

South Africa's pact with Mozambique is one year old and in ruins. It appears to have achieved nothing. JOSEPH HANLON reports

The war of attrition behind a screen of peace

SOUTH Africa's greatest diplomatic triumph, its non-aggression pact with Mozambique, is on the verge of collapse. Mozambican and South African leaders met yesterday for the first time since President Samora Machel publicly accused Pretoria of violating the Nkomati Accord, which they signed only a year ago.

Mr Machel staked his personal prestige, both internally and internationally, on his belief that South Africa would at least partially honour the accord. For ten months, he stuck to his view that Pretoria's top leadership was abiding by the deal, despite all the contrary evidence and the growing pressure from his own government and other Front Line leaders. He blamed continued violations on splits in the South African government or elements within the army acting against government instructions.

It was not until last month that the President admitted publicly that the South African

government itself was ignoring the accord. And only last week did he finally join with other Front Line States in labelling the accord a failure. Tanzanian President Julius Nyerere was speaking for all the Front Line States after their meeting last Friday in Lusaka when he said that the Nkomati pact "had not achieved anything."

Under the accord, Mozambique agreed to expel most African National Congress members, while South Africa agreed to end its support for the Mozambique National Resistance (MNR or Renamo).

Frelimo peremptorily and publicly tossed out the ANC. But South Africa actually stepped up its support of the MNR. The audacity of Pretoria was shown by its duping not only Machel, but European leaders as well. It was on the basis of Nkomati that Prime Minister (now State President) P.W. Botha made his triumphal tour of Europe last June.

Yet the signing of Nkomati was marked by an increase in support for the MNR and the launching of an assault on Maputo, which had previously been shielded. More than one thousand trained MNR men were sent over the South African border and paratroops were dropped near the capital, according to the Mozambican government.

The electricity line from South Africa to Maputo was cut for the first time by sabotage teams now believed to have contained white officers. When Mr Botha was receiving his red carpet treatment in London, air drops to the MNR near Maputo reportedly reached record levels.

By late last year, Maputo was loosely encircled by the MNR with sporadic incidents in outer suburbs creating tension and demoralisation.

Nevertheless, the capital is not under siege. It is still reasonably well supplied with food. People still travel,

but with trepidation, as all the roads and railways leading out of Maputo are regularly attacked.

However, Nkomati did lead South Africa to internationalise support for the MNR. Supplies now also come from West Germany and Portugal, with the support of minority parties in both government coalitions (CSU and CSD respectively). They then go to Mozambique via Malawi as well as through Saudi Arabia and then the Comoros.

By December, the last month for which data is available from security sources, there were only two confirmed air drops to the MNR from South Africa, compared to eight from Malawi and two from the Comoros. But there were regular border crossings from South Africa and continued drops of supplies by South African boats.

Perhaps most disappointing and worrying to all the Front Line States has been the role of the United States,

Britain, and Portugal. They pushed Mozambique into signing Nkomati and implied they would serve as guarantors. In practice they have done nothing to put pressure on South Africa, despite Mozambique joining the IMF and making other obvious signs of new openings towards the West. Indeed, the Portuguese government has allowed stepped up support for the MNR from Lisbon.

And some Front Line States are now privately worried about the role of the United States. They point out that US influence is sufficiently strong in both Malawi and Saudi Arabia that MNR support could not continue without at least tacit US approval, and may actually have active CIA involvement.

It seems that Mozambique's readiness to sign Nkomati, followed by the increased success of the MNR, has led some in South Africa and the West to feel that substantial further concessions can be extracted. Last month, the Mozambican government-run weekly Magazine Tempo said that it was apparent that South Africa's allies would pressure it to support Nkomati only if Mozambique swallowed certain "pills" that those allies have in their "political packages."

Frelimo is left with few options. It could turn to the East bloc and friendly African states for military help. But the Angolan experience is that even this is insufficient to drive out Pretoria's forces and only increases US support for South Africa.

Or Frelimo could try to negotiate with the MNR. Not only is the leadership implacably and unanimously opposed to this, but it is unclear who to negotiate with. There is no dominant central figure like Unita's Jonas Savimbi, and it seems that various factions of the MNR are loyal to different internal and South African commanders, and only a few to the Portuguese leadership involved in talks last October.

Ironically, then, Frelimo goes into the new talks with Foreign Minister, Pik Botha knowing that its best hope is now the anti-apartheid movement in the West. The only chance to salvage Nkomati is that South Africa will have to make some concessions to head off the growing disinvestment campaign in the United States and oil boycott campaign in Holland.

Even then, perhaps the best Mozambique can hope for is that South Africa will ease off the pressure on Maputo and southern Mozambique. It is there that the MNR is still directly supplied from South Africa and still under Pretoria's direct control, and it is only there that South Africa has economic interests. Ending the war in the north will require agreement of Germany, Portugal, and the United States, and the swallowing of more "pills" than simply joining the IMF.