

Mozambique: Politicising the ranks

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An intensified military presence which has resulted in several key roads being reopened has led *Frelimo* to believe that it is gaining the upper hand. But the *Mozambique National Resistance* (MNR) is continuing to advance in Nampula province, and is still capable of mounting significant attacks in other parts of the country.

In recent months *Frelimo* has launched military offensives in three provinces: Inhambane in the south, Manica in the centre, and Zambezia in the north-central area. Roads are crucial in this war and the best indicators of who is winning. The main MNR tactic is to attack traffic and mine roads so that people are afraid to travel. It has succeeded,

and significant parts of the country are paralysed.

Frelimo has just reopened four of the most important roads. From Queimane, the capital of Zambezia province, the road is open without military escort, north to Mocuba, the tea centre of Gurué, and to the railway at Mutuali. Traffic is returning to normal, and tea exports from Gurué have also returned to near normal. From Beira, the road and rail links with Zimbabwe have been open to traffic for six months, helped by Zimbabwean military protection. The Zimbabweans have also reopened the road through Tete which links Zimbabwe and Malawi, although military convoys are still a necessity on one stretch. Most dramatic is the reopening of the only

road between Maputo and Beira. It was closed two years ago when attacks on military convoys became too heavy. The bus and lorry traffic between Mozambique's two biggest cities is now expanding. Military convoys are still necessary for about a third of the distance but attacks are infrequent.

However, the roads are not totally trouble-free. Vehicles have been shot at from the bush near Gurué and Chimoio. On 20 January 27 died when a bus was ambushed on the main road south of Inhambane. But relatively free movement has been restored on main routes. Off the main roads, attacks are more frequent. For example, the electric power line to Beira runs parallel with the Beira-Zimbabwe road and has been cut several times in recent months.

Heavy fighting continues in two areas: northern Manica and Sofala provinces and in the border area between Zambezia and Nampula. Northern Manica and Sofala remains MNR country. The railway north from Beira to Malawi, the Moatize coal mine and the Marromeu sugar estate is effectively closed; the infrequent train service comes under constant attack. Similarly, convoys travelling north from Chimoio are attacked regularly. The centre for these raids, and probably for all MNR operations in Mozambique, is a triangle of three bases in the foothills of the Gorongosa mountain: Cavalo (which was *Frelimo's* main base in this zone 10 years ago), Casa Banana probably the central base with an airstrip), and Mosca. In September a *Frelimo* force regained the town of Maringue, north of these bases, and reinforced Gorongosa town, to the south. In the following months, according to **Mauricio Bento**, one of the commanders there, a series of small forward bases were captured. The three main bases are now surrounded. *Frelimo* is moving in heavy artillery a process somewhat slowed by the rains. The MNR is digging in with newly supplied longer range mortars. The three bases, about 30km apart, house an estimated 3,000 armed men, according to Bento. It will require some heavy fighting before they can be captured.

The other area of heavy fighting is north-east Zambezia and bordering areas of Nampula. The Mozambican army offensive in Zambezia has pushed the MNR further north. But the MNR has established a base at Chinga, 60 km west of Nampula from where it is attacking traffic travelling west and south from Nampula. Traffic on several roads is restricted to convoys and buses and lorries have been attacked. On 20 November a Portuguese priest, Fr. **Arlindo Batista**, was killed in his jeep by an MNR bazooka. Observers in Nampula report that the MNR has been moving in two columns from Chinga, north and south of Nampula, in an attempt to encircle Mozambique's third largest city. There are also reports that the MNR penetrated north into Cabo Delgado province late last year unable to establish bases or maintain supply lines.

How much support from whom?

There seems no doubt that South Africa is continuing to supply the MNR. Reliable accounts of night

parachute drops of supplies have been elicited from eyewitnesses at the Tome and Cavado bases. Fires were lit to mark the drop sites and in both places a single large crate arrived with smaller boxes containing arms and ammunition.

Several unconfirmed reports mention sightings of submarines. Late last year, Portuguese fishermen reported seeing a submarine surface north-east of Beira. A former MNR member has stated publicly that in May, when he had been at an MNR base near the coast of northern Inhambane, three white men and a large number of Mozambicans came ashore in small boats. The Mozambicans were in uniform and said they had just come from training in South Africa, having disembarked from a submarine just off the coast. The former MNR men said that the white men acted like tourists, swimming and taking photographs. More MNR men arrived from the interior and left with the white men to go for training in South Africa.

As evidence of South African support for the MNR grows, there are indications that the MNR has gained a local foothold, at least in Sofala and Zambezia. When the Rhodesian security services established the MNR in 1976, its early recruits were Shona speakers from Manica and Sofala provinces. Efforts were made to appeal for support on tribal grounds, in particular that much of the leadership, including President **Samora Machel**, were southerners and Shangana speaking. Many MNR commanders still appear to be Shona speakers. It was partly for this reason that the MNR had to resort more to terror in the south as the tribal argument did not work there. Indeed a witness of a Christmas Eve massacre in Gaza said the chiefs of the armed group spoke Shona and that their subordinates had to translate into the local Shangana.

In Sofala, there is much talk of *madjibas*, or collaborators, and the fact that the MNR has won support among the peasants is a source of conflict within the villages. An elderly villager who escaped after being captured by the MNR had worked as a tally clerk inside an MNR base. He said that many *madjibas* had supplied food voluntarily to the base. Another who was captured by *Frelimo*, was leading Mozambican soldiers to his MNR base but a *madjiba* tip off gave the MNR time to decamp.

Political boost for the army

Frelimo is taking an increasingly political stance and is conscious that army misconduct has alienated local people in some areas. Mistreatment of the population in Zambezia, particularly in the Gurué area, provoked protests from doctors and priests. It seems to have been one factor leading to the dismissal of the former military commander, **Bonifacio Graveta**. Last November, these incidents died down after top-ranking military officials flew to Gurué and delivered a strong dressing-down to local officials for mistreating civilians. Similarly, the much-feared local army commander in Serupe, 15 km from Gurué, has been jailed. He is accused of executing a tea worker unjustly accused of links with the

MNR, and of burning peasant huts to force people to move to a new communal village.

This heightened political strategy was given a boost in January when Machel tightened political control over the army. **Armando Panguene** was appointed vice-minister of defence and political commissar of the army. He is a former diplomat and governor, but he is also a highly respected former guerrilla commander. At *Frelimo's* fourth congress he was elected a party secretary, making him number 12 in the *Frelimo* hierarchy. **Gideon Ndobe**, a former guerrilla who had fallen into disgrace but who was resurrected at the fourth congress and elected to the central committee, was named a secretary of state for defence. He was already on the army political commissariat.

Taken together, these appointments elevate the political wing of the military and give further support to *Frelimo's* traditional line that the war can only be won by gaining political support of the peasants. Thus political training of soldiers is equal in importance to military training. This balance was lost in the post-independence drift to a modern army with heavy weapons. It is being redressed as the army brings back veterans of the successful liberation war.

The appointment of **Sergio Vieira** as vice-minister of defence is another political move. Although a veteran of the liberation war, he served as Machel's personal secretary and is not popular in the army. He was *Frelimo's* party security chief after independence

and has played an active role in the talks with South Africa. As head of the *Bank of Mozambique*, he succeeded in imposing discipline on what had become virtual anarchy. He became minister of agriculture, failed to control a hostile bureaucracy, and took up the post of governor of Niassa last year. It is possible that he will direct himself to improving either discipline or logistics in the military. But it has also been suggested that as a well known "Stalinist" within the *Frelimo* ranks, his appointment is intended to reassure the East bloc by tightening up liaison.

The factor that unites all three appointments is that they are strong Machel supporters. Several other appointments appear to consolidate his personal control. This is not unexpected as Machel was instructed by the Politburo last year to take more direct control over the army and the war against the MNR.

In this context it is interesting that **Salvador Mutumuke**, Mozambique's youngest general, has been appointed military commander of Maputo province. As well as being highly respected, he is a staunch Machel man and is expected to take charge of the defence of the city. A former presidential assistant **Fernando Honwana**, who returned recently from military training in North Korea is now training, with Korean help a rapid response unit at Chibuto, 100 km north of Maputo. Together, Mutumuke and Honwana ensure that Machel can count on a rapid and loyal response to any attack on Maputo ●