

S. Africa may lose control of rebels it encouraged

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From John Borrell
in Nyamapanda, Zimbabwe

A decade ago, when heavy vehicles lumbered through this trim customs post on Zimbabwe's border with Mozambique, the drivers risked Frelimo ambushes and landmines on the 190-mile route across the rump of Mozambique to Malawi.

The Frelimo guerrillas whose fingers were on the trigger then, are now in power in Mozambique. But crossing the rump is once again a stomach-turning eight-hour drive as a result of the steadily expanding activities of a new guerrilla force, the Mozambique National Resistance Movement (RNM).

The RNM, a shadowy group with little in the way of political ideals and perhaps 4,000 men under arms, is fast making large parts of Mozambique as unsafe as when Frelimo was fighting the Portuguese.

For several years, the RNM's activities were confined to re-

mote areas of central Mozambique and the movement was a nuisance rather than a threat to President Machel's Administration.

But in recent months the scope and scale of the bush war has changed. The RNM is pushing south towards Maputo and north into the Tete province.

A few years ago the movement's military achievements could be recounted in a sentence since they consisted of little more than assaults on villagers and the laying of the odd landmine. Now the RNM has graduated to attacks on bridges and railways and to direct assaults on military barracks. Stores are looted with embarrassing frequency.

President Machel, who last month cancelled a planned visit to Europe to take charge of operations against the guerrillas, is an increasingly worried man. In addition to the war, he has an unhealthy economy to cope with and disagreements within the party.

The RNM's spreading net is

also concerning the Zimbabwe Government and the group of nine southern African states which is working at ways of increasing the level of regional trade and reducing the area's dependence on South Africa.

The road beyond the customs barrier here at Nyamapanda is

sabotaged the oil pipeline from the port of Beira in Mozambique to Zimbabwe.

The frequency of attacks on the two railways lines from Zimbabwe to Mozambican ports has also increased and there is a growing reluctance amongst Zimbabwean businessmen to

THE ZIMBABWE Government has banned all private night flying for security reasons. The restriction, from 6 pm until 6 am, was made effective immediately.—Reuter.

an important artery of trade for Zimbabwe and Malawi, two of the economic powers in the regional group.

A few weeks ago, between 50 and 100 heavy vehicles used the road each week. But since the killing of a driver in April and half a dozen more recent ambushes, most operators are using the longer route through Zambia. Freight rates between the two countries have doubled.

In the past six months, the RNM guerrillas have twice

have goods consigned through Beira or Maputo.

The RNM's interest in Zimbabwe's road, rail, and pipeline links with Mozambique is indicative of more than a guerrilla's appreciation of a relatively soft target.

Despite Pretoria's constant denials, there is considerable evidence that South Africa is the movement's mentor and supplier. Pretoria assumed this role two years ago when white Rhodesia's powers of patronage vanished with the final collapse

of white rule. RNM recruits have been trained in South Africa and a radio station in the Transvaal beams the movement's propaganda to Mozambique.

For South Africa, the RNM has proved a useful vehicle for maintaining economic pressure on Zimbabwe for political gain. The road, rail, and pipeline links with Mozambique are important in Zimbabwe's vision of a future in which it will be much less dependent on trade routes through South Africa.

In addition, the RNM is seen by Pretoria as a potent reminder to Mozambique that guerrilla movements are easily spawned and easily supported. It is a blunt way of asking President Machel's Government to be less hospitable to the South African National Congress.

Until now, the RNM has served Pretoria's twin interests well, but the movement's expansion and the growing threat it presents to President Machel carries with it dangers

that appear to contradict South Africa's regional strategy.

Mozambican ministers privately admit that the army is too poorly motivated and equipped to launch an all-out offensive against the RNM. Evidence of this is Mozambique's decision to ask Portugal for instructors to retrain the army.

President Machel's options may soon be limited to asking for direct foreign assistance. The Portuguese could not provide it for domestic political reasons and the only countries willing and capable may be Mozambique's friends in the Eastern bloc.

It may seem trite at this stage to talk of Cuban soldiers in Mozambique, but it came as a surprise when they moved into Angola in 1975 and into Ethiopia a few years later.

That possibility may have occurred to South Africa but the more powerful the RNM becomes, the more ambitious its leaders seem and it might be possible that Pretoria is losing its grip on the puppet strings.