



# CSIS AFRICA NOTES

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## Cuba and Mozambique

by Gillian Gunn

When Lieutenant Colonel Oliver North presented his "freedom fighter" slide show to potential Contra patrons, he sandwiched between photos of Soviet submarines and Contra graves a chart purporting to identify the location of "Cuban troops" worldwide. Mozambique was prominently featured, with the figure "700" alongside. In a similar vein, conservative U.S. media routinely refer to the presence of "Cuban troops" in Mozambique, and depict a "pro-Soviet dictatorship" supported by Cuban "military, secret police, and other personnel." These claims, and others of the same genre, warrant examination. Is the underlying assumption that Cuba acts as a Soviet tool in Mozambique supported by the historical record? Precisely what is the nature of the Cuban-Mozambican relationship, how has it evolved, and where might it lead?

### Pre-Independence

Contrary to popular perception, the early pre-independence relationship between Cuba and the party that now governs Mozambique (the Frente de Libertação de Moçambique, known as FRELIMO) was tense. Also contrary to conventional wisdom, Cuba did not seek a relationship with the Mozambican nationalist movement at the USSR's behest, but rather at the very point when both Castro and FRELIMO were on relatively poor terms with the Soviet Union.

Such diverse sources as a leading FRELIMO journalist and an anti-Castro Cuban defector agree that FRELIMO's founder, U.S.-educated Eduardo Mondlane, and his successor, Samora Machel, had serious differences with both Fidel Castro and Che Guevara. The first contact between Cuba and FRELIMO occurred when Guevara met with the movement's representatives in Congo and Tanzania during his December 1964-March 1965 trip to Africa. In a speech at a conference of African liberation movements in Dar es Salaam, Guevara emphasized the need for the working class to be the vanguard in any "liberation struggle" and downplayed the need for "long-term mobilization of the peasant masses."

FRELIMO's Mondlane (as well as the FNLA's Jonas Savimbi, who later founded UNITA) vigorously disagreed with Guevara's recommendations. Angola and Mozambique, Savimbi and Mondlane argued, were largely peasant countries with virtually no working class, and thus Maoist-style long-term mobilization of the peasantry was better suited to Mozambican conditions than Guevara's "foco" strategy.



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Machel, who moved into the leadership position in FRELIMO following Mondlane's assassination in 1969, was even more outspoken in his rejection of Guevara's ideas. In February 1974, two months before the coup in Portugal that ushered in the end of the wars of liberation in Mozambique and Angola, he wrote: "In addition to the unreality and idealism of these [foco] concepts, they are based on false premises." It was this conflict which lay behind what Cuban defector Juan Benemelis has termed "a growing polemic with the top leaders of FRELIMO" in the 1960s.

Despite their differences, Guevara did offer Cuban assistance to FRELIMO in 1965. Mondlane promptly rejected the aid as unsuitable and FRELIMO continued its guerrilla war against Portuguese aid, rule with from Algeria, Egypt, Israel, and China. The Cuban offer was renewed two years later, and again rejected.

Relations between FRELIMO and Cuba in the mid-1960s were not altogether hostile, however. In 1966, FRELIMO was invited to and participated in the famous Havana Tricontinental Conference, and later the same year FRELIMO condemned "the provocation of the American imperialists against the heroic people of the Republic of Cuba." In 1968, FRELIMO accepted modest amounts of Cuban medicines, war material, and training, but Cuba was always listed near the end of the "thank you" communiqués to donors — a list on which China was more often than not listed first.

In addition to showing that the relationship between Cuba and FRELIMO had an uneasy start, the above events, and particularly their timing, suggest that Cuba was not acting as a Soviet proxy. There is other supportive evidence for this assessment:

(1) In the mid-1960s, when Havana's outreach to Mozambique began, the FRELIMO leadership had received some Soviet military assistance, but identified much more closely with China, which it believed provided more appropriate weaponry and training for a peasant-based guerrilla war and had a more respectful attitude toward Mozambican nationalist sensitivities.

(2) In the late 1960s, FRELIMO supported the Chinese-assisted ZANU guerrillas who were then fighting for majority rule in Rhodesia from sanctuaries in Tanzania and FRELIMO-controlled territory in Mozambique. The Soviet Union, on the other hand, supported Joshua Nkomo's rival ZAPU movement, which was operating its guerrilla activities from bases in Zambia.

(3) Cuba's relations with the USSR at the time of Castro's mid-1960s overtures to FRELIMO were strained. Cuba was disappointed by Moscow's retreat in the 1962 missile crisis; by its failure to respond "adequately" to either U.S. "aggression" in North Vietnam or intervention in the Dominican Republic; and by Soviet moves to normalize relations with anti-Castro governments in Latin America.

(4) Throughout the 1960s, when Cuba was courting Mondlane, Soviet policy was based on the assumption that Africa and Latin America were not ripe for

full-scale revolution, and support to guerrilla movements in both areas was at a token level.

In sum, Cuba reached out to an African liberation movement more closely allied to China than to the USSR at a time when Cuba's own relations with Moscow were tense. Moreover, the intermediary assigned a primary role in this relationship — the maverick Guevara — was not one of Moscow's favorites.

### The Honeymoon, 1975-1979

Within two years after Mozambique became an independent state in 1975, Cuban-Mozambican relations improved dramatically. Although Soviet and Cuban policies moved in concert during this period, FRELIMO maintained greater distance from both the Soviets and the Cubans than did some other African "revolutionary" movements.

Once in power, FRELIMO faced challenges in both the military and civilian arenas very different from those it had encountered during the war against Portugal. In the military sphere, it was no longer engaged in bush guerrilla warfare, in which emphasis is on light weaponry and high mobility. Instead, Machel and his colleagues were tasked with governing a huge country (over 300,000 square miles) facing the possibility of conventional attack from either Rhodesia or South Africa or both. In these circumstances, the FRELIMO leadership reasoned, Mozambique would need heavy weaponry and other types of assistance required to convert the guerrilla army into a conventional military force.

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In the administrative sphere, FRELIMO soon realized that managing a nation involved vastly more technical skills than running a guerrilla movement. The transition was made more difficult by the mass exodus of Portuguese entrepreneurs, technical experts, and bureaucrats, and by Lisbon's colonial-era education policies. To deal with the urgent requirement to develop the managerial capability to keep the economy and government machinery working, the FRELIMO leadership, committed to a socialist economic model, sought training assistance within a socialist political environment.

The Chinese, who had played a supportive role during the liberation struggle, were unable and/or unwilling to provide the kinds of material goods and services given priority in the postindependence era. Because of China's disheartening experience in Angola in 1975-1976 (when the Beijing-backed FNLA was soundly defeated by the Soviet-aligned MPLA in a three-cornered power struggle), the Chinese were reevaluating their Africa policies. In addition, the weaponry China offered for sale was not particularly suitable for conventional warfare, and cooperation in technical training was hampered by language difficulties. The Cubans and Soviets, on the other hand, together possessed the weaponry Mozambique believed it needed as well as training facilities where language problems would be minimized.

As Rhodesian raids against ZANU bases and Mozambican infrastructure and civilian population centers increased in the first two years of Mozambique's independence, FRELIMO became more appreciative of the advantages of Soviet and Cuban military aid, though it recognized that a major Cuban troop presence would imperil relationships with Western and even some African governments. As the skills shortage increasingly hampered government functions, access to a fast, cheap, language-compatible training service also became an increasingly high priority.

This was the frame of mind within the FRELIMO leadership when Castro toured Africa in March 1977. While in Ethiopia, the Cuban leader received an unexpected communication from Machel, inviting him to visit — not the nation's capital, Maputo, but Beira, a port city halfway up the nation's long coastline. One can only conjecture whether Machel chose Beira as the site for their meeting in order to make his invitation appear less official, or whether he wanted to make a point to the traditionally conservative population of Beira by exposing them to Castro. What is clear, however, is that Castro's performance in Beira permanently changed the nature of Cuban-Mozambican relations.

Mozambicans subsequently described the Castro-Machel encounter as "love at first sight." After squabbling intermittently via envoys for over a decade, the two heads of state meshed well in person. Machel engaged Castro in teasing banter, which Castro returned in kind. The Mozambican leader called Cuba a "trench of liberty" in the world battle against

imperialism, highlighted Cuba's ethnic roots in Africa, and referred to Castro as "Comrade Fidel — guerrilla of the first hour."

Castro picked up the theme of the common slave background of Cuba and Mozambique: "This meeting between slaves, the slave of Mozambique and the slave of Cuba, worries imperialism. And imperialism has reason to be worried...." Castro's words were turned into banner headlines by the Mozambican press.

A month after Castro returned to Havana, an event occurred in Angola that had the effect of further strengthening Mozambique's ties with Havana. On May 27, 1977, Angola's recently dismissed Minister of the Interior Nito Alves mounted a coup attempt against President Agostinho Neto, in which a number of leading MPLA figures were killed. The uprising was eventually put down when Cuban troops joined Neto loyalists in the streets of Luanda. It was a Cuban voice that announced over Luanda radio that the revolt had been crushed and the government was back in Neto's hands.

Soviet inaction in this emergency, and the relationship of a number of Alves supporters with the Soviet embassy staff, led many Angolans to conclude that Moscow had backed the Alves plot. This line of thinking was bolstered by Alves's known preference for the Soviet style of socialist organization and his differences with Neto over the question of granting base rights in Angola to the Soviet Union. One of Machel's close advisers subsequently reported that he had been in Neto's office just after the coup attempt, and witnessed the Angolan president tell the Soviet ambassador that he knew Moscow had been behind the plot.

Whatever the accuracy of accusations of Soviet complicity or the full story of Cuban motivations for helping crush the coup attempt, the significance of this episode for an analysis of the Cuban-Mozambican relationship is that a top Machel adviser who was in the Angolan capital during the uprising reported back to Maputo that the Soviets had tried to overthrow Neto and the Cubans had helped keep him in power. It is not known precisely how FRELIMO digested this information, but, at minimum, Machel probably concluded that the Cubans might be relied upon to protect a head of state not only against machinations by the "enemy" (South Africa and Rhodesia) but also perhaps against coup attempts backed by opportunistic "friends."

In any case, Cuban-Mozambican relations continued to warm over the summer of 1977. Machel's wife, Minister of Education Graça Machel, visited Havana and concluded an education agreement that resulted in 1,200 Mozambican students arriving at Cuba's Isle of Pines in September 1977 on full scholarships. Cuban instructors were provided to teach objective subjects such as science and math, but it was agreed that Mozambicans would teach the classes on more politically sensitive subjects, to ensure that the students retained a Mozambican outlook.

A month after the first Mozambican students arrived



in Cuba, President Machel visited Havana. Castro presented him with the Playa Giron national medal, and 700,000 Cubans turned out in the streets to greet the Mozambican president, a demonstration unlike any seen since Chile's then-President Allende visited Cuba in 1972. Castro and Machel signed a Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation, and Mutual Assistance, very similar to one FRELIMO had signed with the USSR a few months earlier. The Mozambican delegation issued a communiqué demanding U.S. withdrawal from the Guantánamo naval base in Cuba, and calling for an end to the U.S. economic boycott of Cuba. The two leaders expressed agreement on issues ranging from the role of the Nonaligned Movement to the situations in the Middle East, the Indian Ocean, Vietnam, Panama, Puerto Rico, Belize, Chile, Uruguay, and South Korea.

Arriving at the United Nations a few days after the Cuba visit, Machel told reporters: "We found an identity of ideological outlook...there is respect in Cuba for the revolution that is developing in Mozambique.... There was no vanity, no arrogance — rather arrogance against the enemy, not toward friends.... You have seen how he [Fidel] is — his spontaneity, his extraordinary capacity to inspire all of us revolutionaries.... No longer is it that 'Cuban monster'."

Cuban-Mozambican relations were clearly on a new footing, and from 1977 to 1979 the friendship thrived. By 1978 an estimated 700-800 Cuban personnel were in the country, amounting to two-thirds of the total Soviet bloc personnel presence. About a quarter of the Cubans were military advisers, who were specifically under instructions from both governments that they were not to participate in combat operations. The remainder were in civilian economic activities, including agriculture, the sugar and chemical industries, planning, health, and education. Interestingly, Machel selected a Cuban doctor to be his personal physician.

The Cubans were the only socialist bloc *cooperantes* (literally "cooperators") who did not receive a portion of their salaries in hard currency. The precise level of their salaries in the 1977-1979 period is hard to pin down, but it is reported to have been very modest. The Mozambican government did, however, pay for the Cubans' housing and food, neither of which was a drain on foreign exchange reserves.

This relative austerity partly explains why Cubans mixed better than their Soviet counterparts in Mozambican society; they were simply not so ostentatiously better off than their African colleagues. The Cuban practice of sending male-dominated teams to outlying agricultural settings did cause some social tensions, however, as they gravitated toward the wives and daughters of FRELIMO officials. This problem was eventually solved by sending teams with roughly equal numbers of Cuban men and women to the isolated agricultural stations.

It is often assumed that Cuban personnel came to penetrate the Mozambican security apparatus, the Serviço Nacional de Segurança Popular (SNASP). The

facts are hard to verify. Cubans did take the lead in training the special "Departamento de Segurança de Responsaveis," which can be roughly translated as "Department of Security for Leaders." Cuba had gained considerable experience at providing this service elsewhere in Africa, and had a training system already in operation in Cuba for these personnel. The Mozambican leadership, which these Cuban-trained officers protected, was apparently pleased with the quality of performance, and DSR personnel were regularly sent back to Cuba for refresher courses. The East Germans appear, however, to have played a far more prominent role in the overall security area.

Education cooperation also continued to expand. Apparently satisfied with the education Mozambican youths were receiving in Cuba, the government in 1979 sent another 1,200 students to two new schools Castro built for the purpose, bringing the total number of secondary school scholarship places to 2,400.

Although there were still some differences between the Cuban and Mozambican worldviews even at the height of the honeymoon period, these differences either were narrowing or were glossed over by tacit mutual consent. Rhodesia, for example, was an area of foreign affairs in which Cuban and Mozambican policies gradually drew closer together during 1977-1979.

The FRELIMO leadership firmly believed that ZANU had greater support in Zimbabwe and was fighting more effectively than ZAPU. In 1978, the FRELIMO military sent a team into Rhodesia to evaluate ZANU's military needs. The team concluded that ZANU had advanced farther than anticipated, had exhausted the capacity of the light weapons supplied by China, and needed "heavier and more sophisticated equipment, such as artillery and anti-aircraft guns, before they could defend the large static bases [that]...were necessary." Machel's interest in a speedy end to the war was heightened by concern over the increasing frequency of anti-ZANU Rhodesian raids into Mozambican territory in this period. On the basis of this report, Machel and President Julius Nyerere of Tanzania appealed to Moscow and Havana to help ZANU in addition to ZAPU, so as to end the liberation war as soon as possible. Nyerere called in the Cuban and Soviet ambassadors in Dar es Salaam and briefed them on FRELIMO's conclusion, and Machel sent envoys to Moscow and Havana with the same message.

While the approach to Havana seems to have met with some sympathy, that to Moscow got nowhere; indeed, the Mozambican envoy did not even get an opportunity to talk to Brezhnev on the matter. Piqued at the unresponsive Soviet stance, FRELIMO began quiet "loans" to ZANU of some weaponry Moscow had supplied to the Mozambican army, a move that the Soviets sharply protested when they discovered the diversion.

In the 1977-1979 honeymoon period, the Mozambican and Cuban governments also chose to downplay their differences concerning the Nonaligned Movement. (See



"The Nonaligned Summit: Behind the Rhetoric" by Gillian Gunn in *CSIS Africa Notes* no. 63, October 25, 1986.) Castro was increasingly identifying the Soviet-aligned socialist countries as the "natural allies" of the Third World and the nonaligned nations, while Machel maintained close relations (though did not entirely agree) with Yugoslavia's President Josip Broz Tito, the leading exponent of the rival "neutralist" school of thought in the Nonaligned Movement, which saw neither the capitalist nor the socialist countries as "natural allies." In addition, Machel made a distinction between Mozambique's and the Nonaligned Movement's relations with the Soviet bloc, viewing the socialist states as "natural allies" in the first context but not in the second. This was a very subtle distinction, and in the 1977 to 1979 period FRELIMO did not highlight the point.

### **Cordial Disagreement, 1979-1984**

Rhodesia was the initial source of the new strains that began to develop between FRELIMO and Cuba in 1979. Both Machel and Castro were concerned about the "internal settlement" inauguration of Bishop Abel Muzorewa as the prime minister of "Zimbabwe Rhodesia" scheduled for June 1 of that year, primarily because Muzorewa's plans to seek international recognition for this regime would undercut the position of the fragile "Patriotic Front" alliance between Robert Mugabe's ZANU and Nkomo's ZAPU. In late May, a leading member of the Cuban Communist Party, Raul Valdez Vivo, arrived in Maputo and proposed a preemptive strategy to block Western recognition of Muzorewa.

The Valdez scenario called for Nkomo and Mugabe to go (via Mozambique) into a ZANU-controlled area of Rhodesia and declare the formation of a Government of Independent Zimbabwe prior to June 1. This government would be led by Nkomo, and Mugabe would be number two with responsibility for defense. Valdez believed that socialist and Third World countries would promptly recognize the PF government, and assured Machel that ZAPU's Nkomo, Angola's President Neto, Zambia's President Kenneth Kaunda, and Ethiopia's head of state Lieutenant Colonel Mengistu Haile Mariam had already agreed to the plan. FRELIMO apparently gave its tacit approval to this preemptive maneuver on the assumption that Valdez had indeed checked it out with the leaders cited.

At Valdez's request, Machel called a meeting at which the leaders of other Front-Line States (Zambia, Angola, Tanzania, and Botswana) and other key African players were to finalize the preemption plans. On the day the FLS summit was scheduled, however, President Neto cabled Machel to inform him that Nkomo refused to attend and thus he (Neto) saw no point in coming. Ten minutes before Machel was due to meet President Nyerere of Tanzania and President Kaunda of Zambia at the airport, the Cuban ambassador in Maputo conveyed a message that Valdez had decided that there was no

point in his (Valdez) attending if neither Neto nor Nkomo were coming. To complete the fiasco, the Soviet ambassador met Machel at the airport to inform him Mengistu was "too busy" to attend the meeting. Machel was furious, and reportedly instructed the Cuban ambassador to "tell Fidel I am extremely angry with him."

From the aborted Valdez initiative until Machel's signing of the Nkomati Accord with South Africa in March 1984, the Cuban-Mozambican relationship was marked by repeated disagreements and strains. Some specific examples:

- In contrast to his earlier low-key divergence from the Cuban line on interpretation of the term "nonalignment," Machel publicly moved closer to the Yugoslavian version and distanced himself from Castro's "natural ally" line. This led Cuban Politburo member Jorge Risquet to remark pointedly in a 1982 Maputo press conference: "There are attempts in some reactionary circles to make the Movement of Nonaligned Countries an organization which proclaims an absolute neutrality. But after all, the objective of the movement is the fight against imperialism, which dominates and exploits the people."

- Mozambique began to express dissatisfaction with the quality of some civilian *cooperantes*, noting that they often did not have the qualifications specified in the agreements, took inordinately long vacations back in Cuba, and occasionally employed techniques that were not suitable to Mozambican conditions.

- Cuba became uneasy about Machel's diplomatic and economic overtures to Castro's archenemy, the United States. In 1982, Machel began to cultivate Washington in the hope that the Reagan administration would pressure South Africa to halt regional "destabilization" and that U.S. assistance and investment would be forthcoming to help rejuvenate Mozambique's flagging economy.

- In early 1984, Machel indicated Mozambique's intention to join the International Monetary Fund, not one of Castro's favorite institutions, and the European Economic Community's Lomé Convention (the vehicle through which the EEC channels aid to the Third World). The latter move involved accepting the EEC "Berlin Clause" — which implies recognition of the Federal Republic of Germany's claim to all of Berlin, language perceived by Cuba as an affront to the sovereignty of the German Democratic Republic.

- Machel also began, very gently, to encourage Angola's new president, José Eduardo dos Santos, to consider the possibility of negotiations with UNITA.

In addition to these strains, Cuba's military role in Mozambique also began to decline in 1980. This was not because of any specific dissatisfaction, but because the threat from Rhodesia had ended with the Lancaster House agreement, Mugabe's victory in the British-supervised elections, and the country's independence from Britain as the sovereign state of Zimbabwe in April 1980. Even when the security situation subsequently



deteriorated sharply as a result of the antigovernment guerrilla activities of the Resistência Nacional Moçambicana (MNR/Renamo), Machel did not seriously consider asking for Cuban combat troops.

### **Agreeing to Disagree, 1984-1986**

A major turning point in Cuban-Mozambican relations came in March 1984, when President Machel signed the Nkomati Accord with South Africa, under which Mozambique pledged not to provide logistical facilities to the military arm of the African National Congress, while South Africa promised *inter alia* to suspend direct support of the MNR (see "Post-Nkomati Mozambique" by Gillian Gunn in *CSIS Africa Notes* no. 38, January 8, 1985). Cuba's initial irritation at FRELIMO for having adopted policies out of line with those of Havana shifted over time to resigned acceptance that FRELIMO was determined to go its own way. Indeed, Cuban diplomats reportedly talked some officials from other Soviet-allied countries out of boycotting the signing ceremony on the Mozambican-South African border, arguing that, while Machel erred in signing such a pact, it was not the place of the socialist allies to embarrass him at this crucial moment. Rather, the Cuban diplomats stressed, the socialist countries should make a show of solidarity, and "let Machel learn from his own experience that he was wrong to trust South Africa."

The Cuban diplomats were probably acting on direct instructions from Castro, who sent a private message to Machel via Mozambican Minister of Foreign Affairs Joaquim Chissano. According to both British and Mozambican sources, the essence of the message was along the following lines:

Tell the President we cannot question any decision of the Mozambican government. You fought the war on your own, you independently decided upon a socialist course, you supported the Zimbabwean struggle by yourselves. Therefore I cannot question your decision. Therefore I must support you. Our friendship is not in question. We will do our best to improve bilateral relations.

Castro's message was "the most positive of the socialist country responses to the Nkomati Accord," according to one Machel adviser.

Some U.S. sources indicate that the Cuban embassy may have helped the ANC work out relocation plans as its military wing prepared to leave Mozambican soil under the terms of the Nkomati Accord, and may also have served as a communications channel between ANC offices elsewhere and the small remaining contingent of ANC "diplomatic representatives" in Maputo. But there is no indication that Cuba tried to sabotage the accord.

Various Cuban-Mozambican differences over domestic and foreign issues remained after Nkomati, but Cuba seemingly decided that little would be gained by bickering, and the two governments simply agreed to disagree on many matters. For example, when Castro mounted his campaign to convince Third World

countries to declare a moratorium on debt repayment, Mozambican press dutifully reported a debate on international debt sponsored by the Cuban embassy, sympathy for the Castro argument.... Theoretically we agree that the Third World countries cannot pay the debt in the near future and something must change. However, in our case we are trying to demonstrate our creditworthiness to the international financial world.... We don't want to alienate the banks, so we will not be repudiating our debt as Castro urges." Meanwhile, the Mozambican press dutifully reported a debate on international debt sponsored by the Cuban embassy, and the showing of a film of Castro's speeches on the subject.

While FRELIMO support for Angola's ruling MPLA remained firm, there was increased maneuvering behind the scenes to try to facilitate MPLA-UNITA negotiations. For example, the head of Mozambique's prestigious Center for African Studies, Aquino de Bragança (killed in the October 1986 plane crash that took Machel's life), wrote a manuscript and gave interviews to Portuguese newspapers that highly irritated the MPLA leadership. The essence of his argument was that, unlike the MNR, UNITA had legitimate roots in the struggle against Portuguese colonialism and could not be discounted even though it had severely compromised itself by accepting aid from South Africa. Officers in the Angolan military are said to have pressured their Mozambican counterparts ("How could Samora [Machel] do this to us?") and Cuban diplomats were no less disturbed. Interestingly, UNITA's leader, Jonas Savimbi, returned the favor in various Washington fora in 1986 by using almost exactly the same words as de Bragança's to associate himself with FRELIMO's legitimacy as *the* liberation movement of Mozambique. He rejected any parallels between UNITA and the MNR.

On the UNITA issue as on others, Cuba protested but did not retaliate by cutting aid to Mozambique. Indeed, discussions on increasing economic cooperation continued through the period of FRELIMO activism on Angolan matters. Eventually FRELIMO's rhetoric on UNITA became muted, but the Cuban-Soviet role in this shift is questionable since the timing coincided with reports that Angola was meeting some of Mozambique's oil needs following a decrease in supplies from the Gulf.

Agreement to disagree was also evident in the distinctly different positions on South Africa held by Machel and Castro in the 1984-1986 period. Castro's view was relatively hard-line, with emphasis on the need for international sanctions and an escalation of armed struggle. Indeed, *The Observer* (London) reported in November 1985 that its Moscow correspondent had been told by a "senior Cuban official" that "Fidel Castro and the Cuban leadership are seeking Soviet approval to declare war on South Africa." At minimum, Castro pledged that Cuba would be willing to keep its troops in Angola until apartheid was removed, and that Cuba would increase its aid to the ANC.



Machel, in contrast, made it clear that Mozambique was not in a position to join in imposing sanctions on South Africa. Although he publicly urged the international community to invoke the sanctions weapon, he privately expressed concern that Pretoria could retaliate by cutting off the entire southern African region's transport and trade links to and through South Africa. He sought to adhere to commitments made in the Nkomati Accord and refrained from disowning the agreement even when documents discovered at an MNR base in August 1985 indicated that elements of the South African military were violating Nkomati by continuing to assist the MNR. Behind the scenes, he encouraged Angola to continue negotiations with Washington on Cuban troop withdrawal. In his public statements, Machel scrupulously avoided attacking the United States and presented the West as a potential ally against South African destabilization of the region.

The contrasting rhetoric revealed two different assumptions about the pace of South African liberation and the possible role of the West. Machel's policies reflected an assumption that the ending of apartheid would be a long process, that in the meantime neighbors would have to seek some *modus vivendi* with the "monster," and that the West could facilitate the search for that accommodation. Castro's policies revealed a more combative approach. He took the position, at least implicitly, that apartheid could be confronted and overthrown in fairly short order if the right amalgam of forces were brought to bear, and that the West was opposed to African interests in the southern Africa struggle.

In the sphere of civilian cooperation, on the other hand, Mozambique and Cuba moved to resolve their differences. In late 1985 and early 1986, the Mozambican government pressed the Cuban embassy in Maputo on the quality issue. While the Mozambicans said that *cooperantes* in such fields as forensic science, crime prevention, sugar technology, and elementary school education were generally performing well, others, particularly those teaching veterinary science and engineering at the university, were poorly prepared. The Cuban ambassador reportedly said that he too had complained to Havana about the quality issue, but the expanding scope of Cuba's program of placing civilian technicians in African countries had pressured Havana into sending some inadequately trained personnel overseas. It was agreed that the numbers of *cooperantes* should be decreased in the areas where Mozambique was dissatisfied with performance.

There was one subject on which Machel and Castro substantially agreed in the 1984-1986 period: military cooperation. Possibly because of the frustrating Angolan experience (see "Cuba and Angola" by Gillian Gunn in *CSIS Africa Notes* no. 70, March 31, 1987), the Cubans were not anxious to become involved in combat operations in Mozambique. For his part, Machel did not want to jeopardize his military and diplomatic overtures

to the West or his fragile deal with South Africa by inviting in Cuban combat forces. Thus, when MNR attacks escalated and FRELIMO concluded that the Nkomati Accord was being systematically violated, Machel appealed not to Castro but to Washington, requesting nonlethal military equipment. The executive branch initially agreed to provide such assistance, but was prevented from following through by Congress. Machel also sought and obtained British training for Mozambican officers in neighboring Zimbabwe, with the first trainees emerging from the course in early 1986. Overtures for additional military assistance were made to Portugal, France, Spain, and other European nations. Machel asked Zimbabwe for more support troops, which Mugabe readily supplied, thus repaying Machel for his steadfast support to ZANU during the Rhodesian war.

Professor Pamela Falk's statement in *Foreign Affairs* ("Cuba in Africa," Summer 1987), that "Cuban troops" have "helped protect the oil pipeline running from Zimbabwe to Mozambique's port of Beira," and "assisted in...the capture of [MNR headquarters] Casa Banana" is at variance with all information available to me. Indeed, Mozambican sources adamantly deny that there are any Cuban combat troops present in Mozambique, or that the Cuban military advisers take part in combat in any way. Official U.S. sources say there is "no evidence" to contradict the Mozambican claims.

### The Post-Machel Era

Mozambican security concerns increased in late 1986, when the MNR launched a significant offensive in the center of the country, and Machel (and, among others, his Cuban personal physician) was killed in a plane crash on South African soil. (See "Mozambique After Machel" by Gillian Gunn in *CSIS Africa Notes* no. 67, December 29, 1986.) When Cuban Politburo member Jorge Risquet attended Machel's funeral, he told Minister of Foreign Affairs (and presidential aspirant) Chissano that Cuba was "fully prepared" to help Mozambique with its problems. Journalists speculated that this included the possibility of sending combat troops. Chissano (who was confirmed as Machel's successor a few days later) reportedly replied that the current level of assistance was adequate. It is noteworthy that within the FRELIMO leadership Chissano was traditionally regarded as "more comfortable" dealing with the West and "uneasy" about Cuban-Soviet policies. Thus, his elevation to the presidency did not imply stepped-up Cuban-Mozambican military relations.

While "activity" reportedly increased dramatically at the Cuban embassy in Maputo in the days after Machel's death, and Cubans intermittently arrived on the regular flight from Luanda, there was no sign of a new Cuban military commitment. Some reliable observers believe that a contingency plan has existed for some time by which a unit of crack Cuban troops in



Angola could be airlifted to Maputo on short notice to protect the life of the president. If such a contingency plan exists, Mozambique chose not to activate it at the time of presidential transition. Instead, Chissano called on Zimbabwe for additional troops, and also sought help from neighboring Tanzania and Malawi in protecting the transport lines under attack by the MNR.

Since Machel's death, military and civilian sources in the West and in Mozambique have reported evidence of a decrease in the influence of Cuban military advisers. Their number is generally estimated at between 400 and 600 as of late 1987, and most observers believe the figure is gradually declining. Several factors are cited: Chissano's ambivalence about the Cuban-Soviet role; a reduction of the influence of the FRELIMO leaders most at ease with Cuban advisers that began in 1984 and accelerated under Chissano; and a decrease in the number of relatively secure stationing points deemed by FRELIMO most suitable for the positioning of Cuban advisers (to ensure that they do not become caught up in any direct combat with the MNR). The Cuban military advisers are reportedly now primarily serving the Mozambican militia, rather than the army as a whole. Their role in training security personnel protecting the president is also said to be more limited than in earlier years. This may be indirectly related to the fact that a Soviet pilot and copilot were flying Machel's plane when it crashed, and to reports that Chissano subsequently reevaluated the competence of socialist country personnel in the field of presidential security.

In the civilian sphere, reliable sources estimate the Cuban presence as of December 1987 at the 500-600 level and declining. Reasons cited include a shortage of safe work locations, the agreement to concentrate on quality rather than quantity of *cooperantes*, and Chissano's increasing turn to free-market economic policies. Cubans, unsurprisingly, are not viewed as the best advisers on how to decentralize planning, privatize state-owned industries, or introduce the profit incentive in agricultural management — all Chissano goals.

One area in which cooperation is unlikely to be curtailed, however, is education, particularly the program of scholarships in Cuba for Mozambicans. To date more than 6,500 Mozambicans have studied in Cuba, and 4,610 have graduated with a ninth-grade education. Over two-thirds have returned to Mozambique and are now continuing their education or are in the work force. In addition, 800 technical experts have returned from training in Cuba. After some problems when the returnees, in Machel's words, were "persecuted and torpedoed," the government mounted a campaign to facilitate their integration. Now, according to Mozambican officials, "they are making a real difference" and ministries are anxious to employ them. Another 400 students left for Cuba in August 1987. Only children of "workers and peasants" are eligible for the scholarships, and students are free to decline.

On the diplomatic front, the agreement-to-disagree

continues. Cuba remained silent when Chissano mentioned the possibility of establishing diplomatic relations with Israel in late 1987; established a joint commission with South Africa to facilitate rehabilitation of and security for the Cabora Bassa dam and power line; paid an official visit to Washington, which included a meeting with President Reagan at the White House; and hired a former public relations adviser to the Nicaraguan Contras to clarify FRELIMO's image in the halls of Congress.

## In Sum

How, then, should the questions that have arisen in the course of this discussion be answered? Are there "Cuban troops" in Mozambique? Is Cuban influence in Mozambique sufficient to deter Chissano from responding to Western aid with greater sympathy for Western concerns? Does the failure of the United States to aid the MNR amount to abandonment of a potential ally against Cuban machinations?

The above historical summary suggests that the answer to all these points is "no" — with some qualifications. There is no firm evidence of a "Cuban troop" presence in Mozambique, though there are military advisers, whose numbers are declining and whose role increasingly is restricted to militia training. Cuban influence has clearly been insufficient to deter Mozambique from such independent moves as signing the Nkomati nonaggression pact with South Africa; becoming a member of the IMF and the Lomé Convention; turning to the West for military training and supplies; urging UNITA-MPLA negotiations in Angola; reaching out to such "enemies" of Cuba as Israel and the United States; resisting Castro's debt moratorium proposal; and leaning toward the Yugoslavian definition of nonalignment, at least in the context of the Nonaligned Movement. Cuba is not the *éminence grise* behind FRELIMO, and thus U.S. failure to aid the MNR does not amount to forfeiting an opportunity to limit Cuban meddling.

That is not to say that Cuba has no influence in Mozambique. The education cooperation program has given significant numbers of future opinion makers extensive exposure to the Cuban worldview. Cuban civilian and military advisers have access to key decision makers, and, despite the reduced influence of their closest FRELIMO allies, they will continue to be able to make their views known. Castro is still highly respected, and personal relations between many individual Cubans and Mozambicans remain affectionate.

The important factor in evaluating Cuban-Mozambican relations is that the two governments have distinctly different philosophical outlooks on two crucial issues: the future course and pace of the antiapartheid struggle in South Africa and the role of the West in southern Africa.

Castro, as we have noted, foresees a relatively brisk escalation of armed struggle against apartheid. Perhaps



even more than Machel before him, Chissano believes that eradication of apartheid will be a slow process, and that Mozambique and the other states of southern Africa must therefore prepare themselves both to withstand the regional destabilization that the struggle will create and, when possible, to seek a *modus vivendi* with Pretoria.

Castro and Chissano also see the future role of the West in southern Africa very differently. Castro views the United States in particular and Europe to a considerable extent as tacit allies of South Africa, propping it up and delaying the day of "liberation." Chissano, like Machel, sees the United States and Europe as potential allies of the Front-Line States, capable of reducing or preventing South African destabilization by various political and economic pressures, and possessing the military and economic resources to defend and rebuild the region's infrastructure.

These differing philosophical perspectives on the pace of apartheid's overthrow and the role of the West are likely to cause Mozambican and Cuban policies to continue to diverge over the next decade, even more than they have over the last decade. But the two

governments probably will continue to agree to disagree on these matters, refraining from denouncing each other and cordially cooperating in mutually convenient spheres. And, if the past pattern is a reliable indicator of future trends, cooperation will increasingly focus on civilian rather than military affairs.

Gillian Gunn is a 1986-1988 Visiting Fellow in the CSIS African Studies Program. Her previous contributions to the *CSIS Africa Notes* briefing paper series include "Cuba and Angola" (issue no. 70, March 31, 1987), "Mozambique After Machel" (issue no. 67, December 29, 1986), "The Nonaligned Summit: Behind the Rhetoric" (issue no. 63, October 25, 1986), "The Angolan Economy: A Status Report" (issue no. 58, May 30, 1986), and "Post-Nkomati Mozambique" (issue no. 38, January 8, 1985).

A longer version of "Cuba and Mozambique" will appear in *Cuban Internationalism in Sub-Saharan Africa*, a forthcoming book to be edited by Sergio Díaz-Briquets (Duquesne University Press, 1988).





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