

SECRET

N
12

25X1

117

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
NATIONAL FOREIGN ASSESSMENT CENTER

30 November 1978

MEMORANDUM

ANGOLA: UNITA VS. THE BENGUELA

Key Points

- The Angolan Government will find it difficult to make the Benguela Railroad operational not only because of the numerous economic and logistic problems it confronts, but--more importantly--because of UNITA's insurgent activities.
- UNITA apparently plans to step up its attacks against the vulnerable rail-line--much of which passes through territory occupied by the insurgents--and we believe UNITA will be able to attack trains or commit sabotage at will along large sections of the rail line.

[Redacted]

25X1

25X1

RP M 78-10452

25X1

[Redacted]

SECRET

[Redacted]

SECRET

- The insurgents already have substantial stockpiles of military supplies inside Angola.
- UNITA probably believes that its international credibility would be damaged if it failed to prevent the railroad from operating normally.
- Insurgent leader Savimbi, already concerned over the Angolan Government's continuing diplomatic and political gains, may opt to inflict heavier damage on the railroad if he believes his position is deteriorating.
- Persistent UNITA attacks against the line could lead Neto to renew charges that either Mobutu or Kaunda is aiding the insurgents.
- We strongly doubt that the Benguela Railroad can be restored to full use until Luanda reaches a modus vivendi with UNITA or is able to defeat UNITA militarily, neither of which appears likely in the short term.

-ii-

SECRET

SECRET

Introduction

The total reopening of the Benguela Railroad--announced earlier this month--is jeopardized by myriad political, economic, technical, organizational, and logistic problems, any one of which could prevent an early return to efficient operations. In addition to these problems, an even more important question will be the extent to which the insurgents of the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA) maintain or increase their attacks on the vulnerable rail line.

The Benguela reportedly is in generally good condition and an attempt to begin operations along the entire 1,347 kilometer route is expected soon--barring increased rebel activity. In recent weeks, however, representatives of the UNITA insurgents--a force numbering approximately 18,000--have stated repeatedly that they will escalate their attacks. We have no reason to doubt either their intentions or their capability. Even as the repairs on the major bridge at Dilolo were being completed last month, UNITA continued to sabotage other sections of the line, demonstrating that it is able to attack portions of the railroad almost at will.

UNITA Capability

25X1 UNITA insurgents have continued to attack trains and to sabotage portions of the line in central Angola and that they have begun to increase the tempo of their assaults. UNITA probably believes that its credibility both with Luanda and with its outside supporters rests largely on its ability to prevent the railroad from operating. The insurgents are concerned that the Angolan Government's continuing diplomatic gestures toward the West are aimed in part at putting pressure on UNITA. They may have decided to respond by stepping up their attacks on the rail line so as to demonstrate that they remain a force to be reckoned with.

SECRET

SECRET

The insurgents' attacks over the last two years have been numerous, but most have been relatively minor hit-and-run raids aimed primarily at causing derailments, destroying track, and blowing up small bridges. With a few exceptions, most of the damage inflicted by these raids could be repaired within 48 hours. Late last month, however, UNITA reportedly destroyed two bridges that may close the railroad for several weeks. The guerrillas also may attempt to inflict greater damage on the Benguela if they see a substantial increase in traffic on the line or if they believe they are becoming isolated from their traditional sources of external diplomatic or material support.

UNITA will maintain the capability to harass the railroad-- especially in those areas where they have tribal and popular support. We believe that at present UNITA has the men and materiel to survive as an effective guerrilla force against the railroad even without substantial external assistance. Contrary to what Angolan President Neto has publicly alleged, the insurgents are not dependent on outside assistance or sanctuary from Angola's neighbors to maintain their attacks against the line, and they apparently have substantial stockpiles of military supplies inside Angola.

UNITA does not have to destroy the railroad completely to keep it from operating effectively. Frequent minor damage, the threat of sabotage that causes the Angolans to run trains at less than normal speed, and the need for the Angolans to check the line in advance and to scout the surrounding terrain will greatly impede the Benguela's usefulness.

Security Measures

As part of the agreement to reopen the Benguela Railroad, the Angolan Government has promised to provide as much military protection as necessary to ensure its security.

- 2 -

SECRET

SECRET

In addition to posting guards and building fortifications at major bridges, an armored ore car manned by Angolan troops is run in front of each train. Helicopters and spotter aircraft also are flown along the route. There may be as many as a few thousand Angolan troops guarding the line, with work gangs stationed at various points to make repairs caused by UNITA activity. The Angolan Government intends to reinforce its defenses along the rail line, but these measures are unlikely to reduce UNITA's capacity to conduct sabotage.

Luanda had attempted to extract a commitment from Kinshasa to assist with security along the Angolan section of the line, presumably by using Zairian military personnel. Zaire reportedly refused, but each country then agreed to "guarantee circulation and security" within its respective territory. Although Kinshasa has been less than enthusiastic in preparing for the reopening of the railway, the Zairian portion of the line should be secure--at least as long as the Inter-African Force remains in Shaba.

Impact on Zaire and Zambia

Although Kinshasa and Lusaka have reacted positively to Luanda's decision last August to reopen the railroad, neither President Mobutu nor President Kaunda believes that the Angolan Government can ensure the security of the route. Both believe that UNITA will not allow the Benguela to operate until Angolan President Neto agrees to negotiate with the insurgents. Despite the recent Angola-Zaire rapprochement, Mobutu and Kaunda remain sympathetic to UNITA. Neither has indicated that he intends to press UNITA leader Jonas Savimbi to cease his attacks on the railroad. The two presidents have nothing to lose, however, by appearing to support Luanda's attempts to get the Benguela operating again.

- 3 -

SECRET

In the short to medium term, the railroad probably will have little increased economic significance for Angola, Zambia, or Zaire. Nor will Zambia and Zaire attempt to adjust their transport routes until Angola is able to demonstrate that the railroad is secure.* For the present, Zaire and now Zambia's most important route to the outside is the rail line to the south, through Zambia, Rhodesia, and Botswana to South African ports. Loss of this access route, however, would put heavy pressure on Zaire and Zambia to look again to the Benguela.

Increased UNITA attacks on the line could lead Neto to blame the Zairians--or the Zambians--for aiding the rebels and to insist that they put pressure on Savimbi to curtail the attacks. UNITA activities against the Benguela Railroad therefore have the potential of jeopardizing the recent progress made in easing tensions between Angola and Zaire.

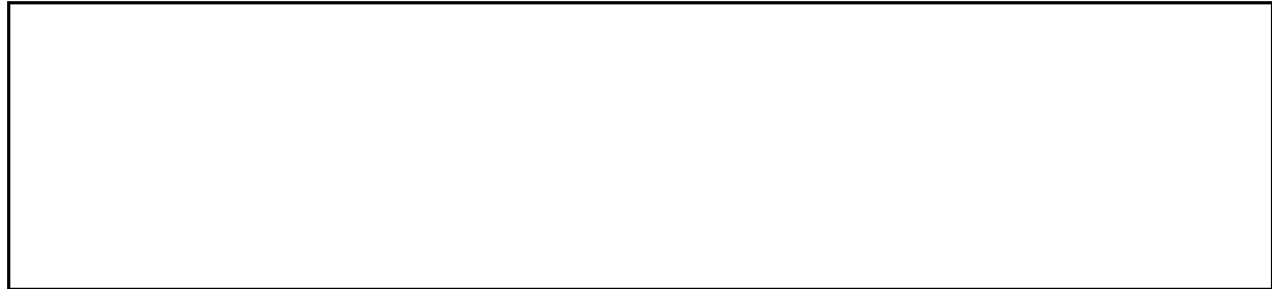
Outlook

There is little doubt that UNITA could put the railroad out of action if it chose to do so. Angolan officials undoubtedly are concerned over the vulnerability of bridges in the Cubal Variant area which, if destroyed, would take many months to rebuild. Even though some of the spans may be guarded by Angolan troops, UNITA has the capability to mount effective operations in this area. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] it would also not be difficult for UNITA to put the line out of operation by destroying the railroad's locomotives. We do not believe that Angolan troops will be able to protect the line--much of which runs through UNITA-occupied territory. Savimbi has threatened to intensify his attacks against the railroad if Cuban troops are used for security.

**Until 1975, Zaire and land-locked Zambia used the Benguela Railroad to transport more than half of their vital copper exports to Angola's Atlantic port of Lobito. Zaire's copper industry in Shaba Region also depended heavily on the line for imports of equipment that were necessary to keep the mines working efficiently.*

25X1

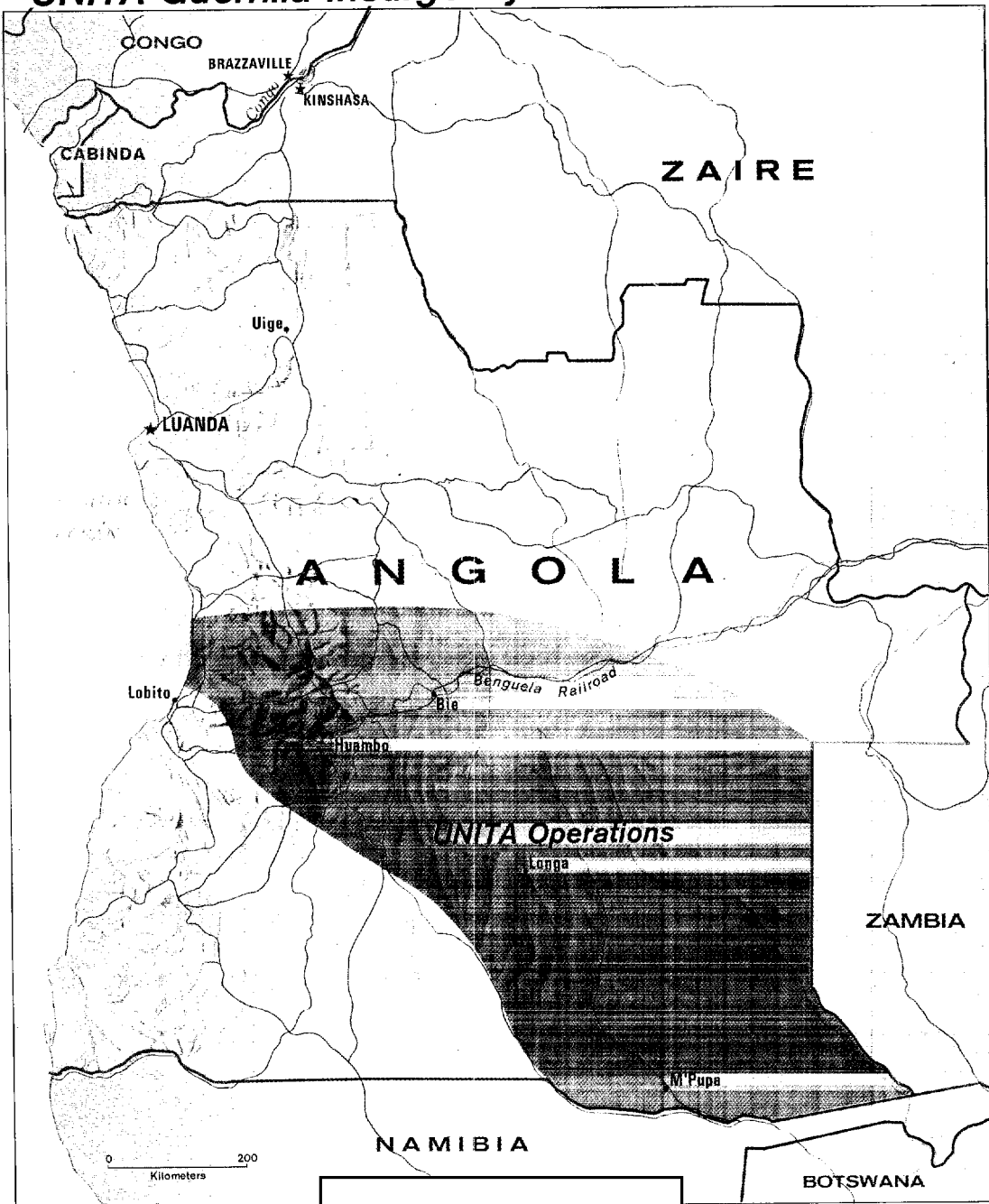


In sum, it is unlikely that Benguela Railroad operations can be restored to the pre-civil war level until the Angolan Government either reaches a modus vivendi with UNITA or is able to defeat UNITA militarily, neither of which appears likely over the short term.

- 5 -

SECRET

UNITA Guerrilla Insurgency



624369 11-78 CIA

25X1

STAT

Approved For Release 2004/12/02 : CIA-RDP80T00634A000500010013-7

Next 4 Page(s) In Document Exempt

Approved For Release 2004/12/02 : CIA-RDP80T00634A000500010013-7