

Don't again break this broken reed

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THE temptation in some quarters to put the boot squarely into the disintegrating form of what was once a country named Mozambique and a government called Frelimo must be enormous. It should be resisted; it would not only be gratuitous but dangerous. Let it be clearly said: in the litany of economic basket-cases, Mozambique, through its past socialist policies, rates a place near the top. The unutterable folly of these policies drove President Machel five years ago passionately to warn Zimbabwe's newly elected Prime Minister Mugabe *not* to follow Mozambique's economic model.

But this realisation in Maputo was already too late. Since the 1970s Mozambique has been caught between the hammer of white intransigence and the anvil of black resistance in its neighbouring countries. It has become Southern Africa's Poland.

These civil conflicts, proxy wars and warlords' wars shattered what Frelimo policies had left to be destroyed in the economy. They claimed thousands of lives and quarterised the country, so that Frelimo rules in Maputo and hardly anywhere else. The Renamo movement, meanwhile, can claim the territory it crosses and the small towns it temporarily seizes.

It is an equilibrium of terror, impotence and incompetence.

Neither (the key lesson for Pretoria hawks) would it improve the other way round. Frelimo would take to the bush, where it would quickly relearn the guerrilla strategies it has so obviously forgotten while in power — and under Soviet military tutelage. Renamo, meanwhile, appears to have little effective political strength or savvy and, if informed sources are to be believed, even less political integrity than the present incumbents. *A luta continua.*

Renamo has built up the capacity to challenge but not to usurp, while Maputo has the power to repress but not to quash. This impasse serves neither the interests of Mozambique nor the region.

The alternative is easy to state but difficult to achieve. The only hope is twofold. Both sides must bow to the overwhelming futility of the war, begin talking and lay the groundwork for the economic "re-colonisation" of the territory by the tens of thousands of Portuguese-Africans only too keen to return.

And Pretoria must accept the role of helping to reconstitute a united Mozambique, thereby forswearing any short-term, tactical temptations to destroy what is left of that pitiable place.