

BOOK REVIEW

Portuguese Africa and the West

by William Minter

Randall Robinson
Pan-African Liberation Committee
P.O. Box 514
Brookline Villiage, Mass. 02147

February 12, 1974

After five centuries of crescendoing military resistance to Portuguese colonial domination, African liberation armies in Guinea-Bissau, Mozambique and Angola can now see unmistakable signs of progress towards independence and consequent relief from a ruthlessly multi-faceted exploitation, historically the hallmark of western relations with Africa since Vasco da Gama rounded the Cape of Good Hope in 1498.

Guinea-Bissau has already declared its independence; the freedom fighters are far from being contained in Angola; and even more recently, the Mozambique Liberation Front (FRELIMO) has opened new theaters of operation deep in that territory's southland, threatening Rhodesian rail life-lines and, for the first time, imperiling major Portuguese population centers in Mozambique.

The diminishing prospects for any kind of qualified Portuguese victory are now desperate enough that the Paris newsletter, Lettre D'Afrique, in January forecasted a gradual Portuguese pullout from Africa in the foreseeable future.

Of course none of the implications here are lost on the remaining white minority rule countries, South Africa and Zimbabwe (Rhodesia). As they all are joined in a symbiosis of mutual defense against African majority rule, whatever bodes ill for Portugal, bodes ill as well for the rest. Making that point even more clearly, the Ian Smith regime in land-locked Zimbabwe (Rhodesia) ——— beleaguered already by threats to their economic life-lines and guerilla attacks across their borders ——— now has been forced to double military conscription and evacuate 5.4 million square miles of border land, thus, creating a free-fire zone in still another effort to defer the inevitable. South Africa,

with troops for some time deployed against the freedom forces in Angola and Mozambique, is expected to attempt seizure of the southern most zones in the two colonies as buffers to her own insecure borders if and when the Portuguese defense collapses.

From all reliable indications, one might, with relative assurance, speculate that a decade from now and certainly not more than two, the face of Southern Africa will have been radically altered. More confidently, the projection can be made that Portuguese colonial hegemony in Africa will end ——— and relatively soon.

But, should the relationship between Portugal and the African territories change soon dramatically, (at least on the surface), will that mean that the fruits of freedom and independence will have necessarily been harvested? Of course the answer is no. The obvious task then will be to wage quite a different kind of struggle against Portugal and the principle Western allies ——— the United States, Great Britain, West Germany, and France ——— that have kept the colonial empire afloat and retarded the bloom of freedom in Africa for so long.

The unfolding of future events is not difficult to visualize. All of the Western powers by the initiative of the United States, will strongly encourage, support, importune, and even fiercely pressure Portugal to hold fast in Africa until it is no longer scarcely feasible economically, militarily, or diplomatically for them to have her do so. Only at that point will Portugal and her allies attempt to put into place the second foreign policy option ——— a neocolonial arrangement of one variety or another, contrived to leave Portugal in virtual control while deceptively accommodating African demands for participation.

In his readable and thoughtfully researched book, Portuguese Africa and the West, William Minter sets forth in broad outline a United States

foreign policy designed to anticipate eventual Portuguese military defeat while preserving Western business and military access to Southern Africa through use of more devious means: "America seems to have made three basic judgements: (1) Southern Africa is of strategic importance to the United States; (2) the best guarantee of stability on Western terms can be found in cooperation with the existing, white-dominated regimes; (3) those regimes, in order to become more acceptable and more effective partners in maintaining stability, would be well advised to make limited steps towards greater participation of Africans. There are two corollary judgements: (1) the disruptive 'liberation movements' must be contained while the reforms are given time to work, and (2) the cooperation with the white regimes must be 'low key' so as to minimize international criticism and domestic debate about the issue."

We'd do well, it follows, to keep in mind that the national enemies of African freedom, comprising nearly all of the so-called "free world", never give up. Long before the overt conduct of military activity is finished, the less detectable and more insidious covert subversive measures have long since taken root. And, perhaps that is the single most rewarding element of Minter's work. Though comprehensively international, most of the presented data about economic, military, diplomatic and NATO variety relationships between Portugal and her allies have appeared elsewhere. But, here we are uniquely afforded a critical glimpse at American foreign policy in the making through the malignant utterings of the Dean Achesons, the Clark McGregors and the rest of those relative few faceless white Americans who have in semi-secrecy all but totally shaped American policy on Africa over the last two decades, without benefit of consultation, except, of course, from Gulf Oil, General Motors, the Pentagon and the like.

Be assured, however, that as their policies, covert or otherwise, haven't worked the Western will in other parts of the Third World, they will have no greater success in turning Africa away from her chosen course of total freedom.