

The mercenary factor

A new factor in the last ten months has been the presence of white mercenaries alongside the guerrillas, with indications that they are commanding MNR groups throughout the country.

Last July, in the south of Mozambique, the MNR attacked civilian vehicles about 40 kilometres from the capital, Maputo. Surviving eye-witnesses confirmed the presence of White mercenaries.

Again in Maputo province, at Ressano Garcia and Namaacha near the border with South Africa, mercenaries were reportedly seen in April and May this year in attacks on farmers, and unprotected towns and villages in the area. In Niassa, in the north of Mozambique, on the border with Malawi, civilian and military sources have spoken of mercenaries leading groups sabotaging important agricultural projects like Unango.

The civil and military authorities in Mozambique, extremely concerned by the presence of White mercenaries, are trying to find out where they are recruited, which nationalities are involved and whereabouts in neighbouring countries their principal logistic bases are. Their suspicions, backed by some concrete evidence, point in two directions: Western Europe — Portugal, France and West Germany; in Southern Africa — South Africa, inevitably, and Malawi. In October last year Mozambique

set up a joint security commission with Malawi, with the aim of containing MNR incursions from Malawi along their 1400-kilometre border with Mozambique. This does not seem to have been a great deterrent.

Recruitment

The first indications of MNR recruitment of mercenaries into its ranks appeared in the months of November and December 1984 in Lisbon; at the same time large quantities of weapons for the rebels were landed in central and northern Mozambique by sea and by air from the Comoros, South Africa and Malawi. In the Portuguese capital, contracts for the recruitment of mercenaries for the MNR had apparently been drawn through MINR, a party of the extreme right run by Kaulza de Arriaga and Professor Jorge Morais Barbosa. Arriaga was Commander-in-Chief of the Portuguese Armed Forces in Mozambique and Barbosa, president of Accao Nacional Popular, ANP, the Salazarist party, and a university professor in the old Lourenco Marques, (now Maputo).

Solution

Just before this agreement was signed on March 16 last year, a cover for the mercenaries in South Africa had already been prepared using pseudo charter and air transport companies, created and backed by South African Military Intelligence and by elements of the Portuguese community in South Africa. This group's projected actions reportedly included sabotage and destabilization operations in the south of Mozambique. The mercenary recruiter mentioned above had himself been contracted in Lisbon in 1981 to fight in Namibia in the 'Buffalo Battalion' which was commanded by a Portuguese Colonel who had led special parachute groups in colonial Mozambique.

What is certain is that Mozambique is now faced with large-scale destabilization which the army seems incapable of containing. The MNR is very close to the capital, Maputo, and occasionally, carries out actions only a few kilometres away, where factories, other economic targets, convoys of civilian vehicles and villages are constantly attacked.

However, some senior officers in the Mozambican Army have little confidence in a military solution, and would like the problem tackled politically. President Machel's drive against the rebels is for now being carried out with the support of troops from allied neighbouring countries. Observers see this as the President's way of gaining time in order to organize his army and perhaps find a more effective policy to end the conflict. ●