

Living With Neighbors

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By Anthony Lewis

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MAPUTO, Mozambique, Jan. 19 — Last Dec. 17 two members of the Mozambique Government met the South African Foreign Minister, R.F. Botha, and others in Komatipoort, just across the border in South Africa. One of the Mozambicans was Sergio Viera, a long-time confidant of President Samora Machel who is now Minister of Agriculture. In a conversation today Mr. Viera said his side had put forward three principles in Komatipoort.

"First," he said, "we want to promote peaceful coexistence with all countries, regardless of their systems.

"Second, we want good relations with all our neighbors, regardless of their systems.

"Third, we demand — and we shall do the same — total respect for the sovereignty of each country and its territorial integrity. We don't interfere in any country."

South Africa is so disproportionately strong that one question is what Mozambique could offer it as a quid pro quo to stop its destabilization campaign. The answer may be that South Africa wants restraints on the activities of the main anti-apartheid organization, the African National Congress.

Mozambique has always said that there are no A.N.C. training or transit camps here. But South Africa has called this country a "springboard for terrorism," and two years ago a South African force entered Mozambique and killed A.N.C. members in Matola, a few miles from this capital.

All this gives significance to Mr. Viera's principle of mutual respect for borders and sovereignty. He made a further comment relevant to the effort to get South Africa to end its support of the anti-Government guerrillas.

"We don't like apartheid," Mr. Viera said, "but it's not up to us to change it. It's up to the people of South Africa."

Diplomats here say that Mozambique will certainly continue to accept A.N.C. members as refugees. It has recently taken in some who escaped the bloody South African raid on Maseru, Lesotho, for example. But the diplomats note what look like signals of less rhetorical support. The A.N.C. president, Oliver Tambo, was here for six days last month without being able to meet President Machel.

Mr. Viera was asked whether there had been any sign of a response from South Africa since the Komatipoort meeting. He said the number of South African supply flights to the M.R.M. had decreased.

On the other hand, he said, the number of M.R.M. guerrillas infiltrated from South Africa by land has increased. Diplomats, reporting the same phenomenon, suggest that South Africa may be emptying guerrilla training camps in the Eastern Transvaal so that American or other foreign observers can be taken there, as part of a verification program, and shown that nothing is going on.

The United States is encouraging the contacts between Mozambique and South Africa, hoping to head off spreading violence in the whole region. Zimbabwe has already been badly affected by the South African campaign here.

U.S.-Mozambique relations are improving at the same time, after a bad period since four Americans were expelled in March 1981 as intelligence agents. Last Thursday Chester Crocker, Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs, had a long meeting with President Machel that observers described as effective. A full American mission is likely to be restored here before long, and there is even a possibility that Mozambique will open an embassy in Washington for the first time.

Mozambique has always taken a pragmatic view on talking with South Africa. It will hold meetings like the one at Komatipoort, while by contrast, Robert Mugabe's Government in Zimbabwe refuses to have any political contacts with Pretoria.

The question is whether South Africa in the long run will allow a Mozambique where people of all colors are treated equally to prosper. On that, officials here believe the United States could make a difference by pressing South Africa. Would that have to be done in public? I asked Mr. Viera. "Absolutely not," he replied. "We don't ask for Las Vegas. There is no need for that."