

President Carter had listed the Clark amendment among a number of other congressionally-imposed restrictions that he wanted removed because, he maintained, they made it difficult for him to respond to Soviet and Cuban advances in Africa. The Reagan Administration announced on Mar. 19, 1981, that it would seek repeal of the Clark amendment, explaining the move as part of an effort to restore the President's rightful authority in foreign policy. Critics of the proposed repeal, noting past U.S. covert involvement in Angola and believing that at least some members of the administration were sympathetic to the UNITA opposition guerrillas, were concerned that repeal might be the first step toward a renewal of a U.S. covert role -- which they opposed. Efforts to repeal the Clark amendment in 1981 did not succeed.

Senator Symms renewed the repeal effort in 1985, and his amendment to overturn the Clark amendment was accepted by the Senate (63-34) as part of the Foreign Relations Authorization Act (S. 1003) on June 11. Repeal was finally enacted into law, however, through the Foreign Assistance Authorization (S. 960/H.R. 1555), which was signed into law by the President (P.L. 99-83, Sec. 811) on Aug. 8, 1985. An amendment to repeal the Clark amendment had been offered to this bill by Representative Stratton and accepted by the House on July 10. The provision was retained in House-Senate conference.

The Reagan Administration supported the successful repeal of the Clark amendment in 1985, although spokesmen insisted that there were no plans to help the Angolan guerrillas. Some critics of the Clark amendment felt that the Administration should have been more outspoken in advocating repeal and questioned the willingness of the Administration -- or at least of some members of the Administration -- to challenge the MPLA government in Angola. Supporters of the Clark amendment, however, perceived the Administration as well pleased with the success of the repeal movement and suspected that with the prohibition out of the way the executive branch would rapidly go forward with aid to Savimbi. An attempt to re-impose legislation similar to the Clark amendment was defeated in the House on Sept. 17, 1986, during debate on the Intelligence Authorization bill (H.R. 4759).

Background to U.S.-Angolan Relations

The situation in Angola today began to take shape in the late 1950s when the first organized efforts were begun to end Angola's 400 years of rule by Portugal. Available evidence indicates that the first American involvement came when the Kennedy Administration, responding to evidence of Soviet and Chinese activity there, started to channel, through the CIA, small amounts of aid to one liberation organization, the FNLA (National Front for the Liberation of Angola), headed by Holden Roberto. The move was an attempt to protect American interests should Portugal be expelled from Angola. The United States could not openly oppose Portugal, a NATO ally, but it wanted good relations with the group expected to form the government of an independent Angola. Neither the FNLA nor other groups were very successful in challenging the Portuguese in the early years, and when the Nixon Administration came into office it is reported to have ended support for Roberto so as not to jeopardize U.S. access to military bases in the Azores.

In 1974, following a coup in Lisbon, Portugal announced it would grant Angola independence. A three-sided dispute erupted among the major groups that had fought for independence: the FNLA, backed largely by China and Zaire; the Marxist MPLA, supported by the Soviet Union; and UNITA, based among the Ovimbundu people and led by the Chinese-influenced Jonas Savimbi.