

**A**CCUSED of massacres and mutilations, denounced by East and West, rebels in Mozambique nonetheless have sustained a 10-year-old insurgency that shows no sign of ending.

No foreign country acknowledges supporting the Mozambique National Resistance, yet its forces manage to hold their own against an alliance including troops from Zimbabwe, Malawi and Tanzania, as well as Mozambique's Soviet-equipped army.

Along with another guerrilla war in Angola, anti-apartheid unrest in South Africa and black nationalist raids in South African-controlled Namibia, the Mozambican conflict has contributed to instability across wide sections of Southern Africa.

Mozambique's marxist leaders say the MNR, also known by its Portuguese acronym Renamo, endures only because of South African support. The charge is widely accepted abroad, despite South Africa's insistence that it halted aid after signing a non-aggression treaty with Mozambique in 1984.

Western diplomats, and even some Mozambicans, say privately that Mozambique may overstate South Africa's involvement for political reasons. These officials say the rebels probably receive covert South African logistical support but are able to wage their hit-and-run war with captured weaponry.

The London-based International Institute for Strategic Studies, in its latest military review, describes the rebels as "South African-backed" but says the MNR "has no significant outside source of major military supplies, relying for the

most part on material captured during its raids."

There is no disagreement on the war's consequences — one-third of Mozambique's 14.5 million people are in need of food aid, 2 million have fled their

# Renamo War: no end in sight

## FOCUS

SAPA-REUTER

homes, the country's economy is in shambles.

The MNR's policies are vague. It calls itself anti-marxist, and leaders have spoken out in the past for a mixed economy and a multi-party democracy — with communist parties outlawed. There has been no recent manifesto, however, outlining the group's specific goals or programs.

### Massacres

Many aspects of the armed conflict are disputed. The government, for example, accuses the rebels of killing more than 900 civilians in five major massacres since July. Western officials say there is no doubt that

rebel units have committed atrocities and attacked civilian targets.

MNR spokesmen blame the massacres on army deserters or terrorist units formed by the government to discredit the rebels. The spokesmen say the MNR receives no outside aid

and does not target civilians.

The MNR has captured foreign missionaries and relief workers on a number of occasions, and generally released them unharmed.

Estimates of the MNR's strength range from 15,000 to 22,000 men, confronted by 30,000 government soldiers, about 12,000 Zimbabwean troops, smaller contingents from Tanzania and Malawi, and Cuban and Soviet advisers.

Britain and Spain help train Mozambican army and police officers, and many Western countries, including the United States, provide non-military aid to the government.

### Raids

One MNR official based in Portugal, in an interview granted on condition he not be identified, acknowledged that the movement was shunned by the West.

"But our diplomatic weakness . . . has no bearing on our military strength," he said. "Frelimo (the ruling party) effectively governs only Maputo and the provincial capitals. During the next year, we will launch attacks aimed at capturing much larger towns and cities than previously."

Western officials say the MNR administers very little territory but is able to disrupt government operations in vast areas.

The rebels "don't need large numbers to conduct a guerrilla war against this government," said a Western military attache in Maputo, the Mozambican capital. He said the army's commanders



MNR Commander, Orlando Macano.

who began their careers as guerrillas fighting Portuguese rule, have had difficulty mastering counterinsurgency tactics.

Recently, the rebels have staged raids in Zimbabwe, reportedly killing 50 civilians, including children who were axed to death.

The MNR had threatened cross-border attacks as retaliation for

the deployment of Zimbabwean troops along the Beira Corridor in central Mozambique, where a highway, railway and oil pipeline link landlocked Zimbabwe to the Indian Ocean.

By most accounts, the rebels are loosely organized, with some units operating with little or no direction from any central command. Journalists who have visited MNR bases say there is little sign of sophisticated weaponry and report that commanders travel by motorcycle.

"Four weeks of criss-crossing Zambezia province on foot, in canoes and on motorcycles revealed soldiers uniformed in ragged T-shirts and shorts, carrying captured Soviet-made rifles," wrote a reporter for the *Star* newspaper of Johannesburg.

The prevailing account of the MNR's origins is that it was established in

1977 by the secret police in white-minority-ruled Rhodesia to create disruptions in neighbouring Mozambique, which was a base for guerrillas fighting the Rhodesian authorities.

When the Rhodesian war ended in 1980 with the creation of black-ruled Zimbabwe, sponsorship of the MNR was assumed by South Africa.

The South Africans say their support for the MNR stopped with the 1984 signing of the Nkomati Accord, in which Mozambique pledged to prevent use of its territory by guerrillas operating against South Africa.

The MNR's leader since 1979 has been Afonso Dhlakama (34), a former Mozambican army officer. Dhlakama says he fled to Rhodesia because of harassment; Mozambican officials say he escaped in 1977 after being convicted of theft.

Parallels sometimes are drawn between the

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# MNR

## causes havoc

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MNR and Unita — the US — and South African-backed rebel movement fighting the Marxist government in Angola.

But the United States considers the MNR an artificially created military force lacking the popular support and political legitimacy of Unita.

Another difference is that Dhlakama lacks the charisma and public-relations skills that Unita gets from its commander, Jonas Savimbi.

Communications between MNR commanders and the movement's external leadership in Portugal appear to be sporadic. There have been periodic power struggles, and some white Portuguese have been ousted in an effort to "Africanize" the MNR.

South Africa's role remains murky. Its foreign ministry recently conferred with Mozambican officials on how to rehabilitate the Cahora Bassa hydroelectric project in northwest Mozambique and protect it from rebel sabotage — an initiative that seemed to contradict claims that South Africa sponsors the rebels.

## Split

Some experts suggest there is a high-level split in the South African Government, with one faction seeking to honour the Nkomati treaty while some military commanders continue aid to the rebels outside official channels.

A question on this topic during a recent television interview drew a carefully worded response from Mr Neil van Heerden, Director General of Foreign Affairs.

"As I sit here, I am not aware of active South African officially sanctioned assistance to the MNR," Mr van Heerden said.

Mozambique appears to be locked in a political and military stalemate, with the rebels incapable of seizing power and the government unable to defeat them and unwilling to negotiate.

As long as Western countries provide economic aid to the government, said the Lisbon-based MNR official, "I don't see any likelihood of negotiations."

"The war could drag on for quite some time," said Professor Mike Hough of the University of Pretoria's Institute for Strategic Studies. "The rebels probably hope that a process of holding out and raising the cost of the war will wear the government down." — Sapa-AP.