

S. Africa recalls Angola troops

Examiner News Services

South Africa has begun pulling troops out of Angola but the extent of the withdrawal is still unclear, Western intelligence and diplomatic sources said yesterday.

The South African government refused to confirm the reports, but Defense Minister P.W. Botha said South Africa government would "not continue to fight on alone" in Angola "on behalf of the entire free world."

South African troops have been fighting on the side of the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA).

Botha's statement was in reaction to claims made in Lusaka, Zambia, by UNITA Foreign Minister Jorge Sangumba that South African troops and technicians have begun to leave Angola on orders from Pretoria.

Military analysts predicted a quick victory for the Soviet-backed Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola if South Africa withdraws its 1,200 troops from the civil war.

Diplomatic sources in Lusaka, Western intelligence sources in Johannesburg and South African newspapers said the Pretoria government had been pulling troops out of Angola in the last few days.

The Johannesburg Star, reporting from Lusaka, said the withdrawal of white troops from UNITA's side — South African newspapers have carefully refrained from identifying UNITA's allies as South African units — has already left UNITA forces virtually on their own.

Foreign journalists just back from Angola reported a sharp drop in South African troop movements, but the diplomatic and intelligence sources said the extent of the withdrawal was still unclear.

Diplomatic analysts said South Africa might be withdrawing its

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troops in an orderly fashion as mercenaries recruited by the National Union replace them.

South Africa had threatened to pull out unless the West, especially the United States, became directly involved in Angola to help stop Soviet influence.

Botha promised to advise Parliament next week of South Africa's involvement in Angola.

On the battlefield, the Popular Movement reported major victories over the Western-backed UNITA and the National Front for the Liberation of Angola.

The Popular Movement, in radio broadcasts from Luanda, said it had captured the National Union's Atlantic port of Novo Redondo on the southern front and San Salvador, the last major National Front stronghold in the north.

Popular Movement troops, which have been led by an estimated 10,000 Cubans, were reported to be within 50 miles of UNITA's provisional capital of Huambo in south-central region. On the northern front, Popular Movement troops are reportedly within miles of the Zaire border.

In Zambia, the Johannesburg Star said word has spread rapidly through Lusaka of a pullback in Angola and that this has caused anxiety and even alarm among the Zambian leadership.

Zambia is South Africa's chief ally in its detente exercise with black Africa and any threat to Zambia and its leader, President Kenneth Kaunda, can only be viewed in Cape Town and Pretoria as a blow to Prime Minister John Vorster's efforts to ease relations between white- and black-ruled Africa.

Meanwhile, another threat arises for South Africa.

Reports in Cape Town said that Soviet agents have been paying increased attention to the South-West African People's Organization

(SWAPO) in recent months, suggesting a Soviet interest in carrying the Angolan war into South-West Africa.

The sources doubt that Moscow will call voluntarily for a halt at the South-West African frontier if Popular Front forces are able to push through the UNITA lines.

They speculate that, urged on by the MPLA and encouraged by the poor Western response to the Angolan confrontation, the Russians and Cubans could be persuaded to go on and try to "liberate" South-West Africa, which is occupied by South Africa over United Nations protests.

If this is so, it partly explains South Africa's contemplated withdrawal in Angola and the massive mobilization of reservists in South Africa during the last few weeks.

SWAPO guerrillas, who have been waging a hit-and-run war with South African troops for the last two years, have intensified their campaign since last November out of southern Angolan bases.

China said yesterday that the Soviet Union is trying to turn Angola into a base for expansion into southern Africa and "eventually the whole continent."

The official Hsinhua news agency, monitored in Tokyo, reiterated the Chinese charge that the Soviet Union singlehandedly fomented the Angolan war, hoping to use the resource-rich country as a strategic center for competing militarily with the United States and expanding south.