

# Mozambique at the Brink

Samora Machel, killed in a plane crash in South Africa, had risen through the military struggle against the Portuguese to leadership of the party that has ruled Mozambique since independence in 1975. He held an African variant of Marxism, but his embrace seemed to loosen as he realized that Moscow could not provide him with the two things his country most desperately needed: development aid and protection against South African bullying. Seeing an opening for "constructive engagement," the Reagan administration launched a pragmatic drive to draw Mr. Machel, in President Reagan's words, out of "the other camp." In so doing he had to dodge the hot protests of American hard-liners who believe he should be arming Mozambican insurgents, not aiding a "Marxist dictator."

The Reagan policy seemed to be making slow, if irregular, headway. Then it began to be overtaken by the regional and international polarization that is the inevitable result, at least in the short term, of the sanctions campaign against Pretoria. South Africa retreated from its American-bro-

kered commitment to work out an accommodation with Mr. Machel, instead intensifying support for the insurgents. Just two weeks ago the South Africans, ostensibly responding to an African National Congress guerrilla action that they blamed on Mr. Machel, dealt him a hard blow by moving to send home Mozambicans working in South African mines. Meanwhile, the United States found itself losing the standing in Pretoria that it had earlier used to induce the South Africans to back off.

Mr. Machel towered over the Mozambican scene. His death, coming at a time of extreme national duress, gives his adversaries in and out of the country fresh advantage. South Africa's support of the rebels was already pushing resisting Mozambique back toward Moscow. It is a moment for Portugal, the United States and other democracies to indicate that there still is some kind of a Western option. It is one last chance for South Africa, which denies complicity in Samora Machel's death, to demonstrate a modicum of good faith.

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