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Southern Africa:

South Africa Reports Angola War Role

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The South African Defense Department January 3 released an official account of Pretoria's involvement in Angola's civil war from September 1975 to March 1976. According to the report, the South African troops joined forces with the pro-West National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA) and the National Front for the Liberation of Angola (FNLA) to fight the Soviet- and Cuban-backed Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA). [See 1976 Angola: [New Cabinet Named; Other Developments](#); 1976 Southern Africa: Angola [Moves on Guerrillas; Other Developments](#)]

The Defense Department said South Africa and its allies came close to controlling the entire country and said the maximum number of South African troops in Angola was 2,000. (The U.S. State Department had estimated a total of 13,000 Cuban troops in Angola at the height of the war.)

It was the first time South Africa officially had admitted joining forces with the pro-West Angola factions. The report said the South African army intervention had begun September 24, 1975, when an officer was sent to help plan an operation to stop an MPLA advance on Nova Lisboa (renamed Huambo). By November 5, 1975, the date Cuba said it decided to intervene on behalf of the MPLA, the combined South-Africa-UNITA-FNLA force held most of the Angolan seacoast. The pro-West forces had penetrated to within 70 miles of Luanda, the capital, and could easily have taken the rest of the country, according to the account.

They did not continue their advance because UNITA leader Jonas Savimbi was hoping to negotiate a settlement with the MPLA, the report said. Savimbi wanted to restore his authority in his traditional area of influence, the south, and did not want to involve the country in further bloodshed. The report said South Africa was willing to accept a cease-fire and hold its positions until the Organization of African Unity (OAU) agreed on a political settlement for the former Portuguese colony. The OAU failed to reach an agreement and increased military aid to the Cuban and MPLA troops, forcing the South African troops to withdraw. The pullout began January 22, 1976 and was completed by March 25, the report said.

The report listed three principal reasons for the South African intervention: to defend the Cunene River hydroelectric and irrigation project; to facilitate "hot pursuit" tactics against the South-West Africa People's Organization based in southern Angola, and to aid the FNLA and UNITA against Communist infiltration. Another report, by Robert Moss, a former editor with The Economist, was published as a series in the Toronto Globe and Mail beginning January 31. Moss said Cuban soldiers had been operating in Angola several months before November 5, 1975, the date on which the Cubans officially said they had decided to intervene. Moss was responding to an official account by Cuba of its role in Angola, written by the Colombian author, Gabriel Garcia Marquez. [See 1977 [Cuba: Angola War Role Detailed](#)]

According to Moss, Cuban Deputy Foreign Minister Carlos Rafael Rodriguez had revealed in a December 1975 speech that there were 230 Cuban military instructors with the MPLA as of the spring of 1975. In August 1975, MPLA Defense Minister Iko Carreira visited Moscow to ask for Soviet troops. Moscow had turned down the request, fearing a confrontation with the U.S., but had suggested Carreira request help from Cuba. The Soviets had given Cuba assurances of direct Soviet intervention if the U.S. blockaded Cuba or sent troops to Angola, Moss reported.

More Cuban military instructors arrived in Luanda August 16, 1975, and shipments of military equipment and troops were reported in September and October. By November 11, 1975, Angola's independence day, there were 4,000 Cuban troops in the country, 2,500 of them in Luanda, Moss said.

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