

Mozambique 1979-1992

Executive Summary

The Mozambican Civil War began in 1979 and lasted until a negotiated settlement was signed by both parties in 1992. The conflict was fought in the Republic of Mozambique between the Frelimo government and Renamo insurgents. The governing party at the start of the civil war was the *Frente de Libertacao de Mozambique* (Frelimo). The national government consistently had approximately 30,000 soldiers throughout the conflict. Frelimo was Marxist in orientation and aligned its foreign policy with the USSR and Cuba. While in power prior to 1992, Frelimo nationalized industry, outlawed private property, and created state-run collective farms and communal villages. This party was initially created in 1962 by exiled Mozambicans who wanted to overthrow Portuguese colonial rule, and became the ruling party of Mozambique in 1975.

The insurgents belonged to the *Resistencia Nacional Mozambicana* (Renamo). Renamo was initially founded in 1975 by the Rhodesian Central Intelligence Organization (CIO) during the Rhodesian Bush War (UDI). The intent was for Renamo to act as a counterinsurgency force against the Zimbabwean National Liberation Army (Zanla). Zanla had based itself in Mozambique after exile from Rhodesia. Once white minority rule ended in Rhodesia (Zimbabwe) in 1979, Renamo lost its primary sponsor in the CIO. After 1980, South African military intelligence forces funded and controlled Renamo. Its mission then expanded to include combating increasing activity by the African National Congress (ANC) within Mozambique and to prevent Frelimo assistance to the ANC. Renamo established bases inside Mozambique against Zanla infiltration routes into Rhodesia. Additionally, these bases helped to destabilize the Frelimo leadership. Renamo initially recruited from a wide pool: “*flechas*” or “crack anti-insurgency” units, Mozambican members of the Portuguese colonial military, and Portuguese who were a part of or associated with the Portuguese General Security Directorate (DGS). Renamo’s political manifesto described itself as a military organization created to end the Frelimo government. Contrary to Frelimo, the insurgent party promoted free-market economics and multiparty elections.

The premise of the fighting was to abolish the Frelimo government and replace the Marxist autocracy with a democracy. Renamo’s strategy was to launch counteroffensives against South African nationalist rebels (ANC) and weaken the Frelimo regime through the systematic destruction of social and economic infrastructure. Renamo attacked schools, hospitals and health units, public shops, and public transportation. In the Beira corridor, an important economic zone in Mozambique, they destroyed 1415 pylons (power lines) which had a repair cost of \$76 million. At its peak, Renamo comprised 20,000-25,000 insurgents. They fought with standard guerilla warfare tactics. The conflict resulted in approximately one million deaths and approximately four million displaced people were moved to refugee camps in Malawi, Zimbabwe, Tanzania and South Africa. Over the 13 years of the conflict, the government moved from an autocracy to a democracy. Frelimo and Renamo reached a negotiated settlement. They

signed the General Peace Agreement (GPA) on October 4, 1992, ending the civil war. The outcome included stable peace and multi-party elections.¹

Assessing the 5 Factors

1. Was the country at the time of the conflict a nation?

No. More than 85% of the population did not identify as a nation—there were ethnic and regional divides, most significantly between the Shangaan-speaking southerners and Shona-speaking populations.

2. Was the government seen by roughly 85% of the population as legitimately in power?

No. There was a significant fracturing within the Frelimo party upon independence in 1975: initially, there was a moderate and democratic Mondlane wing in addition to the authoritarian, Marxist party that came to rule. Renamo's early recruitment targeted these splintered groups and Frelimo's political dissidents. Additionally, Frelimo's lack of respect for traditional and spiritual authorities did not enable recognition of legitimacy from more than 85% of the population.

3. Did the government maintain or achieve security control over roughly 85% of the overall population of the country?

No. Renamo was not well-liked, as their senseless violence and grotesque methods to control the civilian population for intelligence and supplies gave them an international reputation as a "parasite army."² Despite their brutal methods of psychological, tortuous warfare, they were able to control a significant portion of the civilian Mozambican population, specifically in rural areas outside of Sopala and Manica, and the Gorongosa mountains. Renamo was successful in preying on Frelimo's shortcomings as a governing body. Frelimo repressed religious activities despite the majority of Mozambican's "belief in some form of traditional religion,"³ and Renamo's use of traditional religious figures was popular among the peasantry: "Frelimo's lack of respect for religious belief and lack of support for small farmers generated significant anti-regime sentiment and resulted in an increased presence of Renamo in rural areas."⁴

4. Did the insurgents have external sanctuary to a militarily significant degree?

Yes. Mozambique shares land borders with Malawi (1,569 km) South Africa (491 km), Swaziland (105 km), Tanzania (756 km), Zambia (419 km), and Zimbabwe (1,231 km).⁵ These states offered temporary external sanctuary for the insurgents. Tete Province, an area of high insurgent activity, lay within 150 miles of Zimbabwe, Malawi, and Zambia bordering the province on three sides.⁶ This province and its proximity to three nearby nations suggests how easily insurgents could find external sanctuary.

¹ J Michael Quinn, "Civil War: Mozambique (1979-1992)," Omnilogos, June 29, 2021, [Civil War: Mozambique \(1979-1992\) \(omnilogos.com\)](https://www.omnilogos.com/Civil-War-Mozambique-1979-1992/).

² Quinn, "Civil War: Mozambique."

³ Quinn, "Civil War: Mozambique."

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

5. Was there an army or armed constabulary/gendarmerie force in existence at the start of the conflict which was self-sustaining and which was reasonably competent?

Yes. The Frelimo government and Mozambican national military consistently had 30,000 soldiers within its ranks.

Outcome

The insurgents were the only combatants to achieve their goal, as they weakened the Frelimo autocracy and established a multi-party democracy. Renamo's stated objective was "...not to win the war militarily...but to force Frelimo to accept negotiations for a democratically elected government."⁷ In this, Renamo was successful, as the Frelimo party transitioned from an autocratic, Marxist regime to a multi-party democracy: The peace agreement created a new system of government and established a number of civil rights including: freedom of the press and access to the media, freedom of association, expression and political activity, and liberty of movement and freedom of residence.⁸ Additionally, the government passed the Electoral Act establishing "an electoral system which is consonant with the principles of the direct, equal, secret and personal ballot."⁹ The agreement included voting rights, with the age of suffrage set at 18 years.

The end of the war was initially thought to be unlikely: the two parties aggressively promoted their two differing ideologies, and the conflict had been extremely violent for years. There are indicators that morale and resources were low for both sides towards the end of the war, which may have triggered the seemingly abrupt end to the conflict: "as resources for both groups began to dry up, so did the ideological basis of the war."¹⁰ A severe drought in southern Africa affected Renamo stronghold areas, weakening the insurgents. By the late 1980s, the Frelimo government had nearly abandoned its Marxist ideology and announced plans by 1990 for a liberal democratic constitution. The governing party significantly changed its ideology so it would not have to concede to the insurgents or proclaim defeat. Less than 85% of the Mozambican population identified as a nation and recognized the legitimacy of the Frelimo government. The Frelimo government failed to protect more than 85% of the population from the insurgents, and Renamo had external sanctuary. The government lost, and the insurgents won. The Mozambican civil war supports the five factors theory of internal conflict.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Quinn, "Civil War: Mozambique."