

South Africa steps up destabilisation policy

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BY ALAN BROOKS

LAST week's sabotage of the oil pipeline which links Mozambique's second biggest port Beira and the Zimbabwean border town of Mutare confirms the emergence of a new aspect to the South African strategy of destabilising the frontline states in southern Africa.

Coming barely a month after a South African seaborne commando squad destroyed the BP owned oil depot at Beira, plunging Zimbabwe into an acute petrol shortage, the blowing of a six foot hole in the pipeline at Maforga on January 6 by the Pretoria backed MNR rebels in Mozambique is evidently intended to serve several related objectives.

The fifth attack in a little over a year, it will turn the screw even more against Zimbabwe, and by delaying further the reopening of the pipeline it will push prime minister Mugabe's government closer to accepting South Africa's demands for a three year contract for fuel supplies from South Africa to be negotiated at ministerial level — something which it has been holding out against despite tremendous difficulties.

The attack was mounted at a point which was guarded by some of the Zimbabwean troops (generally estimated at 2,000) that were sent into Mozambique late last year at president Machel's invitation, specifically to help protect the pipeline, which as the main alternative route to road and rail links with South Africa for Zimbabwe's fuel imports is a key target for the

MNR and its South African masterminds.

The message is clear: Pretoria is signalling to Mozambique and Zimbabwe that they will not benefit but rather suffer more, by relying on mutual solidarity instead of submitting to the superior economic and military power of their South African neighbour.

The attempt to drive a wedge between the two countries is unlikely to succeed. Frelimo gave crucial support to Zanu and its guerilla army Zanla in the period of the armed struggle before independence, and relations between the two governments are close and cordial.

Both are active members of the Southern Africa Development Co-ordination Conference whose aim of assisting the front line states to reduce their economic dependence on South Africa is viewed with hostility by the apartheid regime. Instead, Pretoria pushes its own plan for a constellation of satellite states which would be economically dependant and politically aligned with the Botha regime against the liberation movements of Namibia, Swapo and South Africa itself, the ANC.

The past year has seen a pronounced and highly dangerous increase in the level of South African aggression and destabilisation.

While Angola remains the principal sufferer, with a substantial portion of the southern part of the country occupied and devastated by Pretoria's forces, there is

no end in sight to the long struggle of independence in Namibia. But the brutal raid in December on Maseru, capital of Lesotho, signified that even a country belonging to the commonwealth, one which has no military forces of its own, is not immune to the apartheid regime's thrust to dominate the entire region and make it safe for the continuation of the apartheid system.

On the eastern flank of this increasingly embattled system, whose internal crisis is mounting daily it is Mozambique which is bearing the brunt of Pretoria's regional ambitions.

In November the Maputo government drew world attention to a build up of South African troops on the common border near Komatipoort in the eastern Transvaal, and expressed fears of a cross border incursion. But the main problem being posed for Mozambique by Pretoria is the self styled Mozambique National Resistance, which was taken over by the South African Defence Force after Zimbabwe's independence.

The SADF has been providing training at bases in the Transvaal, and full logistic support, in terms of equipment, transport by helicopter and other means, and doing the planning for operations. With this help the MNR has been attacking communication lines, terrorising villagers, and seeking to disrupt Mozambique's ambitious development project of overcoming backwardness within a decade.

Mozambique's defence forces have, however, scored some notable successes in eliminating major

bases of the MNR recently.

For its part, the British government has remained curiously silent about the destruction of the BP owned fuel depot, a silence which reflects Thatcher's desire to work

with rather than confront the South African regime, in common with the Reagan administration whose declared support for Pretoria has emboldened it in its aggressive actions.