Chapter 6
War-Stopping and Peacemaking in Mozambique

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I. Introduction
On October 4, 1992, the government of Mozambique and the opposition force Renamo signed a General Peace Agreement (GPA) in Rome, ending a sixteen-year conflict that tore the country apart and followed on the heels of a brutal eleven-year independence struggle. Though Mozambique is still a poor country with a host of social and political problems, it has not returned to war and has recovered at a remarkable pace. With only a few small flare-ups of violence and a government that has seen three free and fair elections at regular five-year intervals, refugees and internally displaced persons have long since returned home. Donor agencies, investors, and, increasingly, tourists have flocked to what many call “Africa’s Success Story.”

Many of the factors that enabled Mozambicans to make peace were the result of external actors and fortune; nevertheless, an analysis of the war and the ensuing peace yields lessons for would-be peacemakers in other parts of the world.

The analysis develops in four parts. Section II provides a background history of the conflict, from the Portuguese arrival in Mozambique to independence. Section III discusses the factors, both internal and external, that fueled the war. Section IV discusses the changes that enabled the parties to consider negotiations and the peace process. Section V analyzes the factors that allowed the peace to last and explains the lessons that this case study provides.

II. Colonial History and Independence, 1498–1975

A. Portuguese Presence
The Portuguese, who first arrived in Mozambique in 1498, barely established a colonial presence for the majority of their first four centuries in East Africa. They kept to a few settlements along the coast of the Indian Ocean, involving themselves in the slave trade, and they avoided the kind of systematic colonial penetration practiced


by their British and French counterparts in other parts of Africa. After the Berlin Conference of 1884, Portugal feared that its minimal presence in Mozambique and Angola would invite the stronger European powers to take away the land allotted to Portugal, so it attempted to strengthen its hold on Mozambique with agricultural development. However, Portuguese cotton and sugar plantations established in the early twentieth century were largely unsuccessful. The Portuguese immigrants who came to run the plantations lacked agricultural know-how, and they created large-scale resentment by forcing native Mozambicans to labor on the farms.²

The economy developed as a result of the mining boom in South Africa and southern Rhodesia, which created a demand for Mozambican ports and migrant laborers. Historian James Ciment writes that Mozambicans’ shared experience laboring in the South African mines and being distrusted by the black South African laborers helped develop a Mozambican nationalism, which would manifest in a unified liberation movement that cut across ethnic and regional boundaries.³

When the dictator António Salazar took control of Portugal in 1932, he sharply increased Portuguese emigration to Mozambique, mainly among unemployed peasants, and worked to resuscitate the Mozambican cotton and sugar plantations. Because Mozambicans were forced to labor on plantations and were barred from even low-wage positions in the Portuguese system, new Portuguese arrivals were able to find jobs in the growing textile industry, ports, and administration. In the 1950s and 1960s, when France and England yielded to demands for independence in Africa, Salazar and his successor Marcelo Caetano refused and redoubled efforts to settle more colonists.⁴ To combat the incipient independence movement, Portugal’s secret police force, the PIDE (International and State Defense Police), harassed, tortured, and exiled nationalist leaders.

B. The Struggle for Independence

In 1962, three nationalist movements came together in Dar-es-Salaam to form Frelimo (the Mozambique Liberation Front), which launched its armed struggle in northern Mozambique on September 25, 1964. Most of the early battles took place in the north of the country, and while Frelimo succeeded in establishing a few “liberated” areas, the Portuguese ruthlessly retaliated against the local Makua people, making Frelimo and its mainly southern leaders somewhat unpopular there. Frelimo’s first president, Eduardo Mondlane, who had studied in the United States, was killed by a mail bomb in 1969. The charismatic and more radical Samora Machel succeeded him. Though Frelimo achieved some military gains in the north, the Portuguese maintained a military advantage throughout.

² A small group of Portuguese, known as prazeiros, lived among Mozambicans for generations. Frelimo was a racially inclusive independence movement, and some prazeiros later played a prominent role in the independence struggle.