

# Incipient Hybrid War in South Central Africa and Mozambique

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Region: [sub-Saharan Africa](#)

Theme: [US NATO War Agenda](#)

## South-Central Africa Foreword

*The Hybrid War research has now moved from the Horn of Africa and East Africa down to a belt of states that the author has taken to calling South-Central Africa, which includes Mozambique, Malawi, Zambia, and Angola (and will be covered in that order). This part of Africa is important because it connects the Central-East African space to the much more developed and economically mature South African one, with the Republic of South Africa (RSA) naturally being the center of gravity in this larger region.*

Mozambique figures into the strategic calculus because of its gargantuan offshore gas reserves, and also because its territory could theoretically function as the most direct route linking RSA with the East African Community, provided of course that the RENAMO insurgency is ever defeated. Malawi, on the other hand, is at the intersection of three New Silk Road-significant countries – Tanzania, Zambia, and Mozambique – making it a ‘geopolitical hinge’ (a country with influence over pivot states and regions).

Zambia, it will be argued, is the ultimate pivot state because of the fact that five separate multipolar transnational connective infrastructure corridors crisscross through its territory, while Angola is an up and coming regional power that serves as the Atlantic terminus for the Southern Trans-African Route (STAR). In aggregate, these four states have their own roles to play in China’s One Belt One Road vision, though because they’re so woefully understudied by multipolar strategists, the Hybrid War vulnerabilities inside each of them might catch the world by surprise if they’re not identified in advance and analyzed before any of their destabilization scenarios are activated.

## Mozambique Introduction

Up until the past couple of years ago, many observers agreed that Mozambique was finally on the [road to recovery](#) after a ruinous Cold War-era civil war. The economy was growing, investment was piling in, and the two formerly warring sides had entered into a prolonged period of peace. That all changed at the end of 2012, however, after Italian prospectors [discovered](#) some of the world’s largest offshore natural gas reserves. RENAMO, the ‘opposition’ party that was supposed to have demilitarized after the war, quickly took up arms once again and renewed its historic insurgency against the government a few months later in [spring 2013](#). Militant leader Afonso Dhlakama [alleged](#) that this was because the government hadn’t fulfilled its part of the [1992 Rome Accords](#), the agreement that ended the civil war, and therefore his organization wasn’t obliged to abide by it either.

It should be obvious to all neutral observers, though, that RENAMO’s primary motivation is

to disrupt, control, or influence Mozambique's energy deposits and export routes before they hit the global market [sometime in the 2020s](#), and that the group is simply hiding behind "democratic" rhetoric as a convenient excuse for doing so. The insurgents aren't "freedom fighters", but [Hybrid War](#) pawns that are intent on usurping power in one of the [world's largest predicted LNG exporters](#), which in that case would make them some of the most important players in the global market. Not only would their patrons wield considerable influence as a result, but the group itself would get insanely rich after being rewarded 'legal' control of the resultant revenue stream. The IMF forecasts that the Mozambican economy will grow an astounding [24% per year between 2012-2015](#), and in a country as [poor](#) as Mozambique presently is, it's little wonder why some people would be willing to kill others and perhaps even die themselves for a chance at administering the financial windfalls of this bonanza.




## The Hidden Strategy

There's much more to Mozambique's Hybrid War than initially meets the eye, though, since RENAMO actually doesn't have to lead the national government in order to receive these envisioned privileges. In fact, all that it has to do is play its cards right in the ongoing [Vatican-led peace talks](#). If the group coordinates with Mozambique's troublesome Western donors who are [already blackmailing](#) the country as it is, then the two could coax the authorities into acceding to RENAMO's prized political demand such of regional autonomy.

The "[regime reboot](#)" that this would produce is much more beneficial to the proxy's patrons than a traditional regime change would be in this context, as it would allow them to functionally achieve all of their objectives whether or not they ever succeed in attaining full national leadership through elections.

Moreover, another detail that doesn't meet the eye right away is that regional autonomy wouldn't just give RENAMO and its backers control over Mozambique's energy exports, but it would also allow them to project influence throughout the rest of Southern Africa via their newfound control over the country's second-largest port of Beira, the Zambezi River, and the Cahora Bassa Dam's international hydroelectricity network. In other words, RENAMO and its foreign patrons would control all of Mozambique's strategic resources and be free to exploit them as necessary in pursuit of their regional goals.

## Cutting Up The Country

Dhlakama boldly [declared](#) in March that six provinces - Tete, Manica, Sofala, Zambezia, Nampula, and Niassa - should come under RENAMO's official control, purportedly because the majority of the population is in support of his movement. He doesn't just want the organization to have the right to appoint their partisan governors to power (though that was [part](#) of their demands), but the militant leader is also in favor of granting each of these provinces [autonomy](#) from the central government. It's difficult to appreciate just how radical of a proposal this is unless one physically maps it out and sees how large of a chunk of the country RENAMO is laying claim to for itself:

Red: RENAMO-claimed territory (66.5% of the national territory and 69.8% of the total population)

Black Star: The Mozambican capital of Maputo

Black Box: Rovuma Basin natural gas deposits

Black Line: Tentative route of the African Renaissance Pipeline to Johannesburg

Blue Line: Zambezi River

Blue Box: Cahora Bassa Dam

Green Circle: The second-largest city and port of Beira

The Mozambican Kingmaker

Dhlakama's strategy is to position RENAMO as the constitutionally protected kingmaker in Mozambican domestic and international affairs, thus meaning that his group wouldn't even have to win a national election in order to determine the country's most important policies. The above map demonstrates this quite well, since the realization of RENAMO's plans in devolving state power to his proposed network of party-controlled contiguous provinces would have the effect of unquestionably making Dhlakama the most powerful force in the country. Here's why:

The African Renaissance Pipeline:

China plans to contribute 70% of the funding needed to construct the \$6 billion [African Renaissance Pipeline](#), a natural gas infrastructure project for [connecting](#) the Rovuma Basin's monstrous reserves to the growing South African marketplace. While the map only illustrates a tentative path that this route could follow, in any case, it's patently obvious that bulk of it would have to pass through RENAMO-controlled provinces. Paired with the proposed autonomy that Dhlakama is fighting for, this means that the party could have the power to enact lucrative transit fees and disrupt supply shipment whenever it chooses, thus making it a 'Southeast African Ukraine' in this regard. The effect that this would have is that RENAMO and its backers would de-facto control South Africa's natural gas supply, thereby representing a major strategic risk for the BRICS country.

Cahora Bassa Dam:

This large-scale project was [completed](#) by the Portuguese during the twilight years of the imperial era, and it's one of Southern Africa's largest hydroelectricity projects. Accordingly, much of the energy that it produces is exported to the [rest of the region](#), including South Africa, where it accounts for [3%](#) of the country's total needs. While this number may seem miniscule (and it is in an absolute sense), it's still an important component of the country's energy policy and has [reliably](#) supplied the grid amidst the numerous internal disruptions that have befallen it over the past decade. So important was this dam in the past that RENAMO previously wanted the area around it to form the "[Republic of Rombesia](#)" at the end of the civil war, though the ruling FRELIMO party refused and succeeded in safeguarding the country's territorial integrity. Nevertheless, this megaproject still has saliency today, and RENAMO could conceivably weaponize its exports as a political instrument if it ever acquired power over this facility.

Zambezi River:

The fourth-longest river in Africa snakes through the southern portion of the continent, and it could one day realistically provide a direct maritime outlet for the landlocked economies of Zambia and Zimbabwe. The Zambezi is difficult to navigate and has yet to be developed to the point where large-scale cargo transport could occur, but the [Zambezi Seaway Corporation](#) is exploring the possibilities to do just that. Even in the absence of that happening, though, there's a chance for Mozambique and Malawi to clinch a deal on the [Shire-Zambezi Waterway](#), which would connect the southern Malawian port city of Nsanje to the Indian Ocean via this route. As it exists, this abjectly impoverished country receives most of its imports from the Mozambican ports of Beira and Nacala, both of which would come under control of RENAMO in any forthcoming autonomous setup, thus giving this sub-state actor almost total control over Malawi if it succeeds in its domestic rearrangement plans for a "regime reboot".

#### Beira Port:

The second-largest port in Mozambique is located in a city of equal measure, and [Beira](#) also functions as one of Zimbabwe's only routes to the sea. A [railway](#) and [pipeline](#) help to link the landlocked country to the rest of the world, and the former even forms part of the [Beira Corridor](#) that [reaches](#) up as far north as Zambia's capital of [Lusaka](#). Evidently, this coastal city isn't just important for Mozambique, but it also plays a pivotal role for its hinterland neighbors as well, so placing it under the "autonomous" quasi-independent rule of RENAMO would correspondingly give the group controlling influence over these other states' economies. By extent, the group's foreign backers would also gain this indirect advantage as well.

#### Concluding Thoughts

The incipient Hybrid War on Mozambique admittedly hasn't been too large-scale of a conflict, and it has noticeably lacked a lot of the Color Revolution elements that typically undergird this stratagem. Nonetheless, this doesn't mean that the unrest hasn't been engineered for the same purpose as other Hybrid Wars, namely to disrupt, control, or influence multipolar transnational connective infrastructure projects. While the existing Cahora Bassa Dam is certainly a significant trophy to be had, much more important in the contemporary geopolitical context is the prospective African Renaissance Pipeline to South Africa, which is exactly what RENAMO wants to seize through its "autonomy" proposal.

If implemented to any tangible degree, this de-facto version of "[Identity Federalism](#)" would likely be paired with a radical reinterpretation of the [1992 Rome Accords](#) that were supposed to have ended the civil war, with the outcome being that RENAMO would be granted broad military independence in administering its claimed provinces. As a result, they'll hold more sway over these territories than the central government itself would, thus leading the 'opposition' group to have more regionally impactful power than the elected authorities themselves in this part of the country. If RENAMO decides to leverage its newfound control over the Cahora Bassa Dam, the Zambezi River, and Beira Port, it could exert tremendous influence over Malawi, Zimbabwe, and even Zambia.

Naturally, it would only be a matter of time before RENAMO would start causing renewed problems inside the rest of the country outside of its control, whether or not it precedes this by flexing its muscles internationally via the abovementioned avenues. The group might seek to 'justify' its actions under the 'democratic' guise that it's 'not fair' for FRELIMO's remaining third of the country (both in territory and population) to still have a deciding say

over the rest of the country's affairs, and accordingly, this might lead to RENAMO making a power grab for Cabo Delgado province, the source of the Rovuma Basin gas deposits. If successful in doing so conventionally or through blackmail, RENAMO's overt or indirect power over this region would complement its existing transit control over the African Renaissance Pipeline and grant it and its foreign backers the missing LNG component necessary to influence the global market on a much more far-reaching scale.

*To be continued...*

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