



AFRICA CONFIDENTIAL

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Mozambique: Chissano's home front

As Mozambique moves slowly towards direct peace negotiations between the government and the *Resistencia Nacional Moçambicana* (Renamo or MNR), President **Joaquim Chissano** is locked in a bitter rearguard action on two fronts against hardliners in his ruling *Frente para a Libertação de Moçambique* (Frelimo).

Fierce infighting has broken out within the military high command, which seems far more committed to this campaign than to the 15-year war against the rebels. The issue is Chissano's last-ditch effort to reform the armed forces before opening peace talks. This means trying to move the defence minister, General **Alberto Chipande**, out of his ministry. On the outcome depends Chissano's ability to control the armed forces after the peace deal, when a ceasefire will have to be implemented.

The president will need all his strength to oversee the inevitable integration of the rebel and government armies. Peace looks threatening to many top army officials, who have used the war to get involved in a wide range of businesses, from ivory- and marble-smuggling to farming and cattle ranching.

During a stormy meeting with the army top brass on 8 February, Chissano sat and watched military commanders accuse each other of corruption, incompetence and general bad behaviour. At the end of the encounter, he announced his plans to name three vice-ministers of defence: Chief of Staff Lieutenant-Gen. **Antonio Hama Thai**; armed forces' political commissar and Political Bureau member Major-Gen. **Antonio da Silva Nihia**, and Colonel **Ismael Mangureira**, the former logistics chief.

The bombshell came with the announcement that it was time to put the defence ministry under civilian control. This meant Chipande, who is widely credited with the collapse of the war effort, would have to leave. But Mangureira has turned down the offer of a deputy minister's post, saying he cannot serve until Chipande is out. Chissano is waiting for Chipande to do the honourable thing and resign. It could be a long wait. The president's leading choice to take over at defence is Political Bureau member **Feliciano Gundana**, the current minister of the presidency and an Ndau. This is the ethnic group in the central provinces of Manica and

Sofala from which Renamo draws the bulk of its military command. His appointment would effectively leave Chissano himself as the defence minister.

The army's squabbling comes at a time when its performance on the battlefield continues to disappoint. In March, the national daily newspaper *Noticias* proudly announced the capture of a major rebel base at Maringue, in Sofala province, by a joint force of **Zimbabwean** commandos and Frelimo troops which had launched an offensive around rebel strongholds in the Gorongosa mountains in late February. What the paper failed to note was that government forces had taken Maringue in an identical offensive last July, only to lose it again to the rebels. Even the elite forces trained by **British** advisers in Nyanga, Zimbabwe, and stationed in the southern province of Maputo, are suffering under the weight of the military collapse. At midnight on 31 January, 300 Renamo fighters attacked the battalion headquarters north of the town of Magude. The barracks were not on alert at the time. The second-in-command was shot eight times and bled to death hours later. There was no transport to take him to hospital.

Chissano is facing opposition to talks with Renamo from within his own party

Chissano is also battling on a second front: the 12-man Political Bureau. This struggle involves constantly shifting alliances in Frelimo's inner citadel. At issue is Chissano's drive to break the party's 15-year hold on power, introduce a multi-party democracy, and bring to heel the state's extensive security apparatus. While the new draft constitution does not discuss the issue of a one-party state, its call for freedom of association implies acceptance of a multi-party system. Its proposal for direct elections to the presidency and parliament is the death knell of Frelimo's monopoly.

This prospect frightens many top party officials who would stand little chance in a free election. This is especially true since urban unrest over dramatically falling living standards - a result of the International Monetary Fund-backed Economic Rehabilitation Programme (PRE) - has reached its highest point yet and taken on a distinctly anti-

Frelimo tone. For weeks, the capital was rife with rumours about an anti-PRE demonstration planned for 12 March that would lead a mob to sack the *Interfranca* hard currency shop in central Maputo. Top United Nations officials warned their employees to stock up at the *Interfranca* and keep their children at home. But though several lorryloads of the feared riot police - some armed, incredibly, with rocket-propelled grenades - sat waiting at the Women's Organisation Square, the action never came.

Tension in Maputo was at its height as Chissano's plane touched down at Andrews Air Force base outside Washington on 12 March for the first full state visit to the **United States** by a Mozambican leader. In a three-hour meeting with President **George Bush**, Chissano laid out his plans to open peace talks with Renamo and to reform the country's political system. Ironically, during a later meeting with US-based Mozambicans, Chissano came face to face with several Renamo officials, including **Julius Sefo**, the new rebel representative to the USA, based in Philadelphia. The meeting went so well that one Renamo supporter handed over a list of questions Chissano would face the following day from a group of right-wing congressmen led by **Dan Burton**.

The 12-15 March visits to the USA and Britain gave Chissano the opportunity to shore up his support from the West's most conservative leaders, Bush and **Margaret Thatcher**, at a time when Western impatience with lack of progress on the peace front was holding up badly needed development assistance and food aid shipments. Some aid officials say Mozambique is on the brink of widespread famine among war refugees.

Further, the spreading unrest in the **Soviet Union** and

eastern Europe has put in grave jeopardy all but token military and economic assistance from the former socialist countries. The increasing shortage of fuel and munitions explains Chissano's February visit to **Libya** and **Algeria**. Chissano had asked to visit Moscow in February, but was turned down by the Central Committee of the Soviet Communist Party which said it had too many problems to deal with at home. Soviet Foreign Minister **Eduard Shevardnadze**'s four-hour visit to Maputo the day after witnessing **Namibian** independence on 21 March took some of the sting out of the earlier Soviet rebuff. At the time of his visit, Maputo was suffering severe power cuts due primarily to rebel sabotage of the electricity lines from **South Africa**. These blackouts have earned Renamo leader **Afonso Dhlakama** the nickname '**Circuit Breaker**'.

While Chissano was in London and Washington singing the praises of his government's radical reform programme, forces were at work at home which were to embarrass him deeply. On 16 March, Information Minister **Teodato Hunguana** expelled **Antonio Mateus**, correspondent for the **Portuguese** news agency *Lusa*, and a stringer for Voice of America radio, after a report on unrest in the capital. He had in any case been due to leave in a week to take up a new post. The 24-hour expulsion was carried out with astonishing speed by a usually lethargic bureaucracy. In fact, the order came from Security Minister **Mariano Matsinhe**, an opponent of Chissano's reforms. The security ministry had been investigating the journalist's activities for several months. Observers suspected an attempt to embarrass Chissano in the West. The expulsion drew protests from both Portugal and the United States and was expected to hang over Chissano's state visit to Lisbon in early April ●