

Soviet Cruiser Reported Sailing Down the West Coast of Africa

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By JOHN W. FINNEY JAN 10 1976

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WASHINGTON, Jan. 9—A Soviet guided-missile cruiser is sailing down the west coast of Africa, informed sources reported today. A question in the minds of Administration officials whether the Soviet Union was intending to reinforce its two warships now in the vicinity of Angola.

The Kresta II class cruiser—one of the most advanced, heavily armed warships in the Soviet fleet—was reported to be off the coast of Mauritania, heading on a southerly course, apparently for the port of Conakry in Guinea.

The movement of the cruiser out of the western Mediterranean was originally linked by naval intelligence to the seizure last week by Morocco of a trawler carrying weapons and a few Algerians to Soviet-supported forces in Angola. The original presumption was that the cruiser would be kept in the vicinity of Morocco to deter any future interference with boats headed for Angola.

As the cruiser continued to head south, however, some uncertainty has developed within the Pentagon as to the mission of the ship.

The cruiser is expected to

reach Conakry this weekend. Its movement from there, in the opinion of intelligence analysts, should provide an indication of Soviet intentions.

The cruiser could remain in the vicinity of Conakry, where the Soviet Union periodically has stationed a warship over the last three years. Or it could proceed southward to join a Kotlin-class destroyer and a tank-landing ship now in the vicinity of Angola.

For reason that still perplex Administration officials, the Soviet Union yesterday chose to deny it had conducted any naval movements off Angola.

A statement distributed by Tass, the Soviet press agency, said "there are no Soviet warships and no special movements off the Angolan coast."

There is a growing belief in State Department and Defense circles that the Soviet Union was intent on a naval show of force off Angola, probably more for psychological than military reasons. The 7,500-ton Kresta cruiser, which carries antiship missiles, is considerably more powerful than the 3,900-ton Kotlin-class destroyer, which is basically armed for antiaircraft missions.