

CENTRAL AFRICA EDITOR ANTHONY RIDER EXAMINES THE GENESIS AND EFFECTIVENESS OF THE MOZAMBIQUE RESISTANCE MOVEMENT

The thorn in Machel's side: 'rebels without a cause'

For Rd: Moz

A YEAR after Zimbabwe independence anti-Frelimo rebels — once closely linked with the old Rhodesian security forces — are still active in Mozambique.

Every few months or so they claim the headlines briefly with a sneak attack on a border village. There are the usual refugees into Zimbabwe, particularly in the Mount Selinda area and tales of ear-cutting and decapitation are re-told by frightened villagers. Then all is quiet again.

Meanwhile, vigilance on both sides of the border continues. Frelimo soldiers man eight roadblocks on the 250km stretch of road between the Zimbabwe border and Beira. Goods trains run between Beira and Umtali and the line is patrolled to prevent the rebels cutting it as they did seven months ago. But there is still no passenger service on the line, although road traffic is not discouraged.

The Beira-Umtali oil pipeline — sealed after UDI in November, 1965 — is monitored carefully after a rebel attempt to sabotage it nearly five months ago. Occasionally rebel groups try to ambush trucks on the main road south of the Beira-Umtali road.

In the Mozambique capital, Maputo, I was told that President Samora Machel's government does not expect the

rebel problem to go away soon. As an official source put it: "The problem is economic, not military. What we need is development in those rural areas where these rebels surface every now and again."

"It is something that will disappear with development only, particularly after local militias are formed and establish better control in their areas. And if we look at the Cuban example, there is precedent for these rebel groups lingering on. The anti-Castro groups lasted five years, so there is a gradual withering away."

But there is another reason for the anti-Frelimo Resistencia Nacional Mocambique (RNM) lasting so long: South African help.

South African support is firmly believed in Salisbury and Maputo to be behind the RNM's continued activity. As Maputo officials see it, the RNM operated almost as an arm of the Smith and later Muzorewa security forces, with full back-up facilities authorised in Salisbury. The RNM radio, Voz Da Africa

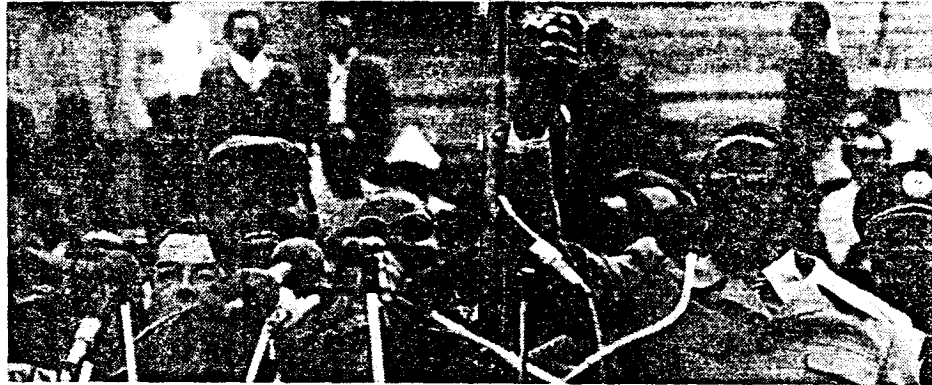
Livre (Voice Of Free Africa), went on the air by courtesy of the Rhodesian Broadcasting Corporation's transmitters.

When the Mugabe government took office in Salisbury a year ago, the RNM, according to both Maputo and Salisbury sources, transferred itself — radio and all — to South Africa. Mozambique security chief, Major-General Jacinto Veloso, says simply: "South Africa took charge of the baby."

He says the RNM's strength is the strength South Africa gives it, and he believes it is all part of what he calls the South African policy to destabilise Mozambique and Zimbabwe.

There is some sympathy for that view among Western diplomats in both Maputo and Salisbury. A leading Western envoy preferred, however, to describe it not as an attempt to destabilise but rather as a bid to keep the Mugabe and Machel governments slightly off balance.

"Either way," he told me, "it is not a policy that makes an awful lot of sense. There is



President Machel and Prime Minister Mugabe... combined action to crush the anti-Frelimo rebels.

some question though whether it is in fact official South African policy or whether it is a case of a little unofficial help for what is really a bandit movement with no ideological base and absolutely no

hope of ever overthrowing the Machel government."

The futility of the RNM cause is readily echoed in Maputo's corridors of power. There an official source had a different twist to the analysis

of why the rebels persist with a campaign that can only have nuisance value. He believes the aim is to force Zimbabwe to use the South African transport system.

"They have put up tariffs

and they're not anxious for a quick return to the pre-Mozambique independence situation where most of the Zimbabwe trade was routed through the Mozambique ports."

The RNM rebels comprise a group of Frelimo deserters who joined forces with a number of Portuguese, some of whom had served in the anti-Frelimo commando units before independence.

"So what you have," says a Maputo source, "is a core of hardened ex-Frelimo with some Portuguese working with them."

"After independence most of the Frelimo soldiers were very disciplined but others... indiscipline set in, they staged a little rebellion and about 130 Frelimo men deserted."

They were led by Andrea Masinga, a quartermaster at Dondo, near Beira who was cashiered. They linked up with a big group of Portuguese defectors. Masinga, who is still remembered as a courageous Frelimo guerrilla operating against the Portuguese in Sofala Province, was killed by his former Frelimo colleagues in a shootout in Gorongosa late in 1979.

His group started a recruiting drive and with material help from across the border

set up a mountain base, Sitatonga, chosen for its good communications. The only road from it led to Zimbabwe. After the Frelimo sacking of Sitatonga last year some of the RNM rebels scattered into the mountains along the border with Zimbabwe.

Others in small groups of perhaps only two or three moved towards the coast. In the absence of supply drops which Maputo claims they had been enjoying from South Africa, they began hitting the odd truck, forcing Frelimo to run a convoy system in some areas.

Before Sitatonga was destroyed, the RNM apparently had so much food flown in that they were able to win recruits and friends in some villages by giving it away.

Security forces say the RNM is now pretty well contained. There is constant liaison between Mozambican and Zimbabwean armed forces and intelligence experts. Joint action on the border is necessary to prevent rebel groups moving at will between the two countries.

The RNM mobility was ap-

parently one reason for the delay in reopening Zimbabwe's popular mountain park in the Chimanimanis, although the main reason is still believed to be the border minefield which the authorities want to make absolutely sure has been cleared.

"It may take some time but we will succeed in eliminating the rebels in the end," a Maputo source asserted. "But in the meantime we are forced to divert valuable resources and men from our prime need to develop our country."

Mozambique's Chief of Staff, Sebastiao Mabote, attributes the support the RNM has had in parts of Manica Province to "low political awareness" of people in remote areas and to the lavish distribution of money by rebels among simple villagers. But against that, one of those villagers, Timothy Sithole, who was among a few hundred refugees into Zimbabwe after an RNM attack, told me there was no support in his area, the border region around Espungabera, for the rebels.

As for the RNM radio, like most propaganda organs, it doesn't aim at high standards. It still seems to believe that uncomplimentary references to President Machel's beard are the height of sophisticated argument.