

SOUTHERN AFRICA AND THE REPUBLICAN SENATE: AN EARLY ASSESSMENT

by Jim Cason

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Angolan government officials got an early glimpse of what life under a Republican controlled Congress will look like when Senator Jesse Helms, just one day after the national elections in this country, threatened sanctions against the MPLA government. Helms declared that Congress would vote new sanctions against Angola when the Republicans take over next January if the MPLA didn't end its offensive against Unita. He also sent a letter to National Security Council Advisor Anthony Lake criticizing the Clinton administration for being too soft on the Angolan government.

Although the MPLA government had already captured Huambo at that point, the immediate public reaction from Senator Helms stands in stark contrast to the behind-the-scenes diplomatic approach advocated by the current Democratic chairman of the Senate Africa Subcommittee, Paul Simon. Simon in fact, strongly argued against Helm's making his sanctions threat public.

Conservative North Carolina Senator Jesse Helms' elevation to the position of chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee is the most dramatic result of the Republican Party's takeover of the U.S. Congress. But the November 8 election, in which Republicans took a 53 to 47 majority in the Senate and a 230 to 204 majority in the House of Representatives, will also bring changes in the way the Congress approaches Mozambique.

Senator Helms has said publicly that his first priority next year will be cutting overall foreign aid and that could hurt funding for Mozambique. "Our biggest problem is that Mozambique gets most of its money from the Development Fund for Africa," acknowledged one Capital Hill based supporter of Mozambique this week. "Helms is looking to cut the Development Fund by about 10 percent and Mozambique could see a reduction in the \$35 to \$50 million in foreign aid it now gets."

Technically Helms takes over as chairman of the full Foreign Relations Committee in the Senate, and another Republican, probably Senator James Jeffords from Vermont or Kansas Senator

Nancy Kassebaum, will be chair of the Africa Subcommittee. In contrast to Helms, both Kassebaum and Jeffords are moderates who vote almost as often with the Democrats as with their Republican colleagues, and have often opposed Helms on Africa policy issues.

But Helms will wield tremendous power by virtue of his chairmanship of the full committee and his partisan, ideological approach to Africa policy is likely to dominate the committee's agenda. Helms was a strong advocate of Renamo before the publication of the State Department's Guersony report and he is best remembered here as the man who blocked Melissa Wells' confirmation as Ambassador to Mozambique for eleven months after she was nominated by Ronald Reagan in 1986.

Asked about Helms' views on Mozambique, one Congressional source who follows the Senator's views closely said this week that Helms didn't have a specific policy objective in Mozambique at this time. "He's very pleased that the elections took place," this source said, "but aware that there still seem to be a lot of issues that need to be worked out." The Senator's concerns in Mozambique, in fact, are similar to those expressed by the Clinton State Department, including continuing economic reform, reducing the size of the civil service and continuing demobilization of the army.

On southern Africa policy, Helms' policy ideas sound remarkably like those coming out of the Clinton White House: "He agrees with much of what the State Department and the White House are saying about Southern Africa being the key, being the place where Africa could turn the corner," one Congressional source familiar with the Senator's policy ideas said this week.

That's probably a good thing because Congressional impact on day to day foreign policy is in fact fairly limited and, as President Clinton has noted several times since the election, the Constitution clearly reserves most power in this arena for the White House. But Congress controls the purse strings, and in addition to blocking foreign aid the Republicans will be able to block U.S. funding for a U.N. peacekeeping mission if they are unhappy with administration policy. For example, notes one Congressional source, if the peace agreement for Angola is signed as expected this Sunday then a request for peacekeeping funds would come before the Senate early in the new year and Helms can be expected to exert pressure to ensure that the Senator's longtime ally Jonas Savimbi is treated fairly.

The Congress will ultimately probably support the U.N. mission in Angola, but President Clinton may not be able to win financial support for other U.N. peacekeeping mission in Africa. The Republican Party majority leader in the Senate, Robert Dole, has suggested that the U.S. is wasting a great deal of money on "non-essential" peacekeeping operations around the world, and earlier this year one of his staff suggested that Dole would advocate an end to U.S. support for many other peacekeeping missions around the world.

While the Senate Africa focus may shift, in the lower chamber the Republican leadership is planning to eliminate the House Foreign Affairs subcommittee focused on Africa as part of a broader plan to reduce the size of Congress. Abolition of the only subcommittee with an exclusive focus on Africa will further reduce the level of debate about Africa beyond crisis issues and eliminate the most powerful lobby for the continent in the lower chamber.

An official at the Congressional Black Caucus, which has successfully fought back Democratic Party efforts to eliminate the House Africa Subcommittee in the last two years, suggested that it may be more difficult to preserve the subcommittee under the Republicans. Although the Caucus itself returns to Washington next year with 41 members, including 2 Republicans, they will be faced with major attacks on funding programs for their core constituencies in urban areas in this country and will not be able to devote much attention to Africa. "The outlook for Africa just doesn't look all that good," one Caucus source said.

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