

# Caught in the Middle

## A widening war adds to Mozambique's woes

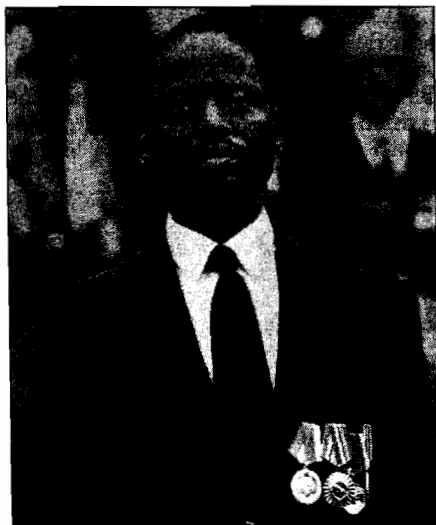
Six weeks after Mozambique's President Samora Machel died when his official jet crashed into a South African hillside, the regional tensions he had tried to quell are once again sharply on the rise. Machel's newly installed successor, 47-year-old Joaquim Chissano, is caught between the growing threat from guerrillas belonging to the shadowy Mozambique National Resistance (MNR), also known as Renamo, and neighboring South Africa's enormous military might. Last week NEWSWEEK's Spencer Reiss visited Maputo, Mozambique's once thriving capital, and filed this report:

Samora Machel's body lies in a white marble tomb in the Plaza of Mozambican Heroes, a traffic circle decorated with sun-parched flowers on the road to Maputo's half-deserted airport. Twenty miles away, a ragged convoy of trucks and buses heads north each morning up the coastal highway, protected by a motley company of Mozambican Army troops. Marauding "bandidos armados"—the phrase used around Maputo for the guerrillas—keep most people off the streets after dark in the city's outskirts. Last week a police ambush killed four men armed with AK-47s during an abortive nighttime raid on a store shed outside neighboring Matola. But Maputo's own languid boulevards—named for revolutionary heroes from Karl Marx to Kim Il Sung—wear their usual air of tropical torpor.

Twenty-two years of almost nonstop war—first against the Portuguese, then Ian Smith's Rhodesia and now the nominally anti-Marxist MNR—plus a devastating drought and a series of bad economic errors have left Mozambique the walking corpse of southern Africa. The loss of Samora Machel, who had taken a more pragmatic, less doctrinaire approach to problems in recent years, was compounded by the fact that several of the government's brightest young lights died with him. His successor Chissano, Mozambique's foreign minister, won quick support from Western and East-bloc countries that help keep Mozambique's 14 million often hungry, mostly illiterate people from utter destitution. "Mozambique needs a guerrilla war

now about as much as an epidemic of plague," says a Western aid official.

Mozambique could, in fact, be rich—it has immense deposits of coal, diamonds and even oil. Mozambique's railways and ports, potentially vital to trade in much of southern Africa, have made it a choice target in the struggle between white South Africa and the black-ruled "frontline" states. Documents captured last year at an MNR command center show a broad range of South African logistical support for the



Holding the fort: President Chissano



An ideological legacy: Revolutionary graffiti

rebels. Though a frontline state itself, Mozambique still relies on its powerful neighbor for everything from Maputo's electricity to cans of Coca-Cola bearing the message "Keep South Africa Tidy." That dependence, the increasing success of the MNR rebels and South Africa's eagerness to eliminate African National Congress (ANC) guerrillas based in Mozambique were the key reasons for the 1984 Nkomati accord, a nonaggression pact signed by the two countries. Though technically still in effect, diplomats in Maputo increasingly view the agreement as a dead letter.

**Terror raids:** South African officials insist they have stopped aiding the MNR; Mozambique officials say the support continues, though possibly being carried out by the South African military acting without direct government authorization. What is clear is that MNR guerrillas have operated with impunity from bases along Mozambique's long border with Malawi, the only fully independent black state that has friendly relations with Pretoria. Elsewhere around the country, MNR actions consist largely of terror raids on civilian targets. In its latest offensive, however, the MNR has consolidated its hold on much of the economically vital Zambezi River valley. Renamo spokesmen in Lisbon and Washington vow that the rebels are pro-Western believers in private enterprise and free elections. So far, however, MNR forces appear to have made only token efforts at establishing civilian administration in the areas under their control.

Despite often exaggerated claims by their overseas spokesmen, the rebels currently pose no threat to Maputo or other major cities. But the government's estimated 16,000 troops remain poorly equipped and poorly motivated, despite more than a decade of support from Soviet, Cuban, Eastern European and North Korean military advisers. Recently groups of selected Mozambican officers and noncoms have traveled to Zimbabwe to work with British trainers already stationed there. In the coming weeks diplomats in Maputo also expect to see Zimbabwean troops join in a major new operation against rebel forces around the port city of Quelimane. Zimbabwe's Prime Minister Robert Mugabe recently told Parliament in Harare: "The survival of Mozambique will also be our survival." South Africa, however, continues to hold the region's strongest hand. And for Mozambique's embattled new president, handling that juggernaut next door may be the toughest test of all.

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