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## Mozambique/South Africa: The Special Forces behind RENAMO

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The 28 November attack on a civilian motor convoy travelling on the main highway north from Maputo brings to some 400 the number of travellers killed on the same stretch of road in RENAMO attacks in two months. Shortly before, in July, occurred a massacre of 400 civilians at Homoine. RENAMO has stepped up its use of atrocity as a deliberate tactic since mid-1987. It is hard to escape the conclusion that this has been done for political reasons, with the approval of the South African military men who control RENAMO.

Hundreds of miles to the west, near Bulawayo in Zimbabwe, the 26 November massacre of a white missionary community marks another atrocity, whose authorship is unclear. The killers are most likely to have been Ndebele dissidents opposed to the Harare government. But some people in Harare have alleged that the attack was the work of 'Super-ZAPU,' diehard opponents who are supported by South Africa. They have no connection with Joshua Nkomo. And it is true that South African support for 'Super-ZAPU' has increased since May 1987. The terrible example of RENAMO shows just how formidable a weapon sponsored destabilisation can be. It is cheap, easy to run, and deniable.

The common denominator in both RENAMO and 'Super-ZAPU' is their relationship with South African military intelligence and Special Forces. Despite South African denials, there is abundant evidence that RENAMO is run by South Africa, as George Shultz and Dr Chester Crocker of the United States' government have both accepted. Crocker describes RENAMO's current position as 'primarily the work of outsiders - South Africans and private Portuguese elements.'

South Africa recruits and trains RENAMO fighters and supplies them by air, sea and land. South African Special Forces sabotage experts undertake missions inside Mozambique which are beyond RENAMO's technical competence, and these are then attributed to RENAMO.

Some observers consider that South Africa's purpose in sponsoring RENAMO is to leave Mozambique in a state of chaos rather than to instal

RENAMO as a friendly government. Hence it is important for Pretoria to prevent RENAMO from becoming enmeshed in negotiations with the Maputo government, as some RENAMO supporters and also the Mozambican bishops have been urging. However if RENAMO succeeds in cutting Mozambique's transport links, as it is attempting, it is hard to see how the Maputo government can avoid negotiation of some sort.

RENAMO in the field consists of a number of independent war-bands of whom the leader is Afonso Dhlakama. Many leaders are deserters from the army of the Maputo government or its guerrilla precursor. Relations between field commanders like Dhlakama and the South African and Portuguese backers of the movement are ensured by exiled Mozambicans operating out of Malawi, Kenya and South Africa (AC Vol 28 No 6).

The key to RENAMO's political and even military strategy is to be found in the South African security establishment, in particular at military intelligence headquarters, at Special Forces' headquarters in Voortrekkerhoogte near Pretoria, and in the operations room of Five Reconnaissance Regiment at Phalaborwa in the eastern Transvaal.

South Africa's Special Forces are now one of the dominant factors in the geopolitics of southern Africa. Their task is to run South Africa's secret wars using techniques of clandestine activity first developed by the Portuguese authorities in colonial Angola and perfected in colonial Rhodesia. Only in Angola itself have external operations been entrusted to South Africa's conventional forces (AC Vol 28 No 23). In effect the Special Forces are the operational arm of South African military intelligence, which wrested control of the secret service establishment in the early 1980s after a protracted struggle with its civilian counterpart the National Intelligence Service, formerly known as the Bureau of State Security (BOSS).

RENAMO has been so successful that it is perceived by some as a genuine liberation movement. It has acquired the support of Ndauspeakers in central Mozambique and eastern Zimbabwe who are

dissatisfied with their governments. In the case of Mozambique, now in a state of advanced decay, others join RENAMO simply to avoid starvation. In Ndauspeaking areas RENAMO can count on the cooperation of local chiefs and of the important spirit mediums who provide the blessing of the ancestors.

The fact remains that, according to South African sources, RENAMO's logistical nerve-centre is at Phalaborwa, the garrison-town on the edge of the Kruger National Park which is the home of Five Recce, the South African Special Forces unit which runs RENAMO. It is in the plantations around Phalaborwa that RENAMO recruits are trained. It is here, and in Special Forces' headquarters at Voortrekkerhoogte, that supplies are organised. And it is from here that Five Recce commandos travel to Mozambique themselves for sophisticated sabotage jobs. They receive support from the air bases at Louis Trichardt and Hoedspruit and the electronic eavesdropping centre at Maripskop.

The Special Forces, some 5,000 strong, form an autonomous unit under Major-General **K. van der Waal**. Their last commandant, Major-Gen. **André 'Cat' Liebenberg**, went on to become army chief, a position he still holds. Each of the five existing reconnaissance regiments has its own commandant, normally of the rank of lieutenant-colonel. Each has its own headquarters although there are also Special Forces detachments at operational outposts like Rundu in the Caprivi Strip, and permanently stationed with Dr Jonas Savimbi's UNITA forces in Angola.

The Special Forces have to operate with the maximum of discretion, so as not to embarrass the Pretoria government. The importance of their task, and the secrecy required to do it, gives the Special Forces a great deal of power. They have become so influential as to mount clandestine operations as far afield as Britain, where a South African spy ring was run by a Special Forces officer, Major **Johann Niemoller**, formerly of Five Recce (AC Vol 28, No 22). Niemoller had earlier helped to negotiate a secret treaty with a sovereign government, of the Seychelles, in 1982.

Another telling illustration of the Special Forces' considerable operational autonomy was in October 1987. **Wim Holtes**, executive director of the South African Trade Organisation, had urged foreign shippers with goods destined for South Africa to unload at Maputo after floods in Natal had cut the railway line from Durban to Johannesburg. Twice in the next few days Special Forces saboteurs working alone or with RENAMO destroyed bridges on the main South Africa to Maputo railway line, in one case within five kilometres of the border. South African cooperation with Maputo may appeal to businessmen, but it is not part of the military plan.

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## THE RHODESIA CONNECTION

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The vital component of the Special Forces, in regard to operations in Mozambique and Zimbabwe, is veterans of the Rhodesian Special Forces and the Selous Scouts. In 1979-80 Rhodesian units moved to

South Africa en masse and were incorporated into South Africa's Special Forces under the command of South African officers. Some, like Selous Scout commander **Ron Reid-Daly**, did not like their new masters and eventually moved on to take up posts in the homelands. Today Five Recce, whose prime task is to run RENAMO, is composed of about 750 people including about 500 blacks. They include former Selous Scouts and former troopers of Bishop **Abel Muzorewa's** personal guard, many of them Ndebele-speakers. There are also many ex-Mozambican Portuguese. The unit has air, sea and land specialists and its own medical and sabotage experts, so it is well suited to combined operations.

Five Recce is not the only Special Forces unit used in support of RENAMO and, reportedly, for undercover work in Zimbabwe. One such is the unit led by Col. **Breyten Breytenbach**, a brother of the well-known poet **Breyten Breytenbach**. This unit formerly worked with Rhodesian security forces under the label of E-squadron. It is based at Louis Trichardt. Thirty-one battalion, an irregular unit of the South African Defence Force like its sister-unit 32 'Buffalo' battalion in Angola, contains many Zulus and is based at Duku Duku.

Other recce units contain British, US and Australian mercenaries. They have been known to train with foreign special forces including Israeli and Italian. South African Special Forces' training school is in Durban.

Special Forces' units and military intelligence officers charged with the task of external destabilisation circulate documents on a 'need-to-know' basis, and appear not to inform civilian politicians of much of their work. Nevertheless some documentary evidence has emerged. The biggest haul is the documents found at Gorongosa in central Mozambique in 1985, when Mozambican and Zimbabwean forces overran RENAMO headquarters there. These revealed the extent of RENAMO training and supply in South Africa. In 1984 a white South African army conscript, **Roland Hunter**, leaked secret documents to the African National Congress (ANC), which in turn passed them to the Maputo authorities. Hunter was working as personal assistant to Col. **van Niekerk**, a military intelligence officer who worked with Special Forces in Namibia and Mozambique. Among documents which Hunter copied and passed to the ANC was a complete list of Special Forces personnel and details of their order of battle. At that time military intelligence had four departments concerned with external destabilisation, one each devoted to Angola, Lesotho, Zimbabwe and Mozambique.

South African agents captured in Mozambique confirm these connections. **Jaime Mondlane**, a Mozambican national captured in March 1987, claimed to have been recruited to South African military intelligence while he was working in South Africa and to have worked as an interpreter to Maj. **André van Rooyen**, recruiting for RENAMO. He was introduced to Afonso Dhlakama at Nelspruit army base. Another man captured in Maputo, allegedly on a sabotage mission, was **George Alerson**, an Angolan-born member of a South African Special Forces unit.

Evidence concerning destabilisation in Zimbabwe

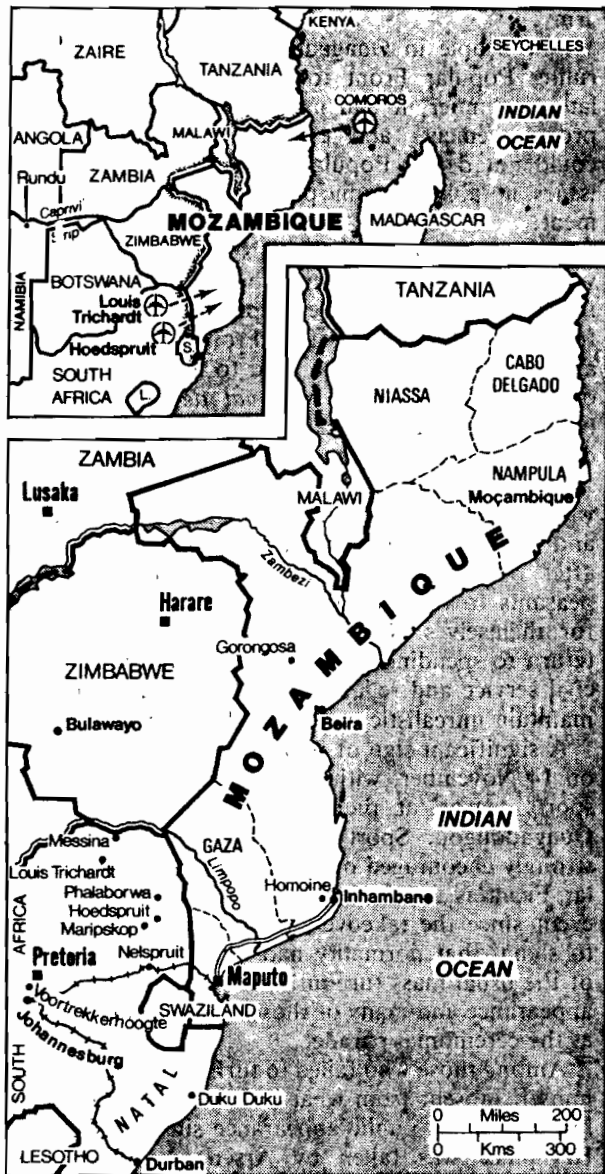
was made public during the trials of members of Super-ZAPU in Zimbabwe. They described having been trained by Major **Calloway**, a former Special Branch officer working for the South African Military Intelligence Directorate. He ran a training camp in the Mona Hills near Messina and supplied weapons to the Super-ZAPU people.

Some sources in Harare claim that the Bulawayo massacre of 26 November was perpetrated by a Super-ZAPU force led by Morgan 'Gayigusu' Sango, part of a band infiltrated into Zimbabwe from South Africa in October. However, no South African connection can be regarded as proven.

Super-ZAPU is hardly a significant force at present, but the example of RENAMO is a worrying one. Since RENAMO's expulsion from its Malawian bases in late 1986 (AC Vol 28 No 23), the light-armed and mobile RENAMO fighters have changed their sphere of operation. They are at present operating in two main theatres. One group, supplied from the Transvaal, is active in Gaza Province. Another is now infesting Inhambane, attempting to cut off Maputo from the rest of the country. A northern contingent, supplied by South African air-drops from the Comoro Islands as well as by sea, is operating in Niassa and Nampula Provinces and threatening the previously peaceful Cabo Delgado. French intelligence sources, reported in the *Indian Ocean Newsletter*, have confirmed South Africa's use of the Comoro Islands as a base. Mozambican government forces have captured parachutes of US manufacture which, they say, are of a type supplied to South Africa. Eye-witnesses along the Mozambican coast testify to boat-landings as well. In recent operations in the south RENAMO units have been well-equipped and well-armed, much better than their ragged FRELIMO opposite numbers.

RENAMO always use Eastern bloc arms. Some of these they capture from FRELIMO. Others are supplied by South Africa from stocks captured in Angola. South Africa is also known to have purchased Eastern bloc arms directly from **Rumania**.

RENAMO itself was invented by the Portuguese secret police in colonial Mozambique, along lines pioneered in Angola by the colonial security chief Dr **São José Lopes**. It was perfected by the Rhodesian intelligence chief, the late **Ken Flower**, as what he used to call a 'pseudo-terrorist' unit, to report on the activities of ZANLA guerrillas operating out of Mozambique. In the Rhodesian establishment RENAMO liaised with the Selous Scouts, a dangerously maverick unit which was not above carrying out massacres which it could then attribute to its ZANLA and ZIPRA enemies.



⊕ Air bases used by South Africa in logistical support for RENAMO

All these relationships now find themselves reproduced on a larger and more dangerous scale in South African clandestine operations. The relationship between Five Recce at Phalaborwa and the RENAMO warlords is one which has existed unbroken for some 12 years, often involving exactly the same people on each side. The question to be asked is whether the South African military establishment is out of control ●