

In his statement to the press after his defection to Maputo on March 24, the former Renamo spokesman **Paulo Oliveira** stressed the "conflict of interests" between the rebel movement's foreign supporters. He claimed that a "Washington-Paris axis" was trying to wrest control of Renamo from a "Pretoria-Bonn axis", and that Evo Fernandes and Artur da Fonseca had strong support among advisers of West German Chancellor **Helmut Kohl**. The latter recently visited Mozambique, as did the Bavarian leader, **Franz-Josef Strauss**. This could be one clue to the disappearance of Mr Fernandes.

By a strange coincidence, just two days after the Fernandes incident the State Department in Washington voiced extremely strong criticisms of Renamo. A department official, quoting Mozambican refugees who had fled to Malawi, said that rebel violence was "systematic and coordinated (and) not spontaneous and undisciplined", while abuses by Mozambican government troops were described as "isolated incidents that took place in remote areas".

The United States, therefore, which said during last October's visit to Washington by Mozambican president **Joaquim Chissano** that it was ready to help in opening talks between Maputo and Renamo (see ION N°301), has apparently decided that the rebels should be as weak as possible. The Mozambican authorities, for their part, said this week that some 1,000 rebels had surrendered during the first three months of the year, while the military is churning out communiques to show that it is strengthening its positions in Zambezia province, which just a few months ago was wholly under Renamo control. Afonso Dhlakama's offer of talks indicates that in these circumstances negotiations might begin, and is also a sign that South Africa is in favour.