

Anthony Robinson
ELEVEN years after the Mozambican National Resistance (MNR) was set up as the idea of Mr Ken Flower, then head of Rhodesia's Central Intelligence Organisation (CIO), it remains a somewhat shadowy organisation.

At regular intervals the movement's spokesman in Lisbon, Mr Evo Fernandes, issues reports on the progress of the civil war being waged against the Frelimo Government in Mozambique. But its operational commander and President, Mr Afonso Dhlakama, is little known.

Mr Dhlakama is the son of a local chief in the Chibabava region of Sofala province who attended mission school before studying at an industrial and commercial high school in Beira. After graduation he joined the Portuguese army, then fighting against Frelimo. In 1972 he deserted and crossed the frontier into Tanzania to join Frelimo, becoming a company commander a year later.

Two years later, however, he fell out with Frelimo, after accusing the new post-independence provincial governor of abuse of power. He crossed into Rhodesia where he met Mr Orlando Cristina, the man chosen by Mr Flower to head the Free Mozambique radio station. This became the rallying point for disaffected Mozambicans willing to join the Rhodesian-inspired campaign of sabotage and disruption against Frelimo.

When Mr Andre Matsangaisa, the first commander of the

Meanwhile back in the bush . . .

Sunday Star, 26/10/86

MNR, was killed in 1979, Mr Dhlakama became leader. A year later, in March 1980, South Africa took control of the MNR at the onset of Zimbabwean independence and air-lifted many MNR cadres out of the country for training and indoctrination.

The decision to support, supply and train the MNR was a key element in Pretoria's grand strategy of subverting and emasculating the newly independent, Marxist-orientated black states.

The MNR also received financial and logistical support from former wealthy Portuguese colonialists.

In March 1985, exactly a year after the signing of the Nkomati Accord, under which South Africa undertook to end its clandestine support for the MNR in return for Maputo's expulsion of supporters of the banned African National Congress fighting against apartheid in South Africa, Mr Louls Nel, then South

Africa's deputy Foreign Minister, said in an interview that the MNR's main foreign backers were Mr Antonio Champallimaud, a former wealth colonialist now based in Brazil, and Mr Manuel Bulhosa, resident in Portugal and former owner of the Lourenco Marques refinery and other business interests.

Prior to his death 18 months ago, Mr Jorge Jardim, reputedly the richest man in pre-independence Mozambique, was the movement's main financier. Further aid came from Saudi Arabia, ostensibly in support of the four million Muslims in the north of the country who had never shown much enthusiasm for Frelimo and its programme of secularising and de-tribalising the country. Saudi aid to the MNR was reportedly shipped into the country via the Comores Islands.

In a rare interview published in The Star last May, however, Mr Dhlakama insisted that "our

main supplier is Frelimo, our arms and ammunition are captured from Machel's army".

Before the death of President Machel in the aircraft crash last Sunday night, the MNR leadership appeared to be pinning its hopes on divisions between Marxists, Africanists and pro-Western factions in the Frelimo Government to oust the president.

Now, to judge by statements from Lisbon, the MNR intends to step up its military offensive, on the assumption that the death of President Machel removes the principal cement which has kept the demoralised Frelimo army together.

The danger now is that the threat of a renewed MNR offensive could be a major consideration in the succession struggle in Maputo. Given also the strained relations with South Africa, the temptation could be to choose a pro-Soviet leader, with a view to seeking greater Soviet and/or Cuban military assistance.

However, the Soviet Union's willingness to step up its commitment to Mozambique is as yet an unknown and somewhat doubtful quantity. It would, in any case, guarantee continuing hostility from South Africa, while reducing the sympathy and willingness to supply aid from the West.

In short, the clear-cut military solution sought by Frelimo appears to be as much a chimera for the MNR which, despite its success in destroying Mozambique's economic and social infrastructure, has given no evidence so far of its potential as an alternative government. — The Financial Times, London.