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BRITAIN is considering sending a military mission to Mozambique to help the Marxist government fight its war against South African backed rebels, a defence source in London said yesterday.

"It would be the next logical step," the source said. "They are looking for people with some experience of running the logistics of this sort of campaign. Their problem is lack of skills in logistics and communications."

"Britain is looking for ways of stepping up its military commitment to Mozambique, and rather than providing just training it is very tempting to provide a military mission with old-fashioned quartermasters as well as logistics and radio experts," the source said.

President Chissano of Mozambique, on a three-day visit to London, said there was goodwill from Britain to develop military co-operation but he would not discuss details.

Britain trains 360 Mozambican officers a year at a training camp in Zimbabwe.

It is understood Mozambique also wants to buy 10 or 12 troop-carrying helicopters, either the

By Richard Dowden
Africa Editor

Italian Bell Augusta BA205, in use with the Zimbabwe army in Mozambique, or the Westland Lynx Mark 7. But Mozambique is short of foreign exchange and is hoping Britain will help provide aid to purchase them.

Britain's military commitment to Mozambique is partly motivated by a desire to be seen to be doing something to help the Frontline States facing South Africa and to avoid criticism for not imposing sanctions.

The involvement may bring Britain into conflict with Washington where the rebels are gaining support. The Reagan administration may provide them with funds and weapons, as it has the UNITA rebels in Angola, on the grounds they are anti-communist.

Conservatives in the US Senate have blocked the appointment of Mrs Melissa Wells as ambassador to Mozambique because of her lack of support for the rebels, whom they refer to as freedom fighters.