

# Soviets seek trouble in southern Africa

by Rachel Douglas

While their erstwhile strategic asset, Col. Muammar Qaddafi, was seeing his forces kicked across the Sahara by victorious Chad, Soviet spokesmen suddenly started hollering, that an explosion of military conflict could occur at almost any moment, somewhere farther south on the African continent.

On March 26, Soviet Foreign Ministry representative Boris Pyadyshev called a press briefing in Moscow, to denounce a joint military exercise by Zaire and the United States, scheduled for mid-April, and the U.S.-assisted modernization of the Kamina airbase in Shaba province, Zaire. Pyadyshev called the base "a springboard for U.S. interference in practically any sub-Saharan country," especially Angola. "The setting up of such a springboard effectively means U.S. transition from covert subversive actions against African nations to direct interference, including military intervention, in their affairs," he charged.

The next day, at a press conference in Harare, Zimbabwe, one of the U.S.S.R.'s vice-presidents talked about the potential for Soviet military actions in Africa. On the radio news in Zimbabwe, monitored by the U.S. Foreign Broadcast Information Service, Deputy Chairman of the Supreme Soviet P.G. Gilashvili was reported as saying that "if the Pretoria [South Africa] regime continues its policy of destabilization against the front-line states, Moscow will intervene militarily." Soviet newspapers did not report Gilashvili's remarks.

Gilashvili, a vice-president since 1976 and a frequent choice to show the Soviet flag in developing countries (he is a Soviet Georgian, one of the non-Slavic ethnic groups from which Moscow often selects its emissaries to Africa and Asia), was on the last leg of a two-week tour of the so-called front-line states, the countries closest to the Republic of South Africa. Starting on March 15, Gilashvili and his Supreme Soviet delegation visited Angola, Zambia, Botswana, Tanzania, Zimbabwe, and Mozambique. The ostensible purpose of the trip was to extend moral support in the struggle against South Africa and to discuss economic cooperation, but the overriding Soviet interest, in gaining strategic advantage from stirring up the tumult of war in the region, was always visible.

An *Izvestia* account of the first two stops omitted any

statements from Gilashvili or other delegation members, except that they had a very busy schedule. Angolan President José Eduardo dos Santos, said the Soviet paper, had spoken of anticipated "expanding aggression . . . by U.S. reactionary circles."

In Lusaka, Zambia, the Soviet delegation intersected a special conference of the Socialist International, a group most intent on stepping up confrontation in southern Africa, whatever bloody consequences may ensue. Delegates from the six front-line states were joined by Socialist International personnel from eight different European countries—and, according to wire reports, Gilashvili's Soviet group! They joined in denunciations of South Africa, especially for the destabilization of Mozambique.

Upon arrival in Tanzania on March 30, Gilashvili was hosted by the deputy prime minister, and minister of defense, S.A. Salim.

## Military interest primary

In all the countries visited, the Gilashvili delegation touted Soviet concern for the economic health of the southern African countries, which in truth are ravaged by the strictures of the International Monetary Fund and the constant military showdown, which has prevented a genuine development policy for the region, including South Africa. In Botswana March 26, Gilashvili announced an agreement on a water-management project and boasted that the U.S.S.R. had funded 50 projects in southern Africa and was going to back 63 more.

A higher-ranking Soviet delegation, which arrived in Mozambique March 28, exhibited the same economic emphasis: Its leader was Nikolai Talyzin, a Politburo alternate member, deputy prime minister and chief of the U.S.S.R.'s State Planning Commission (Gosplan). In an interview broadcast on Radio Mozambique that same day, Soviet Premier Nikolai Ryzhkov called for expanding the number of "concrete cooperation projects" and exploiting "unused opportunities for improving relations" between the Soviet Union and Mozambique.

The chief Soviet interest in the destitute countries of southern Africa, however, lies with military strategic considerations, not economic development. That is evident from the least peek behind the propaganda wrappings.

The economy of Angola, one of the two front-line states that has received the most Soviet attention, has been recently described as "grinding to a halt," its coffee, diamond, iron production, and shipping having suffered precipitous collapse. But the influx of Soviet military hardware to Angola has been immense.

Greeting Talyzin in Mozambique, Peoples Assembly president Marcelino dos Santos mainly had to thank the Soviets not for economic aid, but for "initiatives . . . in the cause of strengthening defense capability of the front-line states." The Talyzin delegation included Y. Y. Kondakov, an officer of the General Staff of the Soviet Armed Forces.