

Battered Mugabe licks his wounds

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AS THE thirteenth anniversary of independence dawns today, Zimbabweans are celebrating two goalless draws.

One was in Zimbabwe's World Cup soccer replay against Egypt and the other, say political wits, was in Mozambique, where the final whistle blew last week on President Robert Mugabe's 12-year attempt to crush Afonso Dhlakama's right-wing Renamo rebels.

A 15km convoy of Zimbabwe national army trucks snaked across the Mozambican frontier on Thursday to be welcomed by President Mugabe for a "victory parade" in Mutare.

"Thanks for a job well done," he told veterans of a force which numbered over 14 000 at the 1986-1988 height of his unsuccessful bid to annihilate Renamo. President Mugabe focused on his troops' success in keeping open the 270km "Beira corridor" for much of the past decade, land-

ZIMBABWE

Ten years of operations inside Mozambique came to an end for the Zimbabwe Army this week when the last soldier was withdrawn, reports

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from Harare

locked Zimbabwe's only outlet to the sea independent of South Africa.

At the height of confrontation with former President PW Botha's government, President Mugabe's leadership of the international campaign for tougher sanctions was undermined by Zimbabwe's reliance on SA routes for 90 percent of its imports and exports.

"Go ahead and cut your throat, but don't come crying to me for bandages," British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher warned Mr Mugabe when he wanted to set a world

example by sealing his southern borders.

Today over 30 percent of Zimbabwean trade goes through Mozambican lines but South Africa remains Zimbabwe's major trade partner and Pretoria's membership is the key issue looming for the 10-nation Southern African Development Community, described as failure, and whose foundation aim of self-reliance has been the cornerstone of Mr Mugabe's foreign policy.

The semi-official Herald, which is controlled by the para-statal mass media trust, warned that Zimbabweans would not sanction redeployment of troops in Mozambique if the UN peace process broke down as in Angola.

Human costs of the bitter fighting in Mozambique's malaria-ridden bush remain Mr Mugabe's closest secret. Shadowy Zimbabwean casualty figures were only hinted at by bulk orders for military tombstones.