

Chill wind of change

South Africa Under heavy pressure from Pretoria, Mozambique and Swaziland have been forced to evict the African National Congress (ANC). But the harsh line taken by these countries, the first to sign non-aggression pacts with the apartheid regime, has shocked the South African liberation movement.

It began when Mozambique, brought to its knees by three years of South African destabilisation, signed the Nkomati Accord on 16 March. This was followed by raids on ANC houses and farms; even hand guns issued by the Mozambican government to ANC officials for their own protection were confiscated.

Next, the ANC was told that it was to be limited to a 10 person diplomatic mission in Maputo. Everyone else would have to leave Mozambique or go into refugee camps, except for a handful of ANC technicians and teachers working on government contracts.

It had been clear that guerrillas would have to go, but it had been assumed that refugees living on ANC farms, working in the ANC women's sewing cooperative, and so on would be unaffected.

Furthermore, the ANC was told it could have no contact with South African refugees coming to Mozambique, as this might be seen to be recruiting terrorists in violation of the Nkomati Accord.

Faced with this, the ANC decided that its members should not go to camps in Mozambique. More than 200 people, including spouses and children, flew out to Lusaka and Dar es Salaam.

The main route for ANC guerrillas and political cadres to enter (and leave) South Africa in recent years has been from Mozambique through Swaziland. In the weeks before and after the signing of the accord, dozens of guerrillas passed from Mozambique into Swaziland.

The late Swazi King, Sobhuza II, had supported the ANC; there was a tacit agreement that guerrillas could pass through if they did not cause any disruption. When armed men were caught, they

gave up without a fight and were given light jail sentences. Sobhuza repeatedly prevented the police, which has close ties with the South African security forces, from carrying out raids against the ANC.

After the King's death two years ago, pressure on the ANC increased including detentions late last year. But this was not

enough for the South Africans, who revealed that Swaziland had signed a secret non-aggression pact shortly before the King's death. After a Durban bomb blast on 3 April, South Africa put the screws on Swaziland. The following weekend there were extensive searches for arms and explosives being taken out of South Africa; cars at the Swazi border were backed up for miles, disrupting the Swazi tourist trade. Then, just before Easter holiday weekend, a prime time for Swazi hotels, the South African police announced to the press that because of "staff shortages" traffic from South Africa to Swaziland would be delayed up to a day at the border.

Soon after the border blockade, the South Africans sent agents to Swaziland to stress the importance of the issue. Craig Williamson, the police spy who infiltrated the International University Exchange Fund in Geneva, was seen in Mbabane, the Swazi capital.

According to diplomats in Mbabane, Swaziland was warned that if it did not act, South Africa would. And they pointed to the machine gun execution of two ANC men in Mbabane last November and the earlier car bomb which killed the ANC representative and his wife in Manzini.

The Swazis took the hint. The week after the first border blockade, a series of raids and shootouts began. In the following two weeks at least three ANC men, one Swazi policeman, and a Swazi soldier were killed.

The Swazi police and army are entirely black, but whites in camouflage uniforms were seen at all the big raids. Israeli and British "observers" were present at some raids, but it seems clear that most of the whites were South African, and that they actually directed an assault on a house in Manzini that led to a seven hour gun battle and killed at least two ANC men.

Raids and shootouts continued into May. Nearly 100 people were detained. Many were badly beaten by police, according to fellow detainees. One ANC man who appeared in court with his head still bandaged told the judge that the police had beaten him so badly that he had been hospitalised for three days.

Meanwhile, the Swazi government launched a vitriolic campaign against the ANC. The Prime Minister, Prince Bhikimpi, called them "foreign criminals infesting this country." The ANC was blamed for armed robberies. And an advertising campaign was launched calling on loyal Swazis to report suspicious goings on in neighbouring houses.

The Swazi government made clear it wanted nothing less than total expulsion of all ANC members in Swaziland. Thirteen ANC members who are United Nations

registered refugees, some of whom had been in Swaziland for many years, were detained in the sweeps and declared prohibited immigrants.

The Swazis made a great show of wanting to talk the issue over with the ANC. But a high level delegation from Maputo was allowed to stay only two days and was not allowed to see detainees who were alleged to have been mistreated, was not permitted to arrange funerals for the three dead ANC men, and was not even given a list of ANC detainees.

Meanwhile, the screws were being tightened in Mozambique. Frelimo rejected a number of names put forward by the ANC for its 10 person mission in Maputo, and a final list has still not been agreed. And Jacob Zuma returned from Swaziland to find that Frelimo had changed its mind, and no longer accepted him as permanent representative and head of the mission.

The top ANC leadership has been assured that it is still free to travel to and through Mozambique. But it was made clear that they were not welcome to live in Mozambique.

Mozambique's stand on the ANC has proved much harsher than its allies or the ANC expected. President Samora Machel faced criticism at both the Front-line states meeting in Tanzania and at a meeting of the ex-Portuguese colonies in Maputo, both held at the end of April. It now seems that Frelimo wants to normalise its relations with the ANC and end the bitterness generated by the initial expulsions and crackdowns, although it plans no concessions.

Mozambique's hard line does not simply reflect South African pressure. There are disagreements with the ANC over strategy. Frelimo might have been more willing to accept continued South African pummeling if it felt the ANC had a better chance of overthrowing the apartheid regime.

The ANC privately accuses Frelimo of misunderstanding the South African struggle and the apartheid regime, and in particular of having been fooled by South Africa's recent "liberalisations". □

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London (CH)

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Argus Media No. 5799

July 1984