

# The big, big catch for Pretoria

by BRUCE LOUDON and NEIL HOOPER

WHATEVER the truth is about Jorge Costa, Mozambique's security chief who has defected to South Africa, there is no gainsaying his extraordinary importance both to his own country and to South Africa.

For though his own activities as a policeman and guardian of the Marxist-Leninist regime in Maputo may now be the subject of controversy, one thing is certain: he is far and away the single most important figure to change sides since Portugal's colonial rule in Africa was toppled by the "Captain's Coup" in Lisbon on April 25, 1974.

He is privy to a vast wealth of secrets not only about the workings and dispositions of the increasingly ramshackle administration headed by President Samora Moises Machel, but also about the massive degree of Eastern bloc penetration into Mozambique.

More importantly from our own country's point of view, he has been, in addition, one of those most closely involved in the workings of the African National Congress (ANC), which uses Mozambique as the principal jumping-off point for its insurgent attacks against South Africa.

## Knowledge

He was, it is authoritatively learnt, the chairman of the joint Mozambican-ANC committee which met on an almost daily basis in Maputo to map strategy and make

plans for the so-called "war of liberation" in South Africa.

An almost constant caller at his office, and a man with whom he shared much of his free time, was Joe Slovo, former Johannesburg advocate who is now based in Maputo and is the communist boss of Umkhonto we Sizwe, military arm of the ANC and its Communist Party ally.

Mr Costa undoubtedly has an intimate knowledge of the day-to-day workings of the ANC in Mozambique — a knowledge that inevitably extends to such crucial details as the location of and

defences around insurgent training camps, arms dumps, and the habits of Slovo and his fellow ANC commanders.

He apparently knows, too, the dispositions, such as they are, of the Mozambican defence force, as well as the location of its East European and Cuban "advisers".

It is not surprising, therefore, that the mood among security bosses in Pretoria today is one of unmitigated jubilation. Mr Costa, despite his comparative youth — he is just 30 — is a big, big catch.

And the effect of his decision to stay in South Africa and seek political asylum is, as one security official intimated, that "they (the ANC) are running for cover; this has put them back a long time.

"This boy knows all their plans. They're going to have to start again from scratch."

## Heavy blow

That, however, is only part of the story. The other is, undoubtedly, that Mr Costa's defection, coinciding as it does with those of other prominent functionaries of the regime in Maputo, represents a massive blow to President Machel.

Mr Costa, it is learnt, is convinced that the skids are under President Machel.

He may not have said so

when he was produced briefly at a news conference in Pretoria a few days ago, but privately he is said to express the view that at most President Machel and his cronies — who came out of the bush at Nachingwea to have power gifted to them by Lisbon's army captains just eight years ago — have only a few months left before they will be deposed.

Only days before Mr Costa defected, President Machel, in a move seen as an indication of the trouble he is in, suddenly cancelled a visit he was supposed to make to Europe.

The reason: the need, he said, to prosecute the war against anti-government guerrillas operating mainly in central Mozambique.

Bland official statements on this, it is believed, disguise deepening concern in Maputo about the activities of well-armed and determined guerrillas of the Movimento Nacional de Resistencia (MNR), an anti-communist front determined to rid Mozambique of its present Frelimo regime.

## Real threat

MNR guerrillas are apparently operating with ease through central Mozambique and pressing their hit-and-run attacks ever closer to Maputo itself.

The insurgents are well equipped and well trained. The suspicion is that they are helped by South Africa.

But what is clear is that their challenge to President Machel has become more serious as Maputo's administration in much of the country has collapsed.

Food shortages, and the collapse of public services and administration have provided an easy breeding ground for the anti-Machel insurgency.

And Frelimo, in its attempts to combat the guerrillas, is seriously hamstrung by the reality of deep divisions within its own young and inexperienced security forces.

The MNR insurgents include many battle-hardened veterans of Portugal's army in Africa, and they are more than a match for President Machel's men.

Indeed, in many respects the clock appears to have

come full circle in Mozambique. In 1974, when 22-year-old Jorge Costa hurried home to Mozambique from university in Portugal and offered to serve the new Frelimo administration, it was easy to blame Lisbon for anything that went wrong. It was also a simple matter to call in communist friends for help.

## Naive

Eight years later, however, disillusionment is rife. The food shortages are infinitely worse than they ever were under the bad old days of colonialism. The economic collapse is infinitely more serious. Intolerance and curbs on freedom more widespread.

And that is why Jorge Costa stood up at his news conference a few days ago and bitterly berated his former comrades for enslaving his country to foreign domination and communism.

Mr Costa is, of course, typical of the young and naive idealists who returned home to Mozambique and the other Portuguese colonies after the coup in Lisbon — filled with revolutionary zeal and fervour and rhetoric.

He, it seems, was so enthused by the overthrow of the colonial regime that, though white, he became virulently anti-white.

Though, young and with little training, those about him had even less going for them and he soon clambered up to occupy one of the most influential positions in the country — in effect, becoming Mozambique's top security operative, with a position just below that of (the also white) General Jacinto Veloso, the former Portuguese Air Force pilot who is Minister of State Security.

## Debriefing

For eight years Mr Costa was one of President Machel's most trusted lieutenants: nothing was decided or done in relation to state security but that he knew about it. And that's where his importance lies.

But what happens now? Mr Costa, it is learnt, is undergoing debriefing virtually round-the-clock by officials of Lieutenant-General Johann Coetzee's Security Branch of the SAP.

An indication of just how seriously President Machel takes the defection is seen in the fact that the President interrupted a speech he was making to announce it.

So what of President Machel's and Frelimo's position? To many it will appear that Mr Costa's defection and that of other senior officials (including that of the Finance Director in President Machel's own office) is the symptom of a wider and more serious malaise — one from which the regime may have difficulty in recovering.

President Machel, ironically, is one of Africa's most charismatic leaders. He is a spellbinding orator. He is personally fearless. But he



**SAMORA MACHEL**  
Under pressure

has led his potentially prosperous nation to bankruptcy and put it in hock to a host of foreign communist powers.

And for that, it seems, Mozambicans are less and less inclined to forgive him.

Mr Costa — and given his powerful position, his view must be respected — believes that Frelimo will be overthrown, *holus bolus*, and that an entirely new, anti-communist and nationalistic regime will be established in Mozambique.

## Ferment

The scenario varies. Some see President Machel learning the lesson of the defections and seeking to moderate his policies. Others see him deposed and his place taken by someone like Armando Guebeza, former Interior Minister and political commissar of the army.

There is no certainty about any of this. All that can be ascertained is that the regime is in a state of ferment and showing signs of collapse.

South Africa in fact gets on reasonably well with President Machel, despite his Marxist-Leninist pretensions. The fact that Mr Costa and two security colleagues were in South Africa for official talks is an indication of that.

Pretoria would benefit enormously if President Machel was indeed overthrown and replaced by an anti-communist administration.

Even if that does not happen, however, Lt-Gen Coetzee and his men have, with Mr Costa's defection, achieved a major breakthrough.

There is no way of checking assertions in some quarters that Mr Costa has long been a South African operative — it really doesn't matter.

What does matter from Pretoria's point of view is that, warts and all, beset by controversy about his past activities, he has come — and he has come from a position of power and influence, with a profound knowledge of just about everything that is going on in Mozambique, not least in relation to ANC activities.