

Reconceptualising localised Cold Wars in southern Africa

Reconceituando Guerras Frias localizadas no Sul da África

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Resumo: Este artigo tem como propósito analisar de que modo condições localizadas contribuíram para a emergência e a continuidade da Guerra Fria no sul do continente africano, durante as últimas três décadas da Guerra Fria. O artigo foca, em particular, o período de 1961-1989, durante o qual conflitos de pequena escala eclodiram nos territórios coloniais portugueses de Angola e Moçambique, na Rodésia (depois Zimbábue), África do Sudoeste (agora Namíbia) e na República da África do Sul. Resultado da colonização e descolonização, da tensão étnica e racial, e da ampla confrontação Leste-Oeste, a Guerra Fria no sul do continente africano, nunca foi um conflito homogêneo – as evidências atestam fortemente que ele continha muitas ”pequenas Guerras Frias”. As forças e os governos dos estados regionais, assim como as potências internacionais, tais como os EUA, a União Soviética, a República Popular da China e, mais notadamente, a Cuba comunista, todas confrontaram seus interesses geopolíticos e geoestratégicos na região sul africana, durante as três últimas décadas da Guerra Fria. Suas manobras econômicas, políticas e militares indicam que a região foi palco de alguns dos mais complexos conflitos localizados do período da Guerra Fria. Este artigo reconceituará a história do sul da África durante a Guerra Fria, demonstrando que, embora intrinsecamente interligados, esses conflitos sul africanos não constituíram uma Guerra Fria homogênea, mas muitas pequenas Guerras Frias, e que condições localizadas foram as forças motrizes do conflito, e não a mais ampla confrontação ideológica Leste-Oeste.

Palavras-chave: África Austral, Guerra Fria, Descolonização, conflitos de pequena escala

Abstract: This article aims to examine how localised conditions contributed to the shaping and maintenance of the Cold War in southern Africa during the last three decades of the Cold War. In particular, its focus is on the period 1961 – 1989, during which ‘brushfire’ conflicts erupted in the Portuguese colonial territories of Angola and Mozambique, in Rhodesia (and later Zimbabwe), South-West Africa (now Namibia) and the Republic of South Africa. The result of colonisation and decolonisation, racial and ethnic tension and the wider East - West confrontation, the Cold War in southern Africa was never one homogenous conflict – evidence strongly attests that it comprised many ‘little Cold Wars’. The forces and governments of the regional states, as well as international powers such as the United States, the USSR, the People’s Republic of China and, most remarkably, communist Cuba, all had clashing geo-political and geo-strategic interests in the southern African region during the last three decades of the Cold War. Their political, economic and military manoeuvring meant that the region played host to some of the most complex localised conflicts of the Cold War period. This article will reconceptualise the history of Cold War southern African by demonstrating that, although intrinsically linked, these southern African conflicts constituted not one homogenous but several little Cold Wars and that localised conditions were the driving forces for conflict, not the wider East-West ideological confrontation.

Keywords: Southern Africa, Cold War, Decolonisation, Brushfire War

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Introduction

From 1961, when armed resistance to Portuguese colonial rule began in Angola and Mozambique, through to the withdrawal of South African and Cuban armies from Angola in 1988, southern Africa was in a constant state of conflict. The outbreak of these ‘wars of liberation’ represented a turning point for the Cold War in southern Africa - when the hitherto localised anti-colonial struggles attracted the interest of the major Cold War players and took on global significance as intersections of the wider East-West confrontation. The already complex geopolitical makeup of the southern African region was compounded by the interjection, politically and militarily, of foreign powers like the United States, the Soviet Union and the People’s Republic of China, each with their own competing strategic interests. At the same time however localised factors, especially the race politics of the South African, Rhodesian and Portuguese governments¹ and the ethnic makeup of the region, contributed to the shaping and maintenance of a distinctly regional web of conflicts in which the belligerents were largely the same but their allegiances and interests remained fluid and constantly shifting. Thus it was, for example, that in Angola during the civil war the United States covertly supported the South African Defence Force² and supplied the anti-communist UNITA guerrillas³ against the Soviet-backed MPLA government, but at the same time both the U.S and USSR maintained various military and developmental agreements with the Marxist-Leninist FRELIMO government of Mozambique⁴, which was fighting South African- trained Renamo fighters. The long-term result of European colonialism and the struggle for self-determination, shaped by racial and ethnic tensions and manipulated by the wider East-West confrontation, these Cold War conflicts and others in South-West Africa, Rhodesia/Zimbabwe and South Africa, were never homogenous, instead comprising many inter-connected but separate ‘little Cold Wars’. An analysis is offered on how local southern African conditions contributed to the shaping and maintenance of a regional status quo based on a fluid and destructive web of separate but inter-connected conflicts. Taking advantage of a variety of archival and secondary source material, this study will reconceptualise the history of southern Africa during the Cold War, positing that the regional conflicts constituted local microcosms of the larger East-West confrontation – in essence, many separate ‘little Cold Wars’.

For much of the second half of the twentieth century, southern Africa played host to the great game of geostrategic competition and ideological rivalry that was the Cold War. Like Europe, Latin America, the Middle East and South-East Asia, southern Africa became a political, military and economic battleground on which the superpowers jockeyed for power and influence, usually to the detriment of the region’s nations. Despite this, southern Africa never appeared to achieve the political or strategic importance of the other Cold War ‘theatres’. In Central Europe the two great ideological and military

heavyweights faced each other directly across the Inter-German Border. In the Middle East the proxy wars between American-armed Israel and the Soviet-supported Arab states, and the Russian invasion of Afghanistan, more than once threatened to drag the superpowers into open conflict. And in South-East Asia the U.S and USSR for three decades embroiled themselves in intense proxy conflicts. In stark contrast to these ‘hot’ flashpoints and strategic crises, the Cold War in southern Africa appeared to be nothing more than a sideshow. This was partly determined by timing; during the 1950s and 1960s the focus of the superpowers was on the Arab-Israeli conflicts and on the wars in Indochina, Korea and Vietnam. And, prior to the outbreak of war in the Portuguese African colonies, the power and influence of the white-minority governments in Portuguese Africa, South Africa and Rhodesia was such that the possibility of open conflict in the southern African region was low – so low in fact that the United States only became actively involved in the Angolan conflict when it became apparent that the Portuguese intended to grant their colony independence⁵, and that the Soviet-backed MPLA could seize power⁶. Conflict had been simmering in southern Africa since the early 1960s (the armed uprising against the Portuguese in Angola and Mozambique had begun in 1961⁷), however it had been relatively contained and only began to take a more violent course in the late 1960s. The withdrawal of the Portuguese from their colonies from 1975 and the transfer of power to the African population were defining moments in the history of southern Africa during the Cold War.

The withdrawal of the Portuguese colonial authorities from their Angolan and Mozambican territories heralded a shift towards open conflict across southern Africa which lasted until at least the end of the Cold War. This paper will address three inter-connected but separate ‘little Cold Wars’ which were being fought in the region after 1975, namely the wars in Angola, Rhodesia and Mozambique, and analyse how the unique local political and ethnic conditions in each of these conflicts helped to shape and define the regional Cold War in southern Africa, and conversely how the Cold War came to manipulate the conflicts themselves.

The Little Cold War in Angola

Armed resistance to Portuguese rule in Angola began in 1961, as it did in Guinea-Bissau and Mozambique. Situated on the west coast of southern Africa, between present-day Namibia (then known as South-West Africa) and Zaire, Angola was arguably the most valuable of the Portuguese colonial possessions, being rich in diamonds, oil, iron, copper and manganese, as well as being a large coffee exporter⁸. Unlike the other two Portuguese colonies, where the liberation struggle was fought by a unified independence movement, Angola was unique in that three major liberation groups were fighting the Portuguese⁹ - occasionally in alliance but more often not. Each of these liberation movements drew their strength from specific geographical areas and ethnic groups, and were

supported by different external powers. The *Frente Nacional de Libertação de Angola* (FNLA – National Front for the Liberation of Angola), formed in 1962 by Holden Roberto, was based in northwest Angola and deeply rooted in the Bakongo people of that region. When the FNLA established a government in-exile in Congo (the Government of the Republic of Angola in Exile, or ‘GRAE’), it received periodic financial support from the United States, however requests for more substantial American non-military aid were rejected on the grounds that it would constitute an American conspiracy against Portugal, a NATO ally¹⁰. The “Marxist-oriented and *mestiço*-led”¹¹ *Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola* (MPLA – People’s Movement for the Liberation of Angola) was formed in late 1956 from the Angolan Communist Party (ACP) and based itself in predominately urban areas of the Portuguese colony, drawing in intellectuals and African students, but remained rooted in the Ambundu people of central-western Angola. When Roberto and the FNLA secured limited American and Western aid, the MPLA under its president, Agostinho Neto, looked to the Eastern bloc for political and economic support and by the mid-1960s the MPLA’s armed wing, FAPLA, was receiving some military training from Eastern bloc advisors outside of Angola¹². The last to be formed was the *União Nacional Para a Independência Total de Angola* (UNITA – National Union for the Total Independence of Angola), which, under the leadership of FNLA breakaway Jonas Savimbi, was created in March 1966¹³. Savimbi expected to win the free elections promised by the Portuguese prior to their withdrawal¹⁴, not in the least because UNITA derived its support from the Ovimbundu peasantry of southern Angola who, at the time, constituted 40 percent of the nation’s population. When the Portuguese pulled out of Angola in 1975/76 the fragile coalition they left in power collapsed and the MPLA, well established in the urban centres, seized power relatively quickly, and the predominately rural-based FNLA and UNITA were relegated to fighting guerrilla wars from their ethnic heartlands.

Although only limited prior to 1975, Soviet support for the MPLA during the insurgency war against the Portuguese ensured that the Portuguese military in Africa had the tacit support of United States, despite placing pressure on Lisbon to restrict the use of American and NATO supplied military equipment in the colonies¹⁵. Portuguese Angola was militarily important to the United States during this period of the Cold War; the American strategic air-bridge to the Far East relied on overflight rights of Portuguese Angola and use of airbases in the territory, and the U.S Navy made extensive use of Angolan ports for replenishment and anti-submarine warfare operations¹⁶. Likewise, Angola’s rich deposits of minerals and oil made it strategically important to both the United States and the Soviet Union. However, the influence of the Soviet Union in the Angolan conflict prior to 1975 should not be overstated; Soviet aid to the MPLA actually only increased after the United States agreed to

provide \$300,000 in funding to Roberto and the FNLA, and Soviet and Cuban military advisors did not begin to arrive in Angola in significant numbers until late 1975¹⁷. Thus Moscow “neither instigated nor agitated for the [MPLA’s] armed struggle”¹⁸ against the Portuguese, but rather played an important role in the post-colonial civil war. The withdrawing Portuguese colonial authorities essentially handed over power to the urban based MPLA¹⁹, creating a political vacuum in which the three separate independence movements abandoned any pretence of cooperation and began fighting amongst one another for control of post-colonial Angola. In this conflict – the Angolan Civil War - the United States stepped up support to not only the FNLA but also UNITA and the South African Defence Force (SADF), which dispatched a modest intervention force from neighbouring South-West Africa, and the Soviet Union and Cuba increased their economic and material aid to the MPLA.

In their frantic withdrawal, as the three-way civil war intensified in 1975-1976, the Portuguese colonial authorities sacked their former colony, taking the nation’s wealth as well as pharmaceuticals, mechanical equipment and heavy vehicles, not to mention the trained personnel required to staff hospitals, schools and other institutions²⁰. Into this vacuum came the Cubans, who provided doctors, nurses and engineers²¹ and, as the military situation improved for the MPLA, Cuban and Soviet military advisors began to arrive in greater numbers to assist in the training of FAPLA troops²². In Washington, this dispatch of Cuban and Soviet personnel to Angola was interpreted to be a direct threat to its interests in the region, and in December 1975 the administration of President Gerald Ford began to supply financial aid to the value of \$400 million USD to the FNLA and UNITA²³. Beyond economic measures, the CIA was instructed to begin supplying American TOW anti-tank missiles and Redeye surface-to-air missiles to Roberto and Savimbi, if French *Milan* and Soviet SA-7 systems could not be discreetly obtained²⁴, as well as to seek out Portuguese and French assistance in recruiting mercenaries to fight alongside the FNLA and UNTIA²⁵. The anti-interventionist atmosphere prevailing in the United States after the Vietnam War – the “Vietnam Syndrome”²⁶ – as well as the Clark Amendment to the *Arms Export Control Act*, prevented official, direct American involvement in the civil war in Angola²⁷, however the United States continued to covertly intervene in²⁸, and manipulate the course of, the conflict. Thus it was that the localised Angolan politico-ethnic struggle became inescapably intertwined with the interests of the Cold War powers in southern Africa. At a higher level the FNLA, MPLA and UNITA, each representing a different ethnic core, were essentially co-opted by external actors – the United States and Soviet Union chief among them – to fight a conflict by proxy over Angola.

Into this already volatile mix came the South Africans. Since 1966, South Africa had been fighting a low-level counter-insurgency war against the

communist guerrillas of the People's Liberation Army of Namibia (PLAN), the armed wing of the South-West African People's Organisation (SWAPO), and had largely prevailed over the insurgents²⁹, at least militarily. The survival of the Portuguese colonial regime in Angola was of great importance to Pretoria's white rulers because it would deny PLAN guerrillas a friendly border across which to flee³⁰ in the event of South African pursuit, friendly territory upon which training and supply bases could be established and, crucially, the Portuguese territories would provide "important depth to the defence of South Africa"³¹ itself. The Portuguese withdrawal and handover of power to the black population in 1975 was viewed with considerable trepidation in Pretoria, which sent the South African Defence Force into Angola to support the FNLA and UNITA and destabilise the MPLA³². Although the South African government insisted that it was making a vital contribution to the defence of the West's interests in southern Africa³³ by intervening against the Soviet Union and Cuba in Angola³⁴, the white regime was more concerned about the danger a stable black Angola would present to its colony in South-West Africa and, by extension, to the Republic of South Africa itself. Ethnic and racial considerations were paramount, and the Cold War battle of ideologies largely served as a smokescreen behind which South Africa's military operations against the "black peril"³⁵ were conducted. At any rate, the initial South African intervention in Angola in 1975/76 – Operation *Savannah* – served American interests insofar as long as the SADF were able to, in the words of Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, "win and then get out"³⁶ of Angola afterwards. In the end, American pressure and international condemnation³⁷ of South Africa's foray into Angola forced Pretoria to withdraw its contingent and not long after the FNLA "began to disintegrate"³⁸. The MPLA secured international recognition as the legitimate government of Angola in February 1976³⁹ and had largely seized control of urban and northern Angola, but UNITA, with sporadic American and South African support, continued to wage a guerrilla war in the south-east of the country until 1988. Pretoria's fears of a 'domino effect' against the white laager in southern Africa kept the South Africans involved in Angola till the end of the Cold War, and UNITA continued to fight on from the Ovimbundu stronghold in southern Angola until 2002, when Savimbi himself was killed and the faction agreed to a ceasefire with the MPLA government.

In Angola during both the Portuguese colonial war and the Angolan Civil War, local ethnic and racial, rather than political and ideological, considerations, were the driving forces of these little Cold Wars. The FNLA, MPLA and UNITA drew their strength from the Bakongo, Ambundu and Ovimbundu peoples respectively and the FNLA and UNITA both received support from Communist China *and* the United States at various points during their struggles first against then Portuguese, and then against each other. Savimbi's UNITA eschewed Maoism for American-style capitalism when it became politically

expedient to do so, and fought side-by-side with the white troops of apartheid South Africa against other Angolans. Localised ethnic and racial factors shaped the conflict in Angola, which was co-opted by the Cold War superpowers to serve as a battleground in their great ideological confrontation.

The Little Cold War in Rhodesia

Although quite distinct from the anti-colonial and post-colonial conflicts in Angola and neighbouring Mozambique, the anti-colonial war in Rhodesia (the 'Bush War') was nevertheless inescapably tied to them, especially as black Rhodesian militants used Mozambique and Angola, respectively, as safe havens and for establishing training camps⁴⁰. And the white-minority governments of Portuguese Africa, South Africa and Rhodesia, worried by the spectre of open black resistance in their territories, co-operated on counter-insurgency operations and intelligence sharing⁴¹. Portugal, in particular, capitalised on Rhodesia's increasing isolation after the government of Ian Smith issued its Universal Declaration of Independence (UDI) in 1965, strengthening political, military and economic ties to Salisbury⁴² to counteract the lack of external support and, at the same time, secure Portuguese Mozambique's western border with Rhodesia. And the white government of South Africa, concerned about the direct threat that a black ruled state in Rhodesia would constitute to the security of white South Africa, began to send South African police units into Rhodesia to assist the security forces in combatting the black resistance movements⁴³, where they represented a large percentage of the counter-insurgency forces⁴⁴. At a higher level, the outbreak of the Rhodesian conflict and the intensification of the Portuguese Colonial War through the late 1960s brought the white powers together under the so-called 'Exercise ALCORA'⁴⁵ - an informal military alliance that nevertheless indicated a commitment on the part of the white regimes to joint defence in the face of the mutual threat against their combined territories by black nationalist movements⁴⁶. Thus security cooperation between the white-minority regimes on the one hand, and the black resistance movements in Angola, Rhodesia and Mozambique on the other, tied three separate localised conflicts into a wider regional web of conflict. Cold War politics pulled them into the wider East-West ideological struggle, but ethnic and racial considerations remained paramount.

The insurgency war in Rhodesia was largely an ethnic anti-colonial war which became embroiled in the wider Cold War in southern Africa. Unlike Angola, the war in Rhodesia never became a proxy battleground for the superpowers because the United States largely avoided becoming actively involved in the conflict⁴⁷. Instead, the Bush War was a protracted war of insurgency and counter-insurgency between the white Rhodesian government and military, and two separate resistance movements - ZANU and ZAPU - both of which represented different ethnic groups (a third, short

lived organisation – FROLIZI - was also formed in 1971 but merged back into ZANU⁴⁸). The Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU), headquartered in exile in Dar-es-Salaam in Tanzania and led by Reverend Ndabaningi Sithole and later Robert Mugabe, was a Communist Chinese supported movement and a nationalist vehicle for the Shona people of northern Rhodesia⁴⁹. By contrast, the Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU), trained and advised by the Soviet Union and Cuba and under the leadership of Joshua Nkomo, was “dominated by the Ndelebe (Matabele) ethnic group”⁵⁰ of south-western Rhodesia. Both movements were formed in the early 1960s but, by the middle of the decade, had largely been suppressed by the Rhodesian Security Forces (RSF) and gone underground. The patronage and support of the major communist powers helped ZAPU and ZANU to reform, rearm and retrain and, after the white government issued Rhodesia's UDI on November 11, 1965, the Bush War intensified.

The external support that ZAPU and ZANU received from the Soviet Union and China respectively shaped the course of the Rhodesian conflict. ZAPU, backed by the USSR and other Warsaw Pact nations, adopted a regular military structure and attempted to conduct a conventional invasion of northern Rhodesia to seize territory⁵¹, with limited success. Further, the concentration of its armed wing (the Zimbabwe People's Revolutionary Army, ZIPRA) into large camps made it an easy target for cross-border raids by the Rhodesian Special Air Service (SAS) and air force bombers. Nevertheless, by 1979, ZIPRA had raised a sophisticated force-in-being of over 20,000 soldiers equipped with advanced Soviet hardware, like MiG fighter aircraft⁵² and presented a significant conventional threat to the Rhodesian regime from its bases in Zambia. ZANU, on the other hand, established an alliance with the FRELIMO guerrillas of Mozambique and with training and military guidance from communist China ZANLA, its military wing, was able to wage an effective Maoist guerrilla war⁵³ against the white government from bases in Tanzania and Mozambique. Both organisations remained hostile to each other throughout the Bush War and did not cooperate; this separation of the black resistance along ethnic and ideological lines was to have a profound impact on the conflict after the transition to majority rule in 1980. Despite mounting Soviet and Chinese support to the resistance movements the Rhodesian security forces, with tacit South African material and military support, fought an effective counter-insurgency campaign, believing by the late 1960s that they had defeated the guerrilla threat⁵⁴. The collapse of the Portuguese colonial empire dramatically tipped the balance of power in the Rhodesian; the Smith government lost its closest ally and eight hundred miles of Rhodesia's eastern and north-eastern border with Mozambique was opened up to infiltration by ZANLA militants, who were now being actively supported by the government of post-colonial Mozambique⁵⁵. With Rhodesia now surrounded to the west, north and east by hostile black ‘frontline’ states, the Smith government realised that postponing

majority rule indefinitely was not possible, however the Rhodesian military continued to keep up pressure on the militants until the end of the 1970s in order to enhance the regime's bargaining position over ZAPU and ZANU in the predicted negotiations⁵⁶.

Persuaded by the United States and South Africa to reach a settlement on the transition to majority rule⁵⁷, Smith announced an 'Internal Settlement', which would introduce universal suffrage within two years and a power-sharing government in which key ministries (military, policy, judiciary etc) would continue to be held by whites. The government formed in November 1978 as a result of the Internal Settlement, which saw Bishop Abel Muzorewa seated as Prime Minister and the nation renamed to Zimbabwe-Rhodesia, lacked credibility amongst the black population and remained unrecognised by the United States, United Kingdom and the Soviet Union. In particular, the administration of U.S President Jimmy Carter would not recognise the formation of government without the inclusion of ZANU and ZAPU, together called the Patriotic Front⁵⁸. Only with the Lancaster House Agreement, proposed by British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher in August 1979 and signed by the Zimbabwe-Rhodesia government and signatories from ZANU and ZAPU in December 1979 would a ceasefire be declared and the transition of Rhodesia to Zimbabwe be complete.

The transition from white-minority to majority rule in Rhodesia/Zimbabwe did not bring an end to the 'little Cold War' in the country; ethnic animosity between the Shona and Ndebele peoples, suppressed during the war by the urgency to fight the white government, resurfaced, especially after Robert Mugabe's ZANU was catapulted to power by the Shona majority in the British-supervised elections. Mugabe initially attempted to incorporate ZAPU political members into his government and integrate ZIPRA fighters into the new military, however he was convinced that ex-ZIPRA guerrillas constituted a threat to his new rule⁵⁹ and in 1982 sent the Zimbabwe Army's 5th Brigade into Matabeleland to liquidate ZAPU's ethnic heartland. The ethnic cleansing that followed – the '*gukurahundi*' – saw the massacre, torture or detention of between ten and twenty thousand Ndebele by the 5th Brigade⁶⁰, an un-integrated unit of the Zimbabwe Army consisting almost entirely of ex-ZANLA fighters⁶¹. At the same time, keen to strengthen economic relations with the West, especially the United States, Mugabe pursued a policy of reconciliation with the white population by allowing white farmers to remain on their land⁶². In Pretoria, Mugabe's rise to power was viewed with significant trepidation by the white government, who had been determined to see Muzorewa remain as Prime Minister⁶³. As a result, throughout the early years of Mugabe's premiership the SADF carried out a series of sabotage and destabilisation operations against Zimbabwe⁶⁴, and targeted African National Congress training camps inside the country. For South Africa, the transition to Zimbabwe was as, if

not more, calamitous than the Portuguese withdrawal was to the Rhodesians; South Africa now stood alone as the last bastion of white-minority rule on the African continent.

Rhodesia/Zimbabwe is a particularly pertinent example of how localised conditions shaped the course of the Cold War in southern Africa. The insurgency against the white Rhodesian government was essentially a race war between white coloniser and black colonised, and the aftermath of Zimbabwean independence further revealed ethnic character of the conflict. ZANU and ZAPU were political vehicles for the Shona and Ndebele peoples respectively, and their ideological association with the People's Republic of China and the USSR were, at least for the triumphant ZANU, alliances of convenience. The liberation struggle in Rhodesia/Zimbabwe was about freeing the Zimbabwean people from white colonialist control, not aligning post-colonial Zimbabwe with either of the Cold War ideological Blocs⁶⁵. Mugabe's abandoned commitment to ideological principles after his ascension to power⁶⁶, the ruthless campaign against the Ndebele in 1982-1985 and his reconciliation with the West⁶⁷ demonstrates unequivocally that localised ethnic conditions, not the East-West ideological struggle, dictated the course of the little Cold War in Rhodesia/Zimbabwe.

The Little Cold War in Mozambique

As in Angola, resistance to Portuguese rule began in the early 1960s. In 1962, three separate resistance movements then operating against the colonial authorities in Mozambique merged to form the *Frente de Libertação de Moçambique*, the Mozambique Liberation Front (FRELIMO)⁶⁸. Headquartered in-exile in Dar es-Salaam and led by Eduardo Mondlane until his assassination in 1969 when Samora Machel assumed the leadership, FRELIMO maintained close relations and a strong ideological association with the Soviet Union⁶⁹, a by-product of waging a war of decolonisation against a NATO power. Unlike in Angola and Rhodesia, where the anti-colonial struggle was hamstrung by the differing ethnic allegiances of the insurgents, FRELIMO's success against the Portuguese was precisely because it managed to unite diverse elements of Mozambican society in pursuit of the shared objective of independence⁷⁰, which Mozambique attained on June 25, 1975. Woe to downplay the importance of FRELIMO's anti-colonial struggle against the Portuguese, it is the post-colonial civil war in Mozambique (1975-1992) which is of most importance here because that particular conflict best highlights how localised conditions contributed to the maintenance of the wider Cold War in southern Africa. In Mozambique, ethnic conditions played less of a role in shaping conflict than in Angola or Rhodesia – localised political and economic factors, as well as the destabilising intervention of South Africa, were more prolific.

The FRELIMO party which ascended to power in Mozambique after

the withdrawal of the Portuguese may have presented a unified front during the anti-colonial war, but it was to face a lengthy and brutal insurgency from a Rhodesian (and later South African) armed and organised resistance movement, the *Resistencia Nacional Mocambicana* (Mozambican National Resistance, 'Renamo'). Conceived by former Rhodesian Central Intelligence Organisation (CIO) chief Ken Flower and comprising former FRELIMO guerrillas who had become disaffected by FRELIMO's increasingly autocratic style of government⁷¹, Renamo began armed resistance against the Soviet-backed government in Maputo in 1976. Renamo had originally been organised by the Rhodesians as retaliation for Machel supporting ZANU militants operating from inside Mozambique after independence⁷², but the transition from Rhodesia to Zimbabwe in 1980 meant that the group was taken over by South African military intelligence who employed Renamo as its own private army against the Mozambican government⁷³. White South African fears about Mozambique's new government were not entirely baseless; FRELIMO indeed continued to be the beneficiary of a significant amount of Soviet and Chinese economic and military aid, especially in the crucial immediate post-independence years⁷⁴, and in its Third Congress in 1977 committed the newly independent country to a classically Marxist political and economic developmental model⁷⁵. Yet under President Machel and his Foreign Minister, Joaquim Chissano, FRELIMO had by the early 1980s demonstrated its resolve to shift the "avowedly Marxist-Leninist...government towards closer political and economic relations with the West"⁷⁶. The reasons for this policy shift were pragmatic, and meant that the Mozambican Civil War would be shaped by localised rather than polarised ideological conditions.

Although heavily dependent on Soviet and Eastern bloc economic and technical aid during the anti-colonial struggle and after independence⁷⁷, the persistent headache of the South African backed Renamo insurgency and the inadequacy of Eastern bloc military aid in addressing this threat⁷⁸, as well as economic downturn due to the failure of rural agricultural reform⁷⁹ forced the Mozambican government to seek out other sources of external support. FRELIMO's adherence to Marxism-Leninism played strongly to Western concerns about Soviet penetration in Africa⁸⁰, yet the United States was keen to maintain good relations with the Machel regime because it desired continued naval access to Mozambican ports⁸¹, and to this end supplied over \$6 million in food aid in 1977⁸² (this was under Carter; under Reagan relations would however cool). The United Kingdom, despite maintaining extensive economic links⁸³ to South Africa, supported the FRELIMO government in its struggle against Renamo forces by dispatching a modest British Military Advisory and Training Team (BMATT)⁸⁴ to Mozambique in 1986, where it trained elements of the Mozambican Army for counter-insurgency operations, and supplied military communications equipment⁸⁵. Mozambique's relations with the Scandinavian

countries were also particularly strong, with Sweden, Norway, Denmark and Finland providing much of the aid necessary to develop FRELIMO's education, health and development programs during and after independence⁸⁶. Most surprisingly, under Foreign Minister Chissano, Mozambique's relations with Portugal warmed to the point that there was significant *rapprochement* between Maputo and Lisbon. Portugal contributed significantly to the anti-Renamo conflict by providing a variety of training and logistical commitments to the Mozambican Armed Forces (FAM), and by 1983 bilateral links were sufficient for Machel and a significant portion of his politburo to visit Lisbon as part of their European tour⁸⁷.

In stark contrast, Renamo remained a wholly South African supported enterprise after it was handed over by the Rhodesians; despite the election of Ronald Reagan to the Presidency in the United States in 1981 and sharply deteriorating relations with the Eastern bloc in general, the United States did not directly support Renamo, as it did with UNITA in Angola. Renamo's success on the battlefield through the early 1980s was significant and its military strength was considerable, but it lacked charismatic leadership and had no clearly identifiable ideological identity or ethnic base⁸⁸. For the South Africans, their operative goal was "never to put [Renamo] in power in Mozambique"⁸⁹ but rather to use it to establish a *cordon sanitaire* in southern Mozambique to prevent the use of that region by the guerrillas of the African National Congress. Additionally, Pretoria capitalised on Renamo's ability to destabilise the Mozambican state through ruthless violence, reducing the ideological appeal of the FRELIMO government and serving as a warning to the other frontline states bordering on South Africa. The 'anti-communist' argument put forth in defence of Renamo was a hollow smokescreen; the insurgents were co-opted by South Africa to execute the apartheid regime's aggressive anti-back security policies in a conflict that in reality had nothing to do with anti-communism. Pretoria rallied to the perception that it was defending the interests of the Western bloc in Mozambique even though it was clear by the early 1980s that the FRELIMO government was steadily moving away from alignment with the Eastern bloc in favour of warmer relations with the United States and Europe. The racial policies of the white minority government in Pretoria and its obsession with national security had a defining impact on Mozambique's post-colonial development and largely shaped the conflict in Mozambique; it is no surprise that after South Africa ceased supporting Renamo in 1990 the group began to fall apart, eventually seeking a ceasefire with the Mozambican government in 1992⁹⁰.

Post-independence Mozambique was a great paradox that effectively highlighted the contradictions of the Cold War; an autocratic state ruled by an staunchly Marxist-Leninist clique and the recipient of considerable amounts of Eastern bloc military aid, established solid relations not only with the economic

powerhouses of the anti-communist West but also its former colonial power, Portugal, at the same time as it was waging a war against insurgents supported by the white-minority government of South Africa, an erstwhile American ally. The Mozambican Civil War also demonstrates the inherent complexity of the Cold War in southern Africa and, these authors argue, the inadequacy of attempting to analyse the topic through purely political or ideological lenses.

Conclusion

The resistance movements in Angola, Rhodesia and Mozambique were all, in some manner, politically and militarily linked despite being geographically separated and rooted in different ethnic bases, just as the white-minority regimes loosely cooperated as part of Exercise ALCORA. And the superpowers, the United States and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, as well as the People's Republic of China, were major players in all three of these conflicts. Thus these conflicts were strongly tied to and influenced by one another – yet they were never homogeneous. Conflicting ethnic and tribal loyalties on the part of black resistance movements, and the widely differing interests of external powers, meant that each particular conflict was a distinct and unique microcosm of the Cold War, 'little Cold Wars'. And although the great East-West ideological confrontation undoubtedly played an important role in enflaming regional conflict, it was localised ethnic, tribal and political peculiarities in Angola, Rhodesia and Mozambique that shaped the course of the Cold War in southern Africa.

Endnotes

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