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THE SLOW APPROACH: Mozambique's contribution to Operation Zimbabwe and the new basis for relations with the West.¹

A LENTA APROXIMAÇÃO: a contribuição de Moçambique para a Operação Zimbabué e a nova base das relações com o Ocidente

EL LENTO ACERCAMIENTO: la contribución de Mozambique a la Operación Zimbabue y la nueva base de las relaciones con Occidente.

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Abstract: During the Cold War years, shortly after gaining its independence, socialist Mozambique was faced with a very thorny issue: that of the sabotage carried out by Ian Smith's Rhodesia on Mozambican territory, with disastrous consequences for the security of Mozambique. This study, based on a political history perspective, was conducted using an approach based in the discourse analysis of American documents that can be consulted today in public archives, starting from those of the State Department and of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). The research concluded that Samora Machel emerged as a protagonist in the transition from Rhodesia to Zimbabwe, partly breaking away from their closeness to the Socialist bloc and approaching the Anglo-American bloc to defend specific national interests. This attitude shows how, in the broad world geopolitics, even small countries like Mozambique can play leading roles, going beyond ideological blocs that seemed insurmountable.

Keywords: USA-Mozambique relations. Samora Machel. Jimmy Carter.

Resumo: Nos anos da Guerra Fria, pouco depois de conquistar a sua independência, o Moçambique socialista viu-se confrontado com uma questão espinhosa: a da sabotagem que a Rodésia, de Ian Smith, estava a levar a cabo em território moçambicano, com consequências desastrosas para a segurança de Moçambique. Este estudo, baseado numa perspectiva da história política, foi levado a cabo mediante uma abordagem fundamentada na análise do discurso de documentos americanos que hoje podem ser consultados em arquivos públicos, a partir do Departamento de Estado e da Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). A conclusão a que se chegou é a de que Samora Machel emergiu como protagonista na transição da Rodésia para o Zimbabué, rompendo, parcialmente, com a sua proximidade com o bloco socialista e aproximando-se do bloco anglo-americano para defender interesses nacionais específicos. Essa atitude mostra como, na grande geopolítica mundial, mesmo pequenos países, como Moçambique, podem desempenhar papéis de liderança, ultrapassando blocos ideológicos, que pareciam intransponíveis.

Palavras-chave: Relações EUA-Moçambique. Samora Machel. Jimmi Carter.

Resumen: En los años de la Guerra Fría, poco después de obtener su independencia, Mozambique socialista se enfrentó a un asunto muy espinoso: el sabotaje que la Rodesia de Ian Smith estaba llevando a cabo en territorio mozambiqueño, con consecuencias desastrosas para la seguridad de Mozambique. Este estudio, basado en una perspectiva de historia política, tiene un enfoque basado en el análisis del discurso de documentos estadounidenses que pueden consultarse hoy en archivos

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públicos, empezando por los del Departamento de Estado y los de la Agencia Central de Inteligencia (CIA). La investigación concluyó que Samora Machel aparece como protagonista de la transición de Rodesia a Zimbabue, rompiendo en parte con su cercanía al bloque socialista y acercándose al bloque angloamericano para defender intereses nacionales específicos. Esta actitud demuestra cómo, en la gran geopolítica mundial, incluso países pequeños como Mozambique pueden desempeñar papeles protagonistas, superando bloques ideológicos que parecían insalvables.

Palabras clave: Relaciones Estados Unidos-Mozambique. Samora Machel. Jimmi Carter.

Introduction

For a long time, political scientists and especially geopolitical experts have derubricated the actions of small countries to a conditioned reflex of what the big powers decided and desired. This is even truer for those states, including those in Africa, that orbited the Soviet sphere during the Cold War. In Africa, probably the most paradigmatic example concerns Angola, whose war was interpreted as a small regional world conflict in which East and West were clashing for hegemony in that country (U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE, 1975; Talbot, 2002; Pierce, 2017).

However, this was not always the case. Some theorists have taken the view that, while it is true that the grand theatre of geopolitics is largely determined by the dialogue, confrontation and clash between the great hegemonic powers, small states nevertheless try to carve out a space of their own, with tactics of followers of large states, with processes of adaptation to changing international situations, based on the principle of pursuing their own national interests. This is true for the small states of Eastern Europe, previously under Soviet rule, such as Estonia or Lithuania (Sulg; Crandall, 2020), but also for Salazar's Portugal, which put the American administration in check with the "Azorrian blackmail" (Rodrigues, 2002) or for Samora Machel's Mozambique, which will be discussed more extensively here. According to a well-known scholar of international politics, the deterioration of the power of large organisations - be they economic or political - would have occurred in recent times, after the collapse of the Berlin Wall and with the spread of globalisation and innovation processes (Naim, 2013); however, the emergence of small states as occasional protagonists of even relevant events on a more general geopolitical level must date back much earlier, as the events discussed in this essay seek to demonstrate.

Without this brief theoretical premise, it would be difficult to understand the subject matter proposed here. A subject that has to do with a very particular moment in the history of contemporary Africa, and especially Mozambique: a moment when a country irrelevant on the international scene, recently independent, an ally of the Soviet Union, finds a

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convergence of national interests with the hated western enemy on the question of the end of Ian Smith's regime in Rhodesia. And it writes one of the most important pages in the history of Southern Africa, and among the least known.

Because of these elements, the study presented started from a fundamental question: what moved socialist Mozambique to collaborate with the two most representative countries of Western capitalism, the United States and the United Kingdom, in the midst of the Cold War, and with the risk of a break with its Soviet ally? The hypothesis is that national interest prevailed over the logic of grand geopolitics, thus confirming the thesis that, in particular circumstances, even countries that are not very important on the international chessboard are capable of taking political initiatives that are apparently contrary to their strategic alliances, but consistent with the aims of national interest.

The research here presented was conducted through a perspective typical of international political history, within a qualitative and contextualist approach. Thus, methodology was based on the analysis of archive documents, mainly American, which are now available for consultation and are a valuable aid for those who wish to reconstruct the complex geopolitical relations in Southern Africa during the 1970s. Much of the material used in this article was found in the archives of the US State Department.

The main methodological issue concerned the criterion for the selection of documents. As has been written (Thies, 2002), this moment constitutes one of the keys to realize good research, avoiding selecting only documents that, a priori, prove the thesis one intends to demonstrate, while ignoring other equally important material. In this sense, research in American archives has been extensive with respect to the subject matter discussed here. All available documents with respect to the Rhodesian question were consulted, offering a sufficiently clear picture, which made it possible to confirm the initial hypothesis, above described. The other technique used to minimise the risks of a one-sided approach to political history concerns the triangulation of sources, without excluding oral sources. In this case, written as well as oral sources in Mozambique are inaccessible or no longer available. The solution, therefore, was to use Mozambican bibliographic sources, which largely confirmed the information gathered in American archives. In addition, adopting a contextualist approach helped to most effectively understand the behaviour of individual political actors within broader geopolitical interests. The consideration of the importance, in this specific study, of the personality and way of relating of leaders such as Samora Machel and Jimmy Carter constituted a very important complementary element for understanding more general political dynamics (Koikkalainen, 2010).

The process of recognition of the new Mozambican state

The first issue that had to be addressed by the American administration was the recognition of Portuguese-speaking African countries. Washington's attitude was not homogeneous. In the Angolan case, the United States only recognised MPLA-led independence on 19 May 1993, under the Democratic administration of Bill Clinton. The historical reasons for this choice are sufficiently well known to justify them in this article, referring back to an actual war situation that had been raging in Angola since before independence, and which involved the USSR and Cuba on the one hand, and South Africa and the United States on the other (Graham, 2011).

For Maputo the matter was different. Despite the fact that Samora Machel's regime was clearly oriented towards a rather harsh form of socialism (later formalised with the III Congreso del Frelimo in 1977), Washington recognised the Mozambique government with a letter from President Ford on the very day of the proclamation of independence, 25 June 1975. Diplomatic relations were established on 23 September of that same year, when Secretary of State, Kissinger, and Foreign Minister, Chissano, signed a joint communiqué. On 8 November 1975, Johnnie Carson was the first American diplomat to be installed at the Maputo embassy, with an *interim* assignment as Chargé d' Affaires (U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE, 1976). In the American political world, however, there was considerable resistance to the recognition of the Maputo government. Significant limits were placed by Congress on the action of diplomacy and the US cooperation agency, USAID, founded in 1961 (Minter, 1976).

Williard Depree, the first American ambassador to Mozambique, recalls how the problems in this bilateral relationship also lay on the Mozambican side. Samora Machel allegedly took about three months to approve his candidature for ambassador, and the first year and a half of his stay in Maputo was particularly troubled. American representatives were never received by Mozambican ministers, much less by the president; a proposed visit by Kissinger was classified as 'untimely' by the Mozambican authorities, and nothing came of it, while the entire staff of the American embassy was closely guarded. For at least eighteen months, relations between the US embassy and the Mozambican government were almost non-existent and marked by mutual suspicion. The situation changed, in part, due to both the pressing needs of Maputo and the changing of the guard in the American administration with the advent of Democrat Jimmy Carter in the White House.

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In the years following the opening of the US embassy in Maputo under the Ford administration, Washington's foreign policy changed substantially (Mori, 2010; Maraziti, 2019). Jimmy Carter, the new president, was in fact an advocate of multilateralism, the promotion of human rights and transparency towards Congress and the American people who had elected him. These principles were enunciated right from the election campaign. In Tokyo in 1975, the future president set out the guidelines of democratic foreign policy. A 'mandatory reassessment' of Washington's entire foreign policy was required, with military action abroad only in the event of a proven threat to American security. And even with regard to totalitarian regimes around the world, Carter reiterated that 'we cannot impose democracy on another country by force' (Carter, 1975). This philosophy involved close, loyal ties and a continuous exchange of information with allies, especially those in Europe, Japan and Israel. The isolationism that had characterised previous Republican administrations was thus to give way to interdependence, which was to become one of the key concepts of the new democratic American administration. In parallel, the pragmatism and cynicism that had been the hallmark of American foreign policy in the 1960s and 1970s would be replaced by a renewed 'vital interest in human rights and humanitarian concerns', projecting American leadership far beyond military or even political issues. In Carter's vision, the United States was to be a world reference also in moral terms. His decisions to end US military support for regimes deemed authoritarian and human rights violators, such as Somoza in Nicaragua, Videla in Argentina, Pinochet in Chile and Geisel in Brazil, were historic. Carter was the first US president to visit sub-Saharan Africa and apply the principles of his 'open diplomacy', a circumstance that also had some repercussions with regard to the Mozambican case (Lockwood, 1977). In Africa, Carter achieved remarkable results for the democratisation and détente of the continent. And the main focus was precisely on South-East Africa.

The new US-Mozambique relationship and the Carter-Machel meeting

The Rhodesian question represented the political-diplomatic ground on which Carter measured the new principles of the White House's African policy. His aim was that this question should not turn into a new Angola (Mitchell, 2023); secondly, Angola (above all) and Mozambique represented situations that were very complicated to manage; nevertheless, Carter tried, especially in Mozambique, to establish cooperative relations with the government of Samora Machel. The latter was beginning to become aware of the lack of convenience of a total alignment with the Soviet Union, never having discarded the possibility of a closer collaboration with the United States; finally, relations with Pretoria were marked by a

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constant ambiguity: on the one hand, condemnation for a hateful regime that was contrary to those human rights that Carter raised to the litmus test of his own policy, domestic and foreign; on the other, the *realpolitik* of the Cold War.

The focus was therefore on trying to solve, together with the British, the Rhodesian question, since the South African one, at the time, seemed unsurmountable, unlike the occupation of Pretoria's troops in Namibia. A problem, too, that would not be solved until much later (Bussotti, 2024).

To successfully deal with the Rhodesian issue, Carter needed the cooperation of South Africa (Stevens, 2012). A collaboration that had a tense moment in the aftermath of the 1976 Soweto massacre, when Carter decided to withdraw American defence officers from South Africa, blocking the export of weapons and computers that could have been used to reinforce apartheid (Hipp, 2012).

The same ambiguities can be found in relations with Mozambique: with Samora Machel's regime there was, in those years, a cautious rapprochement, coupled with the actual impossibility of radically changing the bilateral relations between the two countries. Carter tried to distinguish, at least initially, between political and humanitarian issues. If, in the first case, relations were oscillating, between an initial period of rapprochement and a decidedly more confrontational one, in the second, innovative and courageous attempts were made to resolve critical issues, essentially in the public health sector. For example, a State Department report confirms that Carter had been thinking, since 1977, of a joint intervention with the USSR in the field of health assistance to third world countries, with a specific cooperation programme in the medical field for Mozambique, given its deplorable conditions. In general, it was in the interest of the White House to launch a global programme to combat hunger, which the deputy secretary of state, Warren Christopher, was to take charge of (U.S. FOREIGN RELATIONS, 1977).

At the political level, the thinking at the top of the White House showed a rather obvious intertwining of African policy and the strategic struggle against the Soviet Union. The idea - which was only minimally realised - was to forge relations both with the Organisation for African Unity (OAU), which, however, was considered extremely weak, and with states such as Angola, Mozambique and Ethiopia, where the USSR's influence was preponderant. In a correspondence between White House leaders, there is talk of 'seeking closer economic and political ties with countries where Soviet influence is strong'. Among these countries was Mozambique: instead of passively waiting for the inadequacy of Moscow's aid to take its course in a natural way, so to speak, action was needed (U.S.

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FOREIGN RELATIONS, 1978). Agreements were envisaged, even involving the Soviets, to limit the use of arms in Africa, trying to avoid an escalation by the two major world powers in some specific realities of the continent, Angola in the first place. In general, direct military solutions were discarded: 'After Vietnam,' reads the document (U.S. FOREIGN RELATIONS, 1978), 'this is highly unlikely'. Rather, 'We could limit involvement in military conflicts and give major emphasis to our long-term advantages in relations with Africa: trade, aid, and investment to solve the basic economic problems': this was the final suggestion for a political strategy towards Africa that was, still in April 1978, being defined, with many doubts and few certainties.

Relations between Maputo and Washington began with difficulties, but then took a more positive turn in the early years of the Carter presidency. They culminated with the Carter-Machel summit meeting in late 1977, in New York.

The meeting was well prepared diplomatically. As the American ambassador to Mozambique, Willard Depree, testified, an initial moment of détente came with the release of some American missionaries of the Church of the Nazarene. These had been imprisoned by the Mozambican police, but without any formal charges against them. Their leader, Armond Dall, was released in September 1976, while two of his collaborators, Hugh Friberg, aged 33, and Don Milan, aged 29, were released in April of the same year (AMERICAN MISSIONARY, 1976). According to documents that can be consulted today, Samora Machel had explained to Depree - in a meeting the two held in Maputo on 30 August 1976 - that their detention had nothing to do with their nationality, and that it would be her responsibility to deal with the case herself, as indeed she did (Meeting, 1976).

Given these good premises, Samora Machel tried to wrest from American diplomacy some commitment to economic aid, especially food aid, which Mozambique needed. The second half of the 1970s began to signal significant food shortages for the Mozambican population, partly due to particularly harsh drought periods, accompanied by floods, such as those that occurred in 1977 near the Limpopo River in the south of the country (Souza Sobrinho, 1981). The documents consulted indicate that as early as 1976, Machel and Ambassador Depree had been discussing food aid on the basis of a significant figure. This is what we read in the telegram Depree sent to Washington on this issue: 'I had opportunity to reassure Machel that we were continuing our efforts to follow up on the \$12.5 million aid offer, despite opposition in the congress' (Meeting, 1976). In his aforementioned memoirs, Depree recalls that Machel, at the 1977 meeting, together with several members of the Mozambican executive, including the Minister of Agriculture, had insisted on the need for

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such aid, complaining that privileged partners, such as the USSR and Bulgaria, did not provide for this form of cooperation which, on the contrary, Mozambique needed. At that meeting, Machel offered vast tracts of land near the valley of the Incomati River (with its source in South Africa, in the province of Mpumalanga, running through part of southern Mozambique and with its mouth near Maputo Bay) to potential American investors. Depree had to respond negatively to this proposal, because of the notorious blockade that Congress had put in place when it recognised Mozambique's independence, and which the Carter administration failed to remove. However - as Depree observes - the request, which Machel himself knew could not be fulfilled, had a very political flavour: according to the US diplomat, in fact, the Mozambican president intended to demonstrate that his country was not completely aligned with Soviet policy, showing a 'disillusionment with their allies', while other ministers present at the meeting expressed a certain unease at the way the Soviets were exploiting the rich fishing resources of the Mozambican coast (Depree, 2015, p. 3).

Samora Machel's concerns, apart from the food needs that Mozambique's preferential allies could not satisfy, were directed towards the South African strategy of aggression. A strategy that found its deployment in practices such as apartheid, the Bantustan policy (which consisted of the removal and concentration of the black population in administrative districts called, precisely, by this name), Pretoria's expansionism towards neighbouring countries and its growing nuclear capacity (Lipton, 1972). Depree reports, in the telegram sent to the State Department, that all the points merited a response from the US embassy in Maputo, and that especially the last one, that of the new nuclear reactors in Pretoria, was central to US policy, which was trying to promote disarmament and denuclearisation on a planetary level. Finally, Machel's other major concern was the Indian Ocean area, which was strategic for US policy. Machel strongly condemned the expansion of powers such as the United States, France and Great Britain in the region. The Mozambican president recalled how, during his visit to the Soviet Union in June of the same year (1976), he had recommended to Moscow that it favour the evacuation of all foreign military bases, denuclearisation and the withdrawal of the military fleets of countries outside the region throughout the Indian Ocean. The same demands that the Mozambican president was making to the United States, through Ambassador Depree.

Based on diplomatic contacts in Mozambique, Samora Machel met Jimmy Carter in the only direct conversation the two heads of state had. On 4 October 1977, in New York, on the occasion of the United Nations Assembly, which they both attended, the Mozambican and US delegations had about an hour's conversation, from 3pm to 4pm. Carter was

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accompanied by his own Secretary of State, Brzezinski, the US Ambassador in Maputo, Depree, the Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs, Richard Moose, and other staff men, while Machel came to the meeting with the Foreign Minister, Joaquim Chissano, his Special Assistant, Sérgio Vieira, and the Ambassador to the United Nations, José Carlos Lobo (U.S. FOREIGN RELATIONS, 1977).

The meeting was frank, with Samora on the attack and Carter on the defensive, using a cautious and wait-and-see tone. The concrete results were practically non-existent: Washington made no commitment in bilateral relations, but reiterated its role in pacifying the area and supporting the struggles of Namibia and, above all, Zimbabwe.

Samora Machel began by emphasising the role of the United States during the second phase of Mozambique's anti-colonial struggle against Portugal, reminding Carter of the support, including economic support, given by the American government of the time to Lisbon. Even during the Johnson presidency, it was practically impossible to talk to Washington on African issues, given the American commitment in the Middle East and Vietnam. Similarly, during the Nixon and then Ford presidencies, relations between the two countries were practically non-existent, according to Samora Machel, noting how there had been a 'lack of diplomatic and political support for us from the United States'. Conclusion: 'there was no sensitivity on the part of the US government to colonialism'. Machel acknowledged that with independence relations between the two countries improved somewhat, also reminding Carter that the CIA's predictions of a structural weakness in the Mozambican government had not come true. An exchange of jokes about the capabilities of a then incipient computer science brought Carter and Machel together for a moment. The latter concluded by claiming that the predictions of an imminent fall of the Maputo government were the result of computer science, which was evidently wrong. Carter sympathised with Machel's assertion, saying that his election had also not been predicted by the polls, and that in his case too the computer had been wrong. This quip diluted the tense atmosphere at the beginning of the meeting, allowing Machel to reiterate that his government was stable, supported by the popular masses, with a nationalisation programme that was proceeding apace, while, in terms of foreign policy, the Mozambican president emphasised his firm support for the Zimbabwean liberation struggle, which the United States could not understand. 'For the United States,' reiterated Samora Machel, 'everything violent must be communist and vice versa. There seems to be no understanding of a struggle for independence. Independence is a most precious thing'. And he recalled how, in 1976, he had refused Kissinger's visit to Maputo because of his activities and cooperation with the racist

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regime in Pretoria. With great pride, Machel pointed out to Carter Maputo's struggle against everything to do with discrimination, injustice, and the violation of the most basic human rights, emphasising how the firm opposition to the Pretoria regime was part of this philosophy. For this reason, the Mozambican president was grateful to Carter for the US policy shift towards South Africa, and was in perfect agreement with the US government on this. It was necessary to better understand what this new policy of the Carter administration consisted of and how it could be expressed from a practical point of view.

Carter outlined some of the concrete steps that his young administration had already taken on both the Zimbabwe and Namibia issues, reiterating his physical (at the time of the events narrated by Machel he was in his farm) and especially political distance from the choices of the past, stressing how having supported Lisbon's colonialism for too long had been a mistake. His concern now was focused on establishing friendly relations with Mozambique, beyond the obvious differences. The two agreed on the ground of values: justice, non-discrimination, the principle of self-determination of peoples. It was at this point in the conversation that the Mozambican head of state moved from attack to demands: cooperation, aid, economic development, demilitarisation of the Indian Ocean. He knew that with Carter this prospect would be possible, unlike during the Nixon and Ford administrations. Samora Machel was leading the dances of the conversation; it was him who managed and occupied most of the time of the meeting, from the height of a supposed moral superiority that he flaunted vis-à-vis his American interlocutor. This psychological, as well as political, strategy allowed him to achieve an at least symbolic result: Carter, in fact, had to admit, among the many mistakes made by his country in the recent past, that of identifying Mozambique with the Soviet Union. The American statesman asked the Mozambican president to be patient. Carter needed time to make this difficult transition, also with regard to public opinion and Congress, in order to facilitate the start of economic cooperation, which went beyond mere diplomatic relations. 'I cannot control Congress, and I need your assistance', he emphasised, making a profession of humility, and admitting that 'We have much to learn about Africa'. With these words, and with a series of good intentions, the only meeting between Machel and Carter ended, after an hour of a dense, intense and apparently fruitful conversation.

Apart from the excellent atmosphere and agreement on fundamental ethical principles and important foreign policy issues for South East Africa, the meeting yielded no tangible results for Mozambique. Nevertheless, Washington's pressure on Ian Smith's regime led, a few years later, to indirect but substantial benefits for Maputo as well.

Cooperation in action: resolving the Rhodesian question

The African issue that most engaged the Carter-led White House was the termination of Ian Smith's minority regime in Southern Rhodesia, and its transformation into an autonomous and free country, the future Zimbabwe. In this operation, there was a convergence of American and Mozambican interests, sealed by Samora Machel's role vis-à-vis a reluctant Robert Mugabe during the tight British negotiations at Lancaster House. It is highly probable that that meeting between the two heads of state in 1977, which had led to very few concrete results, had nevertheless activated a mutual esteem that would become valuable two years later.

The Rhodesian question was at the forefront of Samora Machel's thoughts. The explanation is quite simple. According to Rhodesian sources, RENAMO² was formed through a covert local intelligence operation, led by Ken Flower, who wrote a memoir on the subject (Flower, 1987), and who went on to become the director of the Central Intelligence Organisation (CIO) of the new Zimbabwe under Mugabe. According to this interpretation, "Flower formed RENAMO to construct a security buffer against a violent Mozambique" (Bolton, 2013, p. 35). RENAMO, therefore, would have come into being for defensive purposes with respect to the protection of the border between Rhodesia and Mozambique, in a particularly complex historical phase fraught with potential dangers for the Salisbury regime (Hall, 1990; Vines, 1991). It was only after Mozambique closed its border with Southern Rhodesia, complying with the UN resolution by placing some 3,000 personnel on the border between the two countries, that RENAMO would be transformed into a political-military sabotage formation within the country led by Samora Machel, in Flower's opinion (Bolton, 2013).

One of RENAMO's main tasks would initially have been the gathering of information in Mozambique with respect to the Rhodesian liberation movement (ZANLA), led by Mugabe, as well as with respect to FRELIMO's intentions regarding the Rhodesian question. Soon, the focus shifted from simple espionage to open sabotage, with Salisbury supplying weapons and logistics to RENAMO in an operation that Flower recalls as "Operation Dingo". It was to be the prototype for Rhodesian attacks against liberation

² RENAMO (National Resistance of Mozambique) was the political-military organization that carried out a long civil war (about 16 years) against the Mozambican regular army, with the aim to impose democracy to FRELIMO. After the General Peace Agreement signed in Rome in 1992 by the Mozambican Presidente, Chissano, and the RENAMO's President, Dhlakama, RENAMO became the second political party in Mozambique.

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movements opposed to Ian Smith's regime, with logistical bases in Mozambican and Zambian territory (Wood, 2019).

RENAMO, however, did not only receive support from Southern Rhodesia; also from South Africa, organisations close to Pretoria supported the sabotage effort of the new movement, such as the Frontline Fellowship, a religious association that intended to help members of persecuted churches in Africa (Wood, 2019). Peter Hammond, the leader of the organisation, whose manifesto-crusade can be read in a short publication dating back to 2008 (Hammond, 2008), helped RENAMO in various ways for years, never failing to provide it with important support. On the American side, intense espionage work - culminating with the expulsion of six embassy members in 1981 - was carried out against Samora Machel's regime in favour of apartheid South Africa. This work took the form, according to witnesses of the time, of at least two 'covert operations': one by the DIA (Defence Intelligence Agency), the US military intelligence, and the other directly by the CIA, not necessarily converging (Nesbitt, 1988). Apart from its origins stemming from foreign initiatives, it is now widely believed that RENAMO soon acquired a capacity to penetrate mainly rural environments in the centre-north of Mozambique, due to a number of reasons that can only be mentioned here: from the failure of the agricultural policies of the Marxist-Leninist government to significant cultural elements, such as contempt for religion, whatever its matrix, the marginalisation and even persecution of traditional community authorities, along with everything to do with 'tradition', languages and local cultures (Geffray, 1990; Lourenço, 2002). The marginalisation of the peoples of the centre-north of Mozambique from the most relevant decision-making processes within FRELIMO then represented further confirmation that the space within the liberation movement for those segments of the population was very limited, as confirmed by the events of the 'dissidents', or 'reactionaries', known today (Ncomo, 2004).

Despite their obvious differences, both the United States of the democrat Carter and communist Mozambique had a common interest in seeing the Salisbury regime deposed and a legitimate government installed. To this interest was also added the British interest, with the wound of a unilaterally proclaimed independence in 1965 by a minority white regime against the British motherland still open, to which was added, in 1970, the exit from the Commonwealth; meanwhile, the United Nations had imposed isolation measures towards Salisbury in 1966, which were combined with the embargo on South Africa dating back to 1963.

In Africa, the country most affected by the end of Ian Smith's rule was Mozambique. First of all, there were economic reasons that Maputo wanted to solve: if, in

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fact, no state had recognised the independence of Southern Rhodesia, there were few that strictly respected the embargo measures; among them, precisely Mozambique. This entailed considerable economic costs, and the trade that traditionally went from Rhodesian territory to the port of Beira was renounced. The strictness imposed by Samora Machel with respect to the embargo on Rhodesia, with the closure of the borders, in accordance with the provisions of UN Resolution 253 of 1968 (subsequent to 217/1965, which condemned Ian Smith's unilateral declaration of independence) cost Mozambique an economic loss estimated in the order of USD 510 million, with the loss of about 100,000 jobs (Hama Thay, 2020).

The resolution, however, was one-sided. As reprinted in some newspapers of the time, the UN Security Council's decision was historic, but limited: if, in fact, it provided for a ban on Rhodesia's export of 90% of its goods, with a prohibition on the 122 members of the UN Assembly selling oil, arms, motor vehicles and aeroplanes to Salisbury, the margins of discretion for each country were considerable (UNITED NATIONS, 1966). Pretoria, for example, immediately announced that it had no intention of complying with the resolution, which would have lost much of its effect without the support of South Africa, at the time Rhodesia's leading oil supplier and its main trading partner. On the other hand, the United Kingdom itself, which had urged the resolution, was very cautious about the embargo. London's concern was mainly about its relationship with Pretoria, on which the British government depended heavily for gold supplies, and which was the fourth largest country for the sale of its products. Finally, states that at the time represented important trading partners for Rhodesia, such as Switzerland and West Germany, were not yet part of the UN, and were therefore not bound by the various resolutions passed against Salisbury. The same attitude was held by Portugal, which immediately became a good ally of Ian Smith and his minority regime (Barroso, 2009).

The US State Department showed great concern about the all-too-modest effects of the embargo, starting with the position of Great Britain. The crux of the matter, in fact, was the direct interests of the British, especially with regard to South Africa. In this circumstance, 'The British are most reluctant to see sanctions extended to South Africa, from which Rhodesia has been buying most of its petroleum products. Such economic warfare with the South Africans could gravely affect the British balance of payments'. Consequently, 'The Rhodesian economy continued to function reasonably well and the Smith regime remained in firm political control' (U.S. FOREIGN RELATIONS, 1967). The report concludes by stating that the UK would have to enter into serious negotiations with both Pretoria and Lisbon in order to enforce the embargo measures against Rhodesia by these two countries as well. A

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circumstance, however, impracticable at the time because of the multiple British interests in the region. On the American side, the main concern was the possible penetration of communism within *Black Africa*: for this reason, Washington was inclined to make its citizens, especially its companies, respect the UN resolution, since a “[...] continued lack of movement towards a Rhodesian solution could be exploited by extreme African elements, as well as by the Communists, to our disadvantage” (U.S. FOREIGN RELATIONS, 1967).

Faced with the situation just described, which continued until after Mozambique gained independence, Samora Machel took a political initiative at the United Nations, seeking help from the very democratic countries that had passed the embargo resolution against Rhodesia. Mozambique sought a further resolution from the UN Security Council to help its fragile economy, demanding yet another strong condemnation of Ian Smith's regime. With the support of African countries, China, the Soviet Union, Italy and also the United States, which initially wanted to abstain, the UNSC voted on a new resolution, praising the seriousness of Maputo's embargo measures against Rhodesia, condemning the incursions of the Rhodesian military into Mozambique to destabilise the country, and appealing to the goodwill of states to help Mozambique's economy. In the resolution, the Security Council appealed directly to the various UN agencies, including FAO, World Bank, UNDP and others “[...] to assist Mozambique in the present economic situation and to consider periodically the question of economic assistance to Mozambique as envisaged in the present resolution” (UN SECURITY COUNCIL, 1976). The appeal, however, did not contribute much to encourage new interventions in favour of the Mozambican economy, especially by western countries.

The situation for Mozambique was not only unbearable economically: politically and militarily, Southern Rhodesia had also contributed to the country's serious unrest. Salisbury was continuing to forage RENAMO, and the aggressiveness of its military forces was escalating in a way that Maputo was struggling to contain. Mozambique was also hosting important bases of ZANLA, the military wing of ZANU, the Zimbabwean liberation movement that was opposing, along with ZAPU, the minority regime of Ian Smith (Yorke, 2005).

There was no shortage of attacks on Mozambican territory, with enormous damage both in terms of loss of life and infrastructure. Probably the bloodiest operation was the one in 1976 near the village of Nyadzonya, in Manica province, known as 'Operation Eland', or 'Nyadzonya Raid'. Believing to have uncovered, also thanks to aerial recognition, the major ZANLA base in Mozambique, the operation led to the killing of more than 1,000 people, most of them - as Amnesty International also recognised - Rhodesian refugees, elderly

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people and women. The operation was carried out on 9 August 1976, in response to the 5 August operation by ZANLA, which had attacked the Ruda base in Rhodesian territory and killed some soldiers of the Salisbury regime, prompting the white residents there to demand immediate action by Ian Smith's troops (Moorcraft; McLaughlin, 1982).

The situation in the entire region was in danger of getting out of hand, and American concerns played their part in hastening the end of a regime that, now, in the late 1970s, even Pretoria realised was coming to an end. There were several reasons for this, of various kinds: first, Vorster calculated that it would not be possible to keep up a minority government in which the ratio of whites to blacks was 1:22; secondly, economically, the end of the embargo, with the establishment of the new Zimbabwe, would favour the resumption of trade and commerce, also benefiting South Africa; finally, an international mediation role in the affair might partly rehabilitate Pretoria's poor image in the eyes of international public opinion. The constitution of the group known as the Frontline States (Zambia, Tanzania and Botswana, joined in 1975 by Mozambique and Angola) completed the picture with respect to a situation that for Ian Smith was now desperate.

Kissinger brought all his weight to bear to unblock the situation: in June 1976 there was a meeting between the powerful US Secretary of State in the outgoing Ford-led administration and the South African Prime Minister, Vorster, in the then West Germany. Kissinger's political scheme was clear: to put pressure on Pretoria so that Pretoria, in turn, would convince Salisbury of the need for a gradual abandonment of the white minority government in Rhodesia, envisaging a two-year transition period before handing over power to the local populations. Although Ian Smith interpreted the South African request as a betrayal, the fate of his government was sealed: the region's only ally, South Africa, after Mozambique had gained independence from its other historic friend, Portugal, was now determined to dump Salisbury's regime, fearing a hardening of Washington's own positions against Pretoria. Negotiations had to be entered into, and this was a success of American diplomacy, which in practice prompted London to break the deadlock and enter into final negotiations with Ian Smith (Godwin; Hancock, 1993).

However, there was no lack of obstacles and failed attempts, even after the decisive meeting on German soil in 1976. For instance, the Anglo-American plan, presented in 1977 to Smith, and known as the Owen-Vence plan, with the United States already headed by the democrat Carter, was sent back to sender, as it was declared unacceptable. Frequent meetings between South African and Rhodesian diplomacy still left Smith with some hope of survival (Onslow, 2004).

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It took the combined efforts of the United States and the United Kingdom, the pressure of Pretoria on Salisbury, as well as the diplomatic skills of the British foreign minister of the Thatcher government, Lord Carrington, for the negotiations to succeed. However, the risk of its failure was present right up to the last minute, mainly due to Robert Mugabe's resistance. The reason was essentially related to the land issue. Both the white minority that was handing over power to the nationalist movements and the British government itself had the same concern: Southern Rhodesia was one of the largest producers of agricultural commodities in Africa, with an enviable level of efficiency of its *farms*. Mugabe, together with the other leader of the liberation movements, Joshua Nkomo, both delegates from their respective organisations during the Lancaster House negotiations, insisted on an immediate return of those lands to the black majority, thus creating an impasse in the negotiation, which seemed to be well on its way (McGreal, 2002).

The issue concerned the compensation to be given to white *farmers who were* to be expropriated by the future government of Zimbabwe. The position of Nyerere - who, besides being the president of Tanzania, was the leader of the organisation known as Front Line States - was very clear. In the midst of the negotiations, he declared on 16 October that *'The only real problem is the issue of who provides the money for compensation to the settler farmers when their land is redistributed by a future Zimbabwe government. This is not a constitutional question but a simple policy question'*. A policy question that Vance immediately wanted to address with the leaders of the Front Line States, promising them - as well as the various components of the Zimbabwean liberation movements - a substantial economic commitment from Washington to compensate the dispossessed landowners. A commitment, however, that was not quantified, and which left much puzzlement, especially on the part of Mugabe. A few days later, Carter announced an outlay of 1-2 billion dollars to resolve the issue, but the State Department corrected him, pointing out that these funds were for the country's agricultural development in general, not for compensation of the expropriated. Following a further proposal, which reduced the amount of funds to \$1 billion, divided between Great Britain, the United States and the Commonwealth, confusion took over the negotiating table, leading to a sort of impasse, which was difficult to resolve (STAFF REPORT, 1979).

It was at this moment that Carter asked Samora Machel to intervene. As Ambassador Deprea recalls, Carter sent him a telegram, inviting him to beg the Mozambican president, on behalf of the US government, to intervene on Mugabe. The American promises - which, however, did not turn into any written commitment - together with Samora Machel's

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intervention on Mugabe (and also on Nkomo) unblocked the negotiations, laying the foundations for new relations between the West, in particular the United States and Great Britain, and Mozambique. Bases that could not be consolidated in the years immediately following the Lancaster House agreements, but which would play a very important role towards 1983-84, when Maputo began to take its turn in favour of the Western democracies with greater conviction.

The extremely important role Mozambique played in resolving the intricate Zimbabwean question produced a certain political credit in favour of Samora Machel, especially towards the United Kingdom and, to some extent, the United States. A credit that, however, towards the latter country, collapsed due to the capture of alleged CIA spies on Mozambican territory in 1981, which will not be discussed here (Mutemba, 1981).

Margareth Thatcher, however, did not forget Samora Machel's invaluable collaboration in the Lancaster House negotiations, developing with the Mozambican president an even personal sympathy, which was very useful when the charismatic president of that African country began to embark on the path of rapprochement with the West. The British prime minister was the chosen one for a first, historic meeting with the former enemies of capitalist imperialism, to be followed by the 1985 meeting with Reagan in Washington.

The London meeting between Thatcher and Machel on 20 October 1983 sealed a kind of homage and sincere thanks from the British Iron Lady to Samora Machel for the resolution of the Rhodesian question. Four years later, Thatcher showed her gratitude both for having avoided a non-negotiated solution in Zimbabwe, and for having attempted to do the same for Namibia, with, however, unsatisfactory results at the time. An important detail Machel is said to have recalled in that private meeting with the British premier was that 'Mugabe, Nkome and Ian Smith would all, at a certain point, have liked the talks to fail' (Bone, 1983). For the future, the two political leaders agreed to describe the situation in Zimbabwe as critical, and Mugabe as a politician with significant problems. According to Machel, these can be traced back to the human sphere, i.e. the years of imprisonment and the tough fight against Ian Smith, while Thatcher wanted to recall the difficulty the British government was having with Mugabe at the time (as urged by Machel), due to the detention of six white air force officers, accused of high treason and of having wanted to sabotage an air base in the country. From the meeting emerged - despite the difference of opinion - the willingness of the two sides to resolve the situation, and to re-establish cordial relations between the United Kingdom and Zimbabwe, in which Mozambique also had direct interests. Machel put himself forward as a possible interlocutor with Mugabe to release the six pilots

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currently imprisoned in Harare; although there are no documents available to date to confirm Samora Machel's role in this affair, the result was that, in December of that year, the Harare court acquitted the three pilots who were still imprisoned, giving them a week to leave the country and reach the United Kingdom, after 17 months of imprisonment (Mills, 1983).

Conclusion

The study just presented confirmed the initial hypothesis: in international relations, the greater interest tends to prevail. In this case, the overriding interest, for Mozambique, was getting rid of the Ian Smith regime that was sabotaging Samora Machel's effort to build national unity, far more than the strict allegiance to the Soviet bloc. This is why Machel agreed to work with the US and UK to resolve the Rhodesian question. This attitude will serve Machel a few years later to engage in direct discussions with the two major Western powers in order to abandon socialism and adopt the liberal-democratic system that had long been portrayed as absolute evil.

Machel's objectives in setting himself up as a key player in the mediation on the Rhodesian question were thus twofold: the more immediate one was to have an allied and non-hostile neighbour; and the longer-term one was to leave open the possibility of a dialogue with western countries. Mozambique's application for admission to COMECON (the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance, founded in 1949, and the economic arm of the Warsaw Pact) had just been rejected, making Maputo realise that the reasons why non-European countries such as Cuba, Vietnam and Mongolia had succeeded in joining the organisation had to be sought in geopolitical interests, and not in a generic solidarity that had not worked for Maputo. In that meeting with Thatcher, Machel intended to gain further political credit with the United Kingdom, an operation that succeeded perfectly. Thatcher interceded with Reagan before the historic meeting between the two in Washington in 1985, and she did the same for Chissano, by then president of the republic, in 1987, describing him as a moderate, reliable man determined to change the political destiny of his nation. Reagan's response was explicit, agreeing fully with Downing Street, and granting Mozambique an initial \$75 million in humanitarian assistance.

These latter elements show how even one of the world's poorest countries managed to break out of patterns that, historiographically, seemed insurmountable: first of all, Samora Machel tried, from the very first years of Mozambique's independence, to keep a separate path towards the West, at least in foreign policy. The image of a 'hard and pure' communist thus gives way to a statesman who intended to pursue his country's interests even

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while breaking, in keeping with the Cold War climate of that period, the privileged relations with the USSR and the Eastern European socialist bloc. Secondly, the documents consulted also elicit a certain amount of dissatisfaction, not to say distrust, towards the USSR itself, which seemed not to respond adequately to the material needs of the young independent Mozambique. Lastly, the specific Rhodesian affair confirms that, in a geopolitics determined by the Cold War, even small political actors such as Mozambique can play central roles in unblocking very complicated situations, and one that influenced the entire life of an entire region and beyond.

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