

# Zimbabwean troops begin redeploying to corridors

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"Lead"

ZIMBABWE has begun redeploying its troops from strategic forward bases in the Gorongosa area of Mozambique and redeploying them along the Beira Corridor in compliance with the partial ceasefire signed between the Mozambican government and MNR bandits.

Troops operating along the Limpopo Corridor will now be confined to within 3 km of the road, rail and powerline corridor, while convoys on the Nyamapanda to Zobue route manned by Zimbabwean troops will cease in accordance with the agreement signed on December 1 in Italy.

Less than 1 000 troops will be affected by the redeployment. Out of the eight battalions of the Zimbabwe National Army operating in Mozambique, just under one battalion was deployed beyond the limits now agreed to. This is the first time the authorities have detailed the force in Mozambique.

Most of these troops were deployed in the former bandit strongholds in the Gorongosa areas of Cassa Banana, Villa Paiva de Andrade, Fabrica, Machesse and Cavalho.

Gorongosa, a vast expanse of mainly thick forest stretching more than 100 km north-east of Chimoi, had been a stronghold of the MNR bandits before they were routed by the Zimbabweans.

The presence and role of the Zimbabweans in Mozambique became one of the main items on the agenda in last month's talks between the bandits and the Mozambican government.

## Lifeline

The task of the Zimbabwean troops, that is protecting Zimbabwe's lifeline to the Indian Ocean ports of Beira and Maputo, had drawn them deeper into the Mozambican conflict at the invitation of the Mozambican government as the forces attacked bandit bases to prevent attacks on the corridors.

Troops protecting the Beira Corridor began their redeployment with the movement of artillery pieces from the forward bases to Chimoi on

Wednesday. Air Force of Zimbabwe Casa transport planes, flying at tree-top level to avoid being spotted from a distance by the bandits, uplifted the pieces.

Most of the troops had assembled at Villa Paiva de Andrade, having redeployed from the other

bandit bases their rifles in jubilation while withdrawing, they were on alert for possible ambushes from the MNR bandits.

ZNA troops handed over their positions to Mozambican troops before withdrawing. They also helped Mozambican

By Herald Reporter  
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bases by Sunday afternoon.

A 15-vehicle convoy had been assembled. While it waited for the other troops to arrive, the convoy staged symbolic redeployment on Sunday afternoon.

The present commander of the Zimbabwe Special Task Force along the Beira Corridor, who is also the Commander of the Mutare-based 3 Brigade, Col Clever Chiramba, told Zimbabwean journalists at Chimoi that his troops will have redeployed to the corridor by Friday.

## Deadline

The official deadline for Zimbabweans to redeploy to the designated areas, according to the Rome agreement, is January 5. A joint verification commission to monitor the partial ceasefire was expected in Maputo yesterday.

The partial ceasefire was expected to lead to a general ceasefire between the Mozambican government and the MNR bandits, leading to an end of 15 years of banditry.

However, hostilities were not expected to cease immediately. Even as the Zimbabweans

forces with transport as they moved into the positions.

On Sunday morning a Zimbabwean convoy moving towards Villa Paiva de Andrade was ambushed. The MNR bandits did not sustain the attack and withdrew with no casualties on either side.

Although the Sunday incident was no more than a skirmish, Col Chiramba warned the bandits against attacking the Zimbabweans as they redeployed.

With the withdrawal of the Zimbabweans, observers see the bandits stepping up operations for the control of the strategic Gorongosa area but Mozambican forces appear better organised and willing to stand against the bandits.

"He may try to take this place (Cassa Banana) but we will fight him and if it means all of us dying here we will be prepared," Lt Bernard Ndevu of the Mozambican Armed Forces, of FAM, 1st Battalion of the 9th Brigade, said at Cassa Banana.

Within two weeks of the FAM forces moving into the Gorongosa area the MNR bandits had attacked them once near the Pungwe River in the Gorongosa area. This was on Thursday last week and two civilians travelling with FAM were killed while three soldiers were seriously injured.

The bandits also abducted 11 civilians at Cassa Banana on Wednesday morning.