

U.S.-Supported Troops Losing In North Angola

Foe Driving Forces Back Into Zaire

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By Murrey Marder
Washington Post Staff Writer

American-supported forces in northern Angola are crumbling and are being driven back across the border of Zaire, U.S. sources said yesterday.

Ford administration officials acknowledged that severe setbacks have been suffered by troops of the National Front for the Liberation of Angola (FNLA), the original choice of the United States for receiving secret arms aid, but said the FNLA forces "have not collapsed."

The National Front is led by Holden Roberto, who received \$300,000 in "political support" through the Central Intelligence Agency in early 1975, at the outset of the current U.S. involvement in Angola.

American aid was later expanded to include support for the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA), led by Jonas Savimbi. About \$35 million in U.S. aid has been committed.

There were significant interrelated developments involving Angola yesterday:

—Premier Fidel Castro spoke publicly about the Cuban troops fighting in Angola in support of the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA)—which is also backed by the Soviet

Union. Castro said in Havana that MPLA forces have inflicted "catastrophic casualties" on "enemy forces."

—Secretary of State Henry A. Kissinger late yesterday invited ambassadors or chiefs of mission from 37 African embassies in Washington to a State Department conference on the situation in Angola and Africa.

An authoritative U.S. source acknowledged that "the situation looks grim on the northern front" of Angola, where Roberto's forces are being pounded by Cuban troops and the Soviet-backed MPLA. In the last few days the National Front has lost its main Angolan bases, the coastal towns of Ambriz and Ambrizete.

The anti-Communist forces are "crumbling on the northern front, very seriously—but not irretrievably," an American source said. "It has happened before," he said. He was referring to a period before Angola gained its independence from Portugal last November, when Portuguese troops sometimes

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forced Roberto's forces out of Angola over the Zaire border.

If necessary, U.S. sources said, Roberto's retreating troops can mount "guerrilla warfare" from their bases in Zaire. At least 3,000 National Front troops are still intact on the southern front, U.S. officials said, where there are larger forces of the allied UNITA army—who are supported by South African troops.

Despite official attempts in Washington to take a not-despairing view the defeats inflicted on the National Front come at a damaging time for the United States.

Kissinger is preparing to go to Moscow Tuesday to try to bargain simultaneously with the Soviet Union on nuclear arms control, and on a withdrawal of all foreign forces from Angola.

Each military defeat inflicted on the anti-Communist forces in Angola weakens Kissinger's already thin bargaining hand.

The Ford administration also is about to resume an uphill struggle with an overwhelmingly critical Senate to justify further U.S. involvement in Angola.

It was announced yesterday that Kissinger has accepted an invitation to testify before the Senate Foreign Relations Subcommittee on African Affairs, headed by Sen. Dick Clark (D-Iowa), on Jan. 26.

Kissinger said at a news conference Wednesday that the Soviet Union has sent about \$200 million worth of arms aid into Angola. The United States, Kissinger said, is prepared to discuss phased withdrawals of foreign troops from Angola, starting with South African troops, under the following conditions: "If there is a stated, brief interval after which all other forces are withdrawn; that there should be negotiations between the main factions; that all outside powers, including of course, the United States, cease their military intervention. And we are prepared to agree to the end of all military shipments."

At the same time, U.S. officials insist, and so do South African officials, that there is "no coordination" of policy.

There are an estimated 1,000 to 1,500 South African troops in Angola, with thousands more backing them up with supply lines. Kissinger said on Wednesday there are "between 5,000 and 7,000 Cuban military forces in Angola."