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FM PRETORIA

TO PRIORITY FCO

TELNO 430

OF 301000Z OCTOBER 86

INFO ROUTINE HARARE, LUSAKA, GABORONE, MAPUTO, MASERU, MBABANE
INFO ROUTINE LUANDA, DAR ES SALAAM,

IROBI, WASHINGTON

INFO ROUTINE JOHANNESBURG

CNFO SAVING EC POSTS, UKMIS NEW YORK, CONS. DURBAN, CONS. CAPE TOWN

THE SOUTH AFRICAN SCENE

SUMMARY

1. AFTER TWO MONTHS ABSENCE FROM SOUTH AFRICA I FIND LITTLE HAS CHANGED HERE EXCEPT PERHAPS FOR THE WORSE. HAVING CLAMPED DOWN ON SECURITY THE GOVERNMENT SEEM TO BE WITHOUT IDEAS HOW TO BREAK THE POLITICAL DEADLOCK. THERE IS A GROWING SENSE OF STAGNATION IN DOMESTIC POLICY AND OF ISOLATION FROM THE REST OF THE WORLD. THE STATE OF EMERGENCY LOOKS SET TO CONTINUE.

DETAIL

2. THE AUTHORITIES HAVE UNDOUBTEDLY SUCCEEDED IN BRINGING BLACK AREAS UNDER TIGHTER CONTROL. SOME OF THE LARGEST TOWNSHIPS ARE STILL VIOLENT AND THEIR SCHOOLS DISRUPTED. BUT ELSEWHERE E.G. NEAR PRETORIA MANY TOWNSHIPS APPEAR RELATIVELY CALM AGAIN. THE SILENT MAJORITY OF BLACKS ARE PROBABLY THANKFUL ENOUGH. POLITICALLY-MINDED BLACKS HOWEVER ARE DEEPLY RESENTFUL OF THE SECURITY METHODS USED. UNDERNEATH IT ALL THE BITTERNESS REMAINS UNTOUCHED. I SHOULD LIKE TO REPORT THAT THE GOVERNMENT ARE USING THIS BREATHING SPACE TO PREPARE NEW PROPOSALS FOR DIALOGUE OR CONSTITUTIONAL REFORM. BUT THERE IS NO SIGN OF THIS. THE GOVERNMENT APPEAR TO LACK THE WILL OR INCLINATION TO TAKE POLITICAL RISKS FOR A FURTHER MAJOR STEP FORWARD.

3. SOME PRESS REPORTS WHICH I SAW IN THE UK HAD BEGUN TO POINT TOWARDS A NEW-FOUND CONFIDENCE AMONG WHITES, SAID TO BE PARTLY BECAUSE THE GOVERNMENT WERE SEEN AS RESOLVED TO CONTROL BLACK VIOLENCE, PARTLY BECAUSE SANCTIONS HAD PUT EVERYONE IN THE SAME BOAT. I THINK THIS TREND MAY HAVE BEEN EXAGGERATED. IT IS NOT SO MUCH THAT WHITE CONFIDENCE HAS BEEN RESTORED. UNCERTAINTY ABOUT THE FUTURE IS AS PREVALENT AS EVER. BUT MORE WHITES ARE PREPARED TO RALLY BEHIND THE GOVERNMENT AND TO GIVE PRESIDENT BOTHA CREDIT FOR WHAT HE HAS DONE SO FAR.

4. MANY BUSINESSMEN SHARE THIS VIEW. AT THE SAME TIME THEY ARE ACUTELY AWARE THAT THE OVERSEAS BUSINESS COMMUNITY IS STEADILY LOSING CONFIDENCE IN SOUTH AFRICA. ANY SHORT-TERM BENEFITS FROM THE WITHDRAWAL OF US FIRMS ARE OFFSET BY CONCERN THAT WORSE IS YET TO COME. LIKewise WHILE THE ECONOMY IS SET FOR MODEST RECOVERY, ITS EXTENT IS LIKELY TO BE CIRCUMSCRIBED BY INTERNATIONAL SANCTIONS AND SOME LOSS OF TRADITIONAL MARKETS. FOR THEIR PART THE GOVERNMENT ARE MORE DETERMINED THAN EVER NOT TO TAKE LESSONS FROM THE BUSINESS SECTOR OVER THE REFORM PROCESS.

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5. THE MESSAGE FROM RECENT NATIONAL PARTY CONGRESSES (WHICH WERE MORE SIGNIFICANT EVENTS THAN THE EXTRA SESSION OF PARLIAMENT) WAS THAT THE GOVERNMENT WOULD CONTINUE THE MIXTURE AS BEFORE: MEANING SECURITY AS THE NUMBER ONE PRIORITY WITH REFORM PROCEEDING SLOWLY UNDER CAREFULLY MEASURED CONTROL. NO LEAP FORWARD, NO DRAMATIC CONSTITUTIONAL PROPOSALS IN THE PIPELINE, ESSENTIAL FURTHER MOVES TO DISMANTLE APARTHEID (THE GROUP AREAS ACT FOR INSTANCE) BEING DRAGGED OUT OF THE GOVERNMENT WITH EVIDENT LACK OF ENTHUSIASM. FROM THE POINT OF VIEW OF BLACKS, THE BENEFICIAL EFFECT OF EVERY NEW MOVE CONTINUES TO BE LARGELY DISCOUNTED IN ADVANCE FOR BEING SO LONG IN COMING.

6. THUS THE REFORM PROGRAMME HAS LITTLE IF ANY FRESH STEAM BEHIND IT FOR THE MOMENT. IT COULD BE REVIVED. BUT IN THE GOVERNMENT'S OWN WAY, AT THEIR OWN SPEED, AND NOT DICTATED BY OUTSIDE PRESSURES IF THEY CAN POSSIBLY HELP IT. ONE HEARS LESS TALK NOW OF THE POSSIBILITY OF MANDELA BEING RELEASED.

7. THREE SMALL GLEAMS OF LIGHT IN THIS GLOOMY PICTURE:

- (A) ONE EDITOR WHO ATTENDED AN INTELLIGENCE BRIEFING TOLD ME THAT THE MILITARY WERE TAKING A SURPRISINGLY REALISTIC VIEW OF BLACK UNREST. THIS WAS THAT THE ANC MUST BE DEFEATED. BUT MILITARY ACTION WAS NOT ENOUGH. THE GOVERNMENT MUST CORRECT PAST MISTAKES AND TACKLE THE CAUSES OF UNREST IMAGINATIVELY (EASIER SAID THAN DONE IF THE MILITARY REALLY MEAN IT).
- (B) THE DUTCH REFORM CHURCH SYNOD'S ADMISSION LAST WEEK THAT APARTHEID IS CONTRARY TO CHRISTIAN PRINCIPLES REPRESENTS A SEA-CHANGE IN DOCTRINE AFTER ALL THESE YEARS. IT MAY HAVE LITTLE IMMEDIATE EFFECT ON THE POLITICAL PROGRAMME. BUT AS I AM REPORTING SEPARATELY IT SHOULD HELP TO SWING AFRIKANER OPINION BEHIND MEASURES ALREADY TAKEN BY THE GOVERNMENT AND SHOULD STRENGTHEN THE HAND OF CAUTIOUS REFORMERS AGAINST DIE-BARDS OPPOSED TO ANY CHANGE.
- (C) THE GOVERNMENT ARE TAKING AN INTEREST IN THE IDEA OF A BILL OF RIGHTS AS A POSSIBLE FUTURE SAFEGUARD. THEY WOULD WANT IT TO COVER GROUP RIGHTS AS WELL AS INDIVIDUAL RIGHTS. BLACKS SUSPECT THIS MAY BE ONLY ANOTHER MEANS OF ENTRENCHING WHITE SUPREMACY. DRAWING UP A DOCUMENT ACCEPTABLE TO ALL CONCERNED WOULD THEREFORE POSE GREAT DIFFICULTY, ALTHOUGH THE NATAL-KWAZULU INDABA SHOWS THAT IT CAN BE DONE IN A LIMITED SETTING. ANY BILL OF RIGHTS WOULD MOREOVER NEED TO BE ACCOMPANIED BY BALANCED CONSTITUTIONAL ARRANGEMENTS ON WHICH THE GOVERNMENT ARE STILL FUMBLING IN THE DARK.

8. SPECULATION ABOUT AN EARLY ELECTION CONTINUES IN LOWER KEY THAN DURING THE RECENT PARTY CONGRESSES. THE LATEST FORECASTT IS FOR AN APRIL ELECTION HERE. THE THEORY IS THAT P W BOTHA COULD CAPITALISE ON RECENT EVIDENCE OF RENEWED SUPPORT FOR THE GOVERNMENT IN ORDER TO SECURE A NEW MANDATE FOR GOVERNMENT POLICIES, AFTER WHICH THE REFORM PROCESS WOULD MOVE FORWARD AGAIN. PERSONALLY I AM NOT CONVINCED. AN ELECTION IS NOT REQUIRED BEFORE 1992. IT WOULD ONLY WAMAKE SENSE TO RISK THE GOVERNMENT'S OVERWHELMING MAJORITY IN THE PRESENT PARLIAMENT IF THEY WERE SURE OF IMPROVING THEIR HOLD. WHILE THE RIGHT-WING THREAT REMAINS, THE GOVERNMENT ON THE CONTRARY WOULD ALMOST CERTAINLY LOSE SEATS. MOREOVER BLACKS WOULD BE INFURIATED AT ANOTHER ELECTION BEING HELD UNDER A CONSTITUTION WHICH

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THEY TOTALLY REJECT. WHY RISK IT? HENCE THE TALK OF A SAFER ALTERNATIVE, NAMELY A REFERENDUM. YET THIS WOULD ONLY SEEM A LIKELY OPTION ONCE THERE WAS A BROAD PACKAGE OF CONSTITUTIONAL REFORM TO PUT TO THE ELECTORATE.

9. MACHEL'S DEATH HAS BROUGHT INTO SHARP FOCUS THE AMBIVALENCE BEHIND SOUTH AFRICA'S RELATIONS WITH MOZAMBIQUE SINCE BEFORE NKOMATI - WHETHER THE SOUTH AFRICAN GOVERNMENT STAND TO GAIN MORE FROM MOZAMBIQUE BEING STABLE OR UNSTABLE. THE MILITARY VOICE NOW COUNTS HEAVILY IN THEIR DECISION-MAKING. AT THIS STAGE I DOUBT IF THEY HAVE MADE UP THEIR MINDS BUT ARE WAITING TO SEE HOW THE SITUATION DEVELOPS (MY TELNO 399).

10. THE GOVERNMENT WILL HAVE BEEN ANNOYED BUT NOT ALTOGETHER SURPRISED AT FINDING THEMSELVES ACCUSED OF BEING SOMEHOW RESPONSIBLE FOR MACHEL'S DEATH. ALTHOUGH THE SOUTH AFRICANS ARE ALMOST CERTAINLY BLAMELESS FOR ONCE, THEY HAVE PLAYED FOUL SO OFTEN IN THE PAST THAT FEW OF THEIR NEIGHBOURS NOW BELIEVE THEM. THIS WILL REINFORCE THEIR FEELING THAT SINCE THEY ARE NEVER GIVEN CREDIT BY OTHERS, WHY SHOULD THEY BOTHER ABOUT THE EFFECT OF THEIR ACTIONS OUTSIDE ANYWAY.

11. THE NEXT PROBLEM THEY ARE LIKELY TO FACE IS THE IMPOSITION OF SANCTIONS BY NEIGHBOURING STATES. WE MUST EXPECT A MEASURED BUT STRONG REACTION.

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