



"Apartheid is responsible for the death of our President" reads sign

Mozambique: What is South Africa's Strategy?

BY ROBERT DAVIES

Robert Davies is a researcher at the Centre of African Studies, University of Eduardo Mondlane, Maputo, Mozambique.

The death in the air crash on the night of the 19th October of President Samora Machel and other senior Frelimo party and Mozambican government leaders will clearly have a major impact on both the political situation in Mozambique and regional relations.

The full details of the incident itself are not yet available and it is still being officially investigated. However, although it may in the end be difficult to prove conclusively, there is a growing body of circumstantial evidence suggesting that the crash might have been caused by some sophisticated form of electronic sabotage. Informed sources in Maputo are discounting the possibilities that it might have been the result of poor weather, "human error" resulting from an allegedly inexperienced crew, or the plane drifting off course. It appears that the flight had proceeded normally until the presidential plane was about 70 km from Maputo in the region of Manhica. There were no faulty systems on the plane, the weather was fine and the crew was experienced. Contact was lost shortly after the control tower in Maputo gave orders for the plane to prepare for a routine instrument landing.

The plane crashed 200 metres inside South African territory near the Mbuluzi mission in KaNgwane at about 9:30 on the night of Sunday 19th October. However, it was not until 6:40 the next morn-

Tempo

ing that the Mozambican authorities were informed that the plane had crashed on South African territory, despite the fact that the plane's entry had, as Foreign Minister R.F. Botha acknowledged, been monitored on South African radar. Moreover, one of the survivors, Captain Fernando Manuel, had walked to a local clinic after the crash, arriving, according to *Business Day*, at about 10 pm. Shortly thereafter the clinic had phoned the local police.

One hypothesis being put forward is that the plane's instruments and controls might have been interfered with by an electronic signal. An expert on electronic warfare in the United States said that there are so-called false beam devices quite capable of this kind of interference.

However that may be, the fact remains that this tragic development occurred at a time when Pretoria was stepping up pressure against Mozambique. On October 8th, ostensibly in response to a land mine incident in KaNgwane in which six SADF members were injured, the South African government announced that it was prohibiting the recruitment of Mozambican migrant workers. On October 11th, a Mozambican government communique said that information had been obtained from a South African citizen "linked to economic interests" that "the militarists" in Pretoria were planning to launch air raids and had infiltrated a commando to carry out attacks in and around Maputo city. Indeed, just a few days before the air crash, President Machel told a group of journalists that there had been several previous attempts by the South African military to assassinate him - the most recent being in November, 1985, when plans to attack his motorcade using bazookas had been uncovered.

All these developments took place in the context of a stepped up assault in the central provinces of

the country by MNR armed bandits operating out of Malawi (supplied, trained and directed by the extensive network maintained in that country by South African Military Intelligence with the active connivance of the Malawian authorities). One of the major objectives here was clearly to cut the Beira corridor and prevent it from serving as an alternative to continued dependence on South African ports and railways for SADC countries - particularly in the event of the application of counter-sanctions, measures by Pretoria against neighboring states.

This article will examine recent South African actions against Mozambique, both as a background to the death of President Machel and as an indication of the possible direction of future South African policy toward the country.

The Context: Intensified Destabilization

The Pretoria regime said that the October 8th ban on migrant labour recruitment (and by implication the other, subsequent measures which it did not acknowledge) were a response to the land mine explosion in KaNgwane on October 6th. Defense Minister Magnus Malan alleged in a statement on the 7th that the mine was planted by ANC members operating from Maputo. It is true that Pretoria has complained on a number of occasions in the past few months about alleged ANC activity out of Maputo. It clearly wants the ANC presence in Maputo further reduced, if not eliminated altogether. In August, Deputy Foreign Minister Ron Miller, said that Pretoria wanted to raise the question with Maputo, and about the same time South African press reports quoted officials claiming that "the ANC has begun using Mozambican territory for infiltration again" (*Cape Times* 27/8/86).

Nevertheless, there is good reason to believe that the KaNgwane land mine was no more than a con-

venient pretext to implement a series of already planned measures against Mozambique. No proof was presented that the land mine attack had been planned or carried out by ANC members in Maputo, while the repatriation of foreign migrant workers had been threatened on several previous occasions as retaliation against sanctions. In fact the implementation of this measure (and other pressures being applied) was probably provoked by two other recent developments - the pressure by the front line states on Malawi (aimed at cajoling Malawi to cease allowing its territory to be used as a rear base by the armed bandits) and the vote in the US Congress to override President Reagan's veto of the Senate sanctions bill.

There is no doubt that concerted pressure by the front line states against Malawi posed a direct challenge to Pretoria's current regional strategy. Malawi has been used as a base for MNR operations for years and, indeed, after the capture of former MNR headquarters at Gorongosa in August 1985, it became the main rear base for bandit activity in the central provinces of Mozambique. At the same time, bandit action in the central provinces has become more strategically important to the Pretoria regime. One of the principal levers which South Africa has been able to wield against the SADC countries as a whole has been their dependence on South African ports and railways - a dependence artificially created by the repeated sabotage of Mozambican facilities. As pressure for economic sanctions against South Africa increased, Pretoria made it plain that it intended to use the leverage it had over regional states arising from their dependence on South African transport services in its counter-sanctions campaign. This was demonstrated by the hold-ups of Zimbabwean and Zambian traffic in August, and again in early October when Foreign Minister R.F. Botha threatened to respond to a



Anti-Apartheid News

US Congress vote for sanctions by blocking the trans-shipment of US grain to regional states. In such circumstances, Pretoria clearly regards it as essential to act to prevent Mozambican ports from serving as an effective alternative.

The decision by SADCC in January to give top priority to rehabilitating the Beira Corridor to enable it to rapidly take an increased tonnage of SADCC cargo was thus seen as a threat. As the *Financial Mail* of August 15 put it: "There is ... a real possibility that if Beira threatens to become a viable alternative, Pretoria will shift from economic warfare to the real thing, using its military power (or MNR surrogates) to disrupt the rail link and oil pipeline from Beira, on which Zimbabwe is so dependent." In any event, the *Financial Mail's* prediction proved to be accurate. As rehabilitation work on the Beira Corridor advanced - faster than expected by many cynics in South Africa - bandit activity from Malawi was stepped up. Initially it was concentrated in Zambezia and Tete provinces, but there is no doubt that the plan envisaged embracing the entire central region and cutting the Beira corridor. On October 17, the MNR, in fact, claimed to have

attacked Villa Machado in the corridor itself.

The pressure put on Malawi by the front line states, in response to increasing bandit activity from Malawi, thus represented a serious challenge to Pretoria's current regional strategy. Malawi appears to have been seen by Pretoria to have drifted from the fold before (notably in joining SADCC and hosting the 1981 SADCC summit) and therefore to be vulnerable to such pressure. The conclusion drawn thus seems to have been that more pressure should be applied against Mozambique in order to weaken the impact of this action by the front line states. A few days after the news conference in which President Machel spoke about the possibility of closing the frontier with Malawi and stationing missiles along it (September 11th), the *SABC News Commentary* launched a strong attack on both Mozambique and Angola. The commentary said that the President's remarks showed that the "real cause" of destabilization in the region was "civil wars" in states ruled by "marxist dictatorships" unrepresentative of their people. These were spilling over into other states. This was one of the first occasions on which such language had been used in SABC com-

mentaries about Mozambique since Nkomati. It was also one of the first occasions in which the MNR bandits were so blatantly accorded legitimacy in the official media.

The other probable immediate cause of current pressure was the decision by the US congress to override the presidential veto on the Senate sanctions bill. Pretoria had for some time threatened to repatriate foreign migrant workers in retaliation for the imposition of sanctions. There is no doubt that the Pretoria regime was angered by the US vote. Not only did the bill itself represent a severe setback, but Foreign Minister R. F. Botha's lobbying (which, as noted above, included a threat to US grain sales) backfired. His threats to various undecided senators actually had the effect of turning them against him. This may, in part, explain why the decision was made to cut legal migrants straight away, rather than only so-called illegals, as initially expected. However, this does not explain why only Mozambique was so affected, nor does it explain the threatened military action against the capital. If we reject the explanation given - that this was a response to the KaNgwane land mine - then the only conclusion that remains is that current pressures are more than a mere reaction to recent developments, and more than a mere demonstration to the outside world of South Africa's capacity to damage the economies of its neighbours. They represent an attempt to force some changes in Mozambique - either in political behaviour or political structures.

Possible Objectives and Content of Continuing South African Pressure

The loss of President Machel at this moment will be a major blow to the embattled Frelimo government, and will add a further element of insecurity in an already fragile situation. The mood of the populace in general appears to be one of shock and sadness at the loss of a leader

who was held in considerable esteem by the Mozambican people. There is also a feeling of outrage at Pretoria's widely assumed responsibility for the death of Samora Machel. However, the immediate effect has been a consolidation of popular support behind the Frelimo leadership. At the same time, Pretoria has to some extent been placed on the defensive. It is being obliged to do all it can to cover its tracks and deny any involvement in the incident. These two factors together suggest that in the immediate short term, Pretoria may well lay off visible direct pressures against Mozambique. Above all it will probably not wish to confirm the general perception that it was responsible for the death of the President by further economic action or direct assaults on the capital just at this moment. This does not, however, apply to the MNR. The MNR has already announced that it will attempt to take advantage of the situation by stepping up its activity.

However, in the medium term – which may begin at any time after the funeral – the Pretoria regime can be expected to resume its pressure on all fronts. While it seems clear that Pretoria saw its recent pressures as a means of pushing for change in Mozambique, it is not wholly clear whether the changes sought were at the level of government positions and policies, or whether they were seen as part of a process of bringing about a change in the government itself. Indeed there were some indications that, while a consensus existed that Mozambique should be further pressured, there were possibly differences within the regime over the precise objectives such destabilization measures were intended to achieve. Some differences of tone and emphasis in the comments of members of the regime were discernible. For example, Defence Minister Magnus Malan, in a speech the day after the KaNgwane mine incident and the day before the announcement of the ban on Mozambican migrants, said

that President Machel was unwilling or unable to prevent his country from serving as a base for the "Moscow-inspired revolutionary war against South Africa". He claimed that President Machel appeared to have lost control of the situation in Mozambique, and said Pretoria was extremely concerned at the course of events there. Such a statement has all the hallmarks of a classic disinformation tactic designed to provide a justification for the overthrow of a government. On the other hand, in a speech on the 16th, State President P.W. Botha said that he hoped that the Nkomati Accord would survive. The fact that information on plans for stepped-up military pressure around the capital was apparently leaked to the Mozambicans also points to the possibility of divisions within the regime.

Hypothesizing from the above, it seems possible that two competing positions exist within the State Security Council (SSC), with the overall policy of the regime vacillating between them. For convenience these could be describe as *minimalist* and *maximalist* positions.

The *minimalists*, who may well be found in the ranks of the military, as well as among civilian politicians and diplomats, would appear to differ from the *maximalists* only over precisely how far to push the escalating cycle of destabilization measures against Mozambique. As members and defenders of a besieged racist minority regime, isolated to an unprecedented degree at both the regional and wider international levels, they would accept as objective necessities of the present conjuncture further pressure on regional states aimed at least at reducing further the ANC presence in the region as well as at maintaining the widest room for manoeuvre in a sanctions war. They would thus probably strongly support an intensification of bandit activity in the central provinces of Mozambique as a necessary measure to prevent the Beira corridor serving as a viable al-

ternative for SADCC states. They would not want to see the front line states succeed in pressuring Malawi to abandon its support for the armed bandits. They would probably, to some degree at least, share the view that any ANC presence of any type in any regional state was a potential threat. They would thus want to see the ANC presence in Maputo drastically reduced if not altogether eliminated. However, they would differ from the *maximalists* in not necessarily favouring an attempt to overthrow the government in Maputo. They would probably emphasize the risks for Pretoria of any such move – the prospect of getting tied down supporting a puppet regime in power, with Frelimo back in the bush. For the *minimalists*, escalating destabilization would be a means of changing political behaviour, not political structures.

Extrapolating from the above, it is possible to imagine the *minimalists* hoping that current pressures would force the Mozambican government to return to the Joint Security Commission (JSC) set up by the Nkomati Accord. Some sources have suggested that this is, in fact, one of Pretoria's immediate goals. Until recently it is very likely that Mozambique's non-participation in the JSC (following the discovery of the Gorongosa documents) did not bother Pretoria much. The agenda of meetings would probably have consisted of a series of well-substantiated Mozambican complaints about South African violations. However, as indicated earlier, since about the middle of this year it has become clear that Pretoria wants to press for a reduction of the ANC presence in Maputo, and to have a forum to raise complaints on a regular basis.

One thing that is absolutely clear is that no one in the regime would want the JSC to become a forum dominated by Mozambican complaints of continued South African support for the armed bandits. No member of the regime would thus

want it to become even a forum in which the ANC presence in Maputo was traded off against South African support for the MNR. The regime needs more bandit activity, particularly around the Beira corridor and cannot afford to give this up even if concessions were offered by Maputo on the ANC. This would suggest the possibility of the *minimalists* supporting an attempt to revive the JSC but on different terms. This might involve the apartheid regime's trying to extract a tacit understanding that the JSC confine itself to discussing alleged violations only from the territory of the signatories, i.e. an effective agreement that bandit activity from Malawi would be kept off the agenda. Then they might be prepared to bargain reduction, or elimination, of the ANC presence in Maputo against some resumption of migrant labour recruitment. This, at any rate, may be what the Chamber of Mines is proposing. Its statement on the October 8th ban "regretted" that it "had been found necessary" to take this step, but said it was not able to "evaluate the security considerations on which the decision was based. ... The Chamber earnestly hopes that negotiations between the South African and Mozambican governments will lead to an early return to normality." Perhaps in addition to this, the *minimalists* might favour a renewed attempt to use the JSC to suggest and/or push for a negotiated settlement between the Mozambican government and the MNR - a long-standing objective of Pretoria's strategy towards Mozambique.

For the *mazimalists*, on the other hand, not even such an outcome would be enough. They appear to believe that the overthrow of the Frelimo government is an essential precondition for the attainment of any of the major objectives of Pretoria's current regional strategy. They would probably also argue that such a development would enable them to reduce their existing, increasingly costly, commitment to

the MNR armed bandits and thus redeploy scarce resources on the domestic front. The question which arises is precisely how such forces would intend to go about overthrowing the Mozambican government. In my view, the experience of the Lesotho coup of January 20th merits close study as one possible *modus operandi*.

In the case of Lesotho, despite occasional reports of contacts between the South African Defence Force (SADF) and members of the Lesotho Defence Force, the principal South African intervention did not involve direct plotting of the coup. Nor did Pretoria attempt to install its own direct allies - the Lesotho Liberation Army (LLA). Instead, it applied economic and other pressure with the objective of exacerbating the already acute internal contradictions to the point of rupture. The result was that the new government which took over was not seen as (and indeed was not) the mere puppet of Pretoria. Pretoria was not obliged to step in immediately and sustain it. On the other hand, the new government in Maseru immediately conceded a number Pretoria's demands, and has shown itself more susceptible to subsequent South African pressure than its predecessor.

It is possible that the recent pressure directed against the Mozambican capital may, in the *mazimalist* scheme of things, be seen as having a similar role as pressures against Lesotho's President Jonathan in January. Attempts by both Pretoria and certain western intelligence services to promote a negotiated settlement between the Frelimo government and the MNR are generally seen to have failed. The intensification of pressure, in the *mazimalist* scheme, would thus be aimed at exacerbating particular contradictions to the point of rupture. It has been clear for some time that Pretoria has attempted to intervene in contradictions which it

perceives to exist within its neighbours. In the case of Lesotho, there were sharp, obvious contradictions between a minority in the armed forces supporting the Basotho National Party Youth League, and the majority. In the case of Mozambique such obvious splits do not exist. However, a reading, particularly of the literature of the MNR bandits (which to some extent at least probably reflects the views of the SADF) suggests that they see a potential contradiction between certain unspecified senior figures in the Mozambican Armed Forces, who are seen to be "nationalists" more disposed to negotiate with the MNR, and the Frelimo political leadership, seen as intractable "communists." More recent statements from the MNR have indicated that they consider that without President Machel the two factions will not be able to hold together.

Conclusions

It is possible that the death of President Machel (assuming that Pretoria had a hand in it) represented a compromise between *mazimalists* and *minimalists*. Removing the President could be seen as a change of political structures which might result in policy shifts, but which would not involve the risks for Pretoria associated with a wholesale change of government. However that may be, what is certain is that in the medium term at least some resumption of the intensified destabilization campaign can be expected. Whether this will take the form of an attempt to force the Mozambican government, under President Chissano, to enter into negotiations on new, less favourable terms, or an attempt to provoke domestic contradictions to the point of rupture, remains to be seen. The Frelimo leadership - now minus President Machel - will be in for a testing time, and will have to mobilize all the domestic and international support available if it is to successfully withstand the storm ahead.