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Disagreement About Strategy Surfaces Among Angolan Rebels

UNITA Strives for Role in Regional Negotiations

By Peter Wise
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LISBON—The Angolan rebel movement UNITA appears to be overreaching its military capacity and is showing signs of internal dissent as it intensifies guerrilla and diplomatic activity aimed at securing a significant role in negotiations toward a regional peace settlement, diplomatic observers say.

Rebel leader Jonas Savimbi's determination to achieve impressive military successes to demonstrate the insurgents' strength has met with opposition from field commanders who fear that he is pushing the guerrilla offensive ahead too far and too fast, according to the assessment of western analysts here.

Recent tensions within the pro-western rebel movement have been reflected in the rebels' acknowledgment of a setback in plans to advance toward the capital of Luanda, open disenchantment over closer U.S. ties with the Marxist government and uncertainty about the status of top guerrilla leaders.

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The Angolan government claimed that Chilingutilla had been expelled from the movement in disgrace following a series of defeats. Similar reports said another UNITA commander had defected with his troops to the South-West Africa People's Organization (SWAPO), the nationalist guerrilla movement fighting for Namibian independence.

Western observers here said the government reports were probably the result of attempts by Angolan military intelligence to aggravate differences within UNITA. They believe the focus for discord is op-

position from commanders in the field to ambitious military aims favored by Savimbi.

A likely reason for the shake-up, observers say, is to get UNITA members who have been enjoying a relatively high standard of living outside Angola back to the bush to keep them sharp and avoid antagonism within UNITA ranks.

Wilson dos Santos said he would be returning to the field this month to assume his position as UNITA head of information. He has been acting as the organization's spokesman in Europe.

U.S. officials have made it clear that they consider UNITA to be an internal Angolan problem and not part of the equation in seeking a southern African peace settlement. The main issue for the Reagan administration is for Angola and South Africa to reach agreement on a Cuban pullout from Angola tied to a withdrawal of South African troops from Namibia and the implementation of a United Nations independence plan.

Western diplomatic sources said U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs Chester A. Crocker held private talks with Savimbi in Cape Town during a recent visit. The U.S. Embassy issued a statement saying the United States regularly maintains contacts with UNITA but does not always specify times and places. The embassy declined to confirm or deny the reports of Crocker's meeting with Savimbi.

South Africa issued a statement later saying Foreign Minister Roelof F. (Pik) Botha held talks with Savimbi but did not elaborate.

Angola, which has hardened its insistence that South Africa cut off all aid to rebels, would like to see more U.S. pressure on Pretoria to this end. UNITA acknowledges that losing South African support would be expensive but claims it could survive on airlifts of arms from unspecified nations to landing strips in the Angolan bush.

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