

# Banda's policies under fire

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**MALAWI's support for the Mozambique National Resistance has brought it into direct confrontation with the frontline states who insist that it should give positive indication by deeds as well as words that it had changed its stance, or trouble may follow *Mkwapatira Mhango* reports.**

South African Foreign Minister Roelof "Pik" Botha told a news conference in Pretoria early November that a document, proving that Mozambique and Zimbabwe plotted to overthrow the government of Malawi, written in Portuguese, was found amid the wreckage of President Machel's plane. According to the document, Machel and a nine-man high-

powered Zimbabwean delegation led by Security Minister Emmerson Munangagwa, met in Maputo on October 16, three days before Machel died, to plot the overthrow of the Malawi government and to destroy its road links with its neighbouring countries.

The document, which was translated into English, gave a verbatim transcript of the alleged

meeting. It quoted Machel as saying "Banda was worn out". "Let us win the whole of the Malawi population... we can organise a Malawi liberation front, equip it and infiltrate into Malawi in order to destroy the Mozambique National Resistance (MNR) bandits who are there... we will close the border with Malawi", Machel was quoted as saying.

Munangagwa was then said to have told the meeting: "It is possible to destroy bridges and roads linking Malawi to Tanzania and Zambia. Initially, it would be done under the pretext of repairing bridges and roads. That is a political matter; to conquer the people of Malawi and tell them that we have solidarity with them and not with their government."

South Africa immediately warned Mozambique and Zimbabwe saying the whole of southern Africa would suffer and pay a heavy price if such plans were put into operation. Pik Botha said South Africa wanted to know whether the new Mozambican President Joaquim Chissano approved of the plan to overthrow the government of Malawi.

Then in a bitter attack on Zimbabwe, which has led the campaign for economic sanctions against Pretoria, Botha charged that Prime Minister Robert Mugabe's government "eagerly took part in the plotting and drawing up of this conspiracy of aggression and violence".

### False claims

Both Mozambique and Zimbabwe scoffed at these South African claims. Mozambique said the Pretoria claims were a vulgar attempt to turn the victim into the accused, while the *Voice of Zimbabwe* described the claims as baseless and unfounded. But the real question is whether such a meeting could have taken place to discuss the overthrow of the Banda regime.

Political events preceding the death of Machel indicate that a meeting did actually take place. A month before Machel died, he had threatened to close his 1,500km border with Malawi and equip it with tanks, artillery and missiles if Malawi did not stop supporting the MNR rebels.

Then on September 17, Machel arrived in Tete Province, on the border, and immediately launched a scathing attack saying that he wanted war with Malawi.

"Let the enemy show himself rapidly", declared Machel, apparently referring to Malawi. "We prefer an open war to a



The late President Samora Machel made a special trip to Malawi to dissuade Banda (right) from supporting the MNR

clandestine one. If they want war then let them say so. We want clear targets so that we can defeat them."

Machel brought his military experts to Tete so that they could study where best to place defensive equipment along the Malawian border. Tete is one of the three Mozambican provinces that border Malawi and has been a frequent target of MNR operations which are launched from Malawian soil.

Early October the Frontline states - Angola, Botswana, Mozambique, Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe, met in Maputo to discuss the threat posed by MNR to the Mozambican government and destabilisation acts on these countries by South Africa. At the end of the heads of state summit the chairman, President Kenneth Kaunda, issued a statement which clearly indicated that the Frontline states - collectively or individually - might one-day take tough action against Malawi.

Kaunda told a Press conference in Maputo that if Malawi was not checked, it would also support dissidents in Zambia and Tanzania. And at a joint news conference on the Zimbabwean side of the Victoria Falls, Kaunda and Zimbabwe Prime Minister Robert Mugabe clearly threatened Malawi and asked it to cooperate with them to wage an effective war against apartheid.

Mugabe told the joint news conference that if Malawi was true to its word when it claimed no collusion with MNR, then it should use its security forces to seal off the border and stop these clandestine activities. Malawi should show that it was prepared to take positive measures.

Mugabe said the presence of MNR and their South African military advisors on Malawi soil was enough reason for any

government to send security forces to border areas being used by rebels to attack a neighbour because the MNR rebels with support from South Africa and Malawi were actually escalating their war offensive against Mozambique.

In a bid to humiliate the Mozambican national army, the MNR rebels carried out a massive joint operation with South African commandos against Mozambican soldiers who were guarding their border with Malawi at the end of September. The MNR and South African commandos attacked the Mozambican border guards from the rear and forced them into Malawi where they were arrested by waiting Malawian soldiers.

But in a deliberately calculated gesture of goodwill, the Malawi government handed back to Mozambique the 1,500 Mozambican soldiers who had become temporary prisoners of war in Malawi. The hand-over ceremony took place at the Malawi/Mozambique border of Mwanza-Zombwe, about 100km from Blantyre, in three phases. The first ceremony was held on October 1, when a senior Malawi police officer handed over 400 Mozambican soldiers together with their weapons.

### Weapons seized

These weapons included machine-guns, bazookas, rocket launchers, pistols, rifles and ammunition. The regional army commander of Zombwe, Arnold Fungulani, received the soldiers on behalf of the Mozambique government. Similar ceremonies took place at the same venue on October 3, when 700 soldiers were handed over and on October 6, when another 416 soldiers were taken back to Mozambique.

The humiliation of the Mozambi-

can soldiers might have been planned by South Africa, Malawi and MNR as a warning to Mozambique and other Frontline states as to what would happen to them if they attacked Malawi. Malawi is the only country in Africa which maintains diplomatic relations and a military and defence pact agreement with South Africa which gives it a high sense of security.

But Malawi's security has been threatened in the past by its own dissident exiles. In 1965, an ex-minister of education, the late Henry Chipembere, led a bush war against the Banda regime. He fought gallantly before he was driven away. Another ex-minister of Home affairs, the late Yatuta Chisiza, invaded Malawi with a fire-eating band of guerrillas who had been trained in China, Cuba, Algeria and Tanzania. He fought a pitched battle before he was killed and some of his men fled away to Zambia.

Both the Chipembere and Chisiza incursions were ill-prepared affairs and were crushed with ease. But since then, Malawian exiles who live in Zambia, Tanzania and Zimbabwe have been trying to build a viable external force to join hands with the oppressed Malawians inside the country with a view to toppling the Banda regime by force of arms.

There are three opposition movements MAFREMO, the Malawi Freedom Movement now led by Dr Edward Yapwantha, who is a lawyer by training, and LESOMA, the Socialist League of Malawi headed by Mr Grey Kamunyambeni. A third opposition party is led by ex-Malawi minister of external affairs Kanyama Chiume. All the three are operating from the Tanzanian capital of Dar es Salaam. They have all stepped up their activities in view of the recent developments.

A leader of one of these parties is reported to have made an extensive tour of the Frontline states recently explaining his party's position and programme and also trying to win moral support. His party has also launched a military wing known as the Malawi National Liberation Army (MANLA). It is not yet known whether this party has received funding or started the recruitment campaign. But sources close to the party speak with authority and new found confidence.

As if to neutralise the external threat Banda, in September, sent his own-chosen heir-apparent, former Governor of the Reserve Bank of Malawi, John Tembo, to tour Mozambique, Zambia and Zim-

babwe, to deny Malawi's involvement with MNR. This was Tembo's first external mission to neighbouring countries and gave a clear indication of Malawi's fear of reprisals.

Immediately after the death of Machel, bad feeling against Malawi culminated in violent demonstrations and stoning of Malawi embassies in Maputo and Harare. In Lusaka, it was only swift action by police that prevented a crowd of enraged demonstrators from damaging property at the Malawi High Commission. This was the

first time Malawi had been subjected to public hostility in the neighbouring countries, and it could mark a permanent shift in the bilateral relations.

However, all the three Malawian parties in exile have clearly stated that Banda and Malawi are internal problems which must be solved within the borders of Malawi and Malawians themselves. They believe that given the necessary material and moral support, they could stop Banda's support for MNR and topple him from power. ■

**John Tembo (left) the heir apparent in Malawi, was sent to put his country's case to the Frontline states**

