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'S. AFRICAN HOLDS TALKS IN MAPUTO' (590)  
(3/24 WP article by William Claiborne)

March 24 Washington Post carried the following article on page A4 by William Claiborne, with the above headline.

(BEGIN TEXT)

JOHANNESBURG, March 23 -- South African Foreign Minister Roelof F. Botha flew to the Mozambican capital of Maputo today to meet with President Joachim Chissano -- their second meeting there in six weeks -- amid increasing signs that Britain is poised to try to broker a settlement to the 13-year civil war.

Before returning to Pretoria, Botha said in a statement that he and Chissano had "exchanged ideas on latest developments as regards the objectives of achieving peace in the region, and in Mozambique in particular." He characterized the talks as "most useful and positive," and said that Chissano had made proposals that will be followed up.

Foreign Ministry officials would not elaborate on the discussions, but it was understood that Botha told Chissano about his talks on southeastern Africa with British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher last week in London.

Thatcher's planned visit to the region next month is expected to set the stage for a joint initiative by Britain and the United States to end the insurgency being waged against the Mozambican government by anticommunist rebels of the Mozambican National Resistance Movement, known by its Portuguese acronym, Renamo.

Thatcher is planning to meet with Chissano at a military base in eastern Zimbabwe where Mozambican counterinsurgency troops are being trained by British Army officers. Mozambique has closer ties with Britain than any other western country, through extensive mining investments and military assistance.

The Bush administration, responding to a suggestion by Botha last month, also has expressed an interest in helping to negotiate a peace agreement between Maputo and the rebels, as Washington did with the accord for the withdrawal of 50,000 Cuban troops from Angola in exchange for independence for the South African-administered territory of Namibia.

However, South African officials have pointed out that the United States does not have the same kind of influence with Renamo that it has with the U.S.-backed Angolan anticommunist guerrillas of Jonas Savimbi's Union for the Total Independence of Angola.

Rather than mediating directly in the Mozambican conflict, it is considered more likely that the United States would try to facilitate a settlement by persuading outside backers to stop arming the Renamo rebels. A number of influential conservative American businessmen and evangelical Christian groups are supporting the guerrillas.

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Mozambican officials have accused Pretoria of continuing covert support for Renamo, which it openly backed with military aid until it signed the 1984 Nkomati nonaggression treaty with Mozambique. The Chissano government insists that the key to an end to the civil war is full South African compliance with the Nkomati accord, which Mozambican officials feel Thatcher can influence more than the United States.

The Thatcher government played a key role in setting up the summit last year in Sonqo, Mozambique, between Chissano and South African President Pieter W. Botha, which led to a revival of the Nkomati accord and a commitment by Pretoria to rebuild power lines from the Cahora Bassa hydroelectric power project that were destroyed by Renamo guerrillas.

It is widely believed in the South African government that Thatcher, a critic of punitive economic sanctions against Pretoria and a proponent of diplomatic engagement, could be a catalyst not only for regional peace, but also for negotiations toward effecting political change in South Africa.

(END TEXT)

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