

INTERNATIONAL

War hampers efforts to revive Mozambique economy

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Morrumuane, Mozambique

The Mozambican platoon commander ordered 50 young soldiers to take aim. His soldiers advanced silently as bullets fired by rebel gunmen 100 yards away whizzed past.

The report of the soldiers' AK-47 rifles was deafening. Within 10 minutes, the last wisps of smoke blew away over the wide brown field in the southern province of Inhambane, about 250 miles north of Maputo, the capital. With sunlight failing and ammunition running short, both sides headed for home.

There was no victory or defeat, just another stalemate in the bush war between the government and the rebel Mozambique National Resistance Movement (Renamo).

Twelve years after leading Mozambique to independence from Portugal, the tired Army of the Mozambique Liberation Front (Frelimo) is fighting a seemingly unwinnable war. Shortages of food, uniforms, and discipline give Frelimo the look of a guerrilla force that never made the transition to a modern Army.

That look, and the Army's inability to halt Renamo's self-proclaimed campaign to destroy the economy, is undermining President Joaquim Chissano's efforts to revive the nation's economy, to improve his avowed "Marxist" government's economic and military ties with the Western world, and even to experiment with elements of a free-market system.

With help from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and more than \$500 million this year in foreign aid and foreign debt relief, President Chissano has taken tough measures to shore up his nation's economy. Those measures include a 400

percent devaluation of the local currency, spending cuts, and sharply increased prices paid to farmers.

The goal is to eliminate the huge parallel (black) market, to allow private enterprise to thrive, and, by raising food prices, to transfer wealth from the cities to the countryside, where 80 percent of the people live.

If those policies are to succeed, however, the Army must protect key roads and rail lines that carry rural-to-urban trade and bring exports to port. But the Army has failed to defend the nation's highways. Rebel raids on the main highway linking Maputo to the north have claimed more than 400 lives in the past three months.

"The huge sums of international aid and the new free market economic policies will be wasted if Frelimo cannot protect the main transport arteries," said one Western economist in Maputo. And a confidential IMF report on Mozambique's economy says: "External viability with economic growth is not likely if current security problems remain."

Frelimo's opponent, a rebel movement widely believed to be backed by South Africa, has grown stronger since it was set up in the early 1970's by intelligence agents in neighboring Rhodesia, now Zimbabwe.

Frelimo has failed to halt Renamo from destroying shops, factories, and schools. The campaign has virtually broken the back of Mozambique's economy, already one of the world's poorest.

Military transport is so scarce in Inhambane Province that the Army is transporting its troops in trucks borrowed from the "natural disasters office," which delivers food relief to drought victims and refugees.



Mozambican soldiers examine site where government says 53 were killed in October

Poor defense of the nation's highways has allowed the rebels to attack convoys of goods and food relief to an estimated 4.5 million people. This year's drought in some regions and 11 years of civil war have left one in every three Mozambicans in danger of starvation.

Nationwide, nearly 2 million people, most of them farmers, have fled their homes, government officials say. This year, Mozambique will produce just six percent of the food it needs.

Chissano now is in a struggle to reform the armed forces. In June, he removed a wily longtime guerrilla commander, Gen. Sebastião Mabote, as chief of staff - replacing him with Gen. Antonio Hama Thai, a man who had masterminded a successful offensive in the central province of Zambézia earlier in the year.

Although the armed forces have been trimmed from more than 40,000 to some 30,000, military incompetence and corruption are still sapping the war effort.

The ragged state of the government

troops here suggests that perhaps Chissano's biggest challenge is to ensure that the fighting men see a bigger chunk of the defense budget. While Mozambique still depends on arms supplies from the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, military contacts with the West are increasing. Britain has trained junior officers, while Spain and the European Community offered non-lethal military aid last month.

But even if the Army were an effective fighting force, some Western and Zimbabwean military analysts argue, Mozambique is simply too big, and the 20,000-strong Renamo too widely spread, for Frelimo to defeat the rebels on the battlefield.

Both the military and the economic reform efforts are making some headway, however. Air and artillery support were used for the first time when the Army captured Morrumuane and four other rebel bases in Inhambane during a three-week offensive in October.