

Diplomats in Moscow Express Doubt About a Shift on Angola

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MOSCOW, Jan. 5—The Soviet Union has not given any clear public indication that it is willing to reduce its military involvement in Angola despite hopes in Washington that a commentary in the newspaper Pravda had signaled a softening in position.

One sentence in the Pravda article — “the Soviet Union comes out firmly for the termination of foreign armed intervention in Angola”—was interpreted by some American officials as meaning that Moscow might be ready to discuss some reduction of involvement.

But Pravda said almost the same thing on Nov. in an authoritative column signed “Observer,” which indicates a Kremlin-level commentator.

“The Soviet public, together with all peace-loving and progressive forces of the world, resolutely denounces the armed aggression against the African state now being born,” Pravda said then, “and demands the immediate withdrawal of the armed interventionists from the territory of Angola.”

Coalition May Be Issue

Some diplomats who are long-time readers of Pravda see no hint that “foreign armed intervention” is meant to include the Russians or even the Cubans, who are said to have several thousand men supporting the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola, one of three factions in the civil war. Rather, the remark is thought to be directed against American and South African aid to the two other factions.

Some foreign journalists and diplomats believe Moscow may have been willing all along to settle for a coalition among the three groups, as long as the Popular Movement had the leading role.

This view was bolstered by another section of the Pravda

commentary recalling earlier Soviet support for “setting up a transitional government with the participation or representatives of various movements.” This position, Pravda said, was abandoned because of “the leaders of the secessionist alignments that unleashed an armed struggle with active support from outside.”

Then the article continued: “The consolidation of Angola patriotic and anti-imperialist forces, which come out for its genuine independence and territorial integrity, would be undoubtedly met favorably by those who are genuinely concerned about the future of that country.”

This seemed to be a softer position on the prospect of coalition than one taken Dec. 25 by the Government newspaper Izvestia, and so may signal a change. Whether the three factions would accept such an arrangement is an open question.

The Pravda commentary is being viewed also in the light of the meeting on Angola to be held shortly by the Organization of African Unity. In a sense, Moscow seems to have blurred its position, perhaps to avoid embarrassment should the organization fail to endorse a total victory by the Popular Front and choose instead to support coalition.