

A deliberate aviation disaster ?

by Abdul Minty

All the evidence relating to the crash of the Mozambican presidential aircraft in which Samora Machel lost his life indicates that it was an electronically-induced aviation disaster - yet another of apartheid's political assassinations ?

South Africa certainly possesses sophisticated electronic equipment for tracking and intercepting aircraft, and also would have no difficulty in sending up false signals to confuse the plane's navigational systems.

Among the questions which require answers is: did the South Africans, when their radar operators saw President Samora's Tupolev 134 straying from its flight path intercept it by radio and issue any warning, or provide any guidance ?

Certainly there is no technical problem about this. South African radar is well able to monitor flights throughout the region.

This is largely thanks to the British Plessey AR-3D radar system. The British government authorised the export of this system to South Africa, and the anti-apartheid movement exposed the deal at the 1979 Commonwealth summit in Lusaka.

Despite a promise to review the contract, British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher permitted it to go ahead. The AR-3D system was finally integrated into the overall South African air control and command system by 1982. This system facilitates attack missions by South African Air Force jet fighters, with the targets pre-determined and programmed into a computer.

The Plessey radar also enables computerised interception of aircraft movements in the region, both automatically as well as by manual operation.

An operator carrying out airspace surveillance on any of the several Plessey consoles can select and display a combination of data - the position of aircraft as well as maps of the region - and can define the flight paths of the aircraft, as well as defining the intercept profiles.

According to information received by the World Campaign against Military and Nuclear Collaboration with South Africa, the Plessey instructions in the AR-3D operating manual, under the heading "tracking of detected aircraft", include the following:

"An aircraft entering radar cover is first visible to an operator, with the appropriate display facilities selected, as radar video overlaid with a synthetic plot marker. After a small number of sweeps, the computer system may automatically initiate a track corresponding to the aircraft and label it with a track reference and height information. The computer system continues automatically to track the aircraft throughout its lifetime, updating the label information as necessary".

Through manual control the operator can exert much closer control over individual aircraft throughout the tracking process. Thus there can be no possible doubt about the ability of the Pretoria regime to track aircraft in the region, and to monitor their movements, as well as to intercept them.

If in this case the plane was not attacked, but simply led into a mountain side by false signams, there are at least half a dozen ways to do that.

It would most likely also involve some jamming devices to cut off some of the signals between the aircraft and Maputo airport, but that would not be essential.

Electronic deception could be carried out by an emitter that is pre-positioned. Such a device can easily be put into place either by an aerial drop, perhaps by using a parachute, or it can be placed by a person. It can even be carried by an individual on the ground in a back-pack.

Israel has built up considerable experience in electronic deception techniques, and once the technique of directing the beam is mastered, the process becomes very simple.

Since South Africa enjoys close military and other relations with Israel, there would be no problem in Pretoria being provided with all the relevant equipment and know-how.

When a false emitter or beacon is placed in an area where it may be discovered, it becomes important to recover the device once it has performed its function. But if that is difficult, it would be quite simple to equip it with a self detonator which could be remotely controlled.

It should also be noted that the false beacon and any other emitters used for deception can also be brought into operation by remote control, and this will help to ensure that it is only the target aircraft that is misguided.

The South African regime has not wished to draw attention to the sophisticated equipment and techniques that are at its disposal. Instead the Pretoria government, and especially its foreign minister Roelof Botha, has released a series of misleading statements and "revelations" which combine anti-Mozambican propaganda with attempts to avoid suspicion being cast on South Africa.

This string of statements makes it necessary to investigate exactly what the Pretoria regime is trying to hide from the eyes of the world.

(The author, Abdul Minty, is the director of the World Campaign against Military and Nuclear Collaboration with South Africa, and Honorary Secretary of the British Anti-Apartheid Movement)

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