

South Africa still backs Renamo

(X)

SOUTH AFRICAN backing for Renamo rebels in Mozambique has taken on a new life in recent months in clear contravention of the March 1984 Nkomati accord between Maputo and Pretoria.

Western intelligence sources interpret the renewed interest in keeping the rebels supplied and their external links open as a sign that Pretoria sees an advantage in stepping up pressures on Maputo (see page 15) and ensuring the rebels remain dependent on Pretoria. South African military strategists remain convinced that Mozambique continues to host African National Congress (ANC) guerrillas and in their view, support for Renamo also serves to impede or hinder ANC infiltration across the common border.

Recent visits by South African-based journalists to Renamo's main headquarters at Gorongosa in central Mozambique were organised out of South Africa for the first time in many months. The use of South Africa as a stepping off point for such visits had been interrupted. The newsmen were flown from the Lenasia airport near Johannesburg in a Kudu light aircraft

and later transferred at a bush airstrip to an ancient unmarked DC-3 which carried them to an airstrip in central Mozambique. The plane stood on the strip for nine hours, uncamouflaged while the journalists interviewed Renamo leader Afonso Dhlakama. At almost the same time and also out of South Africa, former Renamo secretary-general Evo Fernandes, flew to Gorongosa.

South African support for Renamo is managed and co-ordinated by the military intelligence establishment and in the hands of operations chief, Brigadier Charlie van Niekerk.

Van Niekerk who previously headed the military's "Mozambique Desk", was in Lisbon in June last year for talks with Renamo figures here. At the time he and two technicians installed a new communications network for the local Renamo organisation, linked to other rebel installations at Phalaborwa in northwestern Transvaal (40 kilometers from Mozambique). The same type of equipment was also installed at Renamo's representation in West Germany.

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page 10*

Prior to the Nkomati accord Phalaborwa was the Rear Command headquarters for Renamo — Dhlakama spent some time here — and today houses a sophisticated telecommunications centre for Renamo. It monitors the Maputo government radio network and supplies intelligence for Renamo's military activities.

Divisions (see Vol 1 No 6 Page 9) between Renamo's overseas representations — in Europe and the United States — are underlined by the communications setup. The U.S. representatives communicate with Gorongosa via Malawian radio relay.

The alternative network was established to overcome a block by South Africa to the use of Phalaborwa by the U.S. representatives.

Well informed sources also suggest that South African resupply flights to the rebels originate from Phalaborwa, the Waterkloof military base (outside Pretoria) or the Wonderboom airbase.

The night flights using DC-3s, C-130s, C-160s and light aircraft, drop arms and ammunition and even medicine and buzzbikes, to the rebels.