

The death of Mozambican President Samora Machel is one more blow to an already severely strained FRELIMO government. ROB DAVIES of the Eduardo Mondlane University's Centre for African Studies, Maputo, analyses its implications in the context of recent South African strategy towards Mozambique.

Mozambique
and South Africa

**DEATH
OF A
PRESIDENT**

The air crash on the night of 19 October which killed President Samora Machel and other senior FRELIMO and Mozambican government leaders will have a major impact on both the political situation in Mozambique and Southern African regional relations.

Full details of the crash itself are not yet available, and it is still being officially investigated. Although it may in the end be difficult to prove conclusively, there is a growing body of circumstantial evidence suggesting that the crash might have been caused by some sophisticated form of electronic sabotage. Informed sources in Maputo discount suggestions that it resulted from poor weather, 'human error' resulting from an allegedly inexperienced crew, or the plane drifting off course.

It appears that the flight proceeded normally until the presidential plane was about 70 km from Maputo, in the Manhica region. There were no faulty systems on the plane, the weather was fine and the crew experienced. Contact was lost shortly after the control tower in Maputo ordered the plane to prepare for a routine instrument landing.

The plane crashed 200 metres inside South African territory near the Mbuzini mission in KaNgwane at about 9-30 pm on Sunday 19 October. However, the Mozambican authorities were not informed that the plane had crashed on South African territory until 6-40 the next morning, despite the fact that its flight and entry had been monitored on South African radar, as Foreign Minister Pik Botha acknowledged.

Moreover, one of the survivors, Captain Fernando Manuel, walked to a local clinic after the crash, arriving at about 10-00 pm, according to Business Day. Shortly afterwards the clinic telephoned the local police.

One hypothesis is that an electronic signal could have interfered with the plane's instruments and controls. An expert on electronic warfare in the United States said that there are 'false beam' devices quite capable of this kind of interference.



PRETORIA INCREASES THE PRESSURE

Whatever happened, the fact remains that this tragic development occurred at

a time when Pretoria was stepping up pressure against Mozambique.

On 8 October, ostensibly in response to a landmine incident in KaNgwane in which six SADF members were injured, the South African government announced that it was prohibiting recruitment of Mozambican migrant workers.

On 11 October a Mozambican government communique said that information obtained from a South African citizen 'linked with economic interests' indicated that 'the militarists' in Pretoria were planning to launch air raids, and had infiltrated a commando to carry out attacks in and around Maputo city.

Indeed, just a few days before the air crash, Machel told a group of journalists there had been several previous attempts by the South African military to assassinate him - the most recent in November 1985, when plans to attack his motorcade with bazookas were uncovered.

All this took place against the background of a stepped-up assault in Mozambique's central provinces by MNR armed bandits operating from Malawi. They are supplied, trained and directed by the extensive network maintained in that country by South African Military Intelligence with the active connivance of the Malawian authorities.

A major objective is to cut the Beira Corridor, preventing it from serving as an alternative to continued dependence by Southern African Development Co-ordinating Council (SADCC) countries on South African ports and railways - particularly in the event of application of 'counter-sanctions' measures by Pretoria against neighbouring states.

Recent South African actions against Mozambique bear examination, both as a background to the death of Machel and as an indication of the possible direction of future South African policy towards the country.



INTENSIFIED DESTABILISATION

The Pretoria regime said that the 8 October ban on migrant labour recruitment (and by implication the subsequent military measures which it did not acknowledge) were a response to the KaNgwane landmine explosion of 6 October. Defence Minister Magnus Malan

alleged in a statement the next day that the mine was planted by ANC members operating from Maputo.

True, Pretoria has complained on a number of occasions during the past few months about alleged ANC activity out of Maputo. It clearly wants 'the ANC presence' in Maputo further reduced, if not altogether eliminated. In August, Deputy Foreign Minister Ron Miller said that Pretoria wanted to raise the issue with Maputo. About the same time the Cape Times quoted officials claiming that the 'the ANC has begun using Mozambican territory for infiltration again'.

Nevertheless, there is good reason to believe that the KaNgwane landmine was no more than a convenient pretext to implement a series of measures already planned against Mozambique. No proof was put forward to substantiate the allegation that the landmine attack was planned or carried out by ANC members in Maputo, while repatriation of foreign migrant workers was threatened on several previous occasions in retaliation against sanctions.

In fact, implementation of this measure (and the other pressures applied) was probably provoked by two other recent developments: the Frontline States' pressure on Malawi aimed at persuading Malawi to cease allowing its territory to be used as a rear base by MNR armed bandits; and the US Congress vote to override President Reagan's veto of the Senate sanctions bill.

There is no doubt that concerted pressure by the Frontline States against Malawi posed a direct challenge to Pretoria's current regional strategy. Malawi has been a base for MNR operations for years. Indeed, after the capture of the former MNR headquarters at Gorongosa in August 1985, it became the main rear base for bandit activity in the central provinces of Mozambique.

At the same time, bandit action in the central provinces became more strategically important to the Pretoria regime. One of South Africa's principal levers against the SADCC countries is their dependence on South African ports and railways - a dependence artificially maintained by repeated sabotage of Mozambican facilities.



SANCTIONS AND COUNTER SANCTIONS

As pressure for economic sanctions against South Africa increased, Pretoria indicated it intended to use leverage arising from SADCC's dependence on South African transport services in a 'counter-sanctions' campaign. This was demonstrated by hold-ups of Zimbabwean and Zambian traffic in August, and in early October when Pik Botha threatened to respond to a US Congress vote for sanctions by blocking the trans-shipment of US grain to Southern African states.

Pretoria clearly regards it essential to prevent Mozambican ports from serving as an effective alternative. In January, SADCC gave top priority to rehabilitation of the Beira Corridor, to carry an increased tonnage of SADCC cargo. South Africa saw this as a threat. As the Financial Mail of 15 August put it: 'There is...a real possibility that if Beira threatens to become a viable alternative, Pretoria will shift from economic warfare to the real thing, using its military power (or MNR surrogates) to disrupt the rail link and oil pipeline from Beira, on which Zimbabwe is so heavily dependent'.

This prediction proved accurate. As rehabilitation work on the Beira Corridor advanced - faster than expected by many cynics in South Africa - bandit activity from Malawi was stepped up. Initially it was concentrated in Zambezia and Tete provinces, but there is no doubt that the plan envisaged embracing the entire central region, cutting the Beira Corridor. On Friday 17 October the MNR claimed to have attacked Villa Machado in the corridor itself.

Frontline State pressure on Malawi in response to increasing bandit activity from its territory represented a serious challenge to Pretoria's current regional strategy. Pretoria appears to believe that Malawi has strayed from the fold before (notably in joining SADCC and hosting the 1981 SADCC summit), and thus to be vulnerable to such pressure.

It seems Pretoria concluded that more pressure should be applied against Mozambique to weaken the impact of Frontline pressure. A few days after the 11 September news conference in which President Machel spoke about the possibility of closing the frontier with Malawi and stationing missiles along it,



Maputo, 28 October: FRELIMO's Marcelino dos Santos leads the funeral procession

SABC News Commentary strongly attacked both Mozambique and Angola.

The commentary said the president's remarks showed the 'real cause' of destabilisation in the region was 'civil wars' in states ruled by 'marxist dictatorships' unrepresentative of their people. These were spilling over into other states.

This was one of the first times since the Nkomati Accord that such language was used in SABC commentaries about Mozambique. It was also one of the first times that the MNR bandits were so blatantly accorded legitimacy in official media.

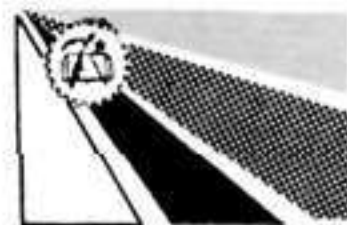
Probably the other immediate cause of Pretoria's current moves against Mozambique was the US Congress override of the presidential veto on the Senate sanctions bill. The Pretoria regime was angered by the US vote. Not only did the bill represent a severe setback, but Pik Botha's lobbying (including a threat to US grain sales) backfired. His threats to various undecided senators had the effect of turning them against him.

This may in part explain the decision to take action against 'legal' migrants straight away, rather than targeting only 'illegals'.

But this does not explain why only Mozambican migrants were affected, nor the threatened military action against the country's capital. If we reject the explanation that these moves were a response to the KaNgwane landmine, the

only conclusion is that current pressures are more than mere reaction to recent developments, and more than a mere demonstration to the outside world of South Africa's capacity to damage the economies of its neighbours.

They represent an attempt to force changes in Mozambique - either in political behavior or political structures.



SOUTH AFRICAN OBJECTIVES

The loss of President Machel is a major blow to the embattled FRELIMO government. It adds further insecurity to an already fragile situation. However, Mozambican people appear shocked and sad at the loss of a leader whom they held in considerable esteem. There is also outrage, since Pretoria is widely assumed to be responsible for the deaths.

The immediate effect has thus been consolidation of popular support behind the FRELIMO leadership. At the same time, Pretoria has to some extent been placed on the defensive. It is obliged to cover its tracks and deny involvement in the incident. These factors suggest that in the short term Pretoria may well lay off visible direct pressures against Mozambique. Above all, it will probably not wish to confirm the general

assumption that it was responsible for the president's death by further economic action or direct assaults on the capital at this moment.

But this does not apply to the MNR, which has already announced it will attempt to take advantage of the situation by stepping up its activity.

But in the medium term, Pretoria will probably resume its pressures on all fronts. While Pretoria saw its recent pressures as a means of pushing for change in Mozambique, it is not clear whether changes sought were of government positions and policies, or to bring about a change in government.

Indeed, there were indications that, while a South African government consensus existed that Mozambique should be kept under pressure, there were differences within the regime as to the precise objectives of such destabilisation measures.

Differences of tone and emphasis were discernable in the comments of members of the regime. For example Magnus Malan said, in a speech the day after the KaNgwane mine incident and the day before the announcement of the ban on Mozambican migrants, that Machel was unwilling or unable to prevent his country from serving as a base for a 'Moscow-inspired revolutionary war against South Africa'. He claimed Machel appeared to have lost control of the situation in Mozambique, and said Pretoria was extremely concerned at the course of events there.

Such a statement has all the hallmarks of a classic disinformation tactic designed to provide 'justification' for overthrow of a government.

On the other hand, in a speech on 16 October, State President PW Botha said he hoped that the Nkomati Accord would survive.

And the fact that information on plans for stepped-up military pressure around the capital was apparently leaked to the Mozambicans also points to possible divisions within the regime.



'MINIMALISTS' AND 'MAXIMALISTS'

Two competing positions probably exist within the State Security Council, with the regime's policy regime vacillating between them. For convenience these could be described as 'minimalist' and

'maximalist' positions.

The minimalists, who may well be found in the ranks of the military as well as among civilian politicians and diplomats, appear to differ from the maximalists only on how far to push the escalating cycle of destabilisation measures against Mozambique.

These are members and defenders of a besieged racist minority regime isolated to an unprecedented degree both regionally and internationally. As such, they would accept as necessary further pressure on regional states to reduce the ANC presence in the region, as well as maintaining the widest room for manoeuvre in a 'sanctions war'. They would probably strongly support intensification of bandit activity in central Mozambique to prevent the Beira Corridor serving as a viable alternative for SADCC states.

They would not want to see Frontline States succeed in pressuring Malawi to abandon its support for the armed bandits.

They would probably share the view that any ANC presence in any regional state is a potential threat. They would thus want to see the ANC presence in Maputo drastically reduced if not altogether eliminated.

However, they would differ from maximalists in not necessarily favouring an attempt to overthrow the Maputo government. They would probably emphasise the risks to Pretoria of such a move - the prospect of being tied to supporting a puppet regime, with FRELIMO fighting in the bush. For minimalists, escalating destabilisation would be a means to change political behaviour, not political structures.

Possibly minimalists hope current pressures would force the Mozambican government to return to the Joint Security Commission (JSC) set up by the Nkomati Accord. Some sources suggest this is one of Pretoria's immediate goals.

Until recently, Mozambique's non-participation in the JSC (following the discovery of the Gorongosa documents) probably did not bother Pretoria much. The agenda of meetings would probably have consisted of a series of well substantiated Mozambican complaints about South African violations.

But since mid-1986, it has become clear that Pretoria wants a reduced ANC presence in Maputo, and wants a forum to raise 'complaints' on a regular basis.

Clearly, no-one in the regime would want the JSC to become a forum dominated by Mozambican complaints about continued South African support for the armed bandits. Nor would any member of the regime want it to become a forum in which the ANC presence in Maputo were traded off against South African support for the MNR.

The Pretoria regime needs more bandit activity, particularly around the Beira Corridor; it cannot afford to give this up even if Maputo offered concessions on the ANC. The minimalists might support an attempt to revive the JSC, but on different terms.

This might involve trying to extract a

the 8 October ban 'regretted' it 'had been found necessary' to take this step, but said it was not able to 'evaluate the security considerations on which the decision was based... The Chamber earnestly hopes that negotiations between the South African and Mozambican governments will lead to an early return to normality'.

Perhaps minimalists favour renewed attempts to use the JSC to 'suggest' or push for a 'negotiated settlement' between the Mozambican government and the MNR - a long-standing objective of Pretoria's Mozambican strategy.

But for maximalists such an outcome would not be enough. They appear to

believe overthrow of the FRELIMO government is essential if any of the major objectives of Pretoria's current regional strategy are to succeed. They would probably also argue that it would enable them to reduce their existing, increasingly costly, commitment to the MNR and re-deploy scarce resources on the domestic front.



**THE
LESOTHO
MODEL**

Precisely how would such forces go about overthrowing the Mozambican government?

The Lesotho coup of 20 January merits close study as a possible modus operandi. Despite occasional reports of contacts between the SADF and members of the Lesotho Defence Force,

the principal South African intervention in Lesotho did not involve direct plotting of the coup. Nor did Pretoria attempt to install its direct allies - the Lesotho Liberation Army.

Instead it applied economic and other pressures, pushing an already acute internal situation to the point of collapse. The result was that the new government was not seen as, and indeed was not, a mere puppet of Pretoria. Pretoria was not obliged immediately to



Mozambicans mourn a popular president

tacit understanding that the JSC confine itself to discussing alleged violations only from the territory of the signatories - an effective agreement that bandit activity from Malawi would be kept off the agenda. South Africa may then be prepared to trade reduction or elimination of ANC presence in Maputo for some resumption of migrant labour recruitment.

This seems to be what the Chamber of Mines may be proposing. Its statement on

step in and sustain it.

But the new Maseru government immediately conceded a number of Pretoria's demands, and has shown itself more susceptible to South African pressure than its predecessor.

Recent pressures against the Mozambican capital may, for the maximalists, play a similar function to the pressures against Lesotho Prime Minister Leabus Jonathan in January.

Attempts by both Pretoria and certain Western intelligence services to promote a negotiated settlement between the FRELIMO government and the MNR are now generally seen to have failed. From the maximalist point of view, intensified pressure would aim to push internal Mozambican contradictions to the point of social collapse.

For some time it has been obvious that Pretoria tries to target interventions at perceived contradictions in states which are destabilisation victims. In Lesotho there were obvious contradictions between a minority in the armed forces which supported the Basotho National Party Youth League, and the majority.

In Mozambique such obvious splits do not exist. But the literature of the MNR bandits (which to some extent probably reflects the views of the SADF) suggests that they see a potential contradiction between certain unspecified senior 'nationalist' figures in the Mozambican armed forces, more disposed to negotiate

with the MNR, and FRELIMO's political leadership, which is seen as intractable 'communists'. Recent statements by MNR spokesmen indicate that they consider that without Machel the two factions will not be able to hold together.



**A TESTING
TIME
AHEAD**

Machel's death (assuming that Pretoria had a hand in it) could represent a compromise between maximalists and minimalists. Removing the president may mean a change in political structures which might result in policy shifts, but would not involve the risks to Pretoria of a wholesale change of government. However that may be, in the medium term at least, some resumption of the intensified destabilisation campaign can be expected.

Whether this will take the form of an attempt to force the Mozambican government under a new president to enter negotiations on new, less favourable terms, or whether it will mean an attempt to provoke domestic contradictions to the point of rupture remains to be seen.

The FRELIMO leadership - now minus Machel - is in for a testing time, and will have to mobilise all the domestic and international support available if it is to weather the storm ahead.

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