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The Director of Central Intelligence
Washington, D.C. 20505

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NIC 01790-88
20 May 1988

National Intelligence Council

MEMORANDUM FOR: See Distribution
FROM: Walter L. Barrows
National Intelligence Officer for Africa
SUBJECT: The Gersony Report and RENAMO

1. This memorandum responds to a request by the Senior Director for African Affairs, NSC, for an Intelligence Community assessment of the recently released report by Robert Gersony on Mozambican refugees, particularly its findings about the RENAMO guerrilla group. The request also asked for an assessment of the relationship between RENAMO and the South African government. The following, while not a fully coordinated document, reflects my "sense of the community" after convening a special meeting of analysts on these questions. I have also inserted my own views, properly identified.

2. Summary. The Gersony Report contributes to our understanding of a murky situation--but analysts are not in accord on its overall intelligence value. State INR finds it of significant value, particularly for the insight it provides on RENAMO abuses of civilians. DIA and Army, on the other hand, contend that it adds only modestly to our information on the insurgency. CIA stands somewhere in between, believing it to be an important study that raises serious questions for future analysis. All agree, nonetheless, that the Report reinforces many of our strong suspicions about RENAMO--such as its tightly organized and disciplined character -- and supports our conclusion that the guerrillas are now active throughout Mozambique. It also prompts us to examine more closely the rebels' mode of operation and the possibility that they are intensifying force and intimidation against civilians in response to growing famine and other shortages.

3. The Report should be read with care, however. It is not based on a scientifically drawn sample, so extrapolations from refugee interviews to the overall situation in Mozambique are not justified. Most analysts believe that certain of its conclusions are overdrawn, particularly its suggestions that responsibility for atrocities by government forces is virtually absent and that the relationship between RENAMO and civilians is based solely on coercion.

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4. On a separate but related matter, we have no evidence that South African officials have encouraged systematic brutality by RENAMO. South Africa continues to assist RENAMO in important ways, but Community analysts agree that this assistance is limited and that even a complete cutoff, while weakening the insurgency, would not cripple it.

5. The Report. Compiling the results of lengthy interviews with nearly 200 refugees and displaced persons at 25 separate camps in Mozambique and four neighboring countries, the Report reflects a painstaking and professional effort to shed light on the reasons behind the growing numbers of Mozambicans who have been dislocated. It draws attention to RENAMO as a principal cause. In my mind, it makes a useful and provocative contribution to those of us in the Intelligence Community who have struggled over the years to discern the nature of RENAMO's obscure war in the bush. Both the information and the perspective it provides are fresh--by focusing primarily on recent arrivals at refugee camps to give a near-current glimpse of developments in the countryside, and by making strenuous efforts to view these developments through the eyes of the refugees themselves to lend a vantage previously unavailable in such systematic fashion.

6. The Report is not based on a fully representative sample, however, which limits our confidence in drawing conclusions about Mozambique as a whole from the refugee interviews. In particular, extrapolating to 100,000 murders of civilians by RENAMO from the 600 murders reported by refugees goes far beyond the data and is statistically unjustified. (INR notes that the number could just as well be too low as too high.) Moreover, in the judgment of CIA and DIA analysts, broad conclusions about insurgent and government behavior toward people still in RENAMO-controlled areas cannot be drawn from the Report. The refugee sample does not necessarily typify these people, some of whom may support the guerrillas or view government soldiers as equally threatening.

7. DIA and Army have reservations on two other methodological issues:

- Translators could have unintentionally influenced the results of interviews with refugees. CIA's refugee expert discounts this as an important factor. I agree; having conducted academic research at the grassroots level largely through translators, I believe that a skilled investigator such as Mr. Gersony would quickly detect systematic distortion.
- Interviewees could have been afraid to speak out against the government, thereby accounting for the Report's remarkable finding that virtually all brutality was inflicted on refugees by RENAMO rather than government troops. Again, CIA's refugee expert believes that this is not a significant factor. I'm agnostic; while African villagers are often forthright even to the point of openly criticizing higher authorities, they also exercise well-known talents for telling outsiders what is best for them to hear.

In any case, we need not hold up the Report to excessively fastidious standards. As with any important source of information, the Report should

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be mined for what is valuable, taking into account possible biases and comparing its data and conclusions with what we already know or think we know. In some respects, it converges with our prior understandings about RENAMO, while in other ways it diverges.

8. Convergence. The Report corroborates our long-standing view of RENAMO as a well organized and centrally directed insurgency. Discipline is tight, and its command and control system is effective. The Report also reinforces our conclusion that RENAMO is now active throughout Mozambique.

9. Analysts disagree, however, over the extent to which the Report's findings confirm a lack of widespread political support for RENAMO and a related overall trend toward increasing violence by RENAMO against civilians. CIA and INR detect such a trend in other reporting over the past year or so, while DIA is skeptical, contending that the appearance of intensified violence may result from local intimidation campaigns (such as that along the Zimbabwe border) rather than a countrywide phenomenon.

10. In any case, the Report reinforces our long-held view that RENAMO is fully able and willing to use brutal intimidation systematically against civilians when it chooses to for its own tactical purposes. We have ample reporting, for instance, that it has recently carried out a campaign of atrocities against villagers inside the Zimbabwe border, most probably to inflict a cost on Zimbabwe for its military involvement against RENAMO in Mozambique. We also know that the rebels deliberately attack communal villages, local officials, and other civilian targets associated with the central government. Finally, the Report is consistent with reporting on forced recruitment into RENAMO and widespread use of civilians as unwilling porters. I believe along with several analysts, however, that the magnitude of the brutality described in the Report goes well beyond reporting from other sources and should be viewed cautiously pending evaluation of additional information.

11. Divergence. The Report's portrayal of RENAMO's relationship with the rural population as based solely on coercion and exploitation is not consistent with other sources that suggest RENAMO makes some effort to win the loyalty of villagers. Over the years we have received occasional reports from first-hand observers in RENAMO areas who discerned more reciprocal ties--or at least neutrality--between rebels and villagers. For instance, several foreign hostages upon their release have reported that villagers were not cowed by the arrival of RENAMO columns; interaction seemed amicable. A fairly recent visitor to the area told me that on one occasion villagers approached his RENAMO entourage to solicit assistance. In addition, we know that RENAMO's leadership is concerned about reports of brutality and has issued orders to prohibit abuses. Finally, RENAMO at least in some areas espouses a home-spun political formula combining reverence for local practices and traditional authority with disdain for the Marxist programs imposed on the countryside by the central government. Rebel spokesmen also have occasionally appealed to historic tribal rivalries and--with some justification--charged that the government leadership is dominated by southerners to the disadvantage of central Mozambicans.

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12. Reporting over the years from a variety of sources, including interviews with refugees, indicates that RENAMO has not been the only important source of brutality against civilians in Mozambique. Government troops also forcibly recruit conscripts and commit atrocities against civilians, with their proportionate share of brutality varying from one locale to another. Moreover, reporting suggests that a share of violence against civilians can also be attributed to third parties--bandits, splinter groups, renegade soldiers or rebels, and the like.

13. Speculation. Several possibilities would help explain disparities between the Report and other sources:

- Any trend toward increasing abuse of civilians by RENAMO is perhaps a response to worsening famine and other shortages aggravated by the group's rapid growth and geographical expansion. Because the Report is based on very recent information, it would reflect the impact of such a trend more heavily than earlier sources.
- There could also be a trend toward less brutality by government forces, perhaps as a result of Maputo's recent efforts to reform the military or because the army is now less active in the countryside, preferring instead to occupy garrisons and patrol roads.
- There could be core areas of popular support for RENAMO, or at least zones where the relationship between rebel and villager approximates that between government and subject, with some degree of mutual obligation. Interviews of refugees likely would not have detected this, since people in such zones would presumably have no reason to flee. This suggests that for intelligence purposes the Report's helpful categorization describing different types of RENAMO control--"tax areas," "control areas," and "destruction areas"--might be expanded to include, say, "support areas."

I will encourage intelligence collection and analytic efforts to test these and other hypotheses stimulated by the Report.

14. The South African Connection. The Report does not deal with South Africa's involvement in Mozambique, but its appearance has raised questions about Pretoria's responsibility for widespread suffering there. We have no evidence indicating that Pretoria has deliberately encouraged use of force and intimidation by RENAMO against civilians, although some South African officials have been no doubt aware that it takes place.

15. South Africa has continued to support RENAMO since it pledged not to do so in the Nkomati Accord of 1984. But the scale of this support diminished considerably after 1984 and is now limited to items such as communications equipment and training; some materiel support, including small arms; medicine; military advice and perhaps training; and tactical intelligence. (DIA doubts that South Africa provides tactical intelligence, such as targetting information, RENAMO seeming capable of meeting its own

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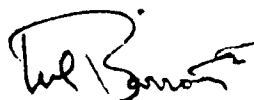
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needs in this area.) Recent intelligence reports detailing links between the South African military and RENAMO corroborate our view that, while Pretoria exercises influence over the guerrillas, it certainly does not control them. Indeed, since 1984, South African influence has waned as RENAMO has become more independent-minded and self-sufficient. Analysts agree that should all South African ties with RENAMO be severed, the insurgency could still sustain itself, albeit at reduced levels.

16. Next Steps. Interviewing refugees has clear intelligence value. In light of the questions stimulated by the Report, I recommend that:

- The State Department commission follow-on refugee studies in the region, from which we expect there would be derivative intelligence benefits.
- Country teams in the region undertake more systematic efforts to glean information from refugees and those who work with them.
- The data base supporting the Report be made available to Intelligence Community analysts.

17. Additionally, I recommend that contacts with the rebel military leadership for intelligence collection purposes be seriously considered. Our understanding of the insurgency will necessarily be incomplete unless it includes a view from the inside. In the meantime, I will work with Community analysts to identify key collection gaps suggested by our reading of the Report.



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