

Mozambique: Pressure to negotiate

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Pretoria is starting to show its hand after the Nkomati Accord: hints are being made that Mozambique's government should enter into talks with the rebel MNR, reports *Paul Fauvet* in Maputo

Speaking recently on the occasion of the ninth anniversary of Mozambican independence, President Samora Machel made an unexpected reference to "new elements" in the "conspiracy organised by imperialism and pro-colonial forces" against Mozambican independence. These "new elements" had become evident after the signing of the Nkomati non-aggression agreement with South Africa in March.

The most likely candidates are Portugal and the United States, and the key factor in the "conspiracy" would seem to be attempts to push Mozambique into negotiations with the rebels of the "Mozambique National Resistance" (MNR). Now nobody, not even the South Africans, say this publicly: but an operation seems to be underway to allow them to say it, as they did, in veiled terms, in August.

The only material support for the tales of MNR military prowess is a series of spectacular actions carried out relatively close to Maputo itself. MNR units infiltrated over the South African border into Maputo province both before and, apparently, after the signing of the Nkomati Accord. On at least three occasions they have sabotaged the power lines carrying electricity to the capital, and they have mounted a number of horrific ambushes on the roads and railways leading out of the city. The aim of this is not

to topple the government (such actions are not considered to be militarily significant), but to grab publicity and to spread panic in Maputo. While it would be an exaggeration to say that Maputo is besieged, people are certainly thinking twice before travelling far from the city.

In the MNR's former strongholds in the centre of the country, the Mozambican army has scored significant successes. The city of Beira, whose power supply was regularly cut off in 1982 and 1983, has not suffered any such disruption since January





Bosom friends: South Africa's Foreign Minister Roelof Botha and UNITA's Jonas Savimbi drink a toast at the State President's inauguration in Cape Town

of this year. In general, the provinces of Manica, Sofala and Inhambane are much calmer than they were a year or so ago. A recent Mozambican offensive further north has pushed the MNR out of much of Zambezia province.

However, the rebels have maintained a strong position in Nampula province, from which they have pushed into parts of the northernmost province of Cabo Delgado. This, and continued ambushes on the Zimbabwe-Malawi highway through Mozambique's north-western province of Tete, strongly suggests that the MNR is continuing to use bases in Malawi, with or without the knowledge of the Malawian authorities.

The Catholic Church joined the attack on Mozambique in June. Its way of celebrating independence was to launch an anti-government broadside in the shape of a pastoral letter from the Mozambican bishops. This cleverly tied together complaints against the law which introduced flogging for certain crimes with a call for negotiations "between brothers."

Militia training in Mozambique



so that no further blood should be shed. The bishops also demanded fundamental political changes: "Let us not be victims of imposed ideologies," they pleaded.

In the wake of a strong pledge by P.W. Botha the previous day that South Africa would not do anything to threaten Mozambican security, Machel was politely asking him to prove it and making it easier for him by implicitly guaranteeing that no returning rebels would be killed.

But the South Africans are reluctant to throw away such a useful tool as the MNR. Their response has been to suggest, so far in private, that Mozambique negotiates with the MNR. Apparently the South Africans want at the very least to see the MNR leaders reinstated in Mozambican public life, while the MNR rank and file are found jobs. Reliable sources report that Pik Botha suggested a public works programme to employ former MNR members which could be financed internationally. This idea is a non-starter: why should Mozambique give preferential treatment to MNR members when citizens who have not indulged in armed rebellion cannot find jobs?

When Mozambique's Minister in the Presidency for Economic Affairs, Jacinto Veloso, visited Pretoria again in mid-August it was undoubtedly to demand that South Africa stop the support which some powerful people in the apartheid state apparatus are still giving to the MNR.

Pik Botha waited until the end of Veloso's visit to announce casually that a "delegation" from the MNR was also in Pretoria — the first time that a South African Minister has publicly admitted the presence of MNR members on South African soil. It seems that Veloso had not been informed of this and looked distinctly shocked at the news.

The suspicion in Maputo is that for Pretoria the Nkomati Accord was only the first step ●