

# MOZAMBIQUE: TERRORIST NOOSE TIGHTENS

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The Nkomati "peace accord" with South Africa has not put an end to Pretoria's destabilization activity against Mozambique. The situation is now critical, as our correspondent reports from inside the country.

By Andrew Meldrum

Quelimane still shows signs of the pleasant, provincial capital and port city that it must have been years ago. The Portuguese-style verandahed and balconied buildings, though dilapidated, are lovely. Families still take evening promenades along the palm-lined port and it is still possible to get a plate of Mozambique's famous Indian Ocean prawns for dinner. Dugout canoes and a ferry cross the harbour to thick jungle swamps leading to the Zambezi River delta about 100 kilometres south. Quelimane is a lazy, steamy town that has seen

better days, not out of place in a Gabriel Garcia Marquez story.

Quelimane is also the strategic capital of Mozambique's Zambezia province and is under siege from the country's South African-backed Mozambique Resistance Movement (MNR). Water is often cut off for days, basic commodities like soap are not available in the shops, many residents wear rags and the state electrical company must work with the army to keep power lines functioning. Most troubling are the attacks by the terrorists on factories and farms only 35 kilometres from the city centre. The MNR recently sabotaged a major cashew processing plant and a large saw-mill just outside Quelimane in Nicuadala. Such activity has encircled the city. The roads are so prone to ambush attacks that the power company must use a small plane to fly its technicians throughout the province to repair power lines and substations.

"Things in the Quelimane area might look bad, but I know it is worse in the countryside," said a worker for Médecins Sans Frontières who travels extensively by plane throughout war-torn Mozambique. "Quelimane is a city offering some amenities, it is by the sea and people still can fish for food," he said. "But in the inland rural areas, the people are too frightened to move from their villages. Even though

A peeling revolutionary mural in Quelimane still puts across a powerful message for the community to unite in building a strong, independent country.

there is plenty of rain now, they are afraid to work in the fields. Much of the international aid of seeds and materials to help those peasants has never reached them."

Government officials in Quelimane say that they can continue to function, although they may be increasingly cut off from the countryside. Zambezia province normally provides 70 percent of Mozambique's exports, producing cashews, coconuts, seafoods, tea, rice and the mineral tantalite, but the raging rebel violence is eroding the province's productivity. Roads, bridges, factories and farms are regularly damaged. The French aid worker said that malnutrition was endemic throughout the countryside as a result of the continuing violence. "Even in Uganda the people are living much better than here," said a Swedish journalist, who has recently been to both countries.

The dire situation is similar throughout many other areas in Mozambique. Virtually the entire Zambezi river valley, which crosses the country, is considered to be in MNR hands, according to officials. Mozambique's capital, Maputo, now faces regular attacks on factories in its Matola and Machava suburbs. Maputo

has also witnessed the horror of landmines blowing off the limbs of residents at the city beach.

Just last year it seemed that Mozambique was about to solve its MNR problems. Some 12,000 Zimbabwean troops had been deployed into central Mozambique to protect the strategic road, rail and oil pipeline corridor running 300 kilometres from Mutare to the Mozambican port of Beira. The Zimbabwean forces captured the rebel headquarters, "Casa Banana," on Gorongosa mountain and were fanning out through Manica, Sofala, Zambezia and Tete provinces to control the rebel problem. However, the MNR has not been controlled so easily. With steady supplies from South Africa and from bases it apparently has in neighbouring Malawi to the north, the group has spread its terrorist activity throughout the country and in February managed to recapture Casa Banana. Zimbabwe is reportedly so discouraged that its troops have been reduced to just 5,000 confined to guarding the Mutare-Beira corridor.

Since its independence in 1975, Mozambique has faced many problems and many bleak periods, but the current situation may be the worst. Despite the Nkomati non-aggression pact signed in March 1984, between South Africa and Mozambique, Pretoria has actually increased its support to the MNR, according to Western diplomats in Maputo and Harare. Mozambican officials have pointedly criticized South Africa for funding the destruction of Mozambique, but at the same time have continued to meet South African officials—such as Foreign Minister Roelof "Pik" Botha, who went to Maputo on February 26—in the hope that Pretoria will eventually honour its side of the Nkomati bargain.

Instead it appears that Pretoria is making new demands on Maputo, telling President Samora Machel's Frelimo government that the only way it can bring peace to the country is to negotiate with the MNR. Western diplomats say that such talks are "inevitable," indicating that they, too, are pressing Mozambique to negotiate with the MNR. Such talks have always been rejected. "Who would we negotiate with?" asked a Mozambican official. "Those mercenary bandits who are terrorizing our country? They don't have any political motivation."

"South Africa is the key to peace in Mozambique," says a Swedish diplomat. "The government may have made some mistakes, especially in the economic sphere, but South Africa's destabilisation is overwhelmingly the cause of Mozambique's misery. I just don't see how that will change until South Africa is liberated."

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