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MIPT: SOUTH AFRICA: POST-ELECTION IMPLICATIONS

SUMMARY

1. ASSUMING ELECTION RESULT AS PREDICTED, PRESIDENT BOTHA LIKELY TO STAY ON UNTIL AT LEAST SECOND HALF OF 1988. SAME CAUTIOUS APPROACH AS BEFORE TO CONSTITUTIONAL REFORM AND GROUP AREAS ACT. STATE OF EMERGENCY TO REMAIN INDEFINITELY. FURTHER ELECTION IN 1989 UNLESS CONSTITUTION AMENDED. DESPITE PROSPECT OF NEW GROUPING ON THE LEFT, EARLY DEFECTIONS BY NATIONAL PARTY MPS DOUBTFUL. ELECTION AND ITS AFTERMATH UNLIKELY TO BREAK CURRENT LOG-JAM.

DETAIL

2. MIPT GAVE MY PREDICTION THAT THE BALANCE OF FORCES IN PARLIAMENT AFTER THE ELECTION WILL BE MUCH AS NOW. THIS TELEGRAM LOOKS PRINCIPALLY AT THE IMPLICATIONS OF SUCH A RESULT. THERE IS OF COURSE PLENTY OF ROOM FOR ERROR, BOTH INDIVIDUALLY (EG WORRALL COULD WIN AGAINST THE ODDS) AND NATIONALLY (EG THE CP COULD BREAK THROUGH MORE SOLIDLY THAN PREDICTED). IF SO, SOME RAPID REASSESSMENT WILL BE NECESSARY.

PRESIDENT BOTHA AND THE SUCCESSION

3. DESPITE WIDESPREAD MISGIVINGS EVEN IN THE NP ABOUT HIS PERSONALITY AND STYLE, PRESIDENT BOTHA SEEMS SET TO REMAIN IN OFFICE, HEALTH PERMITTING, UNTIL AT LEAST THE SECOND HALF OF 1988 AND POSSIBLY LONGER. 1988 WILL SEE A NUMBER OF ANNIVERSARIES OVER WHICH HE WILL WISH TO PRESIDE, INCLUDING HIS TEN YEARS AS HEAD OF GOVERNMENT. IN RESPONSE TO A QUESTION AT A RECENT ELECTION MEETING, PRESIDENT BOTHA SAID THAT HE HAD BEEN ELECTED IN 1984 FOR A FIVE YEAR TERM, AND INDICATED THAT HE COULD STAY ON BEYOND 1989.

4. THERE IS LITTLE PROSPECT OF AN INTERNAL REVOLT IN THE NP TO UNSEAT HIM. CONSTITUTIONALLY AND POLITICALLY, IT WOULD BE EXTREMELY DIFFICULT TO REMOVE THE PRESIDENT AGAINST HIS WILL. THERE SEEM NO NP LEADERS READY TO RISK THEIR CAREERS BY CHALLENGING PRESIDENT BOTHA. HE IS LIKELY TO STAND DOWN ONLY IN THE EVENT OF THE NP LOSING SUBSTANTIALLY TO BOTH LEFT AND RIGHT IN THE ELECTION.

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5. THE EVENTUAL SUCCESSOR IS IMPOSSIBLE TO PREDICT AT THIS STAGE. POTENTIALLY, THE CHOICE WILL BE ONE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT FACTORS DETERMINING SOUTH AFRICA'S FUTURE. PRESIDENT BOTHA APPEARS TO FAVOUR HEUNIS AS SOMEONE WHO CAN BE TRUSTED WITH HIS POLICY LEGACY. A BAD RESULT AGAINST WORRALL COULD HOWEVER WRECK HEUNIS' CHANCES. OTHER CONTENDERS TOO, SUCH AS F W DE KLERK, MAY NOT EMERGE UNSCATHED FROM THE COMING ELECTION ALTHOUGH I WOULD REGARD HIM AS THE STRONGEST RUNNER OTHERWISE. THE MORE UNCERTAIN THE SUCCESSION THE MORE LIKELY IT IS THAT PRESIDENT BOTHA WILL HANG ON TO OFFICE.

GOVERNMENT POLICY

6. PRESIDENT BOTHA WILL SEE ELECTION VICTORY AS VINDICATING HIS CURRENT APPROACH TO REFORM AND HIS SECURITY POLICIES. THE MAIN FEATURES OF GOVERNMENT POLICY UNDER HIS LEADERSHIP ARE LIKELY TO BE AS FOLLOWS:

(I) CONSTITUTIONAL REFORM WILL PROCEED ON THE SAME CAUTIOUS, LIMITED BASIS. THERE WILL BE NO IMAGINATIVE INITIATIVES. THE FOCUS WILL BE ON TRYING TO ESTABLISH THE NATIONAL STATUTORY COUNCIL OR SOMETHING LIKE IT AS A FORUM FOR NEGOTIATING WITH BLACKS, AND ON BUILDING UP BLACK LOCAL AUTHORITIES AND THE HOMELAND GOVERNMENTS. THE GOVERNMENT WILL HOPE THAT THIS APPROACH, COMBINED WITH PRACTICAL IMPROVEMENTS IN AREAS SUCH AS HOUSING AND JOB CREATION FOR BLACKS, WILL GRADUALLY COME TO BE ACCEPTED BY MORE AND MORE BLACKS.

(II) THE GROUP AREAS ACT WILL STAY, THOUGH AMENDMENTS ARE LIKELY TO BE INTRODUCED TO ALLOW GREATER FLEXIBILITY OF IMPLEMENTATION.

(III) THE STATE OF EMERGENCY OR SIMILAR MEASURES WILL REMAIN INDEFINITELY. THERE COULD BE AN EVEN STRONGER CRACKDOWN ON ANTI-GOVERNMENT ORGANISATIONS (EG OVER USE OF FOREIGN FUNDS), PROBABLY ON BLACK TRADE UNIONS, AND POSSIBLY ON THE INDEPENDENT PRESS.

7. THERE ARE NO GROUNDS TO SUPPOSE THAT THE GOVERNMENT'S REFORM POLICIES WILL GAIN SUPPORT FROM CREDIBLE BLACK LEADERS. THE BLACK MUNICIPAL AUTHORITIES WILL REMAIN DISCREDITED AND UNREPRESENTATIVE. AT BEST, THE GOVERNMENT WILL BE ABLE TO COOPT ON TO THE NATIONAL STATUTORY COUNCIL A BODY OF BLACKS WITH NO STANDING IN THE BLACK COMMUNITIES.

PROSPECT OF FURTHER ELECTION IN 1989

8. UNDER THE CONSTITUTION, A GENERAL ELECTION OF ALL THREE HOUSES MUST BE HELD AT THE LATEST BY EARLY 1990. THERE ARE ALREADY DOUBTS THAT IT WILL IN FACT TAKE PLACE. THE

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PRESIDENT, WHOEVER IT IS BY THEN, COULD FORCE THROUGH A CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT TO POSTPONE IT. THIS WOULD NEED THE COOPERATION OF THE INDIAN AND COLOURED HOUSES TO ACHIEVE THE NECESSARY MAJORITIES. BUT A LITTLE ARM TWISTING, PLUS FEAR OF FACING A HOSTILE ELECTORATE ON THE PART OF THE COLOURED AND INDIAN REPRESENTATIVES, MIGHT DO THE TRICK, PROVIDED THE NEW REBEL GROUP IN THE COLOURED HOUSES DOES NOT TAKE OVER IN THE MEANTIME.

9. DESPITE THIS UNCERTAINTY, THERE IS A SENSE IN WHICH THE OPPOSITION PARTIES ARE ALL VIEWING THE CURRENT ELECTION MERELY AS A TRAILER FOR THE NEXT ROUND IN 1989. THE CP MAKE LITTLE SECRET OF THEIR WISH TO SEE THE HNP CRUSHED AT THIS ELECTION SO THAT THEY CAN MOUNT THE RIGHT WING CHALLENGE ALONE IN 1989. THIS PROSPECT MUST PUT A BRAKE ON ANY GOVERNMENT WILLINGNESS TO MOVE AHEAD SPEEDILY. THOSE TO THE LEFT OF THE NP SEE THE NEXT TWO YEARS AS THE OPPORTUNITY TO GATHER THEIR STRENGTH FOR A MORE EFFECTIVE ASSAULT. WHATEVER THE RESULTS OF THIS COMING ELECTION, THE MANOEUVRING FOR THE NEXT WILL BEGIN ALMOST IMMEDIATELY.

POSSIBILITIES OF REALIGNMENT

10. UNLESS THE NP SUFFERS A DISASTROUS ELECTION RESULT, THERE SHOULD BE NO DEFECTIONS BY NP MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT IN THE NEAR FUTURE. THOSE FAVOURING FASTER REFORM WILL WANT TO GIVE THE GOVERNMENT THE CHANCE TO PROVE ITSELF, ESPECIALLY WITH A FURTHER ELECTION (AND A SUCCESSOR TO PRESIDENT BOTHA) IN THE OFFING. BARRING A SURPRISE WIN BY ALL THREE INDEPENDENT CANDIDATES NEXT WEEK, FEW COULD BE AS CONFIDENT AS WYNAND MALAN ABOUT FIGHTING THEIR SEATS AS INDEPENDENTS. ALTHOUGH FRUSTRATION AT THE GOVERNMENT'S SLOW PACE IS LIKELY TO GROW, SPECULATION ABOUT A BREAKAWAY GROUP SEEMS PREMATURE.

11. HOWEVER, THERE IS CLEARLY GOING TO BE AN ATTEMPT TO ESTABLISH A NEW FORCE TO THE LEFT OF THE NP AFTER THE ELECTION. MANY DEFECTORS FROM THE NP HAVE ALREADY DECLARED THEMSELVES. THERE IS TALK OF A NEW PARTY. BUSINESS FINANCE SHOULD BE AVAILABLE. IT IS DEBATABLE HOW FAR A NEW PARTY WOULD CAPTURE THE SUPPORT OF THE MIDDLE OF THE ROAD VOTER, PARTICULARLY THE AFRIKANER. BUT IT COULD ERODE THE HITHERTO SOLID BASE OF THE NP, AND OPEN UP THE CHANCE OF A LOOSE ALLIANCE WITH THE PFP/ NRP (AND PERHAPS COLOURED AND INDIAN PARTIES) TO ACHIEVE A COORDINATED ATTACK FROM THE LEFT AT THE NEXT ELECTION.

12. PROSPECTS ARE DIFFICULT TO PREDICT AT THIS STAGE. IN THE FIRST PLACE THEY DEPEND ON THE SIZE OF MALAN'S MAJORITY AS AN INDEPENDENT OVER HIS NP OPPONENT AND ON HOW WELL WORRALL FARES AGAINST HEUNIS. BUT WHATEVER WORRALL'S IMMEDIATE FATE, THE FERMENT AMONG INTELLECTUAL AFRIKANERDOM WILL CONTINUE. A SOLID BODY OF AFRIKANER ACADEMICS ARE DISILLUSIONED WITH NP POLICY. IN THE BROEDERBOND, EFFORTS WILL CONTINUE TO

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BUILD A FOUNDATION FOR MORE RADICAL REFORM. THE SYMPATHIES OF MANY YOUNGER AFRIKANERS LIE IN THIS DIRECTION. BUT ANY REAL INROADS INTO NP SUPPORT WILL TAKE TIME. THERE IS NO QUICK FIX.

13. TWICE IN ITS PAST THE NATIONAL PARTY HAS LOST A MAJOR SPLINTER GROUP TO THE RIGHT. IT IS HARDER FOR THIS TO HAPPEN ON THE LEFT, BECAUSE IT MEANS CROSSING THE BARRIER BETWEEN AFRIKANERS AND ENGLISH SPEAKING WHITES. UNTIL SUCH TIME AS THIS BARRIER IS CROSSED IN SUBSTANTIAL NUMBERS, THE GOVERNMENT WILL CONTINUE TO WORRY MORE ABOUT THEIR FELLOW AFRIKANERS ON THE RIGHT CONVERTING A POTENTIAL CHALLENGE INTO A REAL ELECTORAL BANDWAGON THAN ANY ENGLISH-LED CHALLENGE FROM THE LEFT.

CONCLUSION

14. FROM OUR POINT OF VIEW, THIS OFFERS PRECIOUS LITTLE COMFORT IN THE SHORT TERM. THE ELECTION IS UNLIKELY TO BREAK THE CURRENT LOG-JAM. THE PROSPECT FOR THE NEXT YEAR OR TWO IS MORE OF THE SAME GOVERNMENT POLICIES, WITH THE SAME FAILURE TO TACKLE THE ROOT CAUSE OF THE PROBLEM. THEREAFTER, THERE MAY BE SOME LOOSENING OF THE NP GRIP AND SOME SHIFT OF OPINION WITHIN THE NP ITSELF. IN THE MEANTIME, THERE WILL BE LITTLE TO HELP FEND OFF CALLS FOR FURTHER INTERNATIONAL PRESSURE AGAINST SOUTH AFRICA.

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