

Zaire Shift Hinted on Angola

Link May Be Sought With Soviet-Backed Faction

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Washington Post Foreign Service

KINSHASA, ZAIRE, Jan. 25

— There are increasing signs that Zaire is now interested in reaching an accommodation with the Soviet-backed Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola and may even be ready to drop its long-standing support for the rival National Front for the Liberation of Angola to achieve an understanding with the Popular Movement.

Top Zairian leaders, including President Mobutu Sese Seka, have been hinting recently at a shift in official policy toward the contending Angolan factions in both public statements and private conversations with Western journalists.

The shift coincides with a radical change over the past months in the hard realities facing this economically and militarily vulnerable country.

The National Front army that previously provided Zaire with a sizable buffer zone between its territory and the heavily, Soviet-armed Popular Movement has now largely collapsed and been driven back to within 60 miles of the Zairian border.

In addition, the Popular Movement army has destroyed a vital rail bridge just inside Zaire at Dilolo and thus cut southern Shada province's main outlet to the Atlantic Ocean through Angola. There are fears that the Popular Movement may try to close the Zaire River to ship traffic and thus provoke the economic asphyxiation of



MOBUTU SESE-SEKO
...no "sentimentalism"

this copper-exporting nation.

In this context, President Mobutu's early January interview with a Belgian newspaper published in the Kinshasa press yesterday seems to take on special significance.

The Zairian president said his country has long supported the National Front and its leader, Holden Roberto, out of "sentimentalism" and also for its own peace and security. But he then added, "Things having become what they are today, there must be an end to sentimentalism on our part."

He said Zaire still supports a compromise among the "different tendencies" within the Angolan nationalist movement, but he did not insist specifically that the National Front should be

included in a coalition government.

Meanwhile, other top Zairian officials have been stressing that Zaire is not hostile to the Popular Movement itself but only wary of the designs that its allies, Cuba and the Soviet Union, may have on their country.

"We are not against the Popular Movement," remarked Zaire's Foreign Minister Mandungu Bula Nyati in an interview during the Addis Ababa African summit conference on Angola earlier this month. Nor, he said, was Zaire against a coalition government dominated by the Popular Movement.

"The problem is how to bring about such a coalition government," he said.

The foreign minister said he thought an alliance between only the Popular Movement and the southern-based National Union for the Total Independence of Angola would be difficult because Roberto's northern National Front army would continue to fight.

But without Zaire's support, it is thought unlikely that the National Front army could carry on more than a low-grade guerrilla war against the Popular Movement and that the long-term answer to this country's security problems may lie in an accommodation with the Soviet-backed group.

There have been reports dating back as far as last August of a considerable

cooling of relations between Mobutu and the National Front's Roberto and indications that the Zairian leader was swinging support away from Roberto to the National Union in Southern Angola.

Since, that time, there has been considerable evidence of less than total support from Zaire for the National Front, particularly during its rout at the hands of heavily-armed Popular Movement troops in northern Angola earlier this month.

In addition, Zairian officials are denying vehemently that there is any family tie between Mobutu and Roberto through their wives, as has been so widely assumed and reported in the Western press. "There is no truth to this at all," insisted one knowledgeable Zairian official.

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