

## **Book Reviews**

# **MOZAMBICAN CIVIL WAR: MARXIST- APARTHEID PROXY, 1977-1992 (Cold War 1945-1991)**

*Stephen Emerson*

Great Britain: Pen and Sword Military.

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When discussing the Cold War, the Berlin Blockade or the Cuban Missile Crisis frequently comes to the fore. What is often under-researched is how this ideological struggle for influence between Moscow and Washington was repeatedly played out across the African continent. Whilst superpower rivalry drove the United States and the Soviet Union to secure new allies and strategic access to mineral resources in Africa through economic and diplomatic means, it had a dark underbelly. The darker dimension of superpower rivalry in Africa as reflected in the use of military measures: awarding allied African governments with military aid packages, covert military assistance and training whilst undermining those African governments hostile to the donor's interests through support for rebel forces in those countries. Whilst these superpower proxies advanced the interests of their benefactors, they often exacerbated existing societal and political cleavages in the country contributing to the chronic instability with which post-independence African states had to contend. In the case of Mozambique, shortly after replacing the former Portuguese colonial authorities, the Machel government made several mistakes in attempting to create a more inclusive economy, a government that served all its citizens, and the Front for the Liberation of Mozambique (FRELIMO) movement enamoured with the socialist ideology. In the process, it alienated large segments of Mozambicans – including traditional leaders and the Catholic Church. In this volatile environment, the Mozambican Resistance Movement (RENAMO) emerged.

This book tells the story of RENAMO from its origins in 1977 as a creation of Rhodesian intelligence against Zimbabwean insurgents using Mozambique as an operational base to its patronage by Pretoria in the 1980s to it developing its own indigenous roots amongst ordinary Mozambicans. By 1992, the Mozambican civil war ended peacefully with negotiations in Rome. The price for Mozambicans was horrific war and suffering for sixteen long years. One million Mozambicans were killed and millions more were made refugees or were internally displaced. The economic infrastructure also lay in ruins – ruins, from which Mozambique have scarcely recovered.

Meticulously researched, incisive, using previously unexplored archival resources and scores of interviews with veteran Rhodesian and Zimbabwean officers, former FRELIMO and RENAMO soldiers – including interviewing RENAMO leader Afonso Dhlakama – Emerson provides fresh insights into the Mozambican civil war, merging personal insights of protagonists with the broader strategic landscape. What emerges is an objective account of the civil war from the deep personal insights of the various protagonists – regional and national – whilst the civil war raged. Whilst the focus is on the conflict between FRELIMO and RENAMO itself, the book is contextualised within the broader context of the Cold War explaining the motivations of the United States and Moscow, the fragility of post-independence African states, the Southern African strategic environment and the machinations of Salisbury and Pretoria in getting involved in the Mozambican theatre.

Whilst academics would find this account of tremendous importance, Emerson provides much more than a novel historical account of the civil war. Policymakers would find the insights of strategic importance when seeking to learn lessons for ending contemporary conflicts. For instance, Emerson's account of RENAMO's lack of political acumen and its highly centralised decision-making process, which created needless obstacles in the negotiations between the parties is superb. FRELIMO, meanwhile, too easily dismissed RENAMO as merely a foreign proxy or bandit movement. In the process, the legitimate grievances driving the insurgency were not dealt with, preventing negotiations from taking place earlier. On the more positive side, the fact that opposing parties shared similar backgrounds created the necessary empathy needed for rapport and trust to develop. Such was the case between Zimbabwe's former President Robert Mugabe and Dhlakama who were both guerrilla fighters, Shona speakers and Catholic educated. Following their meeting in Malawi, Mugabe told the RENAMO leader, "You have your dignity and you know what you are fighting for." The meeting between the Zimbabwean president and the Mozambican guerrilla set the basis for constructive talks, which were to lead to the historic August 1992 peace negotiations, which concluded Mozambique's brutal civil war.

Emerson's book is a veritable tour de force and should find its way in the curriculum of any course focusing on Africa issues of peace and security

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