

Evidence confirms Pretoria support for MNR

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Africa News

WASHINGTON, D.C.—Captured weapons drops and testimony from recent Mozambique National Resistance (MNR) defectors have bolstered evidence that South Africa remains the key source of support for the anti-government rebels.

South African officials have regularly denied providing support for the terrorist MNR gangs. Pretoria claims it stopped aiding the group, also known as Renamo, after the March 1984 signing of the Nkomati Accord, a U.S.-brokered nonaggression pact between South Africa and Mozambique.

After documents detailing continuing Pretoria/Renamo links were captured by Mozambican and Zimbabwean troops at Gorongosa in August 1985, South Africa admitted "technical violations" of the agreement. Since then, some observers have characterized new Mozambican reports of continued South African involvement as insufficient to conclusively discredit Pretoria's denials. Now, accumulating documentation would appear to put the fact—if not the scale—of South African involvement beyond any serious doubt.

Some of the information comes from sources outside Mozambique, such as Zimbabwean businessman Eddie Cross, chief executive of the Beira Corridor Group, who told South African journalists late last year that Zimbabwe and Mozambique regularly monitor radio signals between South Africa and Renamo bases.

In an interview published in *Die Suid-Afrikaan* in December, Cross said that proof of material support, other than intelligence, was limited from late 1985 until May 1987. Then, increasing numbers of resupply operations by both parachute drops and sea landings were identified, immediately preceding stepped-up Renamo attacks against villages and famine relief convoys in southern Mozambique.

But the bulk of the largely anecdotal evidence falls into three categories: captured Renamo fighters held by Mozambique; eyewitness accounts by Mozambicans and others who have seen the attackers, and—most recently—large numbers of Renamo defectors.

Part of the impetus for the latter is Mozambique's new amnesty law, passed by the People's Assembly in December 1987. The measure guarantees total amnesty for war crimes as well as reintegration into society.

The most prominent defector to date is Paulo Oliveira, who served as the group's principal external spokesperson from late 1984 through mid-1987. His testimony on South African backing for the group, presented at a

March 23 press conference in Maputo, is supplemented by that of other former Renamo officers.

In the category of captured fighters are numerous accounts like that of Simao Leque, who was captured in September 1987. He said he had been stationed in a Renamo base from which the July 1987 attack on the village of Homoine was launched. Over 400 civilians were killed in that raid. Leque said he had seen South African helicopters bringing in supplies to the base, located in a remote area of Mozambique's Inhambane province.

TIRED OF THE WAR

Also abundant are reports like those of eyewitnesses to the Renamo attack on Ulongue in Tete province in November 1986, who said the attackers were led by three white men, two of whom spoke English with a South African accent.

More recent are the stories of the defectors. Over 100 Renamo fighters a month have been accepting Maputo's amnesty offer. The influx has been particularly significant in Manica and Sofala provinces, the area where the group was concentrated under the direction of Rhodesia, whose white regime established the movement in the 1970s. (When Rhodesia became independent Zimbabwe in 1980, South Africa assumed sponsorship.)

Alongside Mozambican forces, Zimbabwean troops protecting the Beira trade corridor through these provinces have recently put increasing pressure on Renamo. Both defectors and prisoners include a number of Renamo officers, some originally recruited in the Rhodesian period.

Deputy Cmdr. Modesto Sixpence, a Renamo member since 1979, surrendered in January, saying, "I'm tired of the war, and I can't see it bearing any fruit." Namo Magoro, captured recently in Sofala province, says he had been in Renamo since 1978. Many who trained with him in Rhodesia in 1978 had been with him in the 1985/86 Renamo offensive in the Zambezi Valley, he says.

Magoro reports that the offensive was directed by South African officers aided by right-wing Portuguese, who visited the troops using South African helicopters. Fuel for boats to cross the Zambezi River was landed by parachute, he says.

Other defectors refer to more recent South African involvement. Abilio Jangane, who accepted the amnesty in Tete province, says eight black South African soldiers, including a radio operator, instructors and others who planned military operations, were stationed at his base at Messembedze, near Furuncungo, for several months in late 1987. Renamo intel-

ligence officer Luis Tome describes a sea landing of South African supplies at Chinamba, between Beira and the Zambezi River, also in late 1987. He says the South African ships landed part of a group of 150 men who had been taken to South Africa for training in August 1987.

Tome also tells of a South African effort to set up a Renamo radio station at Chatora, in a mountainous area near the Manica/Tete provincial border. Four South Africans and a Malawian technician arrived to install the equipment, he recounts, but the plan failed because the Chatora base was taken by Mozambican and Zimbabwean troops.

Another defector, Demiasse Juliasse, who had served as bodyguard to Renamo president Afonso Dhlakama, has said that a South African helicopter evacuated the technicians as well as Dhlakama from the base before it was captured.

The majority of the amnestied have been rank-and-file Renamo recruits, such as Francisco Baera, 25, a fisherman in Tete province. Baera says he fled from Renamo after 18 months because he was "tired and demoralized" and because he had never been paid the 300 meticals (about 70 cents) a day he had been promised. In Beira, 15-year-old Francisco Zeca told reporters he had been kidnapped in April 1982, at the age of 10, and given military training in 1984. He said he had always wanted to escape.

Former Renamo spokesperson Oliveira, 29, a Portuguese national who moved to Mozambique with his parents at the age of one, apparently never participated directly in Renamo operations inside Mozambique. He began working for Renamo's "external wing" in Lisbon after 1981 and was sent to South Africa in February 1983 to run Renamo's radio station, operating out of the South African Broadcasting Corp. He visited several Renamo bases in South Africa, including one near Pretoria and one near Potgietersrust in the northern Transvaal. The Potgietersrust command center was closed in November 1983, Oliveira said, and its installations moved to Phalaborwa where it remains.

Oliveira, who left South Africa after the Nkomati Accord when the Renamo radio station was closed down, became the organization's representative for Western Europe—and its chief external spokesperson.

Oliveira apparently decided to leave Renamo after being caught in factional conflict between what he described as the dominant "Pretoria-Bonn" faction and others with closer ties to far-right circles in Paris and Washington, who want to diminish South African control.

Oliveira says U.S. support for Renamo from the Heritage Foundation—a Washington, D.C., conservative think-tank—and the anticommunist lobby Free the Eagle has included materials such as medicines, Bibles, communication equipment and boots. But these efforts to win influence were blocked by South Africa's "virtual monopoly of control," he alleges. [A State Department report released April 20 will provide ammunition against U.S. ultra-right supporters of Renamo. The report, based on interviews with Mozambican refugees, concluded that "it is conservatively estimated that 100,000 civilians may have been murdered by Renamo."]

Oliveira's references to Renamo headquarters at Phalaborwa are echoed in a Dec. 2 article in London-based *Africa Confidential*, which cites documents smuggled out of South Africa by Roland Hunter, an army conscript. Hunter served in 1983 as an assistant to then-Col. Cornelius van Niekerk, a key Renamo liaison. *Africa Confidential* says that operational control of Renamo is still the responsibility of Five Reconnaissance Regiment, a South African special forces unit of approximately 750 men. The unit includes 500 blacks from South Africa and other countries as well as many ex-Mozambican Portuguese.

PROTEST RENAMO ACTIONS

According to Zimbabwean businessman Cross, whose Beira Corridor Group has met with South African State Security Council members to protest Renamo's actions, South African officials claim that such attacks are "unauthorized." After revelation of the Gorongosa documents, and again after the Homoine massacre of last year, South African President P.W. Botha was reported to have told the military to stop aiding Renamo. But Cross says U.S. officials share his doubts that the support could continue without at least tacit approval from the highest South African authorities. (According to Renamo defector Oliveira, van Niekerk last year supervised the installation of sophisticated communications equipment in Oliveira's Lisbon home.)

Sorting out what is "official" and what is "unauthorized" in such murky activities appears to be a difficult task even for government officials in Pretoria. In a South African television interview on July 31 last year, Foreign Minister Pik Botha was asked point blank whether South Africa supported Renamo or not. "I don't know," he replied, "I can say with a clear conscience that I don't know."

"But, sir, you are a member of the Cabinet," the interviewer remonstrated, at which point Botha amended his response by explaining he had been referring to private, not official, aid. "The South African government," he declared, "does not support Renamo."

Gula (NY) 27/14/88