MOZAMBIQUE : A CASE STUDY IN DESTABILISATION

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Destabilisation is a word which was added to most vocabularies by the tactics employed by a number of agencies to bring down the Chilean government of Salvador Allende in 1973. The forces ranged against Allende included the CIA, IT&T, sections of the media, the upper classes in general, and even some members of the Australian Security Intelligence Service. Of crucial importance in the end were the armed forces, but they had had the groundwork done for them by the destabilisers.

Since the fall of Allende the tactics of destabilisation have been employed in contexts as various as Manley's Jamaica, Whitlam's Australia and present day Nicaragua. In Southern Africa a remarkable situation has developed in which the one powerful country, South Africa, is actively pursuing the destabilisation of the governments of a ring of neighbouring states.

All the Front Line States (FLS) are affected to various degrees. Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland (the BLS states) can be pressured by economic moves such as slowing up migrants' remittances or increasing customs formalities. In other cases (Mozambique, Angola, Zimbabwe) economic and military sabotage is used, dissident groups supported or directed, and propaganda campaigns launched. Destabilisation moves close to war in instances such as the armed raids launched into Angola and Mozambique and, more particularly, in the invasion and prolonged occupation of Southern Angola.

This policy, which may variously be seen as a policy of strength or one of desperation, has taken shape in the last eight years. Victories for black majority rule in Angola and Mozambique in 1975 were signals not only to black ghetto youth but also to Pretoria's white minority regime. Initial responses such as the 1975 advance

upon Luanda and the repression at Soweto left Pretoria with a bloodied nose and a more tarnished international image.

When Mr. P.W. Botha, former defence minister and inveterate hard-liner, became prime minister in 1978, Ian Smith's Rhodesia was clearly on its last legs. Indeed South Africa's Rhodesia policy had been indicated as early as 1974 in a secret report to Mr. Vorster, which saw the solution in terms of a compliant black government headed by Bishop Abel Muzorewa.(1) This hope failed, despite Pretoria's covert support for Muzorewa and then the buffer states, the former Portuguese colonies and Rhodesia, were no longer there to protect the South African state.

What is more, the three new independent states were by definition non-racial and, by proclaimed intent, socialist. Zimbabwe has abundant resources, Angola has oil and mineral wealth and Mozambique the capacity to emerge from the extreme poverty which war and Portuguese underdevelopment had left behind. What sort of lesson might black South Africans draw from the success of black majority socialist countries on their borders? Robert Mugabe must have seemed to Pretoria an especially obnoxious neighbour, lifting the minimum wage for Zimbabwean workers upon assuming office and denouncing Apartheid at every opportunity.

So one objective of the destabilisation policy is to ensure that black-run neighbouring states do not succeed. When Zimbabwe's record 1981 maize harvest was at its peak, South Africa abruptly recalled eighty borrowed locomotives and wagons that were needed to transport the harvest. In November 1981 rocket propelled grenades "thought to have been carried by submarines"(2) hit the Angolian oil refinery near Luanda.

A second and linked objective is to maintain the regional economic dependency upon South Africa, a dependency which the FLS are seeking to reduce through their collaboration in the Southern African Development Co-ordination Conference (SADCC). Lawrence Harris describes SADCC as :

> ... an unprecedented attempt by the nine independent states of South Africa to co-operate in building the economic foundations for their development and to free themselves from the dependence upon South Africa that most suffer from. Its first priority is the transport network, with cooperation in food, energy and manufacturing high on the agenda. The group knows that economic independence is necessary to secure political independence. But so does the enemy.(3)

Statistics show some of this struggle: in 1980 90% of Zimbabwe's exports passed through the South African transport system but by 1982 this was down to 60%. In 1980 there were 40,000 Zimbabweans working in South Africa. In 1983 they were "called home". Other states - Lesotho and Mozambique, for example - are economically much weaker than Zimbabwe and cannot yet contemplate an end to the migrant labour system.

South Africa's official economic strategy was laid before a meeting of business leaders by P.W. Botha on 22 November 1979. He proposed a "constellation" of states because in a constellation the stars remained in fixed relations to one another. The "constellation" would be based on mutual respect for sovereignty and on non-interference in internal affairs. Formal diplomatic links would not be necessary (Malawi is the only Southern African state which has such links) but there would continue to be "transnational" meetings. Botha presented the proposal as one of mutual advantage :

> We, and the other countries of Southern Africa, are thus confronted by the challenge and the opportunity to consolidate, in an evolutionary way, the undeniable economic interdependence between us to each other's mutual advantage and towards a logical economic grouping. (4)

The advantages for Botha's government are clear: increased access to markets, resources and labour together with a reduction of pressure for an end to white minority rule. To the FLS governments there is the offer of immediate gains of peace and security in which to pursue the goal of improved living standards. However, this is a bait unlikely to be taken for a variety of reasons. Accommodation with Apartheid would be anathema to the political parties and people in the FLS; they feel confident that white power will fall in South Africa as it has in all other parts of Africa; and they have a deep distrust of all proposals that come out of Pretoria.

Christopher Hill writing on "Regional Cooperation in Southern Africa" offers four possible reasons, other than the obvious economic advantages, for Pretoria's "constellation" policy.(5) He conjectures, first that it may represent a turning away from Europe and America, a search for friends in Africa and even for a more neutral posture on East/West relations. This, he concedes, does not fit with "South Africa's obsession with the dangers of Communism"(6)

His second suggestion is that the constellation was put forward as "a means by which the Republic worked its passage back into the West's good graces."(7) This would be in line with a recurrent theme of Pretoria's propaganda: "Why is your country considering harsh measures against South Africa while Black Africa continues to do business with us?"

Hill makes two further suggestions. The policy he suggests :

> ... can be understood as a move to build a ring of friendly black states, which could be expected not to give hospitality to exiled South African guerrillas. (8)

Finally, the policy is intended: "to ensure that the neighbouring states remain dependent on South Africa."(9)

After the liberation of Angola and Mozambique, after the Soweto uprising, after it became clear that Zimbabwe was slipping from white control, Pretoria needed new and more effective policies. One such policy was the "constellation" which, if successful, would cement Pretoria's economic dominance in Southern Africa. Even if it did not succeed, it could be put forward on the international stage as the peaceful alternative to the pattern of blood and hostility into which Southern Africa was moving. It was equally useful for internal politics as evidence that the National Party had developed a new policy for changed circumstances, a policy which nevertheless gave nothing away and focussed on the development of Afrikaaner interests.

The other side of the "constellation" coin is, of course, destabilisation. If conditions in the FLS can be made sufficiently chaotic and terrible, their governments will have no choice but to deal with the state which has the power to switch off the destabilising forces.

Pretoria's rulers have departed from the standard forms of international diplomacy. They have decided that their :

> Foreign policy should be flexible and amoral. The gun and the maize train will speak louder than a hundred speeches at the United Nations.(10)

This new stance is linked to the dominance of the state security council (SSC) which since P.W. Botha became prime minister has replaced the department of foreign affairs and information (DFAI) as the formulator of foreign policy. The SSC consists of prime minister, defence minister, foreign minister, the chief of staff, and the heads of army, military intelligence and security police. When it is remembered that the defence minister is General Magnus Malan, a former chief of staff, the military dominance becomes more pronounced.

"State security", of course, encompasses more than external threats; it takes in the question of internal security. Here South Africa is feeling the pressure. In a statement smuggled from prison, African National Congress (ANC) leader, Nelson Mandela, predicts that Apartheid will be crushed between the hammer of armed struggle and the anvil of trade union and community action. "A luta continua" - the struggle continues! There have been successful attacks on the SASOL oil refinery, the Koelberg nuclear power plant and the Pretoria headquarters of the S.A. Air Force and the department of military intelligence. There have been armed attacks on police stations and on military barracks and the ANC has pledged to increase the scale of this activity.

Much of the guerrilla activity is coordinated with other campaigns. Black trade union membership and militancy has increased and the mass movement is still very much alive.

> In addition to the increasingly frequent strikes by Black workers (an average of one new strike each day),hardly a week goes by without some protest demonstration, march or rally somewhere in the country.(11)

A survey of blacks in Johannesburg, Durban and Cape Town revealed that Nelson Mandela, imprisoned for more than twenty years was the most popular black leader in the country: 76% said they liked him. (Johannesburg Star, 23 September 1981)

> Open manifestation of support for the ANC was reported on an increasing number of occasions from 1980 onwards, in spite of the banning of the organisation and the laws against promoting its aims. ANC colours were shown at funerals and flags were raised at meetings and demonstrations.(12)

A Central Intelligence Agency study on the ANC, which found its way into the American press in November 1982 noted the "improved efficiency and co-ordination" of the ANC's 1980 and 1981 military operations and predicted "increasing success" for the ANC in winning support within South Africa.(13)

So it can be seen as less than paranoid for the Botha government to place high priority on checking the ANC and their supporters. Clearly most of this effort had best be concentrated within South Africa, the arena of struggle, but it has suited Pretoria to argue that major actions are directed from outside, for instance by white ANC member Joe Slovo who was recently credited with residence in Maputo and the "master minding" of the Pretoria car bombing.(14)

The ANC firmly dispute this, stating that Pretoria's :

> ... propaganda campaign cannot disguise the reality that this operation, like others before it, was planned and executed by units of our people's Army - based and operating within South Africa...(15)

If Botha conceded that this is so, he would in one stroke admit that the internal situation is more serious than has so far been admitted and deprive himself of the basic cover story for attacks on neighbouring states, the argument that these are reprisals for ANC raids launched from within those states.

The Mozambican president Samora Machel denies that there are ANC military bases in his country. He told the 7th Non-Aligned Summit in New Delhi (8 March 1983) that Pretoria sees all opponents of Apartheid as "ANC bases" :

> Thus when the Pretoria regime goes attacking South African refugees in Mozambique, when it attacks Maseru in Lesotho, when it strikes at offices in London, when in the University of Maputo it assassinates a white South African woman, a progressive and prestigious intellectual and scientist, there we really find the definition of what are military bases of the ANC for the Pretoria regime. When South Africa sees on all sides bases of the ANC and acts thus, we can understand why: all those who oppose apartheid, whites or blacks, Coloureds or Indians, are regarded as bases of the ANC, subject to attack from the Pretoria regime. (16)

What is the effect of destabilisation upon Mozambique? Its seriousness is suggested by the bitterness of Machel's denunciations of South Africa.

In 1975 Frelimo emerged victorious after eleven years of civil war to take charge of a devastated country which in normal times had a per capita annual income of US$170. The current world economic recession had begun and commodity prices headed down for the lowest levels in forty years.(17) Trained personnel left Mozambique in thousands, creating large technical and administrative gaps.

During UDI, from 1975 to 1980, Ian Smith armed and supported anti-Frelimo groupings, ex-Portuguese troops, security police and others, who called themselves the MNR or Mozambique National Resistance. After the victory of Mugabe the MNR turned to the South Africans for support which was readily given. They train, arm and transport the MNR giving them directions as to the targets they should select.(18)

The International Commission of Enquiry into the Crimes of Apartheid sent a deputation to Mozambique in May of this year which concluded that: "All that we have seen points to the direct involvement of South Africa."(19) The Commission had gathered evidence of South African helicopter flights and the presence of "Boers" in segregated quarters in MNR camps.

At the Non-Aligned Summit Machel described the activities of the MNR:

How do these elements act? They -

- attack and burn villages, pillage granaries, steal cattle
- burn schools, murder teachers, abduct pupils
- destroy hospitals, murder the medical staff
- attack and burn shops
- attack passenger trains and buses, sabotage railway lines and mine the roads
- destroy fuel storage depots and sabotage electricity cables
- destroy tractors, lorries and other means of production
- attack economic development projects and abduct cooperantes coming from various countries
- abduct, violate and kill the wives and daughters of peasants
- abduct nuns and missionaries
- sow terror amongst the people, cutting off ears, tongues, hands and breasts.(20)

Some of the more sophisticated attacks - as on the marker buoys in the Beira channel or the BP storage tanks at Beira - are attributed to detachments of commandos operating from South Africa.

One such commander, Lt. Alan Gingles, was killed attempting to sabotage the railway line from Beira to Zimbabwe. (Observer, London, 20 February 1983) Although he was 500 km. inside Mozambique attacking a civil target, the South African authorities listed him as"killed in action against terrorists" in the "operational area" which is their expression for northern Namibia and southern Angola.

The MNR are an odd "resistance" force. They have had cooperation from local "feiticeiros" or witch-docotrs and there is an effective alliance with the "regulos" or village heads who lost office when Frelimo came to power. MNR makes little or no attempt to mobilise people or gain their support. They have a radio transmitter, "Voz da Africa Livre", but they lack any political program other than opposition to Frelimo.

There is dispute about their numbers (10,000? 20,000?) and the effectiveness of the Mozambique army (FPLM) in countering them. There is no doubt that because they operate in small groups in difficult terrain with the SADF helicopters or the border available to them, they are very difficult to eradicate.

There are signs, however, that Mozambique is becoming more vigilant and better prepared to deal with incursions. When the South Africans decided to kill some ANC people living in the Maputo suburb of Matola in January 1981, they arrogantly and successfully

crossed the border in a motorised column, shot their victims, and drove away unscathed. On 23 May 1983 Matola was again attacked by between 14 and 16 planes which strafed and rocketed various sites, hurriedly and inaccurately, before being driven off.

The 4th Frelimo Congress in April of this year had "Defend our country" as one of three slogans. In Maputo and in the surrounding countryside vigilance is high with guards on bridges and railway lines.

To improve Mozambican defences, various socialist countries have offered "sophisticated weapons" such as ground-to-air missiles. General Malan, however, told the National Party Congress in August 1982 that Pretoria could not permit "sophisticated weapons" in Mozambique.(21) The close similiarities between Israel's advance into Lebanon and South Africa's attacks on her neighbours may move a step further.

For the past two years Mozambique's natural difficulties have been exacerbated by a prolonged drought. Despite food aid grants, including rice priced at $1.5 million from Australia, food supplies may be exhausted by October with the next major harvest due in April 1984.

MNR activities relate directly to this food shortage. Most obviously they destroy food and reduce productions when peasants fear to venture into their fields. They disrupt transport and destroy consumer goods or prevent production by bringing down power lines. In some areas, peasants have no incentive to produce food for the market because the money they would gain cannot be exchanged for consumer goods.

Shortages in certain areas were intensified by the activities of what the Mozambicans called the "enemies within", black marketeers and saboteurs. These were treated harshly, with flogging and death both possible. It is understandable that a society under seige should see every damaging act as at least potentially linked to the operations of the enemy.

Within SADCC Mozambique has been given primary responsibility for the coordination of transport and communications, a logical decision in view of the routes than Mozambique provides for Zimbabwe, Zambia, Swaziland and Malawi. But it is precisely the development of better transport systems that will reduce the flow of FLS products in the direction of South Africa. Perhaps this explains why Mozambique is, in Samora Machel's words, "the number one target" of the destabilising action.(22)

Will Mozambique yield under this pressure? The 4th Frelimo Congress affirmed support for the ANC and SWAPO, and Frelimo and the Mozambican people have survived hard times before now. During UDI they lost US$500 million because of their adherence to sanctions.(23)

Frelimo and Samora Machel are widely popular and they enjoy advantages not possessed, for example, by Salvador Allende. They have control of the media and the army is closely linked with the Frelimo Party.

An important factor may prove to be the policy adopted by foreign powers. Eastern and Northern European countries are active in Mozambique supplying capital, equipment and personnel for various projects. Donors ranging from the U.S.A. ($50 million) to the

Netherlands ($30 million) pledged a total of $650 million at the second SADCC meeting. It may be that these countries may become involved in steps to muzzle South Africa if projects that they finance, such as transport facilities, are promptly attacked by the South Africans.

So far as public opinion is concerned in the donor countries and in Australia a limiting factor on concern and response to South Africa's terrorist policy of destablisation is that only a fraction of what happens is reported and too often this has been through agencies stationed within South Africa.

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(1) Simon Jenkins, "Destabilisation in Southern Africa", Economist, 16 July 1983, p.16.
This is an influential but seriously flawed article.

(2) Lawrence Harris, "Economic Terrorism", SWAM Newsletter, No. 3, Jan-Feb. 1982, p.5

(3) Ibid

(4) South African Information Service, Towards a Constellation, P.16

(5) African Affairs, Vol.82, No.327, April 1983, p.217

(6) Ibid

(7) Ibid

(8) Ibid

(9) Ibid

(10) Jenkins, op. cit., p.15

(11) Ernest Harsch, "ANC challenges apartheid regime", Intercontinental Press, 25 July 1983, p.417

(12) Apartheid, The Facts, International Defence and Aid Fund for Southern Africa, London, 1983, p.101

(13) Harsch, op.cit., p.419

(14) It is also convenient in terms of National Party ideology that Slovo is a member of the S.A. Communist Party. When I visited Maputo for the 4th Frelimo Congress, Slovo flew in and out of Maputo on the plane I travelled on. He is attached to the ANC Headquarters in Lusaka.

(15) Press statement by ANC Chief Representative in Dar Es Salaam, 23 May 1983

(16) Mozambique Information Office, News Review, No. 2, 17 March 1983, p.1

(17) Not that Mozambique was well endowed with exports. The two major ones were prawns and cashew nuts.

(18) "MNR Atrocities", SWAM Newsletter, No. 2, Sept-October 1981, p.10

(19) Mozambique Information Office, News Review, No. 7, 27 May 1983

(20) Mozambique Information Office, News Review, No. 2, p.2

(21) Joseph Hanlon, "South Africa threatens", New Statesman, 10 September 1982, p.14

(22) Mozambique Information Office, News Review, No. 3, 31 March 1983, p.1

(23) Report of Central Committee to 4th Frelimo Congress, p.151