

THE NKOMATI ACCORD

# Behind the contradictions

There are, on the face of it, many contradictions implicit in the Nkomati Accord. Black Marxists shook hands with white capitalists; a decade of hostility was set aside — too easily? Certainly, the swiftness of events has taken many observers aback. From a simmering conflict between profoundly different social and economic systems, to a detailed and binding agreement covering far more than simple co-existence: all in a few months.

Even allowing for the economic benefits which should flow to the region as a whole (see cover story), the major shift in SA-African relations that has taken place cannot be wholly accounted for as the outcome of what cynics might call constructive destabilisation. Mozambique is stricken by drought, ravaged by war, and starved of foreign currency — but the foundations of its state remain Marxist and revolutionary. It required more than the promise of credit and consumer goods to get Samora Machel to Komatipoort.

The activities of the Mozambique National Resistance movement were, of course, a compelling argument for coming to some kind of terms with Pretoria. Addressing a mass rally in Maputo last weekend, Machel said: "Because of the bandits you had no soap, no razor blades, no combs and no clothes." The pact would mean that "we can now concentrate all our energies on economic development in peace and tranquillity."

Nonetheless, two extra factors seem to have come into play. The one is negative. It is, simply put, that the Soviet empire is under pressure, its worldwide resources strained by endemic leadership problems, the direct threat of the US nuclear deployment in Europe, and the continued attrition of Afghanistan.

The fringes of its power have become vague; its reliance on surrogates correspondingly disproportionate to its ambitions. Lines of command have grown tenuous. Among those private citizens in Maputo with the highest standards of living are diplomats — not least East bloc ones. That kind of elementary comparison is readily made by poor Mozambicans. Outmoded military equipment such as Russia has supplied to Mozambique and Angola is no substitute for reconstruction and development aid.

The negative aspect is that while its material hold on its southern African satellites has been substantially weakened since the mid-Seventies, Russia remains the ideological centre of the communist world. Like the superstates envisaged by George Orwell, constructed on fear and falsehood, it has endured despite many pressures — including the cataclysmic battles of World War Two — and is likely to continue to endure for generations.

Such massive power can, in time, renew its sense of

destiny in far-flung outposts. While Russia's problems are now compellingly close to home, Moscow's global ambitions can rightly be said to be only in abeyance. If the SA-Mozambique accord frays, the Soviets can be expected to step into the arena again.

But the second factor which led to the Nkomati Accord is far more positive. It rests on the assertion by SA's leadership that we are part of Africa, and that our problems must be solved on African soil. That was one particular significance of signing the Accord on the border — not, say, in Lisbon.

It is true that past prime ministers have stressed that they saw themselves as part of Africa. But until the advent of the PW Botha administration, it was difficult not to perceive ambiguity in this stance. The attempts to buy world opinion and the promotion of compliant homeland leaders to the level of statesmen — stars in the famous constellation of states — were part of this ambiguity. The efforts failed. The world was not deceived.

The *rapprochement* with Mozambique is on a different scale altogether. Machel is enormously respected in Africa and, indeed, the West. As Ambassador Brand Fourie suggested last week, SA can no longer hope to buy the good opinion of the West — the road to acceptance lies through Africa. If the SA-Mozambique accord holds, and others follow with equally influential nations, the prospect of sanctions must recede to invisibility. And moral antagonism against apartheid will ultimately achieve more when it is directed from within, by South Africans, and not from the various anti-apartheid cottage industries in Western capitals.

That immediately raises the question: will Pretoria really change apartheid? The answer must be that it will — that it will be impossible not to do so as the implications of the Mozambique pact, and yet others to come, sift through the society.

On the one hand, the generation of greater economic development in the sub-continent will break down barriers, far more rapidly than if SA clings to the bulwarks of separate development, enclosed in a military machine, its very lifestyle backed by such intangibles as the gold price and the length of droughts.

On the other hand, the residual colonial attitude of seeing and treating blacks as second-class citizens or labour units will be broken down as more and more people cross borders to do business or simply to see different societies for themselves. Foreign policy cannot be divorced from internal political developments — or even psychological perceptions.

Only a few years ago it was front-page news that a black



teller had been appointed in a Johannesburg bank. Those who say that SA cannot change should look into any shop in any of our major centres and see who is manning the tills, running the computers, both serving and participating in a unitary economy.

More changes must come. They will not do so overnight:

that would be asking too much. But as white South Africans shed the inertia of the past, change will generate its own momentum.

That must be the real hope of the Nkomati Accord, beyond the highly desirable short-term security and economic benefits to SA and Mozambique.

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