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INTERNATIONAL

South Africa

From Confrontation to Cooperation

24 By Mohamed El-Khawas
(Second of two parts)

In the 1990s, South Africa appears to be inching closer to an era of peaceful co-existence with its neighbors. There are signs that it is shifting from confrontation to cooperation, particularly with Angola and Mozambique.

The first of this two-part series dealt with South Africa and Angola; the second focuses on Mozambique.

South Africa and Mozambique

Initially, South Africa pursued two different policies toward Mozambique and Angola. It objected to the Movimento Popular de Libertacao de Angola (MPLA) coming to power in Angola, but did not oppose the ascendance to power in 1975 of the Frente de Libertacao de Mocambique (FRELIMO) in Mozambique. It knew that FRELIMO, out of economic necessity, would pursue a pragmatic policy. In fact, up until 1980, South Africa maintained economic ties with Mozambique even though the two countries had no formal diplomatic relations.

Mozambique has long been dependent on South Africa for economic survival, having inherited from the Portuguese an economy that was closely linked with South Africa. Mozambique provides transit facilities for South African goods; sells electricity to Pretoria from the Cahora Bassa Dam; provides workers for South African mines. For years, these transactions have helped Mozambique ease its shortages in foreign exchange earnings.

Although Mozambique's government, under Samora Machel, continued to deal with South Africa on economic matters, it remained committed to majority rule in South Africa, and to its support for the African National Congress (ANC) by occasionally allowing ANC fighters to cross its borders and carry out armed attacks inside South Africa.

At the beginning of the 1980s, however, South Africa initiated a more aggressive policy toward Mozambique and other neighboring states by unleashing air and ground strikes against suspected ANC targets.¹

This change in strategy came about as a result of: (1) growing ANC sabotage activities inside South Africa; (2) the end of white rule in Rhodesia (Zimbabwe); and (3) a change of leadership in the U.S.

On January 30, 1981, only 10 days after the presidential inauguration of Ronald Reagan, South African commandos struck



inside Mozambique for the first time. They raided ANC residences in Matola, a suburb of Maputo, the capital city, killing 13 people and kidnapping 3 others.² This action marked the start of repeated military incursions by South African forces into Mozambique and neighboring countries. In the following years, Pretoria intensified its policy of swift retribution, after ANC fighters attacked government buildings inside South Africa, causing heavy casualties.

On May 23, 1983, South Africa's Air Force was used for the first time to attack ANC offices in Maputo, killing 5 and wounding 40. This air raid was a reprisal for a car-bomb explosion in Pretoria three days earlier, which killed 18 people and wounded 190.³

South Africa's repeated military actions inside Mozambique were intended to pressure the government of Samora Machel to cease its assistance to the ANC. Also,

South Africa resolved to escalate its destabilization campaign by providing a safe haven inside South Africa for the right-wing insurgent group, Mozambique National Resistance (RENAMO), which had been expelled from Zimbabwe in 1980. To this day, RENAMO is waging a guerrilla war to oust the government in Mozambique, with the help of South Africa, which has supplied the group with training, weapons, and logistical support along the Indian Ocean coastline.

While South Africa did not initially announce its support of RENAMO publicly, Mozambican officials have said all along that there was clear evidence of such support. In December 1981, for example, documents were found in a RENAMO camp that reported on meetings between its leader, Afonso Dhlakama, and South African officials a year earlier. In one of the documents, a South African officer is quoted as saying, "instructors who go into Mozambique will not only teach, but also participate in attacks."⁴

South Africa also provided RENAMO with broadcasting facilities to help it spread anti-government propaganda in Mozambique, through The Voice of the Mozambique National Resistance, which went on the air inside South Africa during the early 1980s.

Pretoria's assistance to RENAMO, as noted earlier, was intended to put pressure on the Machel government to disavow the ANC. And the longer Machel continued supporting the ANC, the bigger the RENAMO campaign became. By 1983, RENAMO was active in 7 out of the 10 provinces in Mozambique. Its subversive campaigns succeeded in disrupting the economy, which was already hard hit by a severe drought.

According to official estimates, there were approximately 1,000,000 displaced persons in Mozambique in 1986, all forced to abandon their farms and flee their homes in the face of RENAMO attacks on their villages. In addition, 300,000 others had fled to South Africa and Zimbabwe.

The dislocation of so many people has had an adverse impact on agriculture, causing severe grain shortages and forcing the government to rely heavily on foreign aid to meet the country's food needs. This situation exacerbated problems caused by the 1981-1984 drought, during which about 100,000 people died of hunger in Mozambique. Subsequent flooding washed out roads and bridges, adding further barriers

to emergency deliveries of food and medicine.

After the drought emergency, in 1986, it was estimated that about 2,000,000 people were threatened by further starvation because "rebel attacks combined to strangle food production and hinder an international relief effort."⁵

To make it more difficult for the Machel government to cope with its ailing economy, South Africa also put economic pressures on Mozambique. First, the number of Mozambicans working in South African mines dropped sharply, from 120,000 prior to 1975 to only 40,000 in 1983. Their earnings had helped ease Mozambique's foreign exchange problems. Second, South Africa reduced its use of Mozambique's transit facilities, dropping from 6,000,000 tons of exports in 1973 to only 2,000,000 tons in 1982.⁶ Third, it cut its utilization of electricity from the Cahora Bassa Dam. These measures caused a sizeable decline in Mozambique's foreign exchange earnings and contributed to the worsening of its already bleak economic situation.

South Africa's destabilization campaign thus made it costly for the Machel government to continue support for the ANC. Pretoria had used a "big stick" to let Mozambican officials know that they could not resolve their domestic problems without first dealing with the South African demand to bring cross-border raids to an end.

The same message was echoed by the U.S., but with hints of help in pulling Mozambique out of its economic difficulties. In June 1983, Lawrence Eagleburger, U.S. undersecretary of state, said in San Francisco that the Reagan administration was pressing "for dialogue between South Africa and Mozambique, and an end to cross-border violence."⁷

The Nkomati Accord

In the fall of 1983, Machel laid the groundwork for rapprochement with South Africa. He began to scale down his dependence on the Soviet bloc and to move closer to the West, with a visit, in October 1983, to Europe to attract "massive and immediate Western investment and aid."⁸ He also sought to convince Portugal and Britain to give his country military assistance, especially in the area of counterinsurgency training.

While Machel was touring Europe, South African commandos blew up several ANC houses near the presidential residence in Maputo. And South African Defense Min-

ister Magnus Malan asserted that the attacks were in retaliation for the damaging of oil storage facilities the week before in Warmbaths, Northern Transvaal.⁹ Malan blamed the Mozambican government for its failure to heed repeated demands by South Africa "to get rid of the ANC." He also warned that "as long as they continue to help the ANC with the planning of terrorist acts and continue to harbor and provide facilities to the ANC, the South African Defense Force will conduct operations in that country."¹⁰

South Africa provided RENAMO with broadcasting facilities to help it spread anti-government propaganda in Mozambique . . .

South Africa's attacks in Maputo demonstrated Mozambique's vulnerability to military intervention. Mozambique was defenseless; it was unable to stop South Africa's incursions. And, following the October 1983 raid, Malan pointed out that "it was but a small taste of what was to come if neighboring states continued to harbor terrorists." He warned that "South Africa has not yet wielded its 'iron fist' but its patience is wearing thin."¹¹

Under these circumstances, Machel had no other choice but to deal directly with Pretoria and get South Africa to end its military attacks and its backing of the Mozambican rebels. Both the U.S. and Portugal played key roles in getting Pretoria and Maputo to discuss security and economic matters. Finally, in March 1984, the Nkomati Accord was signed, ending years of hostility between the two countries. Both countries promised to discontinue

assistance to insurgent groups. In addition, South Africa was to increase trade and tourism and offer economic assistance to Mozambique.

The Machel government kept its part of the deal by taking steps to halt ANC activities in Mozambique. Police raided ANC buildings in Maputo and confiscated weapons. In addition, hundreds of South African refugees were ordered to leave the country.¹² These measures drew sharp criticism from ANC leaders, who voiced their determination to continue their armed struggle.

But South Africa did not fulfill its obligations under the Nkomati pact. In particular, it continued to provide covert aid to the Mozambican insurgency. Diaries of a RENAMO field commander captured in August 1985 revealed that the South African military agreed to stockpile weapons for RENAMO just before the Nkomati pact was signed. Further, Colonel Cornelius (Charles) van Niekerk, South African military liaison to RENAMO, worked out plans to continue to train RENAMO forces inside South Africa and to supply them with ammunition for their sabotage campaigns in Mozambique. He even urged RENAMO leaders to turn down Machel's amnesty offer that was made in accordance with its agreement with Pretoria. And after RENAMO's main headquarters were moved out of South Africa to neighboring Malawi, South African diplomats in Malawi continued to assist RENAMO and coordinate their country's covert assistance.¹³

In September 1985, in response to these revelations, the Machel government suspended its participation in the joint commission set up under the Nkomati pact.¹⁴ Mozambican officials were disappointed with Pretoria's failure to cease all support for RENAMO and were having second thoughts about the pact. There was growing opposition to the Nkomati pact in Maputo's ruling circles because the continuing flow of South African arms and supplies had enabled RENAMO to expand its activities. Under these circumstances, Mozambique resolved to quietly discard the non-aggression pact with South Africa.

Mozambique was also critical of the U.S. role due to the fact that the U.S. neither pressured South Africa to honor the pact nor increased its economic assistance and investment in Mozambique. The Reagan administration gave Mozambique \$73 million in foodstuffs between 1983 and 1985, but was unable to provide more economic

development assistance because of opposition in Congress to the Marxist regime in Maputo. The Gramm-Rudman legislation led to further reductions in the economic aid package, which amounted to \$9.5 million in 1986, about \$3.5 million less than the year before. Nor was there any prospect for a substantial increase in American corporate investment because of RENAMO's destabilizing military campaign throughout the country.¹⁵

The Machel government also found that the Western powers could not meet all of its military needs to fight the insurgency. The U.S. Congress rejected the Reagan administration's request for \$4.6 million in nonlethal military aid for Mozambique over two years. And Britain provided only a modest training program for the Mozambican military, while Portugal did not respond to requests for military supplies and training in counterinsurgency.¹⁶

In view of these developments, Machel concluded that the West could not help his country pull out of its economic and security problems. In April 1986, he traveled to Moscow to seek more Soviet aid. He was seeking a military solution, with the help of Zimbabwe, which had been affected by RENAMO's sabotage of Mozambique's harbors and transit facilities.

As another line of defense, the Mozambican government took steps to deny RENAMO the use of Malawi as a sanctuary and a supply base. In September 1986, a regional summit was held in Blantyre, Malawi's capital, during which Machel, along with Zimbabwe's Robert Mugabe and Zambia's Kenneth Kaunda, urged Malawi's Hastings Kamuzu Banda to hand the RENAMO rebels over to Mozambican authorities. Banda refused; instead, he promised to expel the rebels from his country. When Banda was slow in fulfilling his pledge, the Mozambican government threatened to blockade Malawi.¹⁷

On October 6, 1986, six South African soldiers were wounded by a land mine just inside the border with Mozambique. This incident marked the resumption of the ANC's activities from Mozambique. In response, Pretoria retaliated by banning further hiring of Mozambicans wishing to work in South Africa. Further, it informed the Machel government that 68,665 Mozambicans already working in South African mines would return home upon the expiration of their contracts.¹⁸

South Africa said the action was taken "as a result of the activities of the ANC

and the South African Communist Party, who are responsible for the continuing deteriorating security situation on the common border. . . and who, according to information in possession of [the government], as confirmed by recent incidents, is still operating from Mozambique."¹⁹

Thus, the Nkomati Accord of 1984 was decisively put to rest—a situation that led to a renewed South African destabilization campaign in Mozambique.

On October 11, 1986 Mozambican officials accused Pretoria of massing troops along their border and of sending commando units "to carry out acts of terrorism" in their country. The following day, leaders of the frontline states held a summit in Maputo and accused Pretoria of "preparing for war." They called on "all the peoples and governments of the world to block South Africa's race toward generalized war."²⁰

On October 19, 1986, Machel, along with 33 other Mozambican officials, died in a suspicious plane crash near Mbuzini, in South Africa, while on a flight home from Lusaka, Zambia. This incident took place just a week after the South African defense minister had predicted that the Machel government was "about to collapse" because of the ailing economy and RENAMO's successful insurgency.²¹ It is in this context that some African leaders, and others wondered whether Pretoria had something to do with Machel's death.

After Machel, Joachim Chissano became the president of Mozambique during a most difficult period in its history. Since taking power in 1986, he has dealt with serious domestic problems resulting from RENAMO's stepped-up sabotage campaign and Pretoria's attacks on suspected ANC quarters in Maputo. Chissano's pragmatism has led him to try again to move closer to the West, to reduce his country's dependence on the Soviet Union, and to mend fences with South Africa. His diplomatic initiative was a success for the following reasons:

- First, the new detente between Moscow and Washington has led the superpowers to become actively involved in the search for political solutions for the Southern African region.
- Second, the Kremlin, under Mikhail Gorbachev's leadership, has lost interest in pouring millions of dollars of scarce resources into a distant military entanglement.

- Third, the economic sanctions against South Africa and the high cost of its military campaigns in Mozambique and other neighboring countries have led the South African government to try to break out of isolation through a policy of communication rather than confrontation.

These developments have made it easier for Chissano to attract Western economic assistance, especially since he has continued to eliminate some of the socialist elements in the Mozambican economy, and to receive loans from the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

In September 1988, Chissano, with the help of Britain, held a summit with South Africa's Botha in Songo, Mozambique. These talks resulted in reviving the 1984 Nkomati Accord. Botha pledged to discontinue support to RENAMO, to provide technical and security assistance, and to "rebuild power lines from the Cahora Bassa hydro-electric power project that were destroyed by RENAMO."²² He also promised "substantial financial aid to Mozambique."²³

The change in government in South Africa in 1989 did not result in any change in policy toward Mozambique. President Frederik W. de Klerk continued to work for the improvement of relations with Mozambique. In December 1989, he met with Chissano in Maputo and announced that his government "does not aid RENAMO in any way whatever."²⁴ However, he acknowledged that some South Africans are still sending equipment and funds to RENAMO. This fact meant that some South Africans, probably including the military or intelligence personnel, have maintained their leverage for destabilizing Mozambique. Under these circumstances, Chissano called upon Pretoria to "increase its efforts" to halt the flow of arms and money to RENAMO across the border.²⁵

In Maputo, de Klerk also discussed Chissano's efforts aimed at ending the civil war in Mozambique. Last July, the South African leader had already endorsed these initiatives and had called on RENAMO to agree to a cease-fire and to help rebuild the economy of the war-torn country.²⁶

Chissano's peace initiatives were also backed by the Bush administration. Herman Cohen, assistant secretary of state for African affairs, travelled to the region in July 1989 to explore "the possibilities for fostering peace in Mozambique."²⁷

Search for Peace

Chissano suddenly shifted his policy in mid-1989, favoring a negotiated settlement for the civil war, which neither side could win in the battlefield. The reasons for his shift were:

- First, the South African government has ceased its support for RENAMO and has begun to cooperate with Mozambique.
- Second, the Soviet Union, Mozambique's main arms supplier, decided to begin pulling its military advisors out of Mozambique over 18 months and to reduce its military assistance by 40 percent.
- Third, Zimbabwe, which has had troops defending key transportation routes in Mozambique, pressured the Chissano government for talks with RENAMO.
- Fourth, the climate in Southern Africa encouraged talks among adversaries, especially after a settlement in Namibia was reached and a cease-fire took hold in Angola.

Chissano hoped that the Angolan model could be used to end the fighting in his country. He called upon RENAMO "to follow suit" and sought the backing of the United Nations to start a dialogue with the rebels.²⁸

RENAMO, on the other hand, insisted that "any cease-fire has to be mutual, not unilateral" as Chissano proposed. Luis Serapiao, RENAMO's representative in Washington and professor at Howard University, stated:

Talks have to be among equal partners without preconditions. The government is offering [a] dialogue about ending the fighting and potentially about the conditions of amnesty for RENAMO members. But it is not willing to agree to power-sharing negotiations.²⁹

In October 1989, Afonso Dhlakama rejected direct talks with the Mozambican government because his movement does "not recognize it as a sovereign state." He instead "wanted to speak, not to the government, but to the FRELIMO Party."³⁰ As a result, a stalemate continued.

Thus, the peace process, which was initiated by officials of Mozambique's Catholic and Anglican churches, was deadlocked because the rebels had declined to accept Chissano's offer to end violence and recognize the country's constitution.

RENAMO's officials have demanded that a constituent assembly be elected and a multiparty system be created.³¹

To break the stalemate, Kenya's Daniel arap Moi and Zimbabwe's Robert Mugabe, who accepted the role of mediators, sought to find a formula that would bring the two factions together for direct talks on a political solution for the internal conflict in Mozambique.

Meanwhile, Chissano, in an attempt to induce RENAMO to start a dialogue, has continued the reforms to liberalize the country's economy and, in January 1990, outlined a new draft constitution aimed at addressing some of the criticism expressed by RENAMO and other Mozambicans. He proposed that the president be elected by universal suffrage and secret ballot. Two or more candidates will run for the president's office. Also, there will be direct elections for members of parliament. National elections can be held in 1991.³²

These reforms were not sufficient to lure RENAMO to the negotiating table, however. To break the stalemate, Moi and Mugabe suggested that the Mozambican government and RENAMO should agree to unconditional talks. In addition, Malawi's Hastings Banda urged RENAMO to start direct talks in his capital on June 12, 1990. But this meeting never took place. It was not until July 8, 1990 that direct talks between the Mozambican government and RENAMO took place in Rome. It is noteworthy that neither Kenya nor Zimbabwe attended the Rome meeting.

At the end of the three-day meeting, the parties agreed to meet again in Rome to seek "a platform for work that will bring the war to an end and create political, economic and social conditions that will bring lasting peace and normalization of life to all Mozambican citizens."³⁴

It is too early to tell whether direct talks will lead to a peaceful solution to the bloody civil war in Mozambique. It is now up to the Chissano government and RENAMO leaders to find ways to end the conflict, rebuild the country and develop its economy.

The peace initiatives have a good chance to succeed because of the end of the cold war and the backing of the front-line states, as well as South Africa, the U.S. and the Soviet Union. In the final analysis, however, Mozambican leaders have the ultimate responsibility for the success or failure of the peace negotiations. □

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