

After Angola — Mozambique

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South Africa's Department of Foreign Affairs, flushed with the success of the Angola-Namibia settlement, is poised to launch a new diplomatic offensive in Africa.

The starting point is Mozambique where Renamo rebels are waging a destructive bush war over large areas of the country. Foreign Minister Pik Botha has written to the US administration offering South Africa's help in ending the conflict, and he also expects the Soviet Union to play the same constructive role that it played in Angola. But Botha is essentially seeking a settlement that will reinforce the diplomatic gains South Africa made over the Angola-Namibia settlement and persuade more African governments to open their doors to Pretoria's diplomats.

Diplomats for Africa

Front File understands that Botha has appointed a number of new diplomats in anticipation of strengthening South Africa's diplomatic links with black Africa. Malawi is at the moment the only African country that has diplomatic relations with Pretoria. Some African experts think Botha is being over-optimistic.

South Africa's relations with black Africa are conducted on three levels: technical (supplying vaccines, etc) — at this level relations are satisfactory; diplomatic — since the Angola-Namibia talks diplomatic exchanges have become much easier; public exchanges — an uphill struggle as African leaders still feel compelled to denounce Pretoria's policies. Little

progress has been made on this rhetorical level.

African countries trade with South Africa, including those who support international sanctions against Pretoria. Trade with Africa now accounts for R4 billion (just under £1 billion) or 10% of South Africa's total trade. Last year, the country had one million black visitors, including migrant labourers. No fewer than 150,000 visas were issued to Zimbabweans (whites and blacks) many for one-day shopping sprees.

In recent years Pretoria's diplomats have emphasized that South Africa's route to the rest of the world lies through Africa. This year will see the most determined application yet of this strategy. A Pretoria source told Front File: 'We will get a much better deal from black Africa than from the US Congress'.

The Department of Foreign Affairs is holding a major conference in Pretoria on April 17-18 to brief the business sector, academics and others on South Africa's increasing involvement with black Africa. Briefings will also be given at South African embassies. South Africa is also opening up a new area of relations: it will offer environmental assistance to African countries. It will help stock a game park in the Ivory Coast and train wardens.

Renamo is the Key

Mozambique, however, is the key to South Africa's new strategy. Pretoria accepts that its relations with Mozambique have become the litmus

test of its claim that it wants to bring peace to Southern Africa. This means it must convince the world that it is no longer supporting the Renamo rebels. The belief that South Africa still supports Renamo persists in some quarters. International businessmen interested in investing in Mozambique are deterred by reports that South Africa supports Renamo.

The Department of Foreign Affairs, Front File learns, is determined in 1989 to 'bury the ghost of support for Renamo'. Although before the 1984 Nkomati Accord the South African Defence Force (SADF) gave some support to Renamo, South Africa claims that it no longer does so. The Mozambique Information Office still refers regularly to 'South African backed banditry', and in January Co-Operation Minister Jacinto Veloso referred to the 'technically well organized terrorist operation of destabilisation waged from outside the country'.

South African government sources claim that in spite of the official position, Mozambique admits privately that it does not believe South Africa is aiding Renamo (some sources have suggested that the aid is being given 'unofficially' by middle echelons of the SADF). South African spokesmen claim that if they were supporting Renamo, it would have better equipment. At the moment, Renamo has no transport, 'only a few rusty AK 47s', no mortars and no RPGs (rocket propelled grenades).

The SADF and Mozambique's Frelimo army conduct joint patrols along the entire length of the South Africa-Mozambique border, and meet daily at Komatipoort to exchange information. The Mozambique government sent investigators to the Comores Islands (reputedly a South African staging post), but found no evidence that Renamo was receiving support from there.

Pretoria diplomats believe that President Joaquim Chissano's government is ready to participate in the new South African peace initiative. They say Mozambique has experienced a relationship with the 'ideological' East and, more recently, with the 'ideological' West, and has come

to the conclusion now that South Africa is its only hope. 'We are ready', the diplomats say, 'to make Mozambique a priority'.

The term 'ideological' East and West is a reference to the (alleged) ideological aims of these blocs. Pretoria takes the view that the West is pouring money unproductively into Mozambique, whereas South African investment would be more effective — SAPPI are re-opening their paper mill outside the capital Maputo, and Natal sugar interests are also showing an interest in Mozambique.

According to a Pretoria diplomat, an Angolan ambassador told him at a recent international conference that the West might not want South Africa and black Africa to

come to an understanding, because it would not be in the West's economic interests.

Pretoria expects its peace initiative in Mozambique to encounter difficulties, but it believes it can succeed. It says a meeting was set up with the Renamo leader

Afonso Dhlakama, but he failed to turn up. However, Pretoria believes the Chissano government would be willing to 'accommodate' Renamo, although Pretoria's assessment of Renamo is that it has no common structures or communications, and that it consists of a number of regional war-lords. Nevertheless, Renamo operates over tracts of Mozambique and prevents the government exercising its writ over large areas.

A Mozambique government minister told a South African businessman that Frelimo was ineffective because there was no money to pay the army. He said that with R100m (about £25m) the army could be paid and the Renamo problem largely resolved.

South Africa points out that Mozambique's economy generally is in deep trouble. Beira, the second port, is virtually a ghost town, with 104 locomotives out of order and only two or three cranes working in the port. South Africa wants to assist in the international rehabilitation of Beira, duplicating its experience with Maputo. □