

## AFRICA

# ASSAULT ON THE FRONTLINE

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▲ Symbol of struggle: at the funeral, Machel's famous forage cap on display

## MOZAMBIQUE

**O**f Pretoria hoped that President Samora Machel's death in an air crash in South Africa on 19 October would mean a weak-kneed government in Maputo, the election of Joachim Chissano, the former foreign minister, to the presidency has put paid to such hopes. Chissano was with Machel throughout Frelimo's struggle, acting as his English-language interpreter most of the time and thus actually nunciating Frelimo policy to most outsiders. He is hardly likely to unmake the policies that he had a hand in shaping.

South Africa's guilt in the downing of the aircraft itself is still to be proved, but its subsequent actions have lent support to the theory that it caused the crash. Documents retrieved from the wreckage – an action amounting to piracy – have been used by its foreign minister, Roelof Botha, to accuse Mozambique and Zimbabwe of planning to overthrow Malawi's President Kamuzu Banda.

Mozambique has also pointed out that the South Africans attempted to blackmail a survivor of the crash to defect to join the Mozambique National Resistance rebels. And a six-man South African team of "experts" which arrived in Maputo on 10 November to take part in the crash inquiry failed to bring the aircraft's vital flight recorder. No wonder many in southern Africa believe that the plane was brought down by South Africa to provoke a military conflagration in the region.

Nathan Shamuyarira, Zimbabwe's information minister says: "The situation has gone beyond verbal confrontation. We face the threat of generalised war breaking out in the region, and South Africa is the aggressor. South Africa is under pressure from the international community and it is making a last-ditch stand. They are angry about the vote in the US senate. They now see that sanctions are a real possibility."

There is much evidence to support this view. In Mozambique, documents captured after the fall of an MNR rebel base earlier this year show that South Africa continued to support the group long after the signing of the 1984 Nkomati accord, which was meant to normalise relations between Pretoria and Maputo.

In early October, Maputo claimed to have found evidence of a South African military plan to infiltrate areas in and around the capital. At the time, Pretoria's defence chief, Magnus Malan, was engaged in a bitter personal attack on Machel. "Samora Machel appears to have lost control of the situation," he said, warning that "South Africa would act accordingly" if the Mozambique President chose "terrorism and revolution".

On 6 October, Pretoria said it would repatriate Mozambican miners working in the Transvaal gold mines, so depriving Maputo of workers' remittances worth a third of its total foreign exchange earnings. It said the move was in retaliation for Maputo's support for African National

Congress guerrillas responsible for mining border areas. It could offer no proof.

The MNR declared war on Zimbabwe in the week after Machel's death, bringing a stinging response from Robert Mugabe. "That is not an MNR voice," he told the national assembly on 5 November. "It is a South African voice which has spoken through the MNR."

At about the same time there were reports from Luanda that South African troops had penetrated about 300km into Angola, reaching areas where there has been no fighting for years. A government spokesman in Luanda said such moves by the South Africans were usually a precursor to a fullscale attack.

"Pretoria no longer believes it is worth keeping up even a facade of good neighbourliness, that there is no longer anything to be gained from the international community from doing so," says Rob Davies, a South African now working at the Maputo-based Centre for African Studies. Its director, Aquino da Braganca, was killed in the Machel plane crash.

Davies believes that the policy change may have taken place in May 1985, when a South African commando unit tried to destroy Angolan oil installations in Cabinda. "We've got to get away from this notion of hawks and doves," he says, adding: "There is nobody dovish, just people with different positions in a regime that agrees wholeheartedly on a policy of destabilisation."

South Africa's neighbours are making a concerted attempt to lessen their dependency on Pretoria, so depriving it of a powerful weapon. Equally, though, South Africa is determined to undermine this effort; hence the escalation of rebel activity in northern Mozambique, now reaching critical levels, and the MNR's threat to hit targets in Zimbabwe.

**T**he Frontline states want new routes to the sea – chiefly through Mozambique in the east and Angola in the west. But their efforts have been sabotaged by the MNR and South Africa and US-backed Unita rebels in Angola.

The Nordic countries have been quick to help in the effort to rehabilitate the Beira corridor through central Mozambique. The US and European Community members have also backed such projects.

Recent diplomatic initiatives in the region by the Frontline states have also angered Pretoria. The October meeting at which Kenneth Kaunda, Mugabe, Machel, and Angola's Eduardo Dos Santos met Malawi's Hastings Banda and Zaire's Mobutu Sese Seko was one such example.

Mugabe said after the meeting: "Our position is that Malawi should change its stance. Whether covertly or overtly, directly or indirectly, knowingly or unknowingly, they were aiding or abetting the MNR. I don't think we should sever relations with Malawi. We should con-



▲ A fire rekindled: pro-Maputo rally, Harare

tinue to talk to them rather than adopt a hostile attitude."

Frontline leaders see regional unity as a priority. In Zimbabwe, the government has been dropping broad hints that a deal between the ruling Zanu and the opposition Zapu is imminent. It is widely believed that South Africa has been supporting dissidents in Zimbabwe.

And the Frontline summit in Maputo the day after Machel's funeral was a display of regional solidarity, designed to show that support for Mozambique was not based on personalities.

Far from being a permanent blow to the Frontline states, Machel's death has rekindled the radical nationalist sentiments that brought the group into being during the liberation struggle against the Smith regime in Rhodesia. Mugabe underlined this in a speech in parliament in early November: "I have said we shall never, ever allow the MNR to control Mozambique - and we mean it," he said. ■

**George Alagiah in Maputo  
& Cameron Duodu**

## A motive for foul play

**P**resident Kenneth Kaunda of Zambia says responsibility for the death of Samora Machel in October must be assumed to rest with Pretoria, and that the onus is on the apartheid regime to prove its innocence. This, though, has not stopped others in the region from searching for positive proof of South African involvement in the air crash in which the Mozambique President died.

Initial speculation that Machel's Soviet-built Tupolev 134B was simply shot down by the South Africans has since been discounted. But in Zimbabwe, where the editor of the *Daily Herald* is also a pilot, the press and others are now settling on the theory that the plane was brought down on the wrong side of the Mozambique-South Africa border because of South African interference with its navigational aids.

Specialists say it is possible to lure an aircraft off course using fake radio signals that can be confused with normal ground-based navigational beacons - and that the South Africans probably have the technology to do just that. Indeed Maputo has accused Pretoria of trying to interfere in the past with navigational aids used by the local air force. With information about the crucial last 30 minutes of the flight currently sub judice, it has been difficult to reach a conclusion one way or the other. Even the three-country investigation into the crash is no guarantee that the matter can be settled. "People keep talking about the investigation and the black box flight

recorder as if they are going to provide all the answers," a Harare-based pilot says. "That box will reveal what information was available to the pilot in the last 30 minutes, but there will be a lot of room for interpretation."

There are many unanswered questions. South Africa keeps a keen watch on all air traffic in the region, so Machel's aircraft was surely tracked by South African radar. If, as Pretoria has suggested, the pilot was simply off course because of a navigational error, why was he not warned? According to reports from Mozambique, the South Africans waited as long as nine hours before informing Maputo of the crash. Why?

What happens after a crash is strictly governed by international regulations. These stipulate, for example, that nothing can be moved or tampered with at the site of an accident till a full investigation team has been convened. Survivors say that in this instance South African police collected and removed many documents.

Some days after the crash, and certainly after the investigation was underway, South African foreign minister Roelof Botha said that the Tupolev had been fitted with old equipment. Even if this were true - and there are many authoritative statements to the contrary - why did Botha go public with these comments?

The answers to these questions may not provide the assassination theorists with the clear-cut evidence they are seeking. However, for many the clincher will be the evidence of strong South African motives to kill Machel.

Pretoria has been guilty of organising regular sabotage in Mozambique. And in the weeks before the crash South Africa had been issuing threats against Mozambique in general and Machel in particular. **George Alagiah in Maputo**