

## A new war in Mozambique?

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The situation in the country is tense. The government has closed all avenues of dialogue with the main opposition party, which now appears to be contemplating a return to war.

The political situation in Mozambique is agitated. At sunrise on April 4, a group of about 200 members of Renamo (National Resistance of Moçambique, the main opposition party) organized a meeting in Muxunguè (Chibabava, Province of Sofala). The FIR (Police of Rapid Intervention) then entered the meeting room in order to disperse the people. It seems that a woman died. As a reaction, in the night of the same day, a Renamo group attacked the Police Headquarters. Five people died and 11 were injured.

The political Renamo discourse, in the last few months, has been the following: If Frelimo's attitude will not change, we'll be back to war. As a first goal, Renamo and its chef, Alfonso Dhlakama, wish to boycott the next local election, set for next November. But the party in power, Frelimo, never considered these menaces seriously.

The reactions from the side of the political world have been quite conciliatory: the Minister of Justice, Benvinda Levi, condemned—in the Mozambican Parliament—the attitude of the FIR, saying it can not attack helpless citizens. President Armando Emilio Guebuza, speaking from Malawi, pointed out that Mozambican people cannot live in an atmosphere of threats because of the conduct of Renamo. Finally, Dhlakama declared that Renamo had to react to the provocation of the FIR. However, the question is more complex than it seems to be, in the sense that the skirmish between FIR and Renamo hides some political problems:

First, why did Renamo decide in this moment (with its chief) to concentrate its men in Gorongosa (Sofala), the old area in which the rebels lived for many years

during the war of the 16 years against Frelimo?

Second, they have arms. Now, it is quite incredible to discover today that the process of disarmament has not been concluded, as the General Peace Agreement in Rome (1992) clearly previewed.

Third, why did Renamo decide—if this is true—to boycott the next election?

Fourth, why did the FIR decide to intervene against Renamo's members in such a violent way?

Let's try to briefly answer these basic questions. The political situation of Renamo is very difficult. In fact, it's true that it continues to be the main opposition party, but the other opposition party present in Mozambican Parliament, Democratic Movement of Mozambique (MDM), has already conquered two important towns (Beira and Quelimane) and it is considered, today, the only possible alternative to Frelimo. The Guebuza governance has closed almost all doors to dialogue with Renamo, and Frelimo is accused by the opposition parties, a great part of civil society, and by independent press to occupy all the political (and economic) spaces in the country. In a moment in which Mozambique is the African country in which, in the next months and years, many multinational enterprises will concentrate their investments in the field of natural gas (Cabo Delgado) and coal (Tete), Renamo is completely out of the prominent process of production and distribution of wealth. And this is seen as a breach of the covenant between the two signatories of the Peace Agreement. So, the only possible answer is not a political, but a violent one.

In truth, Renamo has continued to maintain a profound ambiguity: is it a resistance movement or a political party? Since the Constitution of 1990, the General Peace Agreement and the first general elections of 1994 have been implemented with the active participation of Renamo, and it seems quite curious that one of the main points of that Agreement has been ignored. It induces one to think that first, Renamo has always thought that a return to war could be possible; and second, that Frelimo and the international community have been too tolerant with this situation or that they have underestimated this possibility. But another hypothesis can be formulated: in the recent Mozambican history, there have been very serious facts that could lead to a new war. The most important is represented by the general election of 1999. Renamo never accepted those results, since they think that Dhlakama won against his Frelimo adversary, Chissano. In 2000, during a demonstration in Cabo Delgado Province, organized by Renamo, many activists were detained: 119 of them died in the tiny cell of Montepuez. Only two prison guards have been condemned, but Renamo stopped its demonstrations, despite the enormous gravity of these two facts. It is possible to argue that there has been a 'gentlemen's agreement' between Chissano and

Dhlakama, between Frelimo and Renamo, in order to calm everyone. Today it seems that the situation is different, in the sense that Frelimo does not consider Renamo as a serious political menace, so the party in power can concentrate all political and economic spaces in its hands without any form of sharing. Hence the violent reaction of Renamo.

So, Renamo tends to destroy the good political and institutional framework that Mozambique has created in these last years. And the best and simplest way is, of course, to boycott elections, the paramount form of expression of a modern democracy.

Probably, the answer to this last question is double. First, the 'normal' attitude of Mozambican Police is not to observe the basic lines of conduct of each public official. When Minister Levi related to the Mozambican Parliament the facts about Muxunguè, she also informed them about the killing of Alfredo Tivane, a Mozambican citizen, by the Police in Matola (Maputo), because he disobeyed the order of an agent. All the year's similar episodes occur in Mozambique, as the local Human Rights League points out in its annual reports. Second: as Renamo is not considered a political risk, it is possible to abuse its members, and to provoke them too. This induces one to think that Renamo's members are not citizens *pleno jure*, and that they do not have the right to demonstrate their clear opposition to the decisions of Mozambican institutions.

The last (and also the first) question is then: will Mozambique come back to war? It is very improbable, since—as Immanuel Kant wrote—one of the features of capitalistic economy is that it helps people to avoid war, implementing trade and business. This is the case in Mozambique today. There is no international partner of this country that will permit a return to war. The USA, Italy, Brazil, Australia, Norway, England, India, China and many other countries have strong interests in Mozambique. Dhlakama is too 'small' to win these solid economic interests from the main developed countries of the world. Besides that, during the 16 years war the political international scenario was very different, with the USA and especially the South Africa of apartheid firmly interested in furnishing Renamo with arms and money in order to destroy the socialist Mozambique. Now, the Cold War has ended, so anyone will make these resources available to Renamo. The last consideration is the following: Frelimo cannot occupy all political and economic spaces in the country. The question is not one of an improbable return to war, but one of the pattern of democracy this country aims at affirming in the next years. In brief, do Frelimo's leaders want to reproduce the 'Angola model' or do they wish to build a different and most pluralistic space of public debate?

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