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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
Office of Current Intelligence
18 February 1965

INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

Malawi

1. Last week's raid on Fort Johnston, a district headquarters within 100 miles of the Malawi capital, apparently marks the start of a terrorist campaign by a group of former cabinet ministers determined to overthrow Prime Minister Banda. Such a dramatic show of force enhances their prospects for receiving assistance from other African nationalists who share their resentment of Banda's collaboration with the Portuguese in neighboring Mozambique. Although a popular uprising does not appear imminent, sustained guerrilla operations, backed from outside Malawi, could in the long run tip the balance against Banda.

2. Banda is currently in a strong position. He is, however, faced with the difficulty of trying to ride two horses at once: because of Malawi's exposed geographical position vis-a-vis Mozambique and the fact that Malawi's only transport route to the sea runs through Portuguese territory, Banda has felt forced to maintain cordial and friendly relations with the Portuguese. On the other hand, Banda is acutely aware of African nationalist pressures and on the surface at least he is trying not to be put in the position of opposing the advance of African liberation. He is clearly aware of the threat to himself represented by armed "freedom fighters," and if the pressures become too strong he may well reverse his pro-Portuguese position to save his hide.

3. The Fort Johnston raid arose from a political stalemate that has prevailed since last September when the six most capable members of Prime Minister Banda's cabinet broke with him--a heavy blow for a talent-starved government barely two months after it had achieved nominal independence from Britain. Initially

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the breach was essentially a personality clash without clearcut issues; the dissident ministers challenged Banda's blatantly autocratic conduct. In September, they barnstormed around Malawi, stressing Banda's refusal to replace British civil servants with Africans. More recently all except former education minister Henry Masauko Chipembere, gathered in Dar es Salaam, have begun to solicit support from other African nationalists, focusing their attention on Banda's manifest policy of collaboration with the Portuguese authorities in Mozambique. In September the dissidents professed readiness to compromise with Banda, but by December Chipembere had a manifesto circulated in Malawi asserting that he and his former colleagues were organizing a liberation movement with unspecified foreign support.

4. The attack on Fort Johnston apparently was intended as a hit-and-run action; as such it was highly effective. During the night of 12 February some 200 raiders struck two police stations and a post office, cut all communications, seized 85 weapons and several vehicles, and withdrew with no known casualties. Chipembere, who has a strong popular following in Fort Johnston, his home constituency, probably led the raid. This is the first instance of a concerted terrorist attack against government installations, although opposition elements have sporadically clashed with members of Banda's Youth League since September.

5. A widespread popular uprising does not appear imminent, since Banda retains firm control of the Malawi Congress Party, the only political party in the country, while Chipembere and his former colleagues do not seem to have gained mass support beyond the Fort Johnston district. The Malawi army of four infantry companies and the 2,800-man police force are officered mostly by British expatriates, who estimate that their African subordinates will obey orders in a political crisis, despite recent indications of some antipathy for Banda. These forces probably could suppress any open resistance in Fort Johnston or the Zomba capital area, where many civil servants have become disaffected at Banda's increasingly arbitrary rule.

6. However, a drive to capture the raiders has so far yielded only limited results. A full infantry company and substantial police reinforcements reached

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Fort Johnston the morning after the raid and began operations, but apprehended only 20 suspected rebels in the first 48 hours. The bulk of the raiding force apparently dispersed into extremely rugged terrain where individuals and small groups can survive indefinitely. It seems likely that a resistance campaign can continue as long as action is limited to prudent guerrilla tactics. On the other hand, assassination appears to be the only presently feasible way for the insurgents to get rid of Banda any time soon.

7. Apart from eliminating Banda, the dissidents' ultimate policy objectives remain obscure. Banda's charges that several of the ex-ministers have accepted bribes from Communist China are unsubstantiated. Tanzania's President Nyerere professes a policy of non-intervention, including an ostensible ban on political action by the refugees from Malawi. Oscar Kambona, the radical Tanzanian foreign minister, has occasionally given favorable publicity to the ex-ministers, but no solid evidence--other than the Fort Johnston raid itself--has yet emerged that the Malawi rebels are receiving concrete support from any foreign source.

8. The most immediate external threat to Banda's regime is posed by the Tanzania-based Mozambique Liberation Front (FRELIMO). FRELIMO guerrilla fighters occasionally take refuge in Malawi, and FRELIMO apparently maintains a regular smuggling channel through Malawi into central Mozambique. In January the Malawi police arrested ten FRELIMO agents who were smuggling arms, ammunition, radios, and Portuguese-type uniforms.

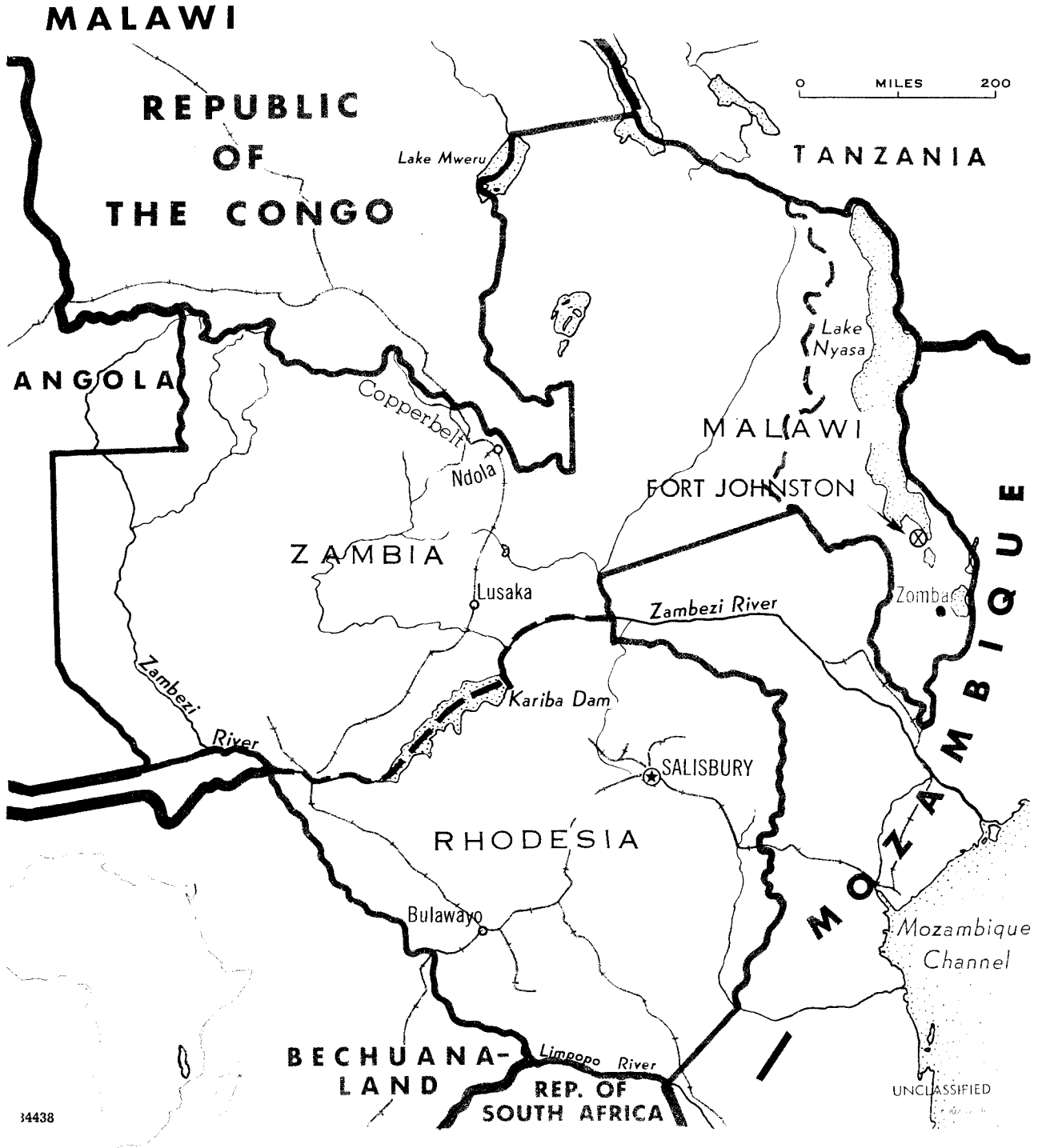
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Continuation of FRELIMO arms smuggling nevertheless leaves an effective channel for arming Banda's enemies within Malawi, and unless he completely reverses his pro-Portuguese policy, the Mozambique freedom fighters and their Tanzanian supporters still have an overriding motive for giving covert assistance to the anti-Banda movement.

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