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Western-Backed Angolans Fleeing

Washington

Soviet-backed forces led by Cuban troops have scored major military victories against Western-backed foes in northern Angola and sent them fleeing to the Zaire border, according to reports yesterday in South Africa and Washington.

There were fears that the successes by the Popular Movement (MPLA) would touch off direct intervention in the north by neighboring Zaire.

Secretary of State Henry Kissinger in Washington cabled a report on the situation along the northern front to the North Atlantic Council in Brussels. Sources said Kissinger informed the allies the Marxist faction was advancing rapidly toward the Zaire border.

Kissinger told diplomats from 37 African countries late yesterday he hoped the civil war in Angola could be settled through negotiations within a month. He said he planned to take up the possibility of such a settlement in Moscow next week when he sees Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev on a new nuclear weapons treaty.

Kissinger also reported problems in eastern Angola, where he said elements of the pro-Western National Front (FNLA) backed by South African soldiers have failed to secure a key railroad facility and "virtually all" the troops and their Zairian allies were fleeing the battlefield.

The FNLA and its ally, the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA), both backed by the United States and South Africa, are fighting the MPLA for control of the former Portuguese colony, which gained its independence last November.

About 7000 Cubans are known to be leading the MPLA fight.

Cuba's news agency, Prensa Latina, reported Prime Minister Fidel Castro said the MPLA "is winning the war against the imperialist invaders of Angola, who are suffering catastrophic losses."

The Soviet news agency Tass reported from the Angolan capital of Luanda that MPLA troops are close to Santo Antonio do Zaire, last stronghold of the FNLA in northeast Angola.

Angola's richest oil fields are located off Santo Antonio, south of the oil-rich Cabinda enclave, which the MPLA controls. Cabinda is separated from Angola by a thin area of Zaire.

Reports have said much of the FNLA war material came from Zaire across the Congo river into Santo Antonio.

The MPLA northern offensive was reportedly led by about 7000 Cuban combat troops and used tanks, helicopter gunships and concentrated rocket attacks to seize the cities.

The London Financial Times and the Yugoslav news agency Tanjug both reported that the MPLA has seized the key Angolan port of Ambriz, its airfield and the nearby city of Ambrizette. Ambriz was the military headquarters of the FNLA.

In the south, where UNITA is fighting the MPLA, the situation is not as serious, primarily because of combat skills of South African troops, a Pentagon official said in Washington.

Clashes between the MPLA and UNITA were reported in four areas. The Johannesburg Star in South Africa quoted UNITA officials as saying a column of 1000 heavily armed MPLA troops led by 500 Cubans and Russian advisers was advancing on the east-central town of Luso.

Associated Press