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**SOUTH AFRICA: THE WHITE ELECTION ON 6 MAY**

**SUMMARY:**

1. AN UNINSPIRING NATIONAL CAMPAIGN, BUT BITTER CONTESTS AT CONSTITUENCY LEVEL, REFORM AND BLACK PARTICIPATION THE MAIN ISSUES. GOVERNMENT UNDER ATTACK FROM BOTH FLANKS AND UNWILLING TO SPELL OUT THEIR REFORM INTENTIONS. EMPHASIS ON ANC THREAT.

2. OUTBREAKS OF BLACK UNREST, LIKELY IN FINAL DAYS OF CAMPAIGN, BUT PATTERN OF SEATS EXPECTED TO REMAIN MUCH AS BEFORE, WITH NEITHER RIGHT NOR LEFT MAKING SIGNIFICANT INROADS INTO NATIONAL PARTY MAJORITY. WORLDWIDE CONTESTS CLOSE, ODDS BEING MARGINALLY AGAINST NP.

**DETAILS:**

3. NOW IN ITS FINAL STAGES, THE LONG DRAWN-OUT ELECTION CAMPAIGN HAS FAILED TO GENERATE AS MUCH EXCITEMENT AS INITIALLY SEEMED POSSIBLE. FACED WITH CHALLENGES ON BOTH LEFT AND RIGHT FLANKS THE GOVERNMENT HAVE PLAYED THEIR HAND SKILFULLY. THE RIGHT-WING PARTIES HAVE REMAINED HAMPERED BY LACK OF AN ELECTORAL PARTY, THE LEFT BY BEING IDENTIFIED LARGELY WITH ENGLISH-SPEAKING WHITES.

4. FOR THE MOST PART, THIS HAS BEEN A DULL, REPETITIVE AFFAIR. THIS DOES NOT NECESSARILY MEAN LACK OF INTEREST. THERE IS WIDESPREAD CONCERN ABOUT THE FUTURE OF WHITES, BUT ALSO UNCERTAINTY ABOUT HOW THIS CAN BEST BE PROTECTED AND ABOUT THE VARIOUS PRESCRIPTIONS OFFERED BY THE PARTIES. GOVERNMENT CONTROL OF RADIO AND TELEVISION HAS HELPED TO SUBDUCE NATIONAL DEBATE BETWEEN THE PARTIES. ONLY THE BATTLE BETWEEN HEUNIS AND WORRALI HAS ADDED SOME HUMAN INTEREST AND CRUSADING SPIRIT, WITH WORRALI PERHAPS SURPRISINGLY STILL WITHIN CATCHING DISTANCE OF HIS MINISTERIAL OPPONENT.

5. AT THE CONSTITUENCY LEVEL, HOWEVER, MANY A HARD FOUGHT CONTEST IS IN PROGRESS. THE NATIONAL PARTY (NP) AND THE CONSERVATIVE PARTY (CP) ARE SLOGGING IT OUT IN THE NORTH IN PARTICULAR. THE PROGRESSIVE FEDERAL PARTY (PFP) AND NEW REPUBLIC PARTY (NRP) SEEM TO BE REAPING SOME BENEFIT FROM THEIR ALLIANCE AND FROM PRESENTING THEMSELVES AS THE NUCLEUS OF A POSSIBLE WIDER GROUPING OF MODERATES WITH POTENTIAL AS AN ALTERNATIVE GOVERNMENT. THE NP HAVE HAD DIFFICULTY MOTIVATING SOME SUPPORTERS DISILLUSIONED WITH THE GOVERNMENT'S RECENT PERFORMANCE AND APPARENT CONFUSION BEFORE COMPLEX ISSUES. AFRIKANER MIDDLE-CLASS CRITICISM OF THE LEADERSHIP FOR LOSING THE INITIATIVE ON REFORM IS A NEW FACTOR. BUT PARTY LOYALTIES AND THE NP MACHINE ARE FORMIDABLE, AND DIFFICULT FOR THE OTHER PARTIES TO MATCH CONSISTENTLY. THERE IS NO INDICATION OF A MASSIVE HAEMORRHAGE OF NP SUPPORT.

**THE ISSUES**

6. PRESIDENT BOTHA OSTENSIBLY CALLED THE ELECTION TO SECURE A MANDATE FOR HIS REFORM POLICY AND FOR POWER-SHARING WITH BLACKS IN PARTICULAR. YET THE NP HAVE SPENT MUCH OF THE CAMPAIGN TRYING TO DEFLECT ATTENTION FROM REFORM. LIKE THIS OR NOT, HOWEVER, THEIR OPPONENTS HAVE ENSURED THAT THIS HAS BEEN THE PREDOMINANT ISSUE, BUT IN DIFFERENT WAYS ACROSS THE COUNTRY. THE CP HAVE ATTACKED THE GOVERNMENT'S REFORM PROGRAMME AS A SLIPPERY PATH TO BLACK MAJORITY RULE AND CAMPAIGNED FOR A RETURN TO STRICT APARTHEID AND PARTITION. THE PFP, NRP AND THE INDEPENDENTS HAVE PRESSED FOR MORE RAPID CHANGE AS THE ONLY WAY TO SAVE SOUTH AFRICA.

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7. THE NP HAVE STRUGGLED TO BE ALL THINGS TO ALL MEN OVER REFORMS. THEIR FIRST PRIORITY HAS BEEN TO FEND OFF THE THREAT FROM THE RIGHT. IN THE RURAL AND POORER URBAN AREAS, THEIR TASK HAS BEEN TO CONVINCCE VOTERS THAT THERE WILL BE NO LOOSENING OF WHITE CONTROL AND THAT THE GROUP AREAS ACT WILL REMAIN TO PROTECT SEPARATE SCHOOLS AND RESIDENTIAL AREAS. WHERE THE PFP/NRP ALLIANCE IS THE MAIN OPPOSITION, THE NP HAS PUT ON A MORE LIBERAL FACE, EXPRESSING A DETERMINATION TO PROCEED WITH GENUINE BUT ORDERLY REFORM AND A READINESS TO ADAPT. THE GROUP AREAS ACT. THIS JANUS-LIKE POSTURE REFLECTS DIVISIONS WITHIN THE NP ITSELF. POLLS HAVE SHOWN THAT NP SUPPORTERS ARE SPLIT DOWN THE MIDDLE ON ISSUES LIKE THE GROUP AREAS ACT AND THE EVENTUAL POSSIBILITY OF A BLACK PRESIDENT. NOT SURPRISINGLY, THE NP HAVE SHELTERED BEHIND GENERALITIES AND REFUSED TO SPELL OUT DETAILS OF THEIR INTENTIONS.

8. PREDICTABLY, THE NP HAVE RESPONDED TO WHITE FEARS ABOUT THE FUTURE BY PLAYING UP THE ANC AND THE REVOLUTIONARY THREAT. THIS HAS SERVED A VARIETY OF PURPOSES. A TOUGH POSTURE ON SECURITY IS ESSENTIAL TO CLOSE OFF ATTACKS FROM THE RIGHT. EMPHASIS ON ANC VIOLENCE AND COMMUNIST IDEOLOGY HELPS TO JUSTIFY THE GOVERNMENT'S REFUSAL TO NEGOTIATE WITH THEM. IT HAS ALSO SERVED TO DAMN THE PFP AS SOFT ON COMMUNISM AND READY TO NEGOTIATE WITH TERRORISTS DESPITE PFP PROTESTATIONS TO THE CONTRARY. ALL THIS HAS SUCCESSFULLY CAPTURED THE HEADLINES, AND DIVERTED ATTENTION AWAY FROM OTHER PROBLEMS. THE ECONOMY HAS NOT BEEN A SIGNIFICANT ISSUE EXCEPT IN A FEW AREAS.

### THE LIKELY OUTCOME

9. ANY FORECAST HAS TO TAKE ACCOUNT OF THE FACT THAT THE LAST OPINION POLLS WERE PUBLISHED IN MARCH. NO SINGLE TREND OF OPINION IS CLEARLY DISCERNIBLE WITHIN THE COUNTRY, AND THE NUMBER OF REGISTERED VOTERS HAS INCREASED BY 30% SINCE THE LAST ELECTION IN 1981. THE NUMBER OF MARGINALS ON BOTH LEFT AND RIGHT IS HIGH. THE PARTY PATTERN HAS BECOME CONSIDERABLY MORE COMPLICATED SINCE THE LAST GENERAL ELECTION. WHILE NATIONAL ISSUES PREDOMINATE ALMOST EVERYWHERE, LOCAL GRIEVANCES AND PERSONALITIES PLAY THEIR PART. MUCH MAY DEPEND ON THE LEVEL OF TURNOUT, WHICH ALL PARTIES ARE FINDING DIFFICULT TO ASSESS, AND ON THE EFFICIENCY OF LOCAL PARTY MACHINES IN GATHERING THE POSTAL VOTE. DELIBERATE ABSENTIONS MAY FIGURE ON A LARGER SCALE THAN USUAL, BUT THEIR MESSAGE WILL BE MIXED.

10. THERE IS STILL TIME FOR DOMESTIC EVENTS TO INFLUENCE THE OUTCOME. FROM MAY DAY ONWARDS, THERE IS ALSO TOO LIKELY TO BE A SURGE OF BLACK PROTEST AND UNREST LEADING UP TO ELECTION DAY. THE GOVERNMENT WILL DO THEIR UTMOST TO SUPPRESS THIS, FOR THEY CANNOT AFFORD TO APPEAR NOT IN CONTROL OF THE SECURITY SITUATION. EVEN SO, THE RIGHT-WING PARTIES STAND TO GAIN MORE THAN THE NP FROM VIOLENT BLACK MILITANCY AT THIS LATE STAGE.

11. DESPITE THESE CAVEATS, I SEE NO REASON TO ALTER THE JUDGEMENTS IN MY EARLIER TELEGRAMS. I WOULD SUMMARISE MY PREDICTIONS AS FOLLOWS:

- (M) THE NP WILL BE RETURNED ONCE MORE WITH AN OVERWHELMING MAJORITY, THOUGH WITH REDUCED MARGINS IN MANY SEATS. AT MOST, THEY FACE A POSSIBLE NET LOSS OF ONLY ABOUT TEN SEATS.
- (NM) THE PFP/NRP ALLIANCE IS LIKELY TO GAIN A FEW SEATS OVERALL, BUT HAS LITTLE CHANCE OF A MAJOR BREAKTHROUGH. IT COULD EVEN END UP WITH FEWER SEATS THAN NOW IF NRP VOTERS IN MARGINALS OPT FOR THE NP RATHER THAN THE PFP WHERE THERE IS NO NRP CANDIDATE.

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(HNP): THE CP WILL GAIN A SIZEABLE PERCENTAGE OF THE NATIONAL VOTES, PERHAPS AS MUCH AS 20-25%, BUT THIS IS UNLIKELY TO TRANSLATE EFFECTIVELY INTO SEATS. THE CP WILL LOSE SOME OF THEIR EXISTING SEATS, ONLY TWO OF WHICH THEY HAVE PREVIOUSLY WON IN THEIR OWN RIGHT. ALTHOUGH THEY SHOULD WIN SUFFICIENT OTHERS TO HOLD THEIR OWN, THEY ARE LESS LIKELY TO MAKE SUBSTANTIAL GAINS OVERALL.

(NW): WITHOUT AN ELECTORAL PACT WITH THE CP, THE EXTREME RIGHT-WING HERSTINGE NASHONALE PARTIYU (HNP) WILL FARE BADLY. THEY COULD LOSE THEIR ONLY SEAT IN SASOLBURG.

(V): OF THE INDEPENDENTS (WHO ARE SIGNIFICANT NOT IN TERMS OF SEATS BUT AS POTENTIAL INDICATORS OF AFRIKANER DISSENT), MALAN WILL WIN, WORRALD COULD POSSIBLY WIN BUT MORE LIKELY WILL MISS BY A SMALL MARGIN, AND LATEGAN SEEMS SET TO LOSE UNLESS THERE IS AN UNEXPECTEDLY LARGE SWING.

12. ALL THIS WILL LEAVE THE BALANCE OF FORCES IN PARLIAMENT MUCH AS BEFORE, WITH THE PFP PROBABLY AS THE OFFICIAL OPPOSITION. SEE MINTI FOR DISCUSSION OF POST-ELECTION IMPLICATIONS.

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