

Pro-West Angolans Seen Recruiting Mercenaries

By David B. Ottaway

Washington Post Foreign Service

KINSHASA, Zaire, Jan. 27 — The pro-Western National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA) has apparently decided to bring in European and American mercenaries to replace South African troops now withdrawing to southern Angola.

Reports circulating here and in London indicate that about 200 white mercenaries are being rushed into Angola. Several small groups of whites have been spotted passing through Kinshasa from European capitals in the past week.

The exact number of mercenaries joining UNITA is not known, but there are thought to be no more than a few hundred, perhaps even fewer. Most are said to be Europeans but at least some appear to be Americans, according to diplomatic sources here.

UNITA's top representative here, Ruben Chitacumbi, was evasive yesterday when asked about these reports but commented with a smile, "They would be welcome."

UNITA's president, Jonas Savimbi, told Western journalists in early January that if the Addis Ababa African summit meeting on Angola did not condemn the presence of Cuban and Soviet troops, his faction would feel free to look for help wherever possible.

His statement was taken to mean that UNITA would hire mercenaries if African states did not press Cuban and Soviet advisers and troops to withdraw from Angola. The meeting ended in a total

failure and did not even condemn the South African, much less the Cuban and Soviet, presence in Angola.

UNITA already has some "foreign technicians," as Savimbi calls them, working with its army, but the exact number remains a closely guarded secret. They are used as instructors, armored car drivers and artillery men, but UNITA officials here say their own people are now taking over some of these jobs.

The questions being asked here are whether enough white mercenaries are available to compensate for the withdrawal of the 1,000 to 2,000 South African soldiers and whether they will arrive in time to stop the present offensive of the Soviet-armed Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola.

Meanwhile, reports circulated here today that the Popular Movement army is closing in on one of the last towns in northern Angola still held by UNITA's ally, the National Front for the Liberation of Angola. The town, Santo Antonio do Zaire, lies in the extreme northwestern corner of Angola at the mouth of the Zaire River.

Its capture would allow the Popular Movement to close the river to Zaire-bound traffic and thus press this country to end its assistance to the National Front. The town's civilian population has already been evacuated and it is defended by only a few hundred National Front soldiers ready to leave by boat over the river into Zaire, according to reports here.

The only other major town in National Front hands in

northern Angola is Sao Salvador, the old historic capital of the Bakongo people who provide the main support for the front.

Speculation about South Africa's decision to withdraw toward the Namibian border continued here, with some diplomatic observers wondering whether the Popular Movement had not reached a secret understanding with Pretoria.

These observers point out that South Africa has already learned to live with nearby Mozambique, another former Portuguese colony, which now has a radical socialist independent government. They added that Pretoria may have decided to seek a similar accommodation with the Popular Movement's government.

UNITA officials seem fond of recalling that last summer the Popular Movement had troops stationed within range of South African forces guarding the Cunene Dam and had not fired a shot at them.

There are also initial indications that both the United States and Zaire, two other supporters of the National Front and UNITA, may also be ready to make their peace with the Popular Movement's government.

Another theory here runs that South Africa realized that it could not hold UNITA's front lines in the face of Cuban troops and sophisticated Soviet weaponry without a sizable escalation of its own involvement, and that this option was rejected.

Instead, Pretoria seems to have narrowed the definition of its interests in Angola to the



The Washington Post

protection of the Cunene Dam just north of the Namibian-Angolan border and, probably, the occupation of a narrow strip of Angolan territory on the other side of the Cunene River.

The main apparent military advantage of this posture would appear to be far shorter

communication lines and the ready availability of air support provided from bases in South African-administered Namibia. As it was, South Africa was probably overextended, operating hundreds of miles deep into central Angola.