

# Military setbacks force rebels terrorism

From Paul Fauvet  
in Maputo

THE WAR that pits the Mozambican army against South African-backed rebels of the Mozambique National Resistance (MNR) has been going well for Government forces south of the River Zambezi, while in parts of the north the MNR are making gains.

Military reverses in the south may have persuaded the rebels to opt for a campaign of urban terrorism. Observers in Maputo fear that the mines placed on a Maputo beach in February, and a car bomb in one of the city's residential areas on April 21 could have been the opening shots in such a campaign.

Documents captured from the MNR last year, and whose authenticity the South African Foreign Minister, Mr Pik Botha, grudgingly admitted, included minutes of a meeting between rebel leaders and South African military intelligence officers in which the latter promised to supply "material for urban guerrilla warfare."

The April car bomb gave MNR representatives in Europe problems. Firstly, the organisation's Lisbon-based Western European spokesman, Mr Jorge Correia, quickly claimed responsibility for the blast. But a few hours later the MNR general secretary, Mr Evo Fernandes, disclaimed the bombing—Mr Correia's statement had been "a misunderstanding."

Mr Fernandes realises that, in the current anti-terrorist climate in Europe, the MNR is asking for trouble if it boasts of bombs aimed against civilian targets.

But a bombing campaign will be the only way for the MNR to keep up its pressure on the capital now that more orthodox military means have failed.

From May, 1985 to March of this year the MNR generated considerable fear in the city by a series of hit and run raids into the Western industrial suburbs of Matola and Machava. From bases in the hills some 15-20 miles outside the city limits, raiding parties would make night incursions into Matola, looting shops, attacking factories and police stations, kidnapping civilians and leaving threatening notes for local political figures.

For nine months the army's response was minimal. Then on March 21, the MNR tried to attack a glass factory in Matola, and fell into a well-laid trap. Mozambican troops cut the raiders to ribbons and in the morning 29 bodies were counted, including the commander of the MNR unit. Since then, the western suburbs have been quiet, and morale inside Maputo has visibly improved.

Maputo is by no means a besieged city. Traffic uses all

three main routes out of Maputo, to Swaziland, South Africa and the north, often without any military escort. Lorries carrying food into the city from farmland 150 miles or more away make the journey without difficulty.

This does not mean that the roads are entirely safe, but the incidence of rebel ambushes has declined dramatically over the past year.

Indeed, throughout southern Mozambique the army has the upper hand. The fertile Limpopo Valley in Gaza province, scene of fierce battles in 1983, is now calm, and in the neighbouring province of Inhambane, Mozambique's most successful military commander, Major-General Domingos Fondo, is mopping up the last MNR

camps in the arid interior.

In Manica province, which borders on Zimbabwe, Mozambican troops have been making some headway in Tambara and Guro, MNR strongholds since late 1981. The military commander here, Major-General obias Dai, says that "unidentified planes" are resupplying the MNR in Manica.

It is north of the Zambezi that the situation is at its most serious for the Mozambican Government. Operating out of bases in Malawi, the MNR has stepped up its activities in all three provinces bordering that country — Tete, Zambezia and Niassa. Reports from both Tete and Zambezia indicate that fresh

supplies of sophisticated hardware, including anti-tank missiles, have reached the MNR via Malawi.

The spectre haunting northern Mozambique has a name — it is Rombezia, a separatist project formulated in the 1960s by opponents of the liberation movement, Frelimo, who wanted to carve out a separate state between the rivers Zambezi and Rovuma (the border with Tanzania). The separatists operated out of Malawi under the name Unar (Rombezia African National Union), and their adherents linked up with the MNR in 1982.