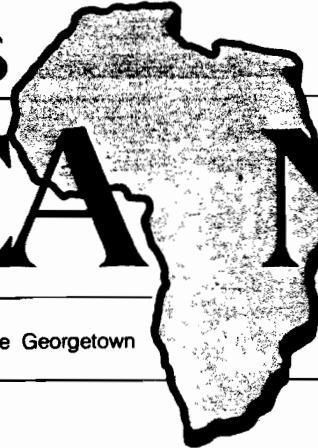


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The MNR

by Colin Legum

In less than two years, the *Resistência Nacional Moçambicana* (MNR) has spread itself across at least a third of the southeast African nation governed since independence in 1975 by the *Frente de Libertação de Moçambique* (FRELIMO) led by President Samora Machel. The MNR now periodically interdicts all of Mozambique's main road and rail communications, as well as its oil and electric power lines.

The quite spectacular achievements of this shadowy rebel movement include the intermittent closing off of the railway line between the port of Maputo (Mozambique's capital) and Zimbabwe; persistent harassment of trains operating on the line from Zimbabwe to the port of Beira, necessitating the employment of army convoys; closure for a time of the Beira railway that provides Malawi's principal access to the sea; cutting off of the water supply to the major port of Beira; and interference with the oil flow to Zimbabwe on a scale necessitating Mozambican or Zimbabwean military controls at points along the 500 miles of pipeline.

Many of the paved roads in the center of Mozambique are hazardous to travel because of land mines and ambushes, and the important coastal road from Maputo to the port of Beira, through the fruit-rich province of Inhambane, has been closed to all traffic for some time. With 5,000 to 6,000 armed men now operating inside the country, the MNR has, moreover, succeeded in establishing a network of several hundred camps from the western borders with Zimbabwe and Malawi and the southern borders with South Africa and Swaziland, right across the third of the country below the three northern provinces of Cabo Delgado, Nampula, and Niassa south of the Makonde territory which abuts on Tanzania.

Although the success of the MNR in establishing "no-go" areas within Inhambane province is unquestionably a serious blow to FRELIMO's authority, nowhere have the rebels succeeded in establishing "liberated areas" as FRELIMO did in its successful bush war against Portuguese colonialism. The real

nature of the MNR threat is not the likelihood that it will overthrow the FRELIMO government, but rather its demonstrated capability for disruption of the country's vital communications and for fostering a sense of insecurity. Both of these are particularly worrying to the authorities at a time of serious economic hardship, worsened by severe drought in much of the country.

Origins and Aims of the MNR

The leaders of the MNR claim to be the true heirs of the martyred creator of FRELIMO, Eduardo Mondlane, who was killed by a parcel bomb in Tanzania in February 1969. Borrowing FRELIMO's slogan, *A Luta Continua* (The Struggle Continues), the MNR identifies the new struggle as being against communism. This makes the movement a natural ally of South Africa, whose leaders hold to the view that the Soviet Union is committed to "total onslaught" to win control of all southern Africa.

By combining information from four reliable sources, it is now possible to piece together the beginnings of the MNR. These sources are: a book published in South Africa in 1982 by Colonel Ron Reid-Daly, former commander of Rhodesia's Selous Scouts, which recounts with pride the role played by the Scouts in training MNR recruits; documents captured by the Mozambican army when an MNR base at Garagua was overrun in December 1981; conversations with Ken Flower, former chief of Rhodesia's Central Intelligence Organization (CIO); and reports by former members of the CIO now working for Zimbabwe intelligence.

The MNR was set up in 1976 by Rhodesian intelligence. Its two purposes in this early period were to utilize Portuguese-speaking Mozambicans (black and white) to gather intelligence about Robert Mugabe's Mozambique-based Zimbabwe African National Liberation Army (ZANLA), and to harass the newly established government of President Samora Machel, which was providing sanctuary and support to Mugabe's

Recent Changes in the MNR's Clandestine Radio

- Amid reports of a bitter internal struggle within the MNR, the rebels' radio station, the *Voice of Free Africa*, has closed down. The station, which used to broadcast twice a day, had been off the air for more than a week.

The closure follows reports from reliable sources of a bitter internal power struggle said to involve Lieutenant Adriano Bomba, the Mozambican pilot who defected to South Africa in 1981 and who joined the MNR late last year. After the death of the former secretary-general of the rebel movement, Mr. Orlando Cristina, Lieutenant Bomba was tipped as the man most likely to fill the post.

—*The Star* (Johannesburg), June 3, 1983.

- As of July 1, the people of Mozambique will regularly hear on their radios the voice of the people's revolt, now under the name *Voice of the Mozambique National Resistance*.

The *Voice of Free Africa* had fulfilled its task and made history since its inception in 1976. It attracted millions of

guerrillas.

The MNR first announced its existence in June 1976 over *Voz da Africa Livre* (Voice of Free Africa), broadcasting from stations in the Rhodesian towns of Gwelo, Umtali, and Fort Victoria. The introductory broadcasts declared war against FRELIMO's "communism," and praised the Smith regime—e.g., "Rhodesia stands for tranquility and respect among all its citizens."

The MNR recruits of this period included a mixture of disgruntled Portuguese and black Mozambicans, dissidents from FRELIMO, veterans of the colonial army, middle-class businessmen, some intellectuals, and *regulos* (traditional chiefs). According to Flower, the first MNR training group was set up at Bindura in Rhodesia in September 1976. Another training camp was established later at Mutare (Umtali). One of Flower's main collaborators was Orlando Cristina, a private secretary to Jorge Jardim, the controversial Portuguese millionaire who had served as Portugal's honorary consul in Malawi and as Dr. Salazar's personal representative in Mozambique. Cristina had been an officer in the Portuguese intelligence service (PIDE), and in this capacity had been involved in developing and recruiting for three separate units for the army—the Special Groups (GEs), the Very Special Groups (GMEs) used for special assignments in Tanzania and Zambia, and the Special Paratroops Groups (GEPs). A fourth interest was the *flechas* (arrows), who came directly under PIDE. Much of the early recruitment for the MNR came from the *flechas*, an especially brutal unit whose record included responsibility for the 1973 massacre at Inhaminga.

MNR groups began to make some tentative military attacks in late 1976 and early 1977 against targets along the border zones of Manica, Tete, and Gaza. Their activities in this period (mainly attacks on villages, abduction of peasants, and burning of shops) were primarily disruptive, and they did not seek to engage the Mozambican army. Their main utility to the Rhodesian forces was intelligence-gathering and acting as guides and interpreters for Selous Scouts missions against ZANLA camps. The MNR was used as an attacking force for the first time in 1979.

The first commander-in-chief of the MNR was André

Mozambicans as its listeners The struggle developed both in quantity and quality. Along with the development of the armed struggle for liberation, there appeared the need for equal development and evolution in a number of sectors. Accordingly, our broadcasts were interrupted for about one and a half months. During this period, the format of the radio and its broadcasts were restructured. Improvements have been made and new techniques were introduced

With the *Voice of the Mozambique National Resistance* as our information medium, . . . we will achieve the true dimensions required of us by the Mozambique people News concerning the country, as well as continued denunciation of the crimes committed by FRELIMO and information regarding the advance of our fight, will be carried regularly The struggle continues.

—Clandestine broadcast in Portuguese, June 23, 1983.

Matzangáissa, a FRELIMO officer who, at independence in 1975, had been promoted to the rank of quartermaster in the new *Forças Populares da Libertação de Moçambique* (FPLM). Shortly thereafter, however, he was charged and convicted of stealing army funds and was sent to a "re-education center." He managed to escape in 1976 and subsequently joined the MNR, serving as its dynamic leader until he was killed during a Mozambican army attack on an MNR base at Gorongosa in October 1979. After Matzangáissa's death, a violent power struggle broke out when Afonso Dhlakama (sometimes called "Jacama" in MNR internal documents) attempted to assume the leadership. Dhlakama, a former officer in the Portuguese army, joined the new Mozambican army of FRELIMO in 1974, but was cashiered following conviction for theft; he joined up with the MNR in Rhodesia. Cristina supported Dhlakama, but the Rhodesians backed Lucas M'lhanga, who had been Matzangáissa's deputy. The matter of succession was settled in a gun battle, which ended with M'lhanga missing and presumed dead and Dhlakama the undisputed commander-in-chief. M'lhanga's supporters (accompanied by the MNR's Political Commissar, Henrique Siteo) fled back into Mozambique and handed themselves over to government forces.

By November 1980, as Dhlakama later admitted, the outlook for the MNR was bleak. But with Mugabe's victory, a new chapter opened up for the movement, with the South African military replacing the Rhodesians as the MNR's mentor.

A few days before Zimbabwe's independence in April 1980, two South African Dakotas flew the MNR headquarters staff from their camp at Bindura, while the radio equipment and staff of the MNR's *Voice of Free Africa* were picked up by a South African C-130 at Mutare. Both of these operations were witnessed and reported at the time by the British military team, under Lt. Gen. Sir John Acland, supervising Rhodesia's transition to independence. American military intelligence sources subsequently confirmed that the new MNR headquarters was established at Phalaborwa in northern Transvaal, near the Mozambique border. The base was later moved to nearby Zoabostad.

In early 1981, the MNR guerrillas were transported into Mozambique in what Zimbabwean military observers described as "an armada" of South African army helicopters. The Mugabe government officially protested the overflight as an infringement of Zimbabwe's air space. The new base camp established within Mozambique at Garagua, near the Save river (the boundary between Manica and Gaza provinces), was two kilometers in diameter and was equipped with a helicopter strip. The Garagua base was supplied by regular air drops staged by South African military aircraft. Reports that there were up to 20 South African military instructors in this main MNR camp have not been substantiated, other than the identification of a lone officer named Colonel van Niekerk (sometimes referred to as "Colonel Charlie" in captured documentation). By the time Garagua was overrun by the Mozambican army in December 1981, the MNR had succeeded in establishing a series of camps stretched over a large part of the country. No South Africans were found at Garagua when it was captured.

Daily contact is maintained between the MNR base camps in Mozambique and their headquarters in South Africa through two mobile radio stations. Conversations are uncoded and can be picked up fairly easily by interceptors. Messages (mostly news of the day's activities and requests for medical and military supplies) are exchanged at almost hourly intervals throughout daylight hours. There were over 370 such messages in December 1982.

Tactical Flexibility

The MNR has consistently demonstrated tactical flexibility in response to changing demands. In 1981, when it was in South Africa's political interest to apply pressures on Zimbabwe and Malawi as well as Mozambique, operations were concentrated on three target areas: (1) the railway lines from Maputo and Beira to Zimbabwe; (2) the strategic oil pipeline from Beira to Mutare in Zimbabwe; and (3) the main paved roads in the center of Mozambique and along the coastal route.

Significantly, the easiest target of all—the Cabora Bassa power line which supplies South Africa with 50 percent of its electric power—was cut in November 1980 and twice in 1981, but not since then. Since the power line is at least as vulnerable as the frequently disrupted oil pipeline to Zimbabwe, it is believed that these limited attacks were meant to disguise the MNR's connections with South Africa. It is also notable that there has been no disruption of the railway line which carries South African goods for export through Maputo.

How much of the credit for the MNR's tally of successes in the past 22 months belongs to the MNR and how much to clandestine South African military forces is a moot point; but some of the operations are clearly so sophisticated as to be beyond the capacity of the MNR. A high degree of expertise in the use of explosives was needed, for example, to blow up the strategic bridge across the Pungue river, an action which, for a time, cut off road communications to Beira. A month later, in November 1981, the marker buoys at the

entrance of the Beira harbor were destroyed; this sophisticated sea operation was obviously well beyond the capacities of the MNR. Moreover, it is known that the idea of taking out the buoys was seriously considered by Ian Smith's security forces and that the Rhodesian officer who repeatedly presented the case for such an operation later emigrated to South Africa.

The major blow struck at the oil tank installations in Beira in December 1982 occurred at the precise hour when the SADF was engaged in carrying out its heavy punitive attack against suspected ANC guerrillas in Lesotho. Five residents of Beira—four Portuguese and one British subject educated in South Africa—were subsequently tried, convicted, and imprisoned in connection with the sabotage. They were not charged with the act of sabotage itself, but with not reporting to the authorities their foreknowledge that it was to take place. The testimony presented at their trial failed to establish by whom or for whom the operation had been carried out. What it did make clear was that the saboteurs had demonstrated great skill in the way they blew up 30 or more tanks, placing their explosives so that they did not take out the pumping station as well.

Most MNR operations, however, remain in the nuisance or attention-getting categories. Land mines are planted to impede and make travel unsafe along main roads; the oil pipeline is sabotaged almost at will; trucks and even trains are ambushed. Foreigners are kidnapped as hostages in order to gain international attention and rewards for their release (e.g., a British ecologist, John Burlison, was taken hostage and a condition for his release was that he should publish a letter sympathetic to the MNR cause in the British press). MNR guerrillas have also captured six Bulgarians working on a technical project, and have killed at least six Portuguese technicians.

In those areas where they are least welcome, the MNR guerrillas make use of all the familiar bush methods in forcing the cooperation of peasants. They employ witchcraft and practice considerable brutality, mutilating lips, ears, arms, and breasts. Supporters of FRELIMO, after having had their lips sliced off, have been sent away with the admonition: "Now you can go and smile at Samora" [President Machel]. Reports of this kind of brutality are so consistent from many of the areas in which the MNR operates that they must be believed.

In addition to press-ganging young peasants into anti-government actions and thereby making it necessary for them to stay with the rebels, the MNR has also been able to recruit supporters among people disgruntled with FRELIMO's rule and by making an ethnic appeal. Both Dhlakama and his predecessor, Matzangáissa, came from Manica province, where they seem to have had some success in recruiting on the basis of shared ethnicity.

How Much Popular Support?

No dissident movement can become a serious threat to an established government, even if it has powerful foreign backing, unless it has an element of popular

support. This has been proved over and over again—most notably in Latin America and Southeast Asia.

While the MNR is heavily dependent on support from Pretoria, from right-wing forces in Portugal, and from white Rhodesians still bitter over their fate, it has succeeded in becoming a formidable enemy to President Machel's regime only because it enjoys a measure of support inside the country. It is impossible to know just how extensive that support is, although its failure to establish any "liberated zones" suggests that it has only limited following in any single province.

There is hard evidence of only one Portuguese citizen actually fighting with the MNR in Mozambique—the chief of operations, a Commander Marques. There are, however, a number of Portuguese in its leadership and more are engaged in its international relations operations. The known leadership of the MNR as of early 1983 was as follows:

- Afonso Dhlakama. Commander-in-Chief.
- Orlando Cristina. Secretary-general. Former officer in Portuguese intelligence (PIDE). Helped establish the MNR in cooperation with the millionaire Portuguese businessman, Jorge Jardim. Moving spirit behind the *Voice of Free Africa*, and chief propagandist in South Africa and Portugal, where he maintained his office. He was killed near Pretoria in April 1983 in what South African police described as a "shooting incident." According to intelligence sources, Cristina was the victim of an internal power struggle within the MNR, and his successor as secretary-general remains a matter of dispute.
- Samuel Guideon Mahluza. Chief of Department of External Relations and Politics. Former deputy-president of UDENAMO, one of the groups that merged to form FRELIMO. Broke with FRELIMO in 1968.
- Adriana Bomba. Head of Information and in charge of *Juventude Moçambicana* (JUMO), the MNR youth wing. Former pilot in Mozambican air force; defected in a MiG-21 to South Africa in 1982. Employed for a time by South African military in intelligence and translation work.
- Raul Domingos. Chief of Defense and Security. Also Dhlakama's chief secretary, and in charge of finance.
- Commander Antônio Juliane. Chief of Education and Social Affairs.
- Commander Marques. Chief of the Department of Operations.
- Commander Zeco. Chief of Security.
- Vincente Zacharias Ululu. Adjutant for International Political Affairs, Department of External Relations and Politics.
- Armande Khemba dos Santos. Adjutant for External Relations.
- B. Bemba. Commissioner for National Politics.
- Evo Fernandes. Editor of the MNR publication *A Luta Continua* (Lisbon). Former PIDE agent. Lawyer. Worked for Jorge Jardim; acted as his business manager for *Noticias da Beira*. Describes himself as European representative of MNR. Lives in Cascais, Portugal.

FRELIMO's New Priorities

President Machel and other leaders of the government frankly acknowledge that the MNR—even with South Africa's help—could not have achieved what it has were it not for the mistakes of the government—especially in the rural areas, and because of the slackness of the army at the beginning of the insurgency.

The seriousness of the MNR challenge is not only acknowledged but has prompted a reevaluation by FRELIMO's leadership of its policies, the party organization, and weaknesses in the military. Complaints by peasants of the behavior of some leading party cadres—arrogance, corruption, indolence, and abuse of power—are being carefully listened to and addressed, and there has already been a shake-up of the party's leadership.

Major attention is also being given to training the national army in counterinsurgency operations. After independence, FRELIMO's insurgency forces were either disbanded or integrated into a more orthodox force, to be trained (initially by Soviet instructors at the main training camp at Nampula) in the use of tanks, heavy artillery, sophisticated missiles, and modern warplanes. While the modern weapons and conventional battle tactics emphasized since 1975 might be useful if the Mozambican military were to find itself in direct confrontation with units of the South African Defense Force, they are of little use in fighting a bush war against guerrillas.

As an interim measure, therefore, the peasant militias are being reestablished, and an effort is being made to attract veteran FRELIMO freedom fighters into military service. Above all, FRELIMO recognizes the need to relearn the lessons it taught the Portuguese when its own forces were fighting the bush war of the 1960s and 1970s—notably how crucial it is that the peasants view the army and the authorities as their friends and protectors.

Since guerrilla tactics are not exactly the strongest point in Russian military expertise (as has been shown by the difficulties the Soviets are experiencing in Afghanistan, and the poor showing of those advising the Ethiopians in their prolonged efforts to bring Eritrean guerrillas to terms), Mozambique has recently begun to diversify its ties. A military training agreement has been signed with Portugal, discussions have taken place with Britain, and the help of the North Koreans has been enlisted for special army training. There is also increased military cooperation with Mozambique's SADCC neighbors: Zimbabwe has taken over responsibility for patrolling two-thirds of the 500-mile oil pipeline, and there are unconfirmed reports of the arrival of small military units from Tanzania.

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