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'PRETORIA ASKS U.S. AID ON MOZAMBIQUE PEACE' (780)  
(2/8 New York Times article by Christopher S. Wren)

February 8 New York Times carried the following article by Christopher S. Wren on page A11, with the above headline.

(BEGIN TEXT)

CAPE TOWN, Feb. 7 -- South Africa has asked the United States to help broker a peace settlement in Mozambique, Foreign Minister Roelof F. Botha said Tuesday.

Botha said he hoped for a plan similar to the peace solution that Assistant Secretary of State Chester Crocker worked out in southwestern Africa, which links independence for Namibia to a Cuban military withdrawal from neighboring Angola.

"I've sent through to the U.S. government a message that we stand ready to have talks with the U.S. government to put together a comparable process for Mozambique, supported by the United States and the government in Maputo," Botha said at a news conference here.

State Department officials said Tuesday that Botha's public statement took the United States by surprise, adding that they would study the request.

"Obviously, our reaction will depend on whether Mozambique wants us to be a mediator," a State Department official said. "But there is every reason to believe that if Mozambique was prepared to accept such a role for the United States, we would be prepared to undertake it."

In response to questions, Botha said he made the suggestion to George P. Shultz, then secretary of state, during "a constructive exchange of views" after the formal signing of the peace package for Namibia and Angola at the United Nations on Dec. 22.

Botha said he asked Shultz to convey the request to his successor in the Bush administration, but they did not discuss it in detail.

In raising it publicly Tuesday, Botha said he wanted the Bush administration to get the message.

"I am hoping some kind of process would be possible in Mozambique," the South African foreign minister said. "I have no illusions as to the difficulties ahead of us, but it can be done."

Following independence from Portugal in 1975, Mozambique has been ravaged by an insurgency waged by the Mozambique National Resistance, a guerrilla movement better known by its Portuguese acronym, Renamo.

The rebels were initially supported and trained by intelligence agents of the white government in Rhodesia. After black majority rule came to Zimbabwe, as Rhodesia is now called, South Africa secretly took over aid to Renamo.

The insurgents, in trying to destabilize the government in Maputo, have terrorized ordinary Mozambicans.

A report last year by the United States State Department estimated that Renamo had killed 100,000 Mozambicans since 1984, most of them unarmed civilians.

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The Mozambican government reported Monday that Renamo insurgents massacred 38 people, wounded another 16 and kidnapped 40 civilians in two separate attacks last weekend.

Renamo also continues to blow up targets like the pylons used to carry electricity from the Cahora Bassa dam, which now operates at only a fraction of capacity.

In the last few years, Pretoria has publically tried to distance itself from Renamo.

But some Mozambican officials have said they believe, but cannot prove, that South African intelligence still funnels aid surreptitiously to Renamo, even as Pretoria offers to help Mozambique rebuild its infrastructure.

A South African diplomat said President P.W. Botha issued a government directive last year ordering that any assistance to Renamo stop immediately.

A Western diplomat said he thought some money was being sent to Renamo by right-wing Portuguese expatriates who immigrated to South Africa after Mozambican independence.

Tuesday, Foreign Minister Botha reiterated his country's denial that it was helping Renamo, and said the Mozambican government itself did not believe the charge. "They've never said it's us," Botha said. "They say they have never accused us as a government."

Since a summit meeting at Cahora Bassa last September between President Botha and the Mozambican president, Joachim Chissano, Pretoria has moved to repair its poor relations with Maputo.

In December, South Africa donated military equipment for a Mozambican security force that would protect the hydroelectric project against Renamo guerrillas.

Botha complained that Renamo had destroyed 600 power-line pylons last September when South Africa was prepared to make more than 18 million dollars available for the dam's reconstruction. Now, an estimated 1,400 of the projects 4,000 pylons have been blown up by Renamo.

Botha did not say how he expected the United States to negotiate an internal peace settlement in Mozambique if South Africa could no longer influence Renamo.

Nor did he say whether his proposal had been cleared with the Mozambicans.

(END TEXT)

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