

By ARLENE GETZ

**S**OUTH Africa's secret support for the Mozambican resistance movement, MNR, is self-destructive and could end in a Russian victory in the region, says a United States expert on Africa.

Mrs Helen Kitchen, a director at Georgetown University's Center for Strategic and International Studies and one of the foremost US authorities on Africa, believes it would be in both South African and American interests to prevent the destabilisation of President Samora Machel's Marxist government in Mozambique.

Failure to do so, she said, could:

- Change Pretoria's 'total onslaught ideology' from fiction to fact.

- Decrease the chances of American policymakers in playing a constructive role on the sub-continent.

- 'Gravely hamper' prospects for reformist change in South Africa if African leaders believed the US had supported South African activities.

Mrs Kitchen, who has visited South Africa many times in the last 30 years, reached these conclusions in a recently-published study, 'US Interests in Africa'.

"However ironic it may seem to argue that US interests in Africa will suffer if Mozambique's Marxist government is overthrown, the

## 'Secret support for MNR could backfire on SA'

reality is that viewing South Africa's problems in East-West terms could be as costly as the no-win situation in which the US found itself when it viewed Angola through those lenses in the mid-1970s," she said.

"The question here is not one of supporting a 'socialist regime' as such, but rather of finding ways of alleviating the insecurity of the leaders of all states of Southern Africa and thus reducing the pressure on them to turn to the Soviet Union as the 'natural ally' against South African hegemony."

However, she was sceptical about whether the US — with its flawed and sometimes incoherent Africa policy — had enough leverage to persuade the South African Government of the ultimate self-destructiveness of its regional actions.

Describing South Africa's growing covert support of the MNR as "one of the world's least-kept secrets",

Mrs Kitchen argued that the Soviet Union would find it hard to refuse a request for assistance from a beleaguered President Machel if it wanted to retain Third World credibility.

In these circumstances the majority of African nations — who supported Soviet aid for the MPLA against South African military intervention in Angola in 1975 — would also favour Russian and/or Cuban assistance in Mozambique.

"It has not escaped Soviet notice that two subjects on which all member states of the Organisation for African Unity can find common ground are opposition to South Africa and to efforts by fellow members to change African borders."

She also rejected Pretoria's claims that the Soviet Union was mobilising a 'total onslaught' against South Africa.

While the Kremlin's 'generalised desires' included furthering 'the radicalisation

of black politics, obtaining access to Africa's minerals and raw materials and nudging the US into closer identification with the white rulers of South Africa, these aims were hardly among Soviet priorities.

The idea that there was a Soviet masterplan to achieve these goals was increasingly discounted, she said.

The record shows that "Africa falls somewhere below Europe, East Asia, the southern rimlands of the USSR and the Middle East in the hierarchy of Soviet geopolitical and resource allocation priorities".

Within Africa, contrary to the view from Pretoria, the Horn region seemed "to continue to be of more strategic importance to Moscow".

Mrs Kitchen also rejected the argument that the Cape sea route — along which more than half of Western Europe's and a fifth of US oil supplies pass — must remain in anti-Communist hands.

"Nowhere has a close relationship with Moscow resulted in Soviet pressure for a cut-off of economic relations with the West."

She discounted the fear of a blockade of the Cape route by hostile forces on the grounds that the real "choke points" for Western oil supplies were at their source and destination.