

IS THE DEATH OF AFONSO DHLAKAMA A THREAT TO PEACE IN MOZAMBIQUE?

By Dr. Stephanie M. Burchard

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Interim RENAMO leader Ossufo Momade gestures during the state funeral of Mozambique's opposition leader, Afonso Dhlakama, in Beira, on Wednesday, May, 9, 2018. Dhlakama, who led a rebel group during the devastating civil war that ended in 1992, died on May 3. He was 65. (Source: AP Photo/Tsvangirayi Mukwazhi.)

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By Dr. Alexander Noyes

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Joyce Banda, former President of Malawi. (Source: Julian Martin, "An Interview with Joyce Banda, thepolitic.org, August 6, 2017, <http://thepolitic.org/an-interview-with-joyce-banda-former-president-of-malawi/>.)

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IDA's Africa team focuses on issues related to political, economic, and social stability and security on the continent.

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Civil War and Its Aftermath

The Mozambican civil war, which lasted from 1977 to 1992, is believed to have [caused](#) the deaths of around 1 million people. The rebel group RENAMO was [supported](#) by various outside groups, including white nationalist governments in Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) and South Africa, as well as by Tanzania, Zambia, and Malawi. The governing FRELIMO [Front for the Liberation of Mozambique], its political origins rooted in Marxism, was initially aligned with the Soviet Union. FRELIMO later enjoyed support from the United States, the United Kingdom, and France.

After the signing of the Rome General Peace Agreement in 1992, UN peacekeeping forces were deployed during a two-year transitional period. Elections were held in 1994, and FRELIMO head Joaquin Chissano won the presidency, defeating Dhlakama 53 percent to 34 percent. FRELIMO has won every parliamentary and presidential election held, but its support has waxed and waned over time. In recent years, RENAMO had enjoyed a [resurgence](#) in popularity due to allegations of corruption levied against the state and a widely shared belief that Mozambique's post-war development has disproportionately benefited the country's elites. In the 2014 elections, FRELIMO presidential candidate Nyusi received just 57 percent of the vote. This figure was as high as 75 percent when former president Armando Guebuza won re-election in 2009. RENAMO also received its largest share of parliamentary seats in 2014 (89 out of 250 seats).

Life of a Rebel Leader

Dhlakama was a controversial figure. After former leader Andre Matsangaissa was killed in 1979, Dhlakama took over control of the rebel group. Under his leadership, RENAMO was [known](#) for its brutal tactics and use of child soldiers. But he was also a charismatic figure loved by his supporters.

Upon the signing of the peace treaty in 1992, Dhlakama remained the head of RENAMO, which converted to a political party. He ran for president five times, losing to the FRELIMO candidate each time. In the lead-up to the 2014 elections, relations between RENAMO and the government disintegrated, resulting in sporadic fighting. In 2013, RENAMO announced it was abandoning the peace accords. After two assassination attempts in 2015, Dhlakama relocated to one of RENAMO's rural bases near the Gorongosa mountain in the north. Intermittent [clashes](#) between RENAMO's armed faction

and the military continued until a truce was announced in 2016; a [ceasefire](#) was formalized in 2017. President Nyusi, who defeated Dhlakama in the 2015 election, [met](#) with Dhlakama at his base in Gorongosa in August 2017. The two were believed to be close to an [agreement](#) before Dhlakama's death.

Death of a Former Rebel Leader

President Nyusi confirmed Dhlakama's death on national television in a statement to the country, calling Dhlakama's death a "bad time" for Mozambique. President Nyusi also expressed [regret](#) at not being able to help save Dhlakama. An official state funeral took place on May 9, 2018, with the president in attendance.

As the head of RENAMO, Dhlakama exerted significant personal control over his party. He would [reportedly](#) call party members on the floor of parliament with instructions on how to vote. Emblematic of his intense management of party affairs and tendency to remove challengers early, Dhlakama had no successor in the party.

After Dhlakama's death, RENAMO [announced](#) General Ossufo Momade, head of the military wing of the party, as interim party leader. Momade is a current member of parliament and was RENAMO secretary general from 2007 to 2012. As one of his first acts, Momade threatened a return to civil war if the government did not immediately accept and implement the agreement that Dhlakama and Nyusi had been negotiating. Drafts of the [agreement](#) included a decentralization provision, in which previously appointed governorships would be transferred, until elections are held, to RENAMO in provinces where RENAMO enjoys majority support, and a demobilization provision, in which RENAMO soldiers would be integrated into the Mozambican armed forces.

Conclusion

The takeover by the military wing of the party has some observers [concerned](#) about the threat of significant violence returning to Mozambique. But with Dhlakama gone and no clear successor to take control of the party in the long term, this could also pose an opportunity for the state to seize momentum and conclude the peace agreement.

A peace agreement could be mutually beneficial to both parties. President Nyusi is on [record](#) as wanting to continue peace talks. As the first president of Mozambique with no civil war credentials, his standing within FRELIMO has been [tenuous](#) at times as he [struggled](#) to wrest control of the party from former president Armando Guebuza. A peace agreement could increase his popularity and help cement his standing within the party before the next elections, scheduled for October 2019. RENAMO is in a position to secure significant concessions from the government if it can promise quick resolution and sign an agreement. Control over several gubernatorial positions (at least [three](#) out of Mozambique's 10 provinces enjoy majority RENAMO support) and senior leadership positions within the armed forces could also improve morale within RENAMO along with the party's electoral fortunes in 2019.

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Joyce Banda, former President of Malawi. (Source: Julian Martin, "An Interview with Joyce Banda, thepolitic.org, August 6, 2017, <http://thepolitic.org/an-interview-with-joyce-banda-former-president-of-malawi/>.)

Background

Malawi is a [low-income](#) landlocked country of 18 million located in southern Africa. In 2016 it had a GDP of \$5 billion, with a growth rate of 4 percent. Bingu wa Mutharika, the brother of the current president, won elections in 2004 and 2009 but became increasingly autocratic in his second term. [Twenty](#) people died in anti-government demonstrations in 2011, leading donors to cut funding to the aid-dependent country. Banda, then serving as vice president, assumed the presidency in 2012 after Bingu wa Mutharika died in office. Peter Mutharika, then foreign minister, attempted to thwart Banda's succession to the presidency, but failed after the military [sided](#) with Banda and upheld the constitution. Peter Mutharika was [charged](#) with treason for these actions.

After a brief moment of domestic and international popularity, Banda, [tainted](#) by the multimillion-dollar Cashgate scandal, lost the 2014 poll after a tense election period [marked](#) by protests and allegations of fraud. Cashgate, the country's largest corruption scandal ever, consisted of a scheme to siphon government funds through fraudulent payments to the tune of an estimated \$250 million. Banda left Malawi after she lost the poll by a considerable margin to Peter Mutharika. The charges against Peter Mutharika were [dropped](#) when he won the presidency.

Protestors' Grievances

Civil society groups organized the recent protests, but were [joined](#) by opposition politicians, including Lazarus Chakwera, leader of the Malawi Congress Party (MCP). The demonstrations were sparked by allegations of government corruption, specifically a \$5.5 million disbursement to 86 different constituencies that a recent budget review revealed had not been properly approved by parliament. Protestors [petitioned](#) the presidency to reverse the payments and sack the minister of finance, Goodall Gondwe. Demonstrators also [decried](#) the lack of basic services, citing frequent electricity blackouts, as well as high unemployment. They also demanded that Malawi move to a simple majority electoral system.

After initially criticizing the demonstrations, the government, through spokesperson Nicolas Dausi, [embraced](#) the protests: "As government we would like to commend Malawians for the peaceful demonstrations, that's a way to go and appreciate." Dausi also praised the police for their professionalism.

Banda's Return

Banda defiantly returned to Malawi on April 28 after an extended self-imposed exile, saying that she does not fear being arrested. Andekuche Chanthuya, Banda's spokesperson, said that Banda "is not afraid or intimidated" and that the

Anti-Corruption Bureau has said that she “is not linked to any cashgate, whether as a beneficiary or as a masterminder [sic].” The director general of the Anti-Corruption Bureau, Reyneck Matemba, [denied](#) these claims: “We never said we have cleared the former president.” While Banda has not said so explicitly, the timing of her return has spurred [speculation](#) that she may run for president again in 2019. Banda has said that she will not comment on her political ambitions until she consults widely with her party, while her party has [said](#) that she returned to Malawi to help the party rebuild before the 2019 elections.

Conclusion

Banda has not yet been arrested, which suggests that she may have come to some sort of [arrangement](#) with President Peter Mutharika. If Banda decides to jump back into the political fray, this could unravel any such armistice and heighten political tensions in the run-up to elections in 2019. Greg Mills, of the Brenthurst Foundation, who also advised Banda’s Presidential Advisory Committee on the Economy, [asserts](#): “If she runs or signals her intention to do so, the gloves will come off.”

Given her Cashgate baggage and her long absence from the country, Banda appears to face an upward climb to become a competitive candidate, despite recent protests against the government. Henry Chingaipe, a political analyst, [noted the difficulties she faces](#): “her party is in tatters,” and her “decision to leave the country for so long eroded trust in her leadership.” Although Peter Mutharika has now praised the demonstrations, the persistent issues of corruption and a lack of effective service delivery are [not easily fixed](#). Protests may continue, with an attendant risk of low-level political violence.

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