

THE SOUTH AFRICAN INSTITUTE OF INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

NATIONAL OFFICE:
Jan Smuts House
University of the Witwatersrand
Johannesburg
South Africa

Telex: 4-27291 SA
Fax: National (011) 403-1926
International + 27 11 403-1926



POSTAL ADDRESS:
P.O. Box 31596
Braamfontein
2017
South Africa

Cables: "INSINTAFF" Johannesburg
Telephone: National (011) 339-2021
International + 27 11 339-2021

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MOZAMBIQUE - SOUTH AFRICAN RELATIONS AND THE RESURRECTION OF THE NKOMATI ACCORD

NKOMATI TWO?

Renamo's recent announcement of a month-long ceasefire to allow aid to reach starving people, and their violation thereof almost directly afterwards, once again highlights the desperate and violent state of affairs in Mozambique today.

An end to the civil war and prospects for peace in the region, despite renewed contact between the South African and Mozambican heads of state in September last year, remain elusive. The meeting signalled the beginning of a relaxation of the troubled relationship between the two countries. South Africa has indicated its willingness to play a role in attempts to end the Mozambican war. This willingness is dampened by significant constraints, however, not least the refusal of the Renamo rebels to accept any peace plan put forward by South Africa.

BACKGROUND TO THE CURRENT POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC CRISIS IN MOZAMBIQUE

Mozambique has been plagued by political unrest and economic problems since independence in 1975. Frelimo's political restructuring was based on Marxist-Leninist guidelines and its long-term goal was to create a socialist state. The new government swiftly nationalised virtually all land, transport and communications. Economically, Mozambique was heavily constrained by its economic relationship with neighbouring states, while the country was buffeted by natural disasters. The economy also suffered calamitous losses of production, largely as a result of the massive exodus of the Portuguese.

From 1980 onwards, national life was increasingly dominated by the twin perils of appalling drought and the escalating political crisis in the region. The latter has taken the form of military and economic devastation by Renamo, particularly aimed

at the Mozambican infrastructure. The dissident movement was avowedly 'anti-communist', and initially supported by substantial infusions of aid from South Africa.

Progress, based on a reasonably sound economic structure, has therefore been elusive. Since independence, production has declined, food imports have increased, and balance-of-payment deficits have been severe and continuous.

The escalating internal conflict, a result of the rising tide of rebel attacks, coupled to disastrous economic performance, led the Frelimo government to the signing of the Nkomati Accord in 1984. The Accord was essentially a non-aggression treaty in which both sides agreed not to give material aid to opposition movements in each other's country. The Mozambican government believed that this would provide the breathing space necessary to defeat Renamo militarily and start the process of reconstructing the country's ravaged economy.

By April 1988, Renamo had caused an estimated US\$10 billion damage to the infrastructure. Economic reconstruction remained elusive. Renamo, still supported by conservative elements in South Africa, Malawi, Portugal, the FRG (West Germany) and the US, continued to inflict damage on the Mozambican infrastructure and its population. The anticipated influx of investment from South Africa did not materialise. This angered at least some business elements inside South Africa, who called on Pretoria to normalise relations with Mozambique.

The military situation in Mozambique had been desperate, aggravated by the sudden death of President Samora Machel in the second half of 1986. One of the most unfortunate effects of the worsening security situation was the exacerbation of a serious famine, which reportedly threatened at least 4,5 million people with starvation.

STRATEGIES TO COMBAT RENAMO

By mid-1987, government troops had become more successful at repulsing rebel attacks. In struggling with the failure of the Nkomati Accord, the Mozambican government has adopted three connected strategies:

- * It has aimed to defeat the insurgents by *force of arms*; however, the Mozambican army is ill-equipped, malnourished and often unable to hold even well-defended positions. As a result, Zimbabwean and Tanzanian soldiers were given the freedom to operate in large areas of the country.
- * Mozambique has also pursued the *diplomatic option*, seeking support from South Africa and the West. President Chissano's first official visit outside the region was to the UK, symptomatic of a developing relationship which clearly constitutes part of a continuing western effort to deflect Mozambique from undue dependence on the Soviet Bloc.

* In addition, Mozambique has continued to consult its *traditional allies* in the Soviet Bloc. The USSR remains Mozambique's principal supplier of petroleum and other imported commodities.

Domestic reforms continue in tandem with the military and diplomatic offensives. Mozambique joined the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund in 1984, while the government also announced a new and liberal foreign investment code, and renegotiated the management of the Cahora Bassa hydroelectric scheme with Portugal and South Africa in 1988.

ECONOMIC RECOVERY DEPENDENT ON RENAMO'S DEMISE

In a speech in March 1989, Dr Prakesh Ratilal, a senior member of the Mozambican government, reiterated its desire to establish a stable climate of peace and cooperation in the region. He pointed out that continued violence by Renamo prohibited 'the normal development of multifaceted relations between Mozambique and South Africa'. Ratilal argued that South African participation in the dismantling of this 'terror machine' would be a positive and active way to implement the Nkomati Accord.

In essence, there are only limited prospects for an improvement in the economic situation until the conflict with Renamo is resolved. Similarly, any peace overtures in the region, whether initiated by South Africa or the superpowers, must be preceded by the neutralisation of Renamo's external support, wherever this originates. Negotiated settlement will remain unlikely unless Renamo can be demonstrated to have a genuine grassroots basis of support among the population. How this could be assessed, one hesitates to say - perhaps a role for another UNTAG? This would require the goodwill of both parties and recognition by them that a military solution would be prohibitively expensive in human and economic terms.