

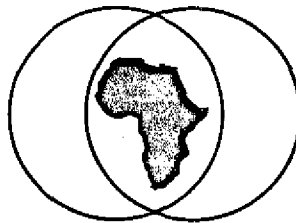
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THE SECURITY SITUATION IN SOUTHERN AFRICA

by

Wilf Nussey

THE SOUTH AFRICAN INSTITUTE OF INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS



DIE SUID-AFRIKAANSE INSTITUUT VAN INTERNASIONALE AANGELEENTHEDE

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The confrontation between the so-called "White South" of Africa and the various guerrilla forces lined up against it began thirteen years ago in the very far north of Angola, and it is no longer a remote affair.

Much of what I shall say here has been printed in the newspapers. But it is rarely that this information has been brought together in a single comprehensive picture of what is in fact the longest war frontier that Africa has known, and to my mind one of the most dangerous. Because of its potential danger, it is essential for the ordinary man in the street to have a clear idea of what is happening in that area.

First, a few preliminary comments. We in this country, and many others in neighbouring countries, have for generations lived with this problem of race and colour, which in our various ways we are still trying to solve, so far without any complete success. Whatever the approaches we and others take towards solving these problems and whatever the progress, not one of these approaches can be assisted by warfare.

The killing that goes on now on this long frontier can have only one effect: to aggravate relations between black people and white people at precisely this moment in history when they are trying desperately to find the means of getting along together, because they are indispensable to each other, and because it is an indisputable fact that white people are in the south to stay.

The effects of this killing are inevitable, because the guerrilla forces which are attacking the south are exclusively black and the forces of the south, fending them off, are predominantly white or white led. When people shoot at each other, each identifies the other by race or colour in a disparaging way. In our present moment of apparent renaissance in this country, when we are trying to find some medium of living and working together, we simply cannot afford the kind of hatred and racial feeling which guerrilla warfare is most certainly breeding.

There is yet another reason why a wide-angle look at this situation is necessary: it is that the more the confrontation grows, the more reluctant governments are to talk about it. From governments on both sides of the frontiers we get a steady stream of silence. When it suits them the more totalitarian governments to the north replace fact with fiction for public consumption. Ours to the south trickle out those few facts which they cannot avoid making public, plus a considerable amount of propaganda. Not one of these governments gives its public, its voters, enough of the information which they must have to assess what the real situation is and what that particular government is doing about it.

⁺The text of talk given at a meeting of the Institute's Witwatersrand Branch on 12 November, 1973.

After the shooting of two Canadian girls at the Victoria Falls in May, 1973, one has a pretty fair idea of how the totalitarian governments of the north operate in this respect.

Those in the south, our governments, use a variety of legislation ostensibly designed to ensure the security of the nation. In South Africa we have the Defence Act which is remarkably encompassing and is used, it seems, largely at the whim of defence people who have little concept of the value of keeping people informed. We also have an Official Secrets Act and a Suppression of Communism Act --- all of which impinge on the security situation. We have a Criminal Law Amendment Act which could make me culpable of salling doubt on all the other acts. These together create a machine which debars the public from knowing what is going on.

In Rhodesia the setup is even tighter. There is the Emergency legislation which has been applicable since U.D.I. and added to from time to time. There is also the Official Secrets Act. The effect of these two is draconian.

There are further examples of this limitation on public information. For instance, we recently had a picture in The Star of a South African helicopter pilot who was given a decoration for flying his helicopter into an area in the Caprivi strip where there had been an ambush. He landed at night and although his helicopter had been shot at, he managed to fly out. Not another word of that situation was published. All attempts to get the Department of Defence and the government to give further information failed. There is quite obviously an intensity of activity in Caprivi which we have no knowledge of.

A second example concerns a major operation going on in north-east Rhodesia against a considerable influx of guerrillas which began recently (late October 1973). During the first two weeks approximately, of this operation, the only report was that thirteen guerillas had been killed. While a sizeable operation has been going on, not a single word of it has come out officially. Rhodesia withholds information on its wounded; it only releases information on its own forces who have been killed and not necessarily on opposition forces who have been killed.

In Mocambique there is an example of how the Portuguese function. You may remember from reports in various newspapers that the Gorongoza Game Reserve was attacked some months ago. Shots were fired and a large part of the area was closed. The place is full of Portuguese commandos and paratroopers disguised as tourists, yet the Portuguese have officially not said a word about this. They still insist that the area is quite safe for tourists.

Let us look at this line of confrontation. It is nearly 5 000 km long --- from the mouth of the Congo River on the Angola-Zaire border right across Africa to the mouth of the Rovuma River on the Mocambique-Tanzanian border. Areas along this line --- SWA, Angola, Botswana, Zambia, Rhodesia, Malawi and Mocambique --- are areas extremely pertinent to our future in Africa. It is a set line and, though not all of it has been active all the time, most of it has at some time. Virtually any part of it could come alive at any time. That includes Malawi, although it is a friendly state.

The confrontation also includes Portuguese Guinea in West Africa, even it is very far removed from southern Africa. This is because Portuguese Guinea is part of Portuguese Africa and it has a direct bearing on what happens in this area.

This long frontier brings together the three sections of the "White South", which have basic differences. They are the Portuguese, the South Africans and the Rhodesians. (For practical purposes one can exclude Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland, except for the moral support they give to the guerrillas.) These three groups are strange bedfellows, because in political philosophy and in race relations they differ enormously. The Portuguese have a genuine non-racialism. They are the world's most mixed people, in fact a large number of them in this country could be classified as coloured.

In Angola there is a total population of about 6 million people, of whom about 1/2 million are "white" Portuguese. Rhodesia has a population of about 6 million, Mocambique has a population of 8,5 million and South Africa a population of 20 -23 million.

We in South Africa at the moment are going through a period which needs no explanation, a state of flux in the relationships between black, white and coloured. In Rhodesia they are going in a diametrically opposite direction. They are introducing increasingly greater restrictions down to what we would describe as "petty apartheid" on Africans, and this is pertinent to the security situation there.

That is the basic background on the "white" side of the frontier. Of the countries on the "black" side, we have firstly the Congo-Brazzaville, an ineffectual state which enters this picture only because it affects the small but very important enclave of Angola called Cabinda, which produces oil. The area affecting northern Angola most is Zaire. South of Zaire we have Zambia which hosts a number of guerrilla organisations, although it denies this. Then there is Malawi, small and lying like a log across the river between the black north and the white south. And on the eastern side we have Tanzania, which strongly supports the various guerrilla movements.

The attack began in March 1961 with ghastly massacres in the north of Angola by an organisation led by Holden Roberto who heads the Revolutionary Government-in-Exile of Angola and the FNLA, the National Front for the Liberation of Angola, the armed wing of that government. In the following year, 1962, an attack began on Portuguese Guinea by the P.A.I.G.C., and in 1964, in September, it began in Mocambique with the killing of a priest in the North. It spread to Rhodesia for different political reasons in 1967, after UDI, and then to the Caprivi strip, and so it spanned virtually the entire frontier between "Black Africa" and the "White South".

Angola now has two main rebel forces attacking it. One of these is the MPLA, Peoples Movement for the Liberation of Angola, which attacks the east from Zambia. Exactly how many guerrillas there are at this moment it is difficult to say. The situation has changed in the last eighteen months to two years, but the attack is certainly being maintained. From the north, Holden Roberto's FNLA is still involved. Only 240 km from Luanda, in a jungle area called the Dembos, the FNLA have entrenched a force which the Portuguese cannot root out.

All traffic from Luanda to the northern coffee growing area has to go around this particular part in convoy. Recently the FNLA put out a statement from Zaire that they were training 17 000 men to attack Angola. From experience I tend to divide these rebel figures by two, sometimes by four, but even so it is a lot of men they are putting into the field.

Lately, however, the Angola war has declined. Among the various reasons for this the chief one is Angola's enormous economic and social development, accelerated by the war and based on coffee, diamonds, iron ore and now oil. The oil has made Angola exceptionally important, in view of the recent developments in the Middle East. They produce about 9 million tons a year, which the Portuguese claim is enough to sustain all of Portugal, including its military effort. One cannot overestimate the importance of this oil to the whole of southern Africa.

A factor which has tended to undermine the justification for guerrilla attack is that Angola has long had a very nationalistic group --- ANGOLANOS they call themselves. They are whites and mulattos born and bred there. They have no great links with metropolitan Portugal except in culture. They resent the restrictions placed on them by Lisbon. This movement was fairly strong, but not significant when the war began in 1961. It immediately disappeared, because Angola could not survive without troops and military and other aid from metropolitan Portugal. But now that Angola is economically booming (it is said by some people to have a greater potential even than South Africa), this nationalism is resurging.

Another factor is that the guerrillas have never penetrated significantly into the main areas of Angola. Draw a line down the middle of Angola and east of it is vast, empty savannah country. The concentration of population and development is in the western part, towards the coast, and along the few railway lines that go inland. The guerrilla forces that move into the eastern areas have found little to attack. They cannot freely attack the Benguela railway, a magnificent target, because this would bring howls of dismay from Zambia. The railway carries 25-30% of Zambia's exports and a similar proportion of its import, and any damage to it would immediately affect the Zambian economy.

The Portuguese have also introduced an effective system of aldeamentos. These are large concentrations of the population in well-organised villages with schools, churches, water, electricity, agricultural extension and other amenities. The bulk of the population in Angola's war zones has now been put into these villages, which has stopped the contact between them and the guerrillas.

Another point which some people say is responsible for the decline of warfare in Angola is that there may well be political negotiations between certain Angolans and leaders of some of the rebel movements.

Yet another reason is that there has been division in one of these movements, the MPLA.

Some of this information cannot be confirmed, but these are pointers we have been given. Angola is potentially powerful and potentially an independent state. It is significantly different from Mocambique. It was remote from its neighbouring states in Africa for probably 400 years, an insular area whose

cultural and philosophical origins lay in Europe. It had virtually no influence from South Africa or Rhodesia, unlike Mocambique, which is profoundly influenced as a neighbour of South Africa and, unfortunately, by some of its racial philosophies. It is this insularity which lies at the root of nationalism in Angola. Of the six million or so people there, nearly half a million are Portuguese settlers or their descendants whose allegiance is to Angola. It is a fair-sized group who, if they demanded a form of independence or greater autonomy, could give Lisbon a hard time indeed.

Angola is the most important of Lisbon's overseas possessions because of its wealth. Lisbon cannot risk losing this wealth by suppressing the nationalist feeling violently, because it would be virtually attacking its own people. At some stage, in the not too distant future, I think Lisbon is going to have to negotiate with Angolans, whose resentment towards Lisbon is being aggravated by the economic curbs which Lisbon has introduced. They have reduced the credit which Angola can get, and Angolans have no foreign exchange of their own, except that allocated to them by Lisbon. The Angolan escudo, their currency, is heavily discounted against the escudo in Lisbon.

Angola could in fact stand on its own feet economically. It is the only Portuguese possession which has a favourable trade balance with Portugal itself. Last year it exported R128 million of goods to Portugal and imported only R46 million. It earns foreign exchange from its diamonds, oil, coffee and various other exports, and the exchange is held by Lisbon. This is causing considerable resentment.

If we have a more autonomous Angola next door, or possibly an independent Angola, South Africa and Rhodesia are going to find themselves with a possibly unpleasant neighbour, one totally non-racial, which does not hesitate to express its disgust for apartheid.

Now let us look briefly at the Caprivi strip, that tiny finger of SWA pointing towards the Zambesi River. We have indications that there is a considerably greater degree of activity in that area than we members of the public generally appreciate. But I am afraid that I cannot tell you what these indications are because of the Defence Act.

South Africa has a secondary defence line, from the mouth of the Cunene River across the top of SWA and up to that point on the Zambezi where lies the junction of Zambia, the Caprivi strip, Botswana and Rhodesia.

Rhodesia is not in a particularly good security position at the moment. Virtually every man of Rhodesia's permanent forces is now up against guerrillas. They have had to call up reserve forces and have something like 4 000 people from outside Rhodesia serving in Rhodesia against guerrilla forces. Exactly how many of these are South African police we cannot say. The danger in Rhodesia is that increased guerrilla infiltration must stretch Rhodesia's security reserves to an even greater extent. The more it stretches Rhodesia's security, the greater the damage to Rhodesian economy. One cannot call up businessmen without causing a slowdown in the overall economy.

The present guerrilla attack began in December, 1972, through the north east and the exceptionally difficult terrain of the Zambezi Valley. It began with an attack in the Centenary area on farmers. Subsequently, Ian Smith admitted at a press conference that guerrillas had been in that area for 6-8 months.

Our information was that they had been in that area for nearly two years before the first trigger was pulled, in the tribal trust lands bordering on Mozambique and Zambia.

The guerrillas had changed their tactics. When they came into Rhodesia in 1967/8 around the Victoria Falls, they came in uniforms and followed classic military tactics. These new attackers look like the locals. They wear khaki pants and shirts like anyone else. They speak the local language, they know exactly where to disappear. They dig up their arms, ambush, shoot and disappear back into the tribe.

Increased guerrilla infiltration in Rhodesia could come at any time. Rhodesians are undoubtedly aware of this and have along their northern borders probably the most intensive barricade against infiltration since UDI. All it needs is for a strong guerrilla force to enter Rhodesia in the north-west and the situation could become grave.

The guerrilla force in Rhodesia at the moment is Zanu, the Zimbabwe African National Union, which for a long time was ineffective, but which suddenly emerged as the leading force with new tactics. Zapu, the Zimbabwe African People's Union, could emerge again in north-west Rhodesia. That the two groups have no love lost between them is one of the saving factors in Rhodesia. The Frolizi, the Front for the Liberation of Zimbabwe, which was supposed to have been a unifying organisation, has been ineffectual.

These guerrillas are using highly sophisticated techniques, taught largely by eastern bloc countries -- Cuba, Algeria and China. They learn simple things like wearing footwear backwards instead of forwards and using the soles of the feet of elephants to obliterate their tracks. They use bomb bursts: a unit having struck splits up and meets somewhere else, which means that the following forces must split up and track down individually and that each of those following forces may run into an ambush.

They have cached areas in the tribal lands, which there is no way of detecting, burying them or sticking them in caves. Villagers who might be very friendly today, could become subversive tonight, dig up their arms, shoot up the local farm, and bury their arms. The only way this can be countered is by winning the hearts and the minds of the people.

There is one factor in Rhodesia which overrides all others. There is no conceivable way in which 1 million white people can exercise their dominance over 6 million black people indefinitely. And that is exactly what the Rhodesian government is trying to do. Some Rhodesian Africans, even moderates, now say they not only do not trust this government, but will no longer trust any white government in Rhodesia, and they will not rest until they get a multiracial government or at least parity between black and white. They say there is a great deal of disillusion amongst the Africans with Smith, with whites generally, even with the so-called pragmatic opposition to Smith, Alan Savory's Rhodesia Party. This disillusion is expressed in sympathy for the objectives of the guerrillas, but not yet with their violence. But, if frustration becomes translated into active instead of just moral support of the guerrilla forces by the bulk of the black people, then Rhodesia will be in very serious trouble.

The Zanu forces attacking north-east Rhodesia enter there via the Tete district of north-west Mocambique with the aid of the Frelimo forces attacking that territory. That Frelimo can assist them is an indication of the depth of penetration of Frelimo into Mocambique.

Until about 1970 the Frelimo attack was mainly from Tanzania into the far north-east corner of Mocambique and along the east side of Lake Nyasa (Lake Malawi). There they were contained by the Portuguese, but in the north-east, the Cabo Delgado area, their attack is still intense and the fighting is the nearest approach to conventional warfare in the whole of Southern Africa.

In 1970 the Frelimo began penetrating the Tete district, site of the big Cabora Bassa scheme, from Zambia, and within two years had infested most of it. And this year (1973) they carried the fight considerably further south, close to the important rail and road link from the port of Beira to Rhodesia at Umtali.

Troops who moved into the Gorongosa area, after the attack on the camp there, found that Frelimo had, in fact, been working in that zone of the Beira district for about a year, possibly two years, to subvert the local Africans, before they started shooting.

While in the Tete and other war zones the Frelimo were denied local African support by the resettlement of roughly one million people into big, protected villages, no such village scheme had yet begun further south. Thus in the northern war areas the Frelimo began to attack African civilians as well as the Portuguese forces, but along the Beira-Umtali line they concentrated on winning African support, with considerable success, apparently.

The troops who rushed into the Beira district to tackle this new threat believe that by now the Frelimo have their preparation agents much further south, possibly beyond the Save River and approaching the Limpopo. We have had a report of a Frelimo gang moving south of the Save, but we cannot get confirmation. It is feasible that anti-South African movements, like the African National Congress, are travelling, or will travel, south with the Frelimo to attack the north-west Transvaal, as the Zanu did to attack north-east Rhodesia.

The overall situation in Mocambique has definitely deteriorated. Despite a heavy concentration of its 60 000 or so troops (mostly Africans) in the Tete District, the Portuguese are not able to drive the Frelimo back or block their infiltration routes. It is a notable achievement for the Frelimo to have reached as far south as Gorongosa, a direct distance of some 600 km from the Zambian border but much further along the bush trails they follow, carrying all their arms and supplies on porters' backs.

The reason for the Frelimo's success is chiefly the absolute wilderness of the western side of Mocambique. Although the Portuguese have held this territory for some 400 years, I believe there are still Africans in the bush there who have not seen a White man. The area is almost virginal and populated by extremely unsophisticated Africans. It is also trackless, but for a few very tenuous roads and has a very thin web of Portuguese administration. Between the Beira-Umtali line and the Save River to the south, it is no less a wilderness, with development confined to the coastal strip.

There is no question of Frelimo taking Mocambique by force of arms alone. They would not have enough men to run the territory, let alone enough trained administrators. The danger is that such a spreading war imposes a rapidly growing economic burden on Mocambique and particularly on Lisbon, which finances most of the defence and provides indispensable manpower.

Malawi enters the picture because it is the weakest link in the Southern African frontier. Officially, it is neutral and friendly to both Black Africa and White Africa. In fact, it cannot prevent the guerrilla forces from making use of it. Malawi officials have admitted to me that they cannot possibly impose tight enough controls on the roads through their country and on its borders to stop the Frelimo passing through Malawi or taking refuge in it. It is known that for some time the Frelimo have sent north to Tanzania, through Malawi, men they have recruited in Mocambique, apparently from the area south of Vila Cabral around Mount Mlanje. We believe that they also send southwards to Mocambique through Malawi the men who have been trained by the Chinese and others in camps in Tanzania, like Nachingwea.

The railway to Tete, a main supply route for the Cabora Bassa scheme, runs for many kilometres close to the Malawi border and has been frequently land-mined and ambushed. When the Portuguese pursue the saboteurs, these flee straight into Malawi --- whose policy is to admit them, but without their guns. It is very doubtful that Malawi could stop them bringing their weapons in with them, however.

The overall picture of southern Africa, then is not pleasing for the White South, but certainly so for the Black North. The confrontation must heighten in the near future as the guerrillas progress, particularly the Frelimo. It might come to the point quite soon where South Africa will have to decide whether or not to go to the help of the Portuguese, if, that is, the Portuguese permit it. They are genuinely motivated by a sense of mission in Africa and a belief that Mocambique is an integral part of Portugal --- a belief at official level at least --- and are intensely proud. An excuse for South African intervention could be the powerlines running some 800 km from Cabora Bassa to the Transvaal border, an excellent Frelimo target.

There is no military answer to the confrontation. The White South could not attack guerrilla bases across the various borders, without instantly elevating the confrontation to a major international issue with a real danger of large-scale foreign intervention --- which is perhaps what the Chinese want. So the answer must be political. And as the guerrilla forces are less concerned about replacing White rule with multiracialism than about establishing Black rule, that too seems a remote solution.