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Angola: U.S.-backed force 'near collapse'

Associated Press

The Soviet-supported forces in Angola continued to drive the Western-backed troops in panic toward Angola's northern border with Zaire, with the Zaire air force providing covering fire for the retreat.

According to the Soviet news agency Tass, the Western-backed National Front — FNLA — holds only three major towns in Angola's northern third.

And U.S. sources report the FNLA is "near collapse."

The Popular Movement — MPLA — armed with Soviet tanks, rockets and heavy artillery, said yesterday they will keep fighting until they win. And Fidel Castro said Cuban troops spearheading the onslaught will stay as long as they are wanted.

"The war will continue until the enemies of the people are defeated," an MPLA spokesman was quoted in a London newspaper, adding that the MPLA forces have been ordered to crush the retreating troops "in one or two weeks."

He said the MPLA will reject U.S. proposals for a coalition government.

Tass also reported that the West has accused the MPLA of aggression against Zaire "to give Zaire a plausible excuse for a possible extension of the war."

Tass said FNLA leader Holden Roberto had fled to Kinshasa, capital of Zaire. The New York Times reported from Kinshasa that Roberto was in the city, but that he denied the FNLA is collapsing and he will return to inspect the situation.

South African sources said

the National Union (UNITA) a Western-backed ally of the FNLA in southern Angola, reportedly backed by South African troops, has said 1,000 MPLA and 500 Cuban troops were advancing on the key southern town of Luso.

U.S. officials said there are 9,500 Cubans in Angola and another 1,000 en route to the former Portuguese colony on Africa's western coast.

Castro said in an interview with Milan's newspaper Corriere della Sera that Cuba has helped African liberation movements in Angola, Mozambique and Guinea-Bissau for 10 years.

Drawing a parallel between African states opposed to the MPLA and European nations that helped Gen. Francisco Franco win the Spanish civil war, Castro said:

"Zaire is the fascism of Mussolini while South Africa is Nazi Germany, or even worse because race discrimination in South Africa has been even written into the constitution."