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FORD'S OPEN DIPLOMACY

Jan. 10 (IPS) -- Through a series of public statements and related diplomatic moves, President Gerald Ford this week took steps to take control of U.S. foreign policy from the Secretary of State Henry Kissinger and Vice President Nelson Rockefeller and to firmly ground that policy on the basis of continued detente with the Soviet Union.

By the end of the President's first significant week of international statesmanship of his administration, Ford had clearly distanced himself from the Rockefeller-Kissinger confrontation policy and had emerged the most significant U.S. spokesman for detente.

In an exchange of public declarations on a possible Angola settlement, both the President and the Soviet leadership continued to bypass Kissinger and his raving threats about a nuclear confrontation with the Soviets over a Popular Movement (MPLA) victory.

Speaking before the American Farm Bureau convention in St. Louis Jan. 5, Ford categorically ruled out the use of food as a weapon against the Soviets over their Angola policy. Instead, he called for a cease fire, an end to all foreign intervention, and asked for an "Angolan solution" to the Angola conflict.

"The linkage (of Soviet grain sales) with the diplomacy would mean disruption and hardship for you, the farmer, a serious increase in tensions between the world's two super-powers and have no effect on Angola whatsoever," the President declared.

The Rockefeller-controlled press played up the President's pandering to his conservative audience with promises to take "the appropriate limited measures necessary to block and stop Soviet actions which we find unacceptable," thereby completely distorting the actual significance of the Ford's statements. First, the President's refusal to accede to policy proposals emanating from Kissinger loyalists in the State Department and elsewhere that the U.S. use of food blackmail, is both a strong affirmation of detente and a statement of commitment to cooperative economic relations with the rest of the world.

Second, Ford had once again publicly contradicted policy positions taken by his Secretary of State. His actions raise the question of how long Kissinger will be allowed to stay in office as an opponent of a President who is determining U.S. Foreign policy. An attempt to paper over the profound differences between Ford and his Secretary of State lay behind the spate of press coverage that portrayed the President's speech as "echoing Kissinger."

The Ford speech, the third in the last week which has stressed a pro-detente policy, came only two days after an editorial in the official Soviet Communist Party newspaper, Pravda which called for "a termination of foreign armed intervention in Angola ... (and for) the people of Angola to be given the right to decide for themselves the questions of building a new life on the conditions of peace and freedom." Pravda further stressed that the Soviets seek "neither economic nor military gain" in Angola.

Reflecting the rift between the President and his Secretary of State, a Ford spokesman reported that the White House was "encouraged" by the Pravda editorial, while a Kissinger spokesman expressed "extreme caution" over the Soviet overture.

Significantly, the Chicago Sun Times, a paper linked to the industrial faction that has been backing Ford, made the Pravda statement its banner lead article Jan. 2, reprinting whole portions directly from the Soviet paper. The article also played up the White House assessment of the article as "encouraging."

The Ford-Soviet "open diplomacy" aimed at difusing the Kissinger-created "Angola issue", began last week with a New Year's Eve Presidential press conference. The President -- in direct contradiction to Kissinger, announced that detente was not based on what the Soviets did in Angola.

This in turn was followed by the aforementioned Pravda article.

Ford wasted no time in responding to the Soviets. Choosing an NBC interview taped Jan. 3 as his forum, the President emphatically swept aside the cold war rhetoric of GOP Presidential pretender Ronald Reagan and other Rockefeller creations on the right, declaring that detente was irreversable and that to pin its future on Angola or the outcome of the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT) was foolish. The Secretary of State had repeatedly and emphatically made pronouncements to the opposite effect over the last several weeks.

Clearly rejecting Kissinger's "Angola is of strategic importance" line, the President indicated that the U.S. might just have to accept an "end result" which may not be what the administration wants at the present time -- a statement which lends itself to the interpretation that the U.S. would in fact accept an MPLA government-regardless of what Kissinger says.

In addition Ford announced that he will campaign on a pro-detente platform pointing out that "those who abandon detente will eventually be the real losers."

Indicating that he is continuing his personal diplomacy to diffuse the tense situation in the Mideast -- where Kissinger's capability to provoke a war is now the greatest -- Ford delivered a thinly veiled attack on the Kissinger dupes of the "Israel lobby" in the U.S. A President has to ignore pressure groups and "look for a broader perspective," he stated. The President has already endorsed a return to the Geneva Mideast Peace Conference -- a move long supported by the Soviets.