

Relations with South Africa, Zimbabwe and Brazil

Summary and key dates

South African Defence Force attack on selected targets in Gaborone (June 14, 1985). Condemnation of incident by UN security Council (June 21). Relations with South Africa (February 1985-January 1986). Government denial of allegations by Zimbabwe regarding activities at Dukwe refugee settlement (Nov. 20, 1985). Establishment of diplomatic relations with Brazil (Sept. 26).

Twelve people were killed and six injured on June 14, 1985, when a force of some 70 South African commando troops carried out a raid on 10 alleged centres of activity of the African National Congress (ANC) in Gaborone (the capital of Botswana). The attack gave rise to international criticism of South Africa's policy; the United States temporarily withdrew its ambassador in Pretoria for consultations in Washington [see page 33897], while the South African ambassador in London was informed by Sir Geoffrey Howe, the UK Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary, of the United Kingdom's condemnation of the incident, describing it as the 'blatant violation of the sovereignty of a fellow Commonwealth country'.

The surprise attack took place in the early hours of the morning and was completed in less than an hour by South African Defence Force (SADF) troops who entered Botswana by road (Gaborone being some 15 km from the South African border- see map on page 33445. A statement from the Office of President Quett Masire issued on June 14 said that attacks on various houses and an office in the capital were carried out simultaneously; four houses were demolished, extensive damage was done to others, and the dead included three women, a six-year-old child who was visiting from Lesotho, and a Somali national who held a Dutch refugee passport (and whose Dutch wife and a 10-year-old child were among the injured). The statement linked the raid with threats of military intervention by South Africa in February 1985 [see page 33446], and claimed that the raiders had fired indiscriminately at passing motorists and had set a number of vehicles on fire. Reports indicated that the South African troops had used loud-hailers to warn residents of neighbouring houses to stay inside, but that some people were caught in crossfire.

The then Chief of the SADF, Gen. Constand Viljoen, in a press conference on the same day, stated that the aim of the raid was to 'disrupt the nerve centre of the ANC machinery in Botswana'.

He reiterated South Africa's claim that since the signature of the Nkomati accord between Mozambique and South Africa in March 1984 [see 32835 A], and the subsequent departure from Mozambique of ANC members, the organization had used Botswana territory from which to infiltrate into South Africa. Although he stated that 'every effort had been made to get at the enemy, and not at the Botswana police or members of the public or innocent members of the

terrorists' families', reports suggested that two policemen had been injured in a clash with the SADF and that the police had then withdrawn. Road blocks set up by the police failed to prevent the SADF forces from leaving the country.

Gen. Viljoen stated that intelligence reports had indicated an imminent intensification of ANC activities; the grenade attacks on the homes of members of the South African Parliament's (Coloured) House of Representatives on June 12 [see page 33768], had, however, been 'the last straw' and had precipitated the operation. (The ANC had denied having links with the 'Western Cape suicide squads', which had claimed responsibility for these attacks.) According to Gen. Viljoen, the raid had been a success, although some of the target houses had been empty at the time; the South African authorities were, he said, aware of eight other centres of ANC activity in Gaborone, and he warned that further raids might be necessary if the government of Botswana did not take steps to remove them.

According to subsequent reports, the SADF had attacked a house whose former occupants had been South African refugees, and which was now occupied by the Somali refugee and his Dutch wife [see above]. Most of those who died in the raid were South African political refugees; observers acknowledged that they were probably ANC sympathizers, but denied that they belonged to the armed wing of the organization, Umkhonto we Sizwe. In a funeral service held in Gaborone on June 22, the coffins of seven of the dead were draped in the black, yellow and green flag of the ANC.

The South African police on June 20 revealed details of documents seized during the raid which allegedly showed that ANC members in Botswana had links with individuals, trade unions and other organizations within South Africa.

According to Maj. Craig Williamson of the South African security police, the ANC operated in Botswana under cover of an organization known as African Arts and Crafts Exporting Agents. Computer discs, bank records and membership lists were also found, which proved, according to Maj. Williamson, that at least nine out of the twelve people killed were involved in the ANC's subversive activities in South Africa. A number of captured weapons were displayed. South African police later reported that ten men and five women had been arrested on June 22 in the Bongoletu township (outside Oudtshoorn, about 350 km east of Cape Town) on the basis of information obtained during the Gaborone raid.

The UN security Council on June 21, 1985, unanimously adopted Resolution 568 condemning the 'unprovoked and unwarranted military attack' on Gaborone. The resolution, among other things, denounced the practice of 'hot pursuit' employed by South Africa to 'terrorize and destabilize Botswana and other countries in the southern African region', and demanded 'full and adequate' compensation by South Africa to Botswana for damage to life and property resulting from the attack. (For UN security Council resolution in the same week South African invasion of Angolan territory,)[see 34026 A]

Meeting in emergency session on June 24, the Commonwealth Committee on Southern Africa expressed its support for Resolution 568 and called for an end to 'all such acts of aggression, provocation and harassment' in the region.

Following an appeal from the Botswana government for international assistance to strengthen its defences against any further attacks, and for compensation payments from South Africa in respect of the dead and injured persons and for damage to property, a UN mission paid a fact-finding visit to Gaborone on July 27-Aug. 2. Its report, issued on Sept. 11, recommended that the international community respond favourably to Botswana's request for US\$14,000,000 to improve its security capabilities and its facilities for South African refugees. The mission assessed the cost of damage to property at over \$190,000. Inconclusive talks on Botswana's request for compensation were held on Sept. 25 in Pretoria between Mr Roelof 'Pik' Botha, the South African Minister of Foreign Affairs, and Dr Gaositwe Chiepe, the Botswana Minister of Foreign Affairs.

Relations had deteriorated in early 1985 following South African threats to take action against suspected ANC activists in Botswana [see 33444 A]; following talks in Pretoria on Feb. 22, however, between Mr Botha and Dr Chiepe, it was announced that South Africa would no longer insist on Botswana signing a security pact similar to the Nkomati accord, the South African government having apparently accepted assurances from Botswana that it would not allow subversive elements to operate against South Africa.

It was noted subsequently that development of the Sua Pan soda ash project, the success of which was dependent on South Africa agreeing to import the product, was expected to go ahead as part of the sixth national development plan (covering 1985/86–1990/91), details of which were presented to the National Assembly in mid-1985. South Africa had previously linked its co-operation in the scheme with the signature of a security agreement.

There were reports in the South African press during March to the effect that South Africa had demanded that Botswana expel all known ANC members. In late March Dr Chiepe denied that South African political refugees (of whom there were about 500 in Botswana) had been asked to leave the country; it was reported, however, that two refugees, who had been injured in an explosion in a house in Gaborone on Feb. 13, 1985 [see page 33446], had left the country for their own safety.

A large arms cache was discovered in Gaborone on April 22 following a police search of 'undesirable elements and illegal immigrants'; no arrests were made and the existence of the cache was not attributed to any specific group. Observers commented, however, that there were fears in Botswana as to the possible South African reaction to the discovery of the weapons.

According to a despatch from the Agence France-Presse on Aug. 1, a total of 24 ANC refugees had been asked to leave Botswana 'as soon as possible'. In a foreign policy statement on Aug. 26 Dr Chiepe denied reports that Botswana was changing its policy towards harbouring refugees, stating that the government asked refugees to leave Botswana for their own safety, if evidence showed that their lives were in danger, but not because it had been told to do so by a foreign power.

A car bomb exploded near a hospital in Gaborone on Nov. 16, killing two adults and two children. President Masire in condemning the incident attributed it to the work of 'deranged individuals or organizations'.

Following the deaths on Jan. 4, 1986, of two white South Africans in a land-mine explosion just south of the border with Botswana near Stockpoort, the South African government gave further indications of possible retaliation against Botswana. A message to the Botswana government issued on Jan. 6 by the South African Department of Foreign Affairs declared that there was evidence to suggest that the mine had been laid by persons emanating from Botswana, and urged the government to institute 'effective measures to eliminate the menace of terrorism', warning that South Africa would 'in terms of established international legal principles' take 'appropriate measures to protect its citizens'.

In an earlier incident, in mid-March 1985, a South African farming couple had been killed near the Botswana border. The killers were alleged to be ANC fighters, and a joint search was carried out in the area. In a statement to the South African Parliament following the attack, the Minister of Law and Order, Mr Louis le Grange, declared that it was the latest in a series of at least 15 violent incidents since August 1984.

It was announced on Nov. 20, 1985, by the publicity secretary of the opposition Botswana National Front (BNF), that two MPs from the majority Botswana Democratic Party (BDP) had defected to the BNF, namely Mr Botshabelo Bagwasi, a former mayor of Gaborone, and Mr Raphael Sekoane, a businessman. [For distribution of seats following September 1984 general election, see 33444 A]

Responding to Zimbabwean allegations that the Dukwe refugee settlement (situated near the Zimbabwean border—see page 33445) was used as a recruiting and training centre for Zimbabwean dissidents, the Botswana Minister of Presidential Affairs and Public Administration, Mr PH Kedikilwe, speaking in Parliament on Nov. 20, reiterated his government's assertions that the policy of granting political asylum to genuine refugees was based on 'humanitarian concerns', and did not imply hostility towards the governments concerned.

Referring to an earlier decision to deploy units of the Botswana Defence Force along the country's border with Zimbabwe, Mr Kedikilwe said that this was in response to a deterioration in the security situation in the area, and was in the interests of both countries.

A Zimbabwean government delegation led by the Minister of Home Affairs, Mr Enos Nkala had visited Botswana in late October but failed to obtain an assurance from the Botswana government that refugees whom it described as 'active dissidents' would undergo a screening process.

A joint statement issued by the governments of Brazil and of Botswana announced that diplomatic relations were to be established at ambassadorial level with effect from Sept. 26, 1985.—(Guardian-Times-Le Monde- New York Times-International Herald Tribune-Africa Economic Digest-United Nations Information Service, London-BBC Summary of World Broadcasts) (Prev. rep. 33444 A)