

Fourth party congress-Cabinet reshuffle-Relations with South Africa-MNRM actions

EXTRACT

The South African Air Force conducted a raid into Mozambique on the morning of May 23, using Impala jet fighters to attack six alleged African National Congress (ANC) targets in the suburbs of Maputo, in retaliation after a ANC car bomb attack on the air force headquarters in Pretoria on May 20.

The bomb in Pretoria exploded during the afternoon rush hour, killing 19 people (including Black and White civilians as well as air force personnel) and wounding about 200. The ANC office in Lusaka (Zambia) declared in a statement on May 21 that “the escalating armed struggle imposed on us as a result of the apartheid regime will make itself felt among an increasing number of those who have chosen to serve in the enemy's forces of repression’, and on May 23 the ANC” military wing, the *Umkhonto we Sizwe*, formally claimed responsibility for the bomb attack.

Gen. Magnus Malan, the South African Defence Minister, said on May 23 that the retaliatory attack on Maputo “could never compensate for the cowardly bomb attack in a busy central area of Pretoria’ but that it would ‘at least demonstrate to the world and South Africa's enemies that South Africa (was) ready to act where and when necessary”. [For South African commando raid in January 1981 against alleged ANC headquarters in Mozambique see page 30889.]

Gen. Malan identified the six targets as the ANC command headquarters, where orders were issued for sabotage by and the briefing of guerrillas; “September House’, which was used as a headquarters for planning guerrilla actions in the rural areas of Transvaal province; “Gubaza's House”, where plans were drawn up for urban terrorism in Transvaal; ‘Maincamp”, at which the guerrillas stayed in transit before infiltrating into South Africa; and two logistical headquarters responsible for the supply of weapons and explosives.

The ANC office in Lusaka (Zambia) denied on May 23 that the organization had any military bases inside Mozambique and added the following day that the only way to “truly honour these victims of aggression [was] by intensifying our offensive within South Africa”.

A South African Defence Force [SADF] spokesman on May 24 declared that South Africa was “satisfied that the places hit were allocated to the ANC and were occupied by terrorists”, and he added that 17 Mozambican soldiers and six civilians had been killed as well as 41 ANC members. However, the Mozambican authorities claimed that only six people (three workers, a soldier, a pregnant woman and a child) had been killed and 40 wounded, almost all Mozambican citizens.

Journalists who were shown around the suburbs of Liberdade, Matola and Sial on May 24 reported that there was nothing to indicate that the targets of the South African raid were of military significance, and moreover the main damage was reported to have been inflicted at the Somopel jam factory in Matola, which was attacked just as workers were arriving in the morning. The SADF on May 24 condemned what it called “the attempt of the Government of Mozambique and the propaganda media to dismiss this attack as if it were directed against civilians”, but a SADF source admitted on the following day that the jam factory and a businessman's home had accidentally been shot up as a result of an overshoot on the only ANC target which escaped the South African jet fighters.

The South African raid was condemned internationally by both Western countries and the Soviet bloc, but Maj.-Gen. Chissano, after a meeting in New York with Sr Javier Perez de Cuellar, the UN Secretary-General, stated on May 24 that Mozambique would not ask for a UN security Council session to be called “because we have other ways to respond to provocations”. He declared that his Government would continue to support the ANC, but denied that Mozambique was in any way connected with ANC attacks inside South Africa.