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MOZAMBIQUE: LESOTHO'S NEW OPENING

TO THE NORTH

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MOZAMBIQUE: LESOTHO'S NEW OPENING TO THE NORTH

by Robert D'A Henderson\*

On June 25th, 1975, the Mozambican people celebrated their newly-won freedom from Portuguese colonial rule. Among the African states invited to the independence ceremonies in the People's Republic of Mozambique's capital of Maputo were the representatives of the government and people of the Kingdom of Lesotho. Despite a wide ideological gulf between the differing systems of government of these two Southern African countries, they have attempted to develop and strengthen relations through a number of bilateral and multilateral channels. One issue which has re-enforced these relations is their common opposition to the apartheid system in South Africa, their common neighbour; in addition, South Africa maintains a dominant economic position vis-a-vis their respective national economies (i.e. migrant labourers, surface transportation, energy supply, etc.). In fact, Lesotho is completely surrounded by South Africa (see attached map), necessitating all of its surface and oceanic trade to pass through South Africa. In this brief paper, I wish to outline the various types of relations between these two newly-independent countries: Lesotho in 1966 and Mozambique in 1975.

Becoming a sovereign and independent state in 1975, Mozambique began to enter into diplomatic relations with many of its neighbouring African states (although not with South Africa or the former Ian Smith regime in the then Rhodesia) and into multilateral relations with the world community of states (especially the United Nations and the Organization of African Unity). In 1976, Mozambique and Lesotho entered into diplomatic relations at the ambassadoral level. The following year Lesotho opened an embassy in Maputo, while the Mozambican Ambassador to Lesotho would be resident in Maputo. But prior to establishing formal diplomatic links or even Mozambique's independence after ten years of liberation struggle, Lesotho government ministers and delegations had held cordial talks with representatives of the Mozambique liberation movement, Frente de Libertação de Moçambique (Frelimo) at meetings of the OAU, etc; Lesotho had supported OAU motions condemning Portuguese colonial rule in Mozambique as well as in Angola and Guinea-Bissau. Further after the April 1974 coup in Portugal and the signing of the Lusaka Accord (September 1974) creating a transitional government in Mozambique until its formal independence, an official Lesotho delegation visited Maputo for the purpose of holding discussions with the newly-formed Mozambique Transitional Government, headed by a Frelimo Central Committee

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member Joaquim Chisanno. These discussions were to explore common strategies for improving the conditions of the migrant workers from both countries who were working in South Africa. Later discussions on this same issue increasingly centered around the creation of joint strategies aimed at decreasing the number of their male workers being recruited to the South African mines and toward creating more domestic employment for them instead. Since 1977, seven Southern African countries (including Lesotho and Mozambique) have met to work out a common approach to the problem of migrant labour to South Africa; in October 1980, they established the Southern African Labour Commission (SALC) to regularly discuss questions relating to migratory labour in Southern Africa. But Mozambique's present position is unclear as it did not send any delegates to the November 1981 SALC meeting in Maseru.

Originally resulting from common problems such as colonial rule and migrant labour problems, these relations began to expand into other types of interaction. When Mozambique, in March 1976, closed its borders with the Ian Smith regime in Rhodesia in accordance with the UN resolutions, Lesotho gave the Mozambique people US\$23,000 in food assistance (i.e. supplies of cooking beans) under the Commonwealth assistance programme to lessen the economic consequences of the border closure. The following year at the Third Frelimo Congress (February 1977), President Samora Machel called for the pursuit of friendly relations of cooperation with Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland (the BLS countries) in the fields of economic affairs, transport and communications. And in a reciprocal show of African solidarity in March 1978, Mozambique's Foreign Minister Joaquim Chissano visited Maseru to discuss Lesotho's threatened situation as a result of its refusal to recognize the Transkei's "independence" from South Africa. Transkei "closed" its three border posts (i.e. Tele Bridge, Qacha's Nek, and Ramatseliso's Gate) with Lesotho in retaliation; it had taken over these posts from the South African Police. These border crossing points were closed in the sense that the Transkei officials demanded that Lesotho citizens produced a valid international passport and had obtained a visitor's visa prior to entering Transkei. Most Lesotho citizens do not have an international passport (basically intended for world travel), rather they possess what is referred to as an "internal" passport (i.e. travel documents) which is accepted for working, living, or travelling in South Africa. In spite of these restrictions upon individual cross-border movements, goods still entered Lesotho from the Transkei. But Lesotho consistently refused to recognize it as an independent state, rather it was and is still seen as part of South Africa and under the

administration of Pretoria. After his inspection, Chissano mentioned the possibility of relations of cooperation being established between the governments of Lesotho and Mozambique. He went on to point out that "the main thing is that we should mutually support each other in the struggle to consolidate our independence and to extend democratic power in Southern Africa." The following month Lesotho's Foreign Minister Charles Molapo made a return courtesy call on President Machel in Maputo, where discussions centered on finding ways of increasing their cooperative, bilateral relations.

As a result of these reciprocal visits, President Machel invited Lesotho's Prime Minister Leabua Jonathan for a five-day state visit to Mozambique in August 1978. At the State Banquet on August 23rd in his honour, Prime Minister Jonathan declared that "although surrounded on all sides by the enemy oppressor [South Africa], Lesotho's contribution towards the [Southern African] struggle has been appreciated by the very oppressed people and by the international community. In our geographical position, we cannot do this without the obvious repercussions. Nonetheless victory is inevitable and we shall continue." To which President Machel replied that "economic independence is more and more clearly becoming the main area of confrontation with imperialism which wants to keep our countries within its orbit of dependence so that it can carry on exploiting our natural resources and labour" .... and the important need for joint action in "the creation of a new international economic order based on independence, each country's recuperation of its own resources, and mutually advantageous cooperation."

On August 26th, members of both the Lesotho government delegation and the Mozambique government signed three bilateral agreements intended to pave the way toward greater cooperation between the two countries in the fields of civil aviation, trade, and scientific-cultural cooperation. Under the terms of the air transport agreement, both countries agreed to operate an air service between Maseru and Maputo, via Manzini (Swaziland). This international service would carry passengers, cargo, and mail between the two countries. Started up in November 1978 by the Mozambique National Airline, there is currently a weekly Mozambique flight between the two capitals as well as a twice weekly Lesotho Airways flight. The trade agreement was intended to expand and promote economic, commercial, industrial and technological cooperation between the two developing countries. Mozambique listed thirty export products (including tea, cement, seafoods especially prawns, sugar, petroleum, clothing, bicycles, refrigerators, a variety of construction materials, etc.) in the appendix to the agreement to offer in trade with

Lesotho; similarly Lesotho listed eleven export products (including beans, peas, wool, mohair, skins, hides, woolen and mohair products, and from 1980 beef and mutton). Also, when transporting goods by air between the two countries, preference was to be given to their respective national airlines. Yet none of the listed export products of either Lesotho or Mozambique (with the possible exceptions of frozen prawns and meat) are high-value, low-weight commodities which would be commercially viable for air freighting between these two markets. Rather most were bulk shipment-type exports for which truck or rail transportation would be more economic. The third agreement sought to provide for an exchange and promotion of bilateral cooperation in the fields of art, culture, education (including academic activities in sciences and technology), and sports.

According to Prime Minister Johathan speaking at President Machel's Banquet in his honour on August 26th, the air service agreement was important in that "our peoples shall much more easily maintain contacts. Their travel schedules have been made easier between our two countries." Similarly the trade agreement was seen as assuring "the constant supply of commodities that we need and you [Mozambique] shall always be availed of all that we can supply to you." The cultural agreement was to restore "our African oneness: the cultural contacts of our peoples shall be the basic restoration of what the imperialists had destroyed." In reply, President Machel stated:

"Our joint positions in relation to the total and complete independence of our countries can only be concretised if they are based on the establishment of new economic relations. The ties of dependence which we inherited are a brake on the development of our economy and the progress of our Peoples. Our unity is strengthened by understanding each other's concrete problems and by a reciprocal interest in each other's development, through the establishment of mutually beneficial cooperation."

He went on to point out that the agreements had "created conditions for the laying of solid foundations for the development of our [bilateral] relations in the fields of transport, trade, labour, public works, industry and other sectors."

The agreements on air services and scientific-cultural cooperation entered into force upon the joint signatures of both countries' representatives on August 26th, 1978. The new air route between Maputo and Maseru has permitted those travelling between the two countries to bypass the previous necessity of passing through a South African border post or international airport in order to get to the other Black majority-ruled African states to

the North. But the perceived benefits of this new direct air link in terms of political policy and traveller convenience must be qualified by several observations. First most Lesotho citizens are not banned from traveling through South Africa and surface transportation (i.e. automobile, bus, train) would be considerably cheaper than the cost of an air flight, though a longer journey. Also most of those individuals who are likely to benefit from this direct flight are South African refugees and those individuals banned from entering South Africa. And finally a weekly non-stop flight between Maseru and Gaborone (Botswana) was subsequently started in October 1979, which can connect with international flights from North America, Europe and the Far East, via Salisbury (Zimbabwe) and Lusaka (Zambia). Flights to Maputo, on the other hand, can make direct connection with international flights to Europe (i.e. Paris) and to Eastern Europe (i.e. twice weekly Interflug/Mozambique National Airline flights to East Berlin and weekly Aeroflot flights to Moscow).

In support of the scientific-cultural agreement, the Lesotho Minister for Health and Social Welfare visited Mozambique in July 1979 with a nine person delegation to study primary health care in that country and to conclude an agreement for the exchange of health personnel. Lesotho agreed to send nursing tutors to Mozambique to assist in training nurses there. Similarly, the Mozambican Minister for Education and Culture Graça Simbine Machel was invited to visit Lesotho in 1980 to observe the role of Lesotho women in a number of the country's development projects, including those in the mountain district of Thaba Tseka. In the area of academic exchanges, a number of staff and students from the National University of Lesotho (NUL) and Eduardo Mondlane University (Maputo) have attended conferences, workshops and seminars at each other's university. A recent example was the prominent contribution made by two academics from Maputo at the November 1981 Workshop on Research Priorities in Southern Africa, held at NUL. But due to the sensitive political situation in both countries, cultural and sporting exchanges are more difficult to organize due to changing conditions, as the Lesotho football team which was to play exhibition games in Mozambique discovered in January 1982 when all their visas were turned down.

In the case of the trade agreement, it was signed subject to ratification by the Lesotho Government; at present, it has not yet been ratified. There appears to be a number of possible reasons for this. First is that the two countries operate on different customs and excise regulations, changes which necessitate additional legislation. Another is that Lesotho is a

member of the Southern African Customs Union (SACU), which also includes Botswana, Swaziland and South Africa. According to Article 19 (section 1) of the 1959 customs union agreement, all trade agreements with countries outside the common customs area must have the prior concurrence of the other SACU members. And a final possible reason is that the level of trade between Lesotho and Mozambique is almost negligible. The exchange of the proposed export goods listed in the agreement has not materialized. But one export product of Lesotho which had not been listed and which is commercially viable for air shipment has found a market in Mozambique: the Lesotho Dispensary Agency currently manufactures medicines and pharmaceutical products for both domestic use and export. Starting in 1980, it exported R55,588 worth to Mozambique and a further R55,640 the following year. At the present, these exports constitute the only significant economic exchange between the two countries. A final point on the trade agreement is that it does provide for the establishment of a joint committee to consult each other on any matter arising from or in connection to the agreement (Art. 10, section 2). But there is no indication whether or not this joint committee will act in a similar manner as the joint commissions for research, development and economic projects established in September 1976 between Mozambique and Tanzania and in April 1977 between Mozambique and Zambia. President Machel has repeatedly called for such cooperative interactions.

Despite both progress and setbacks in bilateral relations, Lesotho and Mozambique have both actively participated in various multilateral, intra-regional relations, in addition to the previous discussed SALC. An important example of such relations is the Southern African Development Coordination Conference (SADCC), only recently started in April 1980 at a summit meeting in Lusaka. Within this organization, each of the nine Southern African member-states (South Africa is excluded) agreed to act as a coordinating country to develop a regional policy implementation approach toward selected economic sectors in the region. Mozambique is responsible for coordinating a regional approach in respect of the transport and communications sector and Lesotho (with Zimbabwe) for the soil conservation and land utilisation sector. At the November 1981 Blantyre summit, SADCC members took a critical look at the region's "severe problems and continual challenges" that are seen to "fall into five clusters: historic inheritance, South African destabilization international economic situation, national resource mobilisation and management constraints, and specific problems to be overcome in building up the habit of effective regional coordination."

More recently, Lesotho and Mozambique had agreed to be signatories to the 18-state preferential trade area (PTA) pact for Eastern and Southern Africa, under the auspices of the Economic Commission for Africa. Though Mozambique and a number of other states did sign the pact in December 1981, Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland (BLS) withheld their signatures pending a review of any possible conflicts between it and the SACU agreement. South Africa has now stated that it has no objection to the BLS countries signing the PTA while retaining their membership in the common customs union. But the SACU agreement would, in its present form, prevent any tariff removal agreement between a SACU member and a non-member. Mozambique and Tanzania have agreed to abolish tariffs between their countries as from January 1982, though it could take ten years to abolish them completely, creating a Mozambique-Tanzania free trade area. The SACU agreement constrains Lesotho from entering into a similar bilateral agreement. Such constraints have created differing opinions within Lesotho as to whether the benefits of SACU membership outweigh the liabilities and whether SACU membership hinders the development of intra-regional bilateral relations between member and non-member African states.

In another type of intra-regional relations, representatives of Lesotho and Mozambique, along with those from Botswana and Swaziland, met in Mbabane (Swaziland) in April 1981 to discuss South African "military incursions and subversive activities" against the Black majority-ruled states of Southern Africa. This was the first meeting of its kind between the four countries attending which was devoted solely to security matters "in the face of South Africa's continued acts of aggression against neighbouring independent African countries." In October of the same year, representatives of Mozambique, Botswana, Tanzania and Zambia visited Lesotho to have a detailed investigation of "the armed attacks within Lesotho by the Lesotho Liberation Army (LLA), the armed faction of the Basuto Congress Party (BCP), and the increasingly aggressive stance taken by South Africa towards Lesotho." These shows of solidarity have further promoted the growing cooperative relations between Lesotho and Mozambique.

In summary, considerable progress has been made in the level and strength of the bilateral, cooperative relations between Lesotho and Mozambique. Further both countries are active participants in a number of multilateral, intra-regional organizations aimed at reciprocal benefits for developing economies and at encouraging regional solidarity. Yet both sets of relations (bilateral and multilateral) must be seen as being directly



affected by South Africa's militarily and economically dominant position in the Southern African region. Lesotho's and Mozambique's repeatedly declared opposition to the apartheid regime in South Africa has acted as a unifying force despite their differing political systems. Similarly South Africa's regional economic power has placed both their national economies into a position of dependency. To a certain extent (i.e. the common customs union), it has acted as an obstacle to their attempts at increased economic cooperation and trade, even though such opportunities are few at the present moment. The intra-regional programme proposals initiated by SADCC may provide possible solutions for overcoming this difficulty in the future, but in the meantime greater joint efforts need to be made to encourage and strengthen the two countries' bilateral relations. Mozambique has provided an additional opening or gateway (besides Botswana and Swaziland) to the rest of independent Black Africa, and greater use can and should be made of this opening. The projected international airport for Lesotho could be another step in this direction, though there are serious questions as to its economic feasibility as well as to donor financing.



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