

ALTHOUGH "peace in the east" has become the latest catchline in Foreign Minister Pik Botha's diplomatic repertoire, most Mozambicans remain unconvinced that it will bring an end to the war that has ravaged their country.

This week Botha told foreign correspondents he had asked the United States late last year to broker a peace agreement similar to the one that ended the war in Angola and brought Namibia to the verge of independence.

"The idea," said the foreign minister "is that if we could have done it in respect of a very difficult area in the west, why can't we do it in the east?" The US State Department was quick off the mark with an enthusiastic response: "If (Mozambique) were to ask us to play a role in this regard, we would be prepared to give thoughtful consideration to exactly how we could be of assistance," said representative Charles Redman.

The government of Mozambique, however, was more wary. A representative told the news agency, Aim, that before responding to Botha's offer they needed the exact content of his proposals and wanted them delivered through appropriate channels.

Botha's immediate aim in making the peace offer was clearly rebut to

## Triumphant Pik gazes east, but Maputo remains suspicious

*The US responded enthusiastically to the Pik Botha suggestion for 'peace in the east' but the frontline states remain unimpressed. By EDDIE KOCH*

claims at the Harare conference that Pretoria is still waging a covert war in Mozambique. At the same briefing he made public a letter to the chairman of the Commonwealth meeting, Canadian Foreign Minister Joe Clark, which offers South African support for creating peace in the region and points to economic assistance Pretoria is giving Mozambique. The point was repeated in a *Network* programme aired on SABC-TV News this week. But South Africa's twitchy response to the Commonwealth conference is clearly linked to deep-seated problems in its economy that are pushing it along the path to peace in Mozambique.

Since September last year South

Africa has revived a series of trade and labour agreements with Mozambique. Many South African corporations have also recently shown an interest in investing in Mozambique. Mineowners, industrialists and farmers in the Eastern Transvaal district of South Africa are eying Maputo as a natural export outlet.

The renaissance in economic activity between Mozambique and South Africa was stressed in the *Network* programme — which acknowledged sanctions have ended any hopes of competing on the markets of the developed world and had forced South African industrialists to expand exports to the African hinterland.

Another crucial factor in Pretoria's



increasing use of diplomacy in the east appears to be the crisis it faces in repaying its foreign loans.

In October last year PW Botha announced, after a visit to Swiss bankers aimed at rolling over some of South Africa's R22-billion foreign debt, he had told the bankers of the role South Africa could play in developing the sub-region.

Pik Botha's peace offer was obviously a continuation of these attempts to solve domestic economic problems by portraying South Africa as a force for development rather than destabilisation. But Mozambique's suspicious

response — and that of other cynics — was clearly shaped by the fact that an escalation in the war by Renamo has accompanied Pretoria's recent diplomatic and economic overtures.

Just days before Botha's statement the rebels massacred 27 civilians on a sugar complex north of Maputo. Renamo followed with a weekend rocket attack on a passenger train travelling between Komatipoort and Maputo which left 11 people dead.

Attacks have been stepped up since September and have apparently been aimed at sabotaging the growing economic links between the two countries. These led Mozambique to claim last month that the Eastern Transvaal was being used as the springboard for a new forms of covert aid to the rebels.

An SADF representative stridently refuted the allegations and insisted that South Africa has stopped all aid to Renamo since 1984. He added the Mozambican government had not made any complaints about violations of the Nkomati Accord through the joint security commission.

Whoever is to blame for Renamo's recent attacks it is clear these must be stopped before Mozambicans will believe "peace in the east" can be transformed from an epigram into reality.