

SOUTHERN AFRICA'S BEIRA CORRIDOR IS NO PLACE FOR U.S. DOLLARS

Ronald Reagan will decide soon whether to ask the Congress for \$500 million to help develop the Beira Corridor, a railroad, highway, and oil pipeline that links Harare, capital of Zimbabwe, with the Mozambican port city of Beira. Touted as a method of reducing the dependence of the "Frontline States" on South Africa, the scheme is in reality nothing more than a thinly-disguised bailout of governments with policies inimical to U.S. interests in the region. As such, the President and the Congress should scrap the proposal.

The project began to gain attention in July, when the "Beira Corridor Consortium"--a group of Western businessmen and officials of southern African governments--visited Washington to try to rally support for their plan. The nations of southern Africa, they said, were much too dependent on South Africa for transportation. Pretoria, they believed, would punish them for their support for international sanctions by cutting off their access to the sea.

This clearly would have a devastating effect on the economies of South Africa's neighbors. Marxist mismanagement and guerrilla wars have taken their toll on the transportation infrastructure of southern Africa; of six non-South African ports that were available 20 years ago, only two remain, and both are badly run down. As a result, the nine nations of the Southern African Development Coordinating Conference (SADCC) depend on South African transportation for fully 68 percent of their import-export trade.

Despite the Beira Corridor project's surface appeal, however, the scheme is severely flawed. To begin with, the two nations most directly involved, Zimbabwe and Mozambique, are run by Marxist regimes with close ties to the Soviet Union. Zimbabwean Prime Minister Robert Mugabe over the last eight years has moved ever closer to the Soviets. During his December 1985 visit to Moscow, he obtained economic aid and signed a party-to-party agreement. It is also believed that he arranged for Soviet arms deliveries to Zimbabwe.

Despite the State Department's policy of trying to "wean" Mozambique away from the Soviet Union by providing it large amounts of economic assistance, Mozambique under Samora Machel is still close to Moscow. Less than two years after coming to power, Machel had signed a Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation with the Soviet Union. The Machel regime has imported over \$1 billion worth of Soviet arms, and houses

almost 1,000 Soviet bloc military and economic advisers. Moreover, Machel has allowed Soviet-trained terrorists of the African National Congress (ANC) once again to use Mozambique as a base for the destabilization of South Africa.

AID and State Department strategists, however, have already realized that it will be hard to convince the President and a majority of the Congress to fund two Soviet-aligned governments--particularly Zimbabwe, which lost its U.S. aid for this year and next due to a much-reported diplomatic insult. Hence, they propose to channel the money through the SADCC, which also includes Angola, Botswana, Zambia, Malawi, Lesotho, Swaziland, and Tanzania.

But virtually all of these governments have adopted collectivist economic policies. In fact, it is the socialist natures of their economies that is in large measure responsible for the decayed transportation infrastructure. Thus, it is unlikely that any money that provided them would be used productively.

The Beira Corridor, moreover, will never be able to act as the alternative transportation route its designers envision because it will be destroyed by the insurgents of the Mozambique National Resistance (RENAMO), the pro-Western guerrilla group which, for the past nine years, has waged an increasingly successful war against Machel. The insurgents now control 80 percent of the countryside, and are active in all ten provinces of the country. RENAMO has demonstrated its strength by exploding ammunition dumps in the capital city, Maputo, and has even chalked its slogans on Machel's house. RENAMO already has demonstrated its ability to cut the existing rail line and pipeline--most recently during the visit of the Consortium representatives to Washington. RENAMO publicly announced then that it would sabotage any attempts to develop the corridor.

Funding the Beira Corridor project makes neither economic nor political sense. In a time of Gramm-Rudman-Hollings and huge budget deficits, the American taxpayer cannot afford \$500 million to prop up two Soviet allies in Africa. Further, even if it were in the U.S. interest to try to rebuild the Beira Corridor, the money would most likely be wasted through flawed economic policies. Finally, any work that was actually completed would be destroyed by the insurgents of RENAMO. The Beira Corridor project is an unwise idea, and should be scrapped.

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For further information:

Allister Sparks, "South Africa's Neighbors Forge a Link to the Sea," The Washington Post, September 28, 1986, p. A27.

Jaime Pinto and Mark Huber, "The White House's Confusing Signals on Mozambique," Heritage Foundation Backgrounders No. 455, September 19, 1985.