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IN MOZAMBIQUE, THE STATE DEPARTMENT IGNORES HISTORY AND THE REAGAN DOCTRINE

(Updating Backgrounder No. 572, "Mozambique Merits the Reagan Doctrine," March 31, 1987.)

U.S. policy toward Mozambique is under high-level Reagan Administration review. As the war between Mozambique's Soviet-backed FRELIMO regime and the pro-Western RENAMO democratic resistance forces continues into its tenth year, increasing numbers of U.S. policymakers in the executive and legislative branches are pushing for a change in U.S. policy toward that southern African country. These policymakers wisely want the Administration to urge FRELIMO to enter into negotiations with RENAMO over the formation of a coalition government to hold internationally supervised free elections. They also have serious doubts about the suitability for office of Melissa Wells, the State Department's controversial candidate for U.S. Ambassador to Mozambique. Wells has called the RENAMO insurgents "bandits"--the same term used by the communist FRELIMO regime. Supporters of the Reagan Doctrine want her nomination withdrawn and replaced by that of someone determined to promote U.S. interests in Mozambique. In pushing the Administration to urge negotiations on FRELIMO and in opposing the Wells nomination, these policymakers are correct.

Polishing a Communist Image. The main defender of the increasingly discredited U.S. policy toward Mozambique is the State Department. It stubbornly insists that it can "wean away" the Mozambican communist regime from its close ties to the Soviet Union. Never in history, of course, has a communist regime been "weaned away" from Moscow. Why the State Department believes that it can succeed in doing so with Mozambique while the U.S. and others have failed to do so with all other countries is something that State Department officials adamantly avoid explaining. Instead, the State Department prefers to focus its efforts on polishing the FRELIMO image. Just recently, for example, U.S. officials have begun pushing the FRELIMO regime to establish diplomatic relations with the Vatican, South Korea, and Israel, in the belief that this will improve FRELIMO's image in the West. It is curious that State Department aides now act as international public relations consultants for self-proclaimed Marxist-Leninist governments.

Violently Recruiting Peasants. While the State Department continues to back continued communist rule of Mozambique, developments inside that country reveal how grim conditions have become under FRELIMO. The Catholic bishops of Mozambique last month issued a pastoral letter urging the government to negotiate a plan for national reconciliation with the RENAMO insurgents. The Mozambican bishops are in a better position than the U.S. State Department to understand what is happening in Mozambique. Through their many local churches, they have that country's best intelligence network. Moreover, as the Catholic church has played an increasingly large role in the distribution of food and relief supplies in famine-afflicted areas, more peasants have had contact with the local churches. The Catholic relief organization Caritas reports that Mozambican peasants complain of famine and blame it on "the war, the forced and violent recruitment of peasants into the [Armed] Forces, and the deployment of special troops without proper logistic supplies, which forces them to steal from villages."

To make matters worse, Mozambican peasants not only have to feed FRELIMO troops, but also those called into Mozambique from Zimbabwe, Tanzania, and Malawi, and advisers from the Soviet Union, Cuba, and East Germany. Another reason for the food shortage, according to peasants cited by Caritas, is "the abusive behavior by the militia forces," who are accused of robbery by many of those polled. Forced resettlement and arbitrary roadblocks also play a role in the food shortage, according to the report.

State Department Inconsistency. State Department policymakers ignore the views of the Mozambican bishops and the church's reports from the countryside. Yet the State Department listens to the bishops of Nicaragua when it comes to making U.S. policy toward Central America. Why the inconsistency? The State Department's current concern with FRELIMO's image in the West is not the first time U.S. officials have tried to polish that Leninist group's image. According to documents found in the wreckage of former Mozambican communist leader Samora Machel's plane crash last October, former U.S. Ambassador to Zimbabwe David Miller "demanded that [Machel] accept the formation of a puppet party in Mozambique in order that he could say in America there was a democracy in Mozambique because the country had more than one party."

It is clear that the State Department is rigidly entrenched with its Mozambique policy, supporting the pro-Soviet, Leninist FRELIMO regime. Equally clear is the fact that the pro-Western RENAMO national liberation movement has made solid gains in Mozambique's countryside. To bring peace to Mozambique, the State Department need not abandon its FRELIMO friends. It need only insist that FRELIMO sit down with RENAMO to begin a process of national reconciliation that should culminate in internationally supervised free elections. Mozambique's Catholic bishops see this. If the State Department continues to be blind to this, responsibility for U.S. policymaking toward Mozambique should be placed elsewhere in the U.S. government.

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For further information:

"Mozambique Church pushing peace" in Africa Confidential no. 17, May 1987.

"Mozambique: drought does not mean hunger" in Africa Confidential no. 15, Feb. 1987.

"Catholic Bishops Urge Government-RENAMO Talks" in Foreign Broadcast Information Service - Middle East and Africa, 18 May 1987, p. U1.