

Guerrillas force war deeper into Mozambique provinces

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in Maputo

Anti-Frelimo guerrillas have moved into two of Mozambique's northern provinces, Nampula and Zambezia. These are the two most populated provinces and provide most of Mozambique's agricultural exports.

Until a year ago, they were largely unaffected by the war. Then, last August, the South African-backed Mozambique National Resistance (MNR) launched an offensive into Zambezia from bases in Malawi. That assault collapsed in November when the Mozambican army captured the main MNR base inside Zambezia at the same time that Malawi bowed to Mozambican pressure and restricted the MNR's use of bases there.

In April, the MNR again swept across Zambezia. By May it had advanced further than last year, reaching the coast and moving for the first time north into Nampula province. Recently, there has been fighting only 30 miles from Nampula city and 20 miles from Quelimane, the capital of Zambezia.

Nothing was said publicly about the new MNR offensive. Then, in a speech in Quelimane on June 19, President Machel admitted that much of Zambezia was now affected, and that some residents of Quelimane were asking when the city itself would be attacked.

He dismissed such fears as nonsense: "People who think the 'armed bandits' will enter the city have chickens' heads," he said. He promised to return in July to visit the affected districts.

There seem to be only a few hundred armed men in Zambezia, but they have practically closed the province. The main target is road traffic. Cars and lorries have been shot at, and dozens of people killed by mines. An electrification project was halted after an Italian civil engineer was kidnapped on the Quelimane-Gurue road on April 24. He is still missing.

The result is that people are afraid to travel, and commerce has collapsed. Traffic from Quelimane to the tea centre of Gurue moves by army convoy.

As happened last year, the MNR men seem to move about the province almost unmolested. But they are moving in smaller groups than last year, and the only two major attacks the MNR has tried both failed. The Mozambican army repulsed an attempt to enter the town of Lugela and an attack on the Quelimane water supply.

President Machel said in Quelimane that the MNR was still operating from Malawi. But the lower level of this offensive suggests that President Banda is no longer allowing South Africa to set up sizeable rear bases for the MNR. This time it pushed quickly to the sea, which suggests South Africa is probably sending supplies by boat, as it does to MNR bands further south.

It is also clear that, either by choice or fear, some peasants are helping the MNR. In response to this, the army has

moved to increasingly coercive measures. For example, people are being forced to move into villages where it is felt they will be less able to help the MNR.

This has had some immediate military success. For example, attacks on the road north of Gurue dropped after people near the road were forced into villages.

But it seems likely to cause Frelimo longer term political harm. Some people object to liv-

ing in the new villages. A few flee into the bush rather than move, sometimes joining the MNR. More slip out of the villages later. And there are reports of people burning their own villages and blaming the MNR as an excuse to move back to their old farms.

In February, President Machel announced an even harder line against people who help the MNR: "Those who deal with the bandits will die with the bandits." And he de-

scribed new army tactics of surrounding MNR groups and then "unleashing intense fire."

The MNR has gained little popular support and seems to make no effort to establish "liberated zones" with an alternative government. It seems content to destroy economic facilities and to make half the country like medieval Europe in the days of the highwaymen, where travel means risking life and limb.

South Africa's aim in backing the MNR seems not to be to overthrow the Frelimo Government, but to paralyse it, and South Africa is clearly having some success.

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