

S. Africa Claims Success in

By Bernard D. Nossiter
Washington Post Foreign Service

PRETORIA, Jan. 29 — The South African government insists that its Angolan adventure has turned out to be a sizeable diplomatic and political success that will strengthen the country against black guerrillas.

Despite the abrupt withdrawal last week of South African troops from the Angolan battlefield, high officials here claim the incursion achieved its principal goals—thwarting a takeover by the Soviet-backed Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola and strengthening Pretoria's detente with neighboring black states.

This judgment is contested in the world outside this closed society and by liberal South African critics of Prime Minister John Vorster's authoritarian government.

Ranking government aides, however, have convinced themselves that South Africa dealt some punishing blows to the black guerrillas threatening Namibia (Southwest Africa) and picked up a bargaining chip to deal with whatever government ultimately emerges in Angola.

South Africa's white supremacist rule is the target of so much verbal abuse from black African states that it is hard to conceive of a workable detente. But Vorster has already established a tacit live-and-let-live arrangement with the new government in Mozambique, a Marxist neighbor on the eastern border.

Some officials here believe that a similar deal with

Angola can be promoted by hanging on to a piece of the country's southern border region — all in the name of protecting the big South African dam and power stations on the Cunene River.

Its dimensions are kept secret although some sources indicate the bulge is as much as 40 miles deep — considerably more than is necessary to protect the dam and power installations.

Information on South African involvement is hard to come by. All this week, Vorster's feeble opposition in Parliament has been complaining that the country was never told South African troops were fighting in Angola until they were pulled back. Government officials, who insist on anonymity, suggest the following scenario:

South Africa moved into Angola last summer with "sophisticated support" for the pro-western National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA). It did so with the blessing of at least two black neighbors, Zaire and Zambia, both of whom were said to fear rising Soviet influence in southern Africa. They were especially concerned about protecting Angola's Atlantic ports and the Benguela railway, which handles Zambian and Zairian copper exports.

The South African contingent, estimated at 1,200 men but possibly as many as 4,500, initially was instructed to clear out Popular Movement forces from "traditional" UNITA territory so that Portugal — which still held nominal sovereignty —

would not hand over rule to the Soviet-backed faction on Independence Day, Nov. 11.

The South Africans succeeded. Portugal simply walked away from the mess.

Pretoria's force was then given a second political objective, again with the encouragement of Zambia and Zaire. It was told to prevent the Popular Movement and its Cuban allies from winning back so much Angolan territory that a majority of nations in the Organization for African Unity would recognize the Soviet-backed group as the sole legitimate government.

This worked, too. At its summit meeting earlier this month, the OAU divided down the middle, 22 to 22, on the recognition issue.

However, both were basically delaying actions with no long-range benefits for Angola's pro-Western forces. UNITA troops are now falling back in the face of a strong Popular Movement advance against major population centers along the Benguela Railway in central Angola.

Critics of the government say that the Angolan incursion badly strained Vorster's efforts to build ties with black states, pointing to Nigeria's swing into the pro-Soviet camp.

Officials countered by saying that the "loss" of Nigeria is far outweighed by strengthened ties with Zambia and Zaire. Foreign Minister Hilgard Muller said South Africa has shown its black neighbors what a reliable ally Pretoria can be.

South African trade with its two closer neighbors is increasing. There is an air cargo

Angola

transport link between Zambia and Zaire and the Jan Smuts Airport outside Johannesburg, and South Africa is counting on its wealth and skills to overcome repugnance in black African states for Pretoria's racial policies.

South African officials still disagree on whether the troop pullback was forced by military setbacks or political pressure.

Defense Minister Pieter Botha told parliament earlier this week that the South African troops won "most" of their battles in Angola, indicating that some had been lost. He also admitted that 29 men were killed in action and an undisclosed number were wounded and captured. This caused one government aide to suggest that the South African withdrawal had "cracked the myth of invincible white supremacy."

Sources close to the military scoff at this idea. They say the withdrawal was made without a single casualty, proving that there was no disengagement from combat. They claim the pullback was the result of "new political requirements," suggesting a link to U.S. congressional refusal to finance arms for Angola's pro-Western factions.

Pro-Soviet Forces Advance in Angola

From News Dispatches

British correspondents in Angola report that the Soviet-backed Popular Movement, led by Cuban troops, is advancing rapidly against Atlantic ports and several

towns along the Benguela Railroad now held by hard-pressed pro-Western forces.

Nicholas Ashford of the Times of London said one assault force is moving on the coast toward Lobito, the main port 150 miles south of Luanda, while other contingents are approaching Huambo and Luso in the interior.

Stewart Dalby of the Financial Times, who visited Luso, said the pro-Western National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA) is short of fuel and only has enough small arms for half the 30,000 men it claims it would be able to field if they had weapons.

Reports from Lusaka, Zambia, and from Paris said UNITA leader Jonas Savimbi and his foreign minister, Jorge Sangumba, are planning a European arms buying tour beginning in London.

In other developments:

—About 60,000 tons of Zambian copper, normally transported on the Benguela railroad to the Atlantic outlet at Lobito, have piled up at the Tanzanian port of Dar es Salaam on the Indian Ocean.

—Zambian President Kenneth Kaunda invoked emergency powers Wednesday night to counter what he called internal subversion and the danger of the Angolan civil war spreading to his country.

—More than 300 Angolan refugees were allowed ashore in the Namibian port of Walvis Bay, after being confined for two weeks in ships and small boats. South Africa had refused to take in the refugees.