

Mozambique: What is the MNR?

Rebels of the *Resistência Nacional Moçambicana* (MNR) have devastated large areas of Mozambique, driving farmers away and wrecking production. The MNR's external leadership, which has the task of explaining the movement to the world, is out of touch with the internal leadership and is ill-informed about events in Mozambique itself. Below we examine the external and internal dimensions of the MNR.

Over the past year, the MNR's president, Afonso Dhlakama, has moved to africanise the movement's image, removing people compromised by the colonial past. In particular, he has taken steps to cut the Portuguese connection, a move long urged by the MNR's friends in the government of South Africa and anti-communist lobbies in the United States. They argue that the Mozambican government will be more likely to negotiate with MNR leaders who are not Portuguese citizens.

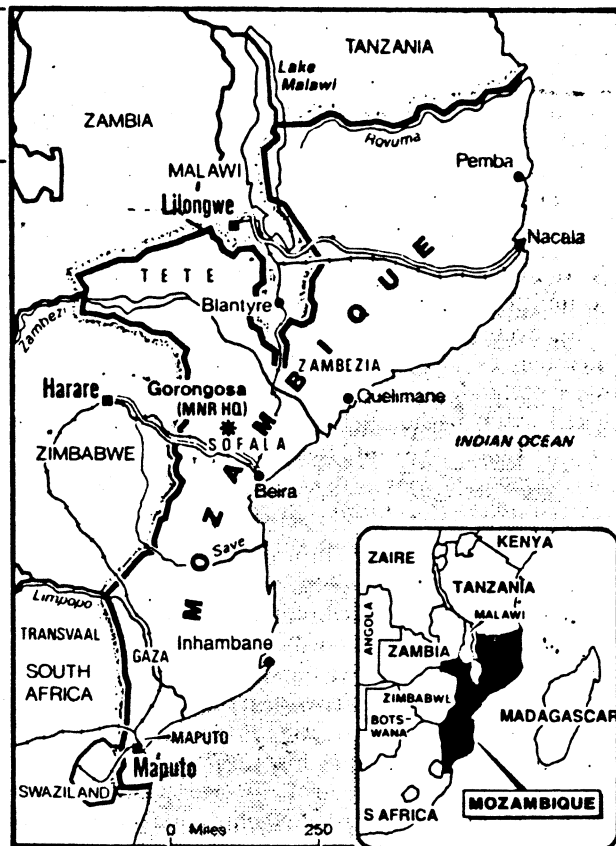
The major casualty of africanisation so far is former Secretary-General Evo Fernandes, a Portuguese citizen of Goan descent. Before independence in 1975 he was a close associate of the leading settler businessman Jorge Jardim and worked on his newspaper *Noticias da Beira* until ousted by pro-Mozambique Liberation Front (FRELIMO) journalists in 1974. Fernandes is believed to have worked for the colonial secret police.

In mid-1986 Dhlakama abolished the post of secretary-general, putting Fernandes in charge of a studies department which has so far published not a word. In February 1987 Fernandes was expelled from the MNR's National Executive Council. Fernandes' friend Jorge Correia, a white Portuguese who had been the MNR's Western Europe representative, was expelled from the MNR altogether. According to an announcement made by the MNR on 27 February, Fernandes and Correia were accused of 'false information, theft of money, use of trusted individuals to divide the MNR, and nepotism.' We have no details of the precise allegations, but the 'false information' referred to is probably the incident in April 1986 when Correia claimed MNR responsibility for a car bomb in Maputo that injured 49 people. This deeply embarrassed the MNR, which attributed the bomb to dissidents inside the Mozambican army.

The new external line up is:

- João da Silva Ataíde, briefly Mozambican ambassador to Lisbon in 1982, who resigned in mysterious circumstances and has now resurfaced as the MNR's man in Lisbon.
- José Francisco Mascarenhas, his number two, a former agent of the Mozambican *Serviço Nacional de Segurança Popular* (SNASP) secret police. After National Director of Security Jorge Costa defected to South Africa in 1982, Mascarenhas was one of about 100 SNASP officers detained for several months. After his release he too went to South Africa, and thence to Portugal.
- Francisco Nota Moises, the new information officer appointed in December 1986. He was formerly an employee of the *British Broadcasting Corporation* at its Nairobi monitoring station.
- Foreign Relations Secretary Artur Januário de Fonseca, last heard of in West Germany in 1986. He is a black Mozambican who worked for the Portuguese secret police in the early 1960s.

Hence blacks now head the MNR's information department and its European operation. But in fact



all MNR public statements since the fall of Fernandes have been made by another white Portuguese, Paulo de Oliveira, a former associate of Fernandes and Correia. He worked for the far-right Lisbon daily *O Dia* before becoming chief European spokesman.

The MNR also has a new representative in Washington. This is Luis Serapião, a former FRELIMO student who refused to return to Mozambique in the 1960s and is now a professor at Howard University. Serapião has written articles bitterly attacking FRELIMO for its mixed-race composition. A row flared up in August 1986 over who really represented the MNR in Washington - Serapião or Artur Vilanculu, another FRELIMO student of the 1960s who later joined the splinter Mozambique Revolutionary Committee (COREMO) before joining the MNR in 1982. Both Serapião and Vilanculu had backing from extremists in the USA, including the *Heritage Foundation* and *Free the Eagle*. They collaborated to set up a pro-MNR Mozambique Information Office, headed by Thomas Schaff, an American citizen who worked for the Zimbabwean Agricultural Extension Service near the Mozambican border until 1985, when the Zimbabwean security police began to investigate his activities.

So Serapião has now won his battle with Vilanculu to be recognised as MNR spokesman in the USA. Certainly Vilanculu's MNR credentials look shaky. In September 1985 he was leading another splinter organisation called CONIMO (Mozambique National Independent Committee), formed in West Germany and including FRELIMO dissidents, such as Zeca Caliate, a FRELIMO commander who deserted to the Portuguese in 1973, and Maximo Dias, ex-chairman of a group which split from FRELIMO in 1974.

These are not the only splinter-groups connected

with the MNR. They also include the *Democratic Party for the Liberation of Mozambique (PADELIMO)* led by Fanuel Mahluza, a FRELIMO fourder-member who quit in 1963. He now divides his time between Kenya and South Africa. Mozambican sources suggest that PADELIMO is an MNR front, set up to facilitate its operations in Kenya, which is important for the MNR as a source of passports.

Also living in Kenya is former FRELIMO central committee member Leo Milas (alias Seifu Milasi) who, according to some accounts, was a founding member of the MNR. He is a black American who pretended to be Mozambican and infiltrated FRELIMO in the 1960s. He was unmasked by the late Dr Eduardo Mondlane in 1966 and expelled from the movement. He works for the *United Nations Environment Programme* in Nairobi.

The internal leadership of the MNR is much less complicated. It hinges on Commander-in-Chief Afonso Dhlakama, who claims to have deserted from the Portuguese army to join FRELIMO in 1972. But in 1972 he was a student at a seminary in Tete Province, and is two years too young to have been conscripted into the Portuguese army. In Maputo it is said that his military career began with FRELIMO only in 1974. He was trained at FRELIMO's rear base at Nachingwea in Tanzania before being put in charge of logistics in Sofala Province.

In 1976 Dhlakama was accused of robbery and put in a 're-education' camp, from which he escaped in 1977 to join the newly-formed MNR in Rhodesia. The Rhodesians put him in charge of the MNR in 1979, after the death of the MNR's first commander André Matade Matsangaissa. Dhlakama won a bitter leadership dispute within the MNR, which transferred its rear base to the Transvaal after Zimbabwean independence.

The rest of the MNR leadership is predominantly Ndauspeaking, a legacy of the Rhodesian *Central Intelligence Organisation's* patronage. Ndauchauvinism gives the MNR a certain legitimacy in parts of central Mozambique, but stops it getting popular support south of the Save River. In the north, the MNR benefitted in 1982 from its absorption of groups of *Africa Libre* fighters operating out of Malawi (AC Vol 23 Nos 15, 16). One of the *Africa Libre* leaders was businessman Gimo Phiri, who became the MNR's chief representative in Malawi, operating under a variety of assumed names. Photocopies of his various passports were among the evidence submitted by Presidents Samora Machel and Kenneth Kaunda and Prime Minister Robert Mugabe to President Kamuzu Banda in their confrontation over Malawian support for the MNR in Blantyre on 11 September 1986. The MNR operates out of Malawi and indeed is quite popular there, not least because MNR fighters take booty and agricultural produce for sale in Malawi and buy consumer goods. In September and October 1986 the MNR launched a major offensive from Malawi into Zambezia and Tete Provinces. A government counter-offensive, now officially confirmed as aided by Tanzanian troops (AC Vol 28 No 2) is driving

them back in Zambezia especially.

By late February 1987, the MNR still had free rein in much of upper Zambezia, northern Tete, and northern Sofala. MNR claims to have launched heavy attacks in the Beira Corridor are discouraged in Maputo and Harare. Zimbabwean troops guard the corridor and keep the railway running. The MNR, operating from bases in South Africa, has also made some attacks into Gaza and Maputo Provinces to divert government forces from their northern counter-attack. At a very generous estimate, the MNR may be said to have unrestricted freedom of movement in some 10-15% of Mozambique's total area. Zambezia, Tete and Sofala were the only provinces in which the MNR forced postponement of a significant number of elections during recent general elections.

But it is misleading to speak of MNR control. MNR bands, many of which really are bandits, with no political motive, do not aim to establish zones of effective control but to put pressure on the government by driving peasant families off the land and into the towns or over the borders. War-parties single out teachers, health workers and government shops for attack. There is no doubt that MNR bands have committed horrible atrocities against civilians.

The remote areas where MNR warlords are more or less secure from government attack appear to be run by local chiefs, with farmers producing food for the MNR. Some eye-witnesses report MNR fighters as having poor equipment, short of ammunition and reduced to cleaning their guns with hot water. In other cases they have bazookas, machine-guns and grenade-launchers. Fighters interviewed in Zambezia said they fought for the MNR because it was preferable to fleeing to Malawi or Zambia. Dhlakama himself tells visitors that he is fighting for ideological reasons, but he seems to be the only one who thinks so, although some MNR fighters claim to have joined the movement after being expropriated by FRELIMO officials. There is evidence that the MNR runs forced labour camps.

MNR warlords operate with a good deal of autonomy but are in regular high-frequency radio contact with their central bases in Mozambique, or even rear bases in Malawi or South Africa. Visitors to Dhlakama's headquarters report aides constantly coming and going with radio messages. Dhlakama, and other leaders such as Commandante Calisto in Zambezia, travel on small motor-cycles looted from sacked towns. But Dhlakama's claims to have a regular government seem pure fantasy. MNR members captured by the government are unable to name any MNR leader except Dhlakama.

The MNR interests South Africa because of its regional role. Its attacks on railways have the effect of forcing the front-line states into dependence on the South African railway system. Nothing is moving on the Malawi-Beira line. The Limpopo line, from Zimbabwe to Maputo, has been closed to international traffic since mid-1984. The Malawi-Nacala line is also out of operation. Other international lines (Beira-Zimbabwe, Maputo-Swaziland, Maputo-South Africa) have been subject to sporadic sabotage but have never been completely shut ●