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## COMMENT

### Machel's death

SOUTH Africans were shocked to learn of the death of President Samora Machel in an air crash.

Although relations between Mozambique and South Africa have deteriorated in recent weeks, there was a time, with the signing of the Nkomati Accord, when it appeared as if the two countries had found a way of living in peace with each other, a good neighbourliness that augured well, it seemed, for the future.

But alas, such are the tensions in this part of the world, that the high hopes felt and so freely expressed at Nkomati were never really fulfilled.

The civil war in Mozambique went on with increasing violence. President Machel accused South Africa of continuing to arm the Mozambique National Resistance movement — a charge South Africa denied.

We doubt very much whether anything South Africa did or did not do could have influenced the direction of the civil war.

The MNR is as genuine a resistance movement as President Machel's Frelimo was in its time, and its victories in the north are its own, not anyone else's.

Indeed, South Africa has found itself in the unenviable position of being charged with helping the rebels while at the same time assisting Mozambique to overcome its railway problems, providing electricity for Maputo, the capital, trying to get the Cahora Bassa hydroelectric scheme going, despite guerrilla attacks, and seeking to stimulate such trade as was available between the two countries.

It would have been quite schizophrenic to back the civil war while helping the Machel regime. Yet it was that kind of madness from which South Africa was said to be suffering.

For its part, South Africa took a growingly jaundiced view of the activities of the African National Congress, operating from Mozambique despite the Nkomati Accord's provision that neither signatory would allow its territory to be used for attacks on the other's territory.

Thus relations soured, with South Africa hinting that it might strike at ANC targets as it has done in the past.

At the same time, as a reprisal for a landmine blast near the border that injured six South African soldiers, Pretoria banned the further recruitment of Mozambican workers and announced it would send home, once their contracts expired, those who were already here.

Yet with all the rancour that had been generated, South Africa acknowledged that President Machel was a leader without whom there could be no peace in Mozambique.

There was never any desire to see him toppled; the best scenario as far as South Africa was concerned was for the MNR and Frelimo to form a coalition government.

There was always the hope that President Machel, who had seen Socialism fail and his country suffering disastrously not only from the effects of civil war but the effects of economic policies that had failed, would take a pragmatic view and opt for a settlement of the civil war that would allow for national reconciliation.

Now he is dead — and the future is more clouded than ever.

There will be some who will hope that the MNR will now take over the country. There will be others who will believe that Frelimo will regroup under a new leader, that the other Frontline States will be tempted to throw their weight behind the Maputo regime to prevent its collapse, and that the war will intensify.

It is too early to say what will happen, except that there will be a period of greater uncertainty that will affect Southern Africa as a whole, not just Mozambique.

In the final analysis, President Machel's death was untimely and further destabilises the region.

Whatever one thought of his policies, he was a man of international stature and a great leader of his people.

And if there was to be a peaceful outcome of the civil war, and a return to good neighbourliness with South Africa, it required his pragmatism and diplomacy, so ably displayed at Nkomati, to bring this about.

Mozambique and Southern Africa will miss him.