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COMMENT:

PEACE MOVES ON MOZAMBIQUE

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The Nkomati Accord between South Africa and Mozambique was signed five years ago yesterday. Developments since then have shown that governments with vastly different political policies can work together in the mutual interests of their countries and of Southern Africa. In the intervening five years, South Africa also became involved in contacts with Angola, Mozambique's sister state, in negotiating a peace accord for south-western Africa. The fruits of this peace accord, formalized last December after many months of painstaking diplomacy, are currently being seen in the transition of South West Africa to independence. And there is hope that the second leg of the peace accord - the end of the civil war in Angola - will now be addressed in earnest, with foreign ministers of Angola and five of her neighbours meeting in Harare on Monday to investigate ways of ending the civil war.

South Africa's rôle in the south-western African peace initiative was not only vital - it was indispensable. Moreover, it established finally South Africa's position as the regional power in Southern Africa. And the course of events during and following the protracted negotiations between South Africa, Angola, Cuba and the United States have abundantly demonstrated South Africa's bona fides towards her neighbours in Southern Africa. It is perhaps no coincidence that in the last six months or so there has been an acceleration in diplomatic and trade contacts between South Africa and Mozambique - a period coinciding with the successful outcome of the south-western African peace initiative.

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In the climate of co-operation and trust that has been created, there are now initiatives afoot to bring peace to Mozambique, which, like Angola, has been torn asunder by a devastating civil war. Mr Pik Botha, South Africa's Minister of Foreign Affairs, suggested last December that a peace initiative similar to that undertaken in south-western Africa should be attempted to end the civil war in Mozambique. The United States, which mediated in south-western Africa, is known to be ready to offer her good offices if formally approached. At her meeting with Mr Pik Botha in London this week, Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher of Britain said her Government would regard it as a major step forward with immense positive potential for the whole of Southern Africa if the civil war in Mozambique could be ended. Mozambique's response has been cautious but it has not been without interest in Mr Botha's suggestion.

To this mix of contributions by interested parties has been added an apparently constructive contribution by the Soviet Union, which has a strong diplomatic presence in Southern Africa. Moscow has given several indications of late that it will support a negotiated settlement rather than a military solution of regional problems in Southern Africa. The most emphatic expression of policy in this regard came this week from the Head of the African Affairs Department in the Soviet Foreign Ministry, Mr Yuri Yukalov, who said that the situation in South Africa should be approached through political means and not military means. This is a direct repudiation of the tactics of the African National Congress.

As was demonstrated in the south-western African peace initiative, outside powers can play their rôle but the final solutions must be provided by the governments of Southern Africa. As the success of the peace initiative in south-western Africa is built upon, there are now hopes that a new era is about to dawn, as well, in south-eastern Africa.