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Brief Report No.: 11/90

MOZAMBIQUE - A COUNTRY IN TRANSITION

This Brief Report was prepared by Anthoni van Nieuwkerk, Research Officer at the Institute, who recently spent a week in Maputo, where he participated in conference on "Rethinking strategies for Mozambique and Southern Africa."

Mozambique today is a country torn apart by its colonial legacy, external aggression, natural disasters and ill-considered economic policies. The initial gains of independence - economic growth, improved health care and educational facilities - have now disappeared, forcing Mozambicans to rethink strategies for the future development of the country. The awesome task of rebuilding Mozambique can only be grasped when one examines figures that reflect the current state of the nation.

Of the approximately 15 million people in Mozambique, more than 70% are under the age of 30.

About 85% of the population live in rural areas.

UNICEF estimates the infant mortality rate at between 325 and 375 per 1000, perhaps the highest in the world, while life expectancy is put at between 40 and 43 years, among the lowest in Africa.

Renamo destroyed 2,655 primary schools and more than 20 secondary schools, depriving half a million pupils of education.

The disruption of the health network by the war is estimated by the authorities to have been responsible for an additional million deaths between 1980 and 1989. There is currently one health post to every 12,000 people, and one doctor to every 44,000 people.

The country is producing less than 10 per cent of its maize requirements, leaving it highly dependent on food aid. Of the 916,000 tons of food needed for 1989/1990, Mozambique received only 295,000.

Total external debt in 1988 was reported to be \$4.3 billion. Debt servicing places a uniquely heavy burden on Mozambique's economy. In 1988, 70% of the country's earnings from exports of goods and services was allocated to debt service.

In the 1989 budget around 40% of total expenditure was allocated to defence.

It is therefore understandable that Mozambican Foreign Minister, Mocumbi, recently asked his fellow countrymen, rather philosophically, who they were and where they were going. To a large extent, these dramatic questions reflect the current less-than-optimistic mood in policy-making circles in Maputo. As discussed below, Mozambique is clearly caught in a process of transition, fraught with contradictions.

The changes currently underway are in many ways brought about by the country's painful and bitter past - a past dominated by the tragic colonial legacy of technical backwardness and ignorance, natural disasters, wars of aggression, and some serious mistakes of government. After 15 years of independence, Mozambicans are seriously questioning the format of almost every aspect of the body politic. A wide range of fundamental political and economic issues are now being debated quite openly - a national debate not unlike the one South Africans currently experience. Perhaps the two most crucial issues under discussion are the political and economic future of the country.

POLITICAL CHANGE

Frelimo's armed struggle was waged with a social revolution as goal. In 1975, Frelimo won the struggle for independence and started implementing its revolutionary vision. This meant the liquidation of the colonial state, racism and capitalism through the transformation of the entire colonial order. At its third Party Congress in 1977, Frelimo adopted Marxism-Leninism as the national ideology and transformed itself from a liberation front into the vanguard party of the 'worker-peasant alliance'. However, the realisation of this ideological vision was not to be. In the years that followed, the socialist revolution increasingly came under fire. Frelimo had to cope with a lack of skilled manpower, an inefficient civil service, a severely distorted economy and divisive ethnicism and regionalism. In addition, the colossal state farm project failed, Renamo atrocities increased, the army lost morale, and Mozambique was buffeted by natural disasters. Thus, after 12 years of ideological experimentation, Frelimo dropped the 'Marxist-Leninist' terminology and started reorganizing the party.

These changes, announced at its fifth Party Congress in 1989, did not prove to be enough. Under pressure from the disastrous consequences of a collapsed planned economy and the continuing

atrocities perpetrated by externally-backed terrorists, the Frelimo government is now faced with the difficult task of democratizing its political system.

DRAFT CONSTITUTION

To this end, a proposed draft constitution is not in wide circulation, with Mozambicans of all walks of life eagerly expressing opinions that are not necessarily in line with traditional party thinking. This atmosphere of openness was made possible by the style and personality of President Chissano. The proposed document provides for direct presidential elections, limits terms of office, and guarantees a broad range of human rights, including freedom of religion and the right to strike.

Although candidates for the People's Assembly need not be Frelimo members, guarantees of a multi-party system are not written into the draft constitution. President Chissano opposes a multi-party system, but is ready to negotiate on it.

Cynical observers assert that the adoption of a new 'Western-style' political system is forced on the country by two factors: the need to end the war, and the political demands of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank.

WAR

It is ironic that, if South African regional policy under P.W. Botha has as one of its aims the destabilisation and replacement of 'communist' regimes with more 'friendly' ones, that strategy achieved partial success in Mozambique. However, by using Renamo as a proxy, South Africa and others have nurtured a monster that is now uncontrollable.

Renamo was created by the Rhodesian Central Intelligence Organisation in 1974 as a fifth column in Mozambique, and handed over to Military Intelligence in South Africa in 1980 when Rhodesia became Zimbabwe. Since then, Renamo has sowed terror and destruction. Large parts of Mozambique are no-go areas for the Mozambique government. The capital Maputo started the year with electricity blackouts caused by Renamo's sabotage. It is not safe to venture more than 10 miles outside the capital at night. There are whole administrative voids in the country and even trains from South Africa are attacked.

NEGOTIATIONS

Despite these difficulties, attempts to start negotiations continue. The current political debate is mainly about the issue of how, rather than whether, Renamo should be incorporated in the new constitutional dispensation. According to the government

direct talks should be held to establish mechanisms whereby:

(i) a ceasefire can be enforced, and (ii) Renamo can be reincorporated into normal socio-economic activities of the country. Although not expressed directly, the adoption of a multi-party system to replace the current one-party system (which is dominated by Frelimo), could become a strong possibility in the near future. This far-reaching change would open the way for opposition groups, such as Renamo, to reorganise themselves as political parties, so that they could contest elections and even put up presidential candidates. Such a development could also result in the disintegration of Frelimo as a strong, cohesive political formation. The current leadership is therefore understandably reluctant to propagate the virtues of Western-style multi-partyism.

ECONOMY

The other widely discussed issue is the state of the economy. Between 1981 and 1986, Mozambique experienced a seriously declining economic performance, as a result of the war, a series of droughts and floods, and the enforcement of a number of unworkable centrally-planned economic projects. Even the Nkomati Accord, signed with South Africa in 1984, did not bring the hoped for peace, since South Africa did not comply fully with the terms of the agreement. Towards the end of 1986, the government announced a 'national recovery' programme, based on criteria for a war economy, giving priority to agriculture, and on negotiations with the IMF and World Bank (both of which Mozambique joined in 1984).

What were the results of this structural adjustment programme? In addition to putting the economy on a modest growth footing (in 1988, GDP grew by 5.5%), the Economic Recovery Programme has led to an improvement in financial discipline and management practices. But much concern is expressed over the social costs of this programme. The rapid devaluation of the metical, removal of subsidies for social services and food prices, and continuing problems with inflation and unemployment have resulted in a severe squeeze on living standards. The lower income groups especially in the urban areas are facing increasing hardship, and the government is worried about the political costs.

Events in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union show that a transition from socialism to some form of open market economy is a traumatic experience. The rulers and the ruled must pay a price for the new - and not necessarily better - order. In Mozambique it is clear that the rural inhabitants, who form the overwhelming majority of the population, once again have to bear the brunt of economic overhaul. Tragically, these very same people were made to suffer the consequences of the South African 'Total Onslaught' and 'Total Strategy'. Decades of war and economic failure inevitably mean that Frelimo is slowly but steadily losing popular support.

It is, moreover, by no means certain that the war will end soon. In fact, many Mozambicans question the wisdom of engaging Renamo in negotiations. Sceptics argue that the composition of Renamo - which they see as a group of terrorists and criminals with no political will of their own - makes it almost impossible for the leadership of both sides to agree on any deal, let alone for Renamo to sell it to its constituency. They simply do not believe that the banditry and mindless violence will end when Dhlakama tells his followers to stop. Even if they do listen to their leaders, what will become of the 20,000 rebels?

Sceptics argue further that the war in Mozambique will only begin to wind down once external support for Renamo is discontinued. South Africa is seen as a key factor. Many people in Mozambique still believe that elements within South Africa continue to support Renamo, and they therefore demand that the South African government should take strong steps to end this. In fact, if the government were perceived to be doing its utmost to end the conflict in south-eastern Africa, its credibility would receive a huge boost. Such a development could even result in positive spin-offs for the negotiation process in South Africa.

Jan Smuts House
June 1990