

# Mozambique: The RNM's lingering war

The "Mozambican National Resistance," though contained by FRELIMO, is kept active by Pretoria. Paul Fauvet reports from Maputo

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**A** year after the loss of its main base at Sitatonga, the "Mozambican National Resistance" (RNM) continues to threaten villages and communications in parts of Manica and Sofala provinces. It has infiltrated south of the Save river and has a certain presence in the northern parts of Gaza and Inhambane provinces.

The extent of this is difficult to estimate since almost nobody lives there. The RNM's tactic seems to be to try to establish direct overland contact with South Africa. Armed groups have been intercepted entering Mozambique at Pafuri, an arid area in northern Gaza where the frontiers of South Africa, Zimbabwe and Mozambique all meet.

The RNM is evidently well armed, thanks to the South Africans. It has proved able to ambush military convoys in southern Sofala on the main Maputo-Beira road — actions which require rather more than peashooters. Nevertheless, it has not proved able to threaten the road and rail links to Zimbabwe and its activities are confined to an area well south of the vital Beira-Umtali line. It has also not been able to revive the kind of sabotage that took place inside Beira itself during the Zimbabwe war.

The main areas of RNM operation remain the two southernmost districts of Manica province, Sussendenga and Mossurize. In Sussendenga the Mozambican army, the FPLM, has now re-established overall military control (though ambushes and attacks on villages still occur), but the mountains of Mossurize remain infested by the RNM and winking them out is a difficult task.

The most tempting target in this part of the country is the power line carrying electricity from the gigantic Cabora Bassa dam down to South Africa. Five pylons in Mossurize were blown up in early April and at the time of writing the supply of electricity had still not been resumed. Since pylons are extremely easy to blow up and since it is quite impossible to put a military garrison on every pylon, there are formidable problems in defending the line. It is unclear whether the RNM were told to blow up the line by the South Africans (in order to give them an excuse for breaking the agreement under which South Africa purchases Cabora Bassa power) or whether this was an independent initiative.

A key question must be: does the RNM have any popular support? Although it could not exist without South African military support, the RNM is not purely and simply a South African creation, for it draws a certain strength from what FRELIMO calls feudalism — from those aspects of traditional society that the Mozambican revolution aims to destroy.

Thus in Mossurize and Sussendenga, the RNM has relied heavily on the local *regulos* (chiefs) and *feiticeiros*, a traditional animist priesthood, frequently dominating the lives of a superstitious peasantry.

The problem for the Mozambican Government is that it has never really controlled this part of the country at all and FRELIMO has never had a chance to put down roots here. Southern Manica was quite untouched by FRELIMO's war against Portuguese colonialism and, as soon as the border with Rhodesia was closed in March 1976, nine months after independence, the area was subject to Rhodesian attacks and infiltration.

FRELIMO has never been able to address the people of Mossurize. The RNM tries to keep it that way, by murdering or

mutilating any FRELIMO officials they come across and anyone who expresses support for FRELIMO policies. They try to enforce a complete separation between the local population and the state trading circuits. Use of salt or sugar in cooking is punished, because these products can only be obtained through government channels. (It is interesting to note that the same tactics have been used in Angola by another South African-backed movement, Jonas Savimbi's UNITA).

If there can be said to be any one focus for the current fighting in Manica, it is the "communal villages" — FRELIMO's basic model for rural organisation. These villages, and the political structures they contain, can erode the traditional forms of peasant society, break the power of *regulos* and *feiticeiros* and, hence, remove the main domestic props for the RNM. Not surprisingly, the RNM tries to prevent the establishment of communal villages. It much prefers a dispersed, politically atomised peasantry.

As for the internal life of the RNM, this is difficult to assess. The organisation since the death in 1979 of its leader, Matsangaiza, has been led by a deserter from the Mozambican army, Afonso Dhlakama. Several of his lieutenants (including the RNM's logistics chief, and its "political commissar") defected shortly after the fall of Sitatonga and gave themselves up to the FPLM. But their story, as told in interviews with the Mozambican Press, has to be treated with caution since they were clearly trying to minimise their own involvement in the movement.

Certainly the picture they project of themselves as political innocents, thrust unwillingly into leading positions, is difficult to accept. Nonetheless, reading between the lines of their story, a few interesting details emerge. It seems that the RNM is rent with personal animosities and that this group of defectors tried to stage a coup against Dhlakama, and failed. It was this failure, and the subsequent threat to their lives, that led to their desertion, rather than any question of political principle. They now denounce Dhlakama as an extremely ambitious and suspicious individual and say that the climate within the movement's leadership is one of mutual distrust ●