

COLIN LEGUM'S

THIRD WORLD REPORTS

CSI SYNDICATION SERVICE. 15 DENBIGH GARDENS, RICHMOND, SURREY. ENGLAND. Telephone: 01-940 6955

No. HQ.2

MOZAMBIQUE'S GRAVEST HOUR SINCE INDEPENDENCE

COLIN LEGUM

London, 15 October 1980

Mozambique faces its gravest hour of peril since its independence from Portuguese rule in 1974. The rebel Mozambique National Resistance (Renamo) has overrun at least a dozen important towns in the border areas with Zambia and Malawi and, more critically, taken the strategic bridge across the Zambesi river which links the north and south of Mozambique.

Although the MNR stands no chance of overthrowing the Frelimo Government of President Samora Machel, it can hope to achieve two major objectives unless substantial military aid is quickly rushed into Mozambique to contain and then defeat Renamo's new offensive.

First, Renamo can hope to win and hold enough ground in the north of the country to establish a rival government; but for this to succeed it will require effective military aid from South Africa. Splitting the country in two has been a long-standing objective of Renamo.

Second, it can make the general security situation so dangerous that Machel will be forced to accept most of Renamo's terms for entering into a coalition government as the price for ending the fighting. This objective has the open backing of the Pretoria regime.

The dramatic breakthrough by Renamo is blamed by President Machel on collusion between South Africa and Malawi. Both these governments deny his charges. Evidence in support of Machel's accusations is to be found in the sequel of events leading up to Renamo's successful offensive.

On 11 September, President Machel, President Kaunda of Zambia and Prime Minister Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe made a *démarche* on President Banda at a meeting in his capital, Lilongwe. They demanded the immediate expulsion of all Renamo forces from Malawi territory, failing which counter-measures would be taken against Malawi, which could include a cut-off of his lines of communication and the placement of a battery of missiles along his border.

Although Banda continued to deny the charge that Renamo was allowed to maintain bases on his territory, he agreed to establish a joint security commission with Mozambique.

On 17 September he sent a 16-man delegation to Maputo to begin talks about establishing such a commission. On the same day Renamo launched its offensive. Some reports claim that as many as 10,000 Renamo activists and supporters crossed into the border provinces of Ntanga and Tete; it is impossible to determine how many of these were armed guerillas and how many were civilians. What is certain is that the attackers had come from Malawi.

There are two possible explanations for the timing of the offensive. The first is that it was the start of the rainy season which favour guerilla operations; and the second is that, faced with Dr. Banda's orders that the Renamo presence be removed from Malawi, its leaders chose to launch a full offensive rather than put themselves in the position of having to surrender to the Mozambique army.

Another important development in the sequence of events was Pretoria's reaction in late August to a landmine explosion on the Mozambique-South African border which wounded six SA soldiers. Pretoria claimed the landmine was planted by ANC insurgents operating out of Mozambique. This incident was the culmination of a series of complaints by Pretoria that the ANC had been allowed to re-establish its presence in Mozambique in contravention of the Nkomati Accord of 1984.

As an immediate reprisal, Pretoria announced it would no longer allow Mozambican migrants to be recruited for work on SA mines and farms. But it still

insisted that this did not mean scrapping the Nkomati Accord which, by then, had been virtually eroded as a result of 18 months of complaints by Machel that the SA military had never, in fact, honoured its side of the agreement to stop aiding Renamo.

Machel claimed that the landmine had been planted by the SA army in order to provide a pretext for renewing attacks on Mozambique and to cover up support for Renamo. His claim seems improbable since it is unlikely that the SA army would have been so clumsy as to plant a landmine that would blow up its own men.

In mid-August, Mozambique's security service claimed that aircraft identical with those which had supplied Renamo before the Nkomati Accord was signed were again landing on runways in Manica province with supplies for Renamo.

Denials by Mozambique that it has allowed the return of an ANC presence are rejected by Pretoria. Its warnings about the intentions of the SA army, unless the ANC presence is removed, are treated in Maputo as evidence that SA stands ready to launch a full-scale military offensive against Mozambique.

So, by the time of the 17 September offensive, relations between SA, Malawi and Mozambique were severely strained. But what is the evidence that the SA military was, in fact, helping to train Renamo forces in Malawi?

The purely circumstantial evidence is that elements in the SA military had continued to maintain contact with Renamo and supplied it with essential material since the Nkomati Accord was signed. Pretoria has had to admit on several occasions that there had been breaches of the Accord, but it explained these away as being part of its efforts to try and persuade Renamo to agree to begin negotiations over ending the fighting. This explanation has not satisfied Machel; nor is it consistent with one of Pretoria's admissions that a SA submarine had landed supplies on the Mozambique coast since the Accord was signed.

It is an open secret that important elements in the SA army were unhappy about the signing of the Nkomati Accord, which they saw as a betrayal of their ally, Renamo. Some of these elements have had to be disciplined by the Defence Minister,

Gen Malan.

Gen Malan has admitted that the army had facilitated the return of Renamo forces out of SA with their equipment, but he claims that this was done before the Accord was finally signed. Some of these Renamo units, which left SA, went to Malawi.

Despite Dr Banda's repeated denials there is strong evidence to show that Renamo has been operating from camps in Malawi which were supposed to house refugees who had fled from the drought in Mozambique and to escape being caught in the cross-pressures between Renamo and the Mozambique security forces. Over a period of 10 months Malan has repeatedly appealed to Banda to put a stop to Renamo's presence on his soil.

Since Malawi and SA maintain diplomatic relations and there is a sizable tourist traffic between the two countries there are no obstacles to SA agents maintaining regular contact with the Renamo force in the country.

That there is a 'White presence' in Renamo is established by the fact that three Whites were seen to be present when a Renamo brigade attacked Lioma in Zambesia province on 12 July. However, these might have been South Africans or Portuguese supporters of Renamo.

But an offensive such as that launched by Renamo on 17 September could only have succeeded if its forces had adequate arms. The natural suspicion is that these came from SA.

Whatever the truth in these murky depths of clandestine warfare, the present situation seems to mark the formal end of the 30 months of uneasy relations between Maputo and Pretoria since the signing of the Nkomati Accord. Once Pretoria believes, as it clearly does, that the ANC is again operating in Mozambique and since it will no longer feel bound to observe the letter, let alone the spirit, of the Accord, its obvious defence posture will be to resume its support for Renamo.

This is certainly the view taken by the leaders of the six Frontline States when they met last week in Maputo, and when Kaunda and Mugabe met again in Harare this week. In their view, Mozambique now stands in urgent need of external

military aid to confront the Renamo-SA offensive. Zimbabwe has maintained an estimated military force of 6,000 men in Mozambique since mid-1985. But it is felt that additional forces are necessary. The question is where they will come from.

Mugabe has stated his strong preference for a Pan-African force; but the doubt is whether there is time for such a force to be despatched quickly, given the logistical weaknesses of most African armies.

The Frontline leaders are convinced that Pretoria's present strategy is to wreck any prospect of the border countries ending their dependence on communications through SA by improving the road and rail links to the sea through Mozambique, which has attracted £400 m of international aid.

In Pretoria the hawks now rule the roost because of SA's mood of determination to resist external pressures exercised through the international programme of sanctions and the state of security inside the country. The hawks are also in a mood to flex their muscles against the Frontline States to demonstrate that SA is not ready to capitulate to their pressures.

All these factors combine to intensify the dangerous situation which has arisen in Mozambique and which confronts the Frontline leaders with the serious challenge of how to rescue their threatened colleague.

*** endit ***