

More false promises

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Special to the Guardian

Guardian (US), 89 03 01

MAPUTO—When South African Foreign Minister Roelof "Pik" Botha last month suggested U.S. mediation to resolve the conflict in Mozambique, the reaction here was icy.

Botha's short-lived proposal, which some observers think was meant for internal South African consumption, came amid mounting evidence that Pretoria is continuing to support terrorist operations by the Mozambique National Resistance (MNR).

Briefing foreign journalists in early February, Botha had suggested that since Washington had played the role of mediator in last year's complex negotiations over Angola and Namibia, there was no good reason why the Americans shouldn't do the same over Mozambique. For good measure, he threw in the suggestion of Soviet participation in such talks.

It seems Botha had not consulted with Washington before making the proposal, and he had certainly not mentioned the idea to anyone in Mozambique.

The first reaction to Botha's statements came from one of Mozambique's senior diplomats, the ambassador to London, Armando Panque, who simply pointed out that Mozambique was a sovereign state under attack, and that it was up to the aggressor to end the war.

On Feb. 8, an unnamed Mozambican government spokesperson declared that "there can only be an official reaction to a complete set of proposals and not to declarations transmitted through the media."

This cold response brought Botha scurrying to Maputo on Feb. 10 to "clarify" his statement. After an audience with President Joaquim Chissano, Botha reversed his earlier call for mediation.

"We do not need mediation. We understand each other," he said, "but if any of the major powers, like the U.S., would be prepared to play a constructive role to assist in the common objective of creating peace and stability, the two governments would not object to that."

Commenting on the matter the following week in Harare, at a joint conference of the Socialist International and the ruling parties of the frontline states, Chissano said it was not at all clear how far the South Africans intended to go with their new proposal.

Some observers in Maputo link Botha's proposal with power struggles inside South Africa's ruling National Party. Following his stroke in January, President P.W. Botha resigned as leader of the National Party, and the party's parliamentary caucus had to elect a successor. Pik Botha did very badly, and was knocked out in the first round of voting.

This seriously damages Pik Botha's chance of eventually becoming South Africa's president. So he may have launched his "peace initiative" as a publicity stunt with a domestic audience very much in mind. "He wants to prove he's still foreign minister," remarked one top Mozambican official.

Mozambique has remained unwavering in its opposition to any negotiations that would involve South Africa's MNR surrogates. At the Harare conference, Chissano warned that if the aim of any projected negotiations was "to seek a compromise between those who want a united and independent nation, and those who merely represent foreign designs, exploitation, dependence and underdevelopment, then we do not accept such a project, since it runs against the interests and the survival of an independent nation."

Despite the promise P.W. Botha made at his September meeting with Chissano that all South African support to the MNR would stop, evidence to the contrary has piled up.

A defector from the MNR's Lisbon office, Chanjunja Chivaca Joao, once head of the rebels' organization and mobilization department for Europe, testified in late November that the communications links between the Lisbon office and the MNR's main military base in the South African province of Transvaal remained fully functional.

Mozambicans repatriated from South Africa have testified that white South African officers tried to coerce or bribe them into joining the MNR, and that they were detained at an MNR camp somewhere near the Kruger National Park.

A rebel spy, Moises Macaxaze, captured in the central city of Chimioio in February, said he had been present when a South African plane flew supplies into a rebel camp on Nov. 12—two months after Botha's promises.

All five incidents of sabotage against the transmission lines carrying electricity from South Africa to Maputo between October and January took place less than three miles from the South African border. Mozambican electricity officials are convinced the saboteurs entered from South Africa and went back there.

In short, it is all business as usual, and Botha's September promises are proving as worthless as the ones made when Mozambique and South Africa signed a nonaggression accord in 1984.

The South African army has promised to "investigate" Mozambican complaints. This investigation started in November, but when the head of the South African army, Gen. A.J. Liebenberg, who co-chairs the Mozambique/South Africa joint security commission, was asked about the progress of the investigations in late January, he could point to no concrete results.

Questioned by Mozambican journalists after a meeting of the security commission in Maputo on Jan. 25, Liebenberg could only say that the investigations "are continuing, and I have invited the Mozambican authorities to assist."

This reticence is hardly surprising, since Liebenberg himself, in his previous job as commander of South Africa's special forces, was deeply involved in the MNR operation. Documents captured from the MNR in 1985 show that Liebenberg took part in meetings with MNR leaders in Pretoria that planned the destabilization of Mozambique. ■

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