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MOZAMBIQUE: RISE OF THE PHOENIX?

RECENT EVENTS:

The ruling Frelimo party in Mozambique has reconsidered its adherence to Marxism-Leninism, and the peace process between Frelimo and Renamo is beginning to take shape.

ANALYSIS:

Since 1975, when the Frelimo government assumed power in Mozambique, the country has experienced the combined consequences of the worst excesses of Portuguese colonialism and the application of inappropriate political and economic policies by its new Marxist-Leninist government. The protracted conflicts that had brought the colony to independence did not end in 1975. In 1980 a new and more savage internecine war erupted that was to bleed the country of its rural population, destroy its infrastructure and bring the economy to its knees.

By 1983, Mozambique was bankrupt, dependent on South Africa for foreign revenue and on the IMF and the World Bank for loans. Moreover, natural disasters, which brought about declining food production, together with Renamo's destruction of the infrastructure, led to starvation on a massive scale.

These developments have forced the Frelimo government to reconsider the suitability of its Marxist-Leninist policies for the country. Furthermore, the main parties to the internal conflict, Renamo and Frelimo, came to accept that the cost of a military victory over the other had become prohibitively expensive, and that a negotiated settlement of the conflict had to be explored as a viable alternative.

Thus, 1988 and 1989 saw the beginning of an initiative directed at persuading the two parties to end their violent campaigns and start talking to each other. External involvement became a major feature of the peace initiative, with the Soviet Union, the United States of America, the United Kingdom and Zimbabwe firmly

behind the effort. Chronologically, the peace process unfolded as follows :

In August 1988, President Chissano told representatives of the Roman Catholic Church and the 17-church Christian Council of Mozambique that he did not object to their plan to meet the Renamo leaders to convince them to lay down arms. The first meeting began late last year.

By March 1989 Frelimo's 10 man Political Bureau presented a 12-point position paper on ending the war to the five permanent members of the UN's Security Council and the churches. The document called on Renamo to agree to several conditions - principally to renounce violence and adhere to constitutional rule - so that there could be "a dialogue about the ways to end the violence, establish peace and normalise life for everyone in the country".

Renamo meanwhile held its first national congress on 5 - 9 June at Gorongosa in central Mozambique. The congress came to the momentous decision to respond positively to President Chissano's peace initiative, and decided to accept the government's main conditions for talks, namely a renunciation of violence and agreement to work out differences within a constitutional framework. Renamo Chief Dhlakama renounced any personal ambitions and indicated that the rebels no longer sought to overthrow the Chissano government. The congress also dropped several previous demands, such as immediate free elections and the withdrawal of all foreign forces in Mozambique.

SIGNIFICANCE:

Renamo's new flexibility opened the door to some dramatic announcements at Frelimo's Fifth Congress, at the end of July, its first such gathering in 7 years. With Renamo strong militarily, but weak diplomatically, and Frelimo having overwhelming diplomatic backing but a demoralized army, the stage was set to bring the two sides together. Chissano worked hard to solidify the dominance of the more pragmatic core of the Frelimo leadership, forging a coalition of himself, Transport Minister Armando Guebuza, Security Minister Mariano Matsinhe, and Foreign Minister Pascoal Mocumbi. President Chissano furthermore approached President Mugabe of Zimbabwe on July 10, asking him to join President Daniel Arap Moi of Kenya as mediator to end the fighting. Talks have started in Nairobi between Renamo and Mozambican church representatives.

The superpowers are also contributing greatly to the peace process. The Soviet Union backed Chissano's search for peace by reducing arms supplies. Moscow has pressurised Pretoria, too, with Deputy Foreign Minister Anatoly Adamishin presenting Pik Botha with evidence that South African support for Renamo continues. South Africa's President elect F.W.de Klerk, after meeting with President Chissano during July, declared that his government had stopped aiding Renamo altogether. Chissano publicly acknowledged that there was no longer any aid from the

SADF, but the possibility that there were still some sources of unofficial aid in South Africa, was left open.

At its Fifth Congress in July, Frelimo faced a number of other problems:

- * Popular discontent with the IMF-backed economic recovery programme;
- * Soaring prices;
- * Accusations of corruption within Frelimo;
- * A demoralized army, constantly being outwitted by Renamo commanders. Clearly, the longer the war continues, the weaker Frelimo's negotiation position becomes.

The congress responded to these and related problems by adopting a new programme and statutes, whereby :

- * Marxism-Leninism, the official party ideology adopted in 1977, was dropped in favour of a more moderate commitment to socialism;
- * support for a mixed economy was expressed with movement away from the Marxist notion of centralised state control;
- * President Chissano's peace talks with Renamo were endorsed.

The party also seeks to become more representative of Mozambique's 15 million people, of which only 200 000 are members.

The adoption of the new programme marked a turning point in the ideological direction of Frelimo, and is said to reflect the growing pragmatism of President Chissano. The change furthermore reflects Mozambique's improving relations with Western countries such as the USA, Italy and Britain, all of which supply substantial quantities of aid.

PROSPECTS:

Given the constructive involvement of a number of foreign countries, the establishment of a powerful mediator team in the form of Presidents Moi and Mugabe, the role of the churches in Mozambique and President Chissano's pragmatism, there is now a good chance that the peace process will continue and the next stage will most probably be for the two parties to the conflict to come together to discuss the agenda for negotiations. Although a number of problems still remain - for instance, the lack of coherent leadership within Renamo itself - the peace process seems to be finally under way. A return to full-scale war now seems unlikely, simply because total military victory for either side has proved impossible.