

ly, sat down and signed a historic non-aggression pact.

For the moment at least, peace seemed to be breaking out all over southern Africa. On the northern border of Namibia, the disputed trust territory occupied by South Africa, a joint commission of South African and Angolan troops established a permanent base to monitor a cease-fire that has been holding for more than a month. In an earlier good-will gesture designed to pave the way for negotiations on the future of Namibia, Pretoria released Herman Toivo ja Toivo, the 59-year-old founder of the rebel South-west Africa People's Organization. South Africa is expected to free all SWAPO political prisoners in the near future. After years of battle, the apartheid regime and its black-nationalist opponents were finally beginning to trade words instead of bullets.

The black states have reason to negotiate.

lays out a plan for Namibian independence under United Nations supervision. The move particularly raised suspicions in Washington, which had not been consulted in advance. "We must learn to walk before we can run," cautioned Herman Nickel, the American ambassador to South Africa. "We must take care not to overload the diplomatic circuits." Roelof Botha quickly replied that South Africa had no intention of sabotaging an international solution to the Namibia problem. "My belief is that a meeting between all those concerned would create better conditions for the implementation of Resolution 435," he insisted. "Is it wrong to go on making suggestions of more ways to work for peace?"

Garrisons: It will clearly take more than "suggestions" to achieve genuine reconciliation in the region. An estimated 800 SWAPO guerrillas have already taken ad-



Machel and Botha meet in Komatipoort: A radical departure from bombs and barbs

DIPLOMACY

A Peace Offensive In Southern Africa

In a grove near the tiny South African border town of Komatipoort, more than 1,300 diplomats and dignitaries sweltered in the noonday heat. Soon Samora Machel, the president of neighboring Mozambique, arrived in a maroon Rolls-Royce. Moments later South African Prime Minister Pieter Botha touched down in a helicopter. Just 10 months ago South African warplanes had attacked the Mozambique capital of Maputo in retaliation for a terror bombing in Pretoria. But now the two leaders showed no hostility at all. They shook hands warm-

ly. Their sagging economies have been devastated by a prolonged drought, and South Africa has applied its military and economic power against them with often brutal effectiveness. Dealing from that position of strength, South African Foreign Minister Roelof Botha also issued an unexpected call last week for a summit to discuss a cease-fire for all of Namibia and steps for granting the territory independence. What was most startling was Pretoria's proposal that Marxist Angola, which has given sanctuary to the guerrillas, and the pro-Western UNITA rebels fighting to overthrow the Luanda government should be included at the conference. "The time has come," said Botha, "for southern Africans to resolve their own problems themselves."

To many Western diplomats, Botha's call still sounded like a cynical bid to impose a Pax Pretoria—and perhaps bypass U.N. Security Council Resolution 435, which

gives South Africa the right to disengage itself from Angola to slip back into Namibia. The rebels have laid mines, attacked villages and bombarded a handful of South African garrisons. At the same time, Pretoria has stubbornly refused to consider allowing U.N.-sponsored elections in Namibia until all 30,000 Cuban troops stationed in Angola have been removed. In the coming weeks, the Reagan administration's top Africa hand, U.S. Assistant Secretary of State Chester Crocker, will be meeting with Angolan authorities to discuss the withdrawal of the Cuban troops. Portugal was largely responsible for brokering last week's agreement in Komatipoort, but Crocker played a key role. Even so, it will take considerable diplomatic skill to prevent his peace offensive from getting bogged down in the hostile political terrain of southern Africa.

by BILL HEWITT with
PETER YOUNGHUSBAND in Komatipoort