

ARTICLE APPEARED
ON PAGE 23

CHRISTIAN SCIENCE MONITOR
9 December 1981

Repeal the Clark amendment — but not now

By Howard Wolpe

Much is at stake as the House debates the fiscal 1982 foreign aid bill and takes up, as part of that debate, the administration's proposal to repeal the Clark amendment prohibiting United States covert military or paramilitary operations in Angola without express congressional authorization.

If the administration initiative succeeds in the House, as it did earlier in the Senate, it will be Soviet and Cuban policymakers that will have the greatest cause to rejoice. For the repeal of the Clark amendment at this time will only give credibility to the Soviet-Cuban propaganda line that the US has entered into a new accommodation with the South African-backed UNITA dissident movement within Angola.

The administration, to its credit, has denied that any decisions have been made to destabilize the MPLA Angolan government; it insists that the proposed repeal is being advocated on the basis of principle alone, i. e., that the executive branch simply opposes legislative restrictions on executive action in foreign policy.

Unfortunately, diplomacy — like domestic politics — is very much a matter of perception. And all administration statements notwithstanding, there is no question that the repeal of the Clark amendment at this time would be perceived as a threatening act by the Angolans, and would be viewed with hostility throughout the African continent.

That is not to say that the repeal of the amendment would not make sense in a different climate and at a different time. It would. And the House Subcommittee on Africa, which I chair, while unanimously opposing repeal at this time, has expressly recommended eventual repeal of it. In the context of a settlement of the ongoing Namibian conflict — which depends, in part, on Angolan cooperation — and in the context of the normalization of diplomatic relations between Angola and the US, the repeal of the Clark amendment would not raise the same diplomatic fears and suspicions. In a more positive, less threatening diplomatic climate, the administration's rationale for repeal of the amendment would be readily accepted at face value.

But not now. Not in the aftermath of the most recent South African invasion of Angola. Not in the face of the US veto of the United Nations resolution condemning that invasion. Not while publicly acknowledged meetings are being held between State Department officials and Angolan dissident leader Jonas Savimbi.

The administration's proposed repeal of the Clark amendment has several ironic aspects.

First, it risks moving Angola further into the Soviet and Cuban orbit at the very moment the Angolan government has been trying to: (a) increase Western investment and economic assistance, (b) lessen Angola's dependence on Cuban troops, and (c) normalize diplomatic relations with the US. All of this has happened despite the presence of 18,000 Cuban troops, 1,000 Soviet advisers, and 500 East German technicians. What more does a country have to do to demonstrate its desire and ability to develop friendly and constructive ties with the West?

Second, the proposed repeal is opposed by the very American economic interests our government seeks to protect. Since the administration announced its intentions to lift the Clark amendment, over a dozen American business executives representing some of the largest corporations in the US have warned that its repeal would seriously jeopardize their business interests, not only in Angola but in several other key African states. These same executives have cautioned

against overreacting to Angola's Marxist rhetoric, noting that Angola has pursued a pragmatic economic course. They point to the government's having hired Arthur D. Little of Boston, Mass. as its oil consultant and its positive economic relations with Chase Manhattan Bank, Boeing, Texaco, and the US Export-Import Bank.

Third, repeal of the Clark amendment at this time would severely complicate the efforts of the administration to strengthen the forces of moderation on the African continent and to improve America's standing with African leaders. Shortly after the State Department confirmed that it intended to act on the Angola legislation, representatives of 50 black states at the UN released a joint statement condemning the apparent drift in the administration's policies toward South Africa and warning of the dangers of lifting the Clark amendment. And in early June, the presidents of six "front-line" states (Mozambique, Angola, Zimbabwe, Zambia, Tanzania, and Botswana) which worked closely with the US and the British in resolving the Zimbabwean question, characterized the administration's decision as an effort to destabilize Angola and strongly criticized the administration's political intentions. Those earlier statements have been followed by others equally critical of the proposed repeal.

Fourth, repeal of the amendment would highlight America's diplomatic isolation in its approach to Angola. Not only does every black African nation but Senegal have normal diplomatic relations with Angola, but so do all of our close Western allies — the Germans, French, British, and Canadians — the very countries with whom we are working to achieve a settlement of the Namibian conflict. All find our policy of nonrecognition of Angola incomprehensible and counterproductive. The Clark amendment repeal would only reinforce these perceptions.

Fifth, for those who see the continuing Angolan civil conflict in East-West terms, pitting the "Marxist" MPLA government against the "anticommunist, pro-Western" UNITA movement, the ultimate irony is that UNITA's leader Savimbi is every bit as socialist as his MPLA counterpart. Indeed it was not too long ago that Savimbi, today the darling of America's far right, was condemning the "American Imperialist" and accepting assistance not only from the American CIA but also from the North Koreans and the Chinese.

Finally, the proposed repeal of the amendment could severely complicate American efforts to secure a settlement of the longstanding and bitter Namibian conflict. The Reagan administration has a unique opportunity to influence the course of events in southern Africa in a positive manner. Unlike the Carter administration, it appears to enjoy the confidence and credibility of the white government of South Africa. And because of this, it may well have the ability to persuade South Africa's leaders that a solution to the Namibian problem is not only in Western interests but also in South Africa's national interest.

However, if the administration loses the confidence of Angola and the front-line African states, its ability to act as an honest broker between South Africa and the front-line states will be lost. In this event, the new administration will have forfeited its usefulness in Africa before it has had an opportunity to demonstrate its ability. This would be especially tragic given the recent indications by the administration that a Namibian settlement may well be within reach.

Howard Wolpe, Democrat of Michigan, is chairman of the House Subcommittee on Africa.