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'PRETORIA SEEKS U.S., SOVIET MEDIATION TO SETTLE CIVIL WAR IN MOZAMBIQUE' (950)
(2/8 Washington Post article by William Claiborne)

February 8 Washington Post carried the following article by William Claiborne on page A34, with the above headline.

(BEGIN TEXT)

CAPE TOWN, South Africa, Feb. 7 -- South Africa is trying to initiate a U.S.-brokered settlement of the civil war in Mozambique similar to last year's negotiated breakthrough in Angola. Foreign Minister Roelof F. (Pik) Botha said today.

While acknowledging that there are major differences between the conflicts in Angola and Mozambique, Botha said that a peace agreement in southeastern Africa might be achieved if the Soviet Union is brought into the process, as it was in Angola.

"The idea is, if we could do it in the west, why can't we do it in the east," Botha said.

He said that he raised the subject in a meeting with then-Secretary of State George P. Shultz after the signing of the Namibian-Angolan peace agreement on Dec. 22 in New York, and that he asked Shultz to pass along the proposal to his successor, James A. Baker III.

There has been no response yet from the Bush administration, Botha said, but one of his aides said later that the foreign minister planned to actively pursue the idea. Botha said he had not yet approached the Soviets with the proposal.

The Angolan agreement, brokered by former U.S. assistant secretary of state Chester A. Crocker, is seen as the United States' biggest diplomatic achievement in Africa.

For 13 years, anticommunist Mozambique National Resistance (Renamo) movement guerrillas have waged a grinding war against the Soviet-supported Mozambique government, most of that time with South African backing.

Pretoria insists that it has stopped assisting the rebels and has begun providing nonlethal military equipment to the Mozambican Army to help it prevent the guerrillas from destroying hydroelectric power pylons running from the Cahora Bassa Dam in north-central Mozambique to South Africa.

In December, South Africa delivered to Mozambique two shiploads of military trucks, radios, uniforms and other equipment for security forces deployed to guard the powerlines against Renamo rebels.

South Africa's Military Intelligence Department, in an effort to destabilize Mozambique, took over control of Renamo in 1979 from the Rhodesian government, which created the rebel group as a fifth column force in its war against black nationalist guerrillas.

Renamo sabotage has kept the Cahora Bassa power project out of operation since 1983. Last September, Botha and President Pieter W. Botha met in Cahora Bassa with Mozambican President Joachim Chissano to discuss restoration of the project with an initial South African injection of 18 million dollars.

At the time, about 600 of the 4,000 power pylons in Mozambique had been destroyed by Renamo guerrillas, but since then the number has risen to about 1,400, according to South African officials.

In an interview at his bush headquarters near Gorongosa Mountain last July, Renamo President Alfonso Dhlakama said he would continue blowing up the pylons as long as they carried electricity to Maputo, the Mozambican capital.

While the ruling Frelimo government controls virtually all of Mozambique's cities and principal towns, the country's vast rural areas, where 85 percent of the 14.7 million population lives, have been trapped in chaotic violence that has collapsed the country's economy and caused widespread suffering.

Botha, talking to foreign correspondents today, called the continuation of the war a "tragedy," saying that the attacks on the pylons alone would double the cost of restoring the sorely needed hydroelectric project. Other South African officials said it would now cost 80 million dollars to replace the sabotaged pylons.

"The war will have to stop. It simply will have to stop.... I have no illusion. I don't say it's going to be that easy, but I say it can be done," the foreign minister said.

Referring to the agreement last year under which 50,000 Cuban troops will be withdrawn from Angola in exchange for South Africa permitting Namibia to become independent, Botha said, "I am hoping the same kind of process would be possible in the case of Mozambique, assuming the Soviet Union will also play a positive role."

The United States, Botha said, would have to play a role as mediator in the negotiations as it did in Angola. He added, "We stand ready to have discussions on the possibility of putting together a similar process of negotiations."

The two situations differ, however.

The main combatants in the Angola war were largely controllable by their superpower patrons -- the Angolan government and the Cubans by the Soviet Union and Jonas Savimbi's anticommunist rebels of the Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA) by the United States.

Although UNITA was not a party to the Angolan negotiations and its role in further national reconciliation is still undefined, Washington, by promising to continue its military aid, can exert considerable influence over Savimbi.

In contrast, none of the potential negotiating partners in a Mozambique peace process could guarantee to "deliver" Renamo, which is funded mostly by business interests in Portugal and Latin America and by right-wing businessmen and evangelical Christians in the United States.

00 FEB 1989

Dhlakama, in lengthy conversations over a period of three days in July, repeatedly said that he felt betrayed by the United States because it had begun to establish close economic ties with the Marxist Mozambican government.

However, he admitted that he could not win the war militarily just as the Mozambican Army also could not -- but that his strategy was to force Frelimo to accept negotiations for a democratically elected government.

(END TEXT)

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