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## **Defense, Ideology or Ambition: An Assessment of Malawian Motivations for Intervention in the Mozambican Civil War**

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*Abstract: Following its independence in 1975, the former Portuguese colony of Mozambique suffered a devastating civil war until the early 1990s. This war, between the ruling Frente de Libertação de Moçambique (Frelimo) and the Resistência Nacional Moçambicana (Renamo), was the context within which issues of underdevelopment and political divisions unfolded. It is well-documented that throughout the Civil War the Renamo rebels, who were primarily a proxy army for the Apartheid regime in South Africa, used the territory of neighbouring Malawi to supply their forces in northern Mozambique and to seek refuge from the operations of the Mozambican armed forces (FPLM). It is extremely unlikely that this could have occurred without the cooperation, or at least acquiescence, of Malawian authorities. This article surveys the history of post-independence relations between Malawi, Mozambique and South Africa, in order to examine a number of theories explaining Malawian support for Renamo.*

### **1. Introduction**

Mozambique's achievement of independence on 25 June 1975 was a pivotal moment in the country's history; a pause between the crushing oppression of Portuguese colonialism and the devastating civil war that Mozambique suffered until the early 1990s. Led by Samora Machel, the new republic's charismatic first President, the revolutionaries of the victorious *Frente de Libertação de Moçambique* (Frelimo) planned to implement a form of people's democracy, in the context of a one-party state, and a programme of 'scientific socialism' (Saul, 1985, p. 45). But the overwhelming challenges facing Mozambique after independence would prevent Frelimo's grand vision coming to fruition. These challenges included the scale of Mozambique's underdevelopment, the ideological divisions that remained throughout the country and within the Frelimo party, and the devastation reaped by South African destabilisation and

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the country's civil war. This final and greatest challenge, the Mozambican Civil War between Frelimo and the *Resistência Nacional Moçambicana* (Renamo), was the principal historical experience of Mozambique's post-independence period, and it was within its context that issues of underdevelopment and political divisions unfolded. It is well-documented that throughout the Civil War the Renamo rebels, who were primarily a proxy army for the Apartheid regime in South Africa, used the territory of neighbouring Malawi to supply their forces in northern Mozambique and to seek refuge from the operations of the Mozambican armed forces (FPLM). It is extremely unlikely that this could have occurred without the cooperation, or at least acquiescence, of Malawian authorities. This article seeks to survey the history of post-independence relations between Malawi, Mozambique and South Africa, in order to examine a number of theories explaining Malawian support for Renamo. Four main theories will be critically assessed and it will be argued that the best explanation of Malawi's relationship with Renamo is that connections were fostered between the paramilitary Malawi Young Pioneers (MYPs), the Malawian Police Force and Renamo, under the direction of the Governor of Malawi's Central Bank, John Tembo. Tembo sought to succeed Banda and become President of Malawi, but faced challenges from various competitors, including the leadership of Malawi's armed forces. By aiding Renamo with training and use of Malawian territory, and forging a bond with their South African and American backers, Tembo hoped that Renamo could be called upon as a third force to support him during any struggle over succession in Malawi.

## **2. Malawi and the White Regimes**

The British Protectorate of Nyasaland formally gained independence as the nation of Malawi in July 1964. At the time the Malawian leadership forged strong political relations with southern Africa's white minority regimes, and maintained these over the following decades. As part of Nyasaland's constitutional transition to independence, in 1958 the long-time Nyasaland African Congress member Dr Hastings Kamuzu Banda was encouraged to return from

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overseas to lead the new Malawi Congress Party (MCP). He rapidly consolidated his personal power over the party apparatus and subsequently became the national leader following the MCP's victory in the 1961 general elections. In the same year Portuguese authorities first made contact with President Banda, through the high-profile Portuguese politician and businessman Jorge Jardim, to discuss the economic benefits of collaboration with their colony Mozambique. Hastings Banda also signalled his willingness to deal with the Apartheid government in South Africa. After independence the authoritarian nature of Banda's regime quickly became apparent, as the President forced a number of dissident ministers into exile and entrenched his personal power through changes to Malawi's constitution (Hedges, 1987; Cabrita, 2000, p. 75). According to Joseph Hanlon, Banda 'stressed his total power by sporadically dissolving his cabinet arbitrarily, only to reappoint most of the same people' (Hanlon, 1986, p. 236). The President's willingness to suppress opposition was emphasised in a speech on 1 April 1965, declaring that:

If, to maintain political stability and efficient administration I have to detain 10,000, 100,000, I will do it. I want nobody to misunderstand me. I will detain anyone who is interfering with the political stability of this country...When a country is building its political institutions it's likely to do many, many nasty things. Well, we are building our political institutions here now... (Short, 1974, p256).

From the time Banda came to power he demonstrated that he was also no ally of southern Africa's radical anti-colonial organisations, imposing tight restrictions on the activities that Mozambique's Frelimo rebels were able to carry out within the country. Then from 1965 the Portuguese secret services used Malawi as a base for operations against Frelimo, and co-operated with South African agents in the training of Malawi's police, army, special branch and the pro-government paramilitary force the Malawi Young Pioneers (Hedges, 1989; Moorcraft, 1990; Vines, 1996). The Malawi Young Pioneers ensured that villagers bought MCP membership cards, attended political meetings and paid taxes. Defiant villagers would be intimidated by the Pioneers,

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who were, 'notorious for their readiness to use violence' (Englund, 1996, pp. 116-117). In 1971 Banda became the first black African leader to visit South Africa and Portuguese-controlled Mozambique ('Banda en Terra Portuguesa', 1971). One aspect of this relationship, which later featured prominently in theories explaining Malawian support for Renamo, involved an agreement made by Portuguese representatives during the 1960s promising Banda territory in Mozambique's underdeveloped north. The then-Malawian Foreign Minister Kanyama Chiume claimed in his autobiography that,

both [Portuguese President] Salazar and the Portuguese settlers convinced Banda that they would give him the northern portion of Mozambique in return for not allowing freedom fighters to pass through Malawi and for the recognition of Mozambique's Independence after the death of Salazar (Chiume, 1975, p. 207).

Malawi and South Africa formalised diplomatic relations in 1967 and subsequently held more than twenty high-level government meetings between 1967 and 1976. South Africa gave financial assistance to Malawi in the form of 'soft loans' for the construction of the new Malawian capital, Lilongwe, and the Nacala railway through northern Mozambique. They also lent millions of rand directly to President Banda's personal company Press Holdings Ltd which, together with its sister company the Agricultural Development and Marketing Corporation (Admarc), controlled Malawi's banks, most agricultural estates, and apparently most 'private' companies. Through these companies Banda owned up to half of Malawi's economy ('Landmarks: South Africa and Malawi Relations', 1977; Hanlon, 1986). South Africa had thus developed significant influence with President Banda and lasting contacts with Malawi's security services.

### **3. Malawi and Independent Mozambique**

Though the Malawian government had opposed Frelimo's war of liberation, and remained highly suspicious of the Mozambican government after independence,

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President Banda's essentially pragmatic approach to regional affairs helped lead to rapprochement between the two nations. In the late 1970s Mozambican Foreign Minister Joaquim Chissano, and Malawian Reserve Bank Governor and political powerbroker John Tembo, met on a number of occasions to voice grievances and investigate potential avenues for cooperation. Frelimo's criticism of the Malawian government generally focused on their attitude and actions towards Frelimo prior to Mozambican independence, their collaboration with South Africa, and contact between Malawi and anti-Frelimo groups such as *Frente Unida de Moçambique* (FUMO), the *Partido Revolucionário Moçambicano* (PRM) and Renamo. Malawian representatives were in turn very concerned that Malawian citizens were training in Mozambique for attacks on Malawi with organisations such as the Socialist League of Malawi (LESOMA), the Malawian Freedom Movement (MAFREMO) and the Congress for the Second Republic. Meetings in 1978 and 1979 made some progress towards cooperation between the countries, focusing on: increasing the flow of oil to Malawi by rail from the ports at Beira and Nacala; rehabilitating the Nacala railway line; the building of a new Petromoc oil refinery at Nacala; developing a connection to the Tazara rail system in Tanzania and Zambia; and the creation of a joint commission to prevent 'sinister activities, such as espionage' ('Mission to Maputo', 1977; 'Remarks on Discussions Held in Maputo', 1979; Comments by C.M. Mkona, 1979; 'Special Political Dispatch Mozambique', 1979; 'Partido Democrático da Libertação de Moçambique (PADELIMO)', 1979; 'Developments in Mozambique', 1979; 'Draft Report on Maputo Talks', 1979; 'O Papel Contra-Revolucionário de Malawi', 1977; 'Cracking the Whip Over Malawi', 1978; 'Cuba Training for Malawi Exiles?', 1978; Legum, 1978; 'Rumblings in Banda's Army', 1979). Meanwhile, from 1978 Malawi began to suffer an economic crisis due to internal mismanagement and global economic changes, which was later compounded by the loss of revenue when the advent of majority rule in Rhodesia/Zimbabwe precluded earnings from sanctions-breaking activities. The sense of crisis only heightened the atmosphere of suspicion in Malawi and many opponents of the regime were accused of plotting the overthrow of President Banda. A number of

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those convicted of subversion, including the former Secretary-General of the MCP Albert Nqumayo, and the senior police officer Focus Gwede, were sentenced to death. During 1980 Banda's increasing paranoia led to the replacement of a series of public figures, including the leaders of the Armed Forces and the Malawi Young Pioneers (Legum, 1977; Hedges, 1987). South African sabotage of Mozambique's Munhava fuel depot at Beira on 23 March 1979, which destroyed US\$3 million worth of oil destined for Malawi, and subsequent 'Renamo' attacks on the Beira-Malawi railway line through Mozambique (actually carried out by South African Special Forces soldiers) ensured that by November 1979 Malawi had a desperate fuel shortage. Though some analysts have suggested that these were deliberate strikes against Malawi to discourage cooperation with its neighbours, and participation in the 1980 Southern African Development Community Conference (SADCC), South African Foreign Affairs documents from the time recognised that Malawi intended to remain in South Africa's orbit and that their participation in SADCC must be understood in the context of their dependence on their neighbours' transport routes (South African Department of Foreign Affairs Document, 8 April 1980; 'Oorsig van die Buitelandse Ekonomiese Aanslag Teen Suid-Afrika', 1980). Rather than attempting to exert leverage on Malawi through the fuel crisis, South African Foreign Affairs documents demonstrate that when approached for assistance by Malawian representatives in late 1979 doves within the Apartheid government did all they could to placate President Banda, assuring him that the problems had resulted from anti-Frelimo activity and not actions directed at Malawi. Oil tankers from Johannesburg were arranged to provide emergency fuel by road, while an airlift was organised with West German financial assistance. The repair of the Beira railway was also discussed. The crisis led to internal discussions in South Africa, which expressed concern about the potential effects of Renamo attacks on the Nacala railway, and noted that contacts within Renamo should be warned that their activities might disrupt South Africa-Malawi trade 'Message from Sekr SVR to ZRGSB', 1979; South African Department of Foreign Affairs Document, 14 November 1979; South African Department of Foreign Affairs

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Document, 15 November 1979; Telegram from ZRGSB to SVR, 16 November 1979; 'ZRGSB Vergadering', 27 November 1979; 'Fuel Stranglehold', 1979; Vines, 1996). Another South African document from this time specifically notes with some relief that the destruction of a bridge south of Inhamitanga in central Mozambique, and two bridges in the country's north, would not affect rail traffic to Malawi ('Militêre Aksies in Mosambiek', 1979).

While the Mozambican government had remained suspicious of Malawian connections to anti-Frelimo groups after independence, serious speculation about Malawian support for Renamo only began in early 1982 after the destruction of Renamo's Headquarters at Garagua, near the South African border. A few months later Renamo merged with Gimo Phiri's Malawi-based PRM and began operations in Zambézia and Tete provinces, their targets including the Beira-Malawi railway and the Tete-Malawi road, which were both important Malawian trade arteries (Hanlon, 1982, 1986; 'MNR "Raiding from Malawi"', 1982; 'SA "Attacking from Malawi"', 1982). In considering theories of why Renamo may have received support from within Malawi, it is important to understand that from the beginning Renamo's operations had a similar effect as South Africa's commando actions of the late 1970s: inflicting serious damage on the Malawian economy. Malawi's economy was highly dependent on importing fertiliser, fuel and spare parts, and exporting tea and tobacco; the expensive alternative to transit through Mozambique being a 3,000 kilometre road route through Zambia. Though the Nacala railway remained open, its poor condition placed heavy limitations on traffic. Thus, due to Renamo's actions, by October 1982 Malawi was reliant on 8,500 tonnes of fertiliser being transported on road and rail routes through Zimbabwe, Botswana and Zambia to fulfil its needs. In turn, economic crisis began to create discontent amongst Malawi's peasant population, perhaps the greatest fear of Banda's paranoid regime. The obviously detrimental effects of Renamo's activities on Malawi led some sources to speculate that they were a warning to Banda's government not to get too close to SADCC (Pinder, 1982; Thomas, 1982; Telex to Malawi's Maputo Embassy, 1982; 'Enquiry into Late Fertiliser Delivery', 1982; 'Farmers Worry Over Fertiliser',

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1983; Hanlon, 1986; Andersson, 1992; Hedges, 1987). The negative impact of the Mozambican Civil War on Malawi continued throughout the 1980s, with the estimated costs for Malawi from Renamo's disruption of Mozambique's transport corridors ranging from US\$60 million to US\$140 million annually: more than one third of Malawi's export earnings. In addition the influx of Mozambican refugees into Malawi from the mid-1980s, reaching almost one million displaced persons by the war's end, placed an extra burden on the already poor country and led to an increase in internal discontent (Fauvet, 1986, Sept 1986; 'Malawi Denials of Allegations', 1986; Brittain, 1986; Isaacman, 1988; Somerville, 1988; 'Mozambique: Massacres Alleged', 25 June 1988; Legum, 1978; Andersson, 1992).

#### **4. Theories of Malawian Support**

The key effects of the Mozambican Civil War on Malawi were significant harm to the economy and a corresponding increase in political instability. Considering that President Banda had a massive personal stake in Malawi's economy, and that the greatest fear of his paranoid regime was internal unrest, the overwhelmingly negative impact of Renamo's actions on the country calls into question theories that President Banda supported Renamo willingly. These theories are primarily that he did so because he dreamt of claiming the northern sections of Mozambique promised to him by the Portuguese, in a strange attempt to return to borders reminiscent of the Maravi Empire; or that Banda sought to replace the Frelimo regime as he thought that it was impossible to peacefully co-exist with a Communist neighbour and that inevitably Mozambique would support his overthrow by subversives. No evidence has been produced to show Banda had any plans to actually seize sections of northern Mozambique, while the immutable-border stance maintained by the Organisation of African Unity would have made such an action politically difficult (Hedges, 1987). The second theory, that Banda believed conflict with Communist Mozambique was inevitable, is undermined by the relatively successful efforts of the two countries to work for their mutual benefit. Their warming relationship is demonstrated by the fact that, despite

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tensions over Mozambique's war, Malawian documents reveal that by October 1984 Malawi was seeking cooperation concerning: their Central Banks; customs matters; trade and industrial development; joint tourism promotion; joint disease and agricultural research; joint training of agricultural personnel; and collaboration in areas as diverse as natural resource development, education, health, community services, sports, cultural matters, and transport issues. On the basis of these meetings Mozambican President Machel visited Malawi from 19-23 October 1984 to sign an agreement of cooperation; hardly indicative of two nations that considered their differences irreconcilable (Telegram from the Malawian Secretary of External Affairs to Malawian Ambassador to Mozambique Itimu, 1984; 'Moçambique-Malawi', 1984; Dimande, 1984; 'Grand Welcome for President Machel', 1985).

A third theory concerning Malawi's motivation for supporting Renamo is that President Banda was forced to acquiesce to Renamo's operations, as Apartheid South Africa threatened Malawi with a destabilisation campaign similar to that being suffered by Mozambique. This argument is initially weakened by the fact that Renamo's war was already creating such massive problems for the small nation that the threat would be almost redundant; President Banda at one point asking in reply to Mozambican criticism, 'Can the Malawi government really be said to be supporting and encouraging its own destabilisation?' (Thomas, 1982). In addition, documents from the South African Department of Foreign Affairs not only contain no evidence that South Africa was forcing the Malawian government to support Renamo, but also clearly demonstrate that doves within the Apartheid regime were doing all they could to assure Malawi that this was not occurring. They instead implemented strategies to ameliorate the negative effects of Renamo's actions on their ally. Foreign Affairs worried that Malawi would be driven away from South Africa by Renamo's activities, somewhat justifiably, as intelligence from high-ranking contacts in the Malawian government revealed that there was,

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widespread dissatisfaction among senior government officials over the sabotaging of the rail links with Mozambique and the resulting suffering and inconvenience caused to Malawi. They blame South Africa for their plight as story has it we are supporting the [Renamo] guerrillas (Telegram to South African Ambassador to Malawi Snyman, 1983).

The general feeling of the department was that it would be detrimental to South African interests for Malawi to believe pressure was being applied on them, and all efforts were made through diplomatic and intelligence connections to assure them this was not the case. It was in South Africa's interest for Malawi to remain stable, and South African documents note that Renamo's activities could damage Banda's popularity and ability to govern, while radical elements might benefit from any crisis and come to power with an anti-South African platform. South Africa's western allies also agreed with this assessment and it is recorded that representatives of Britain, France and the United States had already warned South Africa that Malawi's stability and connection to the West were being undermined (Telegram to the 'Secextern' Pretoria from SALEG Lilongwe, 1982; 'Allegations', 1982; 'Mocambique Insurgents', 1982; 'Malawi: Severing of Supply Lines', 1982; 'RSA/Malawi-Verhoudinge', Nov 1982; 'Co-operation of the Activities', 1982; 'RSA/Malawi-Verhoudinge', Dec 1982; 'Invloed van die Onstabiliteit', 1983; 'Inligtingsverslag: Malawi', 1983; 'RSA/Malawi-Verhoudinge' Jan 1983). To help lessen the impact of the crisis South Africa gave Malawi a R4.9 million soft loan to buy fertilizer in December 1982, a second R1.5 million loan for construction of a seed storage facility, and technical aid worth R500,000 in 1983-84 ('Annual Report: Malawi 1982', 1983; 'Bedrag Bewillig in die 1983/84 Boekjaar', 1983). Thus, there does not seem to have been any coordinated attempt by South Africa to force Banda's government to support Renamo; and if there had been, the extremely negative impact of the Mozambican war on Malawi would surely have convinced Banda to act otherwise.

However, the weight of evidence from various reports, eyewitness testimony, the confessions of Renamo prisoners, and the sheer geographical logic of Renamo's campaign in

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northern Mozambique makes it undeniable that Renamo must not only have operated from Malawian territory, but at some level had cooperation from the country's authorities. Even João Cabrita, who argues that Renamo forces did not use bases in Malawian territory, admits that,

Renamo officials, foreign correspondents and an array of other individuals enjoyed transit facilities in Malawi whenever they wanted to visit the guerrillas' territory in Mozambique.... [and that] South African Air Force planes are known to have flown from Malawi to drop logistical supplies over Renamo bases in northern Mozambique (Cabrita, 2000, p. 239).

It may at this point appear paradoxical to argue that Renamo received support from Malawian authorities even though President Banda neither wanted to support them nor was forced to do so. However, this apparent contradiction is based on the assumption that Banda maintained total political authority in Malawi, and as reporter David Ward asserted that 'nothing of note happen[ed] in Malawi without the knowledge or participation of Dr Banda' (Ward, 1981). While political power in Malawi was certainly centralised in Banda as an individual, there were occasional suggestions that he might not have been all-powerful. An *Economist* article from September 1982, based on a secret Renamo document, reported that 'President Banda is said to be unaware of what is going on'; while southern Africa analysts Phyllis Johnson and David Martin noted in the mid-1980s that some Mozambican officials thought 'the Malawian security services were aiding Renamo without Banda's knowledge' ('The Malawi Strategy', 1982; Johnson & Martin, 1986, pp. 23-24). Indeed, upon closer inspection it becomes clear that under the surface of Malawian politics various factions were acting independently in preparation for the succession struggle that would follow the death of the elderly President. South African Foreign Affairs documents from as early as March 1980 advise that,

[South Africa] should perhaps be careful of getting too involved in the military field in Malawi at this stage. There were signs that President Banda was losing his grip and that there was a jockeying for position for the

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succession (South African Foreign Affairs Document, P.R. Killen, 7 March 1980).

By December 1982 the expectation was that President Banda would not live much longer, and thus the South African embassy in Lilongwe compiled a document entitled 'Malawi after the Demise of Banda'. According to the document, though Banda was in good health, estimates of his age were between 78 and 84 years old. Possible candidates for the Presidency after his death included John Tembo, Governor of the Reserve Bank; Dick Matenje, Secretary-General of the Malawi Congress Party; Miss C. Kadzamira, Official Government Hostess and niece of John Tembo; and Tim Mangwaza, Ambassador to South Africa, amongst others. Tembo was considered an especially strong candidate, and he personally assured the South African Ambassador that there would not be a change in Malawi's attitude to South Africa after Banda's death ('Malawi After the Demise of Banda', Dec 1982; 'Malawi After the Demise of Dr Banda', Jan 1983; 'Inligtingsverslag: Malawi', 1983). However, the true intensity of the internal struggle in Malawi only became clear in mid-1983; also demonstrating that the President was losing his grip on power. In May 1983 a group of government ministers who rivalled John Tembo for the succession (Dick Matenje, Aaron Gadama, J. Twaibu Sangala and David Chiwanga), were killed in what appeared to be a car crash. Popular consensus was that the four ministers were murdered: 'cold-bloodedly killed to remove any competition for Ms Kadzamira and Mr Tembo, if the presidency would become available' (Telegram from the South African Embassy, 1983). An elaborate story was released to explain why the four political enemies were found in the same car, but South African sources concluded that Tembo probably had them killed. In addition to those ministers killed in the car crash, reports were that fifteen other people disappeared following their deaths, including Matenje's younger brother, and Tembo rivals Chirwa, Bwanali and Demba. In 1995, following the advent of multi-party democracy in Malawi, the thirteen-member Mwanza Commission, chaired by Justice Mtegha, eventually found that the ministers were clubbed to death before being put into the car and pushed into a ravine. John Tembo and three

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former top police officials were implicated in the murders, though formally cleared of those charges ('Ministeros Desaparecidos', 1983; 'Malawi', from Glenn Babb to P.R. Killen and Wentzel, 1983; 'Malawi: Interne Magstryd', 1983; 'Malawi: What's Really Going On?', 1983; Telegram from the South African Embassy, 1983; Kapembeza, 1995).

## **6. Conclusion**

Thus, in considering Renamo's relationship with Malawi, it is plausible that elements within the government were providing support to the rebels without the authorisation of President Banda and the hierarchy of the Malawi Congress Party. In fact, it seems highly probable that support for Renamo came from Malawian powerbroker John Tembo, who had less reason than Banda to fear the damage that Mozambique's war was inflicting on Malawi's economy and internal stability. As Alex Vines suggests, Tembo was trying to 'strengthen his hand by wooing support from Renamo groups as a 'third force' to improve his position in the event of some type of armed struggle over the Presidentship' (Vines, 1996, p57). Tembo's main support base was thought to have been within the Malawi Young Pioneers and the police force, headed by Inspector-General Mac Kamwana, which operated its own paramilitary Police Mobile Force and the feared Special Branch ('Malawi: Playing With Fire', 1986; Legum, 1989). This corresponds with a former South African Commando's claim that Renamo's Secretary-General Orlando Cristina made connections with Malawian supporters through the police force, and that Renamo's relationship with Malawi remained within that well-defined channel. Cabrita has also asserted that, '[l]iaison between Renamo and Malawi was through that country's police force, not the Armed Forces' (Cabrita, 2000, p239). Further weight was added to this theory in 1993 when up to 4,000 Malawi Young Pioneers, who violently resisted the army's attempts to demobilise them after the introduction of multi-party democracy, fled into Mozambique and sought refuge at Renamo camps in Tete, Sofala and Zambézia provinces. Meanwhile, 'Renamo-style' uniforms were found stored at a Pioneers base in Lilongwe ('Young Pioneers Gun Down Two Soldiers', 1993; 'Malawi Troops

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Storm Pioneers Bases', 1993; 'Banda's Elite Force Raided', 1993; 'Army Contrives Raids on Pioneers', 1993; 'Police Join Army', 1993; Msengezi, 1993; Coelho & Vines, 1994; Sindima, 2002). While Tembo could undoubtedly call upon a strong support network in the event of a succession struggle, he remained opposed by the leaders of the Armed Forces, Major-General Khanga, Deputy Commander Major-General Yohane, and Head of Military Intelligence Major-General Limbani, who remained un-involved in domestic politics and had poor relations with the police force. In the wake of Banda's death it was possible that these men would be the new king-makers in Malawi. It was also thought Tembo might encounter significant resistance within the civil service ('Malawi Playing with Fire', 1986). These factors may have motivated his cultivation of an alliance with Renamo and their supporters within the South African government. Tembo did seem to be the most likely candidate to succeed Banda throughout most of the 1980s, though towards the end of the decade his influence appeared to be declining. Renamo's connections with Malawi sparked a crisis in late 1986, in which Mozambican President Machel and his allies had threatened military action against their neighbour. Ironically Tembo was then appointed as representative to a high-level border security commission to ease tensions between the two countries ('Wither Malawi?', 1986; 'Machel Gets Malawi Border Defence into Gear', 1986; Martin, 1987; 'Machel Accuses Malawi Police', 1987; Ferro, 1987; Costa, 1986; 'Malawi Happy', 1986; 'Kaunda Slams Malawi', 1986; Isaacman, 1986). The subsequent deployment of Malawian soldiers inside Mozambique to protect the Nacala railway, which resulted from the commission, was to Tembo's advantage as it removed a significant portion of his rivals' forces from the country and exposed them to attack by Renamo rebels ('MNR Murders Strain SA-Malawi Links', 1987; Legum, 1987). Correspondingly, the Armed Forces leadership were very displeased by this deployment; and as Tembo's power continued to wane with the retirement of his ally Police Commissioner Kamwana, Tembo's opponents struck out at him with several attempts on his life, the most serious being in October 1986 and July 1987. This struggle continued to simmer over the following years, as Armed Forces Chief Khanga appeared to be growing in President

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Banda's esteem and was thought to himself be approaching a position from which he could challenge Tembo for the leadership ('Malawi: The Struggle Around Banda', 1989; 'Malawi: Sucked into War', 1989). Banda's comments in October 1987 that the Malawi Congress Party would decide his successor, rather than merely confirming his own choice, was also an indication to observers that the Tembo-Kadzamira alliance may have lost his support ('The Party Must Pick My Successor', 1987).

Ironically, the jostling for position that occurred throughout the 1980s was eventually for nought, and Tembo was never given his opportunity to seize control. Instead, Hastings Banda retained power in Malawi until 1993, when a pro-democratic movement toppled his government and dismantled his one-party state, in parallel to the dismantling of Apartheid in South Africa. Though Banda subsequently lost to Bakili Muluzi in Malawi's 1994 elections, he would live on in South Africa until 1997, reportedly dying at the age of 101. With significant changes occurring across southern Africa, Mozambique's war was also brought to an end with the help of the United Nations. Since then both John Tembo and the new Renamo political party have been denied power through the democratic institutions of their respective countries. But John Tembo is a political survivor, and at the time of writing he is again campaigning for his country's leadership as the Presidential candidate for the Malawi Congress Party in the 2009 elections. It must be hoped that the crimes of the past are not forgotten.

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