

The Guerrilla Fight in Mozambique Also Takes a Toll on Zimbabwe

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HARARE, Zimbabwe — As the crippling war in Mozambique spills over into Zimbabwe, the Government of Executive President Robert G. Mugabe is increasingly faced with competing pressures over this country's military involvement in the conflict.

Zimbabwe's aim is largely to keep open its vital trade routes to the sea. By doing so, it hopes to loosen South Africa's economic stranglehold on the continent's southern region.

But the country is being squeezed by costly military expenditures and what is viewed as destabilization by South Africa, which is often accused of working to snuff out moves by its black-ruled neighbor toward greater self-reliance.

Zimbabwe, a symbol of relative stability in southern Africa, has deployed about 10,000 troops, one-fourth of its army, in Mozambique. They were originally sent to guard the 183-mile Beira corridor, Mozambique's strategic road, rail and oil pipeline route, which links this landlocked country to the Indian Ocean.

A Wider Role for the Army

But the army's role has widened, prompting rebels of the Mozambique National Resistance, which Western diplomats and the Zimbabwean authorities say receives support from South Africa, to cross the border and expand their 12-year-old war into Zimbabwe's eastern highlands.

The Limpopo rail line in southern Mozambique, which links southern Zimbabwe to the Mozambican port of Maputo, is viewed as the key to a further reduction in this country's dependence on South Africa. The line, virtually

paralyzed by rebel attacks since 1984, is being upgraded and is scheduled to reopen soon for limited traffic.

But the line can operate only if Zimbabwe sends more troops to guard it. Mr. Mugabe has publicly said he will do so, but Zimbabwean businessmen close to the Government suggest that the matter is still being hotly debated.

The view among Western diplomats and Zimbabwean economists is that the commitment of more troops and money to the war, without financial support from abroad, could dramatically worsen Zimbabwe's already shrinking economy and heighten public and military opposition here to further involvement. By some accounts, the participation is costing Zimbabwe \$1 million a day.

On the other hand, a slackening of support for Mozambique would mean

the almost certain destruction of an alternative, however fragile, to Zimbabwe's overwhelming economic dependence on white-ruled South Africa. Mozambique, with its long coastline and natural harbors, is seen as offering long-term economic survival to the region's black-ruled nations.

Hard Choice for Mugabe

"Mugabe has to choose between short-term economic stability by distancing Zimbabwe from the war or economic independence over the long haul by getting deeper and deeper into the war," a Zimbabwean economist said. "He could have a lot of sleepless nights deciding what to do."

Eddie Cross, managing director of a private group that seeks to ease the movement of Zimbabwe's trade through Beira, said this nation had made substantial strides in shifting economic traffic to the port.

According to statistics provided by Mr. Cross, use of the port has reduced the amount of Zimbabwe's overseas trade going through South Africa from 94 percent in 1984 to 70 percent last year. He said the Government hoped to lessen its dependence on South Africa even further this year.

If the Limpopo line was reopened and fully restored, Mr. Cross said, "zero transit traffic through South Africa" could be achieved by 1990.

Officers Reported Disgruntled

That alone could be reason enough for the Mozambican rebels to disrupt the line, which runs within 40 miles of the South African border, Western diplomats say. They expect the rehabilitation effort along the line to be a primary target.

But senior Zimbabwean Army officers, who view the Mozambican mili-

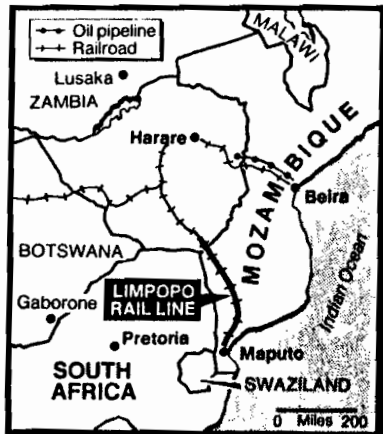
tary as ill trained and disorganized, are said to be increasingly disgruntled over Zimbabwe's involvement in a war that is seen as unwinnable.

Many Zimbabweans are becoming more vocal against military participation in the conflict, as a worsening shortage of foreign exchange translates into annoying shortages of basic commodities, from toothpaste to tires and spare car parts.

Diplomats suggest that South Africa has contradictory aims in its relations with Zimbabwe. It would like to win over Mr. Mugabe, one of the region's most vocal critics of apartheid, and have him publicly recognize Pretoria as the regional superpower. But despite his country's economic dependence on South Africa, Mr. Mugabe has always refused Pretoria's frequent requests for ministerial-level meetings between the two Governments.

At the same time, the diplomats say, South Africa does not want to see Zimbabwe become a successful example of how black majority rule can lead to economic independence and stability. In recent months, Zimbabwe has had a spate of bomb explosions, and the authorities have rounded up groups of people it characterizes as spies and saboteurs. The view here is that they represent South Africa's continuing efforts to undermine Zimbabwe.

"South Africa has a gun pointed at the region and its finger is always on the trigger," a Zimbabwean businessman said. "But our country has no choice but to support Mozambique for moral and political reasons, as well as economic ones. There is no way we can have peace and prosperity if there is not peace and prosperity in Mozambique."



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The Limpopo rail line is seen as vital to reducing Zimbabwe's dependence on South Africa.