

An ocean-to-ocean arc of troubled African nations

From ANTHONY DELIUS

LONDON. — The May Day reprimands issued by President Samora Machel of Mozambique against the Roman Catholic Church, "old-fashioned" trade unions and wearers of wigs and trendy gear may be linked to the great area of unease lying around Zimbabwe-Rhodesia, increasingly disturbed by the struggle inside that country. An arc of troubled nations bends over the top of the south sub-continent from the Indian to Atlantic oceans, from Mozambique across Malawi and Zambia to Angola.

Undoubtedly it is Mozambique that is most constantly affected by the Rhodesian war, its fledgling Marxist government providing the main base camps for the Mugabe wing of the Patriotic Front and at the same time trying to lay the foundations of what its leaders regard as an authentic socialist state.

Underground

Adding to these leaders' confusions is the amount of advice being poured into their ears from Marxist advisers originating from a variety of countries and organizations including Bulgaria and the old South African Communist Party. But the most immediate irritant comprises the activities of an underground sabotage movement.

This group is known as the Mozambique Resistance Movement (MRM), which has set light to fuel tanks, cut communications here and there, and even ambushed regular troops. The Mozambique authorities say that MRM guerillas are trained in Malawi and Rhodesia, and suspicions are even voiced that South Africa also assists them.

No doubt President Machel

is anxious to give his supporters and Mozambicans in general something more substantial and visible to blame for the difficulties his regime is having, hence the reference to the "anti-socialist" attitudes of the Roman Catholic hierarchy, and imitators of the decadent West.

President Mobutu of Zaire, for opposite "capitalist" reasons, also attacked the activities of the leading churchmen in opposing his "African authenticity" campaign of yesteryear, yet his difficulties and failings only grew worse. But there can be little doubt that the frequent invasions of Mozambique by Rhodesian forces striking against guerilla bases is a large element in the difficulty of meeting the country's need for economic growth and stability.

The inability of the Mozambican army to do anything about stopping the Rhodesian incursions at present also reflects on the authority of President Machel's government. Although the Machel regime doesn't seem to be much

shaken by the MRM's "bar-dit" activity any more than by the reported dissatisfaction among the people at having to share supplies of scarce foods with Patriotic Front guerillas, it is very uncomfortable to have to live with. Hence the recent well-publicized shootings of saboteurs, intended to demonstrate firmness of authority as well as a warning to others contemplating subversion.

Malawi, lying along Lake Malawi and Mozambique's north-western border, seems at first sight to be not very much affected by or concerned in the problems, ideological aims or racial struggles of her neighbours. Indeed Malawi's President (for life) Hastings Banda was positively hostile to Mozambique's present rulers when they were conducting a guerilla war against the Portuguese, and he is quite open about his willingness to have dealings with South Africa and Mr Smith's Rhodesia, and probably with Bishop Muzorewa's Zimbabwe-Rhodesia as well.

What is more, he has been more successful than either of

his neighbours, Zambia and Mozambique, in developing the agriculturalists and agriculture of his country.

But there have been reports of some rumblings in the Malawian army, and of Banda's having to accept some manifestly unfair treatment of some other officers by the commander-in-chief in order to keep that officer's loyalty. If the number of people the president once kept in detention — though he has let most of them out over the past year or — is anything to go by, then he does have some security problems.

There are three Malawian political groups in exile, all with head offices in Tanzania. The leader of one, a Soviet-trained economist who works in a Maputo official bank, Dr Attati Mpakati, had his hands badly injured recently by a letter-bomb.

President Banda is now getting on for 80, and if he should die soon it's obvious that the rulers of Zambia, Mozambique and Rhodesia-Zimbabwe will have an intense interest in what sort of government gets into power in Malawi.

The Zambians are in such a state of disturbance over Rhodesian incursions against Joshua Nkomo's guerillas, the near-collapse of the economy and a continuing crime wave that some talk of the country being in an advanced condition of "destabilization". There is no doubt that the once-great authority of President Kenneth Kaunda has been dangerously reduced. His own confidence in the Western powers, and particularly Britain, has been so eroded by the failure of the Anglo-American plan to achieve anything so far in getting a settlement for Rhodesia that he is reported to be increasingly willing to look to the Russians and Cubans for protection from Rhodesian raids.

The Russians of course may give him weapons and advisers but they are unlikely to provide him with the sort of cash aid his country's economy so desperately needs. It is estimated that Zambia has suffered losses amounting to hundreds of millions of rands owing to the confrontation with UDI Rhodesia — and if the Commonwealth conference does take place in Lusaka in August as scheduled, it is likely to hear a desperate plea for large compensation.

Relations have improved between Angola and Zambia since the days when President Kaunda used to talk about Russians and their "cubs" (Cubans) being the major influence in Luanda.

Although one of the front-line states, Angola had enough troubles on its territory between the borders with South West Africa and Zaïre to want

too much involvement in the Rhodesian struggle. But slowly the provision of training camps for Cubans to create guerillas for Joshua Nkomo's cause has drawn Angola into that confrontation more substantially, and the heavy raid by the Rhodesians on a training camp near Luena in Angola has marked this. Perhaps it's significant that the Angolans say the attack was really a joint South African-Rhodesian operation, with Rhodesian aircraft refuelling at a base camp in SWA/Namibia.

The Russians and the Cubans may be as interested in keeping that great arc of territory across the middle of Africa "destabilized" and ready for international use as the Americans and British are anxious to cool things there, without much help from the Rhodesians.