

## Machel's Legacy

The death of President Samora Machel was a watershed in the Southern African regional war - the horribly logical sequel to the 1984 Nkomati 'peace pact'. South Africa's disinformation machine has predictably been working overtime to blame the crash on external factors which did not exist, such as bad weather, pilot error, crew drunkenness, the Tupolov having outdated equipment etc.

But the authorities' combing of the wreckage for eight hours before informing Maputo about the disaster or aiding the wounded, like their refusal to obey normal international rules and release the black box to the Mozambicans, set the real background for the death of President Samora.

Whatever emerges from the international enquiry, this death symbolises the ruthless determination of South Africa to win its regional war whatever the cost in human, diplomatic or economic terms.

Even before the death of President Samora the last quarter of 1986 saw Mozambique's military and social crisis intensify to the point where the very survival of the Frelimo government was threatened. South Africa, previously content to keep Frelimo in a state of virtual impotence by its economic and military destabilisation, appeared to change tack and to be envisaging an attack on the Mozambican capital Maputo itself, just as the Mozambicans believed it was on the eve of Nkomati.

By mid-October South African commandos had already been infiltrated into the capital, the South African army was in force on the Mozambique border, from Malawi waves of heavily armed Renamo forces were unleashed across the border and took five towns in northern Mozambique.

It was the first time they had made any such attempt to hold population centres. At



Machel: Watershed death

a summit in Maputo the front line states presidents forecast imminent open war in the region with Frelimo as the first target. South Africa then openly threatened Mozambique using the excuse of supposed African National Congress guerrillas crossing the border to lay mines.

That the killer bands of Renamo, created by the Rhodesian Special Branch, taken over by South Africa after Zimbabwean independence and still with no political programme and almost no identifiable non-Portuguese leadership, can be promoted to the status of a potential government by a Washington-based lobbying organisation linked to the US administration shows the Reaganite 'low intensity conflict' strategy for the ruthless and cynical genocide which it is - from Nicaragua to Afghanistan.

South Africa has always hit out at its weakest neighbours in its own moments of greatest stress. The threat of international economic sanctions was one key to the timing of the apparent decision to move decisively against Frelimo. In addition, the Zim-



**Mozambique: weakened by war and communications breakdown**

babwean troops guarding the Beira road and rail corridor between Zimbabwe and the Indian Ocean port have been successful in demonstrating the South Africa's economic muscle to control all regional transport routes is not assured.

Then the squeezing of Lesotho to change its government by a coup last January proved to South Africa that this kind of virtual bantustan disguised as an independent state can be a way round Western investment bans inside South Africa itself. (Lesotho's Highland Water Scheme to be financed by the EEC and other major donors will mainly benefit the industry of South Africa's Vaal triangle.)

If Frelimo could be crushed and a client of Pretoria's installed, Mozambique would be even more useful in sanctions busting. For instance its ports could export South African coal under its own label and even South African

steel disguised as having come down the Beira corridor from Zimbabwe, Namibia, Swaziland, Mauritius, Malawi and The Comoros are already far advanced in the South African sanctions busting plans.

This short-term need of Pretoria's is part of the double perspective in the 'low intensity conflict' strategy against Mozambique. For Pretoria's Western allies there is a longer-term calculation of the role of pliable neighbour states in exerting maximum leverage on a future South African regime. The US, Britain and Israel currently make enormous covert use of Malawi and Zaire against, respectively, Mozambique and Angola. This is the pattern for the future use of the states bordering South Africa - from Namibia to Mozambique - against a future nationalist government in Pretoria. •

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