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Senate lifts ban on aid to Angola rebels

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The Senate yesterday repealed the so-called Clark amendment, which bars U.S. military aid to resistance forces seeking to overthrow the communist government in the southern Africa nation of Angola.

The vote was 63 to 34, and the winning margin included several Democrats.

The vote gave a psychological lift to the Reagan administration, which is working to restore aid to similar

resistance forces in Nicaragua.

On a motion by Sen. Steven Symms of Idaho, a Republican, the Senate attached the repeal to the State Department authorization bill. The bill was then adopted, 80 to 17.

The Clark amendment is called that because it was offered by former Sen. Dick Clark of Iowa, a Democrat. It stopped covert U.S. assistance to the guerrillas fighting the Cuban-backed Marxist government in Angola — the guerrillas

were on the verge of victory.

President Reagan urged repeal of the Clark amendment in his 1980 campaign, when he said it was one of his principal foreign policy objectives. The Senate did, in fact, repeal the amendment in 1981, but the House did not and the issue was mooted.

The House has passed its version of the State Department authorization bill, and, as in 1981, differences between the two mea-

sures must be resolved by a House-Senate conference committee. In the present congressional atmosphere — with an uneasy House considering changing its mind on Nicaraguan resistance relief — the fate of the Clark amendment repeal was not at all certain.

During the 1981 debate, Mr. Reagan said that repealing the Clark amendment was one way short of a direct military confrontation for the United States to deal with the threat

in Cuba.

The Clark amendment specifically cut off the covert military assistance that the United States had been providing to forces fighting the communists for control of Angola when the Portuguese colonialists withdrew. The amendment prohibited further U.S. military action in the African nation.

The Symms amendment was adopted yesterday with almost no debate, and on the eve of a House

vote on reconsidering its earlier suspension of aid to the resistance forces, or Contras, in Nicaragua.

Repealing the Clark amendment, Mr. Symms said, "will send a clear signal to the Soviets, to the Cubans [whose troops are stationed in Angola] that the United States can and will recognize democratic forces who are seeking to overthrow the yoke of communist tyranny."

Sen. Jeremiah Denton, R-Ala., said the amendment should be repealed as part of a "coherent policy" to defend against communist encroachment in southern Africa, where he said the United States has important strategic and economic interests.

But Sen. Claiborne Pell of Rhode Island, a Democrat, said repeal of the prohibition "would lead the Angolan government and the international community to conclude that the United States intends to provide aid to UNITA," which he described as "the South African-supported insurgent movement fighting for control of Angola."

Mr. Pell said he does not believe the threat of U.S. aid would compel the Angolan government to reach an accommodation with UNITA.

"It would however, increase Lunda's dependence on the Soviet Union and Cuba and pave the way for the introduction of more Cuban troops into Angola," he said.

"Since the South African govern-

ment refuses to withdraw from Namibia until Cuban troops are withdrawn from Angola, repeal of the Clark amendment would set back the prolonged negotiations for the independence of Namibia," Mr. Pell said.

Beyond the psychological implications in repeal of the amendment, its most immediate effect would be in Angola. Cuba has put 20,000 troops in Angola to defend the communist government against resistance forces commanded by Jonas Savimbi, head of the rebel organization UNITA.

Premier Fidel Castro said recently that Cuba had rotated 200,000 troops through Angola since 1975.

During the debate on repeal, Sen. Symms said that repealing the Clark amendment would be a symbolic gesture that would give a "great lift" to the forces of Mr. Savimbi, who hosted a meeting last week in his guerrilla base in Angola of four anti-Soviet insurgent groups from Africa, Asia and Central America.

The conference was organized by

Citizens for America, a lobbying group headed by Lewis E. Lehrman, which strongly supports President Reagan. It includes rebel groups seeking to overthrow Cuban- or Soviet-aligned governments in Nicaragua, Afghanistan, Laos and Angola.

If yesterday's vote is upheld in a conference with the House, anti-Marxist rebel factions in at least three of the four nations in the alliance will be receiving or be eligible to receive some type of aid from the U.S. government.

The Afghanistan resistance is thought to have received from the

United States over the last several years about \$250 million, mostly administered by the CIA, to pay for its struggle against Soviet occupation forces.

House and Senate committees have approved at least \$5 million for resistance forces in Laos, and favorable votes in both houses of Congress could be reached this year.

If the House joins the Senate in approving the funding for the Nicaraguan resistance, it will be the fourth and final member of the new alliance eligible for U.S. aid.

— Thomas D. Brandt