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Former UNITA Troops Reportedly Flown in to Assist Rebels

US Embassy Rwanda

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COUNTRY: ZAIRE

SUBJ: Former UNITA Troops Reportedly Flown In To Assist Rebels

SOURCE: Brussels Le Soir in French 1-2 Mar 97 p 10
TEXT:

[Report by Colette Braeckman]

[FBIS Translated Text] Two days ago in Bukavu, planes of unknown origin stepped up their flights. They were bringing men into South Kivu who were expected... in Lower Zaire or Shaba. Former Katangese gendarmes, or rather their descendants, these are long-time exiles in Angola who fought with the Angolan Army against UNITA [National Union for the Total Independence of Angola] forces.

The arrival of between 1,500 and 4,000 of these 'Katangese,' housed in the Saio camp in the town center, is the talk of Bukavu. They speak Lingala, and also Portuguese, and lack the discipline of the men of the Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of the Congo-Zaire. They have already tried to requisition cars! But

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they are nevertheless given a warm welcome. But where are these refugees headed? To Kindu or Kisangani? It is a close kept secret. But one thing is certain: The arrival of fresh troops from Angola at least shows that the Luanda government was aware of the operation and that the plane flights, by way of Uganda (with other 'Katangese' also arriving by truck through Tanzania), were financed by external forces. Curiously, while in Bukavu everyone sees the hand of the United States behind the operation, a statement released in Washington urges Angola to keep out of the conflict. This would not be the first time that actions in the field contradict the official stance.

Confident Rebels [subhead]

Alliance officials in Bukavu, Banyamulenge with their long limbs and measured movements, are confident: "It is the advance through the forest, in the area around Kisangani, or possibly Gbadolite, which is difficult. There are no tracks, we have to cross marshlands and impenetrable jungle. The savanna, after Kindu in the direction of Shaba, will be a different matter. It will be a pleasure to march along the paths surrounded by the long grass. We will then be advancing at the rate of 60 kilometers a day."

Not only will the rebel advance be easy but, they believe, it could well be triumphant. "In Shaba, and in Kasai, we will not even have to fight, those two provinces will fall of their own accord, the people are awaiting our arrival as liberators." Reports coming into Bukavu from independent sources confirm this optimism: Eastern Zaire is well and truly in the hands of Laurent Kabila's forces.

This is no doubt why these men in Bukavu and Goma pay little attention to the talks in South Africa. "Before there is any cease-fire we will have made further advances and, by accepting the principle of negotiation, we will gain ground in terms of international opinion. Even if in reality there is nothing to negotiate, except the procedures for Mobutu's resignation."

The confidence and determination displayed by the Alliance fighters is not due entirely to their organizational capacities or the expected support among the local populations. It is now clear that their campaign is part of a vast movement which involves all the countries in the region.

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