

**Tip-Toeing through the Tulips: An Investigation of The United States'  
Decision to Enter the Angolan Civil War in June of 1975**

*A Senior Honors Thesis in History by:  
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## Introduction

On the morning of June 25, 1975, Secretary of State Henry Kissinger had a decision to make. For the past ten months he had been thinking about bringing the United States right into the midst of the rapidly developing Angolan Civil War. Kissinger knew that an explicit commitment of American support to an Angolan faction could significantly advance U.S. interests in Southern Africa, but he recognized that there were serious risks as well. In order to make a more informed choice, Kissinger asked the head of the State Department's African Bureau, Nathaniel Davis, to recommend a plan of action. On the morning of the 25<sup>th</sup>, Kissinger had an answer. Davis advised that the United States should stay far, far away from Angola. He argued that the risks associated with direct American involvement in an African civil war greatly outweighed any potential gain, yet it was Kissinger who held the authority to make the final decision. Two days later, he had made up his mind. Paying little heed to Davis' reservations, the Secretary decided that the United States would directly support two of the three groups fighting for control of Angola. Kissinger called his decision the start of a "heroic phase in U.S. foreign policy."<sup>1</sup>

Within three weeks, Kissinger had convinced President Gerald Ford to green light a program codenamed IAFEATURE. It was highly classified—no one but the highest-ranking American officials and Kissinger's African allies knew of its existence. Its initial budget was six million dollars, but by the time IAFEATURE had ended six months later, more than thirty-one million dollars worth of American weapons and military advisors were sent into Angola. The weapons were mostly World War Two surplus, clandestinely shipped from warehouses in South Carolina to rundown airstrips in Zaire. They were then smuggled across the border and onto

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<sup>1</sup> "Memorandum of Conversation." Washington, June 27, 1975. From Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS) Database, Southern Africa. Volume 28. Document 112.

Angolan battlefields. CIA military advisors worked closely with Kissinger's Angolan allies, the apartheid South African government, and Mobutu Sese Seko of Zaire, all without the approval of the U.S. Congress. This was a direct violation of the 1973 War Powers Resolution. But during IAFEATURE's initial phases, Kissinger, the CIA, and the State Department repeatedly lied about the details of the program to Congress, the Organization of African Unity, and the American people. Then, by December 1975, almost as quickly as it had gotten off the ground, the program was exposed to the world, Kissinger's allies were simultaneously on the run, and American prestige hit a new low. Davis' reservations had become realities.

Kissinger's decision to forge ahead with IAFEATURE in June 1975 was a mistake. His advisors told him what would happen if the United States became involved in the war, he chose not to listen, and their warnings came to fruition. The question that this raises is: Why was Kissinger so determined to try and affect the outcome of the Angolan Civil War through direct American involvement? This paper will offer three explanations, all of which factored significantly in Kissinger's thought making process. First on the Secretary's mind was his desire to keep the Soviet Union out of Angola. While Kissinger was forming alliances with two of the Angolan factions, the Russians were catering to the third. On the heels of Saigon's fall, Kissinger was not willing to let the Soviets win another Third World civil war without a fight. The Secretary's second priority dealt with the issue of preserving American prestige abroad. The United States had Cold War allies in Southern Africa during the summer of 1975—Kissinger considered both President Mobutu Sese Seko of Zaire and President Kenneth Kaunda of Zambia to be important supporters of the Western Bloc. Both of these men wanted the United States to directly involve itself in the Angolan conflict, and Kissinger saw a need to oblige them. He did not want two of his most important black African clients to think that the United States had

become weak and docile after the fall of Vietnam. The Secretary's third and final concern was domestically oriented. Congress had passed the War Powers Resolution in 1973, seemingly shifting a great deal of foreign policy control from the Executive to the Legislative Branch. The President and his cabinet now needed explicit Congressional approval to wage a war. Kissinger saw Angola as a way to grab power back from Congress. He wanted to see if he could still wage a war without legislative approval.

Kissinger accomplished none of his goals. The Soviet supported faction won the war; American prestige was shattered throughout Africa; Congress used its new power to shut down IAFEATURE. The war effort was disastrous, and it had a dramatic impact on the Secretary's policies. The second section of this paper will analyze that impact, both in terms of its domestic and its international ramifications. Domestically, Congress was able to shut down IAFEATURE, bolstering the legitimacy of the War Powers Resolution, while calling into serious question the credibility of the CIA and State Department. Internationally, Kissinger had to recover the prestige that the U.S. had lost. He attempted to do so by radically altering the nation's foreign policy toward Southern Africa. For the first time in his tenure as Secretary, Kissinger began to openly work toward majority rule in Africa. He finally had recognized that in order to create a successful foreign policy toward Africa, that policy could not be clandestinely implemented through the CIA. These changes show that while the United States was only directly involved in the Angolan Civil War for six months in 1975, IAFEATURE changed the way that the United States carries out its foreign policy. Its effects are still being felt today.

## **Chapter One: The Whites were Actually Just About to Leave**

Richard Nixon's first day in the Oval Office was January 21, 1969. His very first meeting was with Henry Kissinger, the man he had chosen to be his national security advisor.<sup>2</sup> During that fateful meeting, the President and his advisor began traveling down a winding path that would eventually lead to American humiliation in Angola. But before Angola had even become a foreign policy concern for the United States, Nixon and Kissinger were concerned with consolidating foreign policy control.

Unlike his predecessors, Richard Nixon was determined to define his presidency with his foreign policy. And in the winter of 1969, the United States needed a president who was focused on foreign affairs. The 1968 Tet Offensive had proven that the North Vietnamese were far from defeat, the Soviets had reached nuclear parity with the United States, France had left NATO, the Middle East was at war, and Africa was undergoing rapid change. Nixon believed that he could guide the country through these international developments, but he felt that in order to do so most effectively, control over the nation's foreign policy had to be centralized. Nixon felt that by allowing the overly bureaucratic State Department to control foreign policy, nothing would be accomplished. He wanted the Executive branch to orchestrate America's foreign initiatives, and he wanted Henry Kissinger, a man who had advised both presidents before him, to orchestrate those initiatives with him.<sup>3</sup> Together, the President and Kissinger would reorganize the ways in which the United States had historically carried out its foreign policy.

Whereas the Departments of State and Defense had had tremendous influence in the making of foreign policy during previous administrations, Kissinger and Nixon gradually took power from those agencies. As the chair of the National Security Council, Kissinger hired a large

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<sup>2</sup> Jussi M. Hanhimaki, *The Flawed Architect: Henry Kissinger and American Foreign Policy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 17.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 24-25.

staff and housed the NSC in the White House. During the early 1970s, President Nixon would go to Kissinger's council whenever he needed foreign policy advice, often leaving the State and Defense Departments out of the discussions. Therefore, foreign policy was debated and created in the White House, with Kissinger and Nixon serving as the chief architects of that policy. By the time of the Angolan Civil War, this organizational structure would have a tremendous impact on the American response to the war.

Once Kissinger had been instated as one of the chief architects of American foreign policy, his first order of business was to have the nation's previous policy closely examined. He had the State Department compile several hundred reports called National Security Study Memorandums, each of which analyzed U.S. policy and U.S. interests in a specific region. NSSM 39 dealt with Southern Africa, and its final policy recommendation would also have a great impact upon the initial U.S. response to the Angolan Civil War.

Perhaps the most startling revelation put forth by NSSM 39 was an explicit endorsement of the idea that the white minority regimes in Southern African were stable. At the time, there were three minority governments in the region. South Africa effectively marginalized its black African population through ruthless legislation, and it ruled over neighboring South West Africa in a similar fashion. Ian Smith's minority government controlled Rhodesia, while Portugal refused to let go of its two Southern African colonies: Angola and Mozambique. In NSSM 39, the State Department argued that these white governments were "[there] to stay,"<sup>4</sup> and that even though wars of independence were raging in Portugal's colonies, the white minorities would retain control well into the future. NSSM 39 recommended that the best policy stance the United States could adopt toward the region would be a friendly and cooperative posture toward the

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<sup>4</sup> "Study in Response to National Security Study Memorandum 39, Southern Africa." Washington, December 09, 1969. From FRUS Southern Africa Database, Volume 28, Document 17.

white states. The memorandum argued that only through this posture could the U.S. hope to convince these nations to gradually move toward majority rule.

While NSSM 39 put forth the idea that only through cooperation could the U.S. hope to convince the white regimes in Southern Africa to consider converting to majority rule, that recommendation veiled the State Department's true motives. NSSM 39's key recommendation was a reflection of the United States' desire to contain communism abroad. A key element of each of Southern Africa's white minority governments was its commitment to the Western Bloc. Portugal was an essential NATO ally—its military base in the Azores was needed to refuel nearly all of America's transatlantic cargo flights—so the Pentagon could not risk upsetting Portugal and losing access to the base. As a result, the State Department was forced to craft a friendly and cooperative foreign policy toward Portugal and its overseas territories. The United States dealt with South Africa (and to a much lesser extent Southern Rhodesia) on similar grounds. South Africa's Nationalist Party was staunchly anti-communist, and it was committed to keeping any Soviet influence out of the region. This led Pretoria to deal with the United States on favorable terms. South Africa housed an American military tracking station along its coast, and it provided the U.S. with a host of raw materials while denying those same resources to the Soviets. Because of South Africa's racial ideology, the United States was forced to publicly condemn Pretoria's domestic policies, but because of all the material gains the U.S. received from South Africa, Washington reciprocated by blocking many UN mandates that were aimed against the ostracized nation. The United States looked at Portugal, South Africa, and Southern Rhodesia as key Cold War allies. They stabilized Southern Africa while keeping the Soviets out. The United States both believed and hoped that these nations would stay in control of the region

well into the 1980s. To help that belief become a reality, the U.S. crafted friendly policy stances toward four African nations that had reprehensible domestic policies.

Yet on April 25, 1974, NSSM 39's key assumption unraveled. The Portuguese government was overthrown in a bloodless coup, and the new regime had zero desire to hold onto its African colonies. Ironically, the coup was carried out by young military officers who had become disillusioned after more than a decade of fighting for control of African colonies that were offering few tangible benefits to those living in the metropole.<sup>5</sup> By July 1974, the new Portuguese government announced that it would be granting independence to all of its overseas colonies, including those in Southern Africa.<sup>6</sup> The whites in Angola and Mozambique were leaving. With one fell swoop, one of the three white governments that the United States had both assumed and hoped was going to be stable for the foreseeable future, was about to undergo radical change.

While many Angolans may have rejoiced at the July 1974 promise of impending independence and peace, political stability within the nation hit an all time low when the Portuguese announced that they would be leaving. This was due to the fact that unlike in Mozambique, where primarily one nationalist organization fought for independence, there were three such groups trying to free Angola. The Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA), the National Front for the Liberation of Angola (FNLA), and the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA) grew from distinct constituencies, distinct political ideologies, and distinct views on how an independent Angola should be governed. These three groups worked together to some extent to combat Portuguese colonial rule in the 1960s and into the 1970s, but even then they existed in fierce competition with each other. When the Portuguese

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<sup>5</sup> Fernando Andresen Guimaraes, *The Origins of the Angolan Civil War: Foreign Intervention and Domestic Political Conflict* (Hampshire, England: Macmillan Press, 1998), 85.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 92.



announced that they would be leaving, the rivalry between the factions intensified, as each saw an opportunity to seize total control of the nation. Fighting quickly broke out between them.

Portugal recognized that civil war in Angola was undesirable. The tiny nation had enjoyed economic ties with Angola for nearly 500 years and had invested a great deal of money in the country's infrastructure. Still wishing to maintain a close economic bond with its former colony, Portugal sought to bring the three factions together at a conference in Alvor in January 1975. What came out of the meetings was the Alvor Accord—an agreement signed on January 15, 1975, that established a temporary government comprised of all the factions. The Accord was supposed to dissolve after a scheduled November 11, 1975 election date. The people of Angola were supposed to decide who would lead their country. However, four days after the Alvor Accord was signed, it became readily apparent that the factions were not willing to let their people vote. Fighting immediately broke out again, and the United States had instigated the fight.

## Chapter Two: The Birth of the Blunder

August 12, 1974 was the day that Henry Kissinger first began to consider directly involving the United States in the Angolan Civil War. Just a few weeks after Portugal had promised Angola independence, Umba Lutete, a high-ranking Zairian diplomat, paid Kissinger a visit. Zaire was worried about the conflict that was brewing inside its neighbor's borders. Its border with Angola was two thousand kilometers long, and two million Angolan refugees had already crossed it and settled in Zaire by the time of Lutete's visit.<sup>7</sup> Zaire could barely support its own people, let alone two million displaced Angolans. To make matters worse for Zaire, the country was nearly landlocked, and it therefore counted on Angola for increased access to the sea. If an unfriendly government came to power in Luanda, Zaire might find itself without an easy way to get its goods to market. Kissinger listened politely to Lutete while he spoke about the refugee and trade issues, but the meeting took a sudden turn when the Zairian ambassador mentioned his third and final concern. His intelligence indicated that the Soviet Union "[was showing] a great interest in Angola."<sup>8</sup> Specifically, the Soviet Union was considering backing the MPLA—the faction that Zaire considered the least compatible with its own interests. Lutete wanted the FNLA to come to power, and he wanted the United States to support them as well. Kissinger was willing to oblige Lutete. He 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>9</sup> Just like that, the die was cast.

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<sup>7</sup> "Memorandum of Conversation." Washington, August 12, 1974. From FRUS Southern Africa Database, Volume 28, Document 99.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

Kissinger moved quickly. He contacted CIA Director William Colby and told him to immediately increase U.S. aid to the FNLA.<sup>10</sup> Unbeknownst to Lutete, and to most people within the U.S. government, the CIA had been secretly sending money to the FNLA since July 1974.<sup>11</sup> The State Department had recognized in July that if the FNLA seized power, its leader, Holden Roberto, would most likely establish a pro-Western Bloc government in Angola. That appealed to Kissinger, so he had Colby use the CIA's Contingency Reserve Fund to support Roberto as soon as the Portuguese announced that Angola would no longer be under its control. Kissinger had no intention of making the initial U.S. aid contributions sizable or visible, and he doubted that the money would have any real impact upon the FNLA's ability to fight its rivals—he was only trying to curry favor with Roberto, should he come to power on his own.<sup>12</sup> But once Lutete informed Kissinger that the Soviets were going to back the MPLA, everything changed.

Kissinger believed that the United States had an unassailable need to counter any Soviet presence in Southern Africa. He worried that if the United States failed to respond to such an incursion, states like Zaire, Zambia, and Tanzania “must conclude that the United States has abdicated in Southern Africa...They will then have two choices where to turn—to China or to the U.S.S.R....This tendency will then spread. It would shift Tanzania and others further left, and have a major effect in Africa.”<sup>13</sup> Kissinger's concern was basically a reiteration of the domino theory—he worried that if Angola became a communist state, its neighbors would follow. And his desired response to the Soviet influence in Angola essentially conformed to the containment policy—he wanted to prevent the spread of communism abroad. Yet, there was much more at

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<sup>10</sup> “Memorandum from Director of Central Intelligence Colby to President's Assistant for National Security Affairs.” Washington, September 19, 1974. From FRUS Southern Africa Database, Volume 28, Document 100.

<sup>11</sup> Guimaraes, *The Origins of the Angolan Civil War*, 101.

<sup>12</sup> Henry Kissinger, *Years of Renewal* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1999), 794-95

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 792.

stake in Angola than containment. U.S. prestige was dying, and in order for Kissinger to craft a successful foreign policy, it desperately needed revitalization.

Before the outbreak of civil war in Angola, Kissinger had consolidated his control over the architecture of American foreign policy even more completely than he had done so alongside President Nixon in early 1969. In 1973, Nixon made Kissinger his Secretary of State, and for the first and only time in American history, someone was the Secretary of State while simultaneously serving as the NSC Chair. By holding control over both agencies, Kissinger was able to pull off a series of diplomatic successes in a relatively short period of time. Favoring an approach that utilized back-room negotiations and secret channels, he ushered in the era of détente with the Soviet Union, and then he used similar methods to broker the first American negotiations with China a few years later. Even though the U.S. was rapidly losing ground in Vietnam, Kissinger was able to temporarily keep American prestige afloat by dramatically easing tensions with the communist powers.<sup>14</sup> Then in late-1973, Kissinger was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for beginning the process that would finally remove American troops from Vietnam. To many, it seemed as if the new Secretary was singlehandedly stabilizing the Cold War World.

But to others, Kissinger's power and approach were troubling. They wondered, why did one man have so much control over foreign policy? Why were the negotiations with the Soviet Union and China carried out in secret? Was the government hiding something? By 1974, answers started coming to light. Watergate had outraged most Americans, and Vietnam was of course still lingering in the background of the American consciousness. As a result, the people overwhelmingly voted Democrat during the mid-term elections that year, and the newly elected Senators began to involve themselves in foreign affairs. Committees were established to question

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<sup>14</sup> Hanhimaki, *The Flawed Architect: Henry Kissinger and American Foreign Policy*, xvi-xvii.

America's foreign and domestic policy initiatives, and the answers they found were startling. The Church Committee found that the CIA had manipulated numerous foreign elections over the decade, with the overthrow of Salvador Allende of Chile representing the most recent case. The United States had carried out secret drug trials that had resulted in two deaths. The families were given millions of dollars to remain quiet. The FBI had illegally opened the mail and monitored the overseas cables of millions of U.S. citizens.<sup>15</sup>

To make matters worse, while all of this information was coming to light, many American initiatives abroad were failing. Vietnam was quickly crumbling; the rest of Southeast Asia was turning red; Portugal had already turned far to the left. Congress had simultaneously cut off American military aid to Turkey, despite Kissinger's protests. The Secretary's attempts to broker peace in the Middle East had only resulted in frustration. Domestically, staunch conservatives felt the Executive was not doing enough, liberals argued that the United States was trampling on its own citizens' rights while destabilizing the globe, and Kissinger was left with "serious questions [as to] whether [he] could continue to conduct a foreign policy."<sup>16</sup>

Kissinger therefore saw U.S. involvement in the Angolan Civil War as a means to an end. If the United States could successfully orchestrate an incursion into Angola on behalf of its African clients, then perhaps some of the embarrassment that had plagued the State Department for the past year could be forgotten. It seemed as if in every corner of the globe, American initiatives had resulted in failure, while the Russians looked like victors. So when Zaire asked the United States to help combat Soviet expansion into Angola, Kissinger saw no choice but to seize any opportunity he could find to regain prestige at Russian expense.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Hanhimaki, *The Flawed Architect*, 429.

<sup>16</sup> Roger Morris, "The Proxy War in Angola: Pathology of a Blunder," *The New Republic* 174, no. 5 (Jan. 31, 1976): 20.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

Although Angola provided the Secretary with a golden chance to revitalize the American image, it was not as if U.S. involvement came without risks. In fact, growing trends in U.S. politics suggested that American intervention would be a very risky venture. In response to the public's dismay over the fact that both the Korean and Vietnam Wars had been escalated without formal declarations of war, Congress had passed the War Powers Resolution over President Nixon's veto in 1973. This legislation required that the President first receive Congressional approval before waging any act of war. If the Congress' actions after the resolution were any indication, it seemed as if an American show of force would never be authorized in Angola. Congress used its newfound power to cut off military aid to Turkey, and the Senate was in the process of cutting off aid to Cambodia.<sup>18</sup> Kissinger knew that the American people and their Congress would never support U.S. involvement in an African civil war so soon after Vietnam, so Kissinger had to think outside the box if he wanted to use Angola to solve the prestige problem.

The CIA's Contingency Reserve Fund was his answer. Since its creation in the late 1940s, the CIA was granted a tremendous amount of latitude to conduct its operations without much oversight. One such aspect of that autonomy was the Contingency Reserve Fund. Created in 1952, the fund existed outside of the CIA's annual budget. The money could be used to finance any unanticipated operation the CIA wanted to carry out, and any expenditure paid for by the Reserve Fund did not have to be authorized by Congress. By the time Kissinger realized that he could use the CIA's money and autonomy to get around the War Powers Resolution, more than thirty one million dollars were still in the bank.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Morris, "The Proxy War in Angola," 20.

<sup>19</sup> John Stockwell, *In Search of Enemies: A CIA Story* (New York: Norton, 1978), 207.

Kissinger had found a way to finance an American incursion into Angola, but he recognized that it would be political suicide to spend all of that money at once. Thirty one million dollars worth of American weapons would be hard to hide in impoverished Angola. So Kissinger authorized a three hundred thousand dollar aid increase to the FNLA in January 1975, just after the signing of the Alvor Accord. Even that amount of money proved difficult to conceal. Holden Roberto immediately used the funds to purchase a television station and began to broadcast propaganda. He then consolidated his forces and moved his troops into the capital city of Luanda. This move naturally made the MPLA, whose main bastion of support was located in the capital, incredibly nervous.<sup>20</sup> As tensions rose, fighting broke out between both sides, and the Alvor Accord became meaningless before its ink had time to dry. Back in Washington, Kissinger watched as the war that he had started began to unfold.

Although the three hundred thousand dollar aid increase did not significantly impact the FNLA's ability to fight its rivals, the money was responsible for starting the war. The FNLA would not have moved into Luanda so quickly without the American endorsement. Then, once the MPLA saw that the FNLA was moving into Luanda, its leaders naturally became concerned. They turned to the Soviet Union for support. The Russians had supported the MPLA during its fight against Portuguese colonialism, but that aid was cut off in March of 1974. The Soviets did begin to provide the MPLA with token support once again in October, but when the American-backed FNLA moved into the capital in January, the MPLA knew it would need more from the Russians if it hoped to defeat its strongest rival. After listening to their client's demands, the Soviets began a massive arms increase to the MPLA in March 1975.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Guimaraes, *The Origins of the Angolan Civil War*, 101.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 102.

According to John Stockwell, the Chief of the CIA Angola Task Force, and the man who ran the daily operations of IAFEATURE, “The Soviets did not make the first move in Angola. Other people did...The Soviets [were] a half-step behind, countering our moves.”<sup>22</sup> It was that sort of mentality—move and countermove—that would characterize the entire escalation of the war. Neither the Americans nor the Soviets wanted to see the other’s client maintain the upper hand, so as soon as the Soviets found out about the January 1975 contribution to the FNLA, they felt they had to counter. So naturally, when Kissinger found out about the Russian countermove, he saw no choice but to make a countermove of his own.

Kissinger became aware of the Soviet arms shipments on April 19, 1975. The opening paragraph of his memoir’s section on Angola reads as follows:

“Only on the rarest occasions does a single state visit change American national policy. Yet President Kenneth Kaunda of Zambia managed to accomplish precisely that feat when he came to Washington on April 19, 1975. On that occasion, he convinced President Ford and me that the Soviet Union was intervening in Angola with military advisors and weapons and that we should oppose this intrusion for the sake of Angola’s neighbors.”<sup>23</sup>

During that fateful meeting, the Zambian president convinced Ford and Kissinger that the United States needed to counter the Soviet presence in Angola. Zaire had made the same request eight months before, but whereas Zaire had only suggested that the Russians were moving into Angola, Zambia provided Kissinger with intelligence reports that confirmed the Russians were once again backing the MPLA. Kissinger felt he had to listen.

Like Zaire, Zambia had an economic agenda as well. President Kaunda wanted the U.S. to back one of the factions so that his nation’s primary access to the sea, the Benguela Railway, would be safeguarded. Kaunda felt that the third Angolan faction, UNITA, best served his interests. But during the meeting with Ford and Kissinger, Kaunda masked his motives and made

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<sup>22</sup> Stockwell, *In Search of Enemies*, 66.

<sup>23</sup> Kissinger, *Years of Renewal*, 791.



a different argument on behalf of UNITA. He claimed that UNITA's leader, Jonas Savimbi, would be the best choice for leading an independent Angola. Kaunda claimed Savimbi had the most "grass root support," and that he had "put forward a formula for bringing the three parties together."<sup>24</sup> Kaunda was "impressed with Savimbi's sincerity and his honesty of purpose."<sup>25</sup> He said he wanted the United States to join him in backing UNITA, so that a coalition government could form in Angola with Savimbi at its head.

As Kissinger indicated in his memoir, Kaunda's endorsement of Savimbi changed the course of American policy. Kissinger was convinced that a dual approach—supporting UNITA in conjunction with the Zambians, and the FNLA in conjunction with the Zairians—would be the most effective countermove to the Soviet arms shipments.

Even though Henry Kissinger was the Secretary of State, he was not in a position to simply grant Kaunda's request on the spot. The State Department has a bureau for each part of the world, and before the Secretary makes any policy decision, he seeks the appropriate bureau's counsel. With regards to the Angolan Civil War, Kissinger contacted his African Bureau, headed by Nathaniel Davis, shortly after Kaunda's visit. Kissinger specifically asked Davis assess the pros and cons of intensifying the American involvement in the war. He wanted to know whether the benefits associated with countering the Soviets and appeasing his African clients were truly worth the risks.

While Kissinger was waiting for Davis' response, he convened a meeting with the 40 Committee on June 05, 1975. The 40 Committee was a subgroup of the National Security Council, responsible for carrying out covert operations. During the June 05 meeting, the members of the committee were divided when asked to make a recommendation. There was no

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<sup>24</sup> "Memorandum of Conversation." Washington, April 19, 1975. From FRUS Southern Africa Database, Volume 28, Document 103.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

agreement with regards to how invested the United States could afford to become in the war. One member argued that “Angola [was] not of great importance,” while a second stressed that “our diplomatic posture [should remain] hands off.” Kissinger’s response was, “We can’t let the communists win there.”<sup>26</sup> The meeting adjourned without a resolution—Kissinger stated that they would wait until Davis made his recommendation—but even in early June, the Secretary was showing his willingness to overlook the reservations of his closest advisors.

Davis made his recommendation on the morning of June 25, 1975. It came in the form of a classified, national security study memorandum. In it, Davis provided Kissinger with a slew of reasons as to why any further American involvement in Angola would be disastrous. First on his list was the fact that an MPLA-controlled Angola would not necessarily be a bad thing for the United States. The only American interest in Angola at the time focused on access to the country’s oil reserves. Kissinger had feared that a communist Angola would nationalize the oil fields, and while that fear was legitimate, Davis argued that the MPLA would have no choice but to keep selling that oil to the United States. The U.S. was its biggest customer. So even if the MPLA came to power, U.S. economic relations with Angola really would not change.<sup>27</sup>

Davis’ second reason should have been even more convincing. He argued, “The uncertainties of the situation in Angola make the risks of becoming directly involved greater than the probable gains to be derived therefrom.”<sup>28</sup> Davis goes on to elaborate that U.S. intelligence with regards to Angola was weak. Most of what Kissinger knew about the factions he desired to back came from hearsay. And his sources, Zairian and Zambian diplomats, had agendas of their own. No one in Washington really knew the actual strength of the FNLA or UNITA, so backing

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<sup>26</sup> “Memorandum for the Record.” Washington, June 05, 1975. From FRUS Southern Africa Database, Volume 28, Document 106.

<sup>27</sup> “Special Sensitive Memorandum Regarding Response to NSSM 224: ‘United States Policy Toward Angola.’” Washington, June 25, 1975. From Digital National Security Archive, Document 01308.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

either one of them would be risky. The United States had not gathered any intelligence of its own, so how could it legitimately assess the strength of its potential allies? Davis argued that without that crucial piece of intelligence, any comprehensive aid program would amount to nothing more than a shot in the dark. American prestige had already fallen so low, Davis did not think a shot in the dark was a risk the U.S. could afford to take.

On top of that, Davis questioned how effective increased American involvement would actually be. Because of the political climate of 1975, he did not think that Congress would endorse a war effort, and since Kissinger had already begun talks with the 40 Committee, it is likely that he did not think so either. Davis opined, “We could not realistically consider any direct, overt, military support, such as arms shipments or personnel. Any assistance would have to be covert, and military assistance would have to be channeled through third parties.”<sup>29</sup> However, Davis strongly believed that the cover would be blown off any covert program. He felt that the Soviets would quickly expose the United States. He argued that the Russians would surely counter any American involvement, but a problem existed in the fact that the Soviets had much more latitude than the United States to increase their aid packages. Davis felt that each and every American arms shipment would be countered by the Soviets, and eventually, the Americans would be forced to send so much into Angola, it would be impossible to keep the war effort a secret.

Davis warned Kissinger that if covert American involvement in the Angolan Civil War were exposed, the consequences would be dire. It would damage the already deteriorating relationship the United States was trying to maintain with the newly, left-leaning Portugal. It would enrage the black African states. The U.S. Congress would have no choice but to view the

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<sup>29</sup> “Special Sensitive Memorandum Regarding Response to NSSM 224.” From Digital National Security Archives, Document 01308.

war effort as a violation of the War Powers Act. And perhaps the most upset group of all would be the American people, who were in no way willing to support American involvement in another Third World civil war. With all of those reasons as his ammunition, Davis' report had seemingly done an effective job of shooting down Kissinger's desire to move into Angola. Two days later, Kissinger shocked the State Department. Ignoring Davis' substantial reservations, Kissinger decided to forge ahead with what he called "a heroic phase in U.S. foreign policy." He went to the President and recommended that the United States should significantly increase support the FNLA and UNITA in their struggle against the MPLA. "We should try to win," he said.<sup>30</sup>

A remarkable aspect of the American involvement in the Angolan Civil War was the ease with which Kissinger convinced President Gerald Ford to endorse his policy recommendation. Ford had access to all of the same documents and opinions Kissinger did; Ford could have asked to sit in on any 40 Committee or State Department meeting. He easily could have asked if backing the FNLA or UNITA was truly a good idea. Instead, he chose to believe Kissinger when he argued that it was. This raises a very interesting question: Where was the President of the United States when the Secretary of State was clearly about to make a terrible mistake? Where was the elected official when the appointed statesman was about to do something most American citizens were opposed to? In *The Flawed Architect: Henry Kissinger and American Foreign Policy*, historian Jussi M. Hanhimaki provides a compelling answer to that question. He argues that Ford knew very little about Africa, and was therefore willing to just accept Kissinger's opinions when dealing with the continent. When Ford took office, Kissinger remained in charge of the State Department and the NSC. Foreign policy was still being controlled in the White House, exactly as Nixon and Kissinger had done so since 1969. But with Nixon out of the

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<sup>30</sup> "Memorandum of Conversation." From FRUS Southern Africa Database, Volume 28, Document 112.

picture, Kissinger was now able to run the show all on his own. Ford knew much less about foreign policy than Nixon or Kissinger, so he was more than willing to trust his predecessor's foreign policy architect when it came to making those types of decisions.<sup>31</sup> Therefore, because of an uninformed President and an intransigent statesman, the United States was about to embark on a disastrous war effort.

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<sup>31</sup> Hanhimaki, *The Flawed Architect: Henry Kissinger and American Foreign Policy*, 411.

### Chapter Three: Tip-Toeing Through the Tulips

Although Kissinger had succeeded in convincing President Ford that covert support for the FNLA and UNITA was a good idea, there was palpable concern amongst the officials in Washington who knew what was about to happen. Perhaps the most upset was Nathaniel Davis. After Kissinger had ignored his pleas to cut off American aid to Angola, Davis resigned in disgust. In his memoir he explains the decision, stating:

“When I received word that the President had decided to go ahead with the proposed covert action program, I submitted my resignation as Assistant Secretary. Mr. Kissinger generously tried to convince me not to resign. I remained firm in my expressed view that I was not the person suited to accomplish the President’s and the Secretary’s purposes in the African Bureau under the circumstances.”<sup>32</sup>

The circumstances that Davis was referring to were his unwillingness and his inability to sit back and watch as the United States blundered its way through the Angolan Civil War. He argued in the memoir, “If we were to have a test of strength with the Soviets, we should find a more advantageous place...it seems clear that it is unrealistic to think in terms of a program that could be both effective and covert.”<sup>33</sup> Davis makes a strong point, and clearly his assessment was correct, but his resignation had little effect on Kissinger.

Once Kissinger decided to override Davis and forge ahead with the Angola program, he had to go to the 40 Committee to work out the logistics of the American aid effort. During these early 40 Committee meetings, the apprehension in the room was thick enough to cut with a knife. Leading the group of dissenters at a June 27, 1975 meeting was CIA Director William Colby. Colby knew that whatever the exact details of the covert operation would be, his Contingency Reserve Fund would finance it, and his CIA operatives would orchestrate it. In mid-1975, the CIA was under heavy fire by Congress and the media. A number of political scandals implicating

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<sup>32</sup> Nathaniel Davis, “The Angola Decision of 1975: A Personal Memoir,” *Foreign Affairs* 57, no. 1 (Fall, 1978): 117.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 114, 116.

the CIA, such as the murder of Robert Trujillo, were coming to light.<sup>34</sup> Colby was worried that CIA involvement in Angola, if exposed, would only make the Agency look worse in the eyes of the American public. He said to Kissinger:

“While it would be useful to give assistance, it 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 the CIA’s own present exposure, to get away without a great deal of criticism. What I’m worried about is leakage and scandal in the present situation...I’m scared of the Congress on this.”<sup>35</sup>

Colby was basically echoing many of the same reservations that Davis had expressed, while adding the additional problem associated with carrying out the program through the already heavily scrutinized CIA. Colby was worried because he did not think a covert operation carried out by the CIA would remain secret for long.

In a July 14, 1975 40 Committee meeting, the Director of the Bureau of Intelligence and Research, William Hyland, informed Kissinger of yet another reason to stay away from Angola. “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 the arms.”<sup>36</sup> His comment represented a rather astute diplomatic position. The black African states resented foreign meddling in their affairs, so if the United States refrained from meddling while the Soviet Union continued to do so, the United States could have placed itself in a position to gain the diplomatic upper hand without escalating the war. But Kissinger was unwilling to accept this diplomatic solution. “I’m surprised at you, Bill,” he said. “They can get involved but we can’t?”<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Stockwell, *In Search of Enemies*, 236.

<sup>35</sup> “Minutes of a National Security Council Meeting.” Washington, June 27, 1975. From FRUS Southern Africa Database, Volume 28, Document 113.

<sup>36</sup> “Memorandum for the Record.” Washington, July 14, 1975. From FRUS Southern Africa Database, Volume 28, Document 115.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

William Hyland and William Colby were not the only dissenters in the room. In fact, not a single member of the 40 Committee present at the July 14 meeting actually supported a plan of action that sent American weapons into Angola.<sup>38</sup> Despite the lack of support, Kissinger remained steadfast in his determination to increase American support to his Angolan allies. His own words shed startling insight as to why this was so.

During the July 14 meeting, Kissinger articulated his desire to prevent the Soviets from gaining a foothold in Southern Africa at American expense. He stated, “If all the surrounding countries see Angola go Communist, they will assume that the U.S. has no will. Coming on top of Vietnam and Indochina, their perception of what the U.S. can and will do will be negative. If the USSR can do something in a place so far away, what is the U.S. going to do?”<sup>39</sup> Clearly he was worried about what the world would think of the United States if he were to let the Soviet Union meddle unhindered in Southern Africa.

In his memoir, Kissinger elaborates even further on what he was thinking during the July 40 Committee meetings. He was thinking, “If Angola goes Communist, it will have an effect in Angola, in Zaire, and in Zambia. These countries can only conclude that the U.S. is no longer a factor in Southern Africa. We will pay for it for decades. It will affect their orientation. They will conclude that the Soviets can put in massive aid and we cannot, it will mean the Soviets are the power factor they have to deal with.”<sup>40</sup> Based upon this articulation of his mindset, one can conclude that Kissinger wanted to prevent the Soviets from gaining a foothold in Southern Africa, and he wanted to stop them from looking more powerful than the United States.

Yet, still at the heart of Davis’ argument against the course of action Kissinger sought to pursue was the effect that this anti-Communist policy would have domestically. Both Davis and

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<sup>38</sup> “Memorandum for the Record.” FRUS Southern Africa Database, Volume 28, Document 115.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Kissinger, *Years of Renewal*, 807.



CIA Director William Colby were worried about what would happen if the details of a covert operation aimed to stop the Soviets were exposed to the U.S. Congress or to the American public. The American people were tired of Cold War proxy wars after Vietnam. They were tired of secrecy after Watergate and the Church Committee. However, Kissinger's memoir and transcripts from the 40 Committee meetings reveal that apparently neither Kissinger nor President Ford was concerned about Congress or the public finding out. Kissinger writes:

"Ford and I had few doubts what was in store for us domestically... [But] we simply could not bring ourselves to abdicate in the face of so brazen a challenge, and we hoped that, if we assumed the initial responsibility, Congress would see it the same way in the end... Ford and I held the view that a country as strong and vital as the United States and on which so much depends has no right to abdicate what its leaders recognize as a vital national interest to domestic politics. If the leaders fight for what is necessary, even if they fail, they will have kept their bargain with our people."<sup>41</sup>

Kissinger's argument is fascinating in that it does not quite make sense, considering the policy he eventually endorsed. The U.S. involvement in the Angolan Civil War was a covert arms program. Kissinger lied to Congress throughout the program's existence. When the public did find out about the program after a series of articles about it were published in the New York Times, Kissinger was livid, to put it lightly. All that being true, how could Kissinger honestly claim that he had hoped Congress would see the Angola program "the same way" as he did, if he lied to them about its details? Furthermore, how could he legitimately feel that he had "kept his bargain" with the American people, if he was irate when they found out about what was happening? His story does not check out, and this is because Kissinger had two other reasons for moving into Angola.

Kissinger saw Angola as an opportunity. It provided him with a chance to score a quick victory at Soviet expense; it provided him with a chance to regain some of the prestige the United States had lost during 1974. In his article entitled *International Credibility and Political*

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<sup>41</sup> Kissinger, *Years of Renewal*, 810-11.

*Survival: The Ford Administration's Intervention in Angola*, historian Thomas Noer argues that Ford and Kissinger made the decision to involve the United States in Angola precisely because of the prestige issue. Ford was an unelected president, who had pardoned Nixon and watched as Vietnam crumbled. His expertise in foreign policy was questionable. Kissinger had been the architect of U.S. foreign policy since the start of the decade, but he was rapidly losing his grip on the wheel. Noer writes, "To ensure Ford's political survival and preserve Kissinger's international order, the President and his advisor needed a rapid revitalization of American foreign policy...In search of domestic success, international prestige, and the reassertion of American power, they focused on a civil war in an obscure former Portuguese colony in central Africa: Angola."<sup>42</sup> Noer's position is supported by President Ford's own words. "I think we can defend it to the public. I won't let someone in Foggy Bottom deter me," he said to Kissinger.<sup>43</sup> Ford knew that he needed a victory after he had lost in Indochina. He knew Kissinger had accomplished nothing during his latest visit to the Middle East. If he could pull out a win in Africa, he stood a much better chance of getting reelected in 1976, and he was not going to let the reservations of the State Department officials in Foggy Bottom get in his way.

Yet, the desire to score a political victory to regain American prestige was not the only reason Kissinger and Ford had for supporting a covert incursion into Angola. They wanted to challenge the War Powers Resolution. Kissinger's statements during the 40 Committee meetings support this notion, as do the writings of former National Security Council member Roger Morris. In his account of the American involvement during the war, Morris writes, "At stake [in Angola] was what Kissinger the scholar had called the 'acid test' of foreign policy...Kissinger

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<sup>42</sup> Thomas J. Noer, "International Credibility and Political Survival: The Ford Administration's Intervention in Angola," *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 23, no. 4 (Fall, 1993): 772.

<sup>43</sup> "Memorandum of Conversation." Washington, July 18, 1975. From FRUS Southern Africa Database, Volume 28, Document 118.

saw this as the place to find out if you could still have covert operations.”<sup>44</sup> The War Powers Resolution had made it illegal for the President to authorize a covert war without Congressional approval. That resolution had the ability to drastically alter the way the Executive Branch had carried foreign policy in Africa since the inception of the CIA. To cite just one example, during the 1960s the United States was able to use the CIA to covertly assassinate Patrice Lumumba of Zaire and install Mobutu Sese Seko as head of state in his place.<sup>45</sup> With the War Powers Act, that degree of autonomy was justifiably restrained, but according to Morris, Kissinger wanted to test the waters and see what he could still do.

Kissinger writes in his memoir that he knew Congress would not agree with his position on Angola. However, during the 40 Committee meetings, Kissinger makes it readily apparent that he was willing to take on the Legislative Branch. He states:

“What I’m asking is why the U.S. should be so afraid of what we tell Congress...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>46</sup>...I would recommend to take on the Congress in the national interest<sup>47</sup>...We would have had Angola settled by January had these bastards not been in town.”<sup>48</sup>

Aside from the startling fact that Kissinger refers to the U.S. Congress as a bunch of bastards, his words clearly demonstrate the presence of an antagonistic relationship between the Executive and Legislative Branches in the wake of War Powers Resolution’s passage. Kissinger truly believed that it was in the nation’s best interest to combat the Soviet presence in Angola, but because of the elected Congress’ need to respond to the will of the people, they would never

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<sup>44</sup> Morris, “The Proxy War in Angola,” 20-21.

<sup>45</sup> Stockwell, *In Search of Enemies*, 237

<sup>46</sup> “Memorandum for the Record.” Washington, August 08, 1975. From FRUS Southern Africa Database, Volume 28, Document 123.

<sup>47</sup> “Memorandum for the Record.” Washington, September 13, 1975. From FRUS Southern Africa Database, Volume 28, Document 127.

<sup>48</sup> “Memorandum of Conversation.” Washington, December 18, 1975. From FRUS Southern Africa Database, Volume 28, Document 153.

support such a venture if the people did not want it. Kissinger therefore saw Congress as an obstacle. But Kissinger argued that he would not give in to Congress.<sup>49</sup> He would challenge them not only to combat the Soviets, but also to combat their newfound influence on his ability to orchestrate a foreign policy. “We look like pitiful characters,” Kissinger said to William Colby. “If this was 1960, [we’d] win it. Because we have to tip-toe through the tulips with the Congress, that stops us. But at this point we must do all we can.”<sup>50</sup> In order to get what he wanted out of Angola, Kissinger most certainly did every single thing he could think of. His actions would destroy Angola.

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<sup>49</sup> “Memorandum for the Record.” FRUS Southern Africa Database, Volume 28, Document 123.

<sup>50</sup> “Memorandum for the Record.” FRUS Southern Africa Database, Volume 28, Document 127.

## **Chapter Four: The Features of IAFEATURE**

On July 18, 1975, President Gerald Ford approved a covert program codenamed IAFEATURE. Even though every single member of the 40 Committee not named Henry Kissinger was opposed to its existence, Kissinger had taken advantage of Ford's ignorance with regards to African issues and convinced the President that the program was in fact a good idea. The plan's initial phase was simple. Mobutu Sese Seko of Zaire had sent his first emissaries to Washington on behalf of the FNLA almost a year before. He was desperate to secure U.S. support for Holden Roberto, so the 40 Committee felt that they could advance U.S. aims through Zaire's eagerness to influence the outcome of the war. The biggest challenge facing the U.S. was keeping the war a secret. Millions of dollars worth of U.S. arms would be hard to hide in Angola, but the United States already had a very public partnership with Zaire. So what the U.S. decided to do was ask Zaire to send its own military supplies into Angola, and then the U.S. would replace Zaire's weapons with American made arms. Everybody would come out a winner.<sup>51</sup> The arms shipments were also to be accompanied by CIA military advisors, and in the event that the Zairian arsenal proved unable to meet the demands of the Angolans, Kissinger had no qualms about making arms shipments directly into Angola.<sup>52</sup>

The initial budget of IAFEATURE was fourteen million dollars, and President Ford approved that number. The U.S. Congress did not. Select members of Congress were however briefed about IAFEATURE, but Kissinger did not brief Congress because he sought their approval. He only briefed them because he knew that if Congress had been left completely in the dark, they would surely call for his resignation if the program were to be exposed. He had to tell the members of the Subcommittee on African Affairs something, so he lied. In his memoir on the

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<sup>51</sup> Stockwell, *In Search of Enemies*, 37.

<sup>52</sup> "Memorandum for the Record." FRUS Southern Africa Database, Volume 28, Document 127.

Angolan Civil War, John Stockwell explains that the “Big Lie” told to Congress by the 40 Committee was that “the purpose of IAFEATURE activity was to provide assistance to the FNLA and UNITA, to enable them to repulse attacks by the MPLA, thereby creating a sufficiently stable situation to allow for political settlement.”<sup>53</sup> Therefore, the 40 Committee was telling Congress that the American weapons were for defensive purposes only, the United States was only arming UNITA and the FNLA to help them fight off the MPLA’s advances, and that the U.S. was only working to establish a coalition by November. Kissinger and the 40 Committee never once told Congress that the January 1975 campaign donation to the FNLA had gotten the U.S. in the position they were in, and he never told Congress that CIA military advisors would be accompanying the arms shipments. Kissinger never told Congress that he wanted the FNLA and UNITA to use U.S. weapons to go on the offensive; he never told Congress that he wanted his Angolan allies to defeat the Soviet client; he never told Congress he wanted to please Kenneth Kaunda and install Jonas Savimbi as the Angolan head of state; he never told Congress that he wanted to appease Mobuto Sese Seko of Zaire by helping Holden Roberto of the FNLA. In short, Kissinger only told Congress what he thought they would be okay with.

Had Kissinger asked Congress to fund IAFEATURE, they could have used the power granted to them under the War Powers Resolution to say no. But like the January 1975 aid increase, the funding for IAFEATURE came from the Contingency Reserve Fund. Congress had no control over that money, and since Kissinger’s briefing did not make it seem as if the U.S. was waging a war, Congress allowed the first planeload of arms leave for Kinshasa on July 29, 1975 without making much noise.

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<sup>53</sup> Stockwell, *In Search of Enemies*, 207.

According to Stockwell, the man who was in charge of IAFEATURE, Kissinger made the most of his fourteen million dollars in early August. CIA operatives were sent to brief Mobutu Sese Seko, Kenneth Kaunda, Holden Roberto, and Jonas Savimbi. Once their allegiances to the plan were secured, weapons began to pour into Zaire. Millions of rounds of ammunition, tens of thousands of rifles, rockets, mortars, trucks, trailers, and amphibious vehicles left over from World War II found their way from warehouses in South Carolina to the central African jungle. Accompanying those weapons were CIA paramilitary advisors, who showed Kissinger's allies how to use them.<sup>54</sup>

As the American involvement in the war was increasing, William Colby continued to brief Congress on behalf of Kissinger. 40 Committee meeting transcripts reveal that he was far from forthcoming. One exchange between Colby, Kissinger, and Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs Joseph Sisco reads as follows:

Colby: "In my briefings on the Hill I have said that we are on the way toward a coalition."

Kissinger: "That's not going to happen. Our objective is to keep the Communists out...Our objective is to stop Communism. We'll later let political events take care of themselves...The Africans aren't going to get together in a coalition. There will be no coalition. That's a pipe dream. Show me one country in Africa where that has happened."

Sisco: "What can we do to prevent spreading these things all around the Senate Foreign Relations Committee?"

Kissinger: "We can't have that. Unacceptable."<sup>55</sup>

This exchange clearly shows that the "Big Lie" Stockwell speaks about in his memoir was in fact being told to Congress by those all the way at the top. Kissinger had Colby tell Congress that the U.S. was in Angola to work toward establishing a Coalition government, but Kissinger knew that would never happen. He was there to fight the Soviets and to score political points. He was

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<sup>54</sup> Stockwell, *In Search of Enemies*, 86-87.

<sup>55</sup> "Memorandum for the Record." FRUS Southern Africa Database, Volume 28, Document 123.

willing to worry about any political fallout later, and in his mind, it was unacceptable for Congress to find out about his true intentions.

Unfortunately for Kissinger, Senator Dick Clark of Iowa became skeptical during Colby's briefings. Clark was the Chairman of the Subcommittee on African Affairs of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. When Colby told Clark's subcommittee that American arms were not going directly into Angola, that American personnel were not accompanying those arms shipments, and that the purpose of the weapons were only meant to allow the FNLA to repulse MPLA attacks, Clark started to think otherwise. On August 04, 1975, he left Washington and headed to Angola. The Senator was going on a fact-finding mission.

Senator Clark was not the only person who became alarmed when American weapons started to pour into Angola. When MPLA troops met heavily armed FNLA and UNITA battalions in early August, they naturally told the Russians that they were outgunned. As Davis and Colby had warned Kissinger, the Russians decided to make a countermove. Their move was the introduction of the 122mm rocket to the Angolan Civil War. That weapon would change the course of the war. With a range far greater than anything the U.S. had sent to its allies, the MPLA was able to use the Soviet rocket to bombard its enemies from safe distances. That tactical advantage allowed the MPLA to easily win skirmishes without suffering many casualties. Even with fourteen million dollars worth of advisors and supplies already in the country, Kissinger knew he had to expand IAFEATURE to counter the Russian countermove.<sup>56</sup>

Kissinger went back to the 40 Committee to come up with a plan of action, and he knew he was in a precarious position. Zero part of him wanted to lose to the Russians, but at the same time, he recognized he was not in a position to orchestrate a decisive victory strike. Had he done that, Congress would immediately know that they had been lied to. They would know that the

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<sup>56</sup> Stockwell, *In Search of Enemies*, 162.



purpose of IAFEATURE was not to establish a coalition. According to Colby's briefings, the weapons were only meant for defensive purposes, so that the coalition could be established. If the MPLA were suddenly wiped out, Congress would know why. So if Kissinger could neither win nor lose the war, he had to do the next best thing: use the election date to his advantage. President Ford increased IAFEATURE's total budget to 24.7 million dollars, and Kissinger used that money to win back small amounts of territory from the Russians and the MPLA, so that by the time of the elections, the FNLA and UNITA would control more of the country, and therefore more of the electorate.

This phase of the war had many more facets than the first. A crucial component of it was a propaganda campaign. Meant to embarrass the Russians, the U.S. began a rather hypocritical policy of announcing to the world that the Soviet Union was destabilizing Angola through its support of the MPLA. The propaganda was meant to reach not just the people of Angola, but the U.S. also condemned the Soviets at the UN and to the Organization of African Unity.<sup>57</sup> Conveniently left out of the American campaign was the fact that the United States was doing the exact same thing.

Aside from the propaganda, Kissinger wanted to increase the number of troops he had on his side. He knew he could not send in American soldiers, but nothing was stopping him from hiring mercenaries. As long as the mercenaries were not American born, the 40 Committee had no problem with them being on the payroll. In his memoir, Stockwell describes how several million dollars were spent to hire only several hundred men.<sup>58</sup> These mercenaries had little impact on the ability of the FNLA or UNITA to combat the MPLA, and Stockwell also describes how a number of atrocities were committed at the hands of the American-hired soldiers. One

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<sup>57</sup> Stockwell, *In Search of Enemies*, 80-82.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 182-83.

such story involves British mercenary George Cullen, who, according to Stockwell, “lined fourteen [of his own African soldiers] beside the road, and gunned the whole lot down. Stripping their bodies, he left them in the sun as an example to others and disappeared into the bush.”<sup>59</sup>

The American taxpayers financed his salary.

The hiring of foreign mercenaries was not the only contact the United States had with other nations with regards to Angola. Aside from the Soviet Union and the United States, other powerful countries took great interest in the outcome of the war. The two that the United States decided to court most aggressively were the People’s Republic of China and the Republic of South Africa. Unlike the United States, South Africa thought in regional terms. It was the most powerful nation in Southern Africa, and its leaders shuddered when the Portuguese pulled out of the region. Portuguese Angola was non-communist, and it was white. South Africa did not want a black, communist state existing close to its borders. Therefore, the South Africans decided to back Jonas Savimbi, the faction leader they viewed as the farthest to the right ideologically. The South Africans decided to support their candidate through actual military support, and they covertly sent thousands of troops north, through Namibia and into Southern Angola. The United States knew that the South Africans were aiding Savimbi in the south, and since South Africa was essentially furthering U.S. aims, the U.S. helped the ostracized nation achieve their mutual goal.<sup>60</sup> The CIA maintained close ties with the South African Bureau of State Security (BOSS) throughout the war. Stockwell writes, “Coordination was effected at all CIA levels and the South Africans escalated their involvement in step with our own...On two occasions the BOSS director visited Washington and held secret meetings with Jim Potts (Stockwell’s superior)...Nearly all

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<sup>59</sup> Stockwell, *In Search of Enemies*, 225

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 185-86.

CIA intelligence reports on the subject were relayed to Pretoria.”<sup>61</sup> Through this exchange of intelligence, the United States helped the South Africans move closer to the MPLA in Luanda.

The Chinese proved to be a much less willing ally than the South Africans. China’s first link with an Angolan movement was established with UNITA in 1964. Savimbi was looking for money, and Peking was looking to turn Africa into a “region of competition not only against the West, but also against what Peking took to be the sacrifice of revolutionary principles by the Soviet Union for the sake of advancing its state interests.”<sup>62</sup> The bond with UNITA did not last for very long, and by the time the civil war had broken out, the Chinese had shifted their support to the FNLA (the shift was due to the fact that China wished to get closer to Zaire, and Zaire was the FNLA’s champion in the international arena). Kissinger saw the Chinese/FNLA alliance as an opportunity. He and President Ford desperately wanted the Chinese to do the same as the South Africans and increase their involvement in the war in step with the United States. In a meeting between Ford, Kissinger, and Chairman Mao, Ford asked the Chairman to help him challenge the Russians in Angola, but Mao was unwilling to plunge the Chinese in too deep.<sup>63</sup>

Despite the Chairman’s unwillingness to help, the war was going well for the United States and its allies in September. Arms continued to make the journey from South Carolina to Kinshasa to Angola, and those arms were making a difference. To capitalize on the momentum, some arms bypassed Kinshasa all together and were sent directly from the United States into Angola. The South African army was helping UNITA rout the MPLA in the south. The FNLA, backed by Zairian paramilitary commandos, was making ground against the MPLA in the north. In June, the MPLA was firmly in control of twelve of Angola’s fifteen provinces. By mid-

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<sup>61</sup> Stockwell, *In Search of Enemies*, 187-88.

<sup>62</sup> Guimaraes, *The Origins of the Angolan Civil War*, 155.

<sup>63</sup> “Memorandum of Conversation.” Washington, December 02, 1975. From Digital National Security Archive, Document 0395.

September, they held three. IAFEATURE was working.<sup>64</sup> But as soon as the Kissinger and the 40 Committee started to revel in the successes of their machinations, one of Davis' warnings came back to haunt them. Davis had predicted that it would be too hard to wage both an effective and a covert operation. The operation was at the peak of its effectiveness, and cracks were forming in its cover.

The leak started on September 10, 1975. The FNLA had retreated from the city of Caxito, leaving behind crates of ammunition. The crates had U.S. Air Force shipping labels glued to their sides. The MPLA seized the crates and showed them to the world. It was now clear to the public that the U.S. was involved in Angola, but the extent of American involvement was still to be determined. However, on the morning of September 25, an article appeared in the New York Times, and it described IAFEATURE in rather accurate detail. Journalist Leslie Gelb somehow knew that the CIA had been funneling money into Angola for months, and he knew that William Colby had briefed Congress. Gelb argued that Kissinger rushed into Angola to support Zaire, and to maintain access to the nation's oil fields.<sup>65</sup> That was not exactly a correct assessment of what was going on—Kissinger really was not concerned about oil; his ties to Kaunda were not exposed; no mention of the War Powers Resolution was made. But regardless of the accuracy of Gelb's reporting, the U.S. position was becoming exposed, and the U.S. propaganda campaign was now beginning to make the nation look foolish. It was hard for the U.S. to keep condemning the Russians for doing the same thing it was.

Although the United States had to effectively abandon the propaganda war when its position became exposed, it was still winning the civil war in late September. That all changed in October. It changed because the Cubans arrived, and they arrived in startling numbers. By the

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<sup>64</sup> Stockwell, *In Search of Enemies*, 165.

<sup>65</sup> Leslie H. Gelb, "U.S., Soviet, China Reported Aiding Portugal, Angola," *The New York Times*, September 25, 1975.

time the war ended, there were at least 10,000 Cuban soldiers fighting for the MPLA.<sup>66</sup> The FNLA did not even have that many troops.<sup>67</sup> The effects of Cuba's involvement were immediately felt. They used the 122mm rocket to regain ground on the FNLA in the north, and they halted the South African advance in the south.<sup>68</sup> Kissinger had to come up with a solution, and he had to do it fast. November 11 was only a month away.

The obvious answer was to throw more money, arms and mercenaries into Angola. But there was a problem with that plan. Before IAFEATURE had even been conceived, there was a little less than 32 million dollars in the Contingency Reserve Fund. By October, Kissinger had already spent close to 25 million. To counter the arrival of the Cubans, President Ford agreed to use the remaining 7 million, but that was the end of the money. If Kissinger wanted anymore, he would have to get it from Congress, and with the War Powers Resolution on their side, they had the power to say no. Before he asked Congress for a dime, Kissinger directed the CIA to make the rest of the money last. But he knew he would need a lot more.

The CIA had to get creative to comply with Kissinger's request. Stockwell describes a method employed by the CIA to move more weapons onto the Angolan front once the money dried up as follows:

“Word went out to the Portuguese still in Luanda that the beneficent Americans would pay \$30,000 to any pilot who managed to skyjack a planeload of MPLA arms and bring it to Kinshasa. Eventually, the CIA's little air force controlled nine stolen aircraft, including one Aztec, one Cessna 172, one Cessna 180, a Rockwell Turbocommander, one Mooney, two Fokker F-27s, and one Allouette III helicopter. Another F-27 was leased from Mobutu's commercial air wing.”<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Guimaraes, *The Origins of the Angolan Civil War*, 136.

<sup>67</sup> Stockwell, *In Search of Enemies*, 125.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 213-16

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 209

Stockwell also describes how the CIA stole aircraft out of hangars belonging to private corporations operating in Angola, such as the diamond magnate De Beers. Yet, despite the ingenuity of the CIA, nine stolen aircraft and their cargoes did not turn the tide against the Cubans.

Kissinger wanted to use what was left of the money to try and decisively win the war. He knew a decisive defeat of the MPLA could alert the Congress to his duplicity, but losing to the Russians was a worse fate. Kissinger saw that fate becoming a reality, so he had the 40 Committee put together an options paper before victory fell too far from his grasp. He was given three choices: broker a diplomatic solution, actively support the South Africans, or substantially increase the arms shipments. All of those options came with their own problems. The MPLA and its allies were now winning—they probably would not want to settle. An open alliance with South Africa would do more harm to American prestige than simply losing the war. Substantially increasing the arms shipments would cost money the U.S. did not have. A fourth option of reaching out to other African heads of state to support the American-backed factions was put on the table, but the 40 Committee agreed that the only leader not already involved and potentially willing to help was Idi Amin of Uganda. The Committee was so desperate for an ally they contacted him.<sup>70</sup> Uganda never provided much assistance.

Even though the diplomatic approach seemed like a long shot at best, Kissinger recognized the need to cut his losses and went for it. Both he and President Ford reached out to the Soviet Union, claiming that their escalation of the Angolan Civil War was destabilizing the nation and not in the spirit of détente between the two superpowers. Kissinger suggested that the United States and the Soviet Union should work together through the OAU to work out a

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<sup>70</sup> "Memorandum for the Record." Washington, November 21, 1975. From FRUS Southern Africa Database, Volume 28, Document 139.

settlement.<sup>71</sup> As expected, the Soviets did not go for it. In their eyes, the United States had destabilized Angola first. Why would they settle now that they were winning?

Without a settlement, the war raged on as the election date approached. On November 11, the FNLA, backed by the Zairian commandos, stormed the capital. They were desperate to take control of the city on election day. But the Cuban forces easily overmatched them, driving the FNLA back to the Northwestern coast. From that day on, the FNLA became a non-factor as a fighting force. They had been routed.<sup>72</sup> Back in the capital, the MPLA celebrated their independence, declaring their land the People's Republic of Angola.

Angola was independent, the FNLA had lost, but the war was not over. UNITA and South Africa fought on in the south. Kissinger saw UNITA as his last opportunity to win in Angola. He focused his efforts there. He reached out to the French and convinced them to send helicopters, fighter jets, and missiles into Angola.<sup>73</sup> He went back to the 40 Committee and told them the U.S. had to win the war, and they had to do it before it was too late. Losing to the Russians was not an option he was willing to consider, and Kissinger was done “tip-toeing though the tulips” with Congress. He asked them for 28 million dollars to fund a third phase of IAFEATURE that was designed to win the Angolan Civil War once and for all.<sup>74</sup>

Once Kissinger made an official request to Congress for funding, Senator Dick Clark was able to shutdown the war effort. He had come back from his August fact-finding mission convinced that the CIA briefings were dishonest. He suspected collaboration between the United States and South Africa, and he knew that Americans were in the country.<sup>75</sup> The problem for the senator was that he could not do anything about what he knew until Kissinger made his funding

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<sup>71</sup> Kissinger, *Years of Renewal*, 818-19.

<sup>72</sup> Stockwell, *In Search of Enemies*, 214-15.

<sup>73</sup> Kissinger, *Years of Renewal*, 824.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 826.

<sup>75</sup> Stockwell, *In Search of Enemies*, 231.

request. That was because before the CIA had briefed any of the senators on the Foreign Relations Committee about IAFEEATURE, they all took an oath of secrecy. Clark could therefore not say anything about the program without facing serious prosecution. But now that Kissinger had asked Congress to fund the war effort, Clark knew he could have a voice.

Clark's method of exposing the State Department's duplicity was ingenious. On December 05, 1975, Clark recommended that the Foreign Relations Committee deny Kissinger's request. Before the remaining senators went along with Clark, they wanted to hear testimony from members of the 40 Committee. The first man to testify was Bill Nelson, the CIA Deputy Director of Operations. Clark got Nelson to admit that the United States was sending weapons directly into Angola, even though Colby had briefed Congress otherwise. Clark's next witness was Ed Mulcahy, the Deputy Assistant of State for African Affairs (he had worked directly underneath Davis). Clark asked Mulcahy point-blank if the United States was sending arms directly into Angola, and Mulcahy denied it. Clark then confronted him with Nelson's testimony, and Mulcahy had to admit that he, along with the 40 Committee, had lied to the Senate. By exposing the duplicity, Clark had won the support of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.<sup>76</sup>

Once the 40 Committee's lies had been exposed on the Senate floor, the press picked up the story. A series of articles ran in the New York Times over the course of the next two weeks, generating ire amongst the American public. A December 12 article by David Binder reported that the CIA had sent 50 million dollars worth of arms into Angola, while collaborating with South Africa.<sup>77</sup> A December 19 article written by Seymour Hersh exposed the fact the CIA had sent money into Angola in January, well before the first significant Soviet build-up in March.<sup>78</sup> With this information coming to light, it was incredibly difficult for anyone in the State

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<sup>76</sup> Stockwell, *In Search of Enemies*, 229-230.

<sup>77</sup> David Binder, "Angola Reported Getting \$50 Million in U.S. Arms," *New York Times*, December 12, 1975.

<sup>78</sup> Seymour Hersh, "Early Angola Aid by U.S. Reported," *New York Times*, December 19, 1975.



Department or CIA to defend the American position. When asked for comment, both Kissinger and Colby said that the war effort was “covert” and they could not provide details.<sup>79</sup>

Given how exposed the U.S. position had become, the Senate voted 54 to 22 to pass the Tunney Amendment to the 1976 Defense Appropriations Bill on December 19, 1975. The Amendment strictly forbade the United States from sending any more money into Angola, through the Contingency Reserve Fund, or through any other means. The House voted in favor of the amendment 323 to 99. President Ford had no choice but to sign Tunney into law.<sup>80</sup> Kissinger had lost his gamble with the Senate; no more money would be available to fight the MPLA. IAFEATURE was over.

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<sup>79</sup> Stockwell, *In Search of Enemies*, 229.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 231.

## **Chapter Five: Analyzing the Wreckage**

Once the South Africans learned that the Americans were pulling out of Angola, they retreated across the border into Namibia in disgust. The Cubans had not broken their lines, but South Africa knew it was already an international pariah. If it remained the last foreign power fighting against the MPLA, its reputation would fall even further. South Africa could not afford to face any more sanctions from the U.N., so it left UNITA to stand on its own, at least for the time being.

Stateside, many of the key figures responsible for IAFEATURE found themselves out of work. On Kissinger's recommendation, President Ford had gambled that Angola would prove to be the foreign policy victory he so badly needed after Vietnam. It clearly did not work out that way. In fact, he looked like an even weaker president. He had to do something to save face, so he started by firing William Colby. The CIA was under heavy fire throughout the mid-1970s, and Angola made the Agency look so much worse. Someone had to answer for that, and that person was William Colby.

Ford was not done after he removed Colby from his post. He then turned his sights on the Secretary. Kissinger's dual role as Secretary of State and NSC Chair had provided him with an unprecedented amount of influence with regards to constructing a foreign policy. His dual role allowed him to override the reservations of the State Department and the National Security Council, and it allowed him to lead the President straight into the political quagmire in which he found himself. As a result, President Ford felt a need to take away some of Kissinger's authority. Ford asked him to step down as National Security Adviser, although he let him remain Secretary of State. Never again in U.S. history has someone held both positions simultaneously. Seemingly, a lesson was learned after IAFEATURE.

John Stockwell also found himself unemployed after IAFEATURE had come to an end, but he resigned on his own accord. He explains why in his memoirs:

“I and many other officers in the CIA and State Department thought the intervention irresponsible and ill-conceived, both in terms of the advancement of United States interests, and the moral question of contributing substantially to the escalation of an already bloody civil war...This is not Monday-morning quarterbacking. Various people foresaw all this and also predicted that the covert intervention would ultimately be exposed and curtailed by the United States Senate.”<sup>81</sup>

Like Nathaniel Davis, John Stockwell became disillusioned by public service after the American involvement with the Angolan Civil War was over.

Disillusionment with the United States was not limited to just American governmental officials. In fact, the people most upset with the United States in early 1976 were African heads of state. As Davis had warned in his policy memorandum, the majority ruled nations across the continent would become incensed if the details of IAFEATURE were exposed. When those details did come to light, Davis was proven right. General Murtala Mohammed of Nigeria was perhaps the most upset with the United States. At the time, Nigeria was quickly becoming one of the world's largest petroleum exporters, and was therefore trying to become a leader in African politics as well. During 1975, Nigeria attempted to broker a peace settlement between the three Angolan factions. When it became known that the United States was secretly pushing the FNLA and UNITA towards war, General Mohammad believed that the U.S. was deliberately sabotaging the peace process. He believed the United States had asked the South Africans to invade, and therefore left the Cubans with no choice but to intervene.<sup>82</sup>

As a result, General Mohammed pledged 120 million dollars to the MPLA in late November, and convinced 22 other African heads of state to recognize the MPLA as the sole government of Angola at a January OAU summit. No state recognized UNITA or the FNLA.

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<sup>81</sup> Stockwell, *In Search of Enemies*, 272.

<sup>82</sup> Noer, “International Credibility and Political Survival,” 777

When President Ford asked the General to back down from his hard line stance, he replied that the gesture was “an attempt to insult the intelligence of African nations.”<sup>83</sup> In fact, the only black African head of state willing to support the United States after the OAU Summit was Idi Amin of Uganda.

IAFEATURE was a monumental failure. That much is clear. Kissinger launched the program to challenge the Russians, restore American prestige, and regain the foreign policy control he had lost to the U.S. Congress. In the end, the Russians had won, the United States looked much worse in January 1976 than it did in January 1975, and it was the Congress who put the breaks on IAFEATURE. But rather than simply concluding that IAFEATURE failed because it should not have been approved in the first place, it is worth asking: Where and why did this operation go so wrong? Was the United States truly incapable of winning a proxy war against the Soviet Union in 1975? Or was the way in which this war was undertaken torpedo its chances for success from the start? The answer to both of those questions is yes.

According to Stockwell, IAFEATURE was doomed from the start. In his memoir, he explains the failure of the mission as follows:

“We had two viable options in Angola. We could give the FNLA or UNITA enough support to win—by going in quickly with tactical air support and advisors we could take Luanda and put the MPLA out of business before the Soviet could react. Otherwise, if we weren’t willing to do that, we would further U.S. interests by staying out of the conflict. The middle ground, feeling our way along with small amounts of aid, would only escalate and get the U.S. far out on a fragile limb. It would help neither the Angolan people or us. To the contrary, it would jeopardize the United States’ position in Southern Africa.”<sup>84</sup>

Stockwell’s basic criticism of IAFEATURE was that the program was compromised by its own design. Because it had to be covert, its effectiveness was limited. Any show of air support, any high tech weapons delivery, any commitment of U.S. ground forces, would have eliminated the

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<sup>83</sup>Noer, “International Credibility and Political Survival,” 777.

<sup>84</sup> Stockwell, *In Search of Enemies*, 158.

MPLA in January 1975. But Kissinger knew he could not do that without facing extreme backlash from Congress.<sup>85</sup> They would have known he was lying about IAFEATURE's goals, and they would have taken action against him. On the other hand, he was unwilling to let the Russians extend their influence into Angola unchallenged, so he adopted a middle-of-the-road approach through IAFEATURE. He would give money and arms to his allies, hoping that the support would allow them to defeat the MPLA. But as Stockwell points out, and as all of Kissinger's advisors made him aware in 1975, the Russians had way more latitude than the United States. They had the capacity to contribute way more than U.S. ever could, and they did. The middle ground approach was bound to fail, and it did fail.

At the same time, the logistical organization of IAFEATURE was flawed. Before Kissinger had authorized that U.S. arms could be sent directly into Angola, they were shipped to Zaire first. Often times, it took the Zairians too long to get the weapons to the battlefronts. On many occasions, by the time the weapons were delivered, the FNLA troops they were intended for had already been routed by the MPLA. On other occasions, the African soldiers did not know how to operate the weapons they were given. The Zairians proved to be ineffective at showing the Angolans how to use the weapons, and the CIA advisors were spread too thin to reach all the Angolan troops.

Another problem associated with IAFEATURE's design was that the whole operation relied upon bad intelligence. Stockwell writes, "We were mounting a major covert action to support two Angolan liberation movements about which we had little reliable intelligence."<sup>86</sup> In fact, Kissinger made the decision to support both the FNLA and UNITA without knowing anything about their fighting capacity. The only criterion for receiving American support during

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<sup>85</sup> Stockwell, *In Search of Enemies*, 134

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 90.

the Angolan Civil War depended on whether the faction was aligned with the Soviets. By the time the war ended, it became clear that the FNLA was by far the weakest faction, yet they received the majority of the weapons sent to Angola during IAFEATURE. Had those weapons been sent to UNITA, the stronger U.S. ally, the war could have ended quite differently.

One of IAFEATURE's most damaging consequences was its effect on American relations toward black African states. Kissinger was so concerned with challenging the Soviets, and he was so worried about appeasing Kaunda and Mobutu, he lost sight of the fact that other African leaders would view the United States' role in Angola with disgust. Shirley Temple Black, the U.S. ambassador to Ghana in 1975, writes, "No one seemed to be coordinating America's overall policy in African affairs, no one was considering what the Angola program might do to our relations with Ghana, or other countries like Nigeria and Tanzania."<sup>87</sup> Kissinger only thought about the global and the domestic ramifications of his actions. He thought about Angola in terms of Cold War strategy, and he thought in terms of U.S. politics. He never stopped to think about what his actions might do to Angolans, and that is precisely what damaged U.S. relations with the rest of Africa. Julius Nyerere, Tanzania's president in 1975, wrote this about the U.S. role in Angola: "America has continued to look at African affairs largely through anti-communist spectacles and to disregard Africa's different concerns and priorities."<sup>88</sup>

Kissinger's own words and actions toward the rest of Africa during IAFEATURE's existence lend a great deal of credence to Nyerere's claim that the U.S. was indifferent to Africa's priorities. In his memoir, Kissinger writes, "The issue, in short, was not the intrinsic importance of Angola but the implications for Soviet foreign policy and long-term East-West

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<sup>87</sup> Shirley Temple Black qtd. by Stockwell, 174.

<sup>88</sup> Julius K. Nyerere, "America and Southern Africa," *Foreign Affairs* 55, no. 04 (July, 1977): 671.

relations.”<sup>89</sup> Kissinger admits, Angola itself did not matter to him; he used it to advance other interests. And when it came to dealing with the OAU about Angola, Kissinger brazenly lied to advance his global interests. He wrote this letter to the OAU on November 21, 1975:

“For our part, the United States is pursuing no unilateral interests in Angola. As I have stated publicly, the United States has no other interests there but the territorial integrity and independence of Angola. We believe that the people of Angola have a right to a government of their own choosing and to live in peaceful independence and well-being.”<sup>90</sup>

It seems odd that Kissinger reproduces that letter in his own memoir, because almost every word of it is false. If Kissinger was solely concerned with the territorial integrity of Angola, then why orchestrate a covert incursion? If he was so steadfast in his belief that that the people of Angola have a right to a government of their own choosing, then why deliberately destabilize the Alvor Accord? If he cared about the well being of Angola, why ignite a civil war that would rage for twenty-eight years? The fact is that during the Angolan Civil War, Kissinger’s dealings with his own colleagues, and with the rest of the world, were dishonest. Angola became an unfortunate pawn in a global war. It almost seems fitting that U.S. prestige was shattered across Africa as a result.

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<sup>89</sup> Kissinger, *Years of Renewal*, 810.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 821.

## Chapter Six: A Change in Rhetoric

The Angolan Civil War was devastating. It lasted from 1975 to 2002. Half a million people lost their lives. The country's landscape and infrastructure were destroyed. It is still trying to recover. But in early 1976, when the United States was forced to come to terms with what it had done, it seemed as if a great deal of positive change would come about.

As Kissinger looked at the world in 1976, it became apparent that the era of dealing with African affairs through covert CIA operations was over. He writes in his memoirs, "The Angolan crisis in 1975 conferred a sense of urgency. It convinced us that to resist future depredations of outside powers, we needed to identify ourselves with African aspirations and to persuade South Africa to abandon its historic support for white minority rule in neighboring countries."<sup>91</sup> That position was a radical departure from where the U.S. had stood on African issues just six months before. Yet, as Kissinger explained, Angola changed the way that the United States had to confront its foreign policy.

In his article, *The CIA in Africa: How Central? How Intelligent?*, political scientist Rene Lemarchand explains why that change had to come about. He writes that before 1975, "creating political order in Africa and elsewhere [was] a process in which clandestine political and paramilitary activities [had] often played a determining role."<sup>92</sup> He argues that African states were ideal targets for covert operations and CIA penetration because of the "inherent fragility" of their political institutions. He goes on to list several examples of how the CIA had meddled in African affairs in the years leading up to Angola. They brought Mobutu to power in Zaire in 1960; they manipulated the outcome of the 1967 elections in Somalia; they facilitated the rise of

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<sup>91</sup> Kissinger, *Years of Renewal*, 903.

<sup>92</sup> Rene Lemarchand, "The C.I.A. in Africa: How Central? How Intelligent?" *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 14, no. 03 (1976): 403.



Richard Ratsimandrava in Madagascar in 1975.<sup>93</sup> After citing these examples, Lemarchand asks the main question of his article: “Must the CIA be viewed as yet another obstructive element in the list of obstacles to development? Or could it conceivably be seen as an instrument of nation building?”<sup>94</sup> He uses the lessons of Angola to answer that question.

Lemarchand acknowledges that while in some instances the United States has successfully used the CIA to bring about a degree of institutional order in Africa, Angola proved that the way in which the CIA conducts its business has a negative impact on long-term stability. He writes that the Angola situation “offers a classic example of the divisive effect of covert activities on the process of national unification.”<sup>95</sup> He adds, “The time has come to recognize the CIA for what it is...an institution [that] has had, and continues to have, a largely negative effect on the process of development in the Third World.”<sup>96</sup> That insight was not hard to come to—it was clear that the American role in Angola exacerbated the war. But after that fact had come to light, Lemarchand’s view began to catch on, not just in academic circles, but in the public forum as well.

In his memoir, Stockwell explains how the CIA was taking heavy fire from the press and the public in the mid-1970s. Both the Church and the Pike Committees were probing the details of CIA operations, and some of those details leaked to the press. In November 1975, at the same time America’s true intentions in Angola were coming to light, people were made aware of the following: “The CIA had been directly involved with the killers of Rafael Trujillo of the Dominican Republic, Ngo Diem of South Vietnam, and General Schneider of Chile. It had

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<sup>93</sup> Lemarchand, “The CIA in Africa,” 413.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 414

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, 419

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, 423

plotted the deaths of Fidel Castro and Patrice Lumumba.”<sup>97</sup> That sort of information, coupled with the fact that the CIA was dragging the nation into an African version of Vietnam, made people justifiably upset. Liberals began to clamor that President Ford’s administration was forgoing diplomacy in lieu of favoring destabilizing covert operations, while conservatives saw Ford’s inability to actually accomplish anything as a key weakness of his presidency.<sup>98</sup> An election was looming in November 1976, and Ford knew he had to change his foreign policy if he was going to have any chance at winning the Republican nomination, let alone the general election. The job of altering that foreign policy fell to Kissinger.

Although the American role in Angola was over (until Reagan picked up the mantle once again during his presidency), another white African state was on the verge of change: Southern Rhodesia. Ian Smith’s minority regime was struggling to curb the rise of black nationalism within its borders, and Kissinger saw Rhodesia as yet another opportunity. By supporting self-determination in Southern Africa, perhaps he could appease those who the Angolan program had alienated. He flew to Lusaka, Zambia in April 1976 to pledge American support to the nationalist cause.

On April 27, 1976, Kissinger promised to change the course of American foreign policy. He delivered a speech in Lusaka, which outlined the stance the United States would apparently be taking with regards to Rhodesia, and all of Southern Africa. He stated:

“My journey is intended to give fresh impetus to our cooperation and to usher in a new era in American policy...We support self-determination, majority rule, equal rights and human dignity for all the peoples of Southern Africa—in the name of moral principle, international law and world peace...The United States position on Rhodesia is clear and unmistakable. As President Ford has said, ‘The United States is totally dedicated to

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<sup>97</sup> Stockwell, *In Search of Enemies*, 236.

<sup>98</sup> Noer, “International Credibility and Political Survival,” 780.

seeing to it that the majority becomes the ruling power in Rhodesia.’ We do not recognize the Rhodesian minority regime.”<sup>99</sup>

Kissinger explained that he had a nine-point plan for bringing about change in Rhodesia. He pledged to work with England and South Africa to bring Ian Smith to the bargaining table. He promised that the leaders of Tanzania, Zambia, Botswana, and Mozambique would be included in the negotiations. He offered support for Rhodesia’s refugees. He stated that the United States would endorse the economic sanctions placed upon Rhodesia by the UN. Kissinger made it clear that the United States was committed to this new era of foreign policy.

Initially, the American position on Rhodesia pleased those Kissinger sought to appease. Julius Nyerere, who had condemned the United States right after Angola, lauded Kissinger’s new policy initiative as “first class.” He said to Kissinger after the speech, “[That] made me very happy.”<sup>100</sup> Leslie Gelb, the same journalist who was instrumental in exposing the U.S. position in Angola, praised the new African policy in an April New York Times article. He stated that the previous American stance toward Africa was “unfocused and drifted with events,” but he found that the plan outlined at Lusaka showed a “determination to eliminate superpower conflict from black Africa.”<sup>101</sup> Kissinger’s former critics were appreciating his newfound commitment to ensuring self-determination in Africa.

Julius Nyerere was not the only African head of state that wanted to see an independent Rhodesia. Kenneth Kaunda wanted the same thing, and like he had done in April of 1975, Kaunda tried to convince Kissinger to take more dramatic action. A year later, in April of 1976, Kaunda met with the Secretary in Lusaka. He argued that the removal of Ian Smith was the key

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<sup>99</sup> Henry Kissinger, “Address by the Honorable Henry A. Kissinger, Secretary of State, At a Luncheon in the Secretary’s Honor, Hosted by His Excellency Kenneth Kaunda, President of Zambia.” Lusaka, Zambia, April 27, 1976.

<sup>100</sup> “Memorandum of Conversation.” Dar Es Salaam, Tanzania. April 25, 1976. From Digital National Security Archive. Document 01932.

<sup>101</sup> Leslie H. Gelb. “United States, Stung in Angola, Forges Africa Policy,” *The New York Times*, April 16, 1976.

to peace in Rhodesia, and Kaunda felt that only Prime Minister Vorster of South Africa could convince Smith to step down peacefully. The Zambian President knew that he himself could not convince Vorster to bring Smith to the bargaining table—Zambia had been harboring South African liberation groups for decades—but Kaunda knew that Kissinger could.<sup>102</sup>

Kaunda's assessment was accurate. Rhodesia depended on Pretoria both economically and politically. South Africa was the only real ally Ian Smith had in the mid-1970s. The United States had an alliance with South Africa as well, and Kaunda was willing to bet the South Africans valued their partnership with the United States more than their connection to Rhodesia. The South Africans exported nearly all of their mineral wealth to the U.S., and it depended on that trade to maintain its economy. The U.S. also protected South Africa to a certain degree in the United Nations. South Africa had developed and was continuing to maintain its nuclear energy plants with U.S. assistance. It imported most of its high-tech military technology from American corporations. Kaunda knew that if diplomatic appeasement or gentle pressure were exerted in the right places, Kissinger could leave Pretoria with little choice but to convince Smith to listen.

Kaunda once again succeeded in getting Kissinger's attention. After their meeting, the Secretary flew to West Germany in secret to meet with the South Africans. He wanted to convince them to exert pressure on Smith. But during the meeting, his commitment to majority rule was not as steadfast as he had made it seem. During the talks with the South Africans, Kissinger made it clear that his speech at Lusaka did not represent a change in policy, but only a change in rhetoric. When discussing the potential new structure of Rhodesia's government, Kissinger stated, "I couldn't care less whether it's unitary or federal. Whatever is internationally

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<sup>102</sup> "Memorandum of Conversation." Lusaka, Zambia. April 27, 1976. From FRUS Southern African Database, Volume 28, Document 195.

accepted, we'll accept...We have no fixed ideas about how the constitution is drafted, as long as it leads to independence. If you look at the black African states, one comes to a melancholy conclusion about what's likely to happen. But that's not our problem."<sup>103</sup> Based upon this statement, it becomes clear that Kissinger was not necessarily concerned with the political viability of a majority-controlled Rhodesia. He cared much more about what the international community thought after Angola. He was still worried about prestige.

Other conversations with the South Africans reveal that Kissinger was also still worried about the potential of an increased Soviet influence in Southern Africa. He had lost Angola, and he was not willing to let Rhodesia turn red as well. That was one of the reasons why Kissinger had turned his sights on Rhodesia in the first place, and as the settlement process dragged on, Kissinger began to fear that any majority government—whether or not he had helped it come to power—could quickly adopt communist ideologies.<sup>104</sup> To ensure that this did not happen, Kissinger altered the version of majority rule that he had described at Lusaka.

The settlement plan that he began to endorse did not sound like majority rule at all. He put forth a proposal in September 1976 that would give the white minority party veto power over all constitutional amendments proposed by the majority. To make matters worse, in this new proposal, the minority party would retain full control over the nation's executive branch.<sup>105</sup> Kissinger was not even willing to remove Smith from power anymore. Even though he had made his speech at Lusaka promising an American commitment to majority rule in Southern Africa, and even though he had personally told Presidents Nyerere and Kaunda that he would see to it

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<sup>103</sup> "Memorandum of Conversation." Grafenau, West Germany. June 24, 1976. From FRUS Southern Africa Database, Volume 28, Document 196.

<sup>104</sup> "Memorandum of Conversation." London. September 04, 1976. From FRUS Southern Africa Database, Volume 28, Document 202.

<sup>105</sup> "Memorandum of Conversation." Zurich. September 06, 1976. From FRUS Southern Africa Database, Volume 28, Document 203.

Zimbabwe replaced Rhodesia on the map, Kissinger showed that he was unwilling to deliver a few months later. The Cold War was still raging, the uncertainties of majority rule scared Kissinger, and Rhodesia suffered as a result. The peace process quickly began to unravel as Rhodesia's liberation movement leaders began to see through the ruse, and the three years that followed Kissinger's failed attempt to broker peace were the bloodiest years of the Rhodesian Bush War.

Looking back on the Angolan Civil War and the exacerbation of the Rhodesian Bush War that followed, one could argue that nothing had changed after Angola. To a certain extent, that is true. Kissinger's promise of an American commitment to majority rule was not at all genuine. He himself admitted that he did not really care about what sort of government was established in independent Rhodesia—he was far more concerned with appeasing his critics. Yet that still being the case, the American involvement in the Angolan Civil War nevertheless had a lasting impact on American foreign policy. Before Angola, Kissinger's diplomatic approach was characterized by secrecy. He used the CIA as an extension of his office to meddle in affairs around the globe. The CIA affected the outcomes of foreign elections; it conspired to assassinate foreign heads of state; it launched a war that tore Angola apart. But after its role in Angola had been exposed, Congress used the powers granted to it under the War Powers Resolution to stop the CIA's war effort. Today, a Secretary of State would be hard pressed to use the CIA, or any wing of the U.S. military for that matter, to wage a covert operation on the same scale as IAFEATURE.

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