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DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE
7 January 1986

SOUTH AFRICA: COMMENTS ON THE WASHINGTON POST SERIES

Summary

The recent series in The Washington Post, "Black Power, White Control: South Africa's Year of Struggle,"* gives a generally well-balanced description of the major dynamics shaping the South African situation. We agree with most points made in the series, particularly that blacks "have created an enduring crisis, not a revolution," even though a new and more radical fervor is gripping urban blacks, especially youths. We also agree that events have shaken many South African whites and that most plausible scenarios for the country's future include intensified violence and repression.

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The recent series of articles in The Washington Post, "Black Power, White Control: South Africa's Year of Struggle," is well-written and a cut above most analyses on the topic by journalists or scholars. Drawing on relevant current events as well as historical background, Glenn Frankel paints a vivid portrait of an intransigent white regime besieged by restive blacks showing unprecedented political consciousness and an increasingly hostile international community.

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* See the series in The Washington Post, 29-31 December 1985, written by Post correspondent Glenn Frankel (a US citizen) with the assistance of Allister Sparks (a South African journalist).

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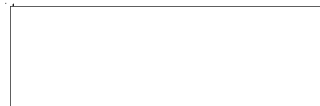
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This paper was prepared for the DCI by [redacted] South Africa Branch, Office of African and Latin American Analysis. Comments and queries may be directed to the Chief, South Africa Branch, [redacted]

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Frankel correctly points out that the unrest and international pressure have exposed some vulnerabilities of South African whites:

- Declining economic conditions have hurt white morale.
- Many whites have been shaken by the sporadic attacks against members of their community and by the ferocity of the fratricide in black townships as the number of victims with even remote ties to the government increases daily.
- The ability of blacks to unite behind and sustain protests such as consumer boycotts of white-owned stores does not augur well in the view of many whites who fear further flexing of black economic muscle.
- Many skilled white workers and professionals are leaving South Africa.

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Strengths and Weaknesses

Frankel deserves credit, in our judgment, for putting the last 16 months of violence in a context that bucks the trend established by many journalists who have seasoned their reports with cataclysmic language. He writes, and we agree, that:

"while blacks have succeeded for the first time in a generation in seriously damaging white South Africa, they remain far from their goal of toppling white rule. The dream that many youths believe is around the corner remains elusive. And because white military power remains intact, there is no clear path to get there. Blacks have created an enduring crisis, not a revolution."

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We believe that Frankel correctly emphasizes the importance of white reactions to growing pressures from the black populace and the international community. White resolve and unity, in our view, are the most important factors affecting South Africa's political future, as evidenced by their central position in the various scenarios outlined in the series. As one South African expert on black politics is quoted by Frankel, "in the end, the (white) regime will collapse from within, when the groups whose support it enjoys withdraw." Frankel skillfully, and correctly in our view, explains why pressures from the black populace and the international community are likely to continue to build. He also gives the reader an appreciation of the diverse factors, such as the

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unique history of the Afrikaners, that one must consider when assessing potential white responses to those pressures. [redacted]

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We believe Frankel is strongest in his analysis on trends in the black community. He offers some poignant insights into the causes and effects of a growing nihilism among young urban blacks. He also describes vividly the dramatic phenomenon of attacks on black collaborators and the losing battle that black moderates are waging to retain credibility among their dwindling constituencies. Departing from the romanticism that frequently characterizes other journalists' work on the topic, Frankel depicts the African National Congress as a two-faced group--sometimes moderate in appearance, other times radical--that is heading toward full-fledged urban terrorism, but faces almost insurmountable obstacles to overthrowing the white regime.* This is consistent with our own views.

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Our criticisms of the series are relatively minor:

- Frankel occasionally overstates his case; e.g., he writes that "there is virtually no one in the black community who expects to be ruled by whites in the year 2000." Even some influential black leaders, including Colored activist Allan Boesak and ANC head Oliver Tambo, have stated privately or publicly that it may be several decades before the white regime falls.
- Frankel dismisses the rightwing threat to the National Party too quickly without explaining its constraining influence on the government's attitude toward reform. Similarly, he does not adequately address the trauma that the reform issue has generated within National Party ranks and the larger white community.
- We believe that Frankel's observation that the government is "unsure of its direction after decades of certainty" is somewhat off the mark. This has become a familiar theme of critics of the government, and a growing lament among even

* Frankel quotes analysts who believe, as we do, that the ANC "is still far from developing the disciplined clandestine networks that could launch a sustained guerrilla war or endure a long-term tit-for-tat campaign with the South Africans...rural warfare is unlikely because of South Africa's vast barren spaces and the long distances between its borders and population centers." [redacted]

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some of its supporters. The government, nonetheless, has continued to stick to a course of reform roughly hewn by senior officials. Although seemingly blind to the unviability of some of its plans, the government has partially unveiled them in the past year while continuing to work out the details behind the scenes.

- Frankel writes that, "for the first time, there is a tension and contradiction between the state's military and economic power..Unbridled use of the former...causes direct, measurable harm to the latter." There is no question that heavyhanded security actions have contributed to the institution of international sanctions against South Africa and the introduction of black economic protests at home. This is not, however, unprecedented; South Africa went through the same experiences during outbreaks of violence in 1960 and 1976-77. Moreover, the government to date has eschewed the option of an all-out, unbridled security response to the unrest. Its reluctance to do so, in our view, is tied more closely to lingering hopes it can succeed in coopting blacks, rather than to fears of the economic consequences of its actions.

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Open-Ended Outcome

Frankel shies away from making a specific prediction on the most likely outcome of the racial tensions in South Africa, ending the series by laying out some of the best-known scenarios with little indication of his own thoughts on which is the most probable. However, he seems attracted to an Algerian-type scenario in which increasingly repressive measures by the government would only steel the resolve of blacks to perpetuate violence. In his defense, each cycle of violence in South Africa's modern history has spawned a multitude of predictions about the country's future (as Frankel himself notes, a cottage industry of forecasting on South Africa has developed recently). His reluctance to select one future scenario as his personal favorite probably reflects a healthy respect for the fast pace at which events are unfolding and the host of factors that could affect both the nature and timing of the eventual outcome.

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APPENDIX

Major Points in
"Black Power, White Control: South Africa's Year of Struggle"

Black Threat

1. The "comrades," angry young urban blacks, now control many townships.
2. Unrest has spread even to rural, traditionally conservative black areas.
3. Blacks have refined their protest tactics, including consumer boycotts, and these are likely to continue.
4. The political middle ground has all but vanished.
5. Nonetheless, the black movement at times seems leaderless and without direction, is not united, and remains far from toppling white rule.
6. Young urban blacks believe liberation is one or two years away; their elders speak of 5 or 10 years; virtually no blacks expect to be ruled by whites in the year 2000.
7. Black students may boycott schools to commemorate the 10th anniversary of the Soweto riots.
8. A new black labor federation may become more politically active.

The African National Congress

1. The group has gained stature and is perhaps the biggest winner in the unrest.
2. Usually one step behind events, the ANC's role has been mainly inspirational.
3. The group has two faces: one moderate, the other radical and violent.
4. ANC attacks--widely applauded by blacks--are up significantly but do little damage to the country's energy infrastructure or white morale; attacks unite whites behind retaliatory strikes.

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5. The ANC shows signs of developing into a more hardline, terrorist group, but it is still far from developing capability to launch sustained guerrilla war or endure all-out effort by South Africa to wipe it out.

Government Program and Plans

1. Apartheid is no longer viable, because it is too expensive and unwieldy.
2. The white regime is losing its grip, unsure of direction after decades of certainty.
3. Both liberal businessmen and the right wing lack adequate leverage to coerce the National Party.
4. The pace of reform is glacial; reforms are not mollifying the blacks as intended.
5. Attacks on black moderates undermine the deal the government had hoped to forge with the black urban middle class, but Pretoria is likely to continue to pursue measured reform while cracking down hard on dissidents. It probably hopes that after black radicals have been subdued by security measures, black moderates will come to bargain.
6. Botha may call for a snap election before support for the ruling National Party erodes further, and may hold a referendum for whites on new constitutional proposals.

Scenarios

1. Analysts at a multinational firm believe South Africa might hobble into the next century under a rightwing white regime that responds fiercely to increasing black unrest and international sanctions by taking extreme measures against the black opposition, repudiating South Africa's foreign debt, seizing foreign assets, and stopping foreign currency flows.
2. The Rhodesian scenario: an intractable guerrilla war wears down white resolve and ends in a political settlement with major concessions to blacks.
3. The Algerian scenario: increasingly repressive measures by the white regime only steel the resolve of blacks to perpetuate violence;

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security forces always maintain the upper hand, but their actions also swell the ranks of blacks bitterly opposed to any compromise; a crisis among whites over government tactics eventually results in complete victory for blacks.

4. Following intensified black unrest, the white regime averts an all-out race war by reaching lasting compromise with blacks (this scenario is based on the belief that Afrikaners are "survivors": once they see the choice is between survival under black rule or destruction, they will seek a settlement).



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