
MOZAMBIQUE

A lesson from aloes

The proportions of the human disaster which has overtaken Mozambique can scarcely be imagined. Here is a country whose capital is actually closer to Johannesburg than is Durban, but which has fallen out of the 20th Century into something resembling the Stone Age.

One million people have died since independence in 1975 and 5m have been displaced. Those who are not shielded by the remnants of the army in the cities of Beira and Maputo are subject to starvation, banditry and colossal destitution.

Next week, Frelimo president Joachim Chissano is meant to meet his main political and military opponent, Afonso Dhlakama, the Renamo leader whose links with the SA military (and before that the Rhodesian security forces) have been well-documented. Perhaps if they can agree on a path to democratic elections and co-operation in reconstruction, the surviving Mozambicans might have some cause to hope their children will not suffer further.

This agreement is by no means assured. Dhlakama is quite probably not in control of the numberless bands of killers and looters who control vast territories in the interior and

drought has made the war for survival nasty, brutish and short.

The Soviets who once backed Frelimo have long gone. There can be little doubt that Chissano will be forced to ask F W de Klerk for help to restore normality, despite the history of betrayal and distrust which underlay the mood of their recent meeting.

In any case, SA itself is hardly stable and its financial resources are so strained that any extensive foreign military operation, even with possible OAU support, is questionable.

So there is really little to be done about Mozambique, except to take it as the pre-eminent case study in Africa of what happens when ideologies clash and have real effects on the daily lives of millions. The ideologies — Marxism for Frelimo and whatever Renamo chooses to call its policies — have little relevance to actual conditions. A wasteland has been left.

South Africans of all persuasions should look on this with dismay. That is the abyss that lies ahead if we do not negotiate. ■