

# Mozambique: Pretoria has the key

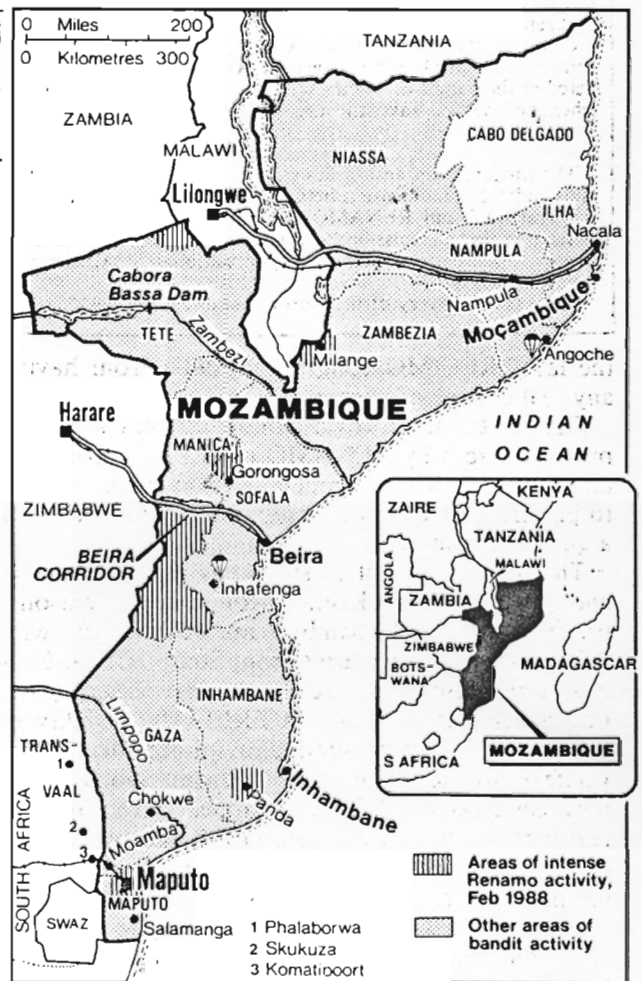
AC 29(5)  
4/3  
68

Security is the major problem facing the government of Mozambique. And the outlook is bleak indeed. Maputo has no prospect of restoring peace until South Africa sees fit. While the government of President Joaquim Chissano would be ready to agree to almost any condition South Africa wished to impose for peace - short of renouncing its independence - South Africa's military men see no reason why they should cease their destabilisation of Mozambique. It is cheap; it costs no South African lives. The South African public, fed a diet of black-on-black violence, doesn't even know it's happening.

Support for the Mozambique National Resistance (RENAMO or the MNR) gives Pretoria a useful handle against Mozambique and, increasingly, against Zimbabwe. South Africa's aim is not to topple the Mozambique Liberation Front (FRELIMO) government in Maputo but to keep it in a state of tension until such time as the securocrats decide what is their bottom line for Mozambique. They have yet to make up their minds. In the meantime, sponsored rebellion has opened up cracks in Mozambique on a scale which few anticipated in 1980, when South Africa's Military Intelligence Directorate inherited RENAMO from Rhodesian security.

In realistic terms, pressure from the United States in particular would probably be the only thing which could make Pretoria decide on what terms it will cease its destruction of Mozambique. That would have to be in the context of similar agreements on Angola and Zimbabwe. The Mozambican government on its own can do precious little on the security front other than try and reorganise its ramshackle army and reflect ruefully on the mistakes of the 1975-82 period, when an absurdly ambitious revolutionary programme helped create the conditions in which sponsored destabilisation has been so brutally effective. The government is also trying to negotiate a series of piecemeal security agreements, the most important of which concerns the Cahora Bassa dam, which might limit the action of the hawks in Pretoria.

Mozambique's rural areas are now in a condition



of anarchy worse than anything since the Portuguese colonial army pushed inland in the last century. Armed opposition or banditry affects nine of the country's 10 provinces. It has displaced some two million people out of a population of 14 million and is the main cause of hunger which affects five million. The government puts its cost at \$6,000 million between 1975 and December 1987. Destruction or looting between 1980 and February 1988 has rendered inoperative 1,800 primary schools, 720 health units, 900 shops, and 1,300 trucks, buses and tractors. It has caused tens of thousands of deaths, and even hundreds of thousands if one includes the knock-on effect on cultivation. Insecurity prevents the current FRELIMO pragmatism, in evidence since

## THE SOUTH AFRICAN CONNECTION

South Africa continues to give massive support to RENAMO in contravention of the 1984 Nkomati non-belligerence agreement, despite denials by South African officials. The operation appears to be run by Brigadier **van Tonder's** Special Tasks' Directorate (STD), a division of the military intelligence establishment which falls under the authority of the Chief of Staff (Intelligence), Admiral **'Dries' Putter** - who, we hear, is shortly to retire.

The STD's liaison officer with RENAMO is still Colonel **Charles van Niekerk**, as it was in 1985 when the capture of RENAMO archives at Gorongosa provided the best documentary evidence to date of South Africa's violation of the Nkomati Accord. In the past, Col. van Niekerk had Afonso Dhlakama and other RENAMO leaders on his monthly payroll. On one famous occasion he sent his secretary **Roland Hunter** shopping with Dhlakama in Johannesburg to buy the RENAMO boss a suit for a forthcoming visit to **West Germany**.

These days, Col. van Niekerk not only maintains contact with RENAMO leaders in the Mozambican bush but is a frequent visitor on RENAMO business to West Germany, Portugal and Malawi. Reports from South African, Mozambican and other sources suggest that South African military men are concerned to keep their grip on RENAMO's external representation and prevent it from falling under **United States'** domination. The former RENAMO secretary-general **Orlando Cristina** was murdered at the behest of South African military intelligence in 1983 when he tried to take the organisation out of South African hands.

The Mozambican authorities claim to have evidence of almost daily radio communication between South African controllers in the Transvaal and RENAMO. The main coordinator of South African radio transmissions at Phalaborwa is said to be one **José Bentos**, apparently a South African national of Mozambican-Portuguese origin.

Since the discovery of the Gorongosa documents, which South

African officials have acknowledged to be genuine, the South African secret services have become more careful. They have trained a special unit of Portuguese and black Mozambican irregulars to supplement the work of the Special Forces. Field operatives do not carry identification. Radio messages are now sent in code on frequency-hopping radios of the type sold by South Africa to **Argentina** and captured by **British** forces in the Falklands campaign. **Zimbabwean** sources claim to monitor fragments of hundreds of such messages every month. South Africa is currently reported to have training-camps for RENAMO at Phalaborwa and Skukuza in the Transvaal.

South Africa is not known to have investigated the identities of two South African nationals named in RENAMO documents captured near Inhambane in August 1987.

RENAMO also continues to receive parachute-drops of arms from aircraft which can only have come from South African bases. If, as South African officials have claimed, airspace violations may have been caused by private aircraft operating from South African territory, they would be recorded by the sophisticated radar system installed along the South African-Mozambican border after the March 1984 Nkomati Accord. In February 1988, for example, the Mozambican armed forces recorded parachute-drops at Inhafenga in Sofala Province, and to the south of Angoche in Nampula Province. RENAMO bands attacked Salamanga and Moamba towns reportedly after infiltrating from South Africa. Mozambican military sources claim that RENAMO casualties have received hospital treatment at Komati-poort in South Africa.

The Mozambican authorities continue to submit information concerning South African support of anti-government activity through both diplomatic and intelligence channels. South African officials have consistently rejected such allegations on the grounds that they are out-of-date or insufficiently detailed.

Western intelligence and diplomatic services also monitor South African support for RENAMO.

the last FRELIMO congress in 1982, from having any real chance of success.

Outside the main towns, many country areas are prey to attacks by RENAMO rebels, by unpaid and unfed FRELIMO government troops who have taken to pilfering, or by other free-booters. Possession of a gun means survival.

The problem is not as simple as both RENAMO and government spokesmen, for different reasons, pretend. Not all bandits are connected with RENAMO or receive arms from South Africa. Bandits of any description are able to terrorise a population which has lost faith in FRELIMO's ability to protect it. Villagers survive by doing deals with whatever war-lord can coerce them. In Shona-speaking areas especially RENAMO appears to enjoy some real support, not least because of the adverse effects of early FRELIMO policy and its continued inability to manage an over-centralised economy which displays all the worst features of Portuguese bureaucracy and East European central planning. Rural Mozambique remains a conservative society, jealous of local power structures and distrustful of central government. Local chiefs sacked by FRELIMO administrators use the climate of insecurity to restore their power.

The fact remains that South African support for RENAMO is the main reason for the spread of banditry and rebellion to such terrifying proportions, as US Assistant Secretary of State Dr **Chester Crocker**, for example, testified to the US Congress in June 1987. Consequently the top priority for Maputo is to persuade South Africa's military establishment to cease support for RENAMO and its destabilisation of Mozambique generally.

The most intense RENAMO activity is now in Gaza and Maputo provinces. The aim of the

RENAMO command under **Afonso Dhlakama** is to cut Maputo off from its hinterland and, with help from abroad, to build up Dhlakama's reputation as a **Jonas Savimbi**-style guerrilla leader at the head of an organised and ideologically coherent force. RENAMO bands surrounding Maputo have easy communication with their rear bases in the Transvaal. It is in these areas, where RENAMO's predominantly Shona-speaking leaders have little support, that RENAMO war-parties have committed their worst atrocities (AC Vol 28 No 24), damaging RENAMO's standing in Europe and the USA. Other parts of Mozambique, such as north of Gorongosa and close to the **Malawian** border, are effectively under RENAMO control.

Dhlakama, probably has between 10,000 and 22,000 fighters under his control. According to Mozambican security sources, they come under a simple command structure which divides Mozambique into military regions, each corresponding to a province. Under the regional commanders are units labelled sectors and advance posts. One key regional commander, Commandant **Mario** in Maputo Province, is a deserter from FRELIMO's post-independence army.

In the face of this, the government armed forces are largely impotent. RENAMO attacks on roads around Maputo are sometimes carried out by only a handful of fighters. Army escorts and garrisons flee or wait for attacks to subside before intervening, such as during a recent attack at Chokwe. There are frequent ambushes on the same stretches of road, sometimes within the space of a few days. The demoralisation of the army is such that, on 27 January, a RENAMO band was able to raid a training academy near Maputo and to steal guns from a government arsenal with the apparent compli-

city of members of the security forces. RENAMO fighters have also stolen army uniforms, while FRELIMO soldiers sometimes have no kit at all.

RENAMO has become more murderous than ever in recent months. The massacres of late 1987 were unprecedented. There are numerous confirmed accounts of the most unspeakable atrocities carried out by RENAMO. Eye-witnesses describe the perpetrators as being as young as 14 years. The bands roaming southern Mozambique now contain numbers of children who, kidnapped from their villages, are forced to murder as their induction into a life of banditry. There is a high rate of desertion by abducted villagers who, having committed atrocities against their own kin, cannot return to their villages.

The Maputo government would be prepared to accept almost any South African condition for peace, as it made plain when it signed the Nkomati Accord in 1984. There is now only a low-level African National Congress (ANC) presence in Maputo, and ANC cadres operate under restrictions which make it difficult for them to sustain a guerrilla network in Mozambique. There are signs that the FRELIMO government would be willing to turn a blind eye to the use of Maputo port for sanctions-evasion by South African businessmen. At present, the port is effectively the victim of South African sanctions. It carries only 900,000 tonnes of South African traffic per year, compared to some six or seven million tonnes in its heyday. The 88 kilometres of railway line from South Africa to Maputo had been out of action for 66 out of the previous 117 days as of January 1988 due to sabotage by RENAMO groups operating from bases in South Africa.

While the government waits for South Africa to decide what it wants from Mozambique, Maputo is trying to involve other countries in the security question. The idea is to complicate the relationship and tie South Africa's hands. The most promising such initiative to date is a tripartite Portuguese-South African-Mozambican agreement on restoring the supply of electricity from the 82%-Portuguese-owned Cahora Bassa dam to South Africa. While South Africa doesn't really need the electricity, Portugal does need to start up the supply so as to stop losing money on the dam. Rumour has it that Portugal put considerable pressure on South Africa for an agreement on the restoration of power-supplies between Cahora Bassa and South Africa - to the extent of threatening to withdraw offers to South Africa of facilities in the Azores and Madeira for sanctions-busting.

In the same vein, Maputo now aims to associate foreign aid-donors with the protection of the projects which they fund. Leaders in the field were the British company Lonrho, which has engaged a British security company, Defence Systems Limited, to defend its assets and to help train Mozambican soldiers. Britain, France, Norway, Sweden, Canada and Spain are among states which have agreed, or are contemplating, contributions towards the protection of projects. The RENAMO response has been to step up its attacks on foreign-funded projects.

The Western response is now thoroughly contradictory. Governments fund development projects which they know risk being destroyed by insurgents

operating out of South Africa or with South African support. Yet in public, British officials, for example, deny having proof of South African backing for RENAMO. In private, we hear, both Prime Minister **Margaret Thatcher** (by letter) and Chancellor **Helmut Kohl** (via **Franz Josef Strauss**) have appealed to President **P.W. Botha** to lay off Mozambique. Western officials tend to say that the solution lies in negotiation with RENAMO, to which the usual Mozambican retort is that no negotiation is possible unless it is with South Africa. Even if FRELIMO were able to negotiate a deal with Dhlakama, it would not stop the fighting and would deprive FRELIMO of one of its few assets, its considerable internal coherence. While South African military men may still be encouraging Dhlakama to believe he can become a minister in a coalition government, South African security men do not really wish this. The last thing they want is to install a puppet government which they would then have to underwrite. Worse still, they would then have to finance the rebuilding of a shattered economy. Much better to leave that to the West and to the **Soviet Union**, which, surprisingly perhaps, is Mozambique's main aid partner.

Mozambican officials have now given up any hope of a purely military solution to the RENAMO problem. A revived national army would undoubtedly be a great asset, but there are depressingly few signs that last June's promotion of a more managerial officer corps, under Chief of Staff General **Antonio Hama Thai**, has achieved success. Despite the retirement of some FRELIMO veterans and the appointment of competent administrators to key posts, such as Colonel **Ismael Mangureira** in charge of army logistics, and in spite of work by British military trainers, there are few signs of improved quality. The army does not even know how many soldiers it has under arms. The military authorities are unwilling to respond to requests from villagers to form local militias until they are able to organise training. In other words villagers such as those around Panda in Inhambane, who beg for weapons to help defend themselves, are told to wait.

Senior officials are rather sanguine about the army problem. They argue that once South African support for RENAMO has dropped away, armed opposition and banditry will rapidly disappear. They cite the fact that RENAMO was on the verge of defeat in 1980, before it was revived with South African support, and that RENAMO fighters soon ran out of ammunition when South Africa ceased supplies for some months after the March 1984 Nkomati Accord. They may be overestimating the difficulty of eliminating even a small number of armed opponents in such a vast country, and the degree to which banditry has arisen from the incapacity of Mozambique's own army. Not least, it is hard to tell what will be the effect of having a generation of teenagers who have been psychologically disturbed by committing atrocities and who will find it difficult to go back to planting cassava.

But all that is in the future. In the meantime, Mozambique's allies could perform one service more important than funding economic development. They could intercede with South Africa ●