

A message for Machel

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No doubt Marxist Mozambique believes it has a manifest destiny to "free" South Africa. But it should remember that people who play hard ball must expect to get hurt.

With the number of terrorist attacks on SA on the increase — almost certainly mounted from Mozambican territory — it will have only itself to blame if SA crosses its borders once more to strike back.

Mozambique claims that SA troops are massing on its frontiers in preparation for an attack. And while there is no reason to doubt the SA Defence Force response that there are no unusual troop movements in the area, it is common cause that a stronger military presence is being systematically built up along the border. And so it should be. This month alone there have been three separate incidents in which property has been destroyed and people killed.

On November 2 came the attack on a fuel depot in northern Zululand. Days later two policemen were wounded and three gunmen were shot dead during follow-up operations the next day. Finally, police and military targets were hit at Tonga near the border south of Komatipoort on Saturday.

Yet Mozambique still sees fit to term the SADF response a threat to its "sovereignty and territorial integrity." Previously it has spoken of "invasion," but the real truth is that SA is doing no more than its duty to protect its own citizens. Indeed, it would be remiss not to do so.

Any direct action by SA, far from threatening Mozambique itself, would be aimed at the ANC and the violent means it has chosen to try to force its will upon this country.

The more intelligent response, we suggest, would be for Mozambique to act — and be seen to act — against those who use its territory as a base for their attacks on SA.

SA has lost patience before, and will probably lose patience again. Claims from Maputo that Mozambique knows nothing about the latest terrorist attack on a police station and servicemen's quarters near Komatipoort could well be true. The more relevant question is whether it is doing anything to pre-empt a recurrence. If not, SA can hardly be blamed for doing the job itself.

Certainly the Machel government's denials of complicity in the Sasol sabotage affair last year were cut short when a South African strike force established beyond doubt that the attack was masterminded from Joe Slovo's Maputo headquarters.

Mozambique, of course, counter-claims that SA is attempting to destabilise the country through support of the resistance movement in its northern provinces. That re-

mains open to doubt but, if true, such action is ill-advised — unless there are telling reasons of which the public is not aware.

There are also stories that an anti-Frelimo radio station is operating with official approval somewhere in the eastern Transvaal.

SA's best course — which it has pursued with limited success — is to demonstrate that as the superpower of southern Africa it can be a major force for good.

And its strongman status in the region — both economically and militarily — is something that Machel would be well advised to note before pursuing a policy of confrontation.

After all, if SA does finally decide to use to the full the muscle it possesses, it will be doing no more than Mozambique's Soviet patrons have done for decades. It is basic to Russian thinking that it should be left free to deal with problems in its area of influence without interference from anyone, especially the West.

Indeed, in case the point is missed, the Soviets have formalised suzerainty over their communist satellites in the Brezhnev Doctrine.

Some will say that it goes no further than the Monroe Doctrine adopted by the US 160 years ago. But few will need reminding how easily the Russians have thus far been able to counter dissidence in the Communist bloc — troops and battalions of tanks into Hungary and Czechoslovakia; invasion of Afghanistan; and threatening troop movements on the borders of Poland.

The FM does not suggest that SA should adopt a similarly belligerent stance in southern Africa. What we do say is that Mozambique, and any other neighbouring state tempted to indulge the violent option, should take cognisance of the realities of their situations.

Thankfully, most states in the region have already done so. Both Swaziland and Botswana, while accepting refugees, are not prepared to host the militants. Lesotho and Zimbabwe display greater hostility at the rhetoric level, but they, too, have stopped short of allowing terrorist attacks. The time has come for Mozambique to do the same. Already it relies on South African economic strength to prevent a slide into national insolvency. SA runs its main harbour, props its railway system, employs its people and buys its goods.

Like the rest of black Africa, it has deep-rooted objections to SA's race policies. So does the FM. But change must come through persuasion. The violent alternative is one that cannot win.

