

# Rebels Have Samora Machel at Bay



Dlakama: Uncharismatic rebel leader

**SUMMARY: Military successes of the anticommunist resistance in Mozambique have made Samora Machel's Marxist government teeter. Rebel leader Afonso Dlakama, a capable commander, may not have the personality to be an effective political administrator. Yet he says "there could be a coup at any moment."**

**R**elentless pressure from Mozambique's anticommunist resistance has created serious strains in Samora Moises Machel's Marxist government, with one faction advocating peace talks with the guerrillas and another a fight to the finish, sources report.

Diplomatic observers in Mozambique

now wonder how long the Machel government can retain power. And the government's inability to keep in check the Mozambique National Resistance, called RENAMO, is now such that not even the Soviet bloc appears prepared to reestablish the government's authority.

The rebels now control all of Mozambique north of the Zambezi River and are exerting military pressure on nearly all the towns and villages south of the Zambezi, according to these sources.

The rebels have blown bridges; cut road, rail and telegraphic communication links; and totally disrupted the movement of supplies.

Aid officials estimate that more than 6 million of the population of 15 million are living at starvation level, due to either drought or rebel attacks on transportation.

However, RENAMO has not translated its success on the battlefield into diplomatic advantage. Leader Afonso Dlakama remains an unknown personality. While he has proved himself to be a good field commander, he does not have the charisma and polish of Jonas Savimbi, Angola's anti-communist guerrilla leader.

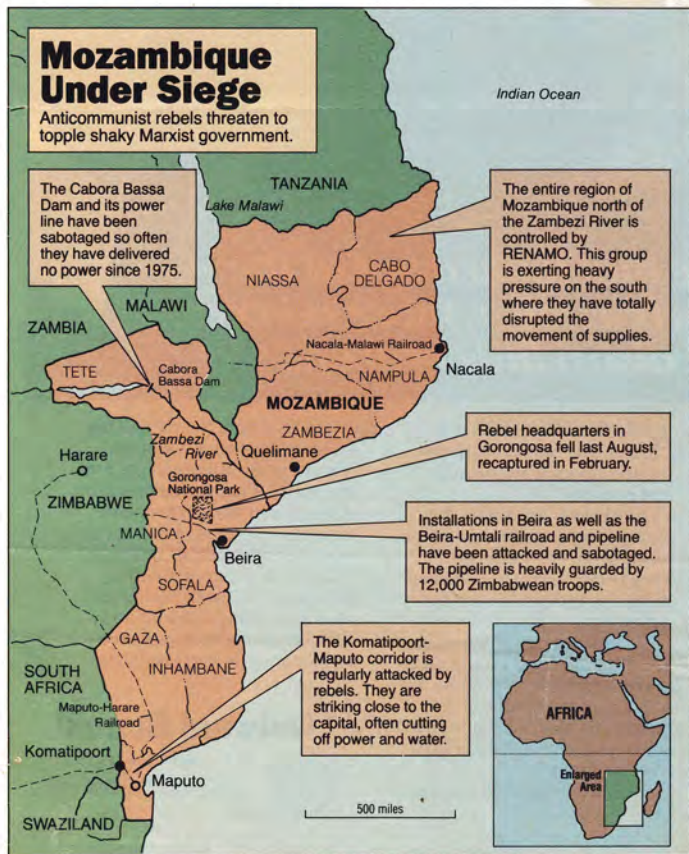
This anomaly — the rebel army controls most of Mozambique while its leader is faceless — worries resistance backers. Most of them are wealthy Portuguese ex-colonialists who fled Mozambique when Machel's government came to power in 1975 and now reside in Portugal and South Africa.

Sources say RENAMO's backers would like the movement to establish a government-in-exile, but they are still searching for a presentable shadow president. So far, finding the right person has proved difficult.

Although he lacks diplomatic skills, the 33-year-old Dlakama is not without political savvy. He has let Machel know that he is ready to negotiate — and that he holds the powerful card of being able to keep the economy strangled and the government tottering until it is prepared to talk terms.

Established by Rhodesian intelligence officers in 1976, the Mozambican resistance movement was originally envisioned as nothing more than a way to recruit Mozambican dissidents to create a diversion against Rhodesian guerrillas then operating out of Mozambique against Prime Minister Ian Smith's government.

But as the movement flourished, the Rhodesians built a radio station for it, and RENAMO soon became a thorn in the flesh of the Machel government. Shortly before white-ruled Rhodesia became black-ruled







MOZAMBIQUE INFORMATION OFFICE

**Rebels, displaying captured arms, control or threaten much of Mozambique.**

Zimbabwe, the entire RENAMO administrative apparatus, including the radio station, was transferred from Rhodesian intelligence to South African military intelligence.

Even the high-ranking official who had been placed in charge of RENAMO affairs in the office of Rhodesia's prime minister was transferred to Pretoria. From there he continued to maintain contact with the now fast-growing rebel movement.

By 1984 the resistance had become a formidable force. Caught between the pincers of RENAMO onslaughts and a devastating drought, Machel was forced to sign the Nkomati Accord with South Africa. Part of the deal was that South Africa would stop assisting and supplying the rebels. But by then the rebel movement had acquired a momentum of its own — along with private backers.

Whereas RENAMO once confined its activities to the bush, it is now making more frequent attacks on the cities — including the capital, Maputo — often cutting off water, electricity and food supplies. Residents say they are in a virtual state of siege.

The power line that runs south from the Cabora Bassa Dam, which was intended to supply power to central and southern Mozambique and South Africa, has been sabotaged so often that it has not worked since the country became independent.

Sections of the vital road and railway from Komatiport, on the South African border, to Maputo are frequently in rebel hands, and vehicles are often ambushed, even though they travel only with heavily armed military escorts.

The strategic road and railway that runs from Beira to Umtali on the Zimbabwe border, paralleling the oil pipeline that supplies Zimbabwe with most of its fuel, is periodically attacked, even though it is guarded by 12,000 Zimbabwean troops on

loan from Prime Minister Robert Mugabe's government.

In August last year a combined Mozambican and Zimbabwean force seized the main RENAMO base at Gorongosa. After the Zimbabweans withdrew, the Mozambicans were unable to hold the base; the RENAMO reoccupied it in February.

The Zimbabweans, who have lost hundreds of men in Mozambican engagements, are reluctant to commit their forces to another assault on the rebels and have adopted a largely defensive role on the pipeline, which is vital to Zimbabwe's economy. And Tanzania, which also had 2,000 troops on loan to Mozambique's government, has withdrawn them.

Machel's position has become increasingly lonely and tenuous. With his country's infrastructure wrecked by the ever-encroaching rebels, he has turned to both East and West for help. His Soviet allies, usually eager to help in military terms, seem curiously reluctant to give any substantial economic aid, and it has fallen to the lot of Western nations to give assistance to the shattered economy — mainly the United States, Britain, France, Italy, Switzerland, Sweden, Denmark and, to some extent, Spain.

The United States signed an agreement with Mozambique early this year to supply 40,000 tons of grain worth \$15 million, bringing to 110,000 tons the U.S. food aid supplied in the past year. The United States has also sent clothing on a large scale for sale or donation to people in rural areas desperately in need of clothes.

"We know that inside Maputo not everybody agrees with Machel," says RENAMO leader Dlakama, a slightly built, bespectacled man. "We believe there could be a coup at any moment." Diplomats in Maputo share his assessment.

— Peter Youngusband  
in Cape Town, South Africa

## Native Marxist from the Bush

When Samora Moises Machel, the president of Marxist Mozambique, lunched with President Reagan at the White House last year, it was not unlike Al Capone dropping in on J. Edgar Hoover. Which may say more about hopes for tranquility in Africa than about either president's preference in dining companions.

Machel, 52, has been president of Mozambique, its only president in the absence of any elections, since independence June 25, 1975, after more than 400 years of rule by Portugal. He is said to have been the first African leader to meet the late Soviet ruler Yuri Andropov. He met in Moscow with Mikhail Gorbachev last March, and Gorbachev is to visit Mozambique this year.

Machel, a native of the bush, is a member of the Shangaan tribe around Maputo, the capital. (As president he attempted to dismantle tribal structures.) His formal schooling was roughly the equivalent of a seventh grade education, according to Professor Luis Serapiao of Howard University's African studies department.

He is slight, bearded, even handsome. He has eight children. His wife, Graca, is minister of education and culture.

In the 1950s, he attended a mission school in Mozambique, worked in a hospital and took nursing courses at night. (Under a 1979 law, says the publication Human Events, all religious buildings and their contents were declared property of the state; children under 18 are forbidden to attend church, and Marxism and atheism are present in the schools.)

Machel received nine months of guerrilla training in Algeria, then trained guerrillas and led attacks on the Portuguese government until the success of the liberation movement in 1974.

He is said to be heavily influenced by a small Marxist group of non-whites from Algeria. In the concentration camps set up by Machel, says Serapiao, more than 10,000 have been imprisoned.

Says one regional expert: "He is a chameleon."

— Miles Cunningham