

Samora Machel

Following is an interview with President Samora Machel of Mozambique published in the March 28 London Observer. The interview was conducted following the recent meeting in Zambia between Machel, the presidents of three other black African nations and leaders of the Zimbabwe liberation movement.



What new strategy evolved from the Lusaka summit with your colleagues from Tanzania, Zambia, Botswana and Rhodesia [Zimbabwe]?

We decided to intensify the armed struggle, because [Rhodesian Prime Minister Ian] Smith's arrogance shows that it is impossible to negotiate. And we decided to consolidate unity in the midst of the armed struggle; to re-define the enemy, and that is very clearly Ian Smith; and, finally, to decide what targets to aim for.

The breakdown of the Smith-Nkomo talks showed everyone, especially the British, that Smith is incapable of understanding. So the only thing for Britain now is to support the armed struggle.

The armed struggle is not against whites as such. Our strategy has a lot of respect for life, a lot of respect for human beings. No children will be killed because they are whites, no women will be killed because they are whites, no farmers will be killed because they are whites, no civilians will be killed because they are whites.

In Zimbabwe, it will be a people's struggle and it will be protracted. It will allow Zimbabweans to transform the present nationalist struggle into a revolutionary struggle that implies profound changes in the society. This will allow the people of Zimbabwe a complete divorce from the system of capitalism. So we would like the struggle to be a long one in order to liberate the mentality of Zimbabweans.

The British Foreign Secretary, Mr. Callaghan, has said that Mr. Smith must accept elections leading to majority rule within two years. Would that be an acceptable time scale?

I do not know if Britain is the administrative power which can fix time limits to Ian Smith. Nor do I know if the foreign secretary's proposals followed consultations with Ian Smith and Joshua Nkomo about a time scale. But my answer is this: Time is a two-edged sword. Give time to the reactionary forces in Rhodesia and you give time to Ian Smith to be better prepared. And this would imply negotiations with Mozambique to reopen her border. Who would this help? Mr. Smith or the majority?

And what does Britain think of the third force, the guerrillas who are waging the armed struggle? It is the main force in Zimbabwe.

When Ian Smith's regime declared UDI [unilateral declaration of independence from Britain in 1965], they did not need a transitional period. Here once again is this paternalistic attitude toward blacks: that they need time to qualify. If Britain wants to make Rhodesia her responsibility, it should be eight months, at most 12, for transition, because time is very dangerous and there is a war situation in Rhodesia.

Can you explain the timing of your decision to close Mozambique's border with Rhodesia on March 3 and apply United Nations sanctions?

Essentially this move is to destroy Ian Smith's economy. We have closed the roads and railways which support Rhodesia's economy. But for those who are for freedom, Rhodesia's borders are not closed.

We did it at this precise moment because the freedom fighters and the people of Zimbabwe are organized to fight

against the Smith regime, so the conditions were ripe for the application of sanctions. We do admit there is an economic crisis in Mozambique but we have applied sanctions nine months after independence after studying Mozambique's economy and because this action will now not divert attention from the Angolan struggle.

When we closed the border, we were well aware of the economic consequences. But for Mozambique it is a temporary setback, even if it lasts five years. What we imported from Rhodesia we can import from elsewhere. But Rhodesia cannot replace these routes. In the final analysis, they will suffer most.

Since the Angolan war, Dr. Kissinger and others in the West have expressed fears that Cuban troops may fight in Rhodesia and South West Africa. Would you allow foreign troops to travel through Mozambique to fight in Rhodesia?

These fears are essentially the myth that exists among the whites that the blacks are not capable. But who brought down Portuguese colonialism which was the representative of Western civilization in Africa? Was it the Cubans, the Russians, or any other foreigners? For 10 years we fought in Mozambique and we defeated Portuguese colonialism. We were able to transform the armed struggle into a revolution and we took power by force. We are leading our state in a revolutionary way and making profound changes in our society.

When I was a child and went to church, white priests used to say that God was white and that blacks did not go to heaven when they died. So now they say that blacks cannot beat the whites without the help of other countries, without the active participation of whites. They must not ignore our capacity. The Zimbabweans will defeat Ian Smith without Cuban participation. [Machel and others in the region have noted, however, that armed South African intervention in Zimbabwe—an unlikely circumstance—could change the nature of the struggle.]

We would like Dr. Kissinger and the American government to worry first about getting rid of the illegal Smith regime. Then they would have the support of the whole world. But I believe they are trying to find a new zone of tension. We believe that Dr. Kissinger's main motive is to try to transfer the tension from the Middle East to southern Africa and, having established that tension here, to find an excuse for bases in the Indian Ocean.

Is it the task of the West to perpetuate crimes and wars of aggression? This is what they should answer. They must not ask about the Cubans and the Russians. They must not try to divert attention from what is happening in Rhodesia. This is a case of an illegal, minority, racist regime and the choice is between supporting those who oppress and those who want freedom.

What happens if an outside force like South Africa intervenes militarily to support Mr. Smith?

South Africa will be defeated. The people are very strong. And in Zimbabwe it is a people's struggle.

Because Smith defines his struggle as racial, he will lose and is already losing. This is a situation of agony and desperation on the part of Smith. But it is not too late: there is still time for him to correct his policies, dissolve his government and transfer power to the majority.

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You have said that Mozambique's government will 'destroy the basis of poverty' by the end of the decade. Yet in more than a decade of African independence no country has achieved that. How do you define the basis of poverty and how will you destroy it?

We will destroy poverty by a correct economic strategy based on the needs of the people. We know what the people want and our central problem is to destroy the colonial structure which is so deeply rooted. So we have to liberate the minds of the people, liberate their creative initiative.

So we have defined the communal villages as places where people will be organized, carry out defined tasks, be programmed and where they will correctly utilize their own forces. Development will begin in the countryside and be supported by industry. We know that you in the West never wanted to industrialize Africa because that is the secret of eliminating poverty.

Reports on the BBC and elsewhere talk of massive forced labor, political repression and concentration camps

in Mozambique. Will you comment on this?

Since we created the new republic we have closed prisons, not opened new ones. In addition we have destroyed the concentration camps, the so-called strategic hamlets, and liberated 1,500,000 Mozambicans. They lived in concentration camps and were brutalized. So now who do we have in prison: the tramps created by colonialism—drug addicts, thieves, prostitutes, criminal elements, con men, smugglers and so on. We have to reintegrate them back into society.

Before, these arrests only affected blacks. But now the world reacts because we also arrest whites who have never been arrested before and who are being arrested by blacks. Once again you come to this white complex.

We serve our people and our interests are antagonistic to the capitalist interests. People ask us if we are communists. Our answer is that we are Mozambicans and we are revolutionaries and consequently we are against capitalism, discrimination and humiliation.

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