

AFRICA NEWS

A Weekly Digest of African Affairs



Boxing Great's

NEW YORK—Jack Dempsey takes a poke at Muhammad Ali during the first Thurman Award Dinner of the Association for the Help of Retarded Children. The award, a tribute to the late Thurman Munson in recognition of his interest in mentally retarded, was presented to Dempsey, Ali, Billy Martin, Bill Bradley, Ralph Kiner, Cliff Robertson, Ethel Kennedy and Munson's widow, Diana. UPI Photo

MOZAMBIQUE
[AN] The South African commandos arrived about 2 a.m. on the morning of January 30 in Matola, an industrial suburb of the Mozambican capital Maputo. Their targets were three houses, residences for South African refugees affiliated with the African National Congress (ANC). The death toll was twelve, according to ANC and Mozambique government reports, including eleven refugees and one Portuguese citizen (an electric company employee). Several of the attacking troops were also killed.

As Mozambican forces responded to news of the attack, the commando unit was evacuated by helicopter, leaving one of their dead behind. The three houses were destroyed, and, according to the South African military, captured weapons and documents were taken to South Africa.

The tactic was not new: Refugees from Zimbabwe in Mozambique and Zambia, and from Namibia in Angola, have seen hundreds die in raids by South African or Rhodesian forces on account of the wars in Zimbabwe and Namibia, from 1976 on. But for over a year Mozambique has celebrated the relative peace that came from the settlement in Zimbabwe and this is the first time that South Africa has openly crossed the border in retaliation for guerrilla actions by the ANC inside that country.

The implied threat in the attack, that future actions could be far less selective and strike hard at Mozambique's economy, is an ominous portent for Mozambique and other neighboring states that may be targets as South Africa strikes back against guerrilla attacks. This article looks at reactions to the Matola attack.

Back On The Hot Spot

[AN] Several facts are still obscure about the raid, particularly how the commandos arrived in an armored personnel carrier, implying that they may have driven from the border. Others think the unit may have infiltrated in over a period of time, among the many South Africans who work in the ports of Matola and Maputo.

Certainly it is clear that they were well-informed on the location of the houses. These were not offices, as implied by the South African claim to have destroyed "planning and control headquarters," but residences. Foreign diplomats who visited the houses reported seeing at least six bodies, some with ears cut off by the killers.

South African Commander in Chief Constant Viljoen issued a communique claiming Maputo had been used as a "springboard for terror against South Africa," citing in particular the raid last June against coal-to-oil conversion plants carried out by ANC guerrillas. At that time South African authorities sought to lay the blame on ANC officials resident in Maputo, but no raid followed. And in the last eight months, the number of reported guerrilla actions in South Africa has been low.

Observers are therefore asking why the retaliation has come at this particular time. Some point to the just-broken-off negotiations on Namibia, suggesting that Pretoria perhaps no longer feels the need to present a conciliatory image to the West. Others note that the action came days after Prime Minister P.W. Botha announced a general election and speculate that the South African leader may be trying to project a hard-line

image for right-wing voters. The *Washington Post* drew attention to the fact that the raid came only two days after new U.S. Secretary of State Alexander Haig spoke of the danger of "rampant international terrorism."

Whatever the reasoning for the timing, the cross-border attack has drawn sharp denunciation from African and other Third World countries. ANC Secretary-General Alfred Nzo issued a statement condemning what he termed "a criminal act of banditry" and a "stepped-up onslaught" aimed at "destabilizing independent states in the region."

Mozambique, for its part, reaffirmed both its right to accept refugees and its "support for the people of South Africa under the leadership of the ANC in their struggle against apartheid."

Particularly noteworthy among the statements of support from other countries was that by Zimbabwe Prime Minister Robert Mugabe, who pledged to step up implementation of the defense pact recently signed with Mozambique. Mugabe also referred to an overall strategy of South Africa to destabilize the frontline states, citing attacks on Angola, support for a coup attempt in Zambia, border raids against Botswana and training of dissidents in Zimbabwe and Mozambique.

Within South Africa the raid was backed both by pro-government commentators and by the white opposition Progressive Federal Party. But reaction among blacks was sharply different. Chief Gatsha Buthelezi, often attacked by other blacks for his official role in the government's "homeland" system, told a rally of 16,000 in Soweto that "even those who are for peaceful change could not rejoice at the death of their kith and kin in the ANC."

Bishop Desmond Tutu, Secretary-General of the South African Council of Churches, said that if the ANC should launch an incursion into South Africa, the bulk of blacks would certainly support them. He also attacked the English-language press for biased reporting and noted that they often referred to the South African Defense Forces as "our boys on the border."

Many blacks, Tutu countered, saw those on the other side as "our boys on the border."

Unlike attacks in Mozambique between 1976 and 1979, in which South African aircraft occasionally joined with Rhodesian forces to hit economically vital targets in Mozambique, this raid carefully avoided such sites. It is unlikely that the Pretoria government wants to damage seriously the ports of Matola and Maputo, which carry a heavy volume of South African trade. Plans are currently under way for a new bulk-handling terminal for coal in Matola

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capable of loading 3,000 tons an hour, which will serve to export South African coal.

Pretoria is not, however, showing similar restraint elsewhere in Mozambique, where it has taken over from the Rhodesian regime as the patron of anti-government guerrillas of the "Resistance." The group, which had its origin among Portuguese settlers and Africans who had served in the Portuguese colonial army was supplied by Rhodesia and coordinated its attacks with that country's forces until the end of 1979. To the original core, Resistance recruited additional Mozambicans, some deserters from the army of the ruling FRELIMO Party, and many among Mozambican migrant workers in neighboring countries. Members of the group captured by Mozambique in recent years have described, for example, being arrested in South Africa and channeled by the South African police to camps of the Rhodesian Special Branch for training.

While observers agree that the group poses no major political or military threat to the government of Samora Machel, it does have the capacity to cause considerable disruption, particularly in Manica and Sofala provinces in central Mozambique. There, for example, in June, Resistance units destroyed a bridge near Save, which was not repaired until December, just before the rainy season would have made the major north-south route impassable. Also in late 1980, they

briefly cut the long-distance power lines from the Cahora Bassa hydroelectric scheme, interrupting power to South Africa.

The major camps inside Mozambique were destroyed by the Mozambican army in 1979 and 1980, and Mozambique and Zimbabwe have coordinated military efforts against them. But the Resistance, with abundant funds and logistical support from South Africa, continues to attack civilian targets in many areas, and a step-up of this destabilization effort remains a threat available to South Africa.

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