

Machel leaves painful legacy

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MOZAMBIQUE'S embattled Frelimo government was in a state of crisis before President Samora Machel was killed. His death has now plunged it into what might be called a super-crisis.

As the President's body lies in state in Maputo, awaiting burial on Tuesday, the Frelimo political bureau is confronting decisions that will profoundly affect the country's immediate and long-term future.

What it decides could bring radical change to one-party Marxist Mozambique.

First on the politburo's order of business is to mourn, inter and suitably honour the bouncy little freedom fighter who supplanted the former Portuguese territory through its first 11 years of independence.

But Machel's era has come to a close and a new one is beginning. The politburo's prime concern now is to try to dictate the shape and direction of the post-Machel era.

To a considerable extent, this will be decided by the choice of Machel's successor.

Machel's sudden death must have brought to a head a long-simmering conflict between the left and right wings of Mozambique's only legal party, a struggle not only over ideology and economic policy, but also over the waging of the guerilla war.

Whichever way the war is looked at, there is no doubt that Frelimo has been losing it. In the most extreme interpretation, the very life of the Frelimo government is at stake.

What to do about the war is therefore the biggest single issue facing the party's 140-member central committee, which ostensibly shapes party policy, and the 11-member politburo, which does.

The politburo's choice of president to succeed Machel could give a pointer to how it proposes to tackle the war issue and will certainly influence, if not dictate, the actions that will be taken from now on.

The crucial question is whether to end the fighting by reaching a political settlement with the Mozambican National Resistance (MNR) movement or to carry on trying to crush or contain it militarily, in the face of the harsh reality that the rebels are going from strength to strength while the chances of Frelimo getting effective outside help remain slim.

What makes a deal with the MNR so hard for Frelimo to swallow is that it almost certainly would involve a compromise with Frelimo's Marxist-Leninist ideology.

To outside observers the failure of that ideology is abundantly illustrated by Mozambique's unchecked slide into poverty and growing hardship for its 13 million people. Frelimo puts the blame on the war, which now eats up half of the national budget, and particularly on South Africa for allegedly preventing the defeat of the rebels by continuing to supply them.

Deviating from basic Marxist tenets would be painful, for they are deeply cherished by the politburo.

When the Frente de Libertacao de Mocambique was formed in Dar es Salaam in 1962 by the merger of three smaller movements, it had no Marxist or, indeed, any well-defined ideological hue.

This remained the case when Frelimo first resorted to arms in 1964 to end rule from Portugal. It was a liberation movement rather than a political party, and a relatively small one, with fewer than 3 000 combatants after 10 years in the bush.

The Marxist colouring came partly from the fact that the Soviet Union, Czechoslovakia and Communist China were the countries most ready to supply the Frelimo guerillas with weapons.

As the movement became more confident of actually succeeding in overthrowing Portugal's rule, the question of the policy to be adopted after independence came to the fore.

From the beginning, Machel was associated with the radical faction of the movement then led by Marcelino dos Santos and which was opposed by a moderate nationalist ethnic grouping.

Both factions have claimed to have had the support of Frelimo's founder and first president, Dr Eduardo Mondlane. However, his assassination by a parcel bomb in 1969 opened the way for Machel to assume the leadership of the party and to consolidate the power of the radicals.

Frelimo nevertheless took power at independence in 1975 as a socialist but not a Marxist party.

Restructuring of the party was assiduously promoted by the radical faction, however, and by 1979 it had emerged as a fully-fledged Marxist-Leninist party.

From the start, Frelimo tolerated no political opposition and this may be one reason why the MNR developed into a powerful, if loosely-knit, resistance movement that today challenges Frelimo's control in more than two-thirds of Mozambique.

Though it incorporates some dissident Mozambique political figures who had opposed the growth of Marxism in Frelimo, the MNR (Movimento Nacional tencia de Mocambique) was first formed by the Rhodesian government as an instrument of retaliation against Mozambique's support for the Zanu guerillas.

The Rhodesians were interested not so much in overthrowing the Frelimo government as in discouraging it from sheltering and aiding Zanu.

When Rhodesia became Zimbabwe, the MNR was taken over by South Africa, whose government had viewed the growth of a Marxist regime on its border with horror. Under South Africa's wing, the MNR became a better organised and more effective force.

Some MNR members may be given the benefit of the doubt and credited with having made

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expedient use of Rhodesia and South Africa to promote their efforts to overthrow Marxist domination in their homeland. But the MNR has never projected a clear ideological image or presented crisp policies.

It has been easy for Frelimo to characterise it as a "bandit" group.

To some extent this has been due to the MNR's inexperience in public relations, but more to its inability to produce a strong and charismatic leader.

Unlike Jonas Savimbi of Unita in Angola, the present MNR leader, the bespectacled Mr Afonso Dhlakama, is hardly known outside his organisation. It is doubtful that more than five out of any 1 000 newspaper readers in any country would recognise a photograph of him.

The MNR, which is also known as Renamo, does have policies, however. In general, it wants a Mozambique that will be non-aligned internationally and will promote a free enterprise economy with a measure of state control.

It favours a political structure blending ethnic customs with Western-style democratic government. The right of the people to select their government by periodic free elections appears from the MNR's statements to be one of its fundamental requirements.

South Africa has made no secret of its arms supplies to the MNR before the signing of the Nkomati Accord between Pretoria and Maputo in 1984.

The Frelimo government says South Africa has violated the Accord, a mutual non-aggression treaty, by continuing to supply the rebels secretly. Pretoria denies this.

The MNR attributes its growing success since Nkomati to its ability to capture arms from the dispirited Frelimo troops.

Whatever the reason, it has reduced Frelimo's control of Mozambique virtually to the urban centres and has made unescorted road travel hazardous almost everywhere.

Yet the rebels can make no convincing claim to popular support. Without an election it is hard to make an accurate assessment, but there is little doubt that the MNR is in no position to put up a viable government at present.



It has set up no government-in-exile, only a variety of spokesmen in overseas capitals, some of whose credentials are dubious and who seem to be at odds with one another.

Neither has it been able to hold any part of Mozambique long enough to set up any kind of administration.

After Frontline States threatened recently to close Malawi's borders unless it stopped sheltering the rebels, large MNR forces, having been recently expelled, appeared in areas close to the Malawi border and captured several towns.

If they can hold the towns, their standing will rise in Mozambique and the outside world.

Even as hit-and-run guerrillas, however, the rebels have worn down Frelimo's control to the point where Pretoria has made serious efforts to bring them together with Frelimo in talks aimed at a political settlement.

These produced the "Pretoria Declaration" of 1984 in which the two sides agreed in principle to a cease-fire.

Nothing came of this much-ballyhooped agreement, however, for it subsequently transpired that while the MNR thought the process was leading to free elections, Frelimo saw it only as an amnesty exercise enabling the rebels to abandon the struggle without fear of punishment and recognise Frelimo's sovereignty.

The South Africans also thought when they arranged

the talks that they were about negotiating an end to the war and a political settlement.

There is evidence that at least some members of the Frelimo government had similar ideas, but that these were unknown to, let alone shared by, other members of the government.

President Machel and the hard-liners in his government have persistently rejected an accommodation with the rebels.

Earlier this year, he gave up some of his administrative responsibilities to give him more time for the prosecution of the war.

Yet expectations of a negotiated settlement have persisted among outside observers, if only because of the desperate position into which the Frelimo government is being pushed by the rebels' successes and the continuing decline of the economy.

The extent of this decline is shown by statistics.

The country's external debt rose from zero in 1973 to \$1.4 billion in 1984, when Mozambique was forced to default on payment of its foreign debt.

Seaborne freight traffic fell from 17 million tons in 1974 to 1.2 million in 1984. Electricity production dropped from 14 billion kWh in 1973 to 5.8 billion kWh in 1981.

Coal production decreased from 574 000 tons in 1975 to 100 000 in 1984 and cotton from 290 000 tons in 1972 to 73 000 in 1981.

Even production of cashew nuts, which was a major peasant industry, fell from 216 000 tons in 1973 to 5 800 tons in 1983.

Deaths due to famine have risen from a very few to hundreds of thousands, and thousands of refugees have fled to other countries, mainly South Africa, to escape the economic hardships as well as the war.

Though some foodstuffs are now in good supply, many staples are rationed and the black market flourishes.

The government blames these problems on drought, floods and the war rather than on the economic system it has imposed on the country.

But while the weather and the war clearly are major factors, the incentive-killing Marxist system has been blamed to a considerable extent by Western analysts.

Their view is supported by the experience of almost every other African country that has imposed similar systems.

The Machel government has softened the harsh constraints it originally applied on private enterprise, but apparently not enough to halt the economic slide.

A question given increased importance by Machel's death is whether the growing misery in which most Mozambicans apparently live will be enough to force Frelimo to negotiate with the rebels.

While some in the Frelimo government appear to have been willing to consider negotiations with the MNR, previous efforts by Pretoria to arrange talks were hampered by the Mozambicans' refusal to deal with the rebels' externally-based representatives, especially the former Lisbon-based secretary-general, Evo Fernandes.

Mr Fernandes was recently removed in what may have been a move by the MNR to open the way for talks with Frelimo.

But at the same time the rebels have announced they will now negotiate only with Frelimo military leaders and not with the politicians.

This apparently unrealistic demand suggests the MNR have been emboldened by their military successes and see the possibility of creating a split between Frelimo's politicians and soldiers.