Mozambique After Machel

by Gillian Gunn

In a transition marked by solemnity but not despair, the leaders of Mozambique's governing party who survived the October 19, 1986 plane crash that took the lives of President Samora Machel and 33 others quietly agreed that Minister of Foreign Affairs Joaquim Chissano should be the successor head of state. President Chissano faces a grim challenge.

Although "approaching collapse" is a relative — and overused — term in Africa, it is an objective fact that Mozambique is approaching mass starvation and financial bankruptcy; that the country's military (Forcas Populares de Libertação de Moçambique [FPLM]) is in danger of losing control of several central provinces and vital regional transport routes to antigovernment guerrillas of the Resistência Nacional Moçambicana, known as Renamo or MNR; and that rhetorical, economic, and military pressures by its powerful neighbor, South Africa, are increasing.

The Succession

The relatively uncontroversial manner in which the succession question was resolved will help President Chissano come to terms with some of the challenges. Six days after Machel's funeral on October 28, when his memory was honored by delegations from over 80 nations, including 18 African heads of state, the 130-member Central Committee of the country's ruling party, the Frente de Libertação de Moçambique (FRELIMO), met to decide the matter.

Although Chissano's selection was virtually a foregone conclusion, the intense if short-lived speculation in the Western press about "a succession struggle" warrants an assessment of the major "rivals."

One widely cited "competitor" was former Minister of the Interior Armando Guebuza, who is conventionally viewed as pro-Soviet and antiwhite, with solid support among the military. The reality is somewhat more complicated. Guebuza is certainly regarded as an ally by those FRELIMO members who resent the fact that whites and mestiços hold 16 percent of government posts although comprising only two percent of the country's population. Many of FRELIMO's black members are unconvinced by the explanation that a temporary imbalance is inevitable given Portugal's colonial policy of blocking black access to education. Guebuza's critics within FRELIMO concede, however, that he does not stir up this disgruntled constituency, but simply refrains from rejecting its support.

Guebuza also has a reputation for intense zeal in carrying out orders. This focus on efficiency, though much needed in FRELIMO, provokes jealousy among colleagues who fear that he will "show up" their lesser performance. His enthusiasm also gets him into trouble, as in 1984 when he implemented in a heavy-handed manner a program to move the unemployed of Maputo to the countryside. The fallout from this episode, combined with his public criticism of the March 1984 nonaggression pact with Pretoria known as the Nkomati Accord (which specified, inter alia, that South Africa was to end its support of the MNR in exchange for a commitment by Maputo not to allow the use by the African National Congress of Mozambican territory as an operational base and/or a springboard for guerrilla raids into South Africa), led Machel to remove him as minister of the interior and temporarily have him placed under house arrest. (See "Destabilization and Dialogue: South Africa's Emergence as a Regional Superpower" by John de St. Jorre in CSIS Africa Notes no. 26, April 17, 1984.)

When things cooled down, Guebuza was given a lesser post as minister in the President's Office, and in March 1986 shifted back toward center stage, with responsibility for agriculture, light and food industry, internal trade, and tourism added to his Political Bureau tasks.

Regarding Guebuza's alleged Soviet links, the verdict
is still not in. He certainly was not vocal in support of Machel’s overtures to the West or the introduction in 1983 of market-oriented economic policies. On the other hand, some FRELIMO sources do not dismiss the possibility that Mozambique under a Guebuza presidency might have lurchled dramatically toward the West. If he determined that such a move served the nation’s interests, it is said, he would follow his past management style and execute the policy in a flamboyant and single-minded manner.

Another presidential “candidate” mentioned in the international press was Alberto Chipande, who served as minister of defense until 1983 when, while nominally retaining his ministerial duties, he was moved to the governorship of Cabo Delgado province. The conventional wisdom is that Chipande was “demoted” because of the poor performance of the FPLM. The move to Cabo Delgado may also have been motivated by a desire to have an experienced military man overseeing developments in a key province under growing MNR pressure, and by the 1983 Fourth Party Congress decision to ensure that Central Committee members receive exposure to conditions in the rural areas. In any case, Chipande was brought back as full-time minister of defense in March 1986, and reportedly has a good relationship with Chissano and with the military rank and file.

A third name mooted as a Chissano “rival” was Marcelino dos Santos, who held the number two position in the party hierarchy at the time of Machel’s death, one rung above Chissano. Dos Santos is reputedly committed to classical Marxist ideology, and was clearly uneasy with both Machel’s pragmatism on foreign policy and the late president’s increasing inclination to mix market-based and conventional socialist economic policies. On the positive side, dos Santos is respected for his care not to air disagreements publicly, and for his role in the independence struggle. A key factor operating against the likelihood of a dos Santos presidency was his ethnicity. Dos Santos is a light-skinned mestizo, and it would be highly unlikely that FRELIMO’s advocacy and practice of multiracialism could be extended to designation of a nonblack as head of state.

Who is Chissano?
Joaquim Chissano, age 47, brings to the presidency 11 years of experience as Mozambique’s foreign minister and 24 years as a leading figure in FRELIMO. He is conventionally identified as “pro-Western,” and South African radio has described Chissano’s appointment as heralding “a somewhat more hopeful outlook for Mozambique itself and for stability in southern Africa.”

Chissano was closely associated with Machel’s policies and performed as FRELIMO’s behind-the-scenes conciliator. He was a key actor in pulling the party through a series of factional crises in the late 1960s, and in uniting it behind Machel after the assassination of the party’s founder, Eduardo Mondlane, in 1969. While holding the position of prime minister in the 1974-75 transitional government, according to Portuguese sources, Chissano suggested that FRELIMO pursue a modus vivendi with South Africa rather than confrontation. Contrary to the conventional wisdom, Chissano did not oppose Machel’s decision to sign the Nkomati Accord. Although Chissano was characterized as disapproving of the negotiations at the time, reliable FRELIMO sources identify him as one of the originators of the Nkomati idea, and say that the party decided he should maintain public distance from the accord to protect his image should the deal backfire. Chissano also shared Machel’s views, stated repeatedly in the weeks before his death, that “Mozambique does not have the capacity to impose sanctions on South Africa.” And, like Machel, Chissano quietly urged Angola’s ruling MPLA party at least to consider the possibility of negotiations with UNITA.

Chissano was also in step with Machel on economic policy. He supported the decisions of the 1983 Fourth Party Congress to increase material incentives for peasants and loosen central control of the economy. (See “Post-Nkomati Mozambique” by Gillian Gunn in CSIS Africa Notes no. 38, January 8, 1985.) In 1986, he called for legalization of private transport and of the purchase by tenants of their state-owned dwellings.

The positions described above do not, however, mean that Chissano is “pro-West.” When this author asked Chissano for his views on Mozambique’s international alliances during an October 1984 interview, he took up his pencil and drew three circles on a piece of paper. Then he explained: “This is Mozambique. This is the West. And this is the East. At the moment the Mozambican and Western circles overlap considerably. But this is not necessarily a permanent state of affairs. Mozambican interests are not intrinsically overlapping with those of any other country.”

Asked about official FRELIMO statements that the socialist countries are Mozambique’s natural allies, Chissano responded: “The socialist countries are natural economic and political allies of the Third World, but they are not natural military allies.” He defined nonalignment as involving nonadherence to any military bloc, but said that it did “not imply neutrality or equidistance between the two blocs on economic and political issues.” (See “The Nonaligned Summit: Behind the Rhetoric” by Gillian Gunn in CSIS Africa Notes no. 63, October 25, 1986.)

Chissano’s public statements since he took up his presidential responsibilities suggest that he has not changed his position. The word order in his recent remark that Mozambique is “a sovereign, African, nonaligned, and socialist state” seems to be a genuine reflection of the new head of state’s worldview. Regarding Mozambique’s immediate foreign policy aims, his speeches have emphasized the need to improve relations with Malawi (through which FRELIMO believes South Africa is aiding the MNR), Mozambique’s commitment to the Southern African Development Coordination Conference (SADCC), its fidelity to the Organization of African Unity, its support for the UN Charter, its friendship with the socialist countries, and its desire to develop cooperation with Western countries, in that
order. He says that he “... will continue ... to implement the spirit and letter of the terms contained in the Nkomati Accord rigorously.”

President Chissano has also restated his endorsement of a mixed economy for Mozambique: “We want the private sector to play a useful role economically and socially, and contribute to the development of our country. To the private investor we will guarantee the protection of his property, returns on invested capital, and adequate conditions for his activities ... We must rigorously follow a salary policy which will reward and encourage competent workers.”

Yet any expectation that Chissano will lead the country down a purely capitalist course is almost certainly unfounded. Since he became president, he has reaffirmed that “Our country has defined the construction of socialism as the objective of Mozambican society ... [O]nly a socialist society guarantees to the people as a whole equal rights and opportunities ...”

Similarly, forecasts that Chissano’s preference for negotiation over confrontation may be an indicator that he will be more prepared than Machel to reach a political accommodation with the MNR seem highly speculative. In a speech immediately after taking office, Chissano warned: “The continuation of the struggle, without pause, against armed banditry in our country constitutes the most sacred and fundamental of the tasks in this phase of our history. It is a struggle in which there can be no form of compromise.” Reports that he had met with anti-FRELIMO elements in New York just before Machel’s death, and was going to travel to South Africa to pursue negotiations with the MNR, are dismissed by FRELIMO sources as groundless.

The Economic Inheritance
Chissano definitely will need the goodwill generated within FRELIMO by the smoothness of his succession and his past reputation as a conciliator, as well as the management skills he honed as foreign minister, to cope with the economic crises he inherited. Recent statistics make chilling reading. From 1982 to 1985, the gross domestic product declined by one-third; industrial and agricultural production went down by approximately one-half; and state expenditure increased by one-third. As of 1986, defense spending accounts for 42 percent of total expenditure (up one-tenth over 1985), the budget deficit has risen to $250 million, and foreign exchange earnings have fallen to $180 million. Mozambique’s total debt is now $3 billion, and its debt service ratio has hit the incredible figure of 170 percent. This means that even if Mozambique spent all its 1986 foreign exchange earnings on debt service, it still would not meet its debt service obligations for the year.

According to a September 24, 1986 statement by the official news agency AIM, hunger now threatens one-third of the population, and the number at risk as of September 1986 was double the figure for six months earlier. The government estimates that it will be able to provide just over one-third of the 715,000 tons of food grain that will be needed over the next 12 months, leaving a gap of about 465,500 tons of maize, wheat, and rice to be filled.

Furthermore, much economic activity now operates outside government control, and a dollar now buys 30 times as many local meticais on the black market (candonga) as it does at the official bank (where the rate is roughly $1 = 40 meticais). A factory worker’s monthly salary buys him, for example, just three kilos of candonga apples.

Mozambique got into this economic mess through a combination of inappropriate economic policies, natural disasters, and the impact of MNR guerrilla activities over the past half-decade. Immediately after independence from Portugal in 1975, FRELIMO began to implement conventional socialist policies. Priority was placed on collectivized state farms, and help to peasant producers was focused on those who joined the largely unpopular “cooperatives.”

The state farms were a disaster from the start. Although receiving the lion’s share of state investment, as of 1982 they only accounted for 20 percent of total agricultural production. Shortages of management skills, inappropriate imported equipment, and the peasants’ distaste for collectivized working conditions all contributed to the failure. Cooperatives worked little better, providing under one percent of production as of 1982.

Although the “family” sector produced over three-quarters of total output, its production also fell precipitously. Deterioration of the family sector was partly caused by the disintegration of the rural distribution network, destroyed when Portuguese petty traders pulled out abruptly at independence. FRELIMO attempted to replace the old network with state-run “People’s Shops.” But provision of consumer goods to stock these shops took second place behind imports of capital equipment for the state farms, and the shelves were soon bare. In the 1980-1982 period alone, the supply of consumer goods to peasants fell by a quarter.

Peasants increasingly refused to sell to the state as they realized that they would find little to buy with the meticais received in payment. Many of those who did produce a surplus gravitated toward the black market, where they received inflated prices, and used the profits to buy the few, astronomically expensive, consumer goods available in that same market. By 1982 an estimated one-half of total peasant production was being diverted through the “parallel” markets.

The industrial sector also suffered from poor planning. The state nationalized a large number of industries after independence, and private sector control of industry declined from 85 percent in 1977 to 27 percent in 1982. Although some plants were taken over for ideological reasons, FRELIMO says that many were put under state control because their Portuguese owners had fled the country and workers faced unemployment if management were not provided by the government. But the state-appointed managers were inexperienced, and a shortage of foreign exchange related to the agricultural problems made it difficult to obtain needed spare parts and raw materials. By the fourth year after independence, according to the United Nations, only 40 percent
of installed industrial capacity was being used.

Much of the agricultural and industrial activity that survived government deficiencies fell victim to the escalating war in the countryside. FRELIMO maintains that South African "destabilization" — both directly through military incursions and indirectly through aid to the MNR and manipulation of economic ties — has cost Mozambique $5 billion since independence. On October 8, 1986, for example, Pretoria claimed that it had reason to believe that the African National Congress was still being allowed to operate from Mozambique, and announced that it was retaliating by ending further recruitment of Mozambican workers and expelling those already in the Republic as their contracts and work permits expired. According to J. Fourie, director of labor relations in South Africa's Department of Manpower, some 30,000 Mozambicans were employed in the South African agricultural sector in 1986, some 66,000 were employed in the mines, and an estimated 170,000 were employed illegal immigrants. If the South African action is carried out, it could cost Mozambique an estimated $50 million a year in foreign exchange earnings (about one-third of the current total).

Meanwhile, the MNR has intermittently blown up the pylons supporting the power line connecting the Cabora Bassa dam complex to South African electricity customers, and the line has been out of action for the last year. MNR disruption of railroad lines connecting hinterland countries with the Mozambican ports of Nacala, Beira, and Maputo has severely reduced income from transport service payments, which traditionally account for between one-third and one-half of the nation's foreign exchange earnings. As a result of South Africa's 84 percent reduction of cargo shipments through Maputo port since independence, and guerrilla sabotage, Maputo handled in 1985 under one-sixth of the tonnage it processed a decade earlier. Disruption of railroad lines further complicates internal economic activity, resulting in crops rotting in rural warehouses while consumer goods gather dust in portside storage facilities.

The frequency of MNR attacks on rural settlements has caused peasants in much of the country to hesitate to cultivate their fields, for fear of being kidnapped or killed. And consumer goods that do reach rural shops are often seized by the MNR. By 1983, an estimated 1,000 rural shops had been destroyed, and in that year about a quarter of the normally marketed grain was lost to the guerrillas. Though statistics are not available for subsequent years, it is safe to assume that increased MNR activities in 1985 and 1986 led to even greater disruption.

Natural disasters have also played a role in Mozambique's economic decline. The nation has historically been plagued with uneven rainfall, and headlines switch from "Starvation Due to Flood" to "Starvation Due to Drought" with depressing regularity. Portugal's neglect of the rural infrastructure during the colonial era, and the resultant lack of dams and basic irrigation facilities, have left Mozambique more vulnerable to climatic fluctuations than its neighbors. An exceptionally severe drought occurred from 1981 to 1984, leading to the 1983-84 famine in which at least 100,000 people died and an additional 4.5 million were at risk.

Machel made some valiant attempts to rectify FRELIMO's economic policies before his death. At the Fourth Party Congress in 1983, priority was placed on small-scale projects; plans were made to break up state farms into more manageable units and encourage private sector farming; the need to decentralize planning was stressed; private industry was deemed worthy of state support; private shops were declared necessary; and the party undertook to sell off some specified industries to private entrepreneurs.

By 1986, however, many of the Fourth Congress resolutions remained unfulfilled. Because of the intensifying guerrilla war, many outlying factories and farms were inaccessible by ground transport. Consumer goods could not be delivered to the private peasant, nor spare parts to the privatized factory. Moreover, party cadres retained a bias in favor of the urban sector, not surprising since that is where most of the cadres were located. For example, the 1983 Congress called for the family agricultural sector to increase production by one-half over the following two years, while only undertaking to increase the supply of consumer goods to that sector by one-fourth. Priority access to consumer goods was to be preserved for urban workers. The chronic shortage of management skills also continued to hamper efforts to rationalize the economic structure.

The Congress did have some positive effects, however. The liberalization of economic controls, combined with the March 1984 Nkomati Accord, encouraged many Western countries to reevaluate their policies toward Mozambique, and aid began to increase, though not as fast as the government had anticipated. Mozambique joined the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank in 1984, and in 1985 obtained approval of a $45 million credit from the International Development Association, the World Bank's affiliate for concessional lending, in support of a five-year economic revitalization program. U.S. aid increased from $4.884 million in 1983 to a peak of $66.785 million in 1985, though falling to an estimated $46.043 million in 1986. Negotiations for IMF support began, and Mozambique's decision to join the European Economic Community's Lome Convention, the vehicle through which the EEC channels aid to the Third World, made it eligible for $135 million in aid from this source over five years.

FRELIMO's increasingly positive attitude toward foreign private investment also bore fruit. In 1986, the British firm Lonrho invested $40 million in agriculture and the U.S. company Edlow Resources Limited signed an agreement to start titanium mining. In general, however, foreign companies hesitated to invest because of the insecure transport system.

In sum, though the war has been only a partial cause of Mozambique's economic problems, and FRELIMO's policy mistakes have played an important role in the economic decline, the war is an effective barrier against economic recovery. Even if policy mistakes were to be vigorously rectified, as Chissano apparently intends, recovery will be partial at best as long as the cities...
remain cut off from the countryside by guerrilla activity and the transport networks serving the hinterland countries continue to be sabotaged.

The Military Inheritance
Mozambique’s already bleak military situation underwent a further sharp deterioration just before Machel’s death. In September 1986, well before the start of the rainy season which usually marks an increase in guerrilla activity, the MNR began a new offensive.

The timing seems to have been affected by a September 11 confrontation between the leaders of Mozambique, Zimbabwe, and Zambia on the one hand and Malawi’s President H. Kamuzu Banda on the other. The three charged that the MNR had been allowed to establish bases in Malawi, and demanded that Banda dismantle these bases and turn the MNR guerrillas in his country over to Mozambique. Banda apparently responded by simply telling the MNR to leave the country, and on September 17 the exodus began, with a reported 10,000 guerrillas crossing into Mozambique. For the first time in its history, the MNR actually took control of border towns and held them. By mid-October it controlled Mutarara in Tete province, Caia in northern Sofala, and Milange in Zambezia province. Ironically, Mozambican peasants fled from the new war area into Malawi to escape MNR actions, and by the end of October UN officials reported that 40,000 had taken refuge in the neighboring state.

Even more worrying for FRELIMO, the MNR took the strategic bridge across the Zambezi river which links the north and south of Mozambique. Control of the bridge also permits the MNR to infiltrate further into Sofala and Zambezia provinces. If it establishes a presence all the way to a province’s coast, it will have effectively cut a swath through the center of the country. Diplomatic sources suggest that the MNR’s objective is to divide the country so that it can set up a rival government in the north and appeal for international recognition.

Military tensions between Mozambique and South Africa also escalated in the weeks preceding Machel’s death. On October 6, a land mine exploded in the Transvaal not far from the Mozambique border, injuring six South African Defense Force (SADF) personnel. The next day Minister of Defense (General) Magnus Malan accused Machel of permitting the African National Congress to infiltrate through Mozambican territory to plant the mine, and warned: “If President Machel chooses terrorism and revolution, he will clash head-on with South Africa.” This was swiftly followed by the previously mentioned announcement of a cutoff of labor recruitment from Mozambique.

FRELIMO countercharged that South Africa had infiltrated a commando unit into Mozambique, that “over the last few weeks, South Africa [had] organized the massive introduction of armed bands into Tete and Zambezia provinces from Malawian territory,” and that “high ranking civilian and military circles of the Pretoria regime are personally guiding” these “bands.” Malan retorted: “When the ANC commits terror against South Africa from neighboring countries, the leaders of those countries are co-responsible.” In turn, Mozambique’s state news agency AIM announced just two days before Machel’s death that it had received private warnings of a plot being hatched by some elements in the South African military to assassinate Machel.

The crash of Machel’s plane in South African territory added to the tensions between Pretoria and Maputo. Many in FRELIMO considered it entirely possible that elements in the South African military had orchestrated the assassination of the Mozambican leader. To date, however, the official Mozambican position has remained that Machel died “in circumstances that are still unclear.”

The abrupt decline in the government’s military situation and the escalation of tensions with South Africa just before Machel’s death were the culmination of a long process. The story began in 1976, when Rhodesia’s intelligence service set up the MNR, recruiting a mixture of disgruntled whites, FRELIMO dissidents, and others. (See “The MNR” by Colin Legum in CSIS Africa Notes no. 16, July 15, 1983.) The main purposes of the MNR at this time were to punish FRELIMO for aiding Robert Mugabe’s Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU) guerrillas, who were fighting for majority rule from bases in Mozambique, and to gain intelligence on ZANU plans. The organization’s military activities initially were merely disruptive, and the MNR did not seek to engage the FPLM during its first few years of existence.

Ironically, the MNR’s transmutation into a genuine threat was the result of the disappearance of its initial patron. According to sources close to the MNR, a few days before the scheduled hand-over of power to an independent black government in Zimbabwe in April 1980 South African aircraft flew key MNR personnel and equipment to the northern Transvaal, near the Mozambique border. In 1981, these sources say, MNR guerrillas were transported back into Mozambique via helicopter, and supplied by South African air drops and sea maneuvers. The MNR established a series of camps covering a wide area of the country, and, supported by its new patron, started hacking away at the nation’s infrastructure.

When Machel signed the Nkomati Accord in 1984, he hoped that South Africa’s undertaking to cut off its support of the MNR would convert an uncontrollable security situation into a relatively straightforward mop-up operation. But according to documents discovered in August 1985 following the capture of the MNR’s headquarters camp in Mozambique’s Gorongosa game reserve, elements of the South African military violated the accord by continuing to assist the MNR.

Although the MNR, with some level of South African support, is largely responsible for Mozambique’s security problems, FRELIMO’s own policy mistakes have also contributed to the deteriorating military situation. Party sources readily admit that FRELIMO’s failure to give sufficient attention to peasant needs, and the resultant food shortages, resulted in an apathetic peasant population, which, while not necessarily supporting the MNR, is not enthusiastic enough about FRELIMO to risk MNR retribution (reliably reported to include severing of ears,

CSIS Africa Notes, December 29, 1986
tongues, and breasts) by providing the army with intelligence on guerrilla movements. The FPLM has also been poorly trained and supplied. Stories of soldiers fainting from hunger and raiding towns for food are so common that they must contain a grain of truth. In July 1986 Minister of Defense Chipande reported that the army was short of uniforms, boots, combat rations, fuel and lubricants, communications equipment, spare parts, engineers, and doctors.

In the wake of the reformist 1983 Party Congress, Machel tried to improve the security situation by placing top priority on providing food and consumer products to the peasant populations under threat from the MNR, hoping this would win their “hearts and minds” and lead to better intelligence flows. But even when the products could get through MNR ambushes, they were seldom enough to make a difference. And in some provinces the FPLM diverted supplies for its own use.

Machel also attempted to address the problem by sending officers for training by a British mission in Zimbabwe. Since February 1986, approximately 150 Mozambicans have graduated from the 12-week British programs and returned to duty. These newly trained officers improved discipline and performance within the FPLM’s top ranks, but had little effect at the lower levels, where the army interacts with the populace. In addition, even the best-trained officer will not perform well if neither he nor his men are receiving food, fuel, or ammunition.

Machel also hoped to reverse the military decline by getting better weapons. The Soviet Union has been the country’s main arms supplier since independence, replacing China, which was FRELIMO’s primary arms source during the war against Portuguese colonial rule. Article Four of the Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation concluded by the Soviet Union and Mozambique in March 1977 states: “In the interests of reinforcing the defense potentials of the High Contracting Parties, they will continue developing cooperation in the military sphere on the basis of appropriate agreements.” Similar clauses about military cooperation appear in Mozambique’s treaties with other Eastern bloc countries.

In practice, Soviet military support has been less than satisfactory in Maputo’s eyes. About two weeks after a 1981 attack by South African commandos on alleged ANC buildings in a suburb of Maputo, one cruiser and three smaller units of the Soviet Indian Ocean fleet visited Maputo and Beira in what the Soviet ambassador called a demonstration of solidarity against further South African attacks, but little else was done in response to the raid. Despite repeated pleas during 1982-1983 by FRELIMO delegations to Moscow for increased military assistance to deal with the depredations of the MNR, the dollar value of Soviet arms deliveries in those years was less than in 1978. (See “What Does the Case of Mozambique Tell Us About Soviet Ambivalence Toward Africa?” by Winrich Kühne in CSIS Africa Notes no. 46, August 30, 1985.)

Why did Mozambique and the Soviet Union fail to strike a military cooperation bargain that might have reduced the pressure on Machel to sign the Nkomati Accord? Some of the possible explanations are that the placement of southern Africa in the Kremlin’s current geostrategic priorities is well below other areas of the world; that Mozambique (unlike Angola) was not in a position to pay for effective arms with hard currency; and that the risk of a direct clash between Soviet bloc personnel and the South African military was much higher than in Angola. Moreover, despite its growing desperation, FRELIMO was developing some strong misgivings over the quality of training (ill-suited for anti-guerrilla warfare) and the costly, outdated weapons offered by the Soviet Union and its allies. Under these circumstances, FRELIMO was not willing to modify its staunchly nationalist stand against foreign military bases on Mozambican soil as a quid pro quo for stepped-up Soviet help.

Machel also made repeated appeals to the West for arms during the 1980s, but met with little response. Britain supplied some advanced infantry rifles and the training in Zimbabwe mentioned earlier, but Mozambique’s inability to pay, combined with concern about the hands into which the arms might fall, caused Britain as well as most other Western governments to balk at supplying more sophisticated weapons.

One appeal that did produce a significant response was Machel’s request at a June 1985 meeting with Prime Minister Mugabe that Zimbabwe supply troops to help protect the “Beira Corridor”—a road, rail, and oil pipeline transport route that runs 170 miles from the Zimbabwean border town of Mutare to the Mozambican port of Beira. Partly because he feels indebted to Machel for the support given to ZANU’s guerrilla army during the Rhodesian war, and partly because the Beira Corridor is Zimbabwe’s main alternative transport route to the lines through South Africa, Mugabe agreed to help.

By mid-1986, Zimbabwe had seconded approximately 6,000 officers and men to duty in Mozambique. Although the Zimbabwean forces repeatedly ousted the MNR from its strongholds, the FPLM proved unable to hold the territory once it was placed under Mozambican responsibility. This led to the MNR and the Mozambican-Zimbabwean forces chasing each other, with neither side able to hold territory against attack by the other.

**Chissano’s Policy Options**

**Option 1. Do a Deal with South Africa.** The arguments for this option are exactly those which prompted Machel to sign the Nkomati Accord with Pretoria in 1984. South African interference and/or direct aggression have contributed significantly to Mozambique’s economic and military difficulties. If Pretoria’s aid to the MNR were truly cut off, FRELIMO’s military task would be less daunting. Mozambique’s economy and the South African business community would mutually benefit from more cross-border investment in tourism, agriculture, and small-scale industry, as well as such joint undertakings as rehabilitation of Maputo port and rebuilding of the Cabo da Roca power line.

The arguments against this option are equally, if not more, convincing. South Africa’s record on its Nkomati
commitments does not inspire trust. Pretoria has confirmed that the references to post-Nkomati arms shipments to the MNR in the Gorongosa documents are substantially correct (but constituted only "technical violations"). U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs Chester Crocker, responding to questions from the press in Nairobi on November 5, 1986, took a harder line: "[T]he impression that a pattern of communication and support does continue" between South Africa and the MNR. Asked about alleged South African arms shipments to the guerrillas, he replied: "It is our impression that the [Accord of Nkomati has] not been fully adhered to."

Another warning signal is the increase in reports of a split between South Africa's Department of Foreign Affairs and the SADF on the issue of relations with Mozambique. In 1985, following the discovery of the Gorongosa documents, Minister of Foreign Affairs Roelof ("Pik") Botha said that he was unaware until after the fact that elements of the military had continued to supply the MNR. Indeed, one of the Gorongosa documents cited an SADF officer's reference to the foreign minister as a "traitor." If the soldier-diplomat split is genuine, President Chissano has even less of a guarantee than Machel did that the civilian authorities with whom his government negotiates will be able to keep the SADF's support of the MNR in check. The possibility that the split is a red herring must also be taken into account.

In any new negotiations, Pretoria would certainly repeat its Nkomati condition that Mozambique undertake to prevent ANC guerrillas from infiltrating into South Africa across their mutual border. Mozambique's military may not be up to the job of preventing all such infiltration, and South Africa could use unintentional violations as a pretext to break the agreement. Moreover, since South Africa contends that the ANC has no effective internal network within the Republic and that all sabotage therefore must be the result of cross-border infiltration, Mozambique could be blamed by Pretoria for any internally-launched ANC actions in Transvaal province. And if the ANC is shifting to a strategy of rural sabotage and away from hard-to-control urban operations, as some observers report, there would be more opportunities for Pretoria to accuse Maputo of breaking the pact.

Chissano must also be aware that South Africa now has two reasons for aiding the MNR, rather than the one reason it had in 1984. It still wants to pressure Mozambique not to support the ANC, but sanctions are an added priority. If, as seems increasingly evident, South Africa intends to use its neighbors as hostages in the sanctions game, there may be greater incentive to help the MNR keep regional transport routes to Africa's east coast closed, while also continuing to aid Angola's UNITA guerrillas in keeping the west coast route out of action. This two-pronged strategy could force southern Africa's six landlocked states to continue to channel some 85 percent of their trade through South African ports, and leave them vulnerable to a transportation cutoff that might be imposed by South Africa in retaliation for a push by them for sanctions. (See "Southern African Interdependence" by Stephen R. Lewis, Jr. in CSIS Africa Notes no. 56, March 27, 1986.) Pretoria's willingness to use the transport weapon both as a deterrent and as retaliation against sanctions has already been demonstrated by its August 1986 slowdown of shipments across the South Africa-Zimbabwe border just after Prime Minister Mugabe participated in a Commonwealth mini-summit at which increased sanctions were discussed. If South Africa were to cut off the MNR completely, this valuable lever would be eroded.

Finally, Chissano would probably face considerable opposition within FRELIMO to more deal-making with South Africa. Although the official Mozambican position is that Machel died "in unclear circumstances," the angry demonstration in front of South Africa's Maputo trade office after Machel's funeral was evidence that many citizens believe Pretoria engineered the crash, perhaps by broadcasting false navigation signals to mislead Machel's pilot. Given Machel's moderating influence within the Front Line states grouping, it is not obvious what advantage Pretoria could have gained from his death, especially a death within South African territory. Logic aside, Chissano would be assuming an enormous political risk to take an Nkomati II initiative in the present highly emotive period.

Option 2. Turn East. The principal argument against this option is that the Soviet Union remains reluctant to increase its economic or military involvement in Mozambique. While Cuba's relationship with FRELIMO is qualitatively different from the Soviet Union's (for example, Western diplomats credit Castro with having mediated between Machel and the Kremlin over the signing of the Nkomati Accord), an infusion of Cuban personnel could not make a significant difference in the military situation unless Mozambique were to receive large supplies of Soviet arms.

Chissano could try to arouse Soviet interest by offering Moscow a base facility, but such an offer would violate a basic tenet of FRELIMO policy dating from its 1962 founding documents. The principle of not allowing any foreign military bases ("with no exception") was reaffirmed in the 1978 constitution. Moreover, some military experts believe that the Soviets' strategic requirements have changed so much since Mozambique's independence in 1975, when the USSR sought such rights, that a base might not be attractive to the Soviet Union now.

In addition, the West, and particularly the United States, would react extremely negatively to any increase in Soviet and Cuban involvement. Aid could be jeopardized, and there would be pressure from the right in Washington for U.S. aid to the MNR.

Option 3. Turn More to the West. Past experience suggests that, even given the political will to do so at the top level, the U.S. and European governments might not deliver the kinds and levels of support Mozambique needs. After Machel signed the Nkomati Accord, the Reagan administration wanted to provide significant aid and non-lethal military assistance. But pressure from
the right in Congress and elsewhere in the policy community succeeded in limiting economic aid to that which directly assists the private sector, and in blocking all military aid.

In addition, foreign aid spending is coming under both budgetary and domestic political pressures in a number of Western donor countries, including the United States. The prospects of sizable new aid initiatives for Mozambique at a time when allocations for “proven friends” are threatened with cuts are limited. Moreover, otherwise sympathetic officials may be hard-pressed to defend investment in projects (such as the Beira Corridor transport route) that Pretoria has the power, and increasingly the will, to destroy.

Chissano also has to keep in mind the possible impact of a major turn to the West on relations with the Soviet Union and its allies. While economic links with the West have been tolerated, and there is reason to believe that Moscow would welcome further sharing of the economic and military assistance burden, an overtly anti-Soviet stance by Mozambique in international fora could result in reduced assistance from the socialist countries.

Option 4: Do a Deal with the MNR. One major problem with this strategy is the difficulty of identifying with whom such a deal might be negotiated. In 1984, for example, South African-sponsored negotiations between FRELIMO and the MNR had seemingly produced an agreement (the “Pretoria Declaration”) that inter alia acknowledged Machel’s authority as president and called for an end to armed conflict within the country. (See “Post-Nkomati Mozambique,” op. cit.) But the MNR’s then secretary-general, Evo Fernandes, backed out of the deal within a week, possibly because of the influence of an MNR faction closely connected with Portuguese industrialists who had lost their properties to FRELIMO nationalization, and who wanted the war continued until they could be assured of the return of these properties.

The MNR’s internal situation has become even more confused since the breakdown of the Pretoria Declaration. In July 1986, a new organization calling itself the Committee for Mozambican Union (CUNIMO) was founded in West Germany. A CUNIMO press release praised the MNR’s leader, Afonso Dhlakama, and claimed that CUNIMO was laying “the foundation for a permanent civil administration following the end of the civil war.” CUNIMO apparently envisaged itself as a “political” wing of the MNR, which has long been criticized for lacking a clear political platform. Dhlakama promptly denied that CUNIMO had any affiliation with the MNR. When CUNIMO tried to send a representative into Mozambique to meet with Dhlakama and clarify the issue, the envoy was stopped at the Malawi-Mozambique border on Dhlakama’s orders.

The CUNIMO-MNR squabble reflects two underlying strains among those Mozambicans actively opposed to FRELIMO: racial/ethnic tensions and the question of under what circumstances negotiations with FRELIMO should be initiated.

A major component of the ethnicity problem is white-black tension. Black MNR members resent the privileged positions enjoyed by some whites, and particularly the high profile taken by Fernandes, a white Portuguese citizen who held the post of MNR secretary-general until July 1986. Because of the difficulties of communication with Dhlakama (who seldom sets foot outside of Mozambique), Fernandes took many independent decisions, and cultivated the image of de facto MNR head. He also derived considerable power from his connections with business interests in Portugal and Brazil.

A 1983 attempt spearheaded by Artur Vilankulu (who is black) to strip Fernandes of his secretary-general credentials failed, and it was Vilankulu who ended up being expelled; he is now spokesman for CUNIMO. A new black-led drive, in July 1986, succeeded; the post of secretary-general was abolished, and Fernandes was demoted to “Chief of Studies and Ideology.” The move defused some black-white tension, but other whites still retain their positions and the racial strain is still evident.

The MNR also suffers from regional-tribal differences. Most of its black leaders come from the center of the country, and many are affiliated with the Manica tribe, possibly because the Rhodesians found it geographically convenient to recruit from Mozambique’s central provinces when forming the organization. The MNR is trying to cultivate leaders from other parts of the country, but progress is slow. Manica domination inevitably causes some unease among the MNR’s ethnically more diverse lower ranks.

The negotiations issue is possibly even more divisive. CUNIMO spokesman Vilankulu has put forward relatively flexible conditions at times, only to state later that he opposes all negotiations and supports total military victory. Depending on whom one talks to within Dhlakama’s MNR, the organization is either willing to agree to anything that guarantees free elections in Mozambique, or believes it can win the current war and is only interested in a power hand-over. And even the same individual within the MNR may have one set of conditions for negotiations one month, and a different set the next. The latest “MNR position,” announced in Washington on September 29, 1986, offers a cease-fire and amnesty to FRELIMO in return for free elections and the expulsion of foreign troops.

Since all individuals calling themselves MNR representatives agree that Dhlakama is the MNR’s leader, one might think that he could clarify the negotiating conditions. But outsiders must usually rely on his representatives to convey messages, making confidential discussions virtually impossible. Furthermore, those who have met Dhlakama say he is more at home with military than with political tactics, and has not decided what his priorities would be in negotiations.

Yet another factor complicating negotiations is the diversity of the MNR’s sponsors and their priorities. The movement reportedly receives or has received aid (a) from South Africans who want FRELIMO to do more to restrict the ANC, and possibly want the Front Line states to undertake not to lobby for sanctions; (b) from Portuguese and Brazilian industrialists, who want the
Mozambique has vigorously denied the allegations, and there is evidence that the documents were tampered with, but, real or fabricated, the documents render any Mozambican action against Malawi more risky. As President Julius Nyerere learned when Tanzania became directly involved in the overthrow of Idi Amin’s regime in Uganda in 1979, Africans take seriously Article III of the Charter of the Organization of African Unity, which forbids disrespect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of member states, subversive activities aimed against them, or interference in their internal affairs.

Option 6. Focus on Economic and Military Reform, with Help from Zimbabwe. This option involves four major elements:

1. Move the younger generation to the fore in the military. There has long been dissatisfaction within FRELIMO at the excessive respect paid to the “historicos,” the now-aging figures who played leading roles in the liberation struggle. Although many have proven unprepared for their post-independence tasks, Machel hesitated to demote them for the sake of unity. Instead the “historicos” were rotated from one responsible position to another. This policy blocked a new generation of young, more technically skilled army officers and civilian administrators from moving into top posts. A major overhaul of the military (including forcing the “historicos” into retirement) would give the younger guard a chance.

2. Move the most competent administrators from the civilian sector to the military sphere. Many of the military disasters stem from poor planning and logistics. The FPLM has already been relying on civilian administrators for advice, but under this strategy the experts would actually be integrated into the army.

3. Implement vigorously the economic reforms outlined in the Fourth Party Congress of 1983. This would involve providing more material incentives for peasants and forcing the urban sector to accept the austerity rural rehabilitation will require.

4. Encourage Zimbabwe to send in more troops and use them not only to take but also to hold territory. This would end the cycle of Zimbabwean soldiers taking towns only to have FRELIMO soldiers lose them.

A major advantage of this four-part strategy is that it relies primarily on national and regional resources. In addition, the only foreign state directly involved, Zimbabwe, has both a record of military competence and a major strategic interest in reestablishing peace in Mozambique. If the Mozambican transport routes were cut, Zimbabwe would be almost entirely dependent upon South Africa for surface transport. Indeed, Mozambican and Zimbabwean interests overlap in so many areas that Chissano recently speculated on the possibility of a future federation between the two countries. Mugabe told the Zimbabwean parliament in November 1986: “The survival of Mozambique is our survival. The fall of Mozambique will certainly be our fall.” Zimbabwean Minister of State for Security Emmerson Munangagwa subsequently added, “It [the Beira Corridor] is so important that we will keep it open at every cost.”
This option would also ease some of the racial strains in FRELIMO, much of whose older guard is nonblack. Because FRELIMO has implemented equal opportunity in education, the younger generation is more racially balanced, though nonblacks still make up a disproportionately large percentage of the skilled personnel. Moving the younger generation to leadership positions in the military would improve the relative position of blacks.

A shift of civilian administrators into the military, however, would not be cost-free. The civilian sector is already badly understaffed, and the siphoning off of management skills from the civilian to the military sphere could contribute to even greater peasant apathy, adding new complications to the military situation.

Another problem with this strategy is that a reorganization of the military aimed at increasing its competence would violate one of the basic principles underlying FRELIMO unity. Under Mondlane and Machel, individuals who "made mistakes" were not demoted. They were moved gently to one side and after a decent period reintegrated into the leadership in another role. This partly explains why FRELIMO is one of the few African parties not to suffer from major factional splits.

If Chissano moves against the "historicos," he will face opposition from the old guard. Machel was reportedly planning such an overhaul at the time of his death and, given his hold on the affection of the FRELIMO membership, he probably could have pulled it off. But Chissano, despite his impeccable party credentials, cannot draw on the same reservoir of emotional support. Therefore, he will have to act cautiously — at a time when speed is critical if the MNR is to be prevented from slicing the country in two.

Another possible problem revolves around Minister of Defense Chipande. Machel reportedly had Chipande's support for this strategy. But with Machel no longer there to protect him, taking responsibility for implementing a sweeping military shake-up involves major political risks. Chissano may not want to subject Chipande to such dangers.

There is a final question that Chissano must face in evaluating this option: Is the Mozambican military already so demoralized that even an influx of new blood, civilian administrative skills, and additional Zimbabwean troops would be insufficient to turn the situation around?

Chissano's Likely Choices
Given the hazards associated with each of the six options, Chissano is unlikely to embrace any one of them fully. According to sources close to the Mozambican government, doing a deal with South Africa, negotiating with the MNR, and turning vigorously to the East or to the West are all ruled out for the time being.

Chissano is reportedly most inclined toward Option 6 (improving FRELIMO's own economic and military performance and getting greater Zimbabwean commitment to the war), partly because it is a logical extension of Machel's plans at the time of his death and would therefore have a better prospect of approval by the FRELIMO Central Committee. This will probably be combined with Option 5, encouraging Malawi to halt MNR aid flows, though the pressure Chissano exerts will now have to be more overt and diplomatic than covert or military. A modified version of Option 3, turning to the West, is also envisaged. And though a major new agreement with South Africa is unlikely, Chissano will seek to smooth relations with Pretoria within the framework of the existing Nkomati Accord.

Chissano confirmed many of these impressions in his first press conference as president, held on December 4, 1986. On South Africa, he insisted that Mozambique was not providing any operational aid to the ANC, and refrained from blaming Pretoria for Machel's death. He promised major economic reforms, including an austerity program that he said would be "like removing a parasite from your foot — very painful but in the end good for you." He expressed faith in Malawi's commitment to cooperate with Mozambique in a recently established joint security commission, and spoke of his hopes that Britain, France, the United States, West Germany, Spain, Italy, and Brazil would supply arms. As expected, he was adamant in his refusal to negotiate with the MNR.

Chissano's maneuvering room, however, is restricted by the stresses Option 6 could place on FRELIMO unity. He made it clear that maintaining unity is a top priority when he expressed faith in the officials appointed by Machel in a November 13, 1986 speech to the opening session of his Council of Ministers: "Their cooperation is fundamental to the success of my mission . . . . I want to appeal that this unity should be neither temporary nor superficial nor conditioned by the emotions of the moment . . . . During this difficult period, more than ever before, there is a need to close our ranks, to make our government a monolithic, cohesive, and unwavering block — a body impenetrable to enemy thought and action."

If Chissano's strategy fails, and the military situation continues to deteriorate, FRELIMO will not necessarily be ousted from power, but it could find itself in control only of the southern part of the country, and perhaps only in the urban areas of the south. This is not an unprecedented situation in Africa. Angola's ruling party, for example, has virtually ceded a chunk of its southern territory to South African occupation and UNITA guerrilla control. But a long-term stalemate could cause major problems for Mozambique's neighbors by keeping the central and northern transport routes inoperative and permitting intermittent sabotage of the southern ones. Such a standoff would also tip the strategic balance in southern Africa even more firmly in favor of Pretoria.
