

South Africa, WXPost JAN 20 1976 UNITA Set

Joint Move

By James MacManus
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HUAMBO, Angola, Jan. 19—Troops of the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA) and of South Africa's regular army are preparing a major pincer movement against the Soviet-backed Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola.

If successful, the operation—which reflects a heavy buildup of South African forces in the central front area—could alter the military balance in the six-month-old civil war here.

From the outline of the plan given by UNITA's leader, Jonas Savimbi, South Africa has evidently decided to escalate its support for the two American-backed liberation groups opposing the Cuban-assisted and Soviet-armed Popular Movement.

Speaking here yesterday, Savimbi told reporters that his organization "will not allow" its ally, the National Front for the Liberation of Angola, to be beaten. "We will stand together," he said as he described the plan for the operation.

Savimbi said that his army

See ANGOLA, A7, Col. 4

ANGOLA, From A1

would airlift 5,000 soldiers to bolster the battered and retreating National Front in the northern theater of the war. UNITA, which controls central and southern Angola, apparently plans to complete the operation in three days.

It is understood that Zaire will furnish the planes to lift the reinforcements from UNITA's military headquarters at Silva Porto, which lies in mid-Angola on the Benguela railway to Zaire and Zambia.

Evidence suggests that the UNITA and South African forces will shortly launch a thrust against Teixeira de Sousa, on the border between Angola and Zaire. This important junction town lies on the Benguela railway which both Zaire and Zambia use to ship copper exports through Lobito, Angola's Atlantic port. Teixeira de Sousa is the only staging post the Popular Movement holds on the railway, and defeat for the Popular Movement at this point would enable UNITA to begin shipments along the line.

Although two bridges have been blown up on the eastern section of the line in Angola, it is reliably understood that bridging equipment has already been moved up into UNITA-controlled areas to repair the damage. Port activity at Lobito also points to an early resumption of traffic along the line.

Two weeks ago, South Africa was reported to be considering withdrawal from Angola. Its apparent change of heart may stem from last week's meeting of the Organization of African Unity, in which half the members refused to recognize the Popular Movement or even to condemn South African intervention in Angola. The Popular Movement's army, largely led by Cubans and supplied with Soviet equipment, controls Luanda, the capital, as well as the northern region and a broad swathe of territory running east from Luanda to the border with Zaire.

South Africa's alleged determination to contest any further Popular Movement expansion is a key development in a war that has already divided Africa and produced sharp diplomatic exchanges between Moscow and Washington.

Although the size of the announced UNITA airlift may be in question, Savimbi seems determined to maintain a two-front pressure on his opponents.

The UNITA leader said that his troops are not better soldiers than those of the National Front, but have much higher morale.

He went on: "We have fought the Cubans. They are good soldiers, and at first we were frightened of them. Now we have held them and we have captured them." UNITA claims to hold 20 Cuban prisoners. "We are no longer frightened of the Cubans."

In Huambo, which is capital of the UNITA-National Front Democratic Republic of

Angola, there is no sign of any South African military presence. But at the main military base of Silva Porto, two hours to the east by car, security is tight.

Journalists passing through to the base with Savimbi were kept on his executive jet during a brief stopover, and the plane's blinds were drawn down.

As the central front's key military logistics base for the anti-Popular Movement alliance, Silva Porto is an obvious staging post for wider South African involvement.

At the moment, the central front runs along a 1,000-mile line between Lobito on the Atlantic and Teixeira de Sousa on the eastern border.

UNITA says it has 20,000 troops dug in at four strategic points along this front.

Savimbi, who with his aides appeared remarkably confident about the military situation yesterday, said he expects a "breakthrough" somewhere along this front. He admitted that the Popular Movement has been redeploying arms and men from the northern theater in preparation for an offensive.



The Washington Post

So far, UNITA reports that it has thrown back a number of attacks along the line. Eighty miles north of Luso, the Popular Movement attacked in force last Thursday under cover of heavy rocket and mortar fire. UNITA sources say the attack was backed by Soviet-made T-34 tanks but was beaten back. Among their many prisoners, UNITA claimed to have captured two Cubans, one a captain.

While Savimbi denies that South African forces have been involved north of Luso, he merely replied, "Ask the South Africans" when questioned about South African military presence elsewhere in Central Angola.

News agencies reported the following other developments related to Angola:

—Moderate African states met secretly yesterday to discuss a coalition of the Popular Movement and UNITA, which would, in effect isolate the National Front, according to reliable sources in Zambia.

The sources said that the 22 countries that opposed a move to recognize the Popular Movement as the sole legitimate government of Angola were taking part in the meeting. Together, the two organizations claim to have the allegiance of more than half the country's 6 million people.

—A UNITA spokesman was quoted as saying that his group's forces had beaten back an attack led by 3,000 Cubans against a strategic supply depot in central Angola Sunday. About 8,000 Cubans have been reported to be fighting alongside Popular Movement forces.

—South African Prime Minister John Vorster conferred with his Cabinet on the future of the country's role in the Angolan fighting, and sources said further meetings are scheduled for today and Wednesday.