

THE FOCUS SWITCHES TO THE EASTERN BORDERS AS THE WAR EXPLODES ...

One frontline: From the townships

MOZAMBIQUE has been reduced by Renamo's war of destruction to little more than a geographical expression.

Yet its strategic value as southern Africa's lifeline from the south has magnified in the wake of the international sanctions campaign against apartheid.

Pretoria's decision to repatriate more than 60 000 Mozambican miners, a severe form of economic sanctions, did not take Samora Machel's embattled Frelimo government by surprise.

Nor did it surprise them that last week's announcement just happened to coincide with a fresh offensive of Renamo rebel forces from Malawi into the north of Mozambique.

Nor should it have surprised anyone who has read Joseph Hanlon's recently-published book "Apartheid's Second Front", in which he shows

South Africa's "war" on its neighbours to be an extension of its battle against the demands of black South Africa in the townships.

"The South African government is combining economic, military and political means to hold its neighbours hostage to protect itself against international pressure," the book's dust cover says prophetically.

"Where it cannot force those countries into line by military aggression and economic destabilisation, South Africa is prepared to impose its own sanctions."

Two events in recent weeks have accelerated the pace of events in Mozambique.

The first was a threat by the Frontline states to impose counter-counter-sanctions by blockading landlocked Malawi unless it stopped its support for Renamo.

No matter what the outcome of the Renamo war, the future is dismal in Mozambique's countryside, where millions face the threat of famine. PHILLIP VAN NIEKERK reports

The second was the decision by the United States congress to impose sanctions on South Africa, coupled by moves in the US and the West to reopen the "Beira corridor", creating an alternative passageway for countries such as Zambia and Zimbabwe.

When the Southern African Development Co-ordination Conference was formed in 1980 as an attempt to loosen southern Africa's dependence on South Africa, all seven major SADCC rail links were operating.

Since then South African-backed

forces in Angola and Mozambique have succeeded in closing all but the Tazara rail link to Dar es Salaam and the Swaziland-to-Maputo line.

As a result the Frontline states depend on South Africa for more than half of their import-export trade, which leaves them extremely vulnerable to South African counter-measures.

The reopening of the road, rail and pipeline link between Harare and Beira would be crucial for the ability of the SADCC countries to break South Africa's stranglehold on them.

The threat to Malawi could not only disrupt Renamo's activities but force South Africa's only African ally to the north into the camp of the Frontline states.

A decision on September 11 by Mozambique and Malawi to establish a joint security and defence commission

was immediately followed by what has been described as a mass expulsion of Renamo forces from that country.

In fact the "expelled" soldiers were all heavily armed, so that by Wednesday this week a Johannesburg morning newspaper reported that "rebel forces appear to be gaining the upper hand over the Mozambican army in northern Mozambique".

President Kenneth Kaunda of Zambia accused Malawi of having launched an invasion, which he described as South African-backed, from its territory.

Both these threats — to reopen the Beira corridor and blockade Malawi — have clearly struck a chord in Pretoria, where a more hawkish mood has predominated since the international sanctions campaign took off in June.

The decision to send home the

... IN THE VERY SAME WEEK THAT SOUTH AFRICA CHOOSES TO REPATRIATE THOUSANDS OF MINERS

through to Tete

Mozambican miners — a move totally unconnected to alleged African National Council insurgency and the landmine blast in which six South African soldiers were said to have been wounded — could only have been aimed at weakening Machel's already devastated economy.

Pretoria's strategists could well have in mind the "Lesotho option" in which economic pressure, in that case a blockade of the border, precipitated a coup which overthrew the government of Leabua Jonathan.

A massive disinformation campaign on the SABC and in the South African press has consistently mooted the possibility of a coalition between Renamo and sections of Frelimo. This is more likely to be envisaged than a Renamo takeover.

A joint government in Mozambique

under South Africa's wing would control the Beira corridor and provide Malawi with an outlet to the sea without the need to go through Zimbabwe.

Sources close to Renamo told the Weekly Mail they did not want simply to step into Frelimo's shoes and inherit Mozambique's problems without guarantees of massive foreign aid. Nor did they want a situation where Frelimo would return to the bush and wage war on a Renamo government in Maputo.

Apart from launching a campaign of terror, mutilation and death on the people of Mozambique, Renamo has bombed virtually every single economic target in the Mozambican countryside. It will take billions of *meticals* to restore the country to viability while, as a result of drought

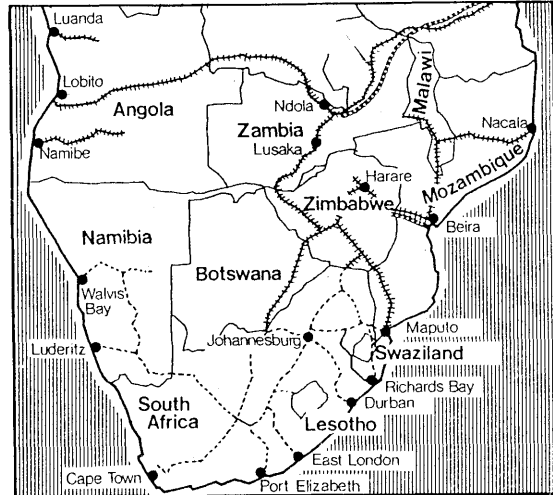
and Renamo activities, millions of Mozambicans are facing famine and starvation.

The Renamo sources denied charges that they were bandits with no real leadership, saying there was a clear leadership structure with Alfonso Dhlakama at its head.

Dhlakama is a former Frelimo official who was booted out for corruption.

The one weakness in the apparent South African strategy is that there has been no sign of division within Frelimo in the face of the crisis and at this stage a Lekhanya-style military coup is unlikely.

And the Frontline states, along with most of the international community, are as determined to hold the line in Mozambique — the key to southern Africa — as the South Africans are to press it back.



Landlocked states face sanctions and counter sanctions as the pressure on South Africa increases