

THE CONTROVERSIAL STATE DEPARTMENT REPORT ON MOZAMBIQUE

(Updating *Backgrounder* No. 633, "In Southern Africa, the State Department Bets Against the Reagan Doctrine," February 12, 1988.)

The State Department has returned to the offensive in the struggle over United States policy toward Mozambique. Apparently recognizing that his policy has failed to "wean away" Mozambique's communist FRELIMO regime from its adherence to Marxism-Leninism and its close ties to the Soviet Union, Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs Chester Crocker has switched his rationale for backing FRELIMO. Now FRELIMO apparently deserves U.S. backing, according to Crocker, because it is a lesser evil than its opponents. This is the bottom line of an April State Department report on atrocities in Mozambique, entitled "Summary of Mozambican Refugee Accounts of Principally Conflict-Related Experience in Mozambique." The report charges that the rebels fighting FRELIMO, known as the Mozambique National Resistance (RENAMO), have engaged in a campaign of terror against unarmed civilians "involving random and brutal killings, slave labor, forced marches and starvation." The report states that "it is conservatively estimated that 100,000 civilians may have been murdered by RENAMO."

These charges are very serious. If true, they may indeed confirm Crocker's conclusion that FRELIMO is a lesser evil. Yet there is little evidence that the report is true; its methods are sloppy and its solid facts are scarce. Rather than mirroring events in Mozambique, the State Department report instead may be reflecting Crocker's new tactics to undermine the RENAMO freedom fighters and to bolster Mozambique's Communist and pro-Soviet regime. The U.S. Congress, therefore, immediately should investigate the controversial State Department report on Mozambique. The Congress should send a team of experts to Mozambique to verify the report's facts. If the report's facts are not valid, Congress should investigate the State Department to determine who is responsible for issuing a U.S. document based on what may be deliberately false information.

The World's Most Miserable Place. For years, the war raging in Mozambique has been particularly brutal, with allegations of abuses by both sides. Villages have been razed, farms and crop stores torched, health clinics and schools attacked, and churches demolished. Independent observers have visited Mozambique and returned with conflicting stories about who was respon-

sible for this massacre or that atrocity. It appears that the only point of agreement is that Mozambique today may be the most miserable place in the world to live. The 43-page State Department report was written by Robert Gersony, an independent consultant under contract to the State Department's Bureau for Refugee Programs. Its very title — "Summary of Mozambican Refugee Accounts of Principally Conflict-Related Experience in Mozambique" — reveals the flawed research techniques of the study: the author deals only with "conflict-related experience" in Mozambique (presumably meaning "war-related experience"), thereby overlooking the tremendous abuses suffered by the Mozambican population at the hands of the FRELIMO regime, simply because those abuses are not related to the "conflict" in a narrow definition. Ironically, the State Department itself, in its own annual human rights reports, thoroughly documents those abuses: summary executions by FRELIMO, torture, forcible relocation of tens of thousands of citizens, establishment of "reeducation centers," the death penalty for such "economic crimes" as black marketeering, and others. By choosing to look only at abuses suffered as a result of the conflict, and ignoring the abuses against the citizens of Mozambique that precipitated the conflict, the State Department report is biased in its conception.

Most Bizarre" Methodology. The report's methodology also is suspect. The author himself acknowledges the two principal difficulties inherent in conducting a study based on interviews with refugees: 1) the author does not speak the language of the refugees and thus has to rely on a translator; 2) the refugees, living in camps guarded by FRELIMO or FRELIMO-allied soldiers, are understandably hesitant to speak out against abuses by FRELIMO soldiers. Though the author declares that he personally selected all the translators, he admits that the pool of translators was small, and implicitly acknowledges that they all had previous biases against RENAMO: all the translators came from either the agricultural development staff of the U.S. Agency for International Development mission, or from health clinics, religious and relief organizations, or local relief committees — all of which have complained of attacks by RENAMO.

Among the report's most serious flaws is the author's extrapolation leading to his conclusion that "it is conservatively estimated that 100,000 civilians may have been murdered by RENAMO." From a small sample of no more than 80 interviews, the author conducts a series of worst-case extrapolations, leading to a conclusion that therefore is highly suspect, and one which may, in fact, have been included in the report only for its shock effect. Declares a high State Department official who has worked with Gersony: "His statistical methodology is the most bizarre thing I've ever seen."

The press, in fact, already is distorting the report's possible distortion. Last week in the *Washington Post*, for example, instead of quoting the report as saying that RENAMO may have committed 100,000 murders, an editorial charged RENAMO with committing "at least 100,000 murders." The ceiling thus has become a floor.

Amnesty International's List of FRELIMO Abuses. Those interested in understanding the true nature of the Mozambique conflict should seek reports from unbiased sources. In the latest world human rights report by London-based Amnesty International, RENAMO comes in for criticism in precisely 146 words out of a 1530-word report on Mozambique; the rest of the report documents FRELIMO abuses of human rights in Mozambique.

Further, the American missionary nurse Kindra Bryan, held against her will last year by RENAMO forces, reported upon her release and return to the U.S. findings that directly con-

tradict an important conclusion in the State Department report: namely, that RENAMO is an insurgency that makes no effort to persuade others of the justness of its cause. Writing in the *Washington Post*, Bryan declared that "From the beginning, the soldiers wanted us to understand their cause. They claimed that the Marxist government, known as FRELIMO, had ruined Mozambique....The soldiers could get themselves all pumped up talking about their cause."

Bryan's account also contradicts the State Department report's allegation that RENAMO abuses those civilians under its control: "At no time were we mistreated by the RENAMO soldiers....[They] were very gentle with us. They never threatened us or shoved us with their guns....The soldiers seemed disciplined and well organized and appeared to have a good relationship with the villagers, who in turn seemed to recognize them as the government." Bryan's account is corroborated by other independent witnesses, including Peter Godwin of the London *Sunday Times*, Jack Wheeler of the Freedom Research Foundation, and the respected British journal, *Jane's Defense Weekly*.

Crocker's \$100 Million Promise. These serious problems with the State Department report should be investigated by Congress. While the investigation is under way, the Reagan Administration should freeze the extra \$100 million that Crocker has pledged to give FRELIMO.

Instead of supporting the communist FRELIMO regime, and thereby prolonging a war that even high FRELIMO officials admit is unwinnable, the Reagan Administration should push FRELIMO to open negotiations with RENAMO for national reconciliation in Mozambique. RENAMO repeatedly has called for such negotiations. The devastation that has taken place in Mozambique will not end until the war ends and all Mozambicans have the right to choose their own form of government through internationally supervised democratic elections. Instead of publishing what appears to be false reports, the State Department should be seeking a negotiated end to the war. Such a conclusion would much better serve the interests of the people of Mozambique and the West.

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