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Panel Discussion on "Portugal and Africa"

DEVELOPMENTS IN MOCAMBIQUE AND IMPLICATIONS FOR SOUTH AFRICA

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Introduction

There are indications that the developments in Mocambique, resulting from the revolution in Portugal, are having a traumatic effect in South Africa, and that there is some re-thinking about future trends in Southern Africa and about our place in Africa generally. A note of urgency has been introduced, at least as reflected in our press, both Afrikaans and English, in editorials and in the views of political commentators. These are healthy signs of a willingness to accept the fact that it would be futile simply to defend the status quo in a region where the pace of change is being accelerated in various directions, and that we are involved in this change, whether we like it or not. It is no use pretending that we will be unaffected in the immediate future by developments taking place now, in Mocambique especially. But in facing up to these developments and to the accommodations which will be required on our part to meet them, we still have reason for confidence in the strength of our human and material resources. It would be a sign of lack of confidence and of a highly nervous society, if we were simply to retreat into a defensive position in a vain attempt to maintain the existing order at all costs, rather than to seek new and even bold initiatives in a changing situation which calls for imagination and flexibility.

In understanding the developments in Portuguese Africa and in learning the lessons which they may have for us, we are handicapped by the long years of neglect of, and lack of meaningful contact with, our neighbours - Angola and Mocambique, and by the consequent lack of information and misunderstanding

about their peoples and policies. Generally speaking, our approach to the Portuguese and to the Africans of these countries has been misinformed and based on superficial stereotypes. For instance, how much do we really know about Frelimo which for years has been simply dismissed as a group of primitive "terrorists", but which has now emerged as the single most important factor with whom the Portuguese have to negotiate over the future of Mocambique, and which may well become, if not the government of that country, at least a dominant influence in an independent Mocambique?

It is not my intention to give a chronological survey of the changes which have taken place in Mocambique, but rather to look at some of the factors which brought about these changes, and their implications for our future in Southern Africa.

Frelimo and the Portuguese Reaction

The problems for Portugal in Mocambique did not start with the formation of Frelimo in 1962; in common with the other European powers Portugal had been faced with the upsurge of nationalism in Africa, especially after 1945. But Portugal's history and stake in Africa were different, and so it reacted differently and did not prepare for withdrawal. This led to a confrontation with the nationalist movements in Mocambique, as well as in the other Portuguese African provinces. Portugal attempted to suppress the nationalist movements within Mocambique, and they therefore organised outside the country - a process which became easier once the neighbouring Black states became independent in the early sixties. But, while these groups were organising openly outside the territory, it is now clear that their influence inside Mocambique was in fact not irradiated. In a divided position these nationalist groups could not be very effective, and so it was with the formation of one movement in 1962, Frelimo (the Front for the Liberation of Mocambique), which included the main nationalist groups, that the struggle for Mocambique really began.

Frelimo strength has been based on the large degree of unity which it achieved, compared especially with the continuing divisions between the Angolan movements, and on the thoroughness of its organisation. It learned a great deal from similar movements in other parts of the world, for instance in Vietnam, and it applied this experience to conditions of Mocambique. Although it chose military means to achieve its aims, it recognised that the struggle was basically a political one and it never lost sight of the political factors.

Eduardo Mondlane, the first leader of Frelimo, said in his book published in 1969, after discussing the military situation: "The political aspect is of even greater importance, for the struggle is essentially a political struggle in which the military is only one aspect." He described, too, the process of preparation of the people before the commencement of military action and the continuing political education required, in which the army itself played a role.

The nature of this type of "liberation" struggle was initially misunderstood by the Portuguese who saw it in purely military terms. However, they gradually realised what was happening and attempted to adapt their counter-insurgency methods. General Spínola has said: "To want to win in a war of subversion by means of a military solution is to accept defeat in advance, unless one possesses unlimited capacity to prolong the war indefinitely ... Is that our case? Obviously not." This, of course, was not an original discovery of General Spínola. It has been proved in all other similar cases, including Vietnam where the greatest military power in the world could not achieve a military victory. To give another example, General Sir Gerald Templer commented, when he arrived to take control in Malaya in 1952: "The solution lies not in pouring more troops into the jungle, but in the hearts and minds of the people."

In recent years the policies of the previous Portuguese government in Mocambique were increasingly based on the realisation that the spread of Frelimo influence could only be countered with the willing support of the people, and earnest efforts were being made to "win their hearts and minds". Success was undoubtedly being achieved in some areas, and the actual influence of Frelimo was not as widespread as that organisation claims. But these policies were too late; they could only perhaps have been fully effective if implemented before the insurgency began. Once military action had started, it could only be ended through acceptance of all the consequences of a political solution, including negotiating with the organisation responsible for the insurgency. The previous government set its face firmly against such negotiation with Frelimo, as it did not wish thereby to give Frelimo legitimacy in Mocambique and in the eyes of the world. But, as Portugal did not have the resources to continue the war indefinitely, there was ultimately no choice but to negotiate.

While there is evidence that the support for Frelimo as an insurgent movement using violence to achieve its aims, was strong only in limited areas, there seems no doubt now that Frelimo has enjoyed a wide general appeal throughout Mocambique in the minds of Black Africans, almost as a symbol of freedom. Even among the Macua people - the largest ethnic group in Mocambique, comprising probably about 40% of the total population - who never supported Frelimo in a military sense and who thus prevented the spread of the Frelimo insurgency south from Cabo del Gado, there are now indications of fairly strong political support for Frelimo. Here again, the political basis of the struggle was not fully appreciated and there was reluctance on the part of the Portuguese to grant meaningful participation quickly enough to the Blacks in the political development of Mocambique, and thus give them a share of power. In his book General Spínola emphasised the importance of such participation, if any solution was to be reached.

The result of this unwillingness, or inability, to recognise fully the political nature of the struggle, and to accept the consequences, was that the Portuguese position continued to deteriorate, and they are now having to negotiate from a position of relative weakness, at least as far as the internal situation in Mocambique is concerned, whereas a few years ago a settlement through negotiations might have been easier. That the present Portuguese Government is aware of this, is indicated by the current efforts to stiffen the resistance to Frelimo.

Linked to this basic political factor was the question of economic development. The previous Portuguese government had realised the importance of this, and they were moving fast to remedy the situation and to provide for better economic advancement for the Blacks. But again this was too late, and economic development had been directed too much at serving the interests of the small Portuguese section of the population and, even more, the interests of metropolitan Portugal. The accusation could therefore be made that Mocambique was still being exploited in the colonial sense.

Even the potential benefits for the Blacks of recent development plans, considerable as these were, were regarded as being determined by the Portuguese for the Blacks who had no meaningful participation in the formulation of economic and social policies. The Portuguese tended to see themselves as the "givers", with the Blacks as the "receivers" - a relationship which is no longer acceptable to Black Africans.

A third factor of vital importance in the conflict between Frelimo and the Portuguese was - and still is, for that matter - the international or diplomatic dimension. From the very beginning, even before military action started, Frelimo prepared "a programme of diplomacy and information". Mondlane explained in his book that it was necessary to make Mocambique known in the world and "to debunk the myths spread by the powerful propaganda services of the Portuguese". Furthermore, he said, it was necessary "to mobilise world opinion in favour of the struggle in Mocambique, to gain material support and to isolate Portugal". The means of doing this included participation in international organisations and the despatch of delegates to international conferences, as well as representatives to various countries. Obviously this campaign was very effective, and Portugal was in fact becoming increasingly isolated. General Spínola, in his book, maintained that Portugal could not continue in this isolated position, and that there was a need for Portugal's policies to be accepted in the world - particularly the western world. (In this connection, he touched a responsive cord in many Portuguese businessmen who were trying to establish closer economic links with the rest of Europe, but who were inhibited by the political barriers of Portugal's unpopularity as a result of its African policies.)

The previous Portuguese government had also realised the importance of this factor and in recent years was devoting considerable effort to countering world hostility. But the isolation and pressures increased, and there is no doubt that General Spínola was correct when he said that Portugal could not withstand these pressures indefinitely. The change in policy which has now occurred has dramatically reduced the pressure on the Lisbon government, and the support which it is receiving, particularly in the West, is at least one factor giving the Portuguese somewhat more strength in the current negotiations with Frelimo, and also with the PAIGC of Guinea. The change of policy and the offer of self-determination for Mocambique have the effect of undercutting Frelimo's campaign for wider support in the world, particularly in Europe.

In the negotiations with the Portuguese, Frelimo will have to take into account this change. While its political and military position in Mocambique may have become stronger, its diplomatic position outside Africa may be weakening. Even within Africa, there are indications that some leaders may no longer give as strong support as in the past to extreme demands by Frelimo - even

though this may not be said publicly at meetings such as the current OAU Summit.

It is too early to predict how these negotiations for a ceasefire will develop, but it looks now as though they will be long and difficult. The Portuguese Government is insisting, according to the latest statement of President Spínola, that the people of Mocambique should be offered a free choice about their future, while Frelimo is demanding that Mocambique must be guaranteed independence before a ceasefire, and that power must be handed over to a Frelimo government. Their official positions are therefore far apart, but both sides may still be influenced by developments within Mocambique and on the international front.

Future Relations with South Africa

As far as future relations with South Africa are concerned, it is difficult to speculate at this state. The South African Government has clearly said that it hopes for co-operation with a Black Government, and there are obvious economic advantages for Mocambique in continued co-operation. These have been frequently mentioned, and they include the income derived from South African traffic through the port of Lourenco Marques, the labour agreement, tourism, Cabora Bassa, and so on. But one has to be realistic and recognise the distinct possibility that the eventual government of Mocambique may be a hostile one. If Frelimo takes over, we cannot be very optimistic about the chances of co-operative relations with the South African Government. Frelimo's deputy leader, Marcelino dos Santos, has made categorical statements that a Frelimo government would cut links and support terrorist incursions, although one cannot yet be sure that this is the view of the Frelimo leadership as a whole. Samora Machel has not committed himself on this point, as far as I am aware.

However, apart from the expressed views of the leaders, there is the danger that Frelimo, after engaging in armed struggle for ten years, is so motivated and structured towards the use of violence, that it will be unable to see alternatives to a policy of confrontation and violence against the South African Government. Such a policy may include active support for South African insurgent movements, such as the A.N.C. - in the same way as Frelimo has already supported ZANU in north-eastern Rhodesia.

Some Implications for South Africa

The implications for South Africa of a Black government in Mocambique will, therefore, depend very much on the nature of that government, and how it comes to power, and it is perhaps too early to speculate further. But there are in any case certain conclusions which can be drawn from the Portuguese experience of the past decade, which carry lessons for us in South Africa, lessons which need to be studied seriously and without delay, in the interests of our own secure development in the future.

In the first place, the Mocambique case has proved once again that this type of struggle is basically not a military one. Military preparedness is, of course, always necessary, but in this type of subversive or guerrilla activity military strength alone cannot be relied on to prevent a deterioration in the security situation, no matter how effectively it is deployed and no matter how well tactics are adapted to meet the requirements of non-conventional warfare. There is no single case of a guerrilla and/or terrorist movement being defeated by military means. It is true that for their part the guerrilla forces cannot defeat overwhelming military superiority, but the point is that guerrilla movements do not rely for their victory only on military means. The military activity, including the use of terrorism, by a guerrilla movement is only one aspect of its campaign, as I have already indicated in the case of Frelimo.

Acceptance of this fact, which makes this type of conflict completely different in kind from conventional wars, involves a fairly radical adjustment in approach, and it requires education of the people, so that they can understand the nature of the potential threat. For instance, it is a fallacy, based on a dangerously misleading concept, to think and talk in terms of defending "borders" in a situation such as this. One is not faced here with the threat of an invasion, as in a conventional war. This is illustrated by the mistake said to have been made by the Portuguese at the beginning of the war in Mocambique. When the military action started in September, 1964, the Portuguese army had been expecting an attack, and it knew that Frelimo was organising in Tanzania. It therefore deployed a large force along the banks of the Ruvuma River and evacuated people living along the frontier. Frelimo, however, was already active inside Mocambique in the north. It was following the normal rules for this type of conflict, namely that the people in the area, where military action is to start, are first prepared politically to give support. The border is only important as an inhibiting factor for the defending power, when

the guerrillas have sanctuary in the neighbouring country. But the actual border is not where the struggle takes place, because it is in the nature of this type of warfare that the guerrillas do not expose themselves to attack while they are crossing the border and it is a physical impossibility to close the border so effectively that no one is able to slip through. In fact, to concentrate on the border is to play into the hands of the insurgent forces which are then more easily able to build up their strength behind this defensive line and operate more easily in the country at large.

Mondlane pointed out: "The first and most lasting asset of a liberation movement is the population of the country where it works. The first task is to ensure unity within the movement and among the population." Referring to the whole Southern African region he said: "It has been recognised that an all-out offensive (i.e. by the African states) against Southern Africa is not the answer. The struggle is one that must be fought from within, making use of guerrilla tactics and based on a pervasive and popular underground movement. The independent states cannot help by direct military intervention but can give much more valuable assistance in the form of material and diplomatic support."

If one accepts, therefore, that the nature of this struggle is basically political, with military activity as one of the levels on which the overall political campaign is fought, and that this struggle involves the whole people and not just two opposing military forces, then the consequences for us in South Africa, if we are faced with the same type of threat which overcame the Portuguese in Mocambique, need to be examined very carefully. There is no time to go into this in detail now, but there are two points I should like to make.

In the first place, insurgencies of this type cannot succeed without the support of the local people. The trouble is that one can never be sure whether or not the local people will support a movement, which claims that it is there to liberate them, if they have any reason to feel they need liberating. The experience of Mocambique and other similar situations indicates that the offer of material benefits alone is never sufficient to satisfy any people. Effective participation in determining their own future is the only answer, and this involves meaningful political rights and power over their own destiny. If the people have that, then there is nothing more which the liberation movement can effectively offer them. Instead, the tendency would then be to resist

those who come in and try to change the existing order and possibly to impose a new domination.

It must be mentioned here that the South African Defence Force is obviously well aware of the importance of support from the local population; official statements and actions have shown this. Within the past few days senior officers in the Caprivi area are reported to have said that an anti-terrorist operation is 20% military and 80% socio-economic, and they have referred to economic and educational development efforts in the north of South West Africa. However, reference to political development is missing from these statements, although one knows that the Government is trying to speed up the homelands policy in that area.

If one is to think in terms of effective participation and of sharing power meaningfully in our situation, then to start with one must get away from any approach which regards the Whites as the "givers" and the Blacks as the "receivers". There is no longer any room for paternalism, because this is one of the surest ways of breeding the support for "liberators" who can easily offer much more, and who now of course can point to their success in Mocambique.

While the answer to any potential threat, therefore, lies basically within our own population, there is a second area which needs attention in the light of the Portuguese experience, and that is the international and diplomatic field. This again is an area of the struggle which is much more important than the military one. Effective diplomatic initiative is required, which involves imagination and thorough planning. But this must never be seen as defensive diplomatic activity and as a means of maintaining the status quo. It must be conducted in conjunction with internal adjustments and accommodations, and it must be directed towards the making of contacts and the opening of channels of communication for the purpose of leading to serious negotiations over differences with other countries, particularly in Africa. I do not believe that this type of diplomatic activity should involve efforts at short-term propaganda advantage or attempts to convert and convince others to accept existing policies and practices in South Africa. This is largely a waste of time and effort. We should be prepared to negotiate seriously, and in this regard we should look at the examples of Israel in the Middle East and now Portugal, as well as at our own experience in this direction, for instance in our relations with our immediate neighbour states and in regard to South West Africa. This is in fact not a new direction for the Government, and in

particular for the Department of Foreign Affairs, which has the experience and talent required. But it needs to be supported more vigourously and consistently, because a willingness to engage in diplomatic negotiations, difficult and delicate as these may be, should be regarded as a vital part of our approach to the rapidly changing situation in our part of Africa - and we should be prepared for this.

A policy of negotiation is not an easy one - as is illustrated by recent developments in the Middle East - and it is a policy which requires not only respect for, or at least recognition of, the other party's strengths, but also confidence in one's own position. I believe that we have reason for such confidence in the strength of our human and natural resources, and in fact it is only those who lack confidence and who feel basically insecure, who might regard such a policy as one of capitulation.