

SA-MOZAMBIQUE RELATIONS

Looking at the links

The current round of talks between SA and Mozambique makes a lot of sense in two respects. Firstly, the countries can offer many reciprocal economic benefits to each other. Secondly, SA is demonstrating that it can play a conciliatory role in southern Africa — when it wants to, and, of course, from a position of strength.

Over the past few years there have been indications that sections of the Frelimo leadership — including President Samora Machel — have regretted the flight of skills and investment that came with independence.

Yet, the brute fact remained that Mozambique's choice of a socialist future condemned its efforts at reconstruction to the wastepaper basket. A low-scale, but vicious, civil war developed; and tolerance of the presence of ANC militants on Mozambican soil invited pre-emptive and retaliatory strikes from SA. Yet, the dialogue between the

two countries never broke down. SA's citizens, to put it at a quite basic level, have wanted to travel to Mozambique, and do business there. And Maputo has had to weigh up the frightening costs of its deteriorating links — rail, energy, food — with Pretoria.

The price of restoring those links will be to exclude the ANC from its soil and to become, in effect, a weak link in the chain of frontline states.

In the wider sphere, while SA will be seen to be holding out a hand of peace to an ideological enemy, this can hardly be read as weakness. Most likely, the prospects of a settlement of the Namibia/Angola impasse must recede. Angola lacks the kind of traditional ties to SA that Mozambique has. So it has very little to bargain with, as it might wish to do, while it harbours Swapo, and the Cubans remain in place.