

# Mozambique: Regional Response to the MNR

During a visit to Zimbabwe, President Joaquim Chissano outlined the regional strategy for defeating the South African-inspired banditry of the Mozambique National Resistance.

By Andrew Meldrum

The widespread international support—from West and East as well as the non-aligned nations—for the Mozambican government was highlighted during President Joaquim Chissano's recent state visit to Zimbabwe and Angola. Naturally, Chissano received firm commitments of continued support for his government from his Frontline allies; but speaking to Harare's large international press corps, the Mozambican president also stressed that his country was receiving a wide range of support that cut across political boundaries in its battle against the South African-backed Mozambique National Resistance (MNR).

In Harare, Chissano reminded his audience that the Mozambican army was bolstered by Zimbabwean and Tanzanian troops and he announced the surprising news that Malawian troops may soon help combat the MNR forces in northern Mozambique. He said that although other African countries, like Nigeria, could be called upon for troops, currently the "efforts by Mozambique and her neighbouring countries should be sufficient."

However, his government needs more military supplies and logistical support for the war. So far, the Western powers have limited their aid to food and other humanitarian relief, with the exception of the British Military Advisory and Training Team (BMATT) programme, which trains Mozambican platoon commanders to British standards in Zimbabwe's Eastern Highlands.

President Chissano charged that South Africa had recently tried to ship new supplies to the MNR bandits, but he said the plan was foiled when Mozambican troops fought off MNR forces trying to take control of two small Indian Ocean ports, Pebane and Micaune, in central Zambezia province. "They did not succeed because we acted in time to prevent the re-supply through the sea," said Chissano. "This is the latest attempt

by South Africa to give logistical support to the bandits." Mozambique has for more than a year charged that neighbouring Malawi has been a base and a supply route for the MNR. Malawi, the only black African country to have full diplomatic relations with South Africa, appears to be guilty of such charges, despite its protestations of innocence.

In Harare, Chissano said his government had passed on to Blantyre new reports that MNR rebels retreating from Zimbabwean and Mozambican troops had fled into Malawi, but he also said he felt the Malawian problem would be resolved by the new joint security agreement signed between the two countries. The Mozambican head of state disclosed that Malawian army troops should soon reopen the 300-mile railway from Malawi to the northern Mozambican port of Nacala, which has been closed for more

than two years because of MNR sabotage. The port is landlocked Malawi's closest access to the sea, and "it is in their interest to make sure that their sea outlet is free of bandits. Both of us will benefit from this," said Chissano. He added that the international aid going to his country was helping his government to fend off the MNR and to grapple with the horrifying breakdown of everyday life in Mozambique's rural areas. The United Nations is launching an appeal for \$200 million to mount a massive food aid programme to the rural Mozambicans suffering from hunger.

Diplomats in Harare noted that international attention focussing on the Mozambican conflict highlights how the South African crisis is affecting the region. "The Mozambican conflict today is analogous to the Spanish Civil War in the 1930s, as it is a conflict in which the international forces are choosing sides, and it may well be the precursor to a much larger conflict that affects the whole region," says a military historian in Harare.

## No Negotiations

Zimbabwe currently has an estimated 10,000 troops in central Mozambique to safeguard the 190-mile transport corridor to the Mozambican port of Beira, Zimbabwe's nearest seaport. Zimbabwean troops have also recently spurred an offensive with the Mozambican army to regain control of the Zambezi river valley which cuts Mozambique in two. A joint Zimbabwean-Mozambican force in February re-took five strategic towns in the Zambezi area that had been controlled by the MNR, Zimbabwean Minister of Information Nathan Shamuyarira announced at the time of Chissano's visit. There are estimated to be about 2,000 Tanzanian troops also deployed in Mozambique.

During his Zimbabwe visit—the first since he became Mozambique's president—Joaquim Chissano ruled out any possibility that his government would negotiate with the MNR, which he dismissed as "mere products of apartheid and colonialism," adding "Why else would they destroy their own villages, murder, rape and maim their own people?"

"We cannot think for one minute that we can negotiate or share power with such criminals. We must fight them to the death," said the president to a crowd of 40,000 Zimbabweans during his visit.

Zimbabwean Prime Minister Robert Mugabe also pledged that his government's military commitment to Mozambique would remain firm. "There will never come a time when we shall surrender to the bandits of the MNR, never ever, never ever," said Prime Minister Mugabe to the cheering crowds at Rufaro Stadium. ▲▲▲

