

Soviet Diplomats in South Africa After Three Decades of Hostility

By CHRISTOPHER S. WREN

JOHANNESBURG, April 26 — The Soviet Union today dispatched its first public diplomatic mission to South Africa since the two countries broke off relations 33 years ago.

The Soviet delegation came to attend a scheduled meeting in Cape Town of the joint commission set up to discuss problems arising in the political settlement for southern Africa concluded last December, which links independence for Namibia to a withdrawal of Cuban military forces from Angola.

Angola, Cuba and South Africa, as signers of the treaty, form the commission; the group has met before in Luanda and Havana, as well as in extraordinary session this month in Namibia. The United States and the Soviet Union have observer status because of their efforts to promote the political settlement.

The visit is not the first by a Soviet diplomat. Earlier this month, Deputy Foreign Minister Anatoly L. Adamishin, a ranking expert on southern Africa, secretly came here for visits with senior South African officials.

Press Plays Up Visit

Vyacheslav A. Ustinov, a senior diplomat who is head of the Soviet delegation at the commission meeting, told reporters today that Mr. Adamishin was not coming because he had other business. His absence was seen as a decision by Moscow not to appear to be too cordial toward Pretoria.

Mr. Ustinov, who arrived in Cape Town this morning on a flight from London with seven American diplomats, said the rest of his delegation would follow shortly.

The South African press is playing up the presence of officials from a country that the Government long regarded as

an implacable foe bent on overthrowing white minority rule in South Africa with its political and military support of the outlawed African National Congress.

South Africa and the Soviet Union broke relations in 1956, after Pretoria accused Moscow of espionage. The South African Government was also upset at the Soviet Embassy for ostentatiously inviting blacks as guests to its diplomatic functions.

The Soviet Union has encouraged liberation movements not only in South Africa but also on its borders, giving substantial aid to Marxist Governments in Angola and Mozambique.

Perception Changes

In the last year, however, the Soviet Union persuaded Angola and Cuba to cooperate with the successful negotiations on southern Africa brokered by the United States.

The decision of Mikhail S. Gorbachev, the Soviet leader, to encourage stability over adventurism abroad to save resources for economic changes at home has made Moscow seem less threatening to Pretoria. The South Africans have also been encouraged by Soviet advice to the African National Congress to seek a negotiated settlement with the white Government rather than its violent overthrow.

Mr. Ustinov told reporters today that he did not expect to discuss the restoration of diplomatic ties with South African officials. The Soviet Union's policy has been not to consider such a move until apartheid is abolished.

Mr. Ustinov said he would hold talks with the South Africans about issues concerning the plan for Namibian independence, which was put in motion last month by the United Nations.