

Death of a terrorist agent by Paul Fauvet

THE last time the former general secretary of the South African backed Mozambique National Resistance (MNR), Evo Fernandes, was seen alive was on Sunday April 17. He was dining in a restaurant in the Portuguese casino resort of Cascais, where he lived, with two men named Alexandre Xavier Chagas and Joaquim da Conceicao Messias.

When he did not return home, his wife, Ivete, informed the police. She claimed that Chagas was an agent of the Mozambican security service, SNASP, and had abducted Fernandes. Later she said she was certain that her husband, "alive or dead", had been taken to Maputo.

However, on Thursday, April 21, Fernandes' body was discovered just outside Lisbon. He had been shot in the head and chest.

The Portuguese police and Interpol tracked down Chagas and Messias, who were both detained in Casablanca, Morocco, at the end of April. A third suspect, Manuel Jorge Pinto da Costa, was arrested in Paris.

The Mozambican government has denied any involvement in the killing. "These are not methods used by Frelimo," Foreign Minister Pascoal Mocumbi told African diplomats in Maputo.

A few days later, when on an official visit to Lisbon, Mocumbi told Portuguese journalists that "attempts to involve Frelimo in acts of terrorism like this are merely designed to obscure the good relations that exist between Mozambique and Portugal."

Naturally, Mocumbi shed no tears for Fernandes, describing his murder as "a terrorist act against a terrorist agent".

Sources close to Mozambican security say that no-one called Alexandre Xavier Chagas works for SNASP. The Mozambique News Agency (AIM) did a little detective work and found that in the last years of Portuguese colonial rule there was an Alexandre Xavier Chagas employed as checking clerk in the port of Lourenco Marques (now Maputo). Sources in shipping recalled that Chagas, who is a Portuguese citizen, reappeared in Maputo late 1986 or early 1987, claiming to represent Portuguese business interests. To

some people he told the unlikely story of how he was representing a widow resident in Portugal who owned tantalite mines in the central Mozambican province of Zambezia.

Paulo Oliveira, a former MNR spokesman in Lisbon who defected to the Mozambican government in March, says that Chagas, far from being a SNASP agent, was trying to organise terrorist activities in Maputo. He recalled that in 1986 Chagas had claimed to represent "a group of discontented people in Maputo". Chagas spun Oliveira a story about needing money in order to "launch terrorist acts" in the Mozambican capital.

Mozambican officials believe that Fernandes' murder probably resulted from conflicts inside the MNR, where he has always been a controversial and unpopular figure.

Fernandes was born in Mozambique of parents from Portugal's Indian colony of Goa. Under colonialism he worked for the Portuguese political police, the PIDE-DGS, and for Mozambique's most notorious white settler businessman, Jorge Jardim. Jardim appointed him business manager on his paper, "Noticias da Beira", in 1974, but he was soon kicked out by the young, pro-Frelimo journalists on the paper. He did not take out Mozambican citizenship at independence, but chose to remain Portuguese.

He went to Portugal in 1976, and from 1979 was the MNR's representative for Western Europe. In 1983 he became General Secretary, after his predecessor, Orlando Cristina, was shot through the head at the MNR's "political camp" at Walmerstad, some 40 kilometres outside Pretoria. Fernandes was the South African military's choice for MNR General Secretary, and he always had a reputation as a hatchet man for the South Africans.

But in 1984, other members of the MNR National Council accused Fernandes of embezzling half a million rands. Alleged financial misdeeds were at least part of the reason for the removal of Fernandes from the post of General Secretary in mid-1986. A million dollars, destined to buy weaponry on the international black market, had gone astray, and the

finger of suspicion pointed at Fernandes. But, according to Oliveira, Fernandes thought he was being victimised because of his Asian origin and complained of "growing racism" inside the MNR. He was put in charge of a research department which, as far as can be ascertained, has produced nothing in its almost two years of existence.

Nonetheless, as from mid-1987 Fernandes was regaining influence inside the organisation. The South Africans certainly considered him as one of the real MNR chiefs: Oliveira described him as an "eminence grise" for the South Africans.

But the MNR's office in Washington did not think so highly of Fernandes. Indeed, according to Oliveira, there is a struggle for control over the MNR between the South African and American private interests. The MNR's Lisbon and Washington offices have scarcely been on speaking terms. In March the Washington representation called the Lisbon office "non-nationalist, without credibility and vulnerable to foreign manipulation, bribery and threats".

Oliveira recalled that there had been threats to kill Fernandes in the past. In August 1987, an embittered MNR member, Inacio Chondze, "asked me for a gun to kill Fernandes", said Oliveira. "I refused to get involved."

Shortly before he left Lisbon for Maputo, Oliveira heard from the MNR Information Secretary, Francisco Nota Moises, that "something was being prepared against Evo Fernandes."

Nota Moises is connected to the American wing of the MNR, and this led Oliveira to speculate that Fernandes' murder was organised "by some American sectors who are opposed to the total control that South Africa has exercised over the MNR".

Fernandes is the sixth MNR leader known to have died a violent death in what appear to be factional squabbles inside the organisation. □