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THE SURROGATE ROLE OF THE MNR

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I have been asked to speak on the role of South Africa's surrogate forces in Mozambique. During the course of this conference others will deal, in detail, with the characteristics and effects of South Africa's aggression on the people of Mozambique. However, I would like to put in a word or two about the character of this aggression prior to dealing with some of the wider, strategic considerations.

In his book, "The true confessions of an Albino terrorist", the renowned South African poet and writer Breyten Breytenbach describes scenes of insane horror he saw in two South African jails. They included cannibalism practised by black and white inmates alike.

"The kring (The circle), governing council, will decide upon a death. Once its decision has been carried out, parts of the body of the victim may be eaten ritualistically", Breytenbach writes. And he goes on to say: "Whites too would open up the belly of the victim, take out the heart, the liver, part of the innard - to eat them."

What produced this level of inhumanity of Man towards Man? Breytenbach argues quite correctly that cannibalism is not a tradition rooted in a specific culture, but that it is the result of the extreme levels of violence unleashed by the apartheid system. Says he: "... consider how structuralised alienation has brought about a society of cannibals. These men eat human flesh as rats will devour each other - for similar reasons - and not because it has been 'traditional' anywhere... At the heart of the South African prison system is the denial of the humanity of 'the other', and in that it is only a reflection of the larger South African cosmos."

What the armed bandits of the MNR are doing in Mozambique mirrors apartheid in its heart of hearts. They hack babies to death; they cut off ears, lips, hands, noses and breasts of defenceless civilians; they rape young girls in front of their parents; through military training, forced executions, drugs and other means, they dehumanise children, preparing them to be the mass murderers of the future; and there have been eye-witness reports of cannibalism as their most extreme manifestation of power. Their barbarity, immensely augmented after Pretoria inherited the MNR from its Rhodesian creators in 1980, merely materialises the permanent task: to inflict unbearable pain on the people of Mozambique, to transform the country into a wasteland, apartheid's brave new world in the making.

The ideological nightmare that is apartheid has reached its climax in Pretoria's regional aggression, particularly in Mozambique. Armed banditry has created a vicious cycle of violence, misery and more violence that threatens to establish those conditions necessary for its own internal, uncommanded reproduction. It is, therefore, not a question of the means justifying the end; the means have become the end.

Secondly, the MNR's task of making Mozambique ungovernable has been used by South Africa's propaganda machinery to "prove" that blacks cannot govern themselves.

There is a variation to this theme. Pretoria has used its surrogate force in Mozambique to "prove" that socialism does not work. It's pretty much like the big bully who steals the little boy's sandwiches and then accuses him of going hungry.

Thirdly, the MNR acts as Pretoria's black cannon fodder in Mozambique so that the white soldiers of the South African Defence Force (SADF) do not have to die. Should they have to die, as happened recently in Angola, the South African Government and military hierarchy would be up against a flood of protests from their own white constituencies.

Fourthly, the war in Mozambique is a cheap war, in fact one paid by the Front Line States. The MNR constantly attacks Mozambique's railway lines so that the landlocked countries of the region have to continue using South Africa's transport system. The money which they pay South Africa in rail and port tariffs is more than enough to sustain the aggression against Mozambique.

But a closer analysis of the phenomenon will reveal the desperation of the MNR, that of being the instrument of specific South African forces in a particular power struggle within the South African white establishment itself.

On the 12th of September this year Presidents Joaquim Chissano and Pieter Botha met at Songo. These are some of the significant events that followed:

1. South Africa's Deputy Foreign Minister, Jacobus Meiring, went to Maputo to finalise negotiations for a 3 million South African loan to Mozambique, added to R3 million more lent some two years ago, both loans aiming at the rehabilitation of the Maputo port installations. The money is to be paid back at a low interest rate, with payments made from the profits generated with that South African investment. From this, one must deduce that important sections of South Africa's white establishment are interested in an efficient running of Maputo harbour. Pieter Botha himself told President Chissano at Songo that Pretoria was interested in having a properly run Maputo corridor.

2. On the 25th of October another important event took place. With much pomp and media attention, the South African Foreign Minister, Roelof Botha, went to Maputo to inaugurate the new South African trade mission. South Africa did its best to reinforce the idea that relations with Mozambique were reaching normalcy, that is, it had become a relationship bordering on cooperation, security matters being a question of the past.

3. While all this diplomacy was going on, other very unpleasant things were happening:

- a) the railway lines linking Maputo to South Africa and Swaziland were attacked and people killed as trains hit mines and MNR groups opened fire from the surrounding bush;
- b) the electricity power line from the South African border town of Komatipoort to Maputo was sabotaged three times;
- c) massacres in villages of Maputo province were started again.

For months there had been a notable absence of MNR activity in Maputo province. Suddenly, it erupted again after Presidents Chissano and Botha met in Songo. The same thing happened before and after the signing of the Nkomati Accord in March 1984.

What, then, are we to make of this?

In August 1975 the SADF invaded Angola. With military aid from Cuba, the Angolans pushed the South Africans back into Namibia. But for South Africa's generals that military defeat was a political victory at home. They effectively destroyed John Vorster's detente policy and created the conditions for the quiet 1978 coup against Vorster. The Minister of Defence, Pieter Botha, became Prime Minister, and the Chief of Staff, General Magnus Malan, became Minister of Defence. By 1980, the State Security Council, composed mainly of military leaders, was the all-powerful political body of the country. Military expenditure grew unchecked as South Africa increased the size of its regional aggression. In short, a caste of military politicians had developed a substantial economic interest in war. All attempts to create peace in the region were, therefore, firmly opposed by them, for a return of the SADF to barracks would greatly diminish the scope for continued military rule.

All this became crystal clear in August 1985 when Mozambican and Zimbabwean troops took control of the MNR's main base at Casa Banana in Mozambique's central district of Gorongosa. The documents found there amply showed who in South Africa was leading a systematic violation of the Nkomati agreement. According to the documents, South Africa's top military leaders had promised the MNR that they would never abandon it. Their continued supply of weapons and ammunition matched words with action.

In other words, the MNR, UNITA, Buffalo 32, the whole military and security apparatus of destabilisation and aggression have been the major weapon of a substantial portion of South Africa's military hierarchy in an internal political conflict that pits them, the military industry, and the Nazi-like sectors of Afrikanerdom, against other political and economic forces that view regional coexistence as the best way for South Africa to maintain its power in the region.

Whether Pieter Botha now controls or does not control the military, whether he is genuinely in favour of coexistence or merely plays the diplomat as the military continue his true political options, is a matter for another set of considerations.

What I have tried to highlight was the MNR's role as an external instrument in a complex power struggle inside South Africa.

Therefore, one must define clearly what one means with the term "surrogate" when talking about the MNR. In so far as it is armed, commanded and organised from South Africa, in so far as its targets are defined by South African military politicians, and in so far as it responds to the domestic South African aspirations of these military politicians, the MNR is part and parcel of the South African military and security apparatus. Viewed this way, the MNR is as surrogate as the South African white soldiers who were sent into Angola to die for the militaristic option of Pretoria's generals.

I would now like to say a few words about a type of blindness a lot of people entertain.

The promoters of generalised terrorism in Mozambique are the same who have substantially increased repression inside South Africa, often applying in their internal actions the same means used by the MNR in Mozambique. The creation of the "vigilantes" in South Africa followed many years of experience acquired in Mozambique through MNR brutality. The MNR has created a model of ungovernability and destruction of a people's organisation which has been applied at times inside South Africa. This type of regional destabilisation, therefore, maximises the potential of self-destruction that exists in South Africa's highly volatile political and social tissue. To force South Africa to abide by the Nkomati Accord, to help Mozambique eliminate armed banditry is, thus, a way of helping to reduce, and eventually eliminate, those forces in South Africa that do not hesitate to destroy South Africa itself if that should mean, in their eyes, keeping apartheid alive.

Finally, I must refer to something that has deeply hurt many of us in Mozambique.

The vast majority of Mozambicans are very, very poor. They have to withstand the misery and technological backwardness inherited from colonialism, they have to face this unique war of mass murder and wanton destruction, they have to overcome a lot of difficulties and policy mistakes inherent in the act of learning how to govern, and they have to live through unjust terms of trade and a ruthless debt. But that is not all.

Mozambicans also have to listen patiently to a number of Western Governments who say they can do nothing to stop connivance with the MNR on the part of ultra-right wing groups in Europe and America, because that would mean infringing on the rights of opinion and association pertaining to the Western model of democracy. This is, however, duplicity of standards for those same governments would not allow groups they deem terroristic to hold meetings and organise psychological warfare in their own territories.

The peoples of southern Africa are fulfilling their duty to fight apartheid directly. Compared with what they have to suffer, they do not ask much of you: only that you help stop those forces which, in your countries, connive with the holocaust which apartheid has unleashed. I believe you wield the political, economic, cultural and legal power to do it.

Thank you very much.

A LUTA CONTINUA!