

## MOZAMBIQUE/SOUTH AFRICA

# Change of heart or tactics?

by a Special Correspondent

PRETORIA's first ever formal security agreement with an independent African state, which was signed on 16 March by Prime Minister Botha and President Machel of Mozambique, upsets the form book spectacularly. Quite simply, there has never been anything like it, and nothing like it seemed possible even six months ago. After a series of talks covering a wide range of issues in their bilateral relations (see AFRICA No. 151), apartheid South Africa and socialist Mozambique have reached an agreement which both sides claim as a victory.

The signing of the 'Nkomati Accord', named after the river which forms part of the border between Mozambique and South Africa, brings to a close a period of intensive and hard negotiations which started on 20 December 1983 with a meeting at ministerial level in Mbabane, capital of Swaziland. The negotiations almost broke down then. The South Africans, used to buying the reluctant cooperation of black neighbours, found themselves confronted with a long list of acts of aggression and destabilization, a demand to end their undeclared war against Mozambique, and the assertion of such a security agreement as a pre-condition of any economic arrangements. They turned abusive and stormed out, and it was only when tempers had cooled that negotiations got under way.

There followed parallel discussions in Maputo and Pretoria on 16 January, further talks in Maputo on 20 February and Cape Town on 2 March, and tripartite talks involving Portugal, on the Cabora Bassa dam and South African purchases of its electricity, in Lisbon in mid-February and Cape Town a few weeks later.

At the centre of the talks has been the question of the Mozambique National Resistance (MNR) and the African National Congress (ANC). The South African Government has never acknowledged its patronage of the MNR, although this is widely accepted as fact by knowledgeable observers. But if Pretoria honours the new pact, MNR sabotage, looting and pillaging, which have plagued nearly all of Mozambique's ten provinces over the past four years, will cease, as will the organization's broadcasts from transmitters in the Northern Transvaal.

Since all this activity has been masterminded by the South African military, and its effects have been highly damaging to the rural economy and regional road

and rail communications, its renunciation represents for Mozambique by far the single biggest gain of the talks. Scepticism remains about Pretoria's good faith, but as the broad lines of the agreement will be out in the open, words can be compared with deeds and South Africa's many critics will be watching keenly.

## Promises

To achieve the agreement, Mozambique has had to promise not to allow its territory to be used for the preparation or launching of armed struggle inside South Africa by the ANC. This undertaking has been deeply distasteful for the Frelimo leadership to give. Having won power through an armed struggle themselves against Portuguese colonialism, and having backed the armed struggle of the Zimbabweans to the hilt, even to the point of sending volunteers to fight with the ZANLA forces inside the country, and at tremendous cost in terms of reprisals, Frelimo leaders are well aware of the importance of armed struggle in dislodging White minority, colonial-type regimes. But they clearly feel that they will do neither themselves nor the ANC any good in the long term if they allowed the South African-backed MNR to bleed the country to the point of economic and political collapse.

Refusing still to equate the ANC and the MNR, the Mozambican leadership have by hard negotiation preserved their right to continue to give political, moral

and diplomatic support to the ANC, including an open presence of the ANC in Mozambique.

The monitoring of these aspects of the agreement is undoubtedly one of the most sensitive of the follow-up questions. In the course of negotiations it became clear that South Africa's capacity to halt MNR activity is much greater than Mozambique's to patrol its lengthy borders with a view to preventing the crossing of ANC guerrillas. Leaving aside any wider considerations such as a possible policy switch by the Pretoria military back to aggression and destabilization, the viability of the pact will depend in no small measure on how the monitoring arrangements work in practice.

South Africa has also failed to get any Mozambican commitment to enter into diplomatic relations, although the Frelimo leaders know that the very fact of an agreement implies a degree of recognition which Pretoria will undoubtedly seek to use, both to cement its alliances with its major Western partners and to cajole other Frontline and neighbouring states into closer relations. But Mozambique has kept its allies informed along the way, and Prime Minister Mugabe has welcomed the agreement, reflecting Zimbabwe's direct interest in the restoration of stability on its eastern flank, which will in turn make it less dependent on lines of communication running through South Africa.

Coming in the same period as the Angola-South Africa-US agreement on a South African withdrawal from southern Angola, the pact gave rise to much speculation as to some major regional realignment of forces. In fact, the processes leading to the agreements on both sides of the continent were quite separate, with only Pretoria as the common factor. ●



Meeting in Maputo...South African Foreign Minister Botha (centre) and Mozambique's Minister for Economic Affairs, Jacinto Veloso (right)