

# Vicious rebels without a cause

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THE RECORD (right) of a small rebel band which operated in Inhambane Province last year is typical of what is happening in Mozambique today. The Mozambique National Resistance, known as Renamo or the MNR, is estimated to be 20,000 strong and has spread into every province of Mozambique. Now its guerrillas are seeping into Zimbabwe. Sometimes they appear as well-organised units up to 600 strong, moving across the countryside, hitting strategic targets. At other times they appear as small bands armed with machetes who simply kill, rape and pillage.

Mozambique can barely be described as a state any more. The government controls hardly anything outside the capital and a handful of towns. It is dangerous to venture a few miles beyond the boundary of any town. The only way to travel between them is to fly. Apart from a few units, the Frelimo government's army has disintegrated and it relies heavily on up to 10,000 Zimbabwe troops sent in to protect key points.

In the countryside there is mass starvation. Only hamlets which can be reached by sea or river or with safe airstrips can be fed. The administrative centres are under siege and inundated with refugees. They are fleeing some of the worst atrocities ever committed in Africa. There are persistent reports of whole villages being murdered and mutilated.

These atrocities are blamed by the government and aid workers on Renamo guerrillas, usually described as bandits backed by South Africa. It is not clear how much disruption is caused by guerrillas directly controlled by the Renamo leadership and how much by outlaws living by the gun in the bush with no political aims beyond their next meal.

Renamo was founded by the Rhodesian Secret Intelligence Service in the late 1960s. Its members were mostly black Mozambicans recruited to spy on Zimbabwean nationalist guerrillas fighting the Ian Smith's Rhodesian government. When the Smith regime fell, the Renamo operation was taken over by South Africa.

About half the group's guerrillas are controlled by Afonso Dhaklana, Renamo's "President". According to South African defence sources this group has worked closely with South African Military Intelligence since 1970, training and coordinating operations with South Africa's 3,500-strong Special Forces at the Voortrekkerhoogte base near Pretoria and the Five Reconnaissance unit at Phalaborwa on the edge of Kruger National Park in Eastern Transvaal.

After the March 1984 Nkomati peace treaty between Mozambique and South Africa, Pretoria scaled down its support for the rebels. According to a confidential analysis prepared by a group of Zimbabwean businessmen this includes "maintenance of the communication system and periodic air and sea drops, some of which were authorised and some unauthorised by Renamo's sympathisers in the South African security/military system".

The South African interest in backing rebels in Mozambique is to disrupt communications. If the roads and railways running through Mozambique are destroyed, Zimbabwe, Botswana, Malawi and Zambia are forced to send their goods through South Africa. Pretoria thus keeps southern Africa in a stranglehold.

But the movement has other backers who want change in Mozambique itself. Portuguese and Mozambicans who lost everything when Frelimo, the Marxist liberation movement, took over at independence in 1975, want the country to be capitalist. So do US right-wingers, looking for anti-communist causes.

These diverse backers have further divided the movement. Renamo is not strongly led. Mr Dhaklana rarely leaves the bush or gives interviews. The movement has no philosophy beyond anti-communism. Its external spokesmen, many of them white, are at loggerheads with each other. Between the bush, the supply bases in Malawi and South Africa, and the exiles and their backers in Pretoria, Lisbon and Washington, the movement is deeply divided, each faction accusing the other of spying for South Africa,

**8 MAY 1987** — Plane flying from south drops supplies by parachute to Renamo rebels in Vilanculos district of Inhambane Province, southern Mozambique.  
**10 MAY** — Town of Panda in Inhambane attacked by rebels, Mozambique News Agency reports. Military sources say nighttime activity on the coast "points to re-supply of Renamo bandits by sea from South Africa".

**9 JUNE** — 18 people killed when Renamo attacks convoy at Chongola travelling to Inhambane.

**18 JULY** — At least 400 people killed when Renamo attacks town of Homoine near Inhambane. Rebels said to be well armed.

**23 JULY** — Four people killed when Renamo rebels attack another convoy at Chongola.

**18 AUGUST** — Nine people killed in Renamo attack on Inharrimbe, 30 miles south of Inhambane.

Frelimo or the United States.

Recently, two Renamo leaders, Mateus Lopes and Joao da Silva Ataide, were killed while returning from a meeting with Mr Dhaklana inside Mozambique. A simple car crash was the official explanation, but other Renamo officials are privately crying murder. They say the culprits are senior members of Renamo who oppose efforts to negotiate an end to the 13-year-old war.

The Washington office of Renamo is trying to usurp Lisbon's traditional position as the external leadership's base, while there is also a strong current of anti-white sentiment.

The main split, however, appears to be between those Mozambicans, largely black and including several Frelimo defectors, who favour some sort of negotiated settlement to the war, and others for whom talks with Frelimo are an anathema.

Intercine brawls are nothing new to Renamo. After the death in 1979 of the rebels' first leader, Andre Matade Matsangaza, in an attack on a Frelimo garrison at Vila de Gorongosa, Mr Dhaklana consolidated his command of Renamo only after a series of bloody feuds.

How then is a movement, badly divided, without a coherent political philosophy, with little to offer the people, able to bring a country like Mozambique to its knees?

No amount of aid from South Africa, Portugal and the United States fully explains its effectiveness on the ground.

A dimension of Renamo which may explain its success is its revival of local headmanships and its use of spirit mediums and local medicine men.

Recently, in a captured Renamo camp in the war zone in Inhambane Province, a young Mozambican army Captain, Eusebio Mussame, explained: "The bandit commanders never do anything without consulting their 'coroneros'. They are very primitive people."

He peered through a tiny opening in the palm leaf walls of a hut and on the dirt floor, illuminated by a thin shaft of sunlight, was a small brown basket. "This is where the traditional medicine man lived," he said. "That is his magic basket."

"This is a war from the Middle Ages," said one Mozambican official. "In some areas, this government is seen as an intruder into a world of age-old traditions. It breeds a very vicious reaction, a desire to destroy any vestige of central, or modern authority."

Traditions in central Mozambique were moulded more than 400 years ago by the Monomatapa empire, one of the great states of the Shona people, the biggest ethnic group in today's Zimbabwe. The Mutapa traders wanted to increase the flow of cloth and beads which they obtained from Swahili and Portuguese merchants for gold and ivory. The Mutapa rulers sent expeditions — usually abortive — into Mozambique to control the Zambezi river valley and gain access to the Indian Ocean.

Among the Shona-related groups now living in Mozambique a complex politico-religious tradition took root, with power shared by the chief and the spirit medium, through whom ancestral spirits speak. Frelimo's Marxist philosophy regarded all this as a barrier to socialist revolution.

Frelimo began its decade-long

war for independence from Portugal in the north, far from the reach of the two sub-groups of the Shona people, the Manyika and the Ndaou, who inhabit a wide chunk of Mozambique's provinces of Manica and Sofala. By the time its guerrillas reached central Mozambique in the early 1970s, the Portuguese had disrupted rural life by moving thousands of civilians into strategic hamlets known as *aldeamentos*.

According to Ken Flower, the late Chief of Rhodesian Intelligence who created Renamo: "The Portuguese had put a lot of villagers into *aldeamentos*, and created a lot of discontented citizens. Frelimo, when they first came into that area, following the Marxist-Leninist doctrine, eliminated a lot of tribal leaders." It is significant that Renamo's strongest support lies in those areas.

Upon assuming power from the departing Portuguese in 1975, Frelimo embarked on an economic programme that favoured big state farms and industrialisation schemes at the expense of peasant families. Villagers were forced into communes, often in the very places where the Portuguese had herded people into strategic hamlets. Frelimo frowned upon strong religious beliefs, and sometimes repressed them.

The war against the "feudalism" of traditional Africa may have cost Frelimo support among conservative African villagers. In contrast the Zimbabwe National Liberation Army, which was based in Mozambique during its struggle for Zimbabwe, realised the potential of spirit media and medicine men and used them.

And now, unlike the Frelimo Marxists the Zimbabwe army fighting in Mozambique tries to work with them.

Frelimo has since reversed most of those policies, dissolving state farms, improving ties with the churches, promoting the private sector and declaring an amnesty for Renamo fighters.

But not all attacks are carried out by guerrillas under Dhaklana's control. "Mozambique is also infested by bandits and local warlords who are not necessarily directed by Renamo," says the Zimbabwe business analysis.

Renamo's relentless attacks on shops, health clinics, schools, farms and massacres of civilians have earned it a name as one of the world's most brutal insurgent forces. Mutilations of unco-operative peasants are almost routine. Renamo is also accused of forcing children to conduct ritual killings of their parents.

Mr Dhaklana said recently in a rare interview that military strategy was merely to "make problems for the enemy". Renamo makes no attempt to control maverick bands.

"In the villages we must destroy the presence of the party and the state," explains Eva Fernandes, the slick former Secretary-General of Renamo. "After that is done, we take the people away to our schools."

The lack of coherence in Mozambique's civil war means peace talks are not likely in the foreseeable future.

"Negotiate with whom?" is the common response from Frelimo officials. In fact, Mozambique has tried negotiations, first with South Africa, culminating in the Nkomati accord, and then with Renamo officials in 1984. Both ended in failure.

Even if all foreign support were withdrawn tomorrow, the war would be unlikely to end until the rebels agreed to lay down their guns. Outright military victory by either side seems a remote prospect. Despite repeated vows never to negotiate with Renamo, Mozambique's President Joaquim Chissano is under pressure, from close western allies and because of the endless misery of his people, to seek a non-military solution to the conflict.

Zimbabwe's 10,000-strong contingent in Mozambique is said to be growing weary of the battle, and many rebel units are said to be short of food and supplies.

Ken Flower, Renamo's Godfather, recalls the organisation's beginnings: "I don't think it was too much of a monster in those days, but there was always a danger it would run away with itself." The danger seems to have been fulfilled.