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## BRIEF REPORT NO. 4

### THE POLITICAL OUTLOOK IN SOUTHERN AFRICA: SOME CURRENT CONSIDERATIONS

This Brief Report is based on an address given by the Director of the Institute, Mr. John Barratt, at a SABRITA luncheon in Johannesburg on 16 March, 1978.

The brief space available does not allow me to comment in any detail on the issues of immediate concern to us in Southern Africa, namely Rhodesia and South West Africa/Namibia, or the over-riding issue of South Africa's own political development, let alone the uncertain future of other important countries in the region, e.g. Angola, Zambia and Mozambique. So I shall simply discuss briefly a few general overall factors which I feel are important in affecting the current political trends in Southern Africa.

Firstly, it has become a truism to say that the Portuguese collapse in April 1974 dramatically changed the situation and critically affected the outlook for Southern Africa. But it is still worth looking back to see what has resulted, in general terms, from that event, as this helps to indicate the current trends.

The Portuguese collapse removed not only the physical, but also the psychological, barriers which had been limiting the influence and advance of Black nationalism into Southern Africa; it encouraged the nationalist Liberation Movements, concerned with the remaining White-ruled countries, and gave them greater international legitimacy and internal support; it introduced into the region two militant and marxist regimes (in Mozambique and Angola) which were perceived to have come to power by military means; and it thus strengthened considerably the trend of violence, i.e. the trend towards the choice of the "armed struggle" as the means of resolving political disputes. This trend was stalled for a time during the 1974/75 détente period, when serious attempts were made (especially by Mr. Vorster and President Kaunda) to resolve conflicts, particularly in Rhodesia, through negotiations. But, when those efforts failed, the trend towards violence resumed and it is now very obvious.

The second, but closely related, factor which has strongly influenced the outlook, was the Angolan War and the continuing civil strife in that country. It was that war, more than any other development, which precipitated the external intervention in the region - intervention at a higher level than ever before from the Soviet Union and Cuba through the supply of weapons, military training and personnel; and also diplomatic intervention by the United States, at a higher level and more intensively than ever before. This Super Power involvement and rivalry in the region has continued since and even increased, and it has of course vastly complicated the conflicts - as can be seen now in Rhodesia and South West Africa/Namibia. While the international character of these conflicts has always been there (and this was clearly

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acknowledged by South Africa in regard to both South West Africa and Rhodesia), the real interest of the Super Powers in this region was minimal before Angola.

A third general factor which continues to have an influence, but which tends to be down-played these days, because of the unavoidable concentration on the conflict issues, is the inter-dependence within the region, as reflected in such fields as trade, transport, labour relations, power and natural resources. These links are to a large extent the result of our colonial heritage (and for that reason are resented by many in the region), but they also stem from the plain facts of geography. For instance, of the ten or so countries in the region, all but four are land-locked. This fact serves to emphasise the vital importance of transport routes throughout Southern Africa and the dependence of the region as a whole on the ports of the few coastal states. There is no doubt that this dependence on South Africa in particular, in the present political circumstances, is resented in some of the other countries, but this fact will remain significant in the future, whatever political changes take place. All these regional links could be vastly expanded, if only the growing political conflicts could be resolved. But even now they remain in operation, and they are at least structures which provide opportunities for mutually beneficial co-operative development in the future.

A fourth factor, not unrelated to the previous one, is South Africa's position of dominance in the region, economically and militarily. This is, of course, a position of advantage, but it also has disadvantages, because of the natural suspicion which is in any case aroused among weaker and dependent states towards a much stronger neighbour, but which in our case is aggravated by the racial issue. As a result of this issue, with the growing political aspirations and demands of South African Blacks, which are not being satisfied by the Government's present policies, South Africa does not have the political power and influence to match its economic and military power in the region. Unless South Africa's national political credibility internationally can be vastly improved, its ability to influence constructively developments in the rest of the region will continue to diminish. It is acknowledged, for instance, that South Africa has had a positive influence on the political development of Rhodesia, but this influence was greatest during the détente period, and when the United States was willing to co-operate more closely with South Africa, and it seems that this influence is now declining.

These are then some general considerations affecting political trends in the region. It must now be added that, if one looks at the present picture of Southern Africa and the current trends for the future, the unavoidable general impression is one of instability and uncertainty. This characteristic of instability is present in various countries, to a greater or lesser degree, and I am not thinking here simply of the future of the new Zimbabwe or the new Namibia, but also of Mozambique, Zambia and Angola (in all three of which the political and economic future is highly insecure). Some of the smaller countries of the region, too, have question marks over their future internal stability. So South Africa has, in addition to its own serious internal problems, the prospect of coping with unstable conditions in most of the countries surrounding it.

Together with these internal situations of instability, which make the future of the region so unpredictable, there are the disputes or actual conflicts between countries. Then all this is further complicated by the international dimension and external intervention, of which I have already spoken

briefly. There is reason for very special concern about the intervention of powers which seek to keep the conflicts alive, for their own wider political interests, by supporting violence and thus contributing to the instability.

This general impression of instability in the region, which unfortunately is well founded, has obviously served to reduce the confidence of many - inside and outside - in the future of Southern Africa. In these circumstances a fundamental guiding principle for South Africa and for our major trading partners (and Britain is especially important in this regard) should be the achievement of stable development in Southern Africa and the restoration of confidence. This does not mean, and I emphasise this, that efforts should be directed to maintaining the status quo. That was for too long the sterile basis of policy in South Africa and Rhodesia, and also in the Western approach to these questions. It is clear now, in any case, that the status quo cannot be maintained; it is collapsing all around us. But the political, economic and social change, which is inevitable, must be encouraged and influenced in a constructive, rather than destructive, direction. And here the major Western countries have a vital role, if they are willing to play it firmly and consistently.

This role should include efforts to preserve, as far as possible, all that can contribute in the economic sphere to future healthy development and growth. In the political sphere it should involve support for moves towards full participation in decision-taking. This does not imply support for, on the one hand, the continuation, in perhaps disguised forms, of the domination of political systems by certain minorities; nor, on the other hand, simply the transfer of that domination to other groups of a different colour, whose claims frankly to wield sole power are based on what is becoming accepted internationally, it seems, as almost a "divine right" of revolution.

In particular then, there is the need now to counter the clear trend towards confrontation and violence as a means of resolving conflicts. For South Africa this means, as it has meant for Rhodesia, a clearer indication that solutions to political differences can be found through negotiation, rather than by imposition - so as to prevent the further strengthening of those who see revolution as their only recourse. For the West (and hopefully for some other African states, too) this means the directing of their diplomatic efforts at negotiated settlements (which the major Western countries have been trying to do), but it also means encouraging by action - not only by vague words - all local efforts at genuine negotiations in Rhodesia/Zimbabwe, S.W.A./Namibia and eventually in South Africa itself - even if the solutions produced are not perfect, because there will in any case be no perfect solutions satisfying everyone.

This is not a simple matter, and South African criticisms of the Western approach to Southern African questions often show a lack of understanding of the many pressures influencing Western policies. But one does expect a greater degree of consistency and firmness, in the West's own interests, at a time when the Soviet Union and Cuba are not hesitating to pursue quite aggressively their interests, as they see them, in Africa. For instance, if the U.S. and Britain see some merit in the present Salisbury settlement, one must ask why they simply abstained on the Security Council resolution condemning that settlement out of hand, instead of vetoing it. The West has thus allowed a major international decision to be taken in favour of the Patriotic Front - without even the benefit by the way of gaining any additional Western influence over the Front's actions. (There is no doubt what the Russians would have done had the situation been reversed.)

In a more determined course of action some risks would have to be taken by the West. But the long-term risks of equivocation and of becoming paralysed by the demands of those who have the guns, are even greater - for both the West and for the peoples of Southern Africa.

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