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Castro Says He Is Cutting Size of Force in Angola

NYTimes

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MAY 26 1976

Special to The New York Times

LUXEMBOURG, May 25—Secretary of State Henry A. Kissinger said today that Prime Minister Fidel Castro had written a letter asserting that Cuba had begun or would

soon begin withdrawing 200 military personnel a week from Angola, and would have cut its force there by half at the end of the year.

After a meeting with Luxembourg's Prime Minister, Gaston Thorn, at the Senningen Castle near here this afternoon, Mr. Kissinger said: "We consider this communication a positive development." But he added that the withdrawal rate of 200 soldiers a week "should be speeded up" until "all combat forces and military forces are withdrawn from Angola."

Secretary Kissinger, who flew here today from Stockholm, has asked the Central Intelligence Agency to begin an immediate study of troop movements in Angola to determine whether Mr. Castro's assertion can be verified. Until the study is completed several weeks from now, the United States will reserve judgment.

Cubans Had Civil War Role

American officials also said Mr. Kissinger had asked the Swedish Prime Minister, Olof Palme, to tell the Cubans that the United States still insisted on a total withdrawal.

If Mr. Castro does begin withdrawing troops at a rate of 200 a week now, at least 7,400 will still be in Angola at the end of the year, according to American estimates. The Cuban forces began arriving there last year during the Angolan civil war and helped to defeat two nationalist movements that were supported by the United States in the former

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Portuguese colony.

Withdrawal of the Cuban force from Angola has been a major goal of Mr. Kissinger's African policy.

The letter about the withdrawal was written by Mr. Castro to Prime Minister Palme. In it, Mr. Castro said Cuba had no intention of sending troops to other countries in southern Africa or in Latin America to aid "liberation movements."

"I do not wish to become the crusader of the 20th century," was Mr. Castro's phrase, according to a Swedish Foreign Ministry spokesman, Lars Lonnback, in Stockholm.

American officials believe that the letter must be confirmed from the field in Angola but that since Mr. Castro himself wrote it, it must be taken seriously.

According to American officials, Mr. Castro's letter was written four days ago and specifically authorized Mr. Palme to pass on its contents to Mr. Kissinger during the Secretary's visit to Sweden. Mr. Palme read it, in English, to Mr. Kissinger during their discussions in Stockholm yesterday but did not give him a copy, American officials said.

The number of Cuban troops in Angola now is a matter of dispute. American intelligence puts it at 13,000 to 15,000, and apparently the Cubans also say they have about that many. But the Swedes are believed to have a somewhat higher estimate.

The Cuban troops were the spearhead of the combat force that brought Dr. Agostinho Neto's Popular Liberation Movement to power in Angola last winter. Since the end of the fighting, Swedish officials said, they have been acting as "development aid advisers" and also protecting Dr. Neto from losing control of the movement to the Soviet Union, which provided him with millions of dollars of weapons and ammunition.

Sweden's Neutrality Policy

Mr. Kissinger, on his recent trip to Africa, said that the United States could not grant Cuba diplomatic recognition until all Cuban troops had left Angola. The maintenance of a small group of Cuban technical advisers in Angola after the military withdrawal would be another matter, American officials believe.

Why the Cubans have decided to begin acceding to the repeated American demands for a withdrawal is unclear. United States officials believe, however, that Mr. Castro realized he had pushed American patience to the limit and wanted to make a gesture of conciliation.

"We believe the policy we have pursued contributed to this," Mr. Kissinger said here.

According to Mr. Lonnback, Mr. Castro's letter arrived in Stockholm last Friday, two days before Mr. Kissinger flew in for a visit to improve Swedish-American relations. After Mr. Palme read the letter to him, Mr. Kissinger expressed appreciation to the Swedish Government. But it was understood that it would take at least a month to determine whether the withdrawals had really begun and how many troops had left.

Mr. Palme is said to have explained to Mr. Kissinger that

he had written an article in a Swedish newspaper that criticized the Cubans for their military intervention in Angola, and that this was why Mr. Castro wrote his letter. Sweden maintains a policy of neutrality and has good relations with Mr. Neto's movement in Angola.

American officials have expressed concern that the Cuban force might be used on the side of the black guerrilla movement in Rhodesia, which is now ruled by a white minority Government headed by Prime Minister Ian D. Smith.

Mr. Kissinger and Prime Minister Thorn held general discussions on European developments and, under a huge cedar tree outside Senningen Castle, Mr. Kissinger said that since Luxembourg had "no overwhelming national aspirations," they had gotten along fine.

The Secretary of State then left for London for two days of meetings with British officials and with members of the Central Treaty Organization.

Explanation by Angolan

Special to The New York Times

LUANDA, Angola, May 25— "The People's Republic of Angola appealed to Cuba for help against the South African invasion last fall and has now decided that the situation is sufficiently under control that the Cuban troops can begin to withdraw," the Angolan Director of Information, Luis de Almeida, declared today.

The Government spokesman insisted that the decision on the gradual withdrawal of Cuban troops was "an act of sovereignty" and not a result of United States pressure.

Mr. Almeida made his comments in an interview after it was disclosed in Stockholm

that Prime Minister Palme had informed Secretary Kissinger of Prime Minister Castor's assertion that he was beginning to pull Cuban forces out of Angola.

The news was made public here in a brief report stating that Angola's Prime Minister, Lopo do Nascimento, on his way to Moscow had announced the withdrawal of "some Cuban contingents" during a news conference in Lagos, Nigeria.

Angola still needs the Cuban military to help it build up a strong national army prepared to repel any attack by South Africa, Mr. Almeida said.

However, the military situation along the southern frontier and in the northern territory of Cabinda, where most of the Cuban and Angolan forces are stationed, has improved so that it is not necessary for all the Cuban forces to remain, he emphasized.

Mr. Almeida put the total of Cuban military forces here at 12,000. Portuguese sources say the number was as high as 18,000 at the height of the battle against the South Africans and rival nationalist groups at the beginning of this year.

Brezhnev Promises Help

MOSCOW, May 25 (AP) — Leonid I. Brezhnev, the Soviet Communist party leader, assured Angola's Prime Minister, Lopo do Nascimento today that the Soviet Union would continue to support Angola's Government in its efforts to build "a new society," the Soviet press agency Tass reported.

Mr. Nascimento, who is in Moscow on a state visit, "expressed gratitude for the selfless assistance and support" that the Soviet Union gave Angola, Tass said.