SOUTHERN AFRICA

The Zone of Instability

In the mountain kingdom of Lesotho, an anti-South African guerrilla leader is decapitated, dismembered and left to rot on a riverbank. In Mozambique, the wife of a white communist who lead South Africa's black independence movement is killed by a letter bomb. In Zimbabwe, Prime Minister Robert Mugabe displays the bodies of three white South African soldiers who had infiltrated his country with a larger group of black troops. All apparently unrelated events—or are they?

South Africa's independent black neighbors frequently accuse the apartheid regime of trying to destabilize their countries. Now there is evidence to suggest that having lost its dream of maintaining white-dominated buffer states along South Africa's borders, Pretoria is indeed trying to create a "zone of instability" in the black nations that harbor its opponents (map). South Africa actively backs insurgencies in Angola and Mozambique, and its hit squads operate with impunity in Lesotho, Swaziland and Botswana. The region's own factional rivalries and political divisions create enough turmoil without a helping hand from Pretoria.

In Zimbabwe, Prime Minister Robert Mugabe displays the bodies of three white South African soldiers who had infiltrated his country with a larger group of black troops. After authorities found the head of the group was a South African resupply column taking a shortcut through Zimbabwe to a base of the Mozambique National Resistance Movement (MNR). Several years ago the Rhodesian Central Intelligence Organization formed the MNR as a fifth column to divert Mozambique's President Samora Machel from supporting Mugabe's guerrillas. When the Rhodesian war ended and Mugabe came to power, South Africa took over sponsorship of the Mozambican guerrillas. With South African backing, the guerrillas have managed to cut power in Mozambique's port of Beira, sabotage the oil pipeline from there to Zimbabwe and deny vast stretches of the Mozambican hinterland to Machel's government.

South Africa also supports Jonas Savimbi's UNITA guerrillas in Angola. South African raids, aimed ostensibly at smashing Namibian guerrilla camps in Angola, have actually opened up five provinces to Savimbi. His 30,000-man army now dominates all three provinces on Namibia's northern border and conducts raids within 100 miles of Luanda. Without the protection of 19,000 Cubans, Angola would have fallen. If the South Africans ever do manage to install their own man in Luanda, they will have taken a step toward the ultimate goal of their zone of instability: to create a new zone of stability under South African control.

Holger Jensen in Johannesburg with Peter Youngusband in Lesotho