kissinger's pursuit of an OAU solution where all foreign powers would withdraw from Angola and a government of national unity would be formed amongst the MPLA, FNLA and UNITA. This was based on a partnership with moderate African nations who applied significant pressure on the US to maintain aid in the aftermath of the Senate vote. Indeed, these countries astutely played into Kissinger's fear that the region would succumb to Soviet dominance. In response, he tried to placate them over Congressional action and forge a strong moderate African bloc to oppose recognition of the MPLA at the upcoming OAU summit in January 1976. Yet he was also presented with a chance to gain almost everything he sought to achieve at the OAU, in the form of an African initiated solution from Tanzania, but he rejected this compromise in favour of adhering to Cold War superpower discussions.

## **An American eagle without claws: the Ford administration versus Congress**

As Angola began to receive sustained attention in the media, conservative and liberal critics of the Ford administration gradually began to increase their attacks on the executive branch's actions. The negative reaction associated with Angola reached such a level that it gave rise to press speculation on Kissinger's position as Secretary of State. The *New York Times* carried stories by journalist Bernard Gwertzman who speculated

[Kissinger's] future has become a subject of increasing speculation. Once regarded as a permanent fixture, Mr. Kissinger, his prestige and popularity on the decline in Washington, is seen by even his closest aides as a lame duck Secretary of State.<sup>3</sup>

The article also outlined Kissinger's strained relationship with Congress adding,

on Capitol Hill he is widely distrusted after once being regarded with reverence. He is seen by conservatives as soft on the Russians [... and] liberals see him as a Cold Warrior ready to plunge the US into another Vietnam to counteract Soviet involvement in Angola.<sup>4</sup>

However, despite the media speculation of Kissinger on Capitol Hill, the majority of Congress continued to ignore the Ford administration's actions in Angola in early December 1975, giving the executive branch hope that it would secure the funding required to carry on the fight in Angola.

This was reflected in a 40 Committee meeting held on 11 December 1975 to discuss the dwindling funding for the operation in Angola. CIA Director William Colby who was apprehensive of Congressional perceptions throughout the autumn of 1975, reported to his surprise that the House Appropriations Committee did not object to a potential request for additional funds. Instead of being "ridden out on a rail. I must say that I was surprised at their reactions – how mild they were. And this committee is not known for its hawks".<sup>5</sup> In fact, at this stage the only objections to US actions came from the House Select Committee on Intelligence and the SFRC. Most notably from Senator Ron Dellums and Senator Dick Clark, who accused the administration of concealing Angolan operational details from Congress and by extension, the American people. Dellums attacked the lack of morality in US policy in Angola:

what is happening in Angola is a war. Life and death are realities in Angola. I would assume that virtually everyone involved there has some degree of knowledge with respect to what, if any, when, where, why, how, and under what circumstances the United States may or may not be involved in Angola. However, there is one party that has no knowledge of American involvement in war, and that is the American people – the people of the United States and their Representatives.<sup>6</sup>

Despite the protestations of Dellums, the Ford administration had followed the correct legislative procedures with regard to disclosing information to the committees about its covert activities under the Hughes-Ryan Amendment passed in 1974. However, the distinction that must be drawn is in the detail of what Ford administration officials told Congressional committees. As former Kissinger aide Roger Morris describes,

senators and congressmen would claim that the CIA briefings were too ‘general’ to reveal the Angolan intervention. But for most, the consultation provision trapped them between violating the secrecy of the briefings and appearing later to be in complicity with the administration.<sup>7</sup>

This is clearly shown by the reaction of some members of the Senate in December 1975 who were not on the committees briefed about Angolan policy.

When Colby defended the Ford administration’s position by reiterating that the CIA had briefed the relevant committees as required throughout the Angolan operation, Dellums dismissed this explanation as a vague attempt to justify US actions. For liberals such as Dellums there was a wider moral issue at stake in Angola as he stressed

in my world, in my value system, it makes no difference whether US uniforms are in Angola or in any other country. But if we are giving money or weapons or providing any other support that results in the death of human beings, then I think a technical response to the question is not responsive to the gut issue I am raising.<sup>8</sup>

He believed there was a larger problem with how the US conducted themselves which had to be addressed which was that covert operations in principle were wrong when no threat to the US mainland existed. Dellums argued that

where this country gets attacked is in the Vietnams [*sic*] of the world and the Angolas [*sic*] of the world and in other places around the world [... and] if we are going to be jeopardized, it is because of our ineptness in predicting major situations or where our covert activity, now that it has been uncovered, has been a major embarrassment to people in the United States.<sup>9</sup>

Dellums's view reflected the liberal desire to adjust US foreign policy to an increasingly multipolar international arena, where US attempts to balance regional crises actually invited further commitments which the US was no longer willing to bear. In Kissinger's interpretation, covert actions, however loosely associated with US national interests were fair practice as long as no US troops or personnel were introduced. However, as Dellums's argument suggests, there was a wider disapproval over how US actions impacted on other states and their citizens and just how far was the US willing to go in terms of fighting the Cold War in the Third World. This still conformed to a Cold War framework as opposed to viewing the situation as a post-decolonization issue which illustrates that Congressional opposition was not a radical departure from established US foreign policy, but instead a narrow definition of the lessons to be learned from Vietnam.

This is illustrated by Senator Dick Clark (D-Iowa) who issued a statement to explain why he chose to introduce a policy rider to the Defense Appropriations Bill to prohibit further aid to Angola. Clark also played on the American public's fear of another secret war being fought in the Third World, and that the Ford administration would be sucked into another Vietnam-type commitment. He stated "Congress and the public are very poorly informed about the US role in Angola. Opinions are being formed on the basis of partial, and, what is worse, misleading reports".<sup>10</sup> He directly linked Angola to Vietnam to increase the significance of the secret operation noting that there had been too many instances of such strategies and declared that "this is as wrong today in the case of Angola as it was in the 1960s in Southeast Asia".<sup>11</sup> The insinuation that the Ford administration



had misled Congress on Angola was a frequently used tactic throughout December 1975 by the Congressional liberals in an attempt to convince the American people that the executive branch tried to deceive Congress and the public. This infuriated Kissinger who was described as “indignant over the Congressional outburst about aid sent to Angola, on grounds that he kept the key committees of Congress ‘fully briefed’ ”.<sup>12</sup> However, it was Clark’s attempt to transfer power from the executive branch to the legislative branch in aspects of foreign assistance programmes that really concerned Kissinger. Clark’s intention to “transfer decision-making about Angola from a small, secret executive branch committee to a forum where the public can participate” would result in a further erosion of Kissinger’s credibility to conduct negotiations with the Soviets, the Chinese and even US allies.<sup>13</sup> Yet, despite the concerns of Dellums and Clark, the Ford administration remained confident that their objections were confined to a minority and that further funding was achievable. Indeed, there was justification for this belief. In a 40 Committee meeting held on 9 December, Mulcahy outlined that several Congressmen expressed no serious objections to Angolan operations, but conceded that he gave vague answers to direct questions when Deputy Secretary of Defense William Clements asked him if he was telling them that the US was directly or indirectly supplying aid through Zaire.<sup>14</sup> Yet it must be noted that beside the attentions of Clark and Dellums, Congress did not push too hard for further details. In fact, newly appointed National Security Advisor Brent Scowcroft expressed his surprise at the initial mood of Congress over Angola: “the opposition has been much less than I expected. Mostly it has been in the press”.<sup>15</sup> However, as more sustained attention on Angola grew throughout December 1975, Congressional opposition significantly increased as both Republicans and Democrats attacked Kissinger. The escalating media speculation on US dealings with the South Africans and reports that \$50 million was already spent on Operation IAFEATURE forced Congress to confront the issue publicly and as a result Congressmen such as House Majority Leader Thomas “Tip” O’Neill (D-Massachusetts), Senator Edmond Muskie (D-Maine) and Senator John Tunney began to openly object to what they described as an immoral and deceptive policy on Angola.

On 14 December 1975, O’Neill appeared on the popular National Broadcasting Company (NBC) Sunday morning interview programme

“Meet the Press”. He admitted the Pike Committee and the International Relations Subcommittee were informed during the year on US covert aid to the region, but did not elaborate on whether objections were raised by Congressmen who attended these briefings.<sup>16</sup> Instead he also played on the American public’s desire to avoid a repeat of Vietnam as he promised “no troops, no advisor, no Americans whatsoever [...] will be sent into Angola”.<sup>17</sup> O’Neill also took the opportunity to criticize Kissinger’s influence in the White House, portraying him as a lone ranger conducting US foreign policy – which simultaneously had the effect of implying that Ford was a weak President. Furthermore, O’Neill outlined that Kissinger’s appetite for power was beginning to affect his performance as Secretary of State. He also drew reference to the growing idea that Kissinger had become too arrogant and too dismissive of the legislative branch. Perhaps sensing that Angola had exposed an opportunity to critically damage Kissinger’s authority, O’Neill damningly cited Kissinger’s credibility with Congress:

it isn’t as good as it had been in the past. They think he has an inflated ego. They think he has been making decisions on himself. In many instances, probably without the President’s advice. But in all instances for the most part without the Congress.<sup>18</sup>

Historian Robert D. Schulzinger also alludes to this, arguing that there was “a feeling in Congress that they’ve been ‘had’ too many times and that Kissinger has played fast and loose with too many laws”.<sup>19</sup> This reflected a recurring theme throughout December 1975 that Kissinger was conducting a secret policy in Angola without Congressional approval and against the advice of the State Department’s African Bureau specialists. This public analysis of Angolan policy being played out on television screens in front of millions of Americans led to a wider discourse among leading academics on US actions in Angola and Kissinger’s influence on US foreign policy.

During a Senate Subcommittee on future US foreign policy, Professor Earl C. Ravenal testified on 15 December that

the whole interventionist premise is becoming increasingly flawed. We are getting into a world that is very different from the kind of

international order we have become accustomed to since 1945. It is a world characterized by a diffusion of power.<sup>20</sup>

So why did Kissinger pursue a rigid and traditionalist Cold War approach in Angola? The main reason was his eagerness to prove US credibility after Vietnam; as a result, Kissinger misjudged Angola as an easy test-case, one where if force was successful it would negate the humiliation of the US fleeing from Saigon. According to Morris there was some justification for this approach as he stated that Kissinger was encouraged by events preceding the Angolan decision such as the *Mayaguez* incident in May 1975. He quotes that officials thought that the Ford administration misjudged Congressional support for action over the *Mayaguez* incident and Kissinger in particular. He observed that “it showed Kissinger that the anti-war alliance on the Hill could be turned”.<sup>21</sup> But when US policy began to falter after the Soviets and Cubans escalated their amount of aid to oppose South Africa’s presence, he began to link Angola into détente in the hope that the Soviets would be compelled to disengage from aiding the MPLA.

Yet this idea was based on incorrect perceptions of détente to the Soviets and this has been previously emphasized by Raymond Garthoff. He argues that the Soviets never viewed détente as a constraint on their ambitions.<sup>22</sup> The primary evidence helps to expand upon this sudden linkage by Kissinger. During Ravenal’s testimony, Congressman Robert J. Lagomarsino (R-California) asked why the Soviets would be willing to alienate the US and risk détente for Angola, if they had so little to gain there. His response is instructive of how he disagreed with Kissinger’s interpretation as he observed that the Soviets

don’t treat détente with the gravity and theological purity that Kissinger apparently attaches to it [... and] they are very selective about détente and therefore they are much more ready for less reason to breach détente when it suits their purpose.<sup>23</sup>

Therefore, the superpower’s interpretation of détente created a barrier to Kissinger’s actions – but this should not have surprised Kissinger. This was one of the problems with his Angolan policy, as it was predicated on a short-term design to ensure the MPLA were not victorious in the civil war. When the tide turned and the Ford administration began to run out of

funding for IAFEATURE, there was no back-up plan. It belied a major flaw in Kissinger's whole Angolan strategy. There was no real detail about how to mitigate Soviet escalation or even a plan to follow if IAFEATURE was successful. Such an approach was hardly in line with Kissinger's attempts to instil a nuanced approach within the State Department towards foreign policy affairs.

In addition to Ravenal, the subcommittee also heard from Robert Weinland, a senior fellow of defence analysis at the Brookings Institution in Washington who argued that Soviet actions were primarily politically motivated. The contrast Weinland drew was that the US did not have to react in every situation. He remarked that US had to respond to military challenges to the US but "for political challenges to [US] nonvital interests – as appears in the case in Angola today – we can take them (if we feel competitive) or leave them".<sup>24</sup> Weinland's view displayed similarities with Davis' argument in July 1975 that the US should find a more advantageous place to counter the Soviets. The testimonies of Ravenal and Weinland establishes that there was some correlation between the academic community and Congressional apprehension regarding Angola as both believed that Kissinger overestimated his ability to manipulate superpower relations.

Furthermore, a multi-polar international system and splintered domestic political environment placed new constraints on Third World competition. One of the key lessons Kissinger failed to absorb from the Vietnam debacle was the idea that the US had to be more nuanced when approaching sensitive international events. This was not advocating an abdicated role on the international stage, but in an increasingly globalized world the US should judge every situation on its merits rather than on perceptions of credibility after Vietnam. Furthermore, Kissinger could have considered whether superpower credibility applied to these post-colonial states where nationalists strived to be taken seriously as protagonists in their own right rather than be bit-part players in an abstract Cold War rivalry. If Kissinger was a genuine realist he would have agreed with his advisors that Angola was not the battleground to reinforce US credibility after Vietnam. While he has admitted on numerous occasions that Angola was not a vital interest, he has never specified any regret for focusing his attention on castigating opposition to his Angolan plans.

The consequences of pursuing such a policy were also reflected in Congress when Congressman Don Bonker (D-Washington) summarized one of the inherent problems with IAFEATURE. He observed

our intervention on the assumption of opposition is self-fulfilling. Certainly we would provoke the other factions to accept higher levels of outside aid than they otherwise would [have sought], and in a very real sense drive them into the arms of the Russians.<sup>25</sup>

Senator Tunney (D-California) also alluded to the wider view when he raised the question of how far the US was willing to go to win in Angola. Specifically, he drew attention to what the US would gain if they poured millions of dollars into Angola but alienated other African states because of its association with the South Africa.<sup>26</sup> Indeed Tunney expanded his argument by pointing to the historical lack of US interest in Africa by declaring

we must keep a close reign on the arrogant attitude that says we have the duty or the destiny or even the right to prescribe the course of government of an African state which our own policies have largely ignored in the past.<sup>27</sup>

This was a theme that appeared to resonate with other members of Congress such as Senator Hubert Humphrey (D-Minnesota) who outlined the dangers of interfering in a region which the US had traditionally ignored. His comments highlighted the link between Vietnam and Angola when he warned “we are a world power with a half world knowledge, and that is how we got into Indochina. We are going to be involved in the same rotten mess in Africa unless we blow the whistle”.<sup>28</sup> As these Congressional attacks mounted, the media led by the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* began to divulge the internal State Department friction over US–Angolan policy and how Kissinger pushed past all opposition in order for the US to confront the Soviets in the region. These leaks greatly frustrated Kissinger as he believed it critically harmed the Ford administration’s ability to control US foreign policy.

## **The battle for the legacy of Vietnam**

The Ford administration was coming under sustained pressure from Congress over the scale of the US involvement in Angola, augmented by stories emanating from the *New York Times* journalist Seymour Hersh who exposed the real reason Nathaniel Davis had resigned from the African Bureau. He outlined the internal divisions within the State Department over Kissinger's handling of Angolan policy arguing that Davis quit "because he believed the policy was utterly wrong [...] and he was unable to carry out a policy he was inimically opposed to".<sup>29</sup> The *Washington Post* also picked up on the story, casting further doubts on Kissinger's claims that he was not alerted to the situation in Angola until the summer of 1975. It was highlighted that Davis warned Kissinger in the spring that civil war was not worth US involvement and they should "let these guys fight it out among themselves and when the dust clears we will find we have not lost very much".<sup>30</sup> These articles were damaging as they alluded to a cover-up over Davis' resignation, countering the previous explanation by the State Department who claimed that Davis was ineffective and lacked ideas for Africa. The smear campaign had also insinuated that he resigned due to opposition within the black caucus and due to the scrutiny he experienced as a result of his time in Chile.<sup>31</sup> Yet this attempt at smearing Davis only resulted in further exposition of how much Kissinger had got US-Angolan policy wrong and once again illustrated his secretive tendencies to ensure a policy designed to reflect his own views and a ruthless approach in dealing with internal opposition. Similarly, the *New York Times* also reported the increased control Kissinger had over the operation in the aftermath of Davis's resignation, asserting Kissinger had "cut down the flow of cables on Angola to the department's African specialists and even to the Bureau of Intelligence and Research, which had also opposed his decision".<sup>32</sup> This view was also expressed a few days later in the *Washington Post*, which highlighted that Davis argued that the Soviets were too far ahead in Angola for any other political group to win and that many officials agreed with him. One report stated that despite these warnings, "Kissinger and the President agonized over the global political impact of the US appearing impotent to challenge Soviet penetration of one of Africa's most strategically important countries".<sup>33</sup> These stories embarrassed Kissinger who believed that such

leaks were humiliating to the State Department. Indeed, this manifested itself in a heated outburst at his State Department colleagues on 18 December 1975 when he chastised:

the Department's behavior [*sic*] on Angola is a disgrace. The Department is leaking and showing a stupidity unfit for the Foreign Service. No one can think that our interest there is because of the Soviet base or the 'untold riches' of Angola. This is not a whorehouse; we are conducting national policy.<sup>34</sup>

Kissinger's outburst also shows how dissatisfied he was with how the State Department operated in general. He did not believe that it fostered officials of integrity, but rather a cohort of individuals whose ambitions for themselves out-weighed any sense of duty to their country. In particular his comments on the African Bureau illustrate his thoughts as he stated that

even more repulsive is the fact that AF was quiet until Davis was confirmed and then it all leaked [... and] I'll be gone eventually but you are people whose loyalty is only to the promotion system and not to the US interest.<sup>35</sup>

In the context of Angola, these leaks represented the final straw for Kissinger who ordered newly appointed Assistant Secretary for African Affairs William Schaufele to get rid of those who worked on Angolan desk, stating "I want people transferred out within two months who have worked on Angola".<sup>36</sup>

In the midst of the leaks from the State Department, the memory of Vietnam became an increasingly salient point for both the executive and legislative branches as both sides were eager to prove that the war was unique and would not be repeated in the future. As the pressure grew on Kissinger to facilitate African allies, his rhetoric and link between Angola and the wider Cold War grew. This is illustrated when he told colleagues that "a US collapse will have the profoundest effect in Africa. In Europe it will prove that the collapse in Vietnam was not an aberration".<sup>37</sup> This statement is interesting as it gives an insight into how Kissinger correlated Angola and Vietnam. The primary evidence shows that Kissinger did not view Africa as important in any sense before Vietnam collapsed, to him it

was just a relative backwater that the US did not really have to engage with. There is no indication that Kissinger or the Ford administration were serious about proactively building a strong relationship with sub-Saharan African states before the Angolan Civil War, which makes Kissinger's statement that a US defeat would have a profound affect somewhat ironic. Furthermore, his assertion that the Europeans were seriously worried about US power is unfounded; the primary evidence does not show a pattern of sustained expressions of concern from European leaders.

Despite Kissinger's concerns about how the Africans and Europeans would perceive the US, the primary area that proved to be most problematic lay in US domestic politics. In contrast to the placid meetings Sisco had with members of Congress in early December, the liberal movement had distinctly shifted. Sisco informed Kissinger that the tone had become aggressive and "the questions are hostile – it is the Vietnam syndrome all over again. They bitched like hell that there is no consultation ahead of time".<sup>38</sup> Indeed Sisco's account is verified by comments made by SFRC Chairman Frank Church (D-Idaho) who strongly condemned the Ford administration. He observed,

it comes close to comedy [...] that the Congress [...] should have no other function but to be advised, after the fact, of an involvement so serious that it could broaden into another war. And that comedy turns into tragedy when Members of Congress must read about such an operation, for the first time, in the *Washington Post*.<sup>39</sup>

The issue of consultation is a sensitive one as it illustrates the confusion that existed in relation to required actions. The Ford administration did consult with certain committees as obliged, however, the full facts of US involvement were never fully divulged.<sup>40</sup> But it was clear that time had finally run out for the Ford administration and Kissinger. This was reflected when Sisco acknowledged that a defeat was imminent on the crucial Senate vote on the Tunney Amendment to the Defense Appropriations Act of 1976 to be held on 19 December. He lamented, "I don't think I changed any minds. Most of these people came in with their minds made up".<sup>41</sup> Such a stark admission from Sisco led to Kissinger informing Ford that the legislative actions were contributing to an environment which exacerbated the wounds of Vietnam to the wider world. He stated "We are living in a



nihilistic nightmare. It proves that Vietnam is not an aberration but our normal attitude".<sup>42</sup> In his subsequent memoirs, Kissinger accuses Congress of carefully manoeuvring around the Angolan situation once it became public knowledge. He argues that this "public outcry ended Congress's acquiescence in the covert program because few of these briefed were prepared to face the onslaught if they publicly endorsed what they had secretly approved".<sup>43</sup> Despite this belief, the Tunney Amendment was comfortably passed on 19 December 1975, prohibiting any further funding for Angolan operations.

However, it must be noted that Congress was not entirely unified on restraining the Ford administration's actions in Angola. While there were liberals such as Senator Tunney who believed that the executive branch was out of control, others thought that the legislative branch should not detract from the executive branch's ability to effectively counter the Soviets. Those with a moderate view urged caution in the face of an escalating standoff between the Ford administration and Congress. From the liberal viewpoint, Tunney's Amendment was heavily linked to the theme of learning lessons from the Vietnam experience, indeed Tunney wrote to Ford specifically stating that "action will be unavoidable if the administration persists in secret plans to plunge this country into a quagmire that appears so like the earlier disaster in Vietnam".<sup>44</sup> He was not alone though as other Senators staunchly opposed further secrecy on CIA activities in foreign countries and the danger of escalation into further commitments. There was also a view that the US should look towards its own national interests and disengage from areas where these were limited. Such thoughts were expressed by Senator Hubert Humphrey (D-Minnesota) who voted against further arms going to Angola on the basis that

the United States had better start taking care of things it knows how to take care of. We know so little of Africa, the 800 and some tribes that make up Africa [... therefore] I say it is like a different world.<sup>45</sup>

Similarly, Senator Alan Cranston (D-California) observed that the Cold War rhetoric needed to be toned down as it contributed to avoidable confrontations. He rejoiced at the passing of the Tunney Amendment by remarking "we have rejected the road to another Vietnam. We have to listen to the global confrontation terms used to describe what is at stake there.

This is the rhetoric that led us into Vietnam”.<sup>46</sup> This cohort of Congressional liberals were in the words of prominent Angolan historian Arthur Jay Klinghoffer “attuned to the post-Vietnam and post-Watergate public mentality which called for executive accountability and Angola was seen as the last hurrah” for the CIA.<sup>47</sup> However, the views of conservatives and moderates are often overlooked in comparison with the coverage given to the liberals such as Tunney and Clark. From a conservative perspective, some insight can be gathered from the statements of Senator Jesse Helms (R-North Carolina) and Senator Strom Thurmond (R-South Carolina), who both voted against the Ford administration. Their view was directly contrasted to the liberal position and claimed that the US was not being tough enough on the Soviets over their actions in Angola.

In the aftermath of the Tunney Amendment, Helms wrote a letter to Ford explaining why he voted against the administration. He believed that “the principal cause of our failure in Vietnam was the unreasonable restraints put upon our military strategy and tactics in order to achieve just the kind of negotiated settlement that apparently is our goal in Angola today”.<sup>48</sup> Yet this was not another sign of American masochism that Kissinger lamented. In fact Helms advocated for stronger action against the Soviets and Cubans directly by withdrawing from the process of normalizing relations with Cuba, putting pressure on the Soviets during the Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty (SALT) negotiations and withholding grain sales to Moscow.<sup>49</sup> He went even further by recommending that the US should utilize the South Africans to ensure that the Soviets would not gain an easy foothold in sub-Saharan Africa stating that the US should “assign a major role to South Africa in restoring freedom in Angola”.<sup>50</sup> For most conservatives, the association with the South Africans was a step too far but there was a sense that economic penalties would have a real and direct impact on the Soviets in Angola. Senator Thurmond also encouraged Ford to use trade as leverage as he believed that Kissinger’s rhetoric over the impact of Angola to détente fell on deaf ears in Moscow, remarking that “détente has offered nothing but fake illusion”.<sup>51</sup> However, there was some degree of apprehension that the extremes proposed by conservatives and the retrenchment of the liberals was leading to an overreaction on Angola. In the middle of this stood the moderate voices of Congress who tried to balance both arguments in order to mitigate the growing tensions in Washington, DC.

This moderate aspect was reported by the media in late December as Senate Minority Leader Robert P. Griffin (R-Michigan) and Senate Appropriations Chairman John L. McClellan (D-Arkansas) both expressed reservations that too much legislative control could be counter-productive in US foreign relations. While Griffin outlined his opposition to provide US aid to Angola, he also stated that he believed that Congress was in danger of damaging the executive branch's ability to conduct foreign policy. Although he was not ready to support further funding to Angola, he was open to other ways for the executive to assert influence in the country, stating "I am not ready, frankly, to endorse the use of funds for covert purposes in Angola [...] but] neither am I ready to say that the executive branch should not have some flexibility".<sup>52</sup> McClellan also expressed reservations about how the US would be perceived if it kept on retreating from areas where the Soviets were expanding. Similar to Griffin's views, he did not view Angola as a key national interest but saw the liberal agenda as being overly restrictive on the executive branch. He observed, "I do think we are going to put ourselves in a position where [...] every time Russia wants to expand, and we are in that area, then we are retreating".<sup>53</sup> The fractured consensus in Congress ensured that the Ford administration faced a challenging task to control the symbolic damage caused by the passing of the Tunney Amendment. Even before the vote, Kissinger was to limit the damage of a potential defeat as he joked with European leaders that the US was in a difficult situation on Angola as "our opponents haven't decided whether to charge us with starting a new Vietnam or for selling out to the Russians".<sup>54</sup> Yet privately he framed the situation as dire. He bemoaned the impending defeat in Angola, but interestingly he escalated the rhetoric to bellicose levels by stating "we will lose Angola [...] we are losing our flexibility and we will soon be in a position of nuclear war or nothing".<sup>55</sup> He urged Ford to take a confrontational approach to Congress, citing that US credibility had been already damaged by their actions. Furthermore, he tried to convince Ford that the Soviets would have settled on US terms if it was not for Congressional intervention. His anger at Congress is evident as he remarked that

no one will ever believe us again if we can't do this [...] we should] take on Congress in the national interest. We have little to lose. It was inevitable there would be a Soviet overture – now they are laughing at

us. We would have Angola settled by January [1976] if those bastards had not been in town.<sup>56</sup>

Kissinger's emotions appear to have resulted in irrational thinking. There is little evidence to suggest that US power was in doubt from European leaders, and Angola was not an area of vital US national interest. However, it was not inevitable the Soviets would compromise. A report released in early December 1975 outlined how the Soviet leadership had their own domestic issues which ensured that they would seek to distract the public by focusing on foreign policy achievement. Indeed the Soviets had suffered their own setbacks on the international stage over the course of 1975 as there was a post-Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) depression, Sinai II was seen as a clear policy reversal and events in Portugal had overtaken them.<sup>57</sup> Therefore, Angola represented a potential symbolic victory over their Cold War rival, one that would capitalize on the US loss in Vietnam and more importantly erase any notion that the Soviets were struggling to compete with the US.

The evidence at the time also illustrates this trend. On 28 December 1975, Scowcroft gave Ford a memorandum that summarized the CIA evaluation of the future of Soviet commitment in Angola. It outlined that Moscow "both on the ground and in its public utterances [... was] willing to go a significant distance to support an MPLA victory".<sup>58</sup> Furthermore, it showed that Kissinger's tactic of trying to link Angola to the détente process was futile as it would not deter the Soviets from pursuing a course of action it believed would reinforce its position as a legitimate world power. The report concluded that

Moscow cannot afford another highly visible defeat [... but] this does not mean that the MPLA has a blank check. A gradual victory in Angola, which minimized the complications on the détente front, would be the ideal outcome for Moscow.<sup>59</sup>

One of the striking features of this report is how it directly contradicts Kissinger's comments to Ford that the Soviets were on the brink of retreating. The report provides compelling evidence that Kissinger completely misjudged the Soviet resolve in Angola, despite receiving

warnings from Davis and other government officials in the build-up to IAFEATURE.

On the other side, the Soviets appear to have astutely analysed US behaviour in Angola throughout 1975 and according to one CIA bulletin, they were emboldened by the events of Vietnam and the Congressional investigations. The bulletin outlines that Moscow concluded that the US

must still feel shackled by their humiliation in Vietnam and by their ongoing fascination with that puzzle they call Watergate. Talk about a paper tiger; why, they were even in the process of deliberately tearing apart their own intelligence services!<sup>60</sup>

Yet the consequences of the Congressional backlash were not solely confined to domestic political affairs. It played a significant role in creating a further burden on Kissinger to engage more with Zaire. Such pressure led him to reject an African led proposal that offered the chance to claw back some credibility without having to risk losing on the vote of the OAU at their emergency summit to be held in January 1976. The pressure created by Congress ensured that certain African countries increased their demands for the US to compete with the Soviets. This undermined an African initiative presented to Kissinger appealing to African nationalism rather than fitting Africa into the wider Cold War sphere of influence outlook.

### **A missed opportunity?: the Tanzanian proposal**

On 17 December 1975, Kissinger met with Zairian Foreign Affairs Minister Mandungu Bula Nyati in Paris to discuss the Angolan situation. Bula raised Zairian concerns about Congressional intervention in US–Angolan policy. He remarked that the Zairian troops believed “that the United States will not intervene. When they [troops] hear the Congress, they are convinced the US won’t intervene”.<sup>61</sup> However, this criticism was a deflection from the problems that existed in Zaire’s own domestic situation and their poor performance in Angola. The failure to heed the warnings of Lannon Walker during the autumn of 1975 about setting realistic expectations with Mobutu on US assistance was now manifesting itself. Indeed, the mismanagement and greediness of the Zairian leader had led to a situation in December 1975 where Zaire now needed to be saved from MPLA advances in northern

Angola. There was now a danger that they could cross the border and invade Zaire. This provides a clear example of how Zaire was an unreliable partner in Angola, and that it was a mistake to base US– Angolan policy solely on Mobutu’s ability to conduct a successful covert campaign. In this context, Kissinger significantly misjudged Mobutu’s effectiveness as a conduit for US policy in Angola. Despite the multiple setbacks and clear ineptitude of the Zairian fighters to operate the weaponry secretly provided to them by the US, Kissinger continued to placate Bula and brushed aside his concerns by dismissing the influence of the legislative branch by stating “the Congress is unbelievable [... but] the major thing is that the Executive Branch is backing you”.<sup>62</sup> Indeed Kissinger promised that help was imminent as the tactic of using mercenaries was being finalized through the French. He assured Bula the US would finance and “He [French President Giscard d’Estaing] will get the people, guns and helicopters”.<sup>63</sup> In addition to the French effort, Kissinger was also seeking ways to circumnavigate Congressional funding and arms restrictions through secretive arrangements with other US allies. On 19 December, during a Secretary’s Principals and Regional’s staff meeting, the possibility of secretly raising funds from Saudi Arabia and Iran was discussed. While Kissinger initially disliked the idea, deeming it as embarrassing, he admitted that it was a viable option. He stated that “the humiliation of the greatest nation in the world going to another country for [*dollar amount not declassified*] [... but] don’t preclude the Saudis. [*dollar amount not declassified*] would be pittance for them”.<sup>64</sup> The Saudi response was positive as they had their own objectives in ensuring that Angola did not fall under Soviet influence. Indeed, Saudi Intelligence Chief Kamal Adham stressed to the US Ambassador to Saudi Arabia that they had their

own strategic reasons for opposing a Soviet puppet regime in Africa that might even go beyond those of the United States, and that it was these factors that would determine how far Saudi Arabia would finally go to support our Angolan friends.<sup>65</sup>

The following day a backchannel message was sent from Kissinger to the US Ambassador in Iran, Richard Helms to assess

if the Shah would find it feasible to make available funds to Zaire for additional equipment and arms which would help preserve the kind of military position for the non-communist forces which is essential if a negotiated settlement is to be achieved [... and] stress that we are not seeking funding for our own programs and could not accept such funds.<sup>66</sup>

The Shah was receptive to such a proposal on the condition that the Saudis would also contribute, however, there is no evidence to confirm that the Saudis or the Iranians ever provided aid to be used in Angola through the Zairian conduit.

Notwithstanding Kissinger's attempts to find alternative funding routes and placate Zairian officials, there is evidence supporting African concerns about the legislative encroachment in US foreign policy. On 20 December 1975, US Ambassador to the Ivory Coast Robert Smith, reported that Ivorian President Houphouet-Soigny had informed him that

America's African friends are distressed that US is not taking a stronger position versus Soviet intervention. "Funds from a special drawer" are helpful, but they won't turn the tide, particularly if US public opinion is reticent. The Soviets know this all too well.<sup>67</sup>

The Ivorians wanted to see full US intervention in Angola as the FNLA and UNITA had proven to be unreliable in the battlefield. Smith also reported that Houphouet-Soigny feared for the entire region if the Soviets prevailed. Despite these fears and criticism of US inaction there was a major barrier to any potential solution – the continued presence of South African troops in Angola. Throughout December 1975, the US attempted to discreetly utilize the South African presence despite public calls for all outside intervention to withdraw. On 5 December 1975, Kissinger cabled the US Embassy in Paris to convey to French Foreign Ministry official Pierre Brossolette that the US viewed the South Africans in Angola as a mixed blessing. He also expressed his desire to co-ordinate with the French to pursue a similar policy to the US in the region.<sup>68</sup> In relation to the South African presence in Angola, the US Ambassador to South Africa William Bowdler, reported on 15 December that South African Foreign Minister Hilgard Muller had raised a request for the US to "make special efforts to get the Soviets and

Cubans to withdraw. A nudge at this psychologically propitious juncture [...] might be all that is necessary to tip the scales in favour of withdrawal of all foreign forces in Angola”.<sup>69</sup> Furthermore, Muller suggested that the South Africans would be prepared to provide the technical assistance for this task “if asked to do so”.<sup>70</sup> Despite Kissinger’s continued denial that the US collaborated with the South Africans in Angola, this evidence would suggest that there was a tentative understanding between the two countries. This is evident in a cable from Kissinger to the US embassy in Cairo, Egypt acknowledging that “we understand fully the deep feelings about South African participation which however is a practical necessity in view of the heavy Cuban involvement”.<sup>71</sup> At the very least it suggests that South African requests for additional assistance and their optimism at turning things around in Angola influenced Kissinger to reject a diplomatic proposal put forward by the Tanzanian, Zambian and Mozambiquean governments. This is interesting as the proposal contained many of the objectives Kissinger hoped the OAU summit would ratify in January 1976. Indeed, he felt that

an OAU initiative and consensus in favor of a ceasefire, the stoppage of outside assistance, the withdrawal of foreign intervention, and an OAU mechanism to conduct negotiations among the three Angolan factions looking toward the establishment of a national government offers real and practical hope in the coming few weeks.<sup>72</sup>

On 23 December 1975, a three-point proposal agreed by Tanzania, Zambia and Mozambique was cabled to US embassies in Africa for further analysis. The proposal outlined that if the US ceased all support to the FNLA and UNITA, restrained Mobutu from further intervention and applied public pressure on the South African government (SAG) to withdraw, then “Tanzania, Zambia and other African governments would induce Neto simultaneously to refuse further Soviet assistance and expel Cuban and other foreign helpers”.<sup>73</sup> Indeed this African-led approach was a crucial part of the intended solution. One of the reasons for this was outlined by Tanzanian President Julius Nyerere’s belief that

Neto’s nationalism would be stronger than his sense of gratitude towards Russians after he won control of the country. However, if



fighting continues and Neto defeats the FNLA/UNITA only because of massive Soviet military assistance [... it] would provide them [Soviets] with a much stronger and more influential position [... therefore] Nyerere believes it important to end fighting now before Neto becomes too locked in Soviet embrace.<sup>74</sup>

This proposal could have been more thoroughly considered by Kissinger as the OAU alternative he preferred was problematic. First, the MPLA had already been receiving formal recognition from countries around Africa and the world since the Portuguese departure in November 1975. This was in stark contrast to the FNLA/UNITA government which had received no recognition from any country around the world in that period before the OAU summit. Second, it would have created divisions within the OAU as some pro-MPLA African states would clash with moderate African states. However, if Kissinger seriously considered the proposal, there was a chance to gain increased credibility with African countries as the US would be seen to support a genuine African-led solution. This could have potentially helped reverse years of neglectful US–African policies which favoured white regimes over black majority rule. This was a missed opportunity for the US as the offer would have allowed the US to bring the focus towards a diplomatic African-led settlement and away from the escalating Cold War rhetoric and internal US political divisions, leaving the US with some level of its credibility intact.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, there were many factors that amalgamated to ensure Operation IAFEATURE was halted in December 1975. Yet Kissinger's pursuit of policies that were not conducive to regional crises such as Angola resulted in the continuation of domestic divisions and increased the strain on US–Soviet relations. As historian John Armstrong argues,

the Angola imbroglio seems to be a paradigm of how not to offset Soviet intervention. The Executive indignantly protests that Congressional obstruction impedes sound policy; but it should have foreseen that insistence on business as usual with the USSR would

hardly convince populist isolationist Congressmen that a real danger has arisen.<sup>75</sup>

Despite the conservative charge that Kissinger should have used economic leverage to extract concessions from the Soviets on Angola, it was the liberal argument that Kissinger was more concerned about. Led by Senators Dick Clark and John Tunney, the Congressional attempts to strip the executive of the power to conduct covert operations and give paramilitary assistance came into sharp focus. However, the liberal charge on policy was not simply based on a moral imperative to stop another US crusade in a Third World country. There was a genuine debate within Congress and the media that the liberals were pushing for too much oversight on US foreign policy, which would ultimately be counter-productive to US interests.<sup>76</sup> As Senator Mike Mansfield (D-Montana) described,

if foreign policy is going to be made like a sausage in the legislative grinder, the product will be a little of this and a little of that, not a solid reflection of the broad national interest. When legislators are dancing to the music of letters from home, personal ambitions and tight schedules, they are going to find it hard to be wise and consistent.<sup>77</sup>

In the midst of this debate there was also an examination of Kissinger's role in foreign policy; one that marked an alarming but continuing trend of his faltering popularity with Congress by the mid-1970s.

Their charge was fuelled when it was revealed that Kissinger pursued US intervention despite the warnings of the African specialists, and in particular Nathaniel Davis, who resigned in protest at such action. This was compounded by testimony from CIA Deputy Director for Operations William Nelson who told Senators during the SFRC African subcommittee that Colby had warned Kissinger that the operation could not be kept a secret and

that he did not think it would be possible to have a decisive effect in the kind of war that was underway. Thus Senators were left with the impression that it was Secretary of State Henry A. Kissinger who had insisted on the operation.<sup>78</sup>

The *New York Times* journalist Leslie Gelb also contributed to this portrayal of Kissinger as the lone ranger of Angolan policy when he quoted one ranking DOD official as stating “it’s not a Soviet-American test of wills, but a test case between Henry Kissinger and Moscow”.<sup>79</sup> In addition, Vietnam dominated the Angolan issue in December 1975, but this was an attempt from both the executive and the legislative branches to use it to their own advantage. While there were some elements within Congress calling for greater involvement in the conduct of foreign affairs, other more moderate Congressmen believed that this was an overreaction that would significantly harm US interest abroad.

As for Kissinger, his continued attempts to portray Angola as different from Vietnam only served to draw further attention to potential similarities. As Gelb observes that

while high administration officials deny that Angola will turn into another Vietnam, they are using much of the Indochina rhetoric of the early 1960s – warnings to others to stay out and protestations of limited American goals – to try to persuade Moscow that further involvements in Angola is risky and that compromise is possible.<sup>80</sup>

This was a point also reflected by Congressman Bonker who alluded to the ironic nature of the Ford administration’s credibility argument when he stressed, “Angola is not now another Vietnam, but the way to convert it to another Vietnam is to escalate to the point that our honor and reputation are again on the line”.<sup>81</sup> Nevertheless, despite the Congressional interference, Kissinger had an opportunity to salvage some credibility from the chaos he had helped create. Yet, he was too preoccupied with Cold War credibility perceptions and placating Zairian concerns of Congressional impact on the supply of arms.

This Cold War lens also tied into African states exerting significant pressure for the US to get more involved – but for their own purposes, and in some case, their own gain. However, despite his arguments in his memoirs, Kissinger cannot blame Congress for the ultimate failure in Angola; it was a situation that could only result in a stalemate at best. Other options such as the Tanzanian proposal should have been thoroughly considered. There was a chance to gain the terms he was stubbornly holding out for at the OAU in January 1976. Furthermore, such a bold move would

simultaneously have put African nationalism to the test by letting African states apply direct pressure on Neto to get the Soviets and Cubans to withdraw from Angola and would have helped reverse years of stagnated US–African policy that favoured white ruled regimes.

1 In his memoirs, Kissinger argues that

the pieces of our strategy were falling into place. A modest increase in our own military support coupled with French assistance, would, at a minimum, prevent a Soviet-Cuban victory and create the basis for diplomacy to bring about the withdrawal of foreign forces.

See Henry Kissinger, *Years of Renewal* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1999), 825

2 Jussi Hanhimäki, *The Flawed Architect: Henry Kissinger and American Foreign Policy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 421–422; Piero Gleijeses, *Conflicting Missions: Havana, Washington, and Africa, 1959–1976* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 332–334.

3 Bernard Gwertzman, “Week in Review,” *New York Times*, 28 December 1975, in Emtel, SecState Washington, DC to US Delegation (USDEL) Secretary, 29180Z, 29 December 1975, US Public Library of Diplomacy, Wikileaks: 1.

4 Ibid.: 2.

5 40 Committee Meeting, 11 December 1975, 11am, Washington, DC, Document No. 147, Vol. XXVIII, Southern Africa, 1969–1976, FRUS: 369. Hawk is a name sometimes used to describe conservative thinking politicians in Washington, DC.

6 Hearing before the House of Representatives Select Committee on Intelligence “The Future of Intelligence,” Ninety-Forth Congress, First Session, 12 December 1975, 10 am, 2212 Rayburn House Office Building, US Government Printing Office, Washington, DC, 1976: 1904. Kissinger argues that

the Congress elected in the McGovernite landslide of the previous year represented the high point of the radical protest. It was violently opposed to intervention abroad, especially in the developing world, ever suspicious of the CIA and deeply hostile to covert operations, and distrustful of the veracity of the executive branch.

See Kissinger, *Years of Renewal*, 826

7 Roger Morris, “The Proxy War in Angola: Pathology of a Blunder,” *The New Republic* 174, no. 5 (31 January 1976): 23.

8 Hearing before the House of Representatives Select Committee on Intelligence “The Future of Intelligence,” 12 December 1975, 1905.

9 Ibid. In response to such accusations, Colby outlined that Congress was not an innocent bystander to such activities as

the Congress had an opportunity to require more than it did [when drafting the War Powers Act]. It did not. It decided not to, and in the

course of its decisions, and in the course of the laws adopted by Congress, it clearly left a field for this activity, and it clearly made arrangements by which this activity – any activity – could be reported to Congress.

(Ibid.: 1906)

- 10 “For the Record: From a Statement by Senator Dick Clark,” *Washington Post*, 11 December 1975, A22.
- 11 Ibid.
- 12 Murray Marder, “Kissinger Fears Angola Uproar Can Hurt Détente,” *Washington Post*, 18 December 1975, A16. The article outlined that six standing committees and two intelligence “watchdogs” committees were briefed.
- 13 “For the Record: From a Statement by Senator Dick Clark,” A22. Clark argued that “the amendment does not seek to prejudge the issue of the US role in Angola. It does not prohibit, encourage, condone or condemn US intervention there”. However, “a regular congressionally established and maintained Foreign Assistance Program – both military and economic – would be the appropriate vehicles for the conduct of a policy of active involvement in Angola” (ibid.).
- 14 Memorandum for the Record, 40 Committee Meeting, Washington, DC, 11 am, 11 December 1975, Document No. 147, Vol. XXVIII, Southern Africa, 1969–1976, FRUS: 370.
- 15 Ibid.
- 16 NBC’s Meet The Press Interview with House Majority Leader Thomas P. O’Neill, 14 December 1975, Sunday Interview Transcripts, Box 70, Ron Nessen Files, GRFL: 2.
- 17 Ibid.: 3. O’Neill drew particular attention to the newer, younger members of the House who would be “absolutely appalled” if Americans were sent into Angola.
- 18 Ibid.: 14. On Kissinger’s reputation, he stated, “I would have to say that he is pretty low in the esteem of Congress, in comparison where he was so terrifically high a couple of years ago”.
- 19 Robert D. Schulzinger, *Henry Kissinger: Doctor of Diplomacy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), 189.
- 20 Hearings before the Subcommittee on Future Foreign Policy research and Development of the Committee on International Relations, “United States-Soviet Union-China: The Great Power Triangle,” Part One, Ninety-Forth Congress, First Session, 2.40 pm, 15 December 1975, Room 2200 Rayburn House Office Building, Washington, DC, US Government Printing Office, Washington, DC, 1976: 94. Ravenal taught American Foreign Policy at the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies. He concluded that “gradually, progressively, perhaps grudgingly, we have to come to a sense of what we can and can’t do in the world, and what we can and can’t afford to do” (Ibid.).
- 21 Morris, “The Proxy War in Angola,” 21.
- 22 Raymond Garthoff, *Détente and Confrontation: American–Soviet Relations from Nixon to Reagan* (Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution, 1985), 530. It was perhaps hypercritical of Kissinger to accuse the Soviets of not playing by the rules of détente. The Soviets saw the US as competing quite successfully in the Middle East by excluding the Soviets from the Arab-Israeli peace talks. In other realms too, such as the rapprochement with China and more covertly, the overthrow of Salvador Allende’s peaceful socialist transition were examples of how the US was well able to ignore the rules of détente.
- 23 Hearings before the Subcommittee on Future Foreign Policy research and Development of the Committee on International Relations, 15 December 1975, 107.
- 24 Ibid.: 86. Ravenal concurred the Soviets held long-term political goals in the region as

they are looking out 15, 20, 25 years in anticipating that there is going to be turmoil, race conflict in South Africa, national wars, regional wars; they want in some way to position themselves politically in that situation so they have more of an influence.

(Ibid.: 107)

- 25 Senate Congressional Record, Ninety-Forth Congress, First Session, 9am, 12 December 1975, Capitol Hill, Washington, DC: 40426.
- 26 Ibid.: 40532.
- 27 Ibid.: 40533.
- 28 Ibid.: 41204.
- 29 Seymour Hersh, "Angola – Aid Issue Opening Rifts in the State Department," *New York Times*, 14 December 1975, 1.
- 30 Lawrence Stern, "State Department Divided on US Role in Angola," *Washington Post*, 15 December 1975, A2. Kissinger argued at the time and later in his memoirs that the "US bureaucracy was so shell-shocked by public outcries over CIA intelligence operations that it was slow in alerting him to what was happening in Angola". See Murray Marder, "Kissinger Finds Election Politics Threaten Détente," *Washington Post*, 15 December 1975, A7.
- 31 Stern, "State Department Divided," A2. Other US newspapers such as the *New York Times* also reported on this attempt by Kissinger to discredit Davis. Davis was appointed as US Ambassador to Switzerland in Autumn 1975 and took up residence in January 1976.
- 32 Anthony Lewis, "No Questions Please," *New York Times*, 15 December 1975, 31. This builds on Hersh's source that claimed that Kissinger was "given the best advice there was and it didn't fit into what he wanted to do [...] he wanted to face off the Russians right there – in Angola". See Hersh, "Angola-Aid Issue Opening Rifts in the State Department," 1.
- 33 Rowland Evans and Robert Novak, "... and the US Response," *Washington Post*, 18 December 1975, A23.
- 34 Memcon, Kissinger, Ingersoll, Scowcroft, Hyland, Schaufele, 18 December 1975, Washington, DC, Document No. 152, Vol. XXVIII, Southern Africa, 1969–1976, FRUS: 389. Such a leak led Kissinger to repeat that this was another case of "American masochism". He also blamed the African Bureau for unreliable information as "we decided to up the payment to Holden because the African Bureau told us he would come out on top, didn't we? We wanted to be in solid with the new government". See Memcon, Kissinger, Ingersoll, Sisco, Mulcahy, Hyland, Schaufele, 19 December 1975, Washington, DC, Document No. 156, Vol. XXVIII, Southern Africa, 1969–1976, FRUS: 403.
- 35 Memcon, 18 December 1975, 390.
- 36 Ibid.
- 37 Ibid. Kissinger feared the Chinese would increasingly perceive the US as weak despite Ford's assurances to Chairman Mao earlier that month and the Soviets would think they could interfere anywhere in the world. Furthermore, it could have significant implications for détente, already under severe criticism as "we'll lose Angola and détente and six other places where we won't stand up – or one day we'll get desperate and say 'let's clean out the Russians' " (ibid.).
- 38 Telecon, Kissinger and Sisco, 18 December 1975, 11.25 am, DNSA: 1.
- 39 Senate Congressional Record, Ninety-Forth Congress, First Session, 9 am, 15 December 1975, Capitol Hill, Washington, DC: 40534.
- 40 Telecon, 18 December 1975, 1. Sisco lamented "consultation is giving them a veto over the decision-making process".
- 41 Ibid. Sisco's observation was correct as influential Senator Edward Kennedy (D-Massachusetts) was publicly advocating "the lesson {of Vietnam} is that we must throw off the cumbersome

mantle of world policeman". Similarly, Senator Alan Cranston (D-California) stated "The United States should be a peaceful world neighbour instead of a militant world meddler". See Michael T. Klare, *Beyond the Vietnam Syndrome: US Interventionism in the 1980s* (Washington, DC: Institute for Policy Studies, 1981), 2–3. Kissinger reiterated his belief to Ford that the US was on the verge of success until Congress interfered as "at the very moment when the Soviets begin to blink, the Congress is going to cut our legs off". See Memcon, Ford, Kissinger, Scowcroft, 18 December 1975, Washington, DC, Document No. 153, Vol. XXVIII, Southern Africa, 1969–1976, FRUS: 395. He also outlined to Ford that he was "purging the African Bureau, after the leaks to the *NY Times* [*New York Times*] article".

- 42 Memcon, 18 December 1975, 395.
- 43 Kissinger, *Years of Renewal*, 825.
- 44 Telegram, Senator John Tunney to Ford, 29 December 1975, White House Central files (WHCF) ND, Box 32, Wars and Angola, GRFL: 2.
- 45 Fred Bridgland, *Jonas Savimbi: A Key to Africa* (New York: Pentagon House Publishers, 1986), 155.
- 46 Senator Alan Cranston, "For the Record," *Washington Post*, 25 December 1975, A18.
- 47 Arthur Jay Klinghoffer, *The Angolan War: A Study in Soviet Policy in the Third World* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1980), 2.
- 48 Letter from Senator Jesse Helms to Ford, 19 December 1975, WHCF FO, GRFL: 1. The amendment was named after Senator John Tunney, who added it onto the motion put forward by Senator Dick Clark on 5 December 1975.
- 49 Ibid. Helms would later side with the neo-conservatives and Ronald Reagan (Republican Governor of California) for the Republican Presidential nomination in 1976.
- 50 Ibid.
- 51 Telegram from Senator Strom Thurmond to Ford, 18 December 1975, WHCF, CO 7, Angola, Box 6, GRFL: 1.
- 52 "Congress Divided over Angola Aid," *Washington Post*, 27 December 1975, A4. The article reported that some in Congress "have refused to join efforts to cut – off the aid, fearing such a move would lock the executive branch into an inflexible foreign policy".
- 53 Ibid.
- 54 Memcon, Kissinger, UK Minister for Foreign Affairs, James Callaghan, French Foreign Minister, Jean Sauvagnargues, Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) Minister for Foreign Affairs, Hans-Dietrich Genscher, 3.30 pm–5.40 pm, American Ambassador's Residence, Brussels, 12 December 1975, DNSA, 01849, DNSA: 8. Kissinger's thoughts on the US ability to beat the Soviets in Angola were clear when he stated, "if we did it overtly, we could break their back" (ibid.: 9).
- 55 Memcon, 18 December 1975, 395.
- 56 Ibid.: 396.
- 57 Emtel, AmEmbassy Moscow Soviet Union to SecState, Washington, DC, 100519Z, 10 December 1975, NSA Country Files, Europe and Canada, Box 21, USSR To NODIS (11), GRFL: 2. Klinghoffer makes a similar point as he argues that the Soviets

realised the geographical and psychological prominence of a victory in Angola in terms of furthering the cause of black majority rule in southern Africa, as it attempted to reverse a string of international failures in Egypt, Chile and Portugal and to undercut its own internal critics who viewed the policy of détente as too inhibiting and restrictive.

See Klinghoffer, *The Angolan War*, 3

58 Memorandum, Scowcroft to Ford, 28 December 1975, "CIA Assessment – Future of Soviet Commitment in Angola," NSA Country Files, Africa General, Angola (2), GRFL: 1.

59 Ibid.: 3. The report also outlined,

however if the conflict seemed to settle into a prolonged and indecisive stalemate [... and] would probably lead other Africans to argue more strongly for a political compromise. The Soviets probably have not yet made up their minds about how to handle this possibility. If it confronted them, the state of their relations with the US in general would be a factor in their reaction and would probably lead them to accept some compromise solution rather than holding out and pressing for a total MPLA victory.

(Ibid.)

In the *National Intelligence Daily*, the CIA concluded that the Soviets may be spurred on by the defeats in Egypt and Portugal. See *CIA National Intelligence Daily*, 31 December 1975, Vol. 2, No. 303, FOIA, CIA Electronic Reading Room: 4.

60 Ibid.

61 Memcon, Kissinger, Lord and State Commissioner for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, Mandungu Bula Nyati, Paris, France, 3.30 pm–4 pm, 17 December 1975, Document No. 149, Vol. XXVIII, Southern Africa, 1969–1976, FRUS: 380.

62 Ibid.

63 Ibid.: 381. Bula suggested that other European states also get involved in order to circumvent the limitations placed on US–Angolan aid by Congress as he stated "you have equipment in Europe. If they come to us with it, no one will see American equipment, and we can prove to Congress that there is no American involvement" (ibid.: 384).

64 Memcon, 19 December 1975, 399–400. Sisco expressed concerns that seeking external funding to continue the operation was dangerous as "the political price would be too high to pay in Africa" (ibid.).

65 Backchannel Message From the Embassy in Saudi Arabia to Secretary of State Kissinger, 21 December 1975, Jidda, 1441Z, Washington, DC, Document No. 162, Vol. XXVIII, Southern Africa, 1969–1976, FRUS: 410. Adham also made the point that "the Zaire regime has a poor record for dependability in the delivery of assistance to the Angolans. His implication was that General Mobutu retains for himself the best of the military equipment and a substantial percentage of financial subsidies" (ibid.: 411).

66 Backchannel Message From Secretary of State Kissinger to the Ambassador to Iran (Helms), 20 December 1975, Washington, DC, Document No. 159, Vol. XXVIII, Southern Africa, 1969–1976, FRUS: 407. However, such secret backchannels were leaked to Congress as Tunney later wrote to Ford and referred to a quote in the press of a high-ranking administration official who claimed that aid would continue as "we are going to keep it up (and) I am not going to say how much or where it is coming from". See Telegram, 29 December 1975, 1.

67 Emtel. AmEmbassy Abidjan, Ivory Coast, to SecState, Washington, DC, 201727Z, 20 December 1975, NSA Country Files, Africa General, Ivory Coast To SecState NODIS (2), GRFL: 3. Increased assistance was emphasized by President Houphouet-Boigny who believed that the "US should not only provide arms but also technicians in Angola, since FNLA-UNITA



unable to man sophisticated weapons equivalent to those being provided to MPLA by Soviets with Cuban technicians". This request was predicated on the fear that the

US will offer too little and too late [... and] if Angola falls to the Soviets Houphouet privately feels that Mobutu cannot hold out, surrounded by Angola and Congo and subject to infiltration and possible overthrow from within [... and] Zambia also isolated. In other words, without using the term, he described a 'domino' theory for central Africa.

(Ibid.)

On the issue of South African involvement, he "thought realists appreciated South Africa was playing an important anti-communist role [... and] if Angola is saved, Houphouet believes it will be key to achieving dialogue between South Africa and Black Africa" (ibid.).

68 Emtel, SecState Washington, DC to AmEmbassy Paris, France, 051554Z, 5 December 1975, NSA Country Files, Europe and Canada, Box 4, France SDT to NODIS (4), GRFL: 2. The US hoped that France would initiate a similar call for African countries to remain neutral and resist the temptation to follow Nigeria into recognizing the MPLA government. The US Ambassador promptly responded the same day by stating that the French were making contact with their allies in Africa to "encourage them to remain calm and avoid changing their position in knee-jerk reaction to the South African role". See Emtel, AmEmbassy Paris, France, to SecState, Washington, DC, 051852Z, 5 December 1975, NSA Country Files, Europe and Canada, Box 5, France SDT to NODIS (7), GRFL: 2.

69 Emtel, AmEmbassy Pretoria, South Africa, to SecState Washington, DC, 151550Z, 15 December 1975, NSA Country Files, Africa General, South Africa To SecState NODIS (1), GRFL: 1. Muller thought the time was right as "the fighting in Angola had reached a new phase in the area south of Luanda. In recent days, the UNITAFNLA forces had inflicted heavy losses in men and equipment on the Cubans". However, he warned of

total disorganization [... within] ... the UNITA controlled area of the south; he said civil administration is non-existent and the economic life had come to a virtual standstill. If the gains made by UNITA-FNLA in this area are to be consolidated [... and] something must be done quickly to reactivate local government and business activity.

(Ibid.: 2)

70 Ibid.

71 Emtel, SecState Washington, DC to AmEmbassy Cairo, Egypt, 251805Z, 25 December 1975, NSA Country Files, Middle East and South Asia, Box 5, Egypt SDT From NODIS (14), GRFL: 2

72 Ibid.

73 Emtel, SecState Washington, DC to AmEmbassy Lusaka, Zambia, 232314Z, 23 December 1975, NSA Country Files, Africa General, Zambia From SecState NODIS (1), GRFL: 1. The telegram was also sent to the US embassy in Dar es Salaam Tanzania for information purposes. This appeal was made in the aftermath of talks between Kaunda, Nyerere and Mozambican President Samora Machel in Dar es Salaam on 14 December 1975. The three-point plan

endorsed a strong condemnation of South African involvement in Angola, called for withdrawal of all foreign intervention and advocated a ceasefire until a government of national unity could be established. It was presumed by Washington that Nyerere authorized the Tanzanian official to approach the US embassy in Tanzania with the offer. This approach was sensitive; therefore, the US embassy in Tanzania was not to inform the Tanzanian government that the US embassy in Zambia was instructed to discuss the approach with Zambian officials.

74 Ibid.: 2.

75 John Armstrong, "The Soviet-American Confrontation: A New Phase?," *Survey* 21, no. 4 (Autumn 1975): 50. Cited in Klinghoffer, *The Angolan War*, 96.

76 Colin Dueck, *Hard Line: The Republican Party and United States Foreign Policy since World War II* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2010), 185. Dueck also contends that Watergate was the basis for the collapse of Kissinger's foreign policy as it discredited realism in US foreign policy and limited its ability to act in Angola (ibid.: 187).

77 Charles Bartlett, "Church Committee Endangers Agents," *The Washington Star*, 29 December 1975, in Emtel, SecState Washington, DC to USDEL Secretary, 292014Z, 29 December 1975, US Public Library of Diplomacy, Wikileaks: 5.

78 Marilyn Berger, "Senate Unit Votes Angola Aid Curb," *Washington Post*, 17 December 1975, in Emtel, SecState Washington, DC to All African Diplomatic Posts, 192040Z, 19 December 1975, Public Library of US Diplomacy, Wikileaks: 2.

79 Leslie Gelb, "Ford is Opposed to Combat Role in Angolan War," 17 December 1975, *New York Times*, in Emtel, 19 December 1975, 5.

80 Ibid.

81 Senate Congressional Record, Ninety-Forth Congress, First Session, 9 am, 16 December 1975, Capitol Hill, Washington, DC: 41066. Bonker's remarks were made on 15 December 1975 but are recorded in the extended remarks section of the Congressional Record on 16 December 1975.

# **7      A fractured consensus**

## **The Ford administration confronts Congress**

### **Introduction**

The historiography of events in US–Angolan policy in early 1976 has consistently concentrated on the credibility theme that influenced Kissinger’s attempts to obtain further funding to continue US operations in Angola. Most publications focus on the contradiction of Kissinger’s main argument; that a failure of the US resolve the conflict in Angola represented a serious threat to US credibility throughout the world. As historian and former US diplomat Raymond Garthoff argues, “Kissinger’s real concern was not Angola at all. He maintained throughout that the United States had no real (much less vital) interests in Angola”.<sup>1</sup> Similarly, Kissinger biographer Walter Issacson writes that “Kissinger’s rationale for American involvement in Angola was not to protect specific interests; instead as usual, he saw it as a matter of credibility”.<sup>2</sup> Yet Kissinger’s inability to adequately defend the Ford administration’s requests for further aid to the FNLA and UNITA exposed a serious flaw in the US–Angolan policy. Instead of engaging with Congressional criticism over the request, Kissinger committed to a strategy of attacking Congress over their intrusion into US foreign policy, mainly in an attempt to shift the blame on the US defeat in Angola. This is especially surprising given that Kissinger began to privately express doubts over the whole Angolan adventure and the carnage it was inflicting on the Ford administration by January 1976. This chapter explores hostility between Kissinger and Congress in early 1976 as liberal members of Congress accused him of lacking the ability to shape cohesive foreign policy which incorporated the lessons of Vietnam. Furthermore, it

illustrates the futility of Kissinger's last ditch attempts to directly negotiate with the Soviets over the Angolan issue during his Moscow trip in January 1976.

Second, in the aftermath of Kissinger's failed negotiation attempt with Soviet Premier Leonid Brezhnev, the Ford administration tried to outmanoeuvre their Congressional critics. This can be seen through the testimonies of Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs William Schaufele before the House Committee on International Relations and subsequently Kissinger's testimony before the Senate Subcommittee on African Affairs. However, this only opened up the Ford administration to attacks from liberal critics such as Congressmen Dante Fascell (D-Florida), Lee Hamilton (D-Indiana) and Stephen Solarz (D-New York). They disputed the argument that an additional \$28 million in aid could have a significant impact on the rapidly deteriorating situation in Angola. At the same time, Senate Democrats distanced themselves from any association with the approval of covert aid for the FNLA and UNITA. Senators Dick Clark (D-Iowa) and Joseph Biden (D-Delaware) countered Kissinger's attempts to portray Congress as willing partners in the approval of Operation IAFEATURE in the summer of 1975. In addition, Democrats George McGovern (D-South Dakota) and Solarz intensified their attacks by continually comparing Angola with the Vietnam quagmire.

Finally, this chapter concentrates on the struggle for the power to exercise foreign policy between the executive and legislative branches of the US government which ended in public humiliation for the Ford administration. In particular it argues that Kissinger's attacks on Congressional interference only served to contribute to the further degradation of the perception of US power in the mid-1970s. Indeed, the continued comparison between Angola and Vietnam by Tunney, McGovern, Solarz and Senator Birch Bayh (D-Indiana) was a tactic which Kissinger underestimated. However there were also serious frustrations regarding how Kissinger was managing US foreign policy, with many believing he focused too much attention on the superpower relationship. Furthermore, his inadequate responses to issues relating to Angolan policy were indicative of this point. The regional issues raised by Clark and Congressman Andrew Young (D-Georgia) over a lack of US-African policy form an important part of the narrative on Kissinger's failings in regard to Angola and in Africa in general. These arguments established the foundations for Africa to

be seen as more than a relative backwater by Kissinger as the Angolan saga trundled on into the spring of 1976. This would culminate in the announcement by Kissinger in April of a substantial change in the direction of US–African policy, by formally calling for endorsement of black majority rule in Africa.

### **The search for a post-Tunney Amendment Angolan strategy**

With the high-profile passing of the Tunney Amendment on 20 December 1975, the attitude in Congress among Democratic liberals was buoyant. Indeed, the decision to block further aid to the FNLA and UNITA served as a timely political boost for the Democrats heading into a Presidential election campaign. Furthermore, the Democrats, including members of the black caucus seized the opportunity given to them to turn a perceived strength into a weakness for the Ford administration, using Kissinger's involvement in the Angolan debacle to undermine his authority. On 12 January 1976, former Chairman of the Congressional Black Caucus Congressman Charles Diggs (D-Michigan) condemned US involvement in Angola as the “biggest blunder in the history of its relations with Africa”<sup>3</sup> and suggested that any other Secretary of State would have been forced to resign over such a fiasco. He advanced the accusation that Kissinger was directly responsible for the US role in Angola and argued that it would have been an avoidable situation if the advice of Nathaniel Davis and other State Department officials had not been dismissed as being influenced by the failure in Vietnam. In addition, he questioned Kissinger's ability to conduct US post-Vietnam foreign policy due to his unwavering adherence to balancing great power rivalry at the expense of regional stability. Diggs argued that “once again African specialists were circumvented by the Secretary's imperious attitude and proclivity toward viewing conflicts in terms of exercises in East–West one-upmanship”.<sup>4</sup> The attacks on Kissinger also highlighted that even the CIA were sceptical that such an operation could succeed. This was emphasized by the Chairman of the Senate Intelligence Committee, Senator Frank Church (D-Idaho) who added that “the CIA opposed the Angola operation because of the impossibility of concealing ‘anything of that magnitude’ in military operations”.<sup>5</sup> Church's comments are revealing as they illustrate a departure away from

condemning the CIA for inappropriate foreign interventions, instead highlighting Kissinger's drive for US involvement. It is somewhat ironic that despite Kissinger's internal efforts to blame the debacle on the CIA and CIA Director William Colby, the agency had relatively managed to avoid the ire of Congress; perhaps in no small part due to Deputy CIA Director William Nelson's testimony in December 1975 confirming that it was Kissinger who primarily pushed for intervention.

Furthermore, Church highlighted the true reason Nathaniel Davis resigned his position and accused the administration of attempting to conceal it claiming that "there has been no acknowledgement by the administration that the reason for Davis' summary departure last September 1975 from the Africa policy-making post was related to his stand in US involvement in the Angolan conflict".<sup>6</sup> Similarly, Congressman Toby Moffet (D-Connecticut) highlighted that the State Department had genuine reservations with the interventionist methods that Kissinger wanted to take in Angola. Moffet made this clear when he observed, "there is no unanimity in the State Department on Angola and there is in some sincere difference of opinion with Secretary Kissinger's stand at very high levels".<sup>7</sup> While these attacks were specifically aimed at creating an image of a lone ranger in the creation of foreign policy, this was not a new characterization of Kissinger. He had been depicted in this manner during the foreign policy successes of the Nixon administration, but now the key difference was his portrayal as the Secretary of State who had lost the ability to correctly determine what US vital interests were.

However, despite the headlines and political incriminations, Kissinger had to confront the reality that IAFEATURE was effectively over. Even more damaging was the public nature of the impending defeat which would damage Kissinger's credibility. On 14 January 1976, Kissinger met with Chairman of the Defense Appropriations Committee Congressman George Mahon (D-Texas) to discuss the upcoming House of Representatives vote on the Tunney Amendment. Mahon informed Kissinger that there was no conceivable way to prevent the House from passing the legislation. Although such news was foreseen, the reaction from Kissinger is striking and displays how much he had elevated Angola in his priorities and the resentment he fostered towards the legislative branch interfering in foreign policy. He lamented, "It's a national disgrace. It is the worst American foreign policy disaster that I can remember".<sup>8</sup> Once again his actions

display a lack of nuance as he refused to accept that Congress had prevailed over the executive branch. Instead Kissinger chose to direct Ford towards the option of continuing the fight with Congress for Angolan aid and he continued to link Congressional behaviour with Vietnam syndrome. This choice represented a flawed logic that was prevalent in Kissinger's Angolan policy from its inception. When confronted with evidence that opposed his views he consistently chose the option with the slimmest chance of success. Yet the decision to continue to confront Congress is particularly interesting in light of newly declassified telephone conversations between Kissinger and Scowcroft. On 6 January 1976 Kissinger privately expressed his regret to Scowcroft that the US committed itself to intervening in Angola. He stated, "maybe we should have let Angola go. This is going to turn into a worse disaster. Maybe we should just not have started the operation".<sup>9</sup> It is clear that Kissinger believed the damage caused by the Tunney Amendment was significant. Despite being repeatedly warned that the domestic conditions in the US were primed for an attack on the Ford administration if IAFEATURE was discovered, Kissinger never really believed that it would be as detrimental as predicted. However, by early January he confided in Scowcroft that he thought that "the defeat they [the Congress] are inflicting on us is worse" than if the US never engaged with the FNLA and UNITA.<sup>10</sup> Yet he decided that the Ford administration had to continue to the struggle, not for Angola, but to defend the principle that the legislative branch should not interfere with the conduct of US foreign policy. He was also driven by the need to destroy the link between Vietnam and Angola as portrayed by Congressmen and in the media. In the early months of 1976, with Angola now lost and with no feasible solution except to ask Congress for \$28 million in further aid to the country, Kissinger formulated his attack on the legislative branch in an attempt to blame them for the defeat in Angola.

During a staff meeting on 16 January 1976, Kissinger expressed his concern over the damaging effects that Congressional action was having on the credibility of US foreign policy and the link between their actions in Angola and Vietnam as "it's the Viet-Nam [*sic*] pattern all over again [... the] construction of credibility gaps, proving that we're losing anyway; therefore, we can't do anything – a total misstatement of the issue".<sup>11</sup> As part of the first phase in the fight against the legislative branch, the Ford administration began work on developing ways to steal the initiative from Congress on the Angolan issue. At the same time, Scowcroft received a

memorandum from NSA staffers Clinton Granger and Les Janka about the possibilities for overt funding to Angola. The document outlined two potential options for providing direct assistance. The first proposal was to reprogramme funds from the Foreign Assistance Act (FAA), but this option was deemed not viable as Ford would realistically have to veto the legislation on other grounds. The second, and more viable option, was to draft new legislation that specifically authorized assistance to Angola as it was the only practical way of obtaining the funding. The main advantage with this proposal was that it “would gain the initiative for the Administration and help take the spot-light off various amendments prohibiting funds for the FNLA and UNITA”.<sup>12</sup> Granger and Janka believed that such a forthright stance would allow Ford to make an “open bid for public support” which could “tap new resources on the Hill”.<sup>13</sup> The report concluded that both options would only stand a “slim chance” of getting approval from Congress. However, it recommended drafting new legislation to potentially

capture the initiative from Congress, [... and] it raises the Angola issue to the status of a public issue, allowing us to make a more effective bid for public support, and it confronts the Congress with a hard choice which could bring us [Ford Administration] unexpected support.<sup>14</sup>

However, the report never stated how or why a new piece of legislation would receive public support. Therefore, the recommendation is surprising given that there was a distinct lack of support for the Ford administration’s pursuit of further funding for the Angolan operation at the time.

As the executive branch was contemplating this privately, Ford went on the offensive to gain public support for a strong response to Soviet and Cuban actions in Angola. The President attempted to rally the American people against the liberal critics of the Ford administration by using his State of the Union speech to proclaim that “the American people have heard too much about how terrible our mistakes, how evil our deeds, and how misguided our purpose [... and] I say it is time to quit downgrading ourselves as a nation”.<sup>15</sup> Yet Ford’s efforts at stirring up domestic support were dashed when he received a memorandum on 23 January 1976 outlining the projection of votes in the House for the passage of the Tunney Amendment on 27 January 1976. It emphatically showed that the battle was



already lost as the “Democratic whip check is running 8 to 1 in favor of the Tunney Amendment [...] if the Chairman’s report is accurate [...] the] amendment will carry by about 300–120”.<sup>16</sup> While Ford struggled to stave off the certain passing of the Tunney Amendment in Washington, DC, Kissinger flew to Moscow to directly broker a mutual withdrawal from the country.

On 21 January 1976, Kissinger met with Soviet General Secretary Leonid Brezhnev for scheduled negotiations on the progression of the next SALT agreement. However, he also attempted to pressure the Soviet leader into discussing the Angolan situation. But a bullish tone was set early on the first day of talks when Brezhnev was asked if Angola would be discussed and he bluntly replied that he had no questions on Angola as it was not his country. However, not willing to see such a public opportunity to pressurize the Soviet General Secretary, Kissinger attempted to seize the initiative in front of the press by stating it would be a point to be discussed. When Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko reminded Kissinger that no topic could be discussed unless it was by mutual consent, Kissinger persevered by declaring he would discuss it and they could listen.<sup>17</sup> However, Kissinger’s persistence ultimately caused Brezhnev to later dismiss any possibility of discussing the subject. In a veiled comment on Kissinger’s handling of the Angolan situation, Brezhnev snapped

are we here to discuss SALT? Or Angola? What [*sic*] do we need a success in Angola? We need nothing in Angola. But the whole world can read in the press that the West, and America, are sending arms and mercenaries in Angola. And you turn everything on its head.<sup>18</sup>

This forceful tone from the Soviet leader continued during the second day of talks when Kissinger raised the Angolan issue again, which resulted in Brezhnev angrily countering “don’t mention that word to me. We have nothing to do with that country. I cannot talk about that country”.<sup>19</sup> It is clear that the Soviet leadership were very conscious that Kissinger was attempting to coerce them into an agreement to offset the political damage being caused in the US. Yet they also recognized that Kissinger was playing poker with a weak hand and they could dictate when Angola could be discussed.

On the last day of the talks, Kissinger was finally allowed to discuss Angola, but not with Brezhnev. Instead Kissinger and Gromyko discussed at length the Angolan situation, but Kissinger was ultimately frustrated by Gromyko's adamant assertions that the Soviet Union was within its rights to assist the MPLA as they were the recognized government of Angola. Kissinger also tried to elicit a response on how the Soviets could justify their assistance in transporting Cuban troops to Angola, yet Gromyko evaded this by claiming that the Soviet Union had no authorization to speak on the behalf of the Cuban government. Such evasiveness left Kissinger frustrated as he realized that it was futile to negotiate a withdrawal of Cuban troops with the Soviet leadership, especially since it was now in a position of strength on the issue. Indeed, he took the opportunity to speak bluntly on the topic. He told Gromyko:

it is a tragedy because the Soviet Union has nothing to gain in Angola. We have nothing to gain in Angola. Five years from now it will make no difference. I must say this is a tragedy, and I say this as one who has been the foremost defender of US-Soviet rapprochement in the United States.<sup>20</sup>

Yet these remarks also clearly demonstrate his lack of concern for the sub-Saharan region and contradict private discussions where he expressed concern that Angola could act as a gateway for the Soviets to exert influence in the entire region. He compounded this by stating that Angola would merely represent a trigger point for an unnecessary dispute in superpower relations, stating that "it wouldn't be the first time in history that events that no one can explain afterwards give rise to consequences out of all proportion to their intrinsic significance".<sup>21</sup> Therefore, he decided to continue his approach of threatening that the US could not tolerate such a large number of Cuban troops in Angola. In addition, Kissinger also claimed that the Soviets were aiding conservative and liberal critics of the Ford administration who advocated a stronger and more robust policy against the Soviet Union. Kissinger outlined,

what makes these events so tragic is that all the remarks the Foreign Minister has made overlook the situation in the United States, in which those who look for every opportunity to injure our policy will attack

this – and we will not oppose it. Even those who oppose doing something in Angola propose doing things directly to the Soviet Union rather than in Angola.<sup>22</sup>

However, as Jussi Hanhimäki points out, the Soviets had their reasons for dismissing Kissinger's threats. He argues that Angola provided "the opportunity to teach a lesson to the Americans about the rules of détente. If Kissinger had felt free to exclude the Soviets from the Middle East, then Angola was payback time".<sup>23</sup> The actions of the Kremlin were based on some level of risk as they wished to maintain positive relations with the US; however, they were aware that the momentum was with them and that it was unlikely that the Ford administration would take drastic action such as withholding grain sales or dismantling détente in a Presidential election year.

Gromyko calculated that Kissinger could not afford such a dramatic setback on détente if he wished to remain in office if President Ford was elected in November 1976. With this in mind Gromyko felt emboldened to turn the tables on Kissinger by telling him the US and more importantly, Kissinger himself, would bear the ultimate responsibility for the collapse of détente. He warned,

if [...] you start to aggravate this whole matter and make statements casting aspersions on our relations, it will not be we who will bear responsibility for the consequences. It will be the responsibility solely of the United States. I cannot believe that this meets the interests of the world situation.<sup>24</sup>

Such a strong rebuke made it clear to Kissinger that there would be no redemption or masterful diplomatic achievement to bring home this time. It seemed that memories of "Super K" were quickly falling into the abyss of failures that Kissinger perceived as being the result of a loss of US credibility. However, in the context of Angola, he was directly responsible for the damage caused in superpower relations.

On 25 January 1976, Kissinger met with Ford to discuss his failed Moscow trip and his subsequent meeting with NATO leaders in Brussels, Belgium. His continuing perception of a link between Angola and Vietnam was evident when he described how the loss of Angola would look to their

NATO allies and stated, “I am deeply worried about our position in the world resulting from Angola. It is opening the Vietnam wounds again”.<sup>25</sup> Crucially he reported that the Soviets refused to negotiate due to the Senate decision to cut funding. He informed Ford that this had given them confidence that the US was unable to counter their actions, stating “on Angola, they were disdainful. It is the Senate action. They think they’ve got us”.<sup>26</sup> This conclusion only added to Kissinger’s ire over the legislative branch’s conduct in the Angolan affair. Such anger further blinded him to the fact that Angola was now a lost cause. Yet he refused to accept that his pursuit of re-establishing credibility had spectacularly imploded, and more specifically, his own strategy had exacerbated the problem. The decision to go on the offensive against Congress only compounded the rift between the legislative and executive branches.

The Ford administration launched a high-profile defence of their case in the hope of exposing the prohibition of further Angolan aid as an example of Congressional recklessness.<sup>27</sup> Yet these attempts to shift the blame onto Congress only further served to expose the lack of detail in the Ford administration’s policy as both Congressmen and academics from various institutions criticized Kissinger’s handling of the Angolan situation. The first opportunity to test this resolve came when Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs William Schaufele attempted to placate the House Committee on International Relations on Angolan policy. Unlike his predecessors, Donald Easum and Nathaniel Davis, Schaufele was a firm believer of Kissinger’s view that US credibility was at stake in Angola and that Congressional interference was encouraging the Soviets to continue their operation. To that end, Kissinger had finally found a congenial mouthpiece to run the African Bureau.

## **Doubling down: Kissinger, Schaufele and the Angolan hearings**

On 26 January 1976, Schaufele came before the Committee on International Relations to defend the Ford administration’s policy on Angola. He repeated the State Department position as previously outlined by Kissinger; namely that the Soviets had breached the boundaries of détente and the US had to confront them in Angola. During his testimony, he drew upon three themes: containment, credibility concerns and Congressional behaviour. On

the first issue, he called for a strong response to Soviet assistance to the MPLA as “the Soviet Union has strained the fabric of détente by its lack of restraint and its pursuit of unilateral advantage in Angola”.<sup>28</sup> Furthermore, he outlined that

we must also make unmistakeably clear our determination to resist any Soviet effort to upset the power balance anywhere in the world by force, regardless of whether the area is seen as one of direct security concern to the United States or not.<sup>29</sup>

However, such a statement was not in alignment with Congressional or public sentiments, which called for restraint against international confrontation unless US national interests were directly at stake. In a wider context, he argued that US credibility in Africa was being eroded as

our African friends and others will perceive that, despite our desire to keep great power rivalries out of Africa, the United States does not have the will to provide the necessary support for that policy and they will trim and adjust their attitudes and policies accordingly.<sup>30</sup>

According to Schaufele, such a scenario would mean that African leaders

would look to the future and may be more amenable to Soviet influence and pressure than they have been in the past because they generally count on us to balance the pressure and influence which the Soviet Union has brought to bear on them in the past.<sup>31</sup>

Once again such a statement contradicts the evidence available to the State Department which had outlined that African states would not fall like dominoes to Soviet influence. Finally, Schaufele hit out at the tactics of Congress for depriving the executive branch of the funding to conduct an effective counter-strategy to Soviet moves in Angola. He warned, “the more we are perceived to lack will the more Moscow will probe [... and] it is difficult to negotiate with your adversary if you unilaterally decide not to use the tools at your disposal which might be convincing”.<sup>32</sup> Yet all of these points only served to illustrate that Angola was similar to Vietnam. The basic arguments that Schaufele proposed were similar to those which were

outlined in the 1960s as Vietnam slowly escalated, primarily, the need to contain the Soviet threat, as well as the regional credibility issue that would arise if the US abdicated and the subsequent domino effect that could occur in the region as a result.

His statements only served to exacerbate liberal opponents who believed détente was a failed policy that did not inhibit Soviet expansionism. Critics such as Congressman Leo Ryan (D-California) stated he could not “accept the present policy of the State Department and your rationale that wherever the Soviets are we have to go too and react”.<sup>33</sup> In response to the statement that the Angolan situation was already lost, Schauffele could only offer a reticent reply that the

present situation, although it has deteriorated, is not yet conclusive [...] and] I have no assurance that the other side would immediately negotiate, because the other side has to be convinced that its adversaries are willing to stick it out.

However, this vague answer was seized upon by Congressman Stephen Solarz (D-New York) who countered,

even if for some miraculous reason the Tunney amendment were defeated [...] it is extremely unlikely that when the funds available are exhausted the Congress would be prepared to appropriate more if the situation has not produced the kind of negotiations you seek.<sup>34</sup>

In addition, he pointed out a major flaw with the request for funds, primarily that the publicity of the request had exposed the level of US commitment to Angola. As a result, Solarz argued that the Soviets had had every encouragement not to enter into negotiations with Kissinger as they knew the US would not be prepared to invest more in Angola. He also concluded that the Ford administration had created and pursued an aimless policy. In essence he charged that the executive branch had not learned any of the lessons from the Vietnam experience, and this is illustrated in his remark that “having recently extricated ourselves from the swamps of Southeast Asia, it really would be a tragedy for the country if we somehow got enmeshed in the jungles of southwest Africa”.<sup>35</sup> Therefore, the US had to learn when to disengage from confrontation with the Soviets and that it

was futile to fight a perpetual conflict in a Third World country with no particular US national interest at stake.

This attack on the Ford administration's argument that US credibility was in jeopardy was led by Congressman Dante Fascell (D-Florida), who condemned Schauffele's appeals for further aid for Angola on the basis that the Ford administration's objectives were "pretty loose [... and] you are asking us to make a major foreign policy decision on US confrontation with the Soviets in Angola which you state is not [a] US desire". Fascell's argument was based on a realistic appraisal of the situation in Angola which left the US with "not much hand calling if we are playing a poker game [... and] I don't see where we either buy the time or get any kind of equality [in Angola]".<sup>36</sup> In addition, Fascell attacked the ironic nature of the Ford administration's argument by questioning the relatively small amount of aid for an operation which the executive branch thought so important to confront the Soviets. He observed,

If we are just going to play around in Angola, and \$28 million seems to be that, the ultimate result will be that the MPLA with Soviet-Cuban help is going to emerge either militarily or politically on top; then where are we?<sup>37</sup>

In effect, Fascell pointed to the wider context beyond the immediate issue of an embargo on US arms; namely what was the US going to do once the MPLA was in government. Indeed, it would look foolish for the US to walk away from Angola completely in this event when Kissinger and the Ford administration had hyped up its level of significance to Congress and the US public.

Ultimately Schauffele's adherence to Kissinger's tactics did not succeed in influencing any undecided Congressional voters and only served to damage the Ford administration's efforts. The inability of Schauffele's attempt to address the scathing attacks on US-Angolan policy and his admission that the Soviets were estimated to have provided \$200 million worth of equipment and arms to Angola dwarfed US aid so significantly, that even if the Tunney Amendment was defeated, it was a futile cause. On 27 January 1976, despite the previous failures, Ford made one last attempt to influence the House vote scheduled for later that day when he sent a letter to the House Majority Speaker Carl Albert (D-Oklahoma) restating

the administration's case for continued involvement in Angola. He hoped to win the vote to demonstrate that the executive branch still carried some credibility in the domestic arena. In the letter, Ford argued that the "imposition of a military solution in Angola will have the most profound long range significance for the United States" and "will send a message of irresolution not only to the leaders of African nations but to the United States allies and friends throughout the world".<sup>38</sup> The fear of another failure and its impact on US credibility at home and abroad was also at the heart of his argument: "the failure of the US to take a stand will inevitably lead our friends and supporters to conclusions about our steadfastness and resolve".<sup>39</sup> However, Ford's plea fell on deaf ears as the vote was passed 323–99 in favour of cutting off all funding for Angolan operations. Furthermore, Ford's tactics and his emphasis on the decline of American credibility were condemned in the press. In a scathing article the *New York Times* columnist Tom Wicker warned that Ford should be careful with his statements,

lest his premature announcements of the decline of the United States should tend toward self-fulfilling prophecy [... Ford] has virtually invited the rest of 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.<sup>40</sup>

This was certainly a point that could be applied not just to Ford, but also to Kissinger, whose rhetoric had escalated significantly since autumn 1975. Therefore, while Wicker's assertion is correct, he mistakenly thought Ford was responsible for such claims. The perception that Angola represented such a crucial credibility concern for the US was ingrained in Ford's thoughts from the beginning of the Angolan debate in the summer of 1975 by Kissinger. However, with the vote over and his Angolan policy in ruins, Kissinger came before the Congressional Subcommittee on African Affairs determined to show that Congress was to blame over the US failure in Angola.

On 29 January 1976, Senator Dick Clark (D-Iowa) chaired the first hearing on Angola with the Subcommittee on African Affairs.<sup>41</sup> With the passage of the Tunney Amendment successfully through both legislative houses, Kissinger decided to go on the offensive against his Congressional



critics. He expressed his “sadness that the Executive has been deprived of indispensable flexibility in formulating a foreign policy which we believe to be in our national interest”.<sup>42</sup> Yet this was entirely different to Kissinger’s earlier statements outlining that the US had no significant national interest in Angola. This is typical of Kissinger’s changing stance on Angola as he desperately tries to justify his actions to that point. However, his criticism was met by equally heavy retorts from Clark and Senator Joseph Biden. Indeed, Clark confronted Kissinger’s attempt to link Congress as being a silent partner on Angolan policy. He raised the question as to why the Ford administration proceeded with a covert operation against the wishes of members on the Congressional committees briefed during the summer of 1975. Kissinger responded by stating,

If, out of these briefings there emerged what would appear to us a determined opposition, we would reconsider our views, reconsider our policy [... although] I do not say that every Member that was briefed expressed support, [... but] we did not have the sense that it would lead to a clash between the Congress and the executive.<sup>43</sup>

Not content with this statement, Biden pressed further by asking whether Kissinger was implying that the failure of Congressional committee members to express opposition at the beginning of the covert operation was seen as a form of approval for Operation IAFEATURE. In his response, Kissinger argued that the Committee members who were

briefed did not understand what we wanted, what we had in mind, or because they were uncharacteristically reticent, we did not get the impression that there was an opposition in principle of a magnitude that would cause Congress simply to shut the thing off in the middle.<sup>44</sup>

However, Biden countered this by illustrating the erratic and changing objectives of the Ford administration’s Angolan policy and how it was this factor which led to a lack of opposition to it. He noted that when he was first briefed about Angolan policy in the summer of 1975, the amount that was put forward to be spent covertly aiding the Angolan guerrilla groups was in the region of \$10 million and “the likelihood of it going beyond that amount was just inconceivable. We had no intention of being involved

beyond that”.<sup>45</sup> In Biden’s view, the Ford administration had misrepresented the Angolan operation as minimal, suggesting that there would be

hardly any involvement and an assurance by the executive branch that there would be no substantial increase in that involvement [... and] no way it would be found out, so there would be no domestic embarrassment [... and] no likelihood of any embarrassment as a consequence of any association with South Africa.<sup>46</sup>

Indeed, Biden’s comments served as a reminder that the Angolan policy was based on very loose objectives, while simultaneously implying that the Ford administration seemed to be making up the story as it went along. Such a scenario allowed the Vietnam analogy to emerge in relation to Angola, something that Kissinger never came to terms with over the course of the Angolan hearings in early 1976.

Seeking answers as to why US–Angolan policy was so erratic, Biden attacked Kissinger’s explanation that the US intervened to balance the threat of the Soviet Union expanding beyond their traditional sphere of influence. He noted that the first time he was briefed by the CIA and State Department officials, the most pressing issue outlined was US credibility to African nations rather than a superpower confrontation. He observed that

the justification from the involvement in Africa had nothing to do with the Soviet Union at that point. That was a low priority as stated to me. The high priority was that there will be destabilization of Africa because friendly African States will feel that maybe we do not have the resolve to help them; specifically Zambia and Zaire.<sup>47</sup>

Furthermore, Biden pointed out how the rationale had shifted from helping prevent African destabilization to a position where US strategic interests were at risk. Yet it had changed again in January 1976 to a situation where US credibility was at risk if they failed to oppose Soviet actions. He summarized that after the initial African stability context he was told two months later

that the justification was our strategic interest and we heard at least a feeble attempt to backup that statement of the sealanes [sic] and Brazil and now we hear that the justification which I assume was all along the global consequences of our failure to exercise that bit of discouragement, whatever level of discouragement it is, in Angola, and almost everywhere else in the world.<sup>48</sup>

While Biden exposed the shifting nature of the Ford administration's Angolan policy, others such as Senator George McGovern (D-South Dakota) outlined that such slippery objectives from the executive branch were similar to executive briefings given on Vietnam a decade earlier. He argued that Congressional action on the Angolan issue was a direct result of the lessons learned from Vietnam. McGovern stressed that "many Members of the Congress who are reluctant to give you the flexibility that you ask for are basing that on a bitter historic experience".<sup>49</sup> Furthermore, Congressman Stephen Solarz also drew comparisons with the early stages of US involvement in Vietnam, stating that he felt

a certain kind of *déjà vu* because [...] the arguments that were advanced in justification of our involvement in Angola they seemed to me to be very much like the arguments that were originally used in defence of our initial intervention in Vietnam, and now the arguments that are being used sound to me suspiciously like the ones that we heard at the end of our involvement in Vietnam.<sup>50</sup>

Kissinger, perhaps realizing that his protests were contributing to the comparison between Vietnam and Angola, conceded that such a proposition was possible, adding "it is clear the pendulum had gone too far in the direction of Executive authority and that led to decisions that were tragic" and that there was a need to "transcend the past sufficiently to find the proper balance between the need for Executive authority and the need for congressional supervision".<sup>51</sup> However, others such as Senator Jacob Javits (D-New York) heavily criticized the lack of international cooperation to resolve the situation in Angola. He stated:

if we had any help, if we had had the least demonstration that others were with us, you might have gotten a very different result [but ...] the

Congress [...] has just about had it with the proposition that it is up to us; everybody will hold our coat, but we will have to do it alone.<sup>52</sup>

This rationale was based on the experience with international partners in Vietnam, as Javits declared,

It seems that the premise in their minds is that they can tell us sotto voce, or in the privacy of the chancery, that they are with us, as so many Asian nations did during the Vietnam war, but they had better find out that that does not work anymore [...] and] they have to realize that they will have to declare themselves with us and that the quiet conversation will not do.<sup>53</sup>

This was a very important point and has at times been overlooked in analysis of US–Angolan policy. Many of the African countries, such as Zaire and Zambia engaged in their own objectives which shifted depending on their perceived outcomes in Angola. This was perhaps inevitable as both countries could not fully trust the US to stay engaged in the region. The failings of US–African policy before the Angolan episode contributed to African states’ unwillingness to publicly endorse US actions, despite their private encouragement for such intervention. The reluctance of the US to condemn Portuguese actions in Angola and towards its other African colonial territories highlighted how marginal Africa was to the US in terms of its Cold War interests. Therefore, it was difficult for many African states to believe Kissinger’s sudden description of Angola as a crucial piece of US Cold War strategy and worthy of jeopardizing détente for.

Such thinking manifested itself in the arguments of Congressman Andrew Young (D-Georgia), a member of the Congressional black caucus who argued that the fundamental reason for the situation in Angola was the absence of an African policy in the aftermath of the Portuguese Revolution in April 1974. He heavily criticized the Ford administration and in particular Kissinger’s lack of initiative to create a policy to help African countries in the aftermath of decolonization. In particular, Young condemned Kissinger’s explanation that the US became involved in order to balance the Soviet interference in Angola. Instead he stressed that the US should have been more proactive in the region but lamented that

what we have in fact done is allowed a Soviet presence to emerge, not just in Angola, but we have opened the floodgates for turmoil and chaos in all southern Africa because we did not do things when we could have.<sup>54</sup>

He pointed to the failure by Kissinger to address African issues during the final years of Portuguese colonialism by choosing Cold War stability over the African right to self-determination. In essence, his criticisms referred back to the failures of NSSM 39 or Tar Baby which was adopted in 1969 and inhibited any progression on US–African relations. Young argued:

I do not think we can take Angola as an isolated incident and I think we make a mistake when we think that the problem that we are dealing with started in January 1975 [...] I think the first time I heard of napalm it was being used not in Vietnam but by the Portuguese in Mozambique and Angola. In light of that history and that wrong policy against all our traditional values, and national interests. I think, we stopped – when the Portuguese Government fell – and did nothing and we created a vacuum and it was in that vacuum that Soviet influence began to expand and the situation became critical.<sup>55</sup>

Deputy Secretary of Defense Robert Ellsworth also acknowledged that the Angolan debacle was caused in a large part due to the ignorance of US–African policy in the Cold War. He observed that

it is possible to go back in history a number of years and to say by way of criticism of previous administrations, of the present administration, of the whole American government, that there might have been more imaginative and luckier set of perspectives on Africa as far as policy is concerned.<sup>56</sup>

Despite these strong statements, neither Kissinger nor Congress emerged from the hearing with any sense of enhanced credibility over the issue. *The Los Angeles Times* columnist Oswald Johnston declared that the hearing only served to dramatize the immense gulf between Kissinger and Congress on matters of foreign policy and resulted in a situation where “nobody seriously addressed the issue of where the administration can turn next”.<sup>57</sup>

This view was shared in an editorial piece in the *Washington Post* which drew attention to the continued irony that US credibility was being damaged as “the administration only compounds its discomfiture and the nation’s misfortune by continuing to treat Angola as the crucial forum in which American ‘resolve’ is being tested”.<sup>58</sup> This theme continued in the press as Kissinger came under further scrutiny for lacking the imagination to create a sustainable Angolan policy, instead choosing to indulge in perception warfare with Congress with little chance of success.

## **The blame game: executive and legislative perspectives on Angola and Africa**

The *New York Times* journalist Leslie H. Gelb, the first man to initially break the story of US covert aid to Angola in September 1975, now turned his attention to the administration’s persistence in the fight with Congress for further Angolan aid. Such action was difficult to understand as according to Gelb, if “administration leaders knew they would lose the Angola votes in Congress, why did they make matters worse by advertising this as demonstrating the impotency of the United States?”.<sup>59</sup> Yet for Kissinger this had morphed away from Angola itself and into a battle for control of US foreign policy itself. He increased the stakes in a speech he gave to the Commonwealth Club of San Francisco and the World Affairs Council of Northern California on 3 February 1976. He warned that Congressional interference to halt an Angolan policy set a dangerous precedent and argued that “if the pattern is not broken now we will face harder choices and higher costs in the future [...] and it is the first time that Congress has halted national action in the middle of a crisis”.<sup>60</sup> This verbal attack did not go unnoticed and the *Washington Post* quoted Kissinger stressing that “the administration will continue to make its case however unpopular it may be temporarily”.<sup>61</sup> In addition, his efforts to show resolve in the face of adverse Congressional and public opinion was providing another example of his escalating rhetoric, which was by now so hollow that it only served to damage the Ford administration’s credibility in both domestic and foreign policy circles. A *Los Angeles Times* editorial drew attention to the lack of understanding Kissinger had over the situation. It argued that while the majority of the American public still supported

détente with the Soviet Union, the problem was that Kissinger misunderstood “the American mind, a misunderstanding dramatized by his erroneous assessment of domestic divisions as more dangerous to America than adversaries abroad”. It was this misunderstanding that led to the mistake of continuing a futile struggle with Congress over Angola; “it is not his strategy but his judgement that had been questioned”.<sup>62</sup> Therefore, the theme of Kissinger’s inability to conduct foreign policy remained despite his attempts to portray the US cause in Angola as noble and its defeat a result of Congressional unwillingness to match the Soviets. By describing the events in Angola as a “crisis” he contributed to his own downfall on the issue. The criticism levelled at Kissinger in the media and in Congress was justified, as not only did Kissinger show poor judgement to commit the US to covert intervention in the summer of 1975, he now compounded this error by building it up to be a matter of major foreign policy importance.

Kissinger’s outburst also drew heavy criticism from some Democratic Congressmen such as Senate Democratic Leader Mike Mansfield (D-Montana) who stressed that “if any administration expects Congress to lie down and play dead, it has another thing coming [... and] this Congress has a responsibility to be heard, and will be heard”.<sup>63</sup> Kissinger’s remarks sparked Democratic Presidential candidate Senator Birch Bayh (D-Indiana) to declare that he was “sick and tired” of Kissinger “playing God” in the creation of US foreign policy and for his repeated attempts to blame the legislative branch for his own failings in Angola. Once again using the imagery of Angola as another Vietnam, Bayh outlined that the majority of Congress were “really adamant in our feeling that we’re not going to let Angola turn another Vietnam”.<sup>64</sup> He went even further by directly attacking Kissinger’s role in the situation. He stated that

no matter how loud Dr. Kissinger yells, no matter what he says [there would be little support from Congress to follow the] Kissinger course that we must run hither and yon and put out every brush fire and assume the mantle of world policeman again.<sup>65</sup>

While Bayh’s comments may have been designed to gain exposure to help his faltering nomination to be the Democratic candidate for the upcoming Presidential elections, there can be no doubt that members of Congress were angered by Kissinger’s flagrant confrontational tactics over Angola.

In the final hearing of the subcommittee on Angola held on 6 February 1976, Senator John Tunney continued to point to the frailties of Kissinger's Angolan policy. Once again he incited the powerful image of Angola becoming another Vietnam quagmire. He outlined that it was inconceivable that the US could establish the balance that Kissinger craved as

The United States cannot save a losing cause with money alone. We would have to supply aircraft, tanks, anti-aircraft guns and missiles, helicopters and other weapons. Who is to fly and operate them? There is no time for training programs, there are no allies ready to intervene with such equipment. We would have to send instructors and advisors, and in all probability, American troops in a pattern all too reminiscent of Vietnam.<sup>66</sup>

However, there was some scepticism that the Vietnam analogy was being taken too far. Liberal Congressmen were accused of being headline seekers; the *Washington Post* columnist Joseph Kraft argued, "a not small fraction of Congress has seen opposition to all covert American operations abroad as a good way to make headlines. Hence the preposterous comparison that in Angola were [sic] the makings of another Vietnam".<sup>67</sup> In addition, academic criticism to invoking the memory of Vietnam was raised by Dr Marshall D. Schulman, Professor of International Relations at the Russian Institute of Columbia University. He argued that linking US credibility to making amends for Vietnam was in fact having a counterproductive effect. He stated:

we learned about Indochina through Vietnam; now we are learning something about Africa [... because] if we proclaim that this is a symbolic case, if we build up the issue as a demonstrative example of United States will, we will magnify the damage of it. In that respect, I think the administration has made a serious error.<sup>68</sup>

However, while the focus from both the legislative and executive branches were mainly concentrated on the lessons of Vietnam, the fundamental problem with Kissinger's Angolan policy remained unanswered.

Senator Clark's argument drew attention to the unrealistic notion that the US could balance the situation in Angola and restore its credibility as



The Soviet Union has already provided \$200 million in assistance and the Cubans have sent 11,000 troops. The Russians have 400 advisors there by our own estimates. It is unlikely that these levels of assistance can be “balanced” by another \$9 million in the defense appropriation or the \$28 million more which has now been requested, or even another \$50 million or \$100 million.<sup>69</sup>

In his memoirs, Kissinger states that the Angolan hearings were merely a forum for

All the standard Vietnam arguments [...] but while the argument over Vietnam nine months earlier had been about the implications of national honor in the face of incipient defeat, in Angola a totally unnecessary strategic setback was being imposed by our divisions where success was quite achievable.<sup>70</sup>

However, this belittles the significance of the Congressional argument to halt further aid to the FNLA and UNITA. The conditions in Angola in early 1976 made it impossible for the US to achieve any sort of balance that could be termed a “success”. In reality, the testimonies of Kissinger and Schauffele serve to show that the Ford administration had in effect run out of ideas on how to proceed in Angola. He was now heavily relying on rhetoric to portray an image that all was not yet lost on Angola. As historian Thomas Noer observes,

despite their attempts to shift the blame to Congress, the administration seemed to have suffered a total defeat in Africa. Conservatives argued Ford had allowed a Marxist victory in Angola [...] while liberals] charged that he had provoked the intervention of the Soviet Union, Cuba, and South Africa and had applied a military approach to a diplomatic problem.<sup>71</sup>

Yet despite Kissinger’s claims at the time and in his subsequent memoirs, some of Clark and Tunney’s criticisms and questions were plausible.

The Ford administration officials who testified in front of the subcommittees in early 1976 held strong personal views on Angola and a loyalty to Kissinger, but all failed to adequately address the actual problem

of how US policy was going to realistically counter the Soviet and Cuban presence in Angola. When confronted with these questions, they retreated to a simplistic view that Congress was solely to blame for the defeat in Angola when it cut all funds in December 1975 and that it was Congress who were responsible for the continued slide of US credibility in world affairs. However, on the latter charge, Tunney made another good observation when he raised the point that this tactic was counterproductive to restoring American credibility as:

We are told a Soviet victory in Angola would rend the very fabric of American credibility around the world. But credibility is an argument based on pride, not policy. It can be self-defeating. With each successive incantation by administration spokesman of the argument that our interests are inextricably bound to those of FNLA and UNITA, more and more of our allies around the world and our friends in Africa actually begin to believe that the fate of the United States and the steadfastness of her global commitments hinges on the fortunes of Jonas Savimbi and Holden Roberto.<sup>72</sup>

Instead of engaging with Congressional criticism over Angolan policy, Kissinger continued to pursue his attempt to shift the blame over the debacle in Angola by portraying the defeat as an example of Congressional defeatism in the aftermath of Vietnam. The primary reason for this was the Ford administration's reluctance to change its policy and engage with the MPLA to establish friendly relations that could offset the danger of relying on the Soviets for support. As Leslie Gelb put it, "one difficulty in arriving at the answers is that there is no predominant view in the administration about just what levels of response it may have to consider".<sup>73</sup> So what actions could the Ford administration take in the circumstances? Professor John Marcum of the University of California, Santa Cruz in his testimony argued the US should have tried to offset the damage it had already done in Angola by abandoning the FNLA and UNITA and initiating discussion with the MPLA. In Marcum's opinion, the US should

establish some kind of discussions with them [MPLA] at this juncture, and not push them, as they themselves have suggested we might, into a kind of Cuban reaction, push them out so far that they will argue they

will have to have the Soviets to protect them from various kinds of threats along their borders, South African mercenaries, and the like.

It was Marcum's belief that if the US could take these steps, "there was a good chance at least the MPLA government would not allow permanent facilities, would not get itself linked up in any major way [with the Soviets]".<sup>74</sup> The alternative would be a

prolonged period of insurgency, guerrilla warfare, along with the phenomenon of continued activity by mercenaries of all descriptions [... and] I think that will really increase the danger that those who are backing the MPLA now will stay longer and in greater force, may need permanent facilities.<sup>75</sup>

Such a revaluation of US strategy could have been considered a defeat, but it would at least have given the US an opportunity to compete with the Soviets for influence with the MPLA. Furthermore, there was no evidence to suggest Neto and the MPLA were hard-line Marxists. Indeed, if Kissinger was a genuine realist he would have abandoned the FNLA and UNITA who had proven to be unreliable. If the ultimate goal was to frustrate Soviet ambitions in Angola, it would have been more advantageous to attempt to gain influence with the MPLA as they were the only group who showed the capability of running Angola as an independent state at that time. It would also have caused embarrassment to the Soviets if they were outmanoeuvred in this regard and could have potentially offset Zairian and Zambian concerns.

## **Conclusion**

In a wider context, it was an overall failure of US–African policy that was the main cause of the failure in Angola as previous administrations had followed policies that propped up Portuguese dictatorships. Therefore, Kissinger was not entirely to blame for the situation that confronted him, but his individual choices and subsequent mistakes created a chain reaction of errors which only further damaged US credibility. Consequently, the media attention on Kissinger's strained relationship with the State Department's African Bureau exposed his lack of interest in African affairs

and how, in the context of the Cold War, the region was relatively neglected until Angola. This issue was raised by George Houser, Executive Director of the American Committee on Africa who condemned Kissinger's Cold War view of African affairs as it continued to showcase that Africa was not taken seriously. He illustrated his point by drawing attention to the fact that

twice in the last year the Secretary of State has replaced Assistant Secretaries – once because an Assistant Secretary had advocated too strong a US policy in southern Africa and a second time because an Assistant Secretary differed on policy toward Angola.

With these apparent contradictions, Houser believed that Kissinger's "non-Africa-centered [sic] policy is hardly designed to win strong support in Africa".<sup>76</sup> Therefore, in addition to the Vietnam analogy, the push for an African policy was now beginning to gather momentum. In addition, because of the high-profile exchanges by Congress and Kissinger on the Angolan issue, there was now a national audience to ensure that it would not be ignored.

Congressman Andrew Young (D-Georgia) summarized the US position in relation to African affairs stating that

whenever there is a vacuum there will be forces moving that I do not think will be moving in the interest of African unity and African freedom. But up to now, we have not, as a nation, moved in the interest of African unity and African freedom.<sup>77</sup>

Therefore, despite his continuing efforts to blame Congress for the Angolan defeat, the lack of a US–African policy was a problem that could no longer be ignored by Kissinger. As Senator Dick Clark concluded in the first hearing held on Angola on 29 January 1976, "I think the Secretary of State has himself said that we have not as yet fully developed an African policy, and that is much of the problem".<sup>78</sup>

However, as the Angolan Civil War entered into a new phase for the first time without American aid, the situation was primed for a political shift as the Vietnam analogy began to lose its relevance. Journalist Stephen Rosenfeld observed that while Clark was not using Angola as a launch pad for any personal political ambitions like Senator Bayh, he was unsure

whether Clark had sufficient control over the liberal agenda to reform US foreign policy towards Africa. He stressed that the liberals in Congress,

though they aspire to the moral high ground, are not yet in full command of the general political terrain. The conviction that there should be no more Vietnams does not necessarily lead to a comprehensive African policy [... and] the Angola episode may have been worth the stress if it teaches all of us, administration and critics alike, that Africa requires a policy of its own.<sup>79</sup>

Indeed, Kissinger's late realization that his confrontational approach could not gain traction resulted in a change of strategy. He came to the conclusion that by initiating a dedicated African policy that called for the support of black majority rule, he could seize the initiative from Congress. As a result, he began to outmanoeuvre his liberal critics in the spring as he embarked on his first trip to Africa in April 1976 to herald this new change in US–African policy.

- 1 Raymond Garthoff, *Détente and Confrontation: American–Soviet Relations from Nixon to Reagan* (Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution, 1985), 524. According to Garthoff, the fact that the MPLA had come to power in Angola was marginal for Kissinger who felt more concerned about the fact that it represented another perceived failure to counter the Soviets (ibid.: 524–525).
- 2 Walter Issacson, *Kissinger: A Biography* (second edition) (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2005), 684.
- 3 David B. Ottaway, “Diggs Calls US Policy in Angola ‘Biggest Blunder’, ” *Los Angeles Times*, 12 January 1976, 10.
- 4 Ibid. Diggs also criticized Ford for “blinding followed [*sic*] Kissinger’s folly” (ibid.).
- 5 Lawrence Stern, “Church Says Kissinger Imposed Covert Angola Role,” *Washington Post*, 15 January 1976, A12.
- 6 Ibid. He also claimed Kissinger was a “compulsive interventionist” (ibid.).
- 7 Mary Russell, “200 on Hill Oppose Angola Aid,” *Washington Post*, 27 January 1976, B3.
- 8 Telecon, Kissinger and Chairman Mahon (D-Texas), 14 January 1976, DNSA: 2.
- 9 Telcon, Kissinger and Scowcroft, 6 January 1976, 12.25 pm, Case No. F-2001–02979, FOIA State: 1.
- 10 Ibid.
- 11 Secretary’s Staff Meeting, 8.12 am–8.55 am, 16 January 1976, 01873, DNSA: 28–29.
- 12 Memorandum from Clinton E. Granger and Les Janka to Scowcroft, “Overt Funding for Angola,” 16 January 1976, NSA Country Files, Africa General, Angola (3), GRFL: 2. The specific reasoning for vetoing the legislation on “other grounds” is not defined in the document.
- 13 Ibid.: 2. An initial memorandum which outlined options that could reprogramme funding through legal loopholes was previously rejected by Scowcroft. See Les Janka and Clinton E. Grainger to Scowcroft “Overt Funding for Angola,” 14 January 1976, NSA Country Files, Africa General, Angola (3), GRFL: 1–2.
- 14 Memorandum from Clinton E. Granger and Les Janka to Scowcroft, 16 January 1976, 3. There was another proposal which suggested increasing aid to Zaire, but this was not feasible as it

would involve amending the Congressional Review Act (CRA) to give a Military Assistance Program (MAP) to Zaire, who was not a MAP recipient. Also, the funding could not be directly spent on arms; it would have to be used as a budget support for Zaire who would then send aid from their own resources. In addition, this option was not viable due to the significant doubt that now surrounded Mobutu's trustworthiness with Angolan funding as "under present circumstances there is now some doubt that additional money for Angola through Zaire would ever reach its intended recipients" (ibid.: 1).

- 15 "The Time Has Come for ... a New Realism," *Washington Post*, 20 January 1976, A13.
- 16 Memorandum, Friedersdorf to Ford, Angola, 23 January 1976, Box 32, Wars and Angola, GRFL, WHCF ND: 1. Mahon's report was based on the votes for Congressman Robert Giaimo's (D-Connecticut) "preferential motion to recede and concur with the Senate (Tunney) amendment".
- 17 Memcon, Brezhnev, Gromyko, Kissinger, Sonnenfeldt, Hyland, Lord, 11 am–1.50 pm, Brezhnev's Office, The Kremlin, Moscow, Soviet Union, 21 January 1976, Box 1, NSA Kissinger Reports, GRFL, 3.
- 18 Ibid.: 11.
- 19 Ibid.: 14.
- 20 Ibid.: 13.
- 21 Ibid.
- 22 Memcon, Gromyko, Kissinger, Sonnenfeldt, Hyland, Stoessel, 23 January 1976, 9.34 pm–11.45 am, Tolstoi House, Foreign Office, Moscow, Soviet Union, Box 1, NSA Kissinger Reports, GRFL: 11.
- 23 Jussi Hanhimäki, *The Flawed Architect: Henry Kissinger and American Foreign Policy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 423–424.
- 24 Memcon, 23 January 1976, 13.
- 25 Memcon, Ford, Kissinger and Scowcroft, Oval Office, White House, Washington, DC, 25 January 1976, Box 17, DGRFL: 3. Ford asked, "Do they know it's not you or me?" to which Kissinger replied "Yes, but, they must deal with the phenomenon" (ibid.).
- 26 Ibid.: 2.
- 27 This public defence was partly in response to Congressman Robert Giaimo's (D-Connecticut) demands that if the administration was so confident that its Angolan policy was not a repeat of early Vietnam policy in the 1960s, then it should present its policy "publicly and defend it". See Robert D. Johnson, *Congress and the Cold War* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 224.
- 28 Hearing before the Committee On International Relations House of Representatives, "United States Policy in Angola," Ninety-Forth Congress, Second Session, 26 January 1976, 2pm, Room 2172, Rayburn House Office Building, US Government Printing Office, Washington, DC, (1976): 2. Schaufele's reply to whether \$28 million was sufficiently in line with Kissinger's policy, "I am convinced that this administrations' request for a few million dollars for continued military assistance in Angola is an appropriately measured response to a situation which has implications outside of Africa", was an attempt to downplay the level of funding requested ahead of the House vote on the Tunney Amendment to the Defense Appropriations Bill.
- 29 Ibid.: 2. Schaufele compounded this mistake by referring to an article written by the Soviet Foreign Minister in the fall of 1975 which "reaffirmed the classical Soviet view that there can be no contradiction between support for détente and support for national liberation struggle. And here again in Angola, Moscow has demonstrated that its words are not idle rhetoric" (ibid.: 6).
- 30 Ibid.: 7.
- 31 Ibid.: 10.
- 32 Ibid.: 7.

- 33 Hearing before the Committee On International Relations House of Representatives, 26 January 1976, 27. Schaufele feebly responded that Ryan's critique had "very little solace for most of the people who live in Angola" (Ibid.). Ryan would later become the first US Congressman to be killed abroad when he was murdered on a fact-finding visit to Guyana on 18 November 1978.
- 34 Ibid.: 29.
- 35 Ibid.: 28.
- 36 Ibid.: 12. Congressman Lee Hamilton (D-Indiana) also attacked Schaufele's hesitant answers. Schaufele eventually responded that \$28 million would be sufficient to bring the Angolan situation under control (ibid.: 16). However, had already been established by Kissinger during his testimony on 26 January 1976 where he outlined to Senator Charles Percy (D-Illinois) that the \$28 million requested was based on the situation in December 1975, but after the passing of the Tunney Amendment and the subsequent escalation of Cuban military forces, Angola "would probably require a considerably larger effort". See Hearings before the Subcommittee on African Affairs of the Committee on Foreign Relations, US Senate, "US Involvement in Civil War in Angola," Ninety-Forth Congress, Second Session, 29 January 1976, 10.35 am, Room 4421, Dirksen Senate Office Building, US Government Printing Office, Washington, DC, (1976): 29.
- 37 Ibid.: 12. Fascell argued that Angolan policy

requires [... and] a full plan and discussion with the Congress of the United States on what it envisions and not to come in here and say 'just give us the \$28 million and we will go along from there'.

(Ibid.: 13)

- Fascell mocked the administration's request by stating, "the question is what good is \$28 million which will be used up in nothing flat. What, a week?" (ibid.: 11).
- 38 Letter from Ford to House Majority Speaker, Carl Albert (D-Oklahoma), 27 January 1976, NSA Country Files, Africa General, Angola (3), GRFL: 1.
- 39 Ibid.: 2. It was feared that such a default would lead to "a future Soviet miscalculation based upon its perceptions of that resolve" (ibid.).
- 40 Tom Wicker, "Mr. Ford and Angola: In the Nation," *New York Times*, 30 January 1976, 25.
- 41 Further hearings were conducted between 3–6 February 1976.
- 42 Hearings before the Subcommittee on African Affairs of the Committee on Foreign Relations, 29 January 1976, 8. Yet, Kissinger remained adamant that the administration's foreign policy was able to offset Soviet gains but that "we got to go on the offensive – we have a damned good foreign policy". See Memcon, 25 January 1976, 3.
- 43 Hearings before the Subcommittee on African Affairs of the Committee on Foreign Relations, 29 January 1976, 23.
- 44 Ibid.: 30.
- 45 Ibid.: 31. Biden said he was unsure "how to handle a CIA briefing or a State Department briefing that is labelled classified when you object vehemently. I mean, what do you do? Do you just walk out and say I object?" (ibid.).
- 46 Ibid.
- 47 Ibid.: 46.
- 48 Ibid.: 46. Later, in his memoirs, Kissinger portrays Biden's statement as implying that "senators would acquiesce in the program so long as the public did not know of it". See Henry Kissinger, *Years of Renewal* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1999), 829.
- 49 Hearing before the Committee On International Relations House of Representatives, 26 January 1976, 34.
- 50 Ibid.: 28.

- 51 Ibid.: 34. McGovern concluded that the issue was salient for both the legislative and executive branches, but both had “to understand that the reluctance of Congress to provide a free hand in Angola or elsewhere is related to history and that this is not something that is going to be cured overnight” (Ibid.: 35).
- 52 Ibid.: 42.
- 53 Ibid.: 44.
- 54 Ibid.: 56. Young wanted the State Department to formulate “an aggressive, negotiated, non-military policy for southern Africa. Otherwise we [will] see that whole area in turmoil, and very definitely it is another Vietnam potentially” (ibid.).
- 55 Ibid.: 55–56. Young had earlier stated that “the Russians have been everywhere. They can’t stay anywhere because the Russians are worse racists than the Americans”, see David Binder, “Aid to Angolans Ended by House in Rebuff to Ford,” *New York Times*, 28 January 1976, 3.
- 56 Hearings before the Subcommittee on African Affairs of the Committee on Foreign Relations, US Senate, “US Involvement in Civil War in Angola,” Ninety-Forth Congress, Second Session, 3 February 1976, 2 pm, Room 4421, Dirksen Senate Office Building, US Government Printing Office, Washington, DC, (1976): 74
- 57 Oswald Johnston, “Kissinger Urges Overt US Effort in Angola,” *Los Angeles Times*, 30 January 1976, B1.
- 58 Editorial, “Geopolitics and Politics,” *Washington Post*, 1 February 1976, 122. The editorial also drew attention to Kissinger’s strategy to pin the blame for the defeat in Angola on Congress by illustrating that the potential request for overt funding

would likely be regarded as a provocation intended to throw blame for collapse in Angola upon Congress. And since it would almost certainly be defeated, it would be an even more blatant advertisement of the administrations’ inability to have its way on Capitol Hill.

(Ibid.)

- 59 Leslie H. Gelb, “Ford Must Find a New Way to ‘Resist’ the Russians,” *New York Times*, 1 February 1976, E2.
- 60 Associated Press, “Kissinger Attacks Congress on Angola,” *Los Angeles Times*, 3 February 1976, 3. The *Los Angeles Times* followed up the story the following day when journalist Daryl Lembke quoted Kissinger as saying “we, the strongest free nation, cannot afford the luxury of withdrawing into ourselves to heal our wounds”. See Daryl Lembke, “Ford Pursuing 2 – Way Policy on Russ–Kissinger,” *Los Angeles Times*, 4 February 1976, A3.
- 61 Murray Marder, “Kissinger Urges Debate Without ‘Defeatist’ Talk,” *Washington Post*, 4 February 1976, A10. Kissinger argued “let us end the defeatist rhetoric that implies that Soviet policy is masterful, purposeful and overwhelming while American policy is bumbling, uncertain and weak” (ibid.).
- 62 Editorial, “Kissinger and Détente,” *Los Angeles Times*, 8 February 1976, E2. The editorial also argued that Kissinger needed to learn that his grand design “will be strengthened, not weakened, by heeding the counsel of Congress, by listening to the reservations of the citizens”.
- 63 UPI, “Mansfield Hits Kissinger for Finger Pointing,” *Los Angeles Times*, 5 February 1976, A2.
- 64 Kenneth Reich, “Bayh Raps Kissinger for ‘Playing God’,” *Los Angeles Times*, 7 February 1976, A19.
- 65 Ibid. Bayh also argued that he was not against firm action in areas such as the Middle East or Western Europe if the Soviets threatened those regions.



- 66 Hearings before the Subcommittee on African Affairs of the Committee on Foreign Relations, US Senate, "US Involvement in Civil War in Angola," Ninety-Forth Congress, Second Session, 6 February 1976, 10.05am, Room 5110, Dirksen Senate Office Building, US Government Printing Office, Washington, DC, (1976): 166.
- 67 Joseph Kraft, "White House Mishandling of Foreign Intelligence," *Washington Post*, 9 January 1976, A19.
- 68 Hearings before the Subcommittee on African Affairs of the Committee on Foreign Relations, 3 February 1976, 112.
- 69 Hearings before the Subcommittee on African Affairs of the Committee on Foreign Relations, 29 January 1976, 3.
- 70 Kissinger, *Years of Renewal*, 830.
- 71 Thomas Noer, "International Credibility and Political Survival: The Ford Administration's Intervention in Angola," *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 23, no. 4 (Fall 1993): 780.
- 72 Hearings before the Subcommittee on African Affairs of the Committee on Foreign Relations, 6 February 1976, 167.
- 73 Gelb, "Ford Must Find a New Way To 'Resist' the Russians," E2.
- 74 Hearings before the Subcommittee on African Affairs of the Committee on Foreign Relations, US Senate, "US Involvement in Civil War in Angola," Ninety-Forth Congress, Second Session, 4 February 1976, 2.15 pm, Room 4421, Dirksen Senate Office Building, US Government Printing Office, Washington, DC, (1976): 150. Marcum pointed to the Mozambique case where the "Mozambicans who came to power with very much the same kind of support have not allowed the Soviets to establish bases" (ibid.).
- 75 Ibid. With regards to Vietnam, there were certain factors that could be likened to Angola, primarily the geographical terrain which presented the opportunity for the FNLA and UNITA to conduct a guerrilla warfare campaign against the MPLA. As the *Washington Post* journalist Leon Dash observed, "if the losers of the present conventional war slip into the empty forests tomorrow, the war could continue for a long time". See Leon Dash, "Angola: A Lesson from Vietnam," *Washington Post*, 10 February 1976, A19.
- 76 Hearings before the Subcommittee on African Affairs of the Committee on Foreign Relations, 4 February 1976, 136.
- 77 Ibid.: 57.
- 78 Hearings before the Subcommittee on African Affairs of the Committee on Foreign Relations, 29 January 1976, 57.
- 79 Stephen S. Rosenfeld, "Foreign Policy Origins," *Washington Post*, 9 January 1976, A19.

## 8 A new beginning?

### Kissinger and US–African policy

#### Introduction

In the aftermath of the House of Representatives' decision to uphold the passing of the Tunney Amendment in January 1976, Kissinger recommended to Ford that the best form of defence was to attack his critics. However, such a tactic ignored the realities that were now beginning to manifest themselves in US foreign policy towards Africa. The recent literature on US–Angolan policy in the spring of 1976 concentrates on Kissinger's speech in April 1976 outlining a new direction for US–African policy. As a result, some of the analysis on the details about that shift in priorities and its impact on the domestic political climate are overlooked. For example, Thomas Noer's article bypasses the confrontational tactics pursued by the Ford administration after the Tunney Amendment was upheld and how its failure to shift the perceptions of the American public helped contribute to a reassessment of African policy. Similarly, George Wright's book *The Destruction of a Nation* and Jussi Hanhimäki's publication *The Flawed Architect* mention Ford and Kissinger's strategy and the shift toward majority rule but do not go into any detail about how it evolved. Even the masterful account of Piero Gleijeses work *Conflicting Missions* diverts around the US domestic political manoeuvring between February and May 1976 and its impact on Kissinger's African policy, as he pushes through to his overall conclusion of the US role in the Angolan Civil War. In fact, the best analysis of the period is by Robert D. Johnson in his article in *Diplomatic History*; he argues that Kissinger outmanoeuvred his Congressional critics and as a result showed the American public that the

legislative branch was ill-equipped to deal with foreign affairs.<sup>1</sup> However, while Johnson's views are well made there is room for debate on whether Kissinger really managed to strategically outplay Congress. In particular, this chapter examines the increasing pressure Kissinger faced from Congress and the media to create and implement a more concerted African policy in the early months of 1976, and how the spectre of Vietnam still loomed in his thoughts and in the domestic political discourse.

In the first section, this chapter will illustrate that the Ford administration made a conscious decision to continue the attack against their Congressional critics for the loss of Angola in order to address the hostility from both liberals and conservatives. In the midst of a competitive primary campaign for the Republican Presidential nomination with former Californian Governor Ronald Reagan, Ford took his opportunity to come out strongly to defend the administration's pursuit of further aid to Angola. However, his sudden eagerness to be involved in the Angolan debate resulted in a contradictory and counterproductive message which was seized upon by his critics. Separately, and away from the spotlight of an election campaign, Kissinger was confronted by a tactical shift from European states that had previously stood with the US during the initial phases of the Angolan programme. In particular the decision by France to recognize the PRA in March 1976 was frustrating for Kissinger. Yet it was based on a realistic assessment of the Angolan situation which Kissinger initially ignored at this point as he desperately sought to salvage some form of credibility from the Angolan debacle.

Second, this chapter examines the increasing calls from various sections of the US political, diplomatic and academic spectrum for a serious African policy. In a series of hearings on the future of US–African policy, Senator Dick Clark defended the actions taken by Congress and attacked the Ford administration for failing to follow the course set by the Europeans and recognize the PRA. However, within the course of these hearings it is clear that the memory and the omnipresence of Vietnam were still highly significant in the formulation of US–African policy. Yet, the continuing tensions between the legislative and executive branches were also beginning to fray with public opinion about both institutions.

The final section illustrates that Kissinger began to acknowledge that Vietnam had influenced US foreign policy too much since 1969 and as a result Africa was marginalized to Cold War priorities in Asia, the Middle

East and in Europe. On his African trip, Kissinger repeated this conclusion to African leaders, stating that US foreign policy had neglected Africa in favour of concentrating on European and Asian spheres of Cold War influence. However, more crucially, he had come to the realization that in order to salvage his own credibility, and that of the US, he needed to reorientate the discussion from the Cold War context to a public endorsement of majority rule for black Africans. In essence, Kissinger created a policy that unified Africa under one main issue in order to publicly appease Congressional liberals such as Clark and Young, while also striking a moral centre for the American public to endorse. However, in private Kissinger continued to blame Congress for being affected by the Vietnam legacy and lacking the strength required to win in Angola.

## **The primacy of US domestic politics over Angolan policy**

In the aftermath of the House of Representatives' decision to uphold the Tunney Amendment in January 1976, the Ford administration continued to blame Congress for the US defeat in Angola. While other nations perceptively initiated diplomacy designed to orientate the new Angolan state to a Western sphere of influence, the US decided to ostracize them until the Cuban presence in the country was withdrawn. The decision by Ford, which was heavily influenced by Kissinger's counsel, was not without risk. In a sharp analysis of the state of US foreign policy, Winston Lord sent a memorandum to Kissinger on 4 February 1976 entitled "Prospects for 1976" in which he concluded:

our biggest problem is at home where the foreign policy progress achieved in recent years is in jeopardy. We had a sound structure; we now risk losing it. We are living off past capital. Our position is being undermined by a legislative – executive struggle and the erosion of popular support.<sup>2</sup>

However, on the same day Kissinger launched his attack on Congress in a speech given in San Francisco by arguing,

those who complain about our failure to respond with sufficient vigor to Soviet moves are often the very ones who incessantly seek to

remove this country's leverage for influence or action – through restrictions on trade and credit, through weakening our intelligence capabilities, through preventing aid to friends to seek to resist Soviet aggression.<sup>3</sup>

It is clear that Kissinger was the instigator of this confrontational approach as he advised Ford on 6 February 1976 that Angola “is gone. But I wouldn't publicly state that we wouldn't ask for more. Keep threatening and say we would have succeeded had Congress not stopped us”.<sup>4</sup> With the challenge for the Republican nomination by Reagan gaining traction in early 1976, Ford felt the need to show his conservative base that he could counter Soviet moves into the Third World. Subsequently he continued to adhere to Kissinger's strategy of confrontation with Congress in an attempt to shift the blame for the Angolan defeat onto the legislative branch. As a result, he increasingly took on the mantle of castigating Congress for failing to give the administration the resources it needed to win in Angola.

However, this was not without its own problems. In his eagerness to defend the administration's policy, Ford's lack of real insight into the issues created problems as he frequently gave contradictory analysis of the situation in Angola. This matter became so pronounced that by 26 February 1976, National Security Advisor Brent Scowcroft received a memorandum from NSC Staff Assistant Margi Vanderhye advising him to prepare a fact sheet on Angola for the President. The reason for this request was to remove the discrepancies that Ford was creating in his statements blaming Congress for the failure in Angola. The memorandum reported that on 24 February 1976 Ford was interviewed by Hearst newspapers on the role of Congress in the Angolan defeat and stated

I personally believe that if we had been able to put in the extra funds – no US military personnel – that UNITA and FNLA would have been able to force [...] a political settlement instead of having the MPLA take over and control Angola.<sup>5</sup>

The following day Ford addressed the Inland Daily Press Association on the status of détente as well as Soviet and Cuban actions in Angola. In particular reference to the defeat in Angola, Ford staunchly defended the

actions of his administration and once again made specific reference to the fact that there were no US troops in Angola when he stated

the blame should not be laid on the White House. The blame should be laid on Capitol Hill because I strongly said that we had to meet the challenge without US military personnel in Angola [...] this is not the fault of the Administration or the Executive Branch. The Congress just failed to stand up and do what they should have done. So there can't be any blame of the Executive Branch in failing to challenge the Soviet Union. The Congress bugged out.<sup>6</sup>

Ford's message was facing a strong liberal critique, one which was still heavily influenced by the events in Vietnam and the secretive foreign policy agenda instigated by former President Richard Nixon and Kissinger since 1969. In an article written for the *Wall Street Journal*, Arthur Schlesinger Jr., a former advisor in the John F. Kennedy administration argued that "the administration showed how little it had attended the lessons of Vietnam and Watergate. Still convinced it could escape the disciplines of the Constitution, it tried to commit the United States to Angola in secret".<sup>7</sup> In particular, he took aim at the notion that US credibility was at stake in Angola and dismissed this assertion, claiming it had been espoused the previous year at the end of US aid to Vietnam as

Mr. Ford still does not understand hyperbole is a wasting asset. Someone should read him the story of the boy who cried wolf. It was only last May [1975] that he said, if Congress did not vote \$722 million in military aid to General Thieu, the world would regard the United States as a feeble and perfidious nation. Congress didn't and the world doesn't. Talk in the fakeapocalyptic vein turns everybody off.<sup>8</sup>

Ironically, while the liberal critique focused on the lessons of Vietnam, the Ford administration also faced mounting criticism from conservatives for the failure to learn from the US experience in South-East Asia.

Former Secretary of Defense James Schlesinger wrote in *Fortune* magazine that

worldwide stability is being eroded through the retrenchment of American policy and power [... and] this growing instability reflects visible factors such as the deterioration in the military balance, but also, perhaps more immediately, such invisible factors as the altered psychological stance of the United States, a nation apparently withdrawing from the burdens of leadership and power.<sup>9</sup>

This charge was also manifested in other US newspapers which outlined how such a retrenchment was perceived by US–African allies. On 14 February 1976, Zairian Foreign Minister Jean Nguza told journalists Rowland Evans and Robert Novak of the *New York Times* that the paralysis inflicted by the US experience in Vietnam was hard for many Africans to understand. In particular, they were concerned that the US intended to retreat in the face of Soviet expansion into Africa; “the Africans, I am sorry to say are losing their confidence in the United States. Wherever there is any trouble, the US says, ‘No more Vietnams’. That is hard for us to understand”.<sup>10</sup> In an interview with Richard Whitcomb on WCKT – TV on 1 March 1976, Ford attempted to address this issue when he repeated his charge that the Congressional decision to intervene in Angola had caused many nations to doubt the credibility of US commitments as he argued:

Our problem is that other nations perceive us as indecisive. I try to be decisive and the Secretary of State tried to be decisive but, unfortunately, the Congress wouldn’t join with us in permitting the United States to undertake what could have been successful [... and] it is very important for our adversaries as well as our friends around the world to know that the United States is strong, will meet its commitments, and I am terribly disappointed when the Congress fails us.<sup>11</sup>

Ford’s lamentations on the impact of Congressional actions on US allies is somewhat ironic, given that during this period one of the key US allies in the struggle against Soviet influence decided to pivot its position. On 12 February 1976, French President Giscard D’Estaing sent a letter to Ford explaining that the French would begin the process of recognizing the PRA along with its African allies, Gabon and the Ivory Coast. While

acknowledging that such a decision was a significant shift in policy he admitted

on the whole, the actions which France and the United States have taken have not been able to improve the situation, to my regret, and we are forced to recognize that the People's Republic of Angola (MPLA) is exercising control over the major part of the territory in this country.<sup>12</sup>

On 14 February 1976, Kissinger responded in a telegram to French Foreign Minister Jean Sauvagnargues. He believed that it was a mistake for France to undertake this approach;

it seemed to me that we [the US] could create a scenario, including aid to the neighbouring states of Zaire and Zambia which would have allowed the West to bargain its recognition and cooperation in exchange for concrete concessions in the area of Soviet and Cuban withdrawal and the establishment of some more representative government.<sup>13</sup>

For Kissinger the issue of credibility was still at the forefront of his thinking when he stated:

Western credibility has suffered grievously as a result of US inability to come to the aid of moderate forces in Angola, and general Western European reluctance to get involved [... and] if we are going to contain the damage caused by what amounts to a Western defeat, then we must make early and serious moves to provide additional economic and military aid to the countries neighbouring Angola, who have remained our friends for the time being and which have been made so vulnerable by the MPLA victory.<sup>14</sup>

Yet he was confronted by arguments that showed that it was unwise to continue on the same course. The situation had fundamentally changed since the passing of the Tunney Amendment and this needed to be addressed by a policy shift to take advantage of the circumstances. Unlike Sauvagnargues, Kissinger refused to accept that the legacy of ignorance had



left the West with little room for manoeuvre, but nevertheless an opportunity existed to use Western economic aid to undermine any Soviet or Cuban attempts to control the new Angolan government.

The US ambassador to France Kenneth Rush explained that the French accepted “the MPLA victory as a reality. Western options are limited. Support for a guerrilla war is out of the question. It would only prolong the fighting and deepen the Soviet involvement by maintaining MPLA dependence”.<sup>15</sup> In addition, Sauvagnargues expressed his fundamental divergence from Kissinger’s opinion that recognition of the PRA meant that other African Marxist groups would now see Soviet/Cuban assistance as a legitimate avenue to seize control of a state. He rejected Kissinger’s idea that the only solution was to force the PRA to bargain concessions before agreeing to recognize them. Rush reported that Sauvagnargues felt that,

if we [the West] attempt to bargain first, we really do not have the leverage we think we do. We worked against the MPLA, and the MPLA knows that we worked against them. Our refusal to recognize the MPLA will have absolutely no effect beyond driving them more deeply into Soviet dependency.<sup>16</sup>

The French had astutely analysed the situation and concluded that the US and their European allies all had historical credibility issues in Africa due to the era of European colonialism and the US for their steadfast support of the colonial status quo throughout the Cold War until the Carnation Revolution in April 1974.

Sauvagnargues proposed that the only chance the US and the Europeans had to get the PRA to distance themselves from the Soviets was if the West started to work to stimulate the “natural African reflex straight away. This could only be done through recognition and communications with the MPLA”.<sup>17</sup> As for the symbolic significance that Kissinger placed on the act of recognition, Sauvagnargues thought that it was not as important as Kissinger believed as long as the US and the West realized that the real leverage lay, not with the act of recognition itself, but from their need for a “Western economic presence”.<sup>18</sup> However, this was a point that Kissinger could not accept despite the degree of realism attached to the French analysis. Instead he remained steadfast in his conviction that the US’ defeat in Angola could have been prevented if Congress and the American public

had shown the determination and strength required to gain a victory. However, it was apparent that the US could no longer keep a loose coalition of moderate African and European allies from shifting their position on Angola. On 11 February 1976, the OAU chose to recognize the PRA by a margin of 27 to 19. In addition, France extended its recognition on 17 February with Portugal following suit on 22 February. This was further compounded by the decision of Zaire and Zambia to recognize the PRA on 28 February 1976 and 15 April 1976, respectively.<sup>19</sup> With each recognition, the prospects of gaining any concessions on Angola dwindled for Kissinger. Yet there was also the sense that the US was on the wrong side of history in Africa and the Angolan debacle was very much situated in the overall failure of US foreign policy towards Africa since the beginning of the Cold War. This became a significant issue for Kissinger's Congressional critics during a series of hearings dedicated to the issue of US–African relations over the course of the spring and early summer of 1976.

### **The impact of Vietnam on Angolan policy and US–African credibility**

As the international political climate was changing around Kissinger in relation to Angola, the domestic dispute continued to rage between the executive and legislative branches over the issue of US credibility in the post-Vietnam and now post-Angola period. On 5 March 1976, Under Secretary of State Joseph Sisco invoked this theme when he told the Senate Budget Committee,

we will require undiminished attention to our own global conventional forces and to our vigilance and our will in order to check the extra-territorial spread of Soviet power at [sic] it flows toward areas of perceived Soviet opportunity. Particularly in a year in which the world has witnessed the debacle in Indochina and Soviet advances in Angola. The perception of American power needs to be reinforced.<sup>20</sup>

The war of words escalated during a series of hearings on African Affairs which provided a forum for those who opposed to the Angolan operation to go on the record. On 8 March 1976, during the first Senate Subcommittee

on African Affairs hearing, chairman of the committee Senator Dick Clark defended Congressional actions by arguing Congress had complied with the Ford administration in all their requests up until December 1975. But he felt that Congress had to take responsibility to halt further aid when it became clear that the size of the Soviet and Cuban involvement would require the US to get substantially more involved in the conflict and with no apparent exit strategy. According to Clark, there were substantial reasons for cutting off US aid, namely the unrealistic expectation that the US could compete with the Soviet and Cuban intervention without a dramatic increase in funding and resources. He argued that even if the Ford administration wanted

to make a strong stand there that you couldn't conceivably have done it with a few million dollars more. You certainly would have needed thousands, perhaps tens of thousands of mercenaries hired from around the world, well enough equipped and trained to fight the Cubans successfully, to say nothing of the other consequences with regard to at least fighting on the same side with the South Africans.<sup>21</sup>

Indeed, the optics of collusion with the South Africans was extremely negative in both international and African perspectives. This was highlighted in the testimony of Professor Peter Vanneman of the University of Arkansas who observed that if

the South Africans never entered that [Angolan] war, I think the United States attempt to achieve a coalition by some military stalemate would have been much more welcomed in Africa, and indeed, that the Soviets might have backed off at that point. The thing that made it impossible for the United States to be on the winning side, regardless of how much aid we put in, was the fact that it was the same side as South Africa.<sup>22</sup>

However, as this military possibility was no longer an option for the Ford administration, Clark drew attention to the changing attitudes of other Western nations in regard to recognizing the PRA.

In his view these changes created opportunities to ensure Angola was not solely dependent on the Soviets for economic aid. This is an important point as it illustrates that Clark was not a hard-line liberal who opposed any

confrontation with the Soviets in principle. The key difference with Kissinger was how to do that in relation to Angola. Instead of opposing every Soviet initiative by military means, Clark advocated using the superior economic strength of the US to outmanoeuvre them. By doing so, the US could also improve its image in Africa if it supported the newly independent nation instead punishing it for initially aligning with the Soviets. In his view the US could offer economic assistance to the PRA which

would make genuine nonalignment a real possibility for Angola and speed the decline of Soviet influence there; and second, it would make clear to the minority regimes of southern Africa that our long-term relations with black Africa were more important to us than automatically opposing everything the Soviet Union supports.<sup>23</sup>

This issue was expanded upon by William R. Cotter, President of the African-American Institute in New York who advocated that if the US engaged immediately with Angola and without preconditions then “Africans are even less likely to be subject to pressure from the East if the West stands ready to support their national aspirations through economic ties, aid programs, and diplomatic support now that independence has come”.<sup>24</sup> In doing so, Cotter raised the possibility that all was not lost in Angola and pointed to the example of Egypt and how Kissinger could turn the tables once again on the Soviets since he “was the chief US architect of that policy reversal in the Middle East, many of those concerned with African-American relations hope that he will seize upon the opportunity for a similar rapprochement with Angola as soon as possible”.<sup>25</sup> Another voice to heavily criticize Kissinger’s pursuit of isolating Angola was the prominent author Waldemar A. Nielsen who testified that such action displayed a lack of understanding of African affairs. He argued that

attempting to chastise them by our nonrecognition [*sic*] is worse than pointless. Any notion that we are going to be able to insist on their ejection of the Soviets and the Cubans as a condition for our recognition is about as total and about as ridiculous a misunderstanding of that situation, African attitudes, and our actual influence in the situation as could readily be imagined.<sup>26</sup>

The two constant themes throughout the course of the hearings was the criticism of the lack of US–African policy and also how Vietnam had polarized both the legislative and executive branches in the formulation of US foreign policy at the expense of other regions, but particularly in the case of US responses to decolonization in Africa.

On 15 March 1976, former Ambassador to Zambia Robert Good testified before the Subcommittee on African Affairs condemning Kissinger's past disregard for African affairs by arguing,

there is nothing like the sudden infusion of 12,000 Cubans and sophisticated Soviet hardware into a volatile and sensitive area to focus the attention of the Secretary of State. But there was no way to overtake the history of neglect.<sup>27</sup>

This raises a significant issue in the course of the Angolan crisis which was that Africa itself had been largely ignored by the legislative branch throughout the Cold War. This also contributed to Kissinger's frustrations with Congress over the issue as he felt that they had their own agenda which did not concern Angola either. As he states in his memoirs, "senators would acquiesce in the program so long as the public did not know of it; they would run for cover once it became public and they were needed to defend their previous positions".<sup>28</sup> However, Good alluded to the irony of Congressional outrage over events in Africa and pointed out that the decision by Congress to halt further funding for the Angolan programme was politically self-motivated. While he agreed that the Senate was right to veto the operation, he added

that it did so largely for the wrong reasons. The congressional reaction to further aid to movements opposing the MPLA in Angola, [...] was inspired more by Vietnam, Watergate, and the CIA revelations than it was informed by knowledge or concern for events in southern Africa. Congress too has pursued a policy of neglect.<sup>29</sup>

Despite the criticism that has been levelled at Kissinger, Congress also pursued an agenda designed to recover the credibility it had lost with its decisions to authorize the Vietnam War. It pursued a tactic of portraying the executive branch as conniving and engaged in un-American deeds. This led

some Congressmen, including black caucus member Andrew Young (D-Georgia), to proclaim that “unwittingly, the Secretary played directly into the hands of the Cubans and the Soviet Union by refusing to look at Africa from the African reality and but seeing it only through European cold war eyes”.<sup>30</sup> However, Young’s comments also wandered into hyperbole, especially when he stated:

I really believe that the great deal of credibility that we have in Africa is derived from the Congress [as it] is the part of Government that is still standing for what America stands for. The covert operations, secret deals, clandestine activities, are not attributable to the Congress to any great extent.<sup>31</sup>

This statement was reproached by Ambassador Good who pointed out that Congressional credibility in Africa was almost on a par with the executive branch.

He argued that throughout the post-World War II period, Congressional attention also focused on other regions of the world, primarily in Europe and Asia, and therefore it could be similarly accused of neglecting the fate of the African people in their struggle for independence. In a sharp rebuke to Young’s comments, Good said:

I am not willing to let Congress off the hook quite so easily. I don’t think the record in Congress has been all that good, frankly, with regard to many issues in Africa, present company excluded. I applaud the work that your [Clark’s] committee is doing. There was a long time when this committee on Africa was not particularly active.<sup>32</sup>

However, in early spring 1976 the committee was proactively seeking to address this problem of previous neglect and none more so than its chairman Senator Dick Clark, who accepted that both branches of the government had failed miserably in relation to Africa and as a result were facing a serious struggle to maintain any influence in the region.

On 21 March 1976, Clark conceded this point when he expressed:

our great problem in Africa has been that we have been on the side of the colonialists, we have been on the side of Portugal too long, and

because of that position and because of our support of ther [sic] colonial powers there we found it very, very difficult to be on the right side of that issue.<sup>33</sup>

He also took the opportunity to reiterate that the US should find some way to try and neutralize the threat of Soviet and Cuban influence in the region when he stated,

I think we have got to find counter-measures for this new phenomenon in the world. But I don't think we ought to try to do it in a situation in which we are going to lose. We have been through that route before, where we have tried to check Soviet aggression in situations in which we cannot win. That doesn't help us one bit.<sup>34</sup>

Historian Robert D. Johnson argues that such statements at this time showed that Clark was in retreat from Ford and Kissinger's criticisms as "unlike the case in 1975, Clark now sounded vague and indecisive, Kissinger and particularly the neoconservatives the reverse".<sup>35</sup> However, while it is clear that Clark modified his position when he called for the need to counter the Soviets, his arguments were not calling for military or covert actions against the Soviets. In fact, his arguments bear a striking resemblance to Nathaniel Davis' point that the US had to be careful about where they chose to intervene in order for them to gain maximum leverage over the Soviets.

In March 1976, Ford and Kissinger were still attempting to deflect their own failings from the Angolan debacle. In particular, Kissinger continued to threaten action against the Cubans, but this was little more than rhetoric. In reality there was nothing the US could do to extract the Cubans from Angola. This approach was also beginning to antagonize other members of the Ford cabinet such as Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld who warned that

were there to be Soviet – supported Cuban activity in Rhodesia, the President of the United States should not warn the world and then be blocked by Congress – the worst thing for the United States would be to appear to be making hollow threats.<sup>36</sup>

The US media were also critical of the approach taken by Kissinger. On 9 March 1976, the *New York Times* carried an editorial which strongly criticized the Ford administration's approach to Cuban involvement in Angola. It said, "there are heavy risks for United States credibility in making vague threats of retaliation against the Castro regime in a situation in which Washington's capacity to organize effective counteraction is virtually nil. Such a course merely invites fresh humiliation".<sup>37</sup> Despite this article and others offering similar critiques and pushing for opening up constructive dialogue with the PRA like their European and African allies, the Ford administration steadfastly refused to accept the political realities which confronted them. Despite the analysis and public commentary on the lack of a concise US–African policy, Kissinger and Ford's focus was still fixated on containing the spread of Cuban troops and Soviet influence from Angola to neighbouring countries. Yet such stubbornness was now questioned within the State Department as officials grew concerned that the US would be perceived as secretly continuing an illegal aid programme and inflicting further damage to Congressional relations, thereby risking further degradation of US credibility abroad.

### **The unintentional realist: Kissinger's new African initiative**

On 12 March 1976, an Operations Advisory Group met to discuss the US disengagement from Angola and how the US could effectively support the neighbouring African states such as Zaire and Zambia in order to stabilize the region. There was no doubt that at this stage Kissinger had concluded that there was no possibility that Angola could be salvaged. Yet the surrounding African countries, especially those which had allied themselves with the US during the Angolan operation had to be reinforced with economic and military aid as he remarked,

I can understand writing off Angola, but not Zaire and Zambia. We've got to do what we can to reassure them [... that] Zaire means something to us. I don't necessarily favor shipping arms to Angola. I think we've had it with Angola [...] but I am concerned about Mobutu and what we do with him ... we must not permit things to slide any



more in Africa. We have to show an interest in propping up Zaire and Zambia. We must not let them think that we are pulling out of Africa.<sup>38</sup>

However, there were reservations over the continuation of any policy that would involve any aid going to UNITA through Zaire. Deputy Director of Office of Management and Budget Paul O'Neill believed that "Congress and the general population expect that we have stopped our involvement in Angola [... and] I think that there would be a very negative reaction if it were to become known that we were still involved".<sup>39</sup> In addition, Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs William Schaufele, in a manner that bore similarities to his predecessors, cautioned that

we are saying on the one hand that we are shutting off the program, but on the other we will continue to dole out money. I just want to be able to report to the Congress that we are out of this, [and] that it is over.<sup>40</sup>

The resurfacing of internal dissent about the direction of Angolan policy began to finally force Kissinger to come up with a better way to address the problem of Africa and the difficulties with Congress.

However, in a wider context the notion of propping up African regimes underpinned a larger problem than US–Angolan policy. This is best summarized by a remark made by Congressman Don Bonker during the Angolan discussion before the passing of the Tunney Amendment in the Senate in December 1975 when he stated, "even in the fanciful event that our side won, it would be a Pyrrhic victory [... and] we would feel obligated to keep the winner on our side [... and] buying a friendship is a tenuous foreign policy".<sup>41</sup> Despite the tensions that flared in 1975 with Zaire, Kissinger still firmly believed in assisting friendly dictatorial regimes in order to prevent further Soviet penetration in the region. Although he did begin to come to the realization at this time that a new African-centred approach was required in order to take the focus away from Angola and the Ford administration's failings there.

In April 1976, Kissinger began to publicly shift his position on how to confront the Ford administration's critics in Congress and the media, and began to develop an African policy designed to win public support and Congressional approval. Hanhimäki observes, "to his credit, Kissinger seems to have learned from the crisis [... but his new approach] did little to

hide the failure of his policies toward Angola. Nor was he a true convert to the cause of majority rule”.<sup>42</sup> This is an accurate evaluation of Kissinger’s thinking on the new African policy as he still held the same convictions that the US could have won in Angola and seethed at the perception that Cuba had effectively upstaged the US on the international stage. In addition, he did not want it to be perceived that the Cubans had forced the US to address African issues, as it would represent a further victory for Cuban leader Fidel Castro and potentially justify further excursions in Africa.

During an NSC meeting on 7 April 1976, Kissinger was adamant that the US had to respond to the issue of majority rule but without it being perceived as a reaction to the Cuban presence in Africa; “our African policy needs to be discussed in the NSC but we can’t be panicked into it by the Soviets and the Cubans”.<sup>43</sup> However, even at this late stage Kissinger was still privately preoccupied with making an example of Cuba and deterring the Soviets from assisting them because

we must make the Soviets pay a heavy price. If the Cubans move, I recommend we act vigorously. We can’t permit another move without suffering a great loss. We must separate the African issue from Cuba. Otherwise, it will be seen as Soviet strength and US weakness.<sup>44</sup>

Despite Kissinger’s hope that his African policy would not be perceived as being a result of Cuban and Soviet interference in Angola, on 16 April 1976 prominent *New York Times* journalist Leslie Gelb argued that Kissinger’s dual approach of publicly condemning and threatening the Cubans while simultaneously advocating majority rule in Africa was “forged in the heat of the Soviet – backed victory in Angola. Confrontations that had not been expected for years suddenly had to be dealt with”.<sup>45</sup> In addition, Gelb wrote that this was the only reason why African affairs were now in the spotlight because as one experienced State Department official told him,

when Nixon and Kissinger took over, Africa had gone through one military coup after another, then became very quiet and remote. It looked like nothing would happen, and if it did it wouldn’t matter. It began a period of neglect.<sup>46</sup>

Furthermore he reported that the current situation had vastly changed from the previous few months and the domino effect that was feared after Angola was now beginning to look like a false alarm. Furthermore, State Department officials who had been concerned about the possible spread of Soviet and Cuban influence across southern Africa believed it had now dissipated and “gone also is the panic in some high State Department quarters about immediate threats to Presidents Mobutu Sese Seko of Zaire and Kenneth D. Kaunda of Zambia”.<sup>47</sup> This would help explain the reasoning behind Kissinger’s sudden change in public statements and how he was able to forge a policy which he believed would gain political and public consensus. It also helped that it coincided with his first visit to Africa which had been billed as a “historic opportunity to mark [a] wholly departure or turning point in US relations with Africa. [The] Trip should be designed to show dramatic break in the past US posture which [... Africans] thought [was] characterized by some ambivalence and equivocation”.<sup>48</sup> The trip also presented Kissinger with an opportunity to reassure African leaders that the domination of Vietnam in US foreign policy considerations for over a decade was over and that Africa would get the attention it deserved.

On 25 April 1976, Kissinger met with Tanzanian President Julius Nyerere in Dar es Salaam and indicated that the Angolan experience had taught him that it was a mistake for the US not to engage more directly with Africa previously. He conceded, “I am willing to admit the mistakes of the past. We have had Vietnam, the Middle East, Watergate; it was not possible to do everything simultaneously. But I am here now to do something”.<sup>49</sup> The following day, Kissinger repeated this message by stating:

if you look at the last decade in the United States, you will see that our first preoccupations were with South East Asia, our relations with China and the Soviet Union and with Europe and Japan [... and] I am aware that there is some justice in the statement that I have not paid as much attention to Africa as I should have, but that will not be true in the future.<sup>50</sup>

On 27 April 1976, Kissinger gave a speech in Lusaka, Zambia, publicly declaring a reorientation of US policy toward Africa by endorsing black majority rule. Kissinger continued to apologize for his neglect of Africa

when he spoke to Senegalese Minister for State Assane Seck on 1 May 1976. In response to Seck's criticism that the US had let the Soviets and the PRC take the lead in helping African states achieve independence, Kissinger was eager to shift the focus off past neglect towards Africa and to reassure Seck that Africa would get his full attention in the future. He also took the opportunity to privately express his ire at Congress for their actions in Angola. Incredibly, he proclaimed that the US could have easily defeated the Cubans and the Soviets in a place like Angola despite the obvious flaws in this argument when he said:

There is no sense in denying that the US has not given the priority to Africa that it deserves or expects [...]. We have had a trying seven years [... but] I say all of these things to indicate that my trip is not an accident but a deliberate policy, and that cooperation with the developing countries will be a permanent part of our overall foreign policy ... [on Angola] we would have been successful there and the Congressional actions were a disgrace. If there was one place where we could have pushed out the Soviets and the Cubans, it would have been in Angola.<sup>51</sup>

In the immediate aftermath of the fall of Vietnam, the deep fracture of the domestic political discourse ensured that it was impossible to envisage a scenario where the US could forcibly remove a foreign power from a Third World country such as Angola. This was illustrated by comments made by Senator Charles Percy (R-Illinois) who accompanied Kissinger on his trip to southern Africa in April 1976. He observed, "Nyerere, Kaunda, and Machel [... all] expressed grave concern to me that United States Government (USG) warnings of retaliation from Cuban and Soviet intervention in southern Africa are not relieved [sic] and are therefore counterproductive".<sup>52</sup> It is hard not to contrast this with Nathaniel Davis' prediction in the summer of 1975 about how limited the US was in the region due to past mistakes in African foreign policy, which were compounded by a hostile US political climate after Vietnam. Yet, nearly a year after the formulation and debate over the covert Angolan operation, Kissinger continued to make unrealistic statements and promises which appeared far from the realism he had espoused in previous years.

On his return, he was widely praised by his liberal critics in Congress for his announcement that the US would now support the calls for majority rule in Africa. Ford was also optimistic that such a bold move would help him during the final few months of the Republican primary campaign. During a NSC meeting on 11 May 1976, Ford outlined his perception of Kissinger's African trip and how the administration could not let domestic politics interfere with the executive branch's foreign policy objectives. Ford told the council that

we recognized that since the fiasco of Angola there was a growing radicalization of the situation in southern Africa and that if we didn't do something we would be creating serious problems for ourselves [...] if we are going to hold our position in the world we cannot have a foreign policy in limbo in an election year.<sup>53</sup>

With his policy being applauded, Kissinger was quick to seize on the perception that he had regained the initiative on African affairs, and also in no small part eager to banish the memory of Angola. He emphasized the need for quick and decisive action on African affairs when he argued, "I do not feel decisions can wait for next year. With every month that passes there is an acceleration of the Rhodesian situation".<sup>54</sup> Therefore, he appeared to have learnt some lessons from the Angolan episode as he approached Rhodesia in a far more proactive manner in comparison with the ignored early warning signs of Angola. However, Kissinger also began to see that in order to gain support he would need to alter his approach and endorse diplomatic efforts to avoid superpower competition. This was illustrated in his comments that

if we [US] conduct a subtle diplomatic offense I think we can defuse the southern African situation so there will be no outside intervention. We will confine the situation to a black/white African war, and we can get black/ white African negotiations.<sup>55</sup>

It was ironic that this was his most logical analysis on African affairs throughout the Angolan crisis and aligned with what Davis and others had consistently advocated for.

His realization that publicly endorsing black majority rule while simultaneously initiating diplomatic approaches was the type of nuanced approach that was sorely needed during the summer of 1975 when there was an opportunity to prevent such foreign intervention. It also built upon the argument that Nathaniel Davis argued for. While Davis did not call for a public change in African policy to promote majority rule, he did urge diplomacy as the preferred course of action. If Kissinger was not fixated on restoring what he perceived to be a US credibility crisis in the aftermath of Vietnam, he may have not dismissed Davis and the other dissenting voices within the State Department and the PPS so lightly. Despite Kissinger's later attempts to cover his African trip as preplanned, there can be no doubt that the subsequent events in Angola hastened the US decision to adopt a more concerted African policy. On 13 May 1976 Kissinger testified before the SFRC on his trip to Africa. In his testimony he argued that the Angolan crisis had made his trip a necessity as "our friends in Africa were increasingly dismayed by our irresolution in countering external pressures and embarrassed by what they interpreted as passivity [*sic*] or worse on the most central issue of African politics, the future of southern Africa".<sup>56</sup> However, unlike his previous testimony and public statements, Kissinger was less abrasive in his assertion that Congress had impaired the credibility of the US in Africa. Indeed, this was reciprocal as some of Angolan policy's fiercest critics lined up to praise Kissinger's efforts. Senator George McGovern (D-South Dakota) offered approval, stating

I want to commend you, not only on the courage of what you did in Africa and what you said when you were there but also the wisdom and the commonsense [*sic*] of this position, because I think this trip was of enormous importance.<sup>57</sup>

However, other Congressional members wanted to ensure that the details included in Kissinger's Lusaka speech were fully implemented.

Senators Hubert Humphreys and Dick Clark welcomed Kissinger's efforts but were cautious that an announcement would be heralded and then not implemented. Humphreys asked how invested the Ford administration was in creating a new US-African policy, fearing that the initiative would be quickly forgotten once the furore had passed. It is Kissinger's response that is worth noting as he emphatically replied, "I consider this

continent to be of critical importance to American security, economic, political, military; absolutely critically important”.<sup>58</sup> Such a statement was a remarkable shift in attitude for Kissinger as he abandoned the Tar Baby policy and publicly elevated Africa to the equal level of policy importance as other geographical regions. The rapid change in his statements at the beginning of the Angolan crisis illustrate that Kissinger finally began to realize that he could not change the domestic political consensus, instead it was he who had to adapt his approach towards both Congress and Africa. Senator Clark was quick to remind him that actions would speak louder than words going forward and that if the US was to disengage again it would come at a great cost to US credibility in the region. He observed that “we talk a good game but that we play a very different one [... and] it will be a great mistake if we once again simply pronounced a number of empty promises”.<sup>59</sup> The theme of credibility in Africa was also raised by African expert Colin Legum who testified to Congress that African leaders were impressed by Kissinger’s speech and the significant departure from the Tar Baby policy. Yet he also expressed reservations similar to those of Senator Clark when he observed that US credibility in Africa was low due to a legacy of ignorance from previous administrations. He believed that in order for the US to gain a higher standing in Africa, US actions from Kissinger’s speech would need to be consistent with the principles announced as “credibility in Dr. Kissinger’s important speech, will come by the decisions on the harder policies that need to be taken over the next few weeks or months”.<sup>60</sup>

Yet privately Kissinger was still highly frustrated with the situation and continued to blame the failure of Angola on Congress and the African Bureau. In his discussions with African leaders in May 1976 he lambasted Congress for preventing the Ford administration from fighting the Soviets and Cubans in Angola. However, his strategy to reassure African leaders and reinforce US credibility also displays a refusal to accept that the US could not win every foreign policy engagement. On 1 May 1976, Kissinger met with Senegalese Foreign Minister Assane Seck and expressed his anger that the US was forced to abandon its programme in Angola by stating,

if we can’t defeat the Russians in Angola, which is the farthest place away from the Soviet Union, we can’t defeat them anywhere. And if

we can't defeat a little country like Cuba [... it] was disastrous [to US credibility].<sup>61</sup>

Despite the public posturing of identifying with majority rule, privately Kissinger never stopped believing that the US had self-destructed once again in failing to have the conviction to match the Soviets in Angola. He continued to believe that events in Vietnam had shattered American credibility as a defender against Soviet aggression. In an effort to convince Seck that the legislative branch was the biggest problem in US foreign policy, Kissinger stated "we have lost nowhere except because of domestic problems. We could have won in Vietnam. This book by the North Vietnamese general admits they started the war again when they saw the Congress cut the aid in half".<sup>62</sup> In addition, Kissinger sought to demonstrate to Seck that the US could have easily defeated the Soviets if the executive had been allowed to continue sending arms to the FNLA and UNITA. He observed:

the tragedy in Angola is actually it was a great Soviet mistake to go to Angola. Because it was at the furthest end of their communications. We could have beaten them and weakened Castro too [... and] as a student of geopolitics, there are not often such opportunities. All it took was courage. In Angola, we could and should have won.<sup>63</sup>

It is clear that Kissinger did not really learn the lessons of either Vietnam or Angola and continued to privately believe that the US could have won both conflicts if there was no interference from Congress. These statements are striking as it is clear that Kissinger was prepared to ignore the complex issues within Vietnam and Angola that would have made a US victory unlikely, instead choosing to blame both defeats as merely a lack of conviction on the part of Congress. Yet the language Kissinger repeatedly used in his exchanges with Seck also display a lack of nuance on how to communicate that the US was still a powerful force in the international arena. This is illustrated when Kissinger described the Angolan defeat, stating

it's a disgrace. It's an embarrassment and a disgrace [... and] when you look at history, sometimes there is a certain disintegration of public



morality – it happened in France, and it happened in the United Kingdom. And in the US between 1972 and 1976. It is a miracle that we maintained any policy. I think we are sure the worst of it is past.<sup>64</sup>

Such comments were hardly reinforcing an image of credibility as the magnitude of US defeat in Angola was exaggerated by Kissinger. By using terms such as “embarrassment” and “disgrace”, he only served to portray Angola as the epitome of failure and display how easy it was for US foreign policy to be held hostage by Congress.

However, what is apparent is that Kissinger was manipulating the African situation in the public domain. He realized that viewing Africa as a united problem helped differentiate it from the Cold War competition in which the US was perceived to be losing ground. Kissinger believed that he could re-establish an equal footing if the US focused on black majority rule. In addition, he felt he could outmanoeuvre his Congressional critics by requesting a large aid bill to invest in Africa as whole, rather than on a country by country basis as before. He also believed that this logic would gain widespread public support. On 22 May 1976, Director of the PPS Winston Lord sent US Assistant Secretary of African Affairs William Schaufele a memorandum of conversation between Zairian President Mobutu and Kissinger. This discussion displays how Kissinger really viewed the situation and revealed the differences between his public posturing and his private thoughts. He told Mobutu,

we both have problems. You must be non-aligned publicly. I must speak of the unity of Africa to avoid domestic criticism just as you must avoid non-aligned criticism. It is easier to defend our friends in the name of African unity than in the name of an alliance with the US.<sup>65</sup>

The announcement of a new African policy was a tactic by Kissinger to try and circumvent the negative reactions from Congress and the US public, rather than a true belief that previous US–African policy was wrong. Furthermore, he continued to view the region from a Cold War sphere of influence perspective and African nationalism was not important in this context. He informed Mobutu that he was trying

to get the Soviet Union to split Africa and I think I am making progress. That is my public position. But my private position is that without strength, there is no foreign policy. You know very well that if we had had a foreign policy, we would have won in Angola. If we had done more for Savimbi, there would have been a victory in Angola, but we must not let this happen again. We must try to give the American people a sense of pride in our African policy.<sup>66</sup>

Kissinger's new African policy was a means to an end. It helped shift the focus away from the US defeat in Angola and simultaneously eased Congressional attacks on the Ford administration over the episode. However, as the French paper *L'Humanite* (Paris) observed, "it is certain that the public position of the US has evolved very rapidly [...] yet it would be naïve to believe [...] that American policy in Africa has changed fundamentally".<sup>67</sup>

## Conclusion

Historian Robert D. Johnson argues that

the passage of the Tunney amendment ended the second stage of the congressional response to Angola. Suddenly, African events changed course, affecting the direction and balance of the ideological debate. With the Tunney amendment eliminating the chance of a US military intervention in Angola, the Vietnam analogy, ironically, lost its relevance.<sup>68</sup>

However, Johnson's argument is open to debate. The evidence shows that the analogy of Vietnam was still very much a part of the domestic discourse on Angola in the first six months of 1976. Kissinger's confrontation with Congress backfired as it only further exposed the fragile political climate in Washington, DC to the world. Such an act exacerbated the credibility issues he sought to resolve. Other nations around the globe, including most of the European and African allies, seized the initiative to recognize the PRA in order to lessen its dependence on Soviet and Cuban assistance, but Kissinger's strategy only served to strengthen that connection. This can be seen in Congressman Andrew Young's charge on 17 May 1976 that

“Angola is so haunting to our national psyche that we have yet to recognize the MPLA government”.<sup>69</sup> Furthermore, Johnson also gives too much credit to the argument that Kissinger’s tactics forced Clark and the liberals into retreat. Congress inflicted its own damage by overextending their attacks on the executive branch. The German newspaper *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (Frankfurt) carried an editorial condemning Congress’ behaviour: “Europe’s most important partner is about to destroy his own strength. In a mood of purism coming close to political insanity, Congress keeps surprising the world with disclosures”.<sup>70</sup> Yet Kissinger’s stance also drew European criticism from the Danish paper *Politiken* (Copenhagen), which observed that

Kissinger has difficulty in explaining why Angola should have such high priority for Washington. He resorts to argument which has been demolished by Vietnam War; namely, that USA should act in order that the rest of [the] world believe [sic] that we can act.<sup>71</sup>

In reality, Kissinger and Ford’s attacks on Congress had little effect and in fact only helped to further curate a weak image of US credibility.

It was not until the eve of his African trip that Kissinger began to understand that he had to change tactics. The hearings on Angola had taught him that in order to outmanoeuvre his Congressional critics he needed to instigate a united African policy rather than one based on individual countries. Kissinger also realized that he needed the support of the American public to fully establish the consensus needed to address African policy. He told Swedish Prime Minister Olaf Palme,

whatever we felt about Vietnam, it shows that no matter how easy it is to get into a crisis, we can’t sustain a policy without domestic understanding. We need to show our people a moral basis for action, and to keep a consensus behind it [... and] we have the peculiar situation that our Left and our Right are combining. Our Left is pushing human rights issues in a way that helps what the Right are advancing.<sup>72</sup>

However, privately he never relinquished the belief that the US could have won in Angola and he took every opportunity to castigate Congress to other

leaders for what he believed was their reckless course of action on Angola. Despite his efforts to argue to the contrary, his African policy was firmly the result of the events in Angola. There is no evidence to suggest that Africa would have been on his agenda in 1976 if Angola never became a focus of Cold War competition. Indeed, Africa was widely ignored by all elements of US politics and the media until the Angolan episode. Perhaps the best illustration of this point was captured by Senator Charles Percy (R-Illinois) who commented that events in Africa were

something that could have been and should have been perceived and suddenly today I think the United States is somehow shocked. They're learning names that they didn't know even know before, like Namibia and Mozambique and countries that today are full pages in the *Chicago Tribune*.<sup>73</sup>

In conclusion, despite his tactical miscalculation over confronting Congress and denying recognition to the PRA, Kissinger eventually managed to successfully reorientate the domestic discussion on Africa away from Cold War competition and towards racial justice and equality. In doing so, Angola slowly began to fall back into relative obscurity as 1976 progressed. While there was still a political focus on the issue from Reagan and the Democratic Presidential nominee Jimmy Carter during the election campaign, the media focus switched predominantly toward Rhodesia. In particular the negotiations with ardent white leader Ian Smith to transition the country to black majority rule after the Clark Amendment was passed and signed into law by Ford on 29 June 1976.<sup>74</sup> Ultimately Kissinger's success was short lived as Gerald Ford lost the 1976 Presidential election to Carter in November 1976. As a result, Angola would not become a significant issue again in US foreign policy until the 1980s when the Clark Amendment was repealed in 1985 under President Ronald Reagan's administration.

1 See Thomas Noer, "International Credibility and Political Survival: The Ford Administration's Intervention in Angola," *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 23, no. 4 (Fall 1993). The other publications mentioned are George Wright, *The Destruction of a Nation: United States Foreign Policy toward Angola since 1945* (London: Pluto Press, 1997); Jussi Hanhimäki, *The Flawed Architect: Henry Kissinger and American Foreign Policy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004); Piero Gleijeses, *Conflicting Missions: Havana, Washington, and Africa, 1959–1976* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2002); Robert D. Johnson, "The

- Unintended Consequences of Congressional Reform: The Clark and Tunney Amendments and US Policy toward Angola,” *Diplomatic History* 27, no. 2 (April 2003).
- 2 Memorandum, Lord to Kissinger, “Prospects for 1976,” 4 February 1976, Box 358, NARA, Maryland: 2.
  - 3 The Wall Street Journal Roundup, “Kissinger Pleads for Increased Support from Public, Congress for Détente Policy,” *Wall Street Journal*, 4 February 1976, 6.
  - 4 Memcon, Ford, Kissinger and Scowcroft, 6 February 1976, 9.25 am–10.16 am, Oval Office, White House, Washington, DC, Box 17, DGRFL: 3.
  - 5 Memorandum, Margi Vanderhye to Scowcroft, 26 February 1976, January-February 1976, Box 7, Chronological File 1976, GRFL: 3.
  - 6 Ibid. Ford explained that “the minute the Congress said no, and we couldn’t provide our allies with what they needed, then the Soviet Union and Cuba won. It is just that simple”. Ford also indicated his belief that the Angolan episode was similar to the Italian invasion of Ethiopia, a comparison which further illustrated his lack of foreign policy expertise as the two cases were not similar on any level.
  - 7 Arthur Schlesinger Jr., “The Troubles of Angola,” *Wall Street Journal*, 9 February 1976, 10.
  - 8 Ibid.
  - 9 James Schlesinger, “A Testing Time for America,” *Fortune*, February 1976, 76.
  - 10 Rowland Evans and Robert Novak, “A Sombre Message from Africa,” 14 February 1976, *New York Times*, A11.
  - 11 Key Foreign Policy Issues, Angola, Republican Party Platform, Ford Policies and Actions (1), Box 28, Michael Raoul Duvall Files, GRFL: 3.
  - 12 Letter from French President Giscard d’Estaing to President Ford, 12 February 1976, Paris, France, Document No. 174, Vol. XXVIII, Southern Africa, 1969–1976, FRUS: 437.
  - 13 Telegram from Secretary of State, Henry Kissinger to the US Embassy in France, 14 February 1976, Boston, 2215Z, Document No. 176, Vol. XXVIII, Southern Africa, 1969–1976, FRUS: 443. Kissinger requested that the decision be postponed for a week on order for the US to coordinate its position with its African and other European allies.
  - 14 Ibid.: 445.
  - 15 Telegram from the US Embassy in France to the DOS, 16 February 1976, Paris, France, 1558Z, Document No. 177, Vol. XXVIII, Southern Africa, 1969–1976, FRUS: 447.
  - 16 Ibid.
  - 17 Ibid.
  - 18 Ibid. When Rush responded stating that giving recognition would only serve to enhance the MPLA’s feeling that they can get what they want from the West without having to eject the Soviets, Sauvagnargues replied that the “use of recognition as a bargaining lever had never worked, especially when the object of the exercise has just won a military victory to come to power” (ibid.).
  - 19 Wright, *The Destruction of a Nation*, 76.
  - 20 Statement of Under Secretary of State Joseph J. Sisco before the Senate Budget Committee, 5 March 1976, Washington, DC, JJS Appearance before Senate Budget Committee, RG 59, Box 21, Records of Joseph Sisco, 1951–1976, NARA, Maryland: 6.
  - 21 Hearings before the Subcommittee on African Affairs, and the Subcommittee on Arms Control, International Organizations and Security Agreements and the Committee on Foreign Relations of the US, US Foreign Policy Toward Angola, “Major Powers in Southern Africa After Angola,” Ninety-Forth Congress, Second Session, 8 March 1976, 10.10 am, 4221 Dirksen Office Building, Washington, DC, US Government Printing, Washington, DC, (1976): 52–53. Clark repeated this argument in a “Meet The Press” television interview on 21 March 1976. See Meet The Press, 21 March 1976, Senator Dick Clark, Ron Nessen Files, Box 71, GRFL: 2.
  - 22 Hearings before the Subcommittee on African Affairs, 8 March 1976, 53.

- 23 Hearings before the Subcommittee on African Affairs, and the Subcommittee on Arms Control, International Organizations and Security Agreements and the Committee on Foreign Relations of the US, US Foreign Policy Toward Angola, "Major Powers in Southern Africa After Angola," Ninety-Forth Congress, Second Session, 5 March 1976, 10.05 am, 4221 Dirksen Office Building, Washington, DC, US Government Printing, Washington, DC, (1976): 3.
- 24 Ibid.: 38.
- 25 Ibid.
- 26 Ibid.: 30. Nielsen also observed

I think it is going to be difficult for us, given our vanity and pretention, and to some people maybe in terms of our domestic political repercussions, if we were to swallow the bitter pill and offer the Luanda government recognition and some kind of help.

(Ibid.)

- 27 Hearings before the Subcommittee on African Affairs, and the Subcommittee on Arms Control, International Organizations and Security Agreements and the Committee on Foreign Relations of the US, US Foreign Policy Toward Angola, "Major Powers in Southern Africa After Angola," Ninety-Forth Congress, Second Session, 15 March 1976, 10.45 am, 4221 Dirksen Office Building, Washington, DC, US Government Printing, Washington, DC, (1976): 71. Good served as US Ambassador to Zambia from 1965 to 1968.
- 28 Henry Kissinger, *Years of Renewal* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1999), 829.
- 29 Hearings before the Subcommittee on African Affairs, and the Subcommittee on Arms Control, International Organizations and Security Agreements and the Committee on Foreign Relations of the US, 15 March 1976, 71–72.
- 30 Ibid.: 88.
- 31 Ibid.: 90.
- 32 Ibid.: 94.
- 33 Senator Dick Clark, "Meet the Press," 21 March 1976, Ron Nessen Files, Box 71, GRFL: 4. Clark had earlier argued that despite his belief that reacting to Soviet interference in Angola was wrong, it does

not mean that the only real option the United States has in southern Africa is to keep hands off and play no role in the changes there. This country's efforts to assure that change comes about peacefully are more important than ever.

- Hearings before the Subcommittee on African Affairs, and the Subcommittee on Arms Control, International Organizations and Security Agreements and the Committee on Foreign Relations of the US, 5 March 1976, 5.
- 34 Senator Dick Clark, 21 March 1976, 14.
- 35 Johnson, "The Unintended Consequences of Congressional Reform," 239. Many of Clark's statements at this time reflected the views that Davis expressed before his resignation. Johnson mistakes Clark's view that ways should be found to counter the Soviets and Cubans as a retreat, when in fact Clark argues that they shouldn't counter them in an area where the odds are against the US. Johnson assumes that Clark meant that both should be countered militarily, when in fact he advocated a concise policy towards the region with economic programmes to reorientate the Africans away from Soviet influence.

- 36 Minutes, NSC, 7 April 1976, 2.35 pm–4 pm, Cabinet Room, The White House, Washington, DC, Box 2, DGRFL: 14. Kissinger's attitude did not change though, and he later commented "we have thrown fear into the Cubans and Soviets by some of the statements we have made", but admitted "I cannot point to concrete examples, but that is my gut feeling". See Minutes, NSC Meeting, 11 May 1976, 6.15 pm–7.15 pm, The Cabinet Room, The White House, Washington, DC, Box 2, DGRFL: 4.
- 37 Editorial, "Cuba's African Role," 9 March 1976, *New York Times*, 30.
- 38 Memcon, Operations Advisory Group Meeting, Washington, DC, 10 am, 12 March 1976, Document No. 182, Vol. XXVIII, Southern Africa, 1969–1976, FRUS: 457.
- 39 Ibid.: 458.
- 40 Ibid.: 459.
- 41 House of Representatives Congressional Record, "What Price Angola?," Ninety-Forth Congress, First Session, 10 am, 12 December 1975, Capitol Hill, Washington, DC: 40426. Bonker continued by observing that Angola could be the catalyst for change in US foreign policy as he remarked "Angola is above all a highly symbolic issue which can give birth to a healthy new direction in our foreign policy" (ibid.).
- 42 Hanhimäki, *The Flawed Architect*, 424.
- 43 Minutes, NSC meeting, 7 April 1976, 2.35 pm–4 pm, Cabinet Room, The White House, Washington, DC, Box 2, DGRFL: 13. Kissinger had earlier commented, "we will try to identify with the aspirations of the black nations in Africa, but not in response to Cuban pressure" (ibid.).
- 44 Ibid.
- 45 Leslie H. Gelb, "US Strong in Angola, Forges African Policy," *New York Times*, 16 April 1976, 4.
- 46 Ibid.
- 47 Ibid.
- 48 Emtel, AmEmbassy Lusaka, Zambia to SecState Washington, DC, 091214Z, 9 March 1976, NSA Country Files, Zambia to SecState NODIS (3), GRFL: 1.
- 49 Memcon, President Julius Nyerere, Tanzania, and Kissinger, State House, Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, 7.05 pm–8.15 pm, 25 April 1976, Document No. 194, Vol. XXVIII, Southern Africa, 1969–1976, FRUS: 485.
- 50 Memcon, President Julius Nyerere, Tanzania, and Kissinger, State House, Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, 11.30 am, 26 April 1976, 01933, DNSA: 2–3. On 28 April 1976, a telegram from the State Department was sent to all the US embassies in the African states that were included on Kissinger's African visit. It contained a message from President Ford which stated his belief that Kissinger's visit was to

mark a new departure in our African policy. It also affords out two countries a great opportunity to advance our bilateral relationship and make a positive contribution to the wider world community. The strengthening of relations between the United States and Africa is a central element of my country's foreign policy.

See Emtel, SecState Washington, DC to AmEmbassy Dakar, Senegal, 280343Z, 28 April 1976, NSA Country Files, Africa General (3), GRFL: 2

- 51 Memcon, Senegal Minister for State Assane Seck and Kissinger, 1 May 1976, 12 pm, Hotel des Almadies, Dakar, Senegal, 01939, DNSA: 5. Kissinger continued "I say all this because it is

important for Africa to understand that our attitudes do not stem from ill will, but from la neccesité des choses” (ibid.).

- 52 Emtel, AmConsul Johannesburg, South Africa to SecState Washington, DC, 240950Z, 24 April 1976, Public Library of US Diplomacy, Wikileaks: 2. In addition Percy commented on discussions with the South Africans on the same issue and met the same kind of response as

every South African official (SAG) I spoke with, from [B.J] Vorster on down, stated that United States Government (USG) warnings to communist powers not to intervene in Rhodesia are actually counterproductive [... and] no one believes the United States would back these warnings with military force.

(Ibid.: 1)

- 53 Minutes, NSC Meeting, 11 May. 1976, 6.15 pm–7.15 pm, The Cabinet Room, The White House, Washington, DC, Box 2, DGRFL: 2.

- 54 Ibid.: 5.

- 55 Ibid.

- 56 Hearings before the Subcommittee on African Affairs, and the Subcommittee on Arms Control, International Organizations and Security Agreements and the Committee on Foreign Relations of the US, US Foreign Policy Toward Angola, “Report of Secretary Kissinger On His Trip To Africa,” Ninety-Forth Congress, Second Session, 13 May 1976, 10.40 am, 4221 Dirksen Office Building, Washington, DC, US Government Printing, Washington, DC, (1976): 185–186. Kissinger outlined that his trip had five aims, which were

to provide our African friends once again with a moderate and enlightened alternative to the grim prospects of violence so rapidly taking shape before them – prospects which threatened African unity and independence, indicated growing violence and widening economic distress; to strengthen US–African relations by applying our policy to the critical issues of the moment – the issue of self-determination and economic development; to stress the positive elements in our policy around which our friends could rally, to make it possible for responsible African leaders to identify with the United States and to work with us; to give friendly and moderate African governments the perception that their aspirations for justice could be achieved without resort to massive violence and bloodshed; and that their hopes for prosperity and opportunity can be best achieved through the open economy of the West rather than submission to the determinist economic dogma of the Communist world.

(Ibid.: 186)

- 57 Ibid.: 198. Republican Senators also gave their approval. Senator Jacob Javits (R-New York) enthusiastically exclaimed “the President and the Secretary have done a legendary service to our



- country” (ibid.: 200).
- 58 Ibid.: 206–207.
- 59 Ibid.: 211.
- 60 Hearings before the Subcommittee on African Affairs, and the Subcommittee on Arms Control, International Organizations and Security Agreements and the Committee on Foreign Relations of the US, US Foreign Policy Toward Angola, “Current Situation in Southern Africa and the Secretary of State’s Lusaka Proposal,” Ninety-Forth Congress, Second Session, 12 May 1976, 10.10 am, 4221 Dirksen Office Building, Washington, DC, US Government Printing, Washington, DC, (1976): 132.
- 61 Memcon, Senegal President Leopold Senghor, Kissinger, 1 May 1976, 4.10 pm–6.20 pm, President’s Palace, Dakar, Senegal, Box 17, Records of Henry Kissinger, 1973–1977, NARA, Maryland: 4.
- 62 Ibid.: 10.
- 63 Ibid.: 7. Kissinger stated, “I recognized the danger of Angola last year at this time. I had first difficulty within our government. My African Bureau is a group of Protestant missionaries who don’t understand political struggle” (ibid.: 6).
- 64 Ibid.: 9.
- 65 Draft Memorandum of Conversation of Meeting On-board the Presidential Boat, Kissinger, Mobutu, Commissioner Nguza, 12.20 pm–1.30 pm, in Memorandum from Lord to Schaufele, 22 May 1976, Box 368, WL Sensitive Non-China, RG 59, PPS, Director’s Files (Winston Lord) 1969–1977, NARA, Maryland: 2–3.
- 66 Ibid.
- 67 Emtel, AmEmbassy Paris, France to SecState Washington, DC, 2817392Z, 28 April 1976, Public Library of US Diplomacy, Wikileaks: 3. While *L’Humanite* (Paris) was described as a communist leaning publication, another French paper *Quoditien* (Paris) concluded that the shift toward majority rule would not have occurred if the Angolan crisis did not happen as “Angola suddenly reminded the US that Africa exists” (ibid.: 1).
- 68 Johnson, “The Unintended Consequences of Congressional Reform,” 235.
- 69 Congressman Andrew Young (D-Georgia), “The Promise of US–African policy,” *Washington Post*, 17 May 1976, A21.
- 70 Emtel, AmEmbassy Bonn, FRG to SecState Washington, DC, 201827Z, 20 February 1976, Section One, Public Library of US Diplomacy, Wikileaks: 2. Another editorial in *Die Zeit* (Hamburg) argued,

shocked by Vietnam and Watergate, [...] Congress penitently accepted the slap in the face in Angola. America can’t and will not act as the world policeman anymore. But can it afford keeping silent in view of developments in Africa that reduce any policy of détente and containment philosophy to idle talk?

(Ibid.)

- 71 Emtel, AmEmbassy Copenhagen, Denmark to SecState Washington, DC, 181318Z, 18 February 1976, Public Library of US diplomacy, Wikileaks: 3. The editorial was published on 16 February 1976. It was part of a syndicated column of articles by Kissinger and former Secretary of State George Kennan who argued contrasting opinions on the Angolan crisis. It was put together for international dialogue syndicate by freelance journalist Victor Zorza.
- 72 Memcon, Olaf Palme, Swedish Prime Minister and Kissinger, Kanslihuset (Prime Minister’s Office), Stockholm, Sweden, 10 am–12.37 pm, 24 May 1976, DNSA: 15.

- 73 Hearings before the Subcommittee on African Affairs, and the Subcommittee on Arms Control, International Organizations and Security Agreements and the Committee on Foreign Relations of the US, US Foreign Policy Toward Angola, "Current Situation in Southern Africa and the Secretary of State's Lusaka Proposal," Ninety-Forth Congress, Second Session, 12 May 1976, 10.10 am, 4221 Dirksen Office Building, Washington, DC, US Government Printing, Washington, DC, (1976): 140.
- 74 Clark's bill, which called for a complete cut-off of military funding for Angola, was tied into the International Security and Assistance and Arms Control Act. It passed the Senate vote on 18 February 1976 and the House vote on 3 March 1976. Ford vetoed the act on 7 May 1976 and it was sent back to both Houses for revisions. After some minor restrictions were removed, the act was passed again by the Senate on 2 June 1976 and the House on 14 June 1976 before Ford signed it into law on 29 June 1976. See Wright, *The Destruction of a Nation*, 76–77.

# Conclusion

The actions of US policymakers during the Angolan Civil War displayed a distinct lack of concern for the impact introducing further arms had on escalating the conflict. Such actions proved to be detrimental to Angolan society. Kissinger's speeches in the build-up to the Senate decision to halt IAFEATURE in late 1975 displayed a lack of sensitivity to the local realities in Angola and indeed the African region in general by continually reverting to Cold War rhetoric. In particular his warnings to the Soviet Union to terminate its support to the MPLA or face consequences to the détente relationship, only served to marginalize the significance of what was happening in Angola itself. Furthermore, his focus on removing the link between Angola and Vietnam in the public discourse only helped to show a lack of understanding of Angolan history. One such statement made by Kissinger in December 1975 highlighted his lack of knowledge on Angola when he stated, "I do not think it [Angola] is a situation analogous to Vietnam, because in Vietnam the conflict had a much longer and more complicated history".<sup>1</sup> Yet the roots of the Angolan conflict were ingrained within the history of Portuguese colonialism that spanned had more than 400 years, rather than the Cold War environment it found itself in when it gained its independence. The ethnic divide had ensured a fragmented liberation effort against the Portuguese during the war for independence from 1961 and this became even more pronounced in the scramble between the MPLA, FNLA and UNITA for the dominant position in post-independence Angola.

Despite Kissinger's attempts both at the time and in his subsequent memoirs to distance the relationship between the two events, the Vietnam connection cannot be dismissed as it played a fundamental role in Kissinger's decision-making throughout the Angolan Civil War. It acted both as a catalyst for intervention and later the comparison became an

obstruction for US involvement in the conflict as Congress halted further arms shipments. Indeed, it was a key driver in Kissinger's decision to reject his advisors' caution that there was a danger of the US becoming entangled in the conflict. It also proved to be the key influencer for Congress to halt US operations in Angola which led to further confrontation between the executive and legislative branches over the lessons of Vietnam. The fluid perceptions of what the collapse in Vietnam meant to US policymakers and members of Congress is a critical topic in the understanding of US–Angolan policy between 1974 and 1976. It also puts into stark contrast the failure of both branches of government to view Angola as an African issue and how a lack of US–African policy was a contributory factor in the failure to outmanoeuvre the Soviets in Angola.

The relative lack of attention to African affairs throughout the Cold War illustrates how the continent was seen as marginal to US national interests. This neglect was well ingrained within US foreign policy before Kissinger entered public service in 1969 in the Nixon administration. However, his own predisposition to view Angola solely through the Cold War superpower rivalry meant there was little to no effort to incorporate the impact of regional and local issues. This significantly contributed to a credibility problem within Africa even before the Angolan conflict began to escalate. Indeed, there was an opportunity to take the initiative to instigate a diplomatic approach with the OAU in the decolonization process in Africa after the Carnation Revolution in April 1974. By doing so the US could have been seen as proactive rather than reactionary on the Angolan issue. Yet Kissinger focused on removing the potential communist influence in the Portuguese government, rather than considering that Portuguese-African territories could potentially come under Soviet influence. Despite the warnings from the African Bureau, Zaire and Tanzania in late 1974 that Angola was primed for civil war and interference from extra-continental powers, Kissinger remained steadfast on addressing the Portuguese problem. Furthermore, he began to marginalize African policy even further by removing Donald Easum in December 1974 and replacing him with Nathaniel Davis. This needlessly created further tensions between the OAU and the US in early 1975 and took the focus even further away from conducting any considered form of US–African policy.

In addition, Kissinger's staunch defence of Davis in the face of African criticism created its own dilemmas as it helped reinforce the impression in

African leaders' minds and indeed Davis for himself, that he would be able to have a significant impact on US–African policy. However, given Kissinger's proclivity towards controlling any new foreign policy initiatives, Davis' role was always designed to be one that followed the Secretary's lead. Yet Davis displayed his own initiative to engage African states and assure them that the US was making serious attempts to address African concerns on issues such as humanitarian assistance, foreign aid and trading agreements. He also attempted to draw Kissinger's attention to the deteriorating situation in Angola, though with the impending collapse of Vietnam, Kissinger was distracted and initially disinterested in the situation. By highlighting the issue of the Davis nomination, it is now possible to illustrate how the relationship between the two men deteriorated rapidly in the aftermath of the Vietnam collapse as Kissinger abruptly shifted his focus to Angola. This book goes beyond previous publications which have mainly focused on the Davis and Kissinger relationship during the lead up to Ford's decision to approve Operation IAFEATURE.

The theme of Kissinger's perception of a credibility crisis in US foreign policy as a result of US failure in Vietnam is salient throughout this publication. Specifically, it illustrates that despite the previous warnings from the African Bureau dating back to 1970 that the Soviets and the Chinese could take advantage of a power vacuum created by Portuguese withdrawal, it was the perception of US credibility in the wake of Vietnam that triggered US involvement in the Angolan Civil War. In addition, this publication assesses the credibility argument and highlights that opposition to the covert operation in Angola from various State Department officials, US embassies and academics did not see credibility as a key driver for US action. They foresaw that once the covert Angolan operation was exposed, the Ford administration would incur the wrath of legislators who would link the conflict to Vietnam. The primary evidence shows there was no unified consensus within the State Department that such a credibility crisis existed in relation to the pursuit of US intervention in Angola in June and July 1975. In conjunction with Davis, there was serious opposition to Kissinger's policies from Under Secretary of State Joseph Sisco, INR head William Hyland and PPS head Winston Lord, who all cited a lack of US national interest in Angola as being one of the primary factors in any decision to get involved in the Angolan Civil War. While these concerns were dismissed by Kissinger as being the product of Vietnam syndrome, the

objections raised were fundamentally based on conforming to domestic political confrontation in Washington, DC. More importantly, they were centred on a more realistic assessment of US interests and capabilities in Angola where the US position was particularly weak after years of neglect of African affairs.

Yet, the question of whether there was a correct option to be taken in July 1975 is open to interpretation. Historian Piero Gleijeses observes that

if the US had failed to intervene it would have lost face with those who supported UNITA and the FNLA: South Africa, China, France, England [...] Belgium [...] Zaire, Zambia, and a handful of other African countries. Perhaps, too, the Soviet Union would have seen it as a sign of weakness.<sup>2</sup>

This statement is a fair point to a certain extent. The timing of the Angolan Civil War created inescapable dilemmas for the Ford administration. As a result, the US reaction to the situation was being monitored by the Soviets, Chinese and indeed encouraged by Portugal and some African states such as Zaire, Zambia and the Ivory Coast. There is no easy answer to the question of whether the US would have outmanoeuvred the Soviets in Angola if they had chosen to engage in diplomacy rather than a covert operation. To participate in counterfactual history would not advance the study of US foreign policy toward Angola. Instead this publication contends that the political climate in the aftermath of Vietnam within Washington, DC was too fragile for the US to engage in another foreign civil war.

These conflicting positions link how Angola became the epicentre for renewed conflict between the executive and legislative branches of the US government. There is no disputing that Kissinger knew his plan for covert operations in Angola was a risky strategy given the adverse political climate in Washington, DC. However, he seriously misjudged the severity of the backlash from Congress and in particular their strategy of comparison between Angola and the Vietnam experience once it became headline news in December 1975.<sup>3</sup> This publication adds further Congressional analysis on Angola by outlining the various groups, their motivations and highlighting Kissinger's contempt for their intransigence. Indeed, Kissinger's miscalculation of Congressional opposition was compounded when he advocated the Ford administration pursue a bellicose defence of the

Angolan programme in early 1976. It only served to weaken the administration's position both at home and abroad by highlighting the fractured political discourse within the US between the executive and legislative branches. Furthermore, Kissinger's attempt to link Angola with détente backfired significantly. As a result, his threatening rhetoric failed to deter the Soviets and at home it was seized upon by his conservative critics as a means to attack his handling of US foreign policy. The inability of Kissinger and his colleagues to articulate the danger posed by the Soviets and Cubans only cast further doubt that the executive could pull back from turning Angola into another Vietnamtype stand against the spread of communism. In addition, the subsequent tactic pursued by Ford and Kissinger to criticize Congress after the decision to uphold the Tunney Amendment in January 1976 was neither feasible nor constructive. Indeed, it served to project an image of US weakness and exemplified the divergence between the executive and legislative branches to the international community.

The Ford administration itself created the conditions under which US credibility could be questioned and these were compounded by the inability of the administration to articulate what a successful outcome in Angola looked like. Ultimately Kissinger initiated a new African policy as he eventually acknowledged that his confrontational tactics against Congress had failed and were damaging Ford's Presidential election hopes. While other Western countries including France began to readjust their policies to reflect the political realities in Angola, the Ford administration stubbornly refused to admit they had erred. As a result, there was no re-evaluation of the decision to intervene in Angola itself because both Ford and Kissinger continued to believe that such a measure was vital to the need to protect US credibility. The decision to address US-African policy was motivated primarily by domestic political calculations rather than an actual concern for the welfare and rights of black Africans or strategic rivalry on the continent. Yet it was a step in the right direction and marked a progression on US-African policy, albeit as a result of a failed operation in Angola. As Congressman Andrew Young summarized, "there is no joy in this policy stuff, only a confrontation with political realities. Angola was the hammer that struck this proper chord into place".<sup>4</sup>

These events outlined contributed to a shift in US-African policy but how did they project into the future? While such a shift in policy was

welcomed by Congress, it did not reflect any shift in policy from the executive branch toward Angola itself. Due to the presence of Cuban troops, the US withheld establishing diplomatic relations with the PRA, despite the majority of its allies such as France, Portugal, Zaire, Zambia and the UK reorienting their positions in spring 1976 to address the reality of the MPLA victory. The US also voted against Angolan entry to the UN on 23 June 1976; however, the US abstained when the vote was raised again on 22 November 1976, and as a result the PRA joined the UN on 1 December 1976. However, by that time US focus had shifted distinctly away from Angolan affairs and onto the problem of Rhodesia.<sup>5</sup> Despite a late concerted attempt to broker a deal towards a transition of power between the white Rhodesian government led by Ian Smith and black opposition leaders, Ford's defeat to Democrat Jimmy Carter in the Presidential election in November 1976 ensured that Kissinger's late African initiative was left to the Carter administration to implement with mixed results.

Overall, while Kissinger mismanaged US foreign policy towards Africa throughout his tenure in public office and especially in the case of Angola, the latter was triggered by a misperception of a credibility crisis in the aftermath of Vietnam. This publication illustrates the significant level of dissent to Operation IAFEATURE that goes beyond the objections of Nathaniel Davis who was previously seen as the lone voice of opposition to Kissinger's Angolan strategy. It also shows how the memory of Vietnam deeply impacted both the Ford administration and Congress in their arguments over Angola. The subsequent chain of events contributed, ironically, to be the catalyst for change in US–African policy that neither the executive nor the legislative branches had foreseen.

- 1 “The Angola Issue: Clark: Kissinger: Moynihan,” *Washington Post*, 18 December 1975, A23. The article is a transcript of remarks made by Kissinger and US Ambassador to the UN Daniel Moynihan on Angola. The article also carries a response to these remarks by Senator Dick Clark.
- 2 Piero Gleijeses, *Conflicting Missions: Havana, Washington, and Africa, 1959–1976* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 357.
- 3 It is important to reiterate here that while the story initially broke in September 1975 when the *New York Times* journalist Leslie Gelb wrote about US involvement in Angola, the story did not gain traction until December 1975. One of the key differences in the four-month gap was that the Angolan Civil War had escalated to the point where Cuban and South African troops were directly involved.
- 4 Congressman Andrew Young (D-Georgia), “The Promise of US–Africa Policy,” *Washington Post*, 17 May 1976, 21.
- 5 The Clark Amendment was signed into law on 29 June 1976. This controversial law which amended the International Security Assistance and Arms Export Control Act banned military



funding for use in Angola would prove to be a controversial piece of legislation, especially for elements of the right-wing of the Republican Party. It would eventually be repealed during the Ronald Reagan Administration in 1985.

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