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Soviet Influence In Namibia Stirs Hill's Concern

While many of their colleagues were junketing around the Caribbean last January, two Senate staff members were trekking through the bush in Southwest Africa, riding on "mine-proof" vehicles and hunkering down in machine-gun nests.

The two men, Joel Lisker and Bert Milling, were checking out firsthand the guerrilla warfare that has torn Namibia for 15 years. They were gathering information and lining up witnesses for hearings this week by Sen. Jeremiah Denton's subcommittee on security and terrorism.

What led the two committee aides to forsake the comforts of Capitol Hill for the combat zone along the Angolan border was the growing concern in Congress over Soviet influence in the region. As to why the United States should worry about Russian intentions in Namibia, a top-secret Central Intelligence Agency file on the country lists explicit reasons for concern.

Namibia, which is bigger than Texas but has a population smaller than Houston's, contains enormous quantities of uranium, diamonds,

copper and other minerals. In fact, it has both the world's largest uranium mine and the largest diamond concession. Much of its mineral wealth is classified by the CIA as "strategic," meaning that the United States needs the minerals and doesn't have its own supply.

Though the Soviets are largely self-sufficient in these essential minerals, the CIA suspects the Kremlin wants to be able to deprive the West of these strategic minerals by controlling Namibia. Also, when coupled with Angola, Namibia would give the Soviets a strategic anchor in the south Atlantic.

That's why the United States worries about the South West Africa People's Organization (SWAPO), and why the Marxist guerrillas are covertly supported by the Soviet Union. According to the CIA, the Russians provide training, weapons and other necessities that have kept the insurgents in business over the years.

"Moscow remains SWAPO's main supporter," a recent secret CIA report states. "Although there are unconfirmed reports that SWAPO has expressed interest in reviving its old ties with Peking, the Chinese currently are not willing to do more than offer the insurgents moral support and quietly back the initiative of five Western powers to negotiate a settlement with South Africa."

Intelligence sources and secret reports, examined by my associates

Dale Van Atta and Joseph Spear detail the extent of the Kremlin's involvement with SWAPO. Here are the key bits of evidence:

- SWAPO's present leader, Sam Nujoma, is virtually a Soviet puppet. Internal SWAPO documents indicate that Nujoma has to get Moscow's permission before dealing with his own subordinates.

- Young Namibians are sometimes recruited into SWAPO with promises they will become doctors or teachers within six months. Instead, they are packed off to "engineering camps"—terrorist training centers in Angola and Zambia.

- The most promising recruits are sent to advanced terrorist schools in East Germany and the Soviet Union. Aeroflot flies them from Luanda, Angola, to Moscow by way of Libya; sometimes the Namibians are provided with United Nations passports. In East Germany, they are told to pass themselves off as Ugandans.

- SWAPO guerrillas are well equipped with Soviet pistols, rifles and rocket launchers.

There is evidence that discipline is harsh in the guerrilla forces. One defector, who walked 150 to 200 miles to escape SWAPO's clutches, told of being forced to dig his own grave and lie in it when he was suspected of treachery. He was nearly buried alive before his fellow guerrillas finally believed his protestations of innocence.