

Gains Over Mozambique Rebels Seen

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HARARE, Zimbabwe — Zimbabwe's minister of state for security, Emmerson Mnangagwa, has claimed that troops from his country have gained the upper hand in fighting against rebel forces who launched a major offensive in the central provinces of neighboring Mozambique eight months ago.

In a recent interview, Mr. Mnangagwa said Zimbabwe's intervention in Mozambique to aid its neighbor had frustrated an attempt by the rebels, who are believed to have South African backing, to cut Mozambique in half and declare an independent republic in the northern sector.

He said it had also eased pressure on a vital trade corridor that the rebels were threatening to sever. The corridor connects Zimbabwe by road, rail and oil pipeline with the Mozambican port of Beira.

The minister's assessments are not entirely shared by specialists in Washington who try to stay informed about the guerrilla war being waged against the government in Maputo, the Mozambican capital.

The U.S. specialists say the intervention of Zimbabwean troops, combined with counterattacks by Maputo's forces, did force the guerrillas out of territory that they had started to control inside Mozambique.

But the specialists said the insurgency remained pervasive and that there were still large areas in which the rebels operate freely and do significant damage.

The U.S. specialists add that the Zimbabwean troops have had bet-

ter success in improving security along the Beira corridor, where considerable new outside investment has helped rehabilitate facilities.

A spokesman for the Beira project said the first phase was now almost completed and the amount of cargo using the corridor had doubled since last year.

Electricity also has been restored to Beira, Mozambique's second largest city with a population of 300,000. Rebels had sabotaged its hydroelectric cables, blacking out the city for nine months and forcing the port and the oil pipeline from which Zimbabwe draws its

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gasoline to operate on auxiliary power.

As seen from Zimbabwe, these developments, together with new British military and financial aid and other attempts to reopen transportation routes disrupted by fighting in the region, are gradually easing South Africa's stranglehold on its landlocked black neighbors.

A year ago these countries were dependent on South Africa's transportation network for 68 percent of their import-export trade.