

The Mozambican National Resistance (RENAMO) as described by ex-participants

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This report, based on recent interviews with thirty-two ex-participants in the Mozambican National Resistance (Renamo), describes the operations of this guerrilla group and its linkages with the South African Defence Force.

The interviews provide compelling new evidence for two major conclusions:

(1) A high proportion of the Renamo rank-and-file combatants, probably in excess of 90%, is recruited by force, and kept in the Renamo ranks by control mechanisms including threats of execution for attempted desertion.

(2) The professionally competent Renamo military operations are sustained by regular supplies from South Africa as well as by a centralised system of command, control and communications (C3) and a co-ordinated programme of basic and advanced military training.

During a seven-week research trip in November and December 1988, the author carried out the interviews individually, out of hearing and sight of officials. Half of those interviewed had accepted the amnesty offer of the Mozambican government, the other half were prisoners captured in battle. Of the thirty-two interviews, nine were in Maputo, ten in Chimoi in central Mozambique, and thirteen in Zambezia Province, ensuring representation of Mozambique's three major geographical zones.

The interviews averaged forty-minutes to an hour. All but two were in Portuguese. The respondents clearly distinguished their own direct observations, what they had heard from other Renamo combatants, and questions that they lacked information to answer.

The average age of the interviewees was 27, their average level of education between third and fourth grade. The earliest participant in Renamo was abducted in December 1978, and the latest in August 1987. On average they had spent 37 months in the Renamo forces. They included three with more than eight years experience, and nineteen whose stay extended into 1988.

Without exception, all 27 who had been directly involved in combat inside Mozambique said they had originally been abducted at gunpoint. Moreover, they said that all or almost all of those who trained with them had also been forcibly abducted. Most said the standard penalty for trying to escape was execution.

They described the supply operation for munitions as a strict need-to-know system in which only some soldiers had direct access to the deliveries. Almost all made reference to captured arms, but none said these were their major source. Outlying bases received supplies from central bases in each province by head portage. Bases in southern Mozambique received some supplies overland

from South Africa, but elsewhere the pattern was of periodic landings of DC-3's, parachute drops, or sea landings.

A given area normally received supplies only once or twice a year in quantities sufficient to last that long. The last specific delivery cited in my interviews was a plane landing in Zambezia Province in April 1988, mentioned by a combatant who escaped in June 1988. Another ex-Renamo member, speaking to journalists in Manica Province in late November, said she had carried supplies from South African planes which landed in the Gorongosa area in October 1988.

South African involvement was also cited in an interview by a recent defector from Renamo's Lisbon office. He said that in October, when he left, they were still receiving Renamo military communications from the same South African officer who had always handled the communications.

The interviewees also described a highly centralised system of command, control and communications, with its apex the communications link between the Renamo headquarters in central Mozambique and South African special forces. The military training they described ranged from basic training and special courses in bases in Mozambique to long-term instruction for selected soldiers in South Africa. ●