

# MALAWI: Mozambican rebels seek sanctuary

Despite security agreements between Mozambique and Malawi, it appears that rebels from the former are still using the latter for attacks against Mozambique.

There is every indication that, despite the protestations of the Malawian Government and the security pact signed last October, rebels of the Mozambique National Resistance Movement (MNR) are still using parts of Malawian territory to launch attacks against Mozambican targets and to seek sanctuary when pursued by FRELIMO troops. Attacks on economic and purely civilian targets in Tete province in May and June and the disappearance of those responsible, along with their prisoners, have convinced senior Mozambican officials that Malawi is either unwilling or unable to prevent the MNR from using its territory.

## Kidnap

A recent event pointing to the use of Malawian territory was the kidnapping of five nuns in Mozambique in early June. They were seized by the MNR, which claims that they are all in good health but has given no indication of, if and when, they might be released. A senior provincial official in Tete Province said in mid-June that it was very likely that the MNR unit had taken the nuns to a refuge in Malawi. The official added that, despite the goodwill of the Malawian Government, there were still elements within that country that gave support and sanctuary to the MNR.

These comments echoed earlier ones by Tete's Governor, Eduardo Arao. He said that there was evidence that the rebels still used Malawi as a base and a refuge after raids in Tete Province. Arao expressed his regret that, "despite the good intentions expressed by the Malawian Government during President Machel's visit, it has not translated the intention into action."

The major question concerning Malawi's attitude towards the MNR is not so much whether the Banda

government wants to prevent the MNR from using its territory, but whether it is able to do so. The agreements signed by Presidents Machel and Banda during the former's visit to Malawi covered joint action to deal with the MNR and to keep the all-important road and rail links through Mozambique open. Malawi depends on these trade routes to get its tobacco and tea exports to world markets and to import vital commodities such as oil and coal.

In the past there has been justifiable suspicion in Maputo that Banda supported the MNR and related groups. During the Mozambican liberation war Banda had maintained close ties with the Portuguese authorities and after the war he had retained links with anti-FRELIMO figures such as the late Jorge Jardim, thought to have been one of the chief sponsors of the MNR.

However, Malawi's membership of the SADCC and its need to keep open trade routes led to a downgrading of relations with anti-FRELIMO forces and a policy of improving functional interactions with Mozambique. The havoc wrought by the MNR with Mozambique's transport system was felt deeply by Malawi and Banda became more and more concerned about export and import delays and increased transport costs. At times MNR attacks put out of action the rail and road route to Beira and the road to Zimbabwe. As these sabotage raids coincided with repairs to the railway to Mcala, Malawi was forced to use the long and expensive lorry run to South Africa or the delay-prone TanZam railway.

It was these problems, and not any great change of political outlook, that led Banda to sign security agreements with Mozambique and to pledge his help in ending the MNR threat. The

present wave of attacks around Malawi's borders is a potentially dangerous to the Malawian economy as it is to Mozambique, and so it is hard to believe that the hard-headed Dr Banda would agree to assist the MNR in damaging his own economy.

However, Malawi has a small army (the total armed forces add up to only 4,600) which is used more for internal security than for counter-insurgency or defence against an external threat. Furthermore, both Israel and South Africa, *de facto* supporters of the MNR, have played a major role in training Banda's army and security forces. Both these factors would inhibit the ability, and perhaps the willingness of the forces to move against the rebels.

## Deserters

In addition, President Machel said during his visit to Malawi in October 1984 that many deserters from FRELIMO's liberation forces and collaborators with Portuguese colonialism had fled to Malawi after Mozambican independence and that many of them had gained positions in the Malawian police, army and civil service. Banda did not deny this nor did he conduct a purge of such officials. Therefore, it is very likely that, even if Banda is still willing to stick by the agreements with Mozambique, many of his security officials and those directly responsible for preventing incursions into Malawi are not willing to oppose the MNR and may even support the movement.

It is hard to see how Mozambique and Malawi can overcome this problem in bilateral relations short of a total change of regime in Malawi. Although Banda himself may not want to aid the MNR any longer, the general policies of his government and his continued friendliness towards South Africa make it hard for rigorous action to be taken against the Mozambican rebels. Those two factors have the further effect of making Mozambique and other neighbouring states wary of Banda's protestations of good faith and adherence to the ideals of the SADCC.