

# Clash with Machel ally points risk

*The Star*  
12/1/83  
p. 17

A skirmish between Zimbabwean troops and anti-Frelimo guerrillas in Mozambique has underlined the growing danger of the rebels, allegedly backed by South Africa, clashing with the forces of several Frontline states.

Though otherwise inconsequential, the shoot-out appears to have been the first acknowledged contact between the Mozambique National Resistance (MNR) and troops of a Mozambican ally drawn into the conflict to protect its economic interests.

When the three companies of Zimbabwean soldiers were sent to Mozambique in mid-November they joined an estimated several thousand Tanzanian troops sent by President Julius Nyerere to reinforce the Frelimo forces.

Two other Mozambican neighbours, Zambia and Malawi, are believed to have been asked by President Samora Machel's government to send troops, though there is no evidence that any have arrived.

## CLAIMED

However, in a recent radio broadcast an MNR spokesman claimed Zambian troops had been deployed already.

The skirmish in question took place on Friday evening when guerrillas launched a mortar attack on a pumping station about half way along the pipeline that carries most of Zimbabwe's fuel supplies from Beira to Lutete in Zimbabwe.

Before they could do any damage the attackers were beaten off by Zimbabwean troops stationed at Mafora to protect the 288 km fuel pipeline.

## DISCUSSED

Though the possibility of Zimbabwean military involvement in the Mozambican conflict has been discussed for years, Prime Minister Robert Mugabe is believed to have been forced into taking action after the MNR blew up the Mafora pipeline pumping station on October 11.

At the same time the MNR kidnapped three Portuguese technicians and their families.

The Portuguese were later released but maintenance workers refused to go back to the pipeline without protection.

Now they are escorted in and out of Mozambique by troops and helicopter gunships.

Zimbabwe's position worsened when saboteurs blew up part of the Beira fuel tank farm causing a fuel shortage crisis in Zimbabwe just before Christmas.

Other Zimbabwe imports have also been disrupted by MNR attacks on road and rail routes from Beira and Maputo, increasing Harare's dependence on routes through South Africa.

The MNR radio station, Radio Free Africa, has at least twice warned that the movement would begin attacking Zimbabwean targets if the Mugabe government continued providing military support to Mozambique.

Zimbabwe is not the only black-ruled state in Southern Africa with a vital interest in Mozambique's security.

Without the Mozambican ports, landlocked Zambia must rely on South Africa to help shift the huge overflow from the inefficient Tanzam Railway to Dar es Salaam.

Malawi came close to economic strangulation recently when the MNR began ambushing vehicles carrying food and other supplies from Mozambique's Tete Province to Blantyre.

The guerrillas, who Mozambique says were operating out of southern Malawi, later broadcast an assurance that they had nothing against Dr Kumuzu Banda's government and would in future protect his trade routes.

South Africa has repeatedly denied helping the MNR.

However, as an indication of world opinion on the subject, the prestigious New York Times declared in an editorial last week: "No one would be surprised to learn that South Africa planned the recent sabotage attacks on the Mozambique oil storage tanks."

Referring to "Pretoria the bully", the newspaper suggested that South Africa had planned the attacks using black surrogates.

It noted that the attacks had left Zimbabwe dependent on South Africa for oil and added: "Forcing Zimbabwe to its knees will not make it a safer neighbour for South Africa."