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FM PRETORIA

TO DESKBY 290800Z FCO

TELNO 278

OF 290600Z AUGUST

INFO PRIORITY JOHANNESBURG, CAPE TOWN

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MIPT: SOUTH AFRICA INTERNAL: STATE OF EMERGENCY 10 WEEKS ON
SUMMARY

1. GOVERNMENT AND MOST WHITES CONSIDER EMERGENCY JUSTIFIED AND RELATIVELY SUCCESSFUL SO FAR. SECURITY FORCES GIVEN FREE REIN. HOWEVER, THOUGH UNREST IS GENERALLY REDUCED, TOWNSHIPS REMAIN TENSE AND POTENTIALLY EXPLOSIVE. OPPOSITION GROUPS DOWN BUT BY NO MEANS OUT. NO SIGN OF MODERATE BLACK LEADERSHIP EMERGING IN TOWNSHIPS. TERRORISM AGAINST WHITES ONLY A MARGINAL THREAT AT PRESENT. GOVERNMENT WILL PLAY EMERGENCY LONG. DESPITE OUTBURSTS OF VIOLENCE, SECURITY FORCES LIKELY TO KEEP LID ON, USING WHATEVER FORCE IS CONSIDERED NECESSARY. BUT DILEMMA OF WHEN TO LIFT EMERGENCY UNLIKELY TO RESOLVE ITSELF.

DETAIL

2. THE EMERGENCY IS NOW TEN WEEKS OLD. ALTHOUGH ITS MAIN FEATURES ARE CLEAR, ITS DETAILED AND LASTING IMPACT IS NOT. THE EMERGENCY MEASURES THEMSELVES, PARTICULARLY MEDIA RESTRICTIONS, MAKE IT WELL NIGH IMPOSSIBLE TO PIECE TOGETHER A COMPREHENSIVE PICTURE. THE GOVERNMENT ISSUES AS LITTLE INFORMATION AS POSSIBLE. MANY OF OUR CONTACTS ARE IN DETENTION OR IN HIDING. MONITORING GROUPS PUBLICISE AS MUCH AS THEY CANN BUT WITH ONLY PARTIAL SUCCESS. THE SITUATION IS NOT IN ANY CASE UNIFORM ACROSS THE COUNTRY. NONETHELESS, THERE IS SUFFICIENT EVIDENCE ON WHICH TO BASE SOME JUDGEMENTS ABOUT THE SUCCESS OR OTHERWISE OF THE EMERGENCY.

GOVERNMENT APPROACH TO THE EMERGENCY

3. THE IMMEDIATE GOVERNMENT OBJECTIVES IN IMPOSING THE EMERGENCY WERE TO FORESTALL A PERCEIVED THREAT OF WIDESPREAD UNREST PLANNED FOR JUNE 16 AND TO RESTORE LAW AND ORDER IN BLACK AREAS. JUNE 16 PASSED OFF RELATIVELY PEACEFULLY, AND THE GOVERNMENT CLAIM THAT THE EMERGENCY IS SUCCEEDING ON THE LAW AND ORDER FRONT. THE MINISTER OF LAW AND ORDER, LE GRANGE, TOLD PARLIAMENT ON 22 AUGUST, PRIOR TO THE SOWETO DISTURBANCES, THAT UNREST-RELATED VIOLENCE WAS DOWN BY ABOUT 60% SINCE THE START OF THE EMERGENCY. EVEN SO, THE GOVERNMENT ADMIT THAT THERE IS A LONG WAY TO GO BEFORE ACHIEVING A RETURN TO NORMALITY, HOWEVER THAT IS DEFINED.

4. THE EMERGENCY IS INCREASINGLY SEEN AS A LONG HAUL. IT SEEMS SET

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TO LAST WELL INTO NEXT YEAR AT LEAST. THERE IS NO SIGN OF GOVERNMENT WAVERING. WE HAVE HEARD THAT PRESIDENT BOTHA HAS ESTABLISHED A SMALL WAR CABINET TO CONTROL GOVERNMENT ACTIONS UNDER THE EMERGENCY AND SO AVOID THE MISMANAGEMENT WHICH CHARACTERISED THE PARTIAL STATE OF EMERGENCY EARLIER THIS YEAR AND LAST.

5. THE SECURITY FORCES CONTINUE TO OPERATE BEHIND THE SCREEN OF MEDIA RESTRICTIONS AND IMMUNITY FROM PROSECUTION. THEIR MAIN INSTRUMENT HAS BEEN DETENTIONS ON AN UNPRECEDENTED SCALE (OVER 15,000 ON SOME ESTIMATES), WHICH HAVE BEEN ACCOMPANIED BY A GOOD DEAL OF MALTREATMENT AND BRUTALITY. BANS ON PUBLIC MEETINGS HAVE ALSO PLAYED AN IMPORTANT PART. THE SECURITY FORCES WILL CONTINUE TO USE WHATEVER FORCE THEY CONSIDER NECESSARY WITH FULL GOVERNMENT BACKING. THE GOVERNMENT MAKE NO APOLOGY FOR ANY EXCESSES.

6. THERE IS NO DOUBT THAT THE EMERGENCY HAS GIVEN THE GOVERNMENT AND THE NATIONAL PARTY A MUCH NEEDED FILLIP IN THE WHITE CONSTITUENCY. WHITE LIBERALS MAY PROTEST, BUT THE GREAT MAJORITY OF WHITES BELIEVE THE EMERGENCY IS JUSTIFIED. ANC TERRORISM AGAINST WHITE TARGETS REINFORCES THIS BELIEF. THE WHITE COMMUNITY SEEMS REASSURED THAT THE GOVERNMENT STILL HAS THE WILL AND POWER TO STAMP HARD ON VIOLENT DISSIDENCE. THE LATEST POLL SHOWS THAT TWO THIRDS OF WHITES THINK THE PRESIDENT IS DOING A GOOD JOB.

OPPOSITION GROUPS

7. THE UDF (THREE YEARS OLD ON 20 AUGUST) AND ITS AFFILIATES HAVE BORNE THE BRUNT OF DETENTIONS. OVER HALF OF THOSE DETAINED ARE ESTIMATED TO BE UDF ACTIVISTS. THE UDF HAS BEEN UNABLE TO HOLD ANY MAJOR MEETING SINCE 12 JUNE. NONETHELESS, THE NATIONAL EXECUTIVE HAS BEEN ABLE TO MEET CLANDESTINELY, AND MANY LOCAL STRUCTURES REMAIN IN PLACE. IN SOME AREAS, THE STREET COMMITTEES AND RELATED BODIES HAVE BEEN EMASCULATED, BUT IN OTHERS THEY MAY EVEN HAVE EXPANDED. THOUGH SEVERELY HAMPERED, THE UDF IS BY NO MEANS BROKEN. THE SAME IS TRUE OF OTHER GROUPS SUCH AS AZAPO. IN THE LONGER TERM, HOWEVER, ORGANISED GROUPS SEEM BOUND TO SUFFER INCREASINGLY FROM THE DISRUPTING EFFECTS OF DETENTIONS AND HARRASSMENT.

8. THE OTHER MAIN FOCUS OF OPPOSITION, THE BLACK TRADE UNIONS, HAVE ALSO BEEN HIT HEAVILY BY DETENTIONS. IN THE FIRST FEW WEEKS OF THE EMERGENCY, SOME UNIONS USED STRIKES IN AN ATTEMPT TO FREE DETAINEES. HOWEVER, THE CRIPPLING OF THE LEADERSHIP THROUGH DETENTIONS, AND THE FAILURE OF THE 14 JKLY STRIKE CALL, HAS PRODUCED SOME DRAWING IN OF HORNS, AND THE EMPHASIS NOW IS MORE ON IMPROVEMENT IN CONDITIONS OF SERVICE. THE GOVERNMENT HAS RELAXED ITS GRIP ON THE UNIONS SLIGHTLY, BUT WILL NOT HESITATE TO TIGHTEN IT AGAIN IF THE UNIONS ONCE MORE ADOPT A HIGH POLITICAL PROFILE.

EFFECT ON THE TOWNSHIPS

9. THE BLACK TOWNSHIPS, BOTH AROUND MAJOR CITIES AND MORE RURAL TOWNS, HAVE BEEN THE FOCUS OF SECURITY FORCE ACTIVITY. THE SECURITY PRESENCE REMAINS PERVASIVE IN MANY TOWNSHIPS, AND ONE IN WORCESTER, WESTERN CAPE, HAS BEEN EFFECTIVELY SEALED OFF. THE SECURITY FORCES HAVE FREQUENTLY USED THEIR WEAPONS WHEN ATTACKED, AND EVEN IN RESPONSE TO MINIMAL PROVOCATION.

10. EVEN ALLOWING FOR GOVERNMENT EXAGGERATION, THE SECURITY FORCES

HAVE SUCCEEDED IN LOWERING THE LEVEL OF VIOLENCE AND UNREST. THE PREVENTION OF MASS GATHERINGS OR PROTESTS HAS BEEN A CRUCIAL ELEMENT IN THE STRATEGY. EVEN TAKING ACCOUNT OF SOWETO, THERE HAVE BEEN FEW INSTANCES SO FAR OF CROWDS TURNING ON THE SECURITY FORCES OR OTHER ESTABLISHMENT TARGETS. BUT POLITICAL MURDERS, ARSON AND INTIMIDATION CONTINUE, AND ARE UNLIKELY TO CEASE. INDEED, GOVERNMENT-BACKED VIGILANTES HAVE OFTEN BEEN THE PERPETRATORS OF SUCH INCIDENTS.

11. MEANWHILE, THE GOVERNMENT HAVE HAD LITTLE SUCCESS IN CHANGING BLACK ATTITUDES. MANY BLACKS MAY QUIETLY WELCOME THE IMPROVED SECURITY SITUATION, BUT IN POLITICAL TERMS, THEY HAVE SO FAR PROVED LARGELY IRRELEVANT. AMONG THE RADICALS, UNREAL EXPECTATIONS OF EARLY VICTORY WILL HAVE BEEN SHAKEN, BUT THE FIGHT NEVERTHELESS GOES ON. RENT BOYCOTTS CONTINUE, ADMITTEDLY ENCOURAGED BY INTIMIDATION OF BACKSLIDERS. SCHOOLE BOYCOTTS IN THE WAKE OF HEAVY HANDED INTERVENTION BY THE SECURITY FORCES IN THE SCHOOLS THEMSELVES HAVE HIT SOWETO AND OTHER TOWNSHIPS. THE FRAGMENTATION OF OPPOSITION ORGANISATIONS, WHICH MIGHT HAVE CHANNELLED POLITICAL ACTIVITY INTO MORE CONSTRUCTIVE AREAS, HAS PASSED RESPONSIBILITY DOWN TO INEXPERIENCED, LOCAL LEADERS AND IN SOME AREAS HAS LED TO ANARCHY AND GANGSTERISM. THE SOWETO OUTBURST ON 26 AUGUST ILLUSTRATES THE FRAGILITY OF THE SITUATION.

12. THE GOVERNMENT THEREFORE HAS LITTLE CAUSE FOR LONG-TERM OPTIMISM. THERE IS NO SIGN AS YET THAT A MODERATE BLACK LEADERSHIP WILL EMERGE, EVEN FROM AN IMPROVING SECURITY SITUATION. ALTHOUGH SOME BLACK COUNCILS ARE SEEKING WITH MIXED SUCCESS TO REASSERT THEIR AUTHORITY, E.G. THROUGH EVICTIONS OVER NON-PAYMENTS OF RENTS, THEY REMAIN DESCREDITED IN THE EYES OF THE BLACK COMMUNITY, AND MANY, IF NOT MOST, ARE UNABLE TO FUNCTION PROPERLY. IN SOME CASES, WHITE ADMINISTRATIONS HAVE TAKEN OVER. RESIGNATIONS OF COUNCILLORS, WHETHER PROMPTED BY CONVICTION OR INTIMIDATION, CONTINUE. THE THREAT OF UNGOVERNABILITY STILL HANGS OVER MANY AREAS.

TERRORISM

13. THE SPATE OF BOMBS IN WHITE AREAS EARLIER IN THE EMERGENCY HAS DIED DOWN, BUT SPORADIC INCIDENTS CONTINUE. THERE IS NO REASON TO SUPPOSE THAT THE RECENT CONCENTRATION ON SOFT TARGETS WILL BE REVERSED. IT IS AN OPEN QUESTION AS TO HOW FAR SUCH ACTION IS DIRECTED BY THE ANC IN EXILE AND HOW FAR IT IS CONDUCTED BY CADRES ACTING INDEPENDENTLY. TO THE GOVERNMENT, IT MAKES NO DIFFERENCE. AT PRESENT, THE SECURITY FORCES ARE GENERALLY COCK-A-HOOP ABOUT THEIR ABILITY TO DEFEAT THE ANC AND CAN POINT TO A NUMBER OF RECENT SUCCESSES AGAINST ACTIVE SERVICE UNITS. ALTHOUGH TERRORISM REPRESENTS NO THREAT TO THE SYSTEM AT PRESENT, ITS CONTINUATION COULD ULTIMATELY BEGIN TO AFFECT WHITE CONFIDENCE.

OUTLOOK

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14. GOVERNMENT STRATEGY NOW IS TO PLAY THE EMERGENCY LONG IN THE HOPE OF KNOCKING THE FIGHT OUT OF RADICALS AND CONVERTING THE BLACK COMMUNITY AT LARGE TO POSITIVE SUPPORT FOR LAW AND ORDER. BUT THERE SEEMS NO PROSPECT OF A RETURN TO COMPARATIVE NORMALITY ON THE POST-SOWETO (OKYL) PATTERN. THE FRUSTRATION, ANGER AND DETERMINATION TO CONTINUE THE STRUGGLE ARE TOO STRONG. THOUGH WEAKENED, THE OPPOSITION IS BY NO MEANS ERADICATED, AND IN SOME AREAS, HAS BEEN REPLACED BY FORCES EVEN MORE DIFFICULT TO CONTROL. SECURITY FORCE GAINS SO FAR COULD STILL BE THREATENED BY THE TENSE SITUATION IN THE SCHOOLS AND BY ATTEMPTS BY BLACK TOWN COUNCILS TO RE-ESTABLISH CONTROL. THE LIKELIHOOD IS HOWEVER THAT THE EMERGENCY WILL IN GENERAL KEEP THE LID ON THE SITUATION IN THE TOWNSHIPS, THOUGH WITH THE CONTINUING LOW LEVEL UNREST AND OCCASIONAL LOCALISED ERUPTIONS. IF NEED BE, THE SECURITY FORCES WILL NOT FLINCH FROM WHATEVER ACTION THEY CONSIDER NECESSARY TO CONTROL UNREST.

15. THE GOVERNMENT'S DILEMMA OF WHEN TO LIFT THE EMERGENCY IS UNLIKELY TO RESOLVE ITSELF WITH TIME. THEY COULD DECIDE AT SOME STAGE TO DO AWAY WITH THE NATIONAL EMERGENCY AND RELY ON OTHER SECURITY LEGISLATION, WHICH MIGHT ALLOW A MORE FLEXIBLE, GRADUATED APPROACH. ALTERNATIVELY, THE GOVERNMENT COULD TEST THE WATER BY ALLOWING SOME RESUMPTION OF POLITICAL ACTIVITY UNDER CONTROLLED CONDITIONS. BUT EVEN IF THE EXPLOSION, WHICH SOME OBSERVERS PREDICT WILL FOLLOW THE LIFTING OF THE EMERGENCY, DOES NOT TAKE PLACE, THE MESSY SITUATION WHICH EXISTED BEFORE THE EMERGENCY COULD WELL RETURN.

16. A MAJOR QUESTION IS WHETHER THE GOVERNMENT WILL USE THE IMPROVED SECURITY BROUGHT BY THE EMERGENCY TO PUSH THROUGH ACCELERATED REFORM. THE RELEASE OF MANDELA REMAINS AN OUTSIDE CHANCE. BUT OTHERWISE ALL THE SIGNS ARE AGAINST ANY IMAGINATIVE INITIATIVE (SEE MIFT).

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