

Botha, Chissano Meet in Mozambique

Leaders Play Down Differences, Pledge Peace in Southern Africa

By William Claiborne
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SONGO, Mozambique, Sept. 12—In his first state visit to a black African country, South African President Pieter W. Botha met today with Mozambican President

Joachim Chissano, and the two frequently contentious leaders pledged a new era of detente to serve as a model for peace in southern Africa.

In an unusually conciliatory tone, Chissano told reporters after his two-hour meeting with Botha that he believes Pretoria has made "important" reforms in its apartheid racial policies and indicated he would accept Botha's invitation to visit South Africa.

Such a visit would be a major breakthrough in South Africa's efforts to break the diplomatic isolation to which it has been subjected throughout the world because of its adherence to the apartheid system of racial separation.

It would allow Pretoria the opportunity to challenge the logic of western countries imposing punitive economic sanctions at the same time a Marxist, black-ruled neighbor—for years one of South Africa's most hostile—begins to strengthen economic and diplomatic relations.

Botha's appearance today seemed to underscore an intensified Pretoria policy of extricating South Africa from military conflicts in the southern Africa region, as evidenced by the recent disengagement of forces in Angola, the steps that have been made toward a withdrawal of Cuban troops from that country and the beginning of a process of independence for Namibia.

The South African action also coincide with diplomatic maneuvers by the Soviet Union aimed at finding regional solutions to conflicts with South Africa. Botha referred to those maneuvers today when he said, "The two superpowers have entered a new era in their relations. . . . In our own subcontinent, serious attempts are being made to resolve our problems peacefully. Indeed, Africa is thirsting for peace and progress."

For his part, Chissano dismissed suggestions that he may be subjected to criticism by other leaders of black-ruled "front-line" states in southern Africa, saying, "We are ready to take the process as far as possible."

He said other front-line leaders were aware of today's meeting at the huge Cahora Bassa hydroelectric plant on the Zambezi River, adding, "They will not criticize me."

Botha today also paid homage to

a onetime adversary, the late Mozambican president Samora Machel. As recently as a year ago, Machel was portrayed by Mozambican officials as the victim of an assassination plot by South African military agents. They said the agents lured Machel's aircraft off course with a false beacon before it crashed on a hillside just inside South Africa.

Army commandos have launched several raids inside Mozambique targeted against suspected hideouts of the African National Congress, the main guerrilla force seeking to overthrow the minority rule in Pretoria.

Botha also pledged substantial economic assistance to war-ravaged Mozambique, telling Chissano, "We prefer wealthy neighbors, because we know they will go well with us."

Most significantly, Botha took pains to distance himself unequivocally from anticommunist insurgents of the Mozambique National Resistance movement, who have paralyzed the country's economy with hit-and-run guerrilla warfare for 13 years.

Botha obliquely advised the guerrillas, who are called by their Portuguese acronym Renamo, to surrender and accept Chissano's offer of amnesty.

Moreover, he pledged South Africa's assistance to the Mozambican Army in protecting the pylons that will carry Cahora Bassa powerlines to South Africa, warning, "These power lines which link us represent the future, and let no one who has the interests of southern Africa at heart disrupt them."

Renamo President Afonso Dhlakama, in an interview in July at his bush headquarters in central Mozambique's Gorongosa District, said his forces would attack the power lines if the Mozambique government attempted to restart the Cahora Bassa project.

Botha's pledge of support for the power project puts South Africa in the unusual position of helping protect pylons that six years ago it allegedly helped Renamo guerrillas destroy.

The 2,000-megawatt Cahora Bassa project, spanning the Zambezi River in northwest Mozambique, is the largest in Africa, capable of producing enough power to meet all of Mozambique's needs and still supply South Africa with nearly 10 percent of its requirements.

Continued on Pg. 14

However, beginning in 1982, Renamo guerrillas destroyed more than 500 of the 6,000 pylons on the Mozambican side of the border, bringing the \$2 billion project started by the colonial Portuguese government to a standstill and making it a symbol of southern Africa's failed dreams.

In June, South Africa, Mozambique and Portugal agreed to sink \$30 million into restoring the 600-mile power line as a cornerstone of

an economic cooperation plan.

Mozambique has claimed that since it signed the 1984 Nkomati nonaggression pact with South Africa, Pretoria has continued to equip Renamo covertly.

Chissano said today the South African delegation had given him "guarantees" that there would be no covert assistance to Renamo, adding, "For us, that amounts to helping us overcome the Renamo problem."

In a joint communique, both sides pledged to fully "reactivate" the long-dormant Nkomati Accord and to work toward improving road and rail links between the two countries.

Botha's arrival here in a South African Air Force DC3 had few appearances of a state visit by a head of government.

A few hundred Mozambican school children looked on curiously across a fence as Chissano tried to

wade through a throng of reporters and photographers who surrounded the South African president as he stepped off the plane.

Botha rode unceremoniously in the back of a dusty Land Rover as the two presidents toured the hydroelectric project and returned to an administrative complex for their meetings.

However, the two leaders appeared to warm to one another, frequently joking, smiling and clapping backs.