

## Mozambique: A waning MNR?

*Frelimo* is to hold its fourth party congress on 25-30 April. It will probably result in some significant policy shifts, and in theory will set *Frelimo's* economic and political course for the next five years. The most important backdrop to the congress is that the war against the *Resistência Nacional Mocambicana* (MNR) now appears to be under control. About a third of the country remains affected, but the military position has changed little since July 1982 (AC Vol 23 No 15). Since then the MNR has launched two offensives, both fairly shortlived and yielding little tactical gain.

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The first was in late August when several hundred MNR guerrillas crossed into Zambezia province from Malawi. Virtually unopposed, they swept east, burning tea factories and cotton gins, mining roads and destroying dozens of vehicles. A number of foreigners were captured, including a six-man Bulgarian road survey team. In the town of Gurué, centre of the tea industry, an MNR group captured the army barracks, looted weapons and uniforms, and marched singing down the high street before disappearing into the surrounding tea estates. MNR attacks occurred frequently within 40 km of the

coast and the provincial capital, Quelimane. Then the offensive quickly collapsed. After mid-November, apart from in the mountainous district bordering Malawi, incidents were sporadic.

Two developments appear to have precipitated the collapse: 1) The cutting of the railway from Malawi to Beira and the road through Tete province to Zimbabwe began to threaten seriously the functioning of Malawi's economy. On 27 October Mozambique's foreign minister, Joaquim Chissano, went to Malawi where he met President Banda. Shortly after, the MNR's facilities in Malawi were apparently closed, and supplies of oil for Malawi were resumed. 2) On 2 November the Mozambican army captured the main MNR base in Zambezia, about 50 km from the Malawi border, freeing the six Bulgarians.

The second offensive was in December when several hundred guerrillas crossed the border from South Africa's Kruger National Park, less than 200 km from Maputo. Their objective appeared to be to cut off Maputo from the rest of the country. Mozambican units, commanded by the vice minister of defence, Sebastiao Mabote, encountered the guerrillas head on. In a series of battles, particularly over the New Year near Macia on the main road 150 km north of Maputo, the MNR was badly mauled. The summary execution in January of seven guerrillas at Macia and nearby Magude was clearly extremely popular among the locals.

Mabote then led his men against entrenched MNR bases north of the Limpopo River. By mid-February he had cleared a 70 km wide strip north of the river. Rail services to Zimbabwe on the Limpopo valley line and bus services between Xai-Xai and Inhamitane, both halted in November due to repeated attacks, resumed in January. Attacks on the road and railway still occur, but they are much less frequent, and shops and health posts have reopened in a number of villages.

Mabote admitted that *Frelimo* underestimated the MNR and was slow to respond. But having done so, it seems to have regained the initiative, at least in the south. Soldiers are better trained, better fed, and better disciplined. They now pursue the MNR.

*Frelimo* has also devised a more effective counter-insurgency method by training and arming thousands of people in villages, factories and state farms. The army does not have enough helicopters and ground equipment for sophisticated counter-insurgency operations. But the combination of the peoples' militia and the further training of commando units to track and capture the guerrillas is now proving fairly successful.

### *Frelimo's foreign assistance*

The large expansion of the army and the forming of new militias has put a heavy training burden on *Frelimo*, which as a consequence has turned increasingly to outside help. There are now 400 Tanzanians providing basic training, plus 500-1000 trainers and advisers from the East bloc (Cuba, Soviet Union, East Germany, Hungary and Czechoslovakia). A few North Koreans arrived late last year

and were seen around the Limpopo valley during the fighting in January. (We understand that President Samora Machel's personal advisor, Fernando Honwana, is in North Korea for military training.) So far, however, only Zimbabwe has provided combat troops: about two Zimbabwean battalions guard the oil pipeline and attack MNR concentrations near it. MNR claims that Tanzanians and other nationalities are involved in combat are almost certainly false.

### *Pretoria's change of strategy?*

South Africa's role as guardian of the MNR has been made more public recently. (In February, the South African defence minister, Gen. Magnus Malan, said that South Africa might in future aid the MNR). But the Mozambican government, not without appreciation of *realpolitik*, is unsure of how South Africa now intends to use the MNR. Six months ago it appeared that South Africa was attempting, via the MNR, to play the major role in overthrowing *Frelimo* and Machel.

For at least three reasons this strategy now appears to have been dropped: 1) *Frelimo's* military and political organisation has improved, making MNR operations more difficult 2) Mozambican international diplomacy, particularly its threat to ask for Cuban troops, and its allied rapprochement with the US, has resulted in a lot of pressure on South Africa to curtail support for the MNR, and 3) Mozambique might concede to some of South Africa's demands that *African National Congress* members in Mozambique be restricted.

One of the first probable pointers to South Africa's revised policy to the MNR and Mozambique was the nature of the December MNR offensive from the Kruger National Park (see above). Instead of being dispatched into an area where they could live off the land by stealing food and supplies, the guerrillas this time entered an area stricken with cholera and acute drought. There was little to forage, and south Africa made no apparent attempt to resupply them. The offensive was thus almost suicidal.

One interpretation by Mozambican officials was that it was a "carrot and stick" exercise by South Africa, the stick being that the MNR could be sent with some impunity fairly close to Maputo, and the carrot being that if *Frelimo* made certain concessions to South Africa, the latter was prepared to abandon at least this MNR group to *Frelimo*. The first concession made was to meet the South Africans at the border town of Komatipoort on 17 December. (A previous meeting was held at the town on 11 December 1981 - the last time before 17 December that the two sides met officially). The South Africans were represented by foreign minister Pik Botha, the Mozambicans by security minister Jacinto Veloso and head of *Frelimo* party security, Sergio Vieira. Botha was unhappy that his counterpart, Chissano, was absent. But the meeting enabled the South African government to tell its critics that it was talking to both Mozambique and Angola. The second concession wanted by South Africa is that

ANC members in Mozambique be moved at least to the north of the country, far from the border with South Africa. The ANC has no bases as such in Mozambique – a fact widely acknowledged, even by South Africa – but ANC members live quite openly in Maputo. So far the Mozambicans have not agreed to this demand. If it does, the ANC would be officially cordoned off from all South Africa's borders.

### The new-found Washington connection

Diplomacy with the US has been unexpectedly successful. In March 1981 it will be recalled that four US diplomats were expelled from Mozambique on the grounds they worked for the CIA. Diplomatic representation was then cut to a minimum, and food shipments from the US were stopped. Although informal ties were maintained with the US after the March 1981 freeze, little of substance happened until Chissano visited New York and Washington last year. A US delegation was invited to visit Mozambique. It arrived in Mozambique in December. **Chester Crocker**, US assistant secretary of state for African affairs, then met Machel on 13 January. Shortly after a US congressional group arrived for a two-day visit, which unexpectedly included a meeting with Machel.

Having been asked by Chissano to take a public stand against South African-orchestrated destabilisation, a US state department article in the January issue of *Africa Report* referred to the MNR as receiving "the bulk of its support from South Africa". This signal was followed by verbal demands by the US that South Africa should cease destabilising Mozambique. The US is meanwhile considering the possibility of providing security assistance to guard the Beira-Umtali pipeline. US economic assistance may also shortly be forthcoming. At present it is prohibited by a 1980 ban. Though the 31 January trade agreement between Mozambique and the Soviet Union, designed to double bilateral trade by 1985, may have narked the White House, President **Reagan** is expected to revoke the ban. In June last year Congress refused to approve a House Africa Subcommittee recommendation that \$5m out of the \$27m Economic Support Fund allocation for the southern Africa region be allocated for Mozambican road and port development, on the grounds that first Mozambique should show a desire to improve relations with the US. That has now been achieved. The US is now stepping up food aid, with promises of more to come and the appointment of an ambassador if *Frelimo* desists from inviting in Cuban troops.

Mozambique has also been talking to other western countries. Pressure on South Africa, particularly through the UN security council, is seen in Maputo as being most effective. In May, Machel is due to visit **Britain**, where he is expected to have talks with **Margaret Thatcher**, whom he has called Britain's "best prime minister in 15 years". Machel apparently hopes that the British government, with its experience of the Lancaster House talks and Zimbabwean

independence, will take a similar initiative on South Africa.

As part of fence mending with Western Europe, Mozambique signed an agreement with **West Germany**. *Frelimo* does not expect to get much help from it, especially under the Christian Democrats. But Bonn did withdraw its veto on EEC aid to Mozambique. Britain and some other European countries have been pressing Mozambique to join the Lomé convention. Mozambique now says it will indeed participate in the Lomé III negotiations.

Western countries are also pressing Mozambique to join the IMF and *World Bank*. When the minister-governor of the *Bank of Mozambique*, **Prakash Ratilal**, visited the US in February to talk with government and bank officials, he was widely expected to talk with the IMF, although in the end he never did.

Meanwhile, Mozambique keeps up its East-West balancing act. Machel visited the Soviet Union and East Germany on 1-5 March. East Germany, which has backed *Frelimo* since before independence, recently pushed Mozambique's successful bid to join *Comecon* and argued forcefully that the Soviet Union was not supporting Mozambique enough economically. East Germany took the signing of the agreement with West Germany with equanimity, and Machel was warmly received by President **Erich Honecker**.

Machel claimed that he gained more than expected in Moscow, with promises of increased economic help and "new actions to strengthen Mozambique's defence capacity". He steered a narrow diplomatic path between the US and the Soviets. At a dinner for him, the president of the Soviet council of ministers, **Nicolai Tikhonov**, directly blamed the US for threatening nuclear war and talked of the "racist Pretoria regime supported by the USA." But the final joint communiqué did not mention the US. Instead it talked of "South Africa supported by imperialism" and threats to world peace being the "responsibility of imperialism." On the other hand the communiqué reaffirmed Mozambique's support for the Soviet intervention in **Afghanistan**.

Mozambique's diplomatic successes come at a time of deepening economic crisis. War, weather, and world recession have combined to cause a serious foreign exchange squeeze. Although no official figures have been released, all Mozambique's main export receipts were at record lows last year. Cashew nut production was hit by a fungus and the prawn catch by bad weather; many cotton gins, tea factories, and sawmills have been destroyed by the MNR; coal exports are down because the MNR has cut the railway; sugar production has fallen because of machinery breakdowns. And the world recession has pushed down export prices. In the south of the country, the worst drought in decades has destroyed the entire 1982/3 grain crop. The MNR is estimated by government officials to have destroyed 30,000 tonnes of stored grain. Mozambique has appealed for 255,000 tonnes of food aid. The international response so far has been good.

The problems are exacerbated by the policy set by Frelimo's third party congress in 1977 to give investment priority to big state farms and heavy industry. As war and recession have bit harder and cut the amount of foreign exchange available, capital investment was cut less than spending on consumer goods and hand tools for peasants. Rural shops are virtually empty and in some areas a barter system is operating, with peasants selling crops only in exchange for goods. Thus production of cash crops, food as well as cashew and cotton, has fallen.

In preparation for the congress, thousands of meetings have been held in villages and factories to debate a draft policy document for the congress, elect new party officials, and hold general discussions. It has been made clear to participants that they are free to speak out. In rural areas there have been many complaints over the lack of support for the peasants - the empty shops and insufficient help for the new cooperatives and communal villages. In urban areas there has been more emphasis on falling middle class living standards. Where peasants, for example, complain of lack of soap and sugar, both of which are available in Maputo, residents of the latter complain of no toothpaste or powdered milk. In a way it is symptomatic of the push and pull which is making government difficult. For instance, the new minister of agriculture, Sergio Vieira, is trying to push people out of Maputo offices into the countryside to boost farm production - a policy which not unnaturally is strongly resisted by the bureaucrats.

By allowing people to speak out, a lot of bottled up criticism has clearly been released, proving that middle-level government bureaucrats have downplayed the level of popular discontent. Clear disagreements are arising below the politburo level, where various groups attempt to have their views accepted by the top leaders. Although the overall commitment to socialism is not in doubt, the right way to achieve it, is. At the congress next month, rural and military delegates will probably push for more support for peasants and cooperatives, while urban representatives will continue to support heavy industry and big state farms, despite the liability the latter have proved since 1977.

However, there is no sign of division within the top leadership. Its commitment to consensus is both its strength and weakness: decisions are made with everyone's support; when, as fairly often, there is no unanimity, no decisions are made at all.

The congress is due to elect a new central committee, which is bound to include more people who did not fight in the liberation war, such as urbanites who became involved with the "dynamising groups" just after independence, and members of the new technocratic elite. Indeed, nine ministers, most named since the third congress, are not even on the central committee. The Politburo is then elected by the new Central Committee. Little change is expected, although Sergio Vieira, a rising star, might be elected. After the congress, a major reshuffle of ministers is expected. There has been little change in three years and the economic ministries need strengthening. Finally, several ministries have already undergone internal restructuring, so a new set of secretaries of state is likely to be appointed.

#### Footnotes

1. One curious sidelight is that the MNR and the South Africans seem finally to have taken over the other anti-Frelimo movement, *Africa Livre*. (By the end of the year the MNR was active only in the same mountainous border districts of Zambezia where *Africa Livre* had been before). During the September push, actions in Zambezia were regularly reported for the first time on the MNR radio *Voz da Africa Livre*, and the guerrillas spoke Portuguese rather than the local language. The takeover thesis is further supported by the announcement that the number three man in the MNR executive council is Daniel Guideon Muhluzo, who was a founding member of *Coremo*, the organisation that eventually became *Africa Livre*.

The MNR executive council was announced in Lisbon in September 1982. President and commander-in-chief is Afonso Dhlakama. His number two is secretary general Orlando Cristina, an ex-Portuguese secret police (*PIDE*) agent who became link man between the MNR and first Rhodesia and then South Africa. Other members include: the MNR's Lisbon spokesman, Evo Fernandes, as coordinator of the political and foreign departments; Adrinano Bomba, the pilot who defected to South Africa in his Mig-21, as head of information; and Bomba's brother, Boaventura Bomba, as national political commissar.

2. It was a climbdown for Mozambique because the agreement (and those of the EEC) contain a form of the "Berlin Clause" which East Germany finds objectionable. Both sides agree that West Germany administers three sectors of Berlin; so every agreement with West Germany has a clause which extends the agreement to cover West Berlin. Accords with the East bloc refer simply to "Berlin (West)". But all other agreements refer to "Land Berlin", and this phrase and the inverted commas are kept even when the clause is translated into other languages. The East bloc says this implies Berlin is a land, or state, in the Federal Republic, in violation of four power agreements.