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THE South African government has violated the Nkomati non-aggression accord it signed with Mozambique in 1984 by airlifting journalists into parts of Mozambique occupied by the MNR bandits.

The latest such incident was reported in a recent issue of the New York Times. Times correspondent John Battersby wrote on his own illegal trip into Mozambique where he claims to have interviewed bandit chief Afonso Dhlakama somewhere in the central district of Gorongosa. His piece is datelined "Gorongosa district July 28".

Unlike several other journalists who have written of trips with the MNR, Battersby explained how he got there. The trip was arranged in Washington through an ultra-right organisation called Freedom Incorporation.

Then all Battersby, and three other journalists had to do was catch a plane from Johannesburg airport. The plane crossed the border and a few hours later landed at a bandit-controlled airstrip in central Mozambique.

Naturally, this is all disguised as a private operation — Battersby said the plane was chartered through a Freedom Incorporation luminary called Harry Schultz: but, whether Battersby is aware of it or not, such flights cannot take place without the knowledge and consent of the South African authorities.

South African airports are well-organised places with tight security. Pilots do not just fly in and out of them as they like. Presumably Battersby's pilot had to file a flight plan with the control tower.

This means that he either filed a flash flight plan, or that the South African aviation authorities were well aware of his intention to violate Mozambican airspace. Pilots who file flash flight plans are usually in a lot of trouble — unless somebody powerful (the South African military, for instance) is backing them up.

Furthermore, there is no chance of any plane slipping over the border into Mozambique undetected. The Mozambique/South Africa border is a highly sensitive bit of airspace. Shortly after the Nkomati Accord, the Mozambican authorities complained of low-flying aircraft entering Mozambique from South Africa illegally.

The South African response, announced by Defence Minister General Magnus Malan himself, was to declare the entire eastern Transvaal border area "spe-

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cial restricted airspace". Malan added that "all possible technological aids are being used to ensure its effectiveness".

The then Air Force chief, Lt-Gen Denis Earp, announced that all pilots would need official permission to fly in this area, which extended from the Limpopo River to the Swaziland border. Earp's statement was carried in full by the pro-government South African daily The Citizen on March 21 1985.

The general's order gave the exact co-ordinates of the area which pilots needed special permission to enter.

As far as the Mozambican news agency (AIM) is aware, this order is still in force. (If it has been quietly cancelled, that would constitute clear official encouragement for MNR airdrops).

In addition, the South Africans say they installed a "special low-altitude radar network" along the border with Mozambique to detect unauthorised flights. For-

eign Minister Roelof Botha publicly boasted of this system's capabilities also in March 1985.

Here is how the Johannesburg Sunday Times of March 17 1985, gave the story: "Mr Botha said a special low-altitude radar network had been set up by South Africa along the border with Mozambique and had become operational on March 8. He said this was done to monitor low-flying aircraft which Mozambican officials said were entering their country from South Af-

rica without identification or flight plans."

In other words, there are at least three ways through which the South African authorities must have known about the journey made by Battersby and his friends. First, through the Johannesburg control tower, second through their military control over airspace in the border area, and third through their low-altitude radars.

Presumably there was also radio contact between South Africa and the MNR airstrip

where Battersby landed in order to inform the bandits that the plane was on its way. Such contact is also a violation of the Nkomati Accord.

The only conclusion to be drawn is that the flight happened because the South Africans wanted it to happen.

It is also fairly clear why this journey took place. Pretoria, using a front company, was ferrying a reporter from one of the most prestigious papers in the United States into zones occupied by the MNR surrogates, in a desperate attempt to repair the damage done by the devastating report on MNR atrocities released earlier this year by the US State Department.

They were not entirely successful. Battersby's article is far from a eulogy of the MNR, and his mention of his mode of transport, wittingly or otherwise, lays bare once again the MNR's South African connection. — Zlana-AIM.