

Background to the Mozambique conflict

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By Moeletsi Mbeki

MOZAMBIQUE'S war against the MNR has entered a new and decisive stage of decentralisation of power to the provinces accompanied by the political mobilisation of the peasants, says Professor Aquino de Braganca, director of the Centre for African Studies at Eduardo Mondlane University in Maputo.

High ranking members of Frelimo's Politburo have been moved out of the capital and have now taken charge of the battle for the hearts and minds of the peasants in the provinces.

"There are lots of mistakes Frelimo maybe has committed; unfortunately this is a situation of war but now we have to win politically. This is a big battle," said Cde Braganca, himself an influential member of the party.

"If you go to the Zambezi province today where Mario Mashungu, a Politburo member and Minister of Planning who is now in charge of Zambezi, the situation has greatly improved and decentralised.

MOVING

"We are now moving towards a popular economy of war, a complete transformation of Mozambique, a rethinking of our own experience of 10 years of independence in terms of popular perspective because only with the peasants can we win this war."

Another Politburo member, Cde Marcelino dos Santos, has taken charge of political structures in Sofala province where the port of Beira is situated. He said as a result banditry has been reduced and "great effort has been made to re-launch our economic activities in Zimbabwe".

Until about two or three months ago, the MNR was a terrorist organisation that was only interested in destruction of the country's economy.

They have not been interested in putting forward a political programme or in trying to obtain the support of the peasants, Cde Braganca said. The objective was not so much that they should present themselves as a political group "because South Africa never wanted it", he said.

"There is sufficient proof that South Africa did not want to have a political alternative to Frelimo. They wanted to create a very weak Frelimo to deal with.

"If you study very



CDE BRAGANCA

carefully how the MNR have been acting, they have been directed at least three or four times a day through contacts with their headquarters in South Africa to move and destroy this bridge, this harbour, this electricity powerhouse.

"Precise things, the physical destruction of means of transport and centres of food production.

"But I have not seen today a region with peasants controlled by the MNR. They haven't proposed a programme, they haven't presented themselves as a political group because South Africa itself never wanted it," Cde Braganca emphasised.

The recent change of direction by the MNR where it is now combining terrorism with putting forward political demands is a "positive aspect" of the Nkomati Accords, said Cde Braganca, because as a result of the Accords the other backers of the MNR — the Portuguese connection — have been forced to reveal themselves, he added.

DEMANDS

The demands being put forward by the Portuguese connection were neo-colonial demands and he therefore felt that they would not be accepted by the mass of the peasants in his country.

Among the demands being put forward by the MNR are that the chiefs who were installed by the Portuguese before Mozambique's independence in 1975 should be brought back to power and that the property of the Portuguese settlers which

they had abandoned when they left should be restored to them and guaranteed to them by the constitution.

"These points are only coming out now and this is the positive aspect of Nkomati; it has forced them to reveal themselves," he said.

Asked if he thought Frelimo would be able to gain the support of the peasants to resist the new demands being made by the MNR, he said:

"The mass of the peasants in Mozambique are war-weary and the situation is very difficult for them with this destruction but the mass of the peasants in Mozambique do not want the chieftains to come back because they recognise them as their oppressors, tools of the Portuguese, something like chiefs in South Africa today.

"The masses do not want them to come back whatever may be the mistakes and difficulties of the government."

Turning to evaluate what Mozambique has gained by signing the Nkomati non-aggression pact with the Pretoria regime in March last year, Cde Braganca said the pact should be understood in its historical context. He said there had existed a state of undeclared war between Mozambique and South Africa from 1964. From 1967 he said there were as many as 2 000 elements of the South African army fighting against Frelimo inside Mozambique.

COMPROMISE

A war you finish either by smashing the enemy or you sit down at the table and discuss a compromise, he said. Mozambique decided to "put an end to the undeclared war because it realised it could not smash South Africa and neither did South Africa think it could smash Frelimo and occupy Maputo". The pact was to respect sovereignty, respect of frontiers and not to create subversive activities against each other, he said.

"While Mozambique has respected the letter and spirit of the Accords, my own impression is that the insurgency has continued — certainly from South Africa — and this is the problem," Cde Braganca said. He added that he was not in a position to say whether or not the Accords would be maintained or broken.

"I see that things are not moving as the two countries thought when they signed the Accords. The insurgency continues,

the MNR elements penetrate from South Africa and there is evidence now of arms coming from South Africa."

Pressed on whether he thought Frelimo had made a mistake by signing the Accords and especially by hurriedly expelling ANC cadres while the Pretoria regime was showing reluctance to get rid of the MNR, Cde Braganca replied:

"It may be. The position of Samora was to apply the Accords immediately after signing. Now Frelimo applied the letter and spirit of the Accords, if the others haven't done it you can see who are the people who stick to their word and who do not stick to their word.

"It becomes clear now to the world that they don't mean it."

MISTAKE

"Has Frelimo made a mistake or not? This is another problem. This is a judgment historians and the outside world will do tomorrow but I explain to you the point of view of Mozambique and I share this point of view. I think Frelimo had to do it and it did it.

"Now the negative aspects are that things are continuing although the destabilisation has not increased after Nkomati as many observers say.

"Destabilisation has increased in a certain number of centres. The MNR are doing activity in the capital because it gives more echo in the international arena and this is one of the big battles of the MNR sponsors who are in Europe and with relations in South Africa."

Cde Braganca stressed however that he thought there were positive aspects to the Nkomati Accords. Firstly, the Portuguese backers of the MNR have been forced to the surface and compelled to show their neo-colonialist political colours.

Secondly, South Africa State President, P. W. Botha, who had been trying to present himself as a man of peace now stands revealed to world opinion as continuing to be a man of war. "His isolation will be doubled," Cde Braganca said.

But above all, Cde Braganca said the Accords have created a schism within the ranks of the South African establishment. There are those who want a "pacified space" so they can invest and there are others who want armed conflict to continue, he said. — Zimpapers Feature Service.