

Army protecting country's lifelines in Mozambique

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ZIMBABWE'S involvement in the Mozambican conflict was never intended to be an interference in another country, but was aimed at protecting Zimbabwe's lifelines and to suppress destabilisation in the region, the ZNA's present commander in the Beira Corridor has said.

Colonel Clever Chiramba, commander of 3 Brigade and the Special Task Force in the Beira Corridor, in an interview at his headquarters at Chimoi last week, dismissed claims by critics of Zimbabwe's military involvement who said that the ZNA had become

an occupation force.

Col Chiramba said that military operations his men took against the MNR bandits were meant to protect the rail, road and powerline that ran down the Beira Corridor.

Even attacks at Casa Banana, about 100 km north of the corridor, or Mtarara, further to the north in Mozambique, were all meant to protect Zimbabwe's lifeline.

"All the MNR bases we attacked beyond the corridor were being used to plan and launch attacks on the corridor and that's why we had to destroy them before they came to us," he said.

Zimbabwe had the ca-

capacity to destroy the MNR bandits but had not involved itself beyond the need to keep trade flowing through the corridors, Col Chiramba said. Even the deployment of the troops could never be likened to a posture normally adopted by an occupation force.

In any case, the ZNA was in Mozambique at the invitation of the legitimate government there. Should the government in Mozambique feel that the presence of the ZNA was no longer needed, the troops would withdraw, he said.

Col Chiramba disagreed that Zimbabwean troops were an obstacle to

peace. "We prevented terrorism from prevailing in Mozambique. We suppressed the force of destabilisation and prevented South Africa from achieving its aim of setting up a constellation of puppet states."

The interview was conducted shortly after Col Chiramba had given orders to commanders in the forward bases in Gorongosa area to begin re-deploying their troops to positions in the Beira Corridor in compliance with a partial ceasefire agreement between the Mozambican government and the MNR bandits.