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Seven Scenarios for South Africa

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South Africa has seven possible destinies. From left to right the seven rubrics are: (1) Revolution, (2) Substantial Regime Change, (3) Power Sharing, (4) Limited Power Sharing, (5) Concessions, (6) Change But No Change, and (7) Reaction and Retrenchment.

The least likely scenarios—those hardest to imagine being realized—are the two extreme ones at either end of the continuum. This is a testimony to the extent to which South Africa has evolved politically. No matter how virulent and enduring the unrest of 1985, the country's ruling cadre has clearly undergone a profound shift in outlook since the days of Prime Minister Vorster. South Africa is no longer a country where whites believe that apartheid as a political program can ensure the continued dominance of whites over blacks. Likewise, Africans no longer accept their subjugation or believe that whites can magically make the power of black numbers disappear. A process of evolution has begun and is accelerating. The violence and repression of 1984-85 have hastened the pace of change objectively and also in terms of both white and black thinking. Political participation has emerged as the only sure bridge across the abyss dividing black and white aspirations for this beautiful, rich, and potentially powerful country.

Reaction and Retrenchment (7)

For all of these reasons, Reaction and Retrenchment (Scenario 7) has the least analytical power of all of the scenarios. It presupposes the coming of the Conservative and Herstigte Nasionale parties to power (on the lines of the National Party takeover of 1948) following a major lurch to the right as a result of adverse white reaction to reform initiatives of the present government. Theoretically, the general election results of 1989 could produce such a reversal. Or events before 1989 could lead to a military coup or a massive defection of sitting members of the National Party away

from their government. But there are profound historical as well as psychological reasons for doubting whether such a shift would or could take place, particularly in the charged atmosphere that is the reality of South Africa now and for the near future.

But there is a second point. Scenario 7 presupposes a turning back of the clock, a withdrawal of present overtures to the world and to Africans, as insufficient and as unsatisfactory as those overtures may be. This is a laager scenario, but South Africa has never known political laagers. Its leaders, even in the darkest of days, have always known how to retreat. They have known how to reach the exits, how to reformulate their positions, and how to find the high ground of flexibility. Even a regime farther to the political right than the present one would, willy-nilly, find itself somewhere within Scenario 6 — Change But No Change. The path of evolution is one which permits deviations, but no total turnabouts. To walk more slowly, or even to walk in place, is possible, but this would be a feature of Scenario 6, not 7.

Revolution (1)

At the opposite end of the spectrum is Scenario 1, Revolution. Revolutions, in the classical sense, occur when the state loses legitimacy — when it can no longer impose its authority. When the state can no longer compel obedience, then the regime is overthrown, or it weakens, decays, and is pushed aside. The breakdown begins when the lower orders become disaffected, perceive the power of the state to be past, and follow new leaders and new ideologies.

Since the state relies on a military institution to assert itself, and since the noncommissioned ranks of armies and police forces are by definition composed of lower orders or at least representatives of the lower orders, the disaffection of that section of a state's citizenry automatically signals the collapse of the

state. In Iran, for example, the Ayatollah Khomeini's message commanded the attention of more and more members of Iran's military rank and file. When those lower orders perceived the likely victory of the mullahs, dissatisfaction with the Shah was transformed into disaffiliation, and the revolution began.

It is immensely difficult to devise a theoretical framework for a South African revolution. The popular employment of that label is unhelpful, for a revolution is a total destruction of the prevailing order, not simply a shift in the composition of the ruling class (Scenario 2). In the case of South Africa, the potential revolutionaries may possess sufficient grievances, but they lack funds, arms, materiel, and the standard building blocks of a late twentieth-century revolution.

It is arguable that those components might in future be more readily available than at present. Moreover, sanctuaries and outside supporters — so crucial in the North Vietnamese and the Chinese successes — may become more available despite the current hegemony of South Africa in its neighborhood. On the other hand, there are some analytical and practical reasons why sanctuaries are likely to remain unavailable and revolution as a total concept unrealizable.

The military forces of South Africa may be 6 to 10 percent nonwhite, and those percentages may increase. But the lower ranks of South Africa's standing and conscript armies, as well as the numerous reserves ("Commandos"), will in this century remain overwhelmingly white. If the struggle for South Africa is between white and black, and not between different classes or different ideological persuasions, then no revolution fueled by a shift in the allegiance of the army will occur so long as the state continues to recruit its soldiers from among the ranks of those whose very way of life is at stake. Unlike the case in Portugal in 1974, the soldiers (as well as officers) of the South African Defense Force have no obvious self-interest in refusing to shoulder arms in defense of the present state.

Change But No Change (6)

Scenario 6 describes South Africa in 1985. Africans protest violently in recurring cycles which have varying amplitudes but which ebb and flow across the geographical face of South Africa. The state may have difficulty restoring peace and tranquility, but its ultimate authority is mortgaged in no overwhelming sense. That is, ordinary police tactics of crowd control are barely sufficient to impose law and order, but the firepower of the army is held largely in reserve. Indeed, although it is analytically likely that the repressive force of the state fuels much of the rioting (goading participants to challenge police patrols and so on) and that many of the townships are today ungovernable, it does not necessarily follow that this year's violence begets greater violence, and then even more violence, and that the state crumbles. Recurrent and intensified violence is certain in South Africa, but neither its intensification nor its effects will necessarily be governed by lineal rules of progression.

Within the framework of Scenario 6, the state combines repression with the granting of concessions. Furthermore, the concessions follow limited consultation between the state and representatives of the protesters. In order to contain the riots, to stabilize the townships, to appease the West, to buy time, and so on, the state is prepared to improve the conditions under which Africans live, work, and play. The state and the white political system thus offer changes — smoothings of the evolutionary path — which whites and the state believe are significant. That is, they constitute major alterations in the ways in which whites were for so long led to believe that their relations with Africans should be arranged, as well as in the place of Africans within the overall structure of South African society. Yet whatever assertions the state makes about the significance of its concessions, Africans regard "concessions" as cosmetic or irrelevant or both, whatever their nature and objective validity.

The state, within the confines of Scenario 6, is prepared to continue or even to accelerate its program of reform while asserting the importance of a top-down orchestration of the reform process. Africans, however, no longer want to be on the receiving end of reform. They demand participation in the process itself — in the negotiation of reforms that will be meaningful. Naturally the state — any state — finding itself in this scenario knows that to negotiate the nature of change means a derogation of the authority of the state, and a weakening of its sinews of war.

Likewise, it is fundamental to Scenario 6 that protesters and their leaders believe that they will lose the momentum of their protest if they accept concessions as improvements decided upon unilaterally. In addition to such tactical considerations, the disaffected majority in South Africa has decidedly moved beyond a willingness to receive proffered economic and social benefits to an awareness that their political weaknesses can only be rectified by an insistence upon political participation. Thus, although the state wants to reform meaningfully (but more slowly than Africans desire), the state is not yet willing to accept the basic elements of the prevailing black demand for political participation and for *negotiating* its translation into practical policies.

This scenario — an abbreviated, abstracted description of the present dilemma — is important for what follows in the scenario-building exercise. It describes state immobility masquerading as forward movement. The state offers what it considers to be meaningful change. Blacks reject that change. And since blacks reject it, the label of Change But No Change is apt. Yet the levels of rhetoric are high in this phase: the state attempts to persuade its own supporters, Africans, and foreigners that its intentions are good but that it needs time. It talks about threats from the right (which may not be false). It hints, it frets, and there is some lack of cohesion within the ruling party. But in this phase either leadership or resolution is lacking for the kinds of strategic repositioning, rather than tactical readjustments, that would move South

Africa from this scenario to Scenario 5, and beyond.

This last point is conceptually valuable. What Africans want, what the West calls for, and what a peaceful (or at least non-cataclysmic) solution to the South African problem demands is a major strategic shift of a kind that happens only very occasionally in the life of any modern state. What governments in crisis generally try to do, instead, is to evade strategic necessities by tactical rearrangements and repositionings. An outside judgment is that only when a party, a ruling oligarchy, or a government is prepared to take the conceptual leaps that a strategic reassessment logically demands will South Africa begin to address (and therefore presumably to resolve) the fundamental issues of a country where a decreasing minority denies effective political participation at the central (and other) levels to its majority.

Concessions (5)

Scenario 5, Concessions, is not yet the scenario within which South Africa is operating. Since Scenario 5 is different more in degree than in kind from Scenario 6, however, South Africa could slide easily from the one to the other, but not back. Part of the regime's current dilemma is that a return to a Scenario 6 posture cannot be achieved once Scenario 5 has been entered. Thus, the transition from 6 to 5 worries the government. And 5 has an open-ended quality unsettling to any government bent more on cautious than wholesale reform, or, to put the proposition in a slightly different way, any government seeking to control the pace and direction of reform rather than to begin a process over which authority could be lost.

Under Scenario 5, which could prevail any day now, the levels of violence common during 1985, especially after the declaration of the state of emergency, would induce the government to grant concessions (meaningful to whites, as discussed above, but not to blacks), and then more concessions, and then further concessions — without achieving fundamental stability. What differentiates 5 from 6 and others is that the entrance into this scenario would be hastened by a combination of continued or renewed violence and intensified pressure from the West. The introduction of stronger U.S. sanctions, the animosity of Europe (and Australia and Canada), would be but a part of the overall atmosphere of Western alienation.

A second distinction between this and lower-numbered scenarios is that the conferring of concessions would be preceded, in each case, by some form of consultation between the state and presumably "authentic" representatives of the protesting majority. Consultation had not occurred in any notable or easily legitimized degree by the time of President P.W. Botha's August 1985 "Rubicon" speech to the Natal Congress of the National Party. Indeed, the government may already have lost its final opportunities to consult by that time, inasmuch as Africans had moved on to demands for negotiated settlements and it had become dangerous to be consulted by the government. Any such consultation, by individuals or

groups, risked a loss of credibility and the label "collaborator" or "stooge."

Nevertheless, it is theoretically possible for a government intent on believing that concessions would mute an opposition, or quiet protesters, to find Africans with whom discussions can occur. A government might also believe that the very contours of its concessions might defuse or defer protest. Clearly the government of South Africa could gain credibility overseas with the enunciation of an end to pass laws and influx control, broad new plans for housing and education, the introduction of an African franchise at the local or regional level, the provision of common citizenship, and so on. Nelson Mandela could be released. But such attempts to buy peace and time are bound to be insufficient if — from the majority point of view — they are introduced unilaterally and are not part of an overall restructuring of South Africa, including the homelands. In a more profound sense than most Africans realize, the majority seeks official recognition that South Africa can no longer progress without considering black preferences and opinions. Africans seek to become an integral part of the bargaining process.

Limited Power Sharing (4)

The government of South Africa has long ago realized that Africans prefer Scenario 4 to 5. That is, Africans want power sharing, even if limited, rather than concessions. The government would very much prefer to provide the latter, and to guide (a euphemism for control) the process. The government wants to slow down, to be static and passive. Those reactions are all possible under 5, but not 4. Thus the conceptual leap between 5 and 4 is much greater than between 6 and 5. Yet the failure of 6, Change But No Change, signaled by violence without end and the inability to repress without embarrassing losses of life, could lead to a decision to move directly from 6 to 4 — on the grounds that concessions would be refused or rebuffed, but that limited power sharing would have at least some chance of halting rioting and removing the sting of protest. This it might, but only if the shift to limited power sharing is negotiated with Africans. To decide to negotiate is the major step. To persuade Africans recognized as politically legitimate to negotiate is a second major move, and both are intertwined.

A result of open bargaining between whites with physical and economic power and blacks with numerical (and possibly historical) power could be the sharing of political control in the operational sense between white and black at local and regional levels. The black cities would become black-governed entities with full revenue raising and revenue expending powers. Blacks would receive the franchise at the municipal level. Municipalities would obtain statutory rights and also have influence at the regional level. Blacks would begin to experience autonomy — a measure of control over their destiny in the political sense. They would start to have a stake in their own

country, and have real if limited power as against the central government.

It is within this scenario that the South African government could experiment with the devolution of regional authority or consociational arrangements. It could shift responsibility for black affairs, education, health, and so on, to a new provincial government composed of black and white representatives, as proposed in the Ciskei Commission and Buthelezi Commission reports.

It is not clear whether or not the government has begun to think broadly and innovatively about limited power sharing in the sense of Scenario 4. Again, it is a question of power devolved being essentially unrecoverable. Further, although whites might be persuaded to concede limited power sharing in the sense described, they would want power sharing to remain limited, and not be a transitional stage. Africans, on the other hand, may have reached the point where they can only be persuaded to accept limited power sharing if they believe it to be a prelude to Scenario 3. Alternatively, but only after a period of bitter repression, Africans might become more willing to accept such "half loaves" rather than the full loaf that their leaders urge them to demand.

Scenario 4 would clearly become an option for the white government only after levels of violence reached new heights, Western pressure became even more insistent, and the National Party underwent substantial alterations in the nature of its leadership. A fundamental move would elevate those who believed in the modernization of white attitudes over those who preferred to react rather than gamble. Leaders would arise who understood that the old ways — the ways of the higher-numbered scenarios — simply cannot give South Africa stability and prosperity.

Power Sharing (3)

Scenario 4 is an alternative to 5, and not as likely a progression from 5 as it is from 6. Scenario 3, Power Sharing, obviously flows from 6, and could result directly (as could 2) from 6. If violence is high and sustained for long periods, if police and military repression proves insufficient to quell or shorten the cycles of violence, if Western pressure grows more compelling and isolating, if prosperity fades (for whites as well as blacks), and if — decisively — the costs to the white way of life as well as the country's economy become too great (or are so perceived by large numbers of whites), then Scenario 3 becomes an operational possibility.

A shift to 3 is less abrupt, by definition, than a shift directly to 2. But it would nevertheless occur with comparative rapidity once the decision makers appreciated that the white will to resist or to continue fighting had snapped. That appreciation would occur subjectively, not objectively, but it would occasion a crisis of legitimacy.

There are two preconditions: (1) that Africans would, over the bargaining table, be constrained to accept less than "one man, one vote" by the existence

of a still strong military machine in white hands, and (2) that leaders would assume power in the National Party and in the top echelons of the Defense Force who were prepared to settle for less than total victory and to demand more than total defeat. Leaders of that caliber would not necessarily arise in time, or become conscious early enough to play their role. Nor would a military leadership necessarily recognize that there is an alternative between victory and defeat. Nevertheless, if there were unremitting agitation by Africans at levels five times greater than in 1985, white persons of power would be compelled to devise a new solution and Scenario 3 could be the negotiated result.

Substantial Regime Change (2)

Scenario 2 — Substantial Regime Change — is less than a revolution, for the prevailing order changes, but the structure of society remains. It may sound far-fetched in 1985, but South Africa could be transformed radically and rapidly without the classical revolution which, as we have reasoned, is highly unlikely. Substantial regime change means a shift from white to majority rule under conditions of uncommonly high stress, with limited time for adjustment, little preparation, and few safeguards for minorities.

Scenario 2 could prevail if, after a period of sustained violence at about, say, 10 times the 1985 intensity, with widespread loss of white as well as black life, the white government finds that the quenching of violence is possible only by open negotiations with Africans from a posture of weakness rather than strength. Prior to this point a National Party regime would have given way to a transitional white group, the military would have acknowledged an inability to continue fighting in a sustained way against Africans, and partition would be the solution on the lips of many.

The Odds

These are the logical alternatives for the future of South Africa. A simple conclusion is that there is every cause for anxiety, since none of the scenarios is promising, and each of the possible states would be reached only by the compulsion of events, not imaginative leadership. On the other hand, the 1984-85 cycle of violence does not necessarily and ineluctably presage repetitious cycles immediately. Historical determinism is not at work, but numerical superiority, international hostility, and the passage of time may nevertheless produce the same results.

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