

SADC AND THE CONFLICT IN MOZAMBIQUE: QUIET OR ABSENT DIPLOMACY?

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The attitude of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) denotes a certain understanding of the historical, political and socioeconomic dynamics in Mozambique that precludes a concerted diplomatic response to the persistent military conflict that threatens full-blown civil war.

SADC's understanding of the factors influencing the conflict may be based on several assumptions. Firstly, that conflict is of a domestic nature. For example, opposition party, *Resistência Nacional de Moçambique's* (RENAMO), demands include that its former guerrilla forces be (re)integrated into Mozambique's military and police forces; a call for the *departization*¹ of the state apparatus; and the right to govern territory where it obtained the majority of votes in the 2014 general elections. Secondly, SADC may believe that the Mozambique government *Frente de Libertação de Moçambique* (FRELIMO) possesses the necessary internal capacity to effectively deal with the crisis. After more than twenty years of apparent peace and stability, amid continuous threats by RENAMO to revert to armed struggle, FRELIMO has demonstrated its ability to resolve political upheaval without necessarily involving SADC. Thirdly, in the present global and regional context, post the Cold War era and the end of apartheid, SADC does not foresee the potential for conflict escalation, as RENAMO lacks the required (external) political and military backing to be of serious concern. Finally and perhaps most importantly, linked to the previous assumption, is the negative historical legacy associated with RENAMO. A movement frequently criticised as originating and being supported by colonial anti-revolutionary Southern Rhodesia (Zimbabwe) and South African apartheid forces. SADC was established in answer to the struggle against colonialism and white-minority rule in the region. Of its 15 member states, five of the most prominent ones are governed by former liberation movements, namely, The People's Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA), the African National Congress (ANC) in South Africa, Mozambique Liberation Front (Frelimo), Namibia's South West Africa People's Organisation (SWAPO) and the Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU PF).

¹ The term "departization" of the state is used here to refer to freeing the state apparatus from control or domination by one or more political parties. "Partization" of the state refers to the full control or domination of the state apparatus by one or more political parties.

THE CIVIL WAR (1976 – 1992)

A brutal civil war, with devastating social and economic consequences, erupted between the government of FRELIMO and rebel movement RENAMO just a year after Mozambique's independence in 1975. The death toll was estimated to be one hundred thousand, while nearly one million indirect casualties were recorded. Thirteen percent of the country's population (15 million in 1990) became war refugees and approximately 4.5 million people were internally displaced. The country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) estimated at US\$1.969 billion, was half of what it would have been without the impact of the war. The economic infrastructure of the country was also in tatters. Sixty percent of the country's primary schools were either destroyed or closed; roads, bridges and communication systems were also extensively damaged. Mozambique's debt had grown from US\$2.7 billion in 1985 to US\$4.7 billion in 1991 marking the country as one of the most aid dependent nations in the world.

RENAMO is considered by many sources within and outside the SADC region as having been created and supported by outside forces. The Rhodesian Central Intelligence Organization (CIO) was in fact deeply and actively involved in the creation and support of RENAMO up until 1980. White Rhodesians feared the influence of the FRELIMO government on their existence and gathered anti-FRELIMO network members to overthrow the government. This network gathered in Rhodesia in 1976 to form Mozambique National Resistance (today RENAMO). In 1980, when Zimbabwe's independence resulted in the loss of support for RENAMO by the former Ian Smith regime, the movement was funded by the South African apartheid government to continue destabilising Mozambique to counter FRELIMO's support of the South African liberation movement, the African National Congress (ANC). Domestically, RENAMO benefited from the significant disgruntlement amongst large swaths of the rural population (mainly from north and central Mozambique) who felt marginalised by FRELIMO's socialist policies and the manner in which they were being implemented.²

The Mozambican conflict ended with the signing of a general peace agreement in 1992 under the auspices of the Catholic Church (Community of Sant'Egidio). However, two years before, the country had adopted a new constitution which, in a changed international political and economic context (brought by the end of the cold war and some domestic factors like drought), paved the way for the end of the war and the signing of the General Peace Agreement (GPA) on 4 October 1992. This constitution finally included most of the issues RENAMO "allegedly" had been fighting for, namely, a multiparty democracy, freedom of organisation, free and secret ballot, individual basic rights and direct vote for a president.

MULTIPARTY ELECTIONS AND PYRRHIC VICTORIES

The GPA also created the necessary legal and economic conditions for the transformation of former guerrilla movement, RENAMO, into a legitimate political party. Since 1994 Mozambique has run periodic multiparty elections. There have been five general elections (presidential and parliamentary), two provincial elections and four local elections. At national level, the president and 250 national parliamentary

² Jaime Pinto, *Jogos Africanos* (Lisboa: Edição esfera dos livros, 2008), David Robinson, *Renamo, Malawi and the struggle to succeed Banda: Assessing theories of Malawian intervention in Mozambique's civil war* (Eras Edition 11, November 2009); Sayaka Funada-Classen, *The origins of war in Mozambique: A history of unity and division* (South Africa: African Minds, 2012); Alex Vines, *Renamo's rise and decline: the politics of reintegration in Mozambique* (International Peacekeeping 2013, pp. 375-393)

members are elected. FRELIMO has won all general elections (Joaquim Chissano - 1994 and 1999; Armando Guebuza - 2004 and 2009; and Filipe Jacinto Nyusi - 2014) and most of the provincial and local ones. All these electoral processes took place under enormous and constant accusations of electoral fraud, and were strongly contested by the main opposition parties, particularly RENAMO, as well as some local observers. It can be argued that the effects of FRELIMO's Pyrrhic victories may have resulted in further discrediting of the country's electoral processes and its electoral institutions as well as seriously discouraging voters from participating in elections.

CONDITIONS FOR PEACE

In 2013 RENAMO subjected its participation in both the 2013 municipal and 2014 general elections to a number of guarantees by threatening to disrupt the process if they were not met. The most relevant being a call to change the electoral law to allow parity in political party representation under the Mozambique Electoral Commission (CNE). RENAMO also demanded, albeit with less vigour, a guaranteed proportional share of the country's wealth. In an attempt to force FRELIMO to implement these changes, RENAMO reverted to armed struggle. In 2014 after some of its demands were accommodated, more specifically on changes to the electoral legislation, RENAMO agreed to a ceasefire and participated in the electoral process. However, the (re)integration of its troops into the military and police forces, and the implementation of the agreement on *de-partization* of the state apparatus are yet to be implemented. The contested results of the 2014 general elections, won by the ruling FRELIMO, exacerbated the country's fragile political situation. SADC's electoral observers highly commended the institutions involved and classified the process as free, fair and transparent.³ These results, again strongly contested by RENAMO, fuelled the most recent round of military conflict.

PROVINCIAL AUTONOMY

Unhappy with the outcome of the elections, RENAMO's latest ambitious demand is autonomous control of provinces in which it obtained a majority in the 2014 general elections (Sofala, Manica, Tete, Nampula and Zambézia). Parliament rejected the demand on 30 April 2015. RENAMO claims that the electoral process that handed victory to the current President and the ruling party was not free, fair or transparent, and provincial autonomy is the only way to resolve this electoral quarrel. Following FRELIMO's rejection of the proposal, on 2 September 2015, summarily announced the official establishment of a military headquarters in Morrumbala District (Zambézia Province). The command centre would provide police and military training to a RENAMO-led army and police force to secure the autonomous territories unless the government relented and RENAMO was granted the right to peacefully govern the territories. Dialogue for a peaceful settlement between the government and RENAMO deadlocked and RENAMO abandoned its previous objective of autonomous provinces by seizing power by force.⁴

³ Electoral Commissions Forum of SADC Countries. A Preliminary Statement to the National Electoral Commission (CNE) of Mozambique by the Electoral Commissions Forum of SADC Countries (ECF-SADC) Observer Mission on Mozambique Presidential, Parliamentary & Provincial Elections held on the 15th October 2014. Maputo, 16th Day of October 2014

⁴ <http://www.jornalnoticias.co.mz/index.php/main/56659-dhlakama-abandona-ideia-de-governar-a-forca>

REPRISALS

Up until March 2016, the conflict resulted in 10 000 refugees fleeing Tete province into neighbouring Malawi, while many others are said to have entered the Zimbabwean territory.⁵ Figures on direct casualties are difficult to obtain, however, apart from the victims of the quasi-daily attacks on civilian vehicles by RENAMO, 13 bodies have been found scattered in the bush in Manica and Sofala provinces. The bodies were discovered following an investigation into a mass grave in Canda Administrative in Gorongosa district.⁶ Both FRELIMO and RENAMO stand accused of targeting each other's party members, with two FRELIMO local secretaries shot dead allegedly by RENAMO forces.⁷ In 25 May 2016 Amnesty International launched a campaign denouncing Mozambican secret service police of arbitrarily arresting, detaining and shooting Benedito Sabão, a RENAMO supporter.⁸ Local media reported the existence of a government death squad focused on eliminating opposition party and civil society voices critical of the government.⁹ José J. Macuane, a prominent political analyst and commentator, was shot and seriously injured on 23 May 2016, allegedly by this squad because of his critical views on government policies and attitude to crime.¹⁰

ECONOMIC HARDSHIP

The negative economic effect of the conflict on both Malawi and Mozambique will increase as conflict persists. The economic decline, and a threat to future economic gains, has already been attributed to the continuous fighting.¹¹ At least five Malawian vehicles are recorded to have been attacked, prompting the Malawian government to urge truck drivers to bypass Mozambique and use the Zimbabwean route.¹² In Zimbabwe there are rumours that RENAMO is recruiting unemployed youth to join its forces.¹³ In a country with an unemployment rate of an astonishing 95%, joining RENAMO offers an attractive option to young men seeking to secure much needed income. Mozambicans fleeing their country to avoid conflict is not a new phenomenon. At the height of the civil war in 1980, one in three Mozambicans fled their homes for neighbouring countries (South Africa, Malawi, Tanzania and Zimbabwe) with Malawi and South Africa hosting the largest number of Mozambican refugees.

Meanwhile, the impact of the Mozambican conflict with the potential to disrupt neighbouring countries seems to have gone unnoticed by SADC. Apart from Zimbabwe-backed condemnation of RENAMO's armed activities in November 2013 and a call to stop a rebellion, no action by the regional bloc is publicly

⁵ <http://www.voanews.com/content/mozambique-refugees-flee-to-malawi/3139815.html>

⁶ <http://www.africanews.com/2016/05/10/13-dead-bodies-discovered-in-the-center-of-mozambique/>

⁷ <http://opais.sapo.mz/index.php/component/content/article/63-politica/41268-desconhecidos-matam-secretarios-da-frelimo-em-manica.html>

⁸ <http://www.amnestyusa.org/get-involved/take-action-now/mozambique-protect-benedito-sabao-ua-12616>

⁹ Equipa de Investigação do Canal de Moçambique, "A lista de mortes encomendadas pelo governo: esquadrão da morte," *Canal de Moçambique*, April 13, 2016, 2-3

¹⁰ <http://allafrica.com/stories/201605240202.html>

¹¹ <http://www.jornal.ceiri.com.br/crise-politica-em-mocambique-poe-em-risco-ganhos-economicos-recentes/>
<http://www.jornalnoticias.co.mz/index.php/provincia-em-foco/58096-tete-changara-hostilidades-armadas-afectam-ambiente-de-negocios>

¹² <http://www.news24.com/Africa/News/renamo-attacks-malawi-urges-truck-drivers-to-use-zim-route-20160617>

¹³ <http://clubofmozambique.com/news/zimbabwe-borders-under-threat-reads-the-financial-gazette/>

known.¹⁴ South Africa, the European Union and the Catholic Church are yet to respond to invitations by the government of Mozambique to mediate the impasse as a precondition established by RENAMO.

THE DOMESTIC NATURE OF THE CURRENT CONFLICT

The current conflict is essentially a military expression of a domestic political problem that emerged as a result of FRELIMO's political inflexibility that prohibits any form of opposition. FRELIMO conceives itself as the nation thus it cannot be replaced or removed. Any attempt to remove FRELIMO from power is perceived as a threat to nation building and must be completely eliminated even by violent means.¹⁵ It is in this difficult context that RENAMO and other opposition parties are pursuing power alternation. Added to this is FRELIMO's historical legacy as a liberation movement that seems to have granted it the legitimacy to govern the country indefinitely.¹⁶ RENAMO demands to be allowed some space into the country's governing process. FRELIMO's tactical deployment of strategies such as neopatrimonialism, vote rigging and electoral fraud have been used to obstruct RENAMO and other political parties that lack organisational capacity to effectively supervise elections in Mozambique.

While the conflict is essentially domestic, the socioeconomic impact will affect the import and export of goods by Malawi, Zimbabwe and Zambia. Furthermore, the thousands of Mozambican refugees crossing into Malawi and Zimbabwe will further pressurise economies already in dire straits.¹⁷

MOZAMBIQUE POSSESSES THE NECESSARY INTERNAL CAPACITY TO EFFECTIVELY DEAL WITH THE CONFLICT

RENAMO has officially lost all the general elections held in Mozambique and has always threatened to revert to war after each presidential election.¹⁸ However, with the exception of the most recent elections in 2014 these threats have never materialised. This may have indicated that FRELIMO possesses the necessary internal capacity to keep the peace. RENAMO's Dhlakama has too, on many occasions, confirmed having reached agreement with the government and averted military engagement. However, the recurrent nature of the conflict per se and the call by RENAMO to include external mediators should be a warning that existing internal capacity is no guarantee of peace. With FRELIMO controlling significant segments of civil society, it is difficult to gauge the loyalties of Mozambican actors during a mediation process. The most recent attempt on Dhlakama's life and his subsequent house arrest in Beira in October 2015 during a negotiation process involving local mediators, may have significantly discredited local actors as potential mediators in a conflict resolution process.¹⁹

¹⁴ <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-24635338>

¹⁵ Michel Cahen, interview by Fredson Guilengue, April 26, 2016. Available at: www.rosalux.co.za

¹⁶ <http://opais.sapo.mz/index.php/politica/63-politica/32047-general-alberto-chipande-atribui-mais-meio-seculo-de-governacao-ao-partido-frelimo-.html>

¹⁷ <http://www.unhcr.org/en-us/news/latest/2016/4/5710d5746/unhcr-begins-relocating-mozambican-asylum-seekers-malawi.html>

¹⁸ <http://www.dw.com/pt/momentos-de-instabilidade-pol%C3%ADtica-em-mo%C3%A7ambique-uma-cronologia/a-16912568>

¹⁹ <http://www.dw.com/pt/pol%C3%ADcia-mo%C3%A7ambicana-invade-casa-de-dhlakama-na-beira/a-18772017>

THE CURRENT REGIONAL AND GLOBAL POLITICAL CONTEXT AND RENAMO'S HISTORICAL LEGACY

As mentioned, the historical origin of RENAMO and its subsequent military and financial support are associated with anti-revolutionary forces (e.g. apartheid) during the period of the cold war particularly from 1977-1990. From 1980-1983, RENAMO relied heavily on financial and military support provided by the apartheid government to enable it to conduct military raids into both Mozambique and Zimbabwe. When PW Botha came to power in South Africa, RENAMO was part of the regime's "Total Strategy". Thus it grew in size, became more effective and managed to finally establish military bases inside Mozambique.²⁰ The demise of apartheid, which coincided with the end of the cold war, together with internal dynamics such as a long drought and war fatigue, led to the signing of a peace agreement and the end of the civil war in 1992. From 1976 to 1992 RENAMO was in conflict with Mozambican, Zimbabwean and Tanzanian forces.

The assumption that in the current global and regional context conflict will not escalate completely ignores the level of disgruntlement of Mozambicans with FRELIMO, the extent of RENAMO's support particularly in the rural areas, and legal public funding allocated to RENAMO. Before the last general elections Mozambicans demonstrated against the government for the first time. RENAMO's electoral performance shows 40% support by the electorate. In addition, RENAMO's guerrilla-style war tactics require very little external financial and political support to inflict significant disruption, while it can count on widespread popular support for its survival. Rumours are that RENAMO forces, recently spotted close to the Malawian border, wore new military uniforms, carried modern weaponry, and just before the recent government counterattack, troops in Gorongosa were financially able to support local shops.²¹ Since 2013 to date there has been conflict in 6 of the 11 Mozambican provinces (Sofala, Manica, Tete, Nampula, Zambézia and Inhambane) with a higher number of incidences reported in Sofala Province.²²

In light of its membership dominated by former revolutionary movements, in other words, a group of former struggle movements closing ranks in support of each other, and RENAMO's historical legacy, it is highly probable that SADC would simply side with FRELIMO instead of being actively involved in conflict resolution. In fact, the only recorded SADC reference to the Mozambican conflict, through Zimbabwe, was to warn RENAMO to cease its war efforts and a statement that it would consider sending troops to support Mozambique's government should conflict escalate.²³ SADC may already be following through on its promise because it has been reported that an unspecified number of Zimbabweans troops were ambushed by RENAMO on their way to Gorongosa. Dhlakama also claims that mercenaries from Angola and Tanzania are involved in FRELIMO-led combat against RENAMO.²⁴ This might be the reason why RENAMO avoided asking SADC (or the African Union) to be party to group mediation for conflict

²⁰ David Robinson, *Curse on the land: a history of the Mozambican civil war* (Crawley: University of Western Australia, 2006).

²¹ <https://www.issafrika.org/events/mozambiques-new-war>

²² https://www.google.com/maps/d/viewer?ll=-15.077759%2C39.153042&spn=0.150503%2C0.187969&msa=0&mid=1LCUIGpMriQvzeiFUN6_6bdricKU

²³ <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-24635338>

²⁴ <http://nehandaradio.com/2016/06/03/zim-soldiers-reported-killed-mozambique/>

resolution. Instead, as a precondition to resume effective negotiations, it strongly requested that the European Union, the Catholic Church and the South African government are involved.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

There is no doubt that SADC's diplomacy is absent, however, given the apparent lack of internal solutions to this crisis, the associated conflict escalation and the profound economic effects on Mozambique's regional economy (e.g. retraction of investments), I argue that SADC should assume a firm, impartial leadership position. Its role should be to facilitate a mutually acceptable disarmament and re-integration process between FRELIMO and RENAMO.

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