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DEPARTMENT OF STATE A/CDC/MR

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 from Lourenco Marques
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MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

Date: February 5, 1969

Subject: Mondlane's Assassination

Participants: Governor General Rebello de Souza
John G. Gossett

On February 4 I had asked for a ten minute interview with the Governor General, at his convenience, which was granted the following day. I opened the conversation by saying that I would be most interested and appreciative to hear his Excellency's informal and personal assessment of the possible effects of Mondlane's death on the capabilities and tactics of FRELIMO and on Portuguese fortunes in Mozambique. I said that of course I had received no instructions or questions from the Department to cause me to request this audience, and that I had done so on my own initiative because, as Mozambique was the Province directly effected by FRELIMO activities, I considered his own assessment uniquely valuable and important.

The Governor General began his reply with what has become his tandard disclaimer on substantative matters, to the effect that his comments would be necessarily informal and personal and in strict confidence because "of course, the purpose of Consulates is primarily commercial". He then made the following points:

1. The Portuguese viewed the terrorists as a viable force only because of Tanzanian sanctuary and support and the assistance they were receiving from other powers; therefore, it seemed to him that the death of Mondlane should have little or no effect on the course of terrorism in the North.
2. He then dwelt at length on the increasingly favorable course of the struggle in the North over the last several months and said that at this point operations were now going very well indeed for the Portuguese in Cabo Delgado and Niassa Districts and "even in Tete where Mendlane had threatened to interfere with Capora Bassa".

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3. He went on to say that he believed that the eventual defeat of FRELIMO must now for some time have been foreseen by most FRELIMO leaders themselves, including Mondlane; that for both FRELIMO and the Portuguese the most important circumstance assuring eventual FRELIMO defeat was not FRELIMO's increasing weakness in battle but its failure to extend or even maintain its previous level of subversion of the people. He said that this failure was due partly to the wisdom and success of the Portuguese "Aldeamento" (African Resettlement) Program and in part to consistent Portuguese restraint in the type and nature of the counter-insurgency activities of Portuguese military forces. He said, for example, that sometimes officials ask him how many FRELIMO forces the Portuguese were killing and his usual reply (obviously not for publication) was "as few as we possibly can under the circumstances". He added that it takes much longer to change a man's mind than to kill him but he believed this was the only way to eventually eliminate insurgency and subversion and that this was the primary goal of the Portuguese military and civilian officials in Mozambique.
4. He said that the pertinence of these facts to the death of Mondlane was as follows: That help from America and elsewhere in the West had begun to dry up recently for FRELIMO, and that beginning around the time of the mid-1968 Party Congress Mondlane had felt obliged not only to attack America and the West more and more violently but also to cater evenly and consistently to the Chicoms and the Russians at the same time; this situation, together with FRELIMO's reverses in the field, had sharply reduced Mondlane's value to FRELIMO and may even have reduced his influence with Nyerere. Therefore, when a senior Maconde leader of FRELIMO was recently sacked by Mondlane the Macondes probably felt that he could be spared and that the time had come to eliminate him.
5. [REDACTED] as [REDACTED] by the fact that the first reports from Reuters had reported that Mondlane was killed by a rifle shot the previous night. He said that "the Portuguese" (probably meaning his own local intelligence people) thought that the use of a time bomb was much more typical of the Macondes than assassination by a rifle shot. He said that if it should turn out that Mondlane had been killed with a rifle, this would make the causes of the assassination even more obscure.

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6. He added, apropos of nothing, that Mondlane had left the Portuguese world to which he had really belonged because he had come to believe that the Portuguese had not done enough for him - or at least because the Portuguese had made their offers to him "too late". He said he thought Mondlane had few close ties left in the Portuguese world although he did have some relatives here - for example, one of Mondlane's cousins was on the Governor General's household staff.
7. Returning to the subject of the effect of Mondlane's death on the Portuguese world, he said that, as Mondlane had a certain stature in the non-communist world that no other FRELIMO leader was likely to achieve, his death might prove to be a net gain for the Portuguese. He said that aside from this aspect of the situation he saw no clear pattern of any other effect for better or worse on the Portuguese position.
8. The Governor General said that perhaps the Tanzanian police would find out who had actually shot Mondlane and that perhaps this information would eventually become public through a court trial or otherwise, but that he thought it very possible that internal political problems in Tanzania or Nyerere's concern with protecting the Black African image might cause Tanzania never to divulge the truth or alternatively to blame the Portuguese.
9. The Governor General added that he himself could not at this stage dismiss the possibility that the assassination was the work of "agents provocateurs" seeking, perhaps primarily or at least secondarily, to fix the blame of Mondlane's death on the Portuguese. [REDACTED] which credit, even if they had been so minded which of course they were not.

COMMENT: There was nothing particularly new or surprising in anything the Governor General said except perhaps the length to which he went in discussing it and the lack of either frankness or perception. I had asked for ten minutes and he talked for nearly forty. Much more interesting than what the Governor General had to say was his manner in saying it. As an effective political pro, he has on all previous occasions I had seen him publicly or privately, been composed, fluent, persuasive and effective. Enough time had elapsed after the assassination that he should have had fairly good guidelines, if only tentative ones, as to what position the Portuguese would take. He has always taken a completely

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Salazarist position on Portugal in Africa, and I had expected that regardless of what he said there would be at least a faint air of complacency and satisfaction at the death of an old enemy. On the contrary, he was nervous and ill at ease and on occasion fumbled a bit for words. For the first time I noticed an occasional twitch over his left eye and his lips were dry and his expression a bit strained. He was as cordial as ever in saying good-bye.

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