A Conversation with F. W. de Klerk

Although the half-day meetings of the CSIS Working Group on South and Southern Africa are customarily off the record, an exception was the exchange with South Africa's Deputy President F.W. de Klerk on November 8. This issue of CSIS Africa Notes shares with our readers Mr. de Klerk's opening comments on South Africa's current political and economic situation as well as a sampling of his responses to questions raised in the follow-up discussion period. Because the Deputy President spoke extemporaneously, without text or notes, the following version was based on the taped record of the meeting.

I've been asked to address in my opening remarks basically two subjects: the role of the National Party in the Government of National Unity, and prospects for economic development and foreign investment. Let me initially say that things are going well in South Africa. Within the Government of National Unity we have established a good working relationship between the three participating parties within the presidency, consisting of an African National Congress president (President Mandela) and two executive deputy presidents (Deputy President Thabo Mbeki and myself). Also we have established and we are establishing conventions as to how such a multiparty leadership of the Cabinet should operate.

I am not there because I've been asked to be there. I'm not there at the behest of the president. In terms of our transitional constitution, I've been elected by 4 million South Africans to that post. I directly represent them, and in that capacity I have a specific mandate with regard to my role in the Government of National Unity. And essentially this mandate is, through negotiation—constant negotiation—within the multiparty cabinet, to assure that the values those 4 million voters underwrote when they voted for the National Party will be maintained, and that through effective compromises we can serve the best interests of all South Africans on the basis of constantly seeking consensus.

This is the ethos of the transitional constitution, and the ethos the transitional constitution dictates for the Government of National Unity. Thus far there has been an admirable commitment from all those participating—the senior partner (the ANC), the second biggest partner (the National Party), and the smallest partner in the coalition government (the Inkatha Freedom Party)—to act within this spirit and within those parameters in seeking consensus. And we have already achieved consensus on a very wide range of issues.

In my interaction with leaders of parties in countries with a long history of consecutive coalition governments, there was one central theme in the advice they gave me as to what my role should be in a government of
national unity. That advice was that we should strive to negotiate (as soon as possible) fairly detailed policy frameworks for the Government of National Unity, against which—after those agreements are finalized and those policy frameworks have been established—individual decisions by ministers can be tested and to which all the participants will be regarded as bound to advocate. It has the advantage that no party can claim credit as a party for good decisions made by the Government of National Unity, and that no party can shift the blame for mistakes made by the Government of National Unity.

We have already achieved, on a vast number of issues, agreement on such policy frameworks. I would like to refer only to two. One is the Reconstruction and Development Program. It has already become the centerpiece of the vision, the planning, the goals, the policy of the Government of National Unity. I think the two smaller parties, my party and the IFP, were, politically speaking, magnanimous in accepting the name Reconstruction and Development Program, because in the election this was the dynamic name the ANC used to encapsulate its election promises and its policy with regard to socioeconomic development, to addressing the needs of disadvantaged South Africans.

All of us had more or less the same goals and policies. All parties said housing, improved medical services, a shift toward primary health care and away from curative health care, improved education, access to land—everything was there in the manifestos of all parties. But we agreed to the name—it is a catchy name that contains a message on its own—and then sat down and negotiated the substance of it. What has now become the Reconstruction and Development Program of the Government of National Unity is in many respects substantially different from the individual policies of the participating parties—the ANC, the National Party, and the IFP. It is a joint policy framework. It is aimed at addressing every aspect of life. It seeks to be a comprehensive program, properly coordinated, with integrated planning with regard to all disciplines, properly managed to ensure that expenditure will be managed in a very cost-effective way.

A very important aspect is how it is to be funded, because in that lies the second big consensus we have reached, namely consensus with regard to an economic policy framework that will be applied in South Africa. The essence of the economic policy framework is that it will be funded from what one could term savings in the budget—that the budget will not grow in real terms over the next five years and that through reprioritizing, through the scrapping of programs, through the gradual but orderly trimming of the size of the civil service, through better economic and financial management within each department, savings will be made which will be allocated to a Reconstruction and Development fund.

Second, fiscal discipline will be the name of the game. Third, all the typical economic policy parameters and principles that have succeeded so admirably in countries such as the United States and Germany and Great Britain, and later in the new rising economies in countries such as Singapore, Malaysia, etc., will be the joint economic policy framework of the Government of National Unity. Thus, our goal is to ensure that we create an investor-friendly climate, to ensure that we will build confidence in economic stability, but most importantly, to ensure that we create sufficient economic growth to enable us to address our single biggest problem, namely unemployment, and to ensure that we will create new wealth with which we can successfully address the needs and aspirations of the disadvantaged.

The Reconstruction and Development Program will furthermore be funded by the judicious use of foreign aid. We have just had a rather unique donor conference. It was not a donor conference in the typical sense where countries stood up and pledged so much for this and so much for that. It was really an interaction between donors, recipient countries, and NGOs [nongovernmental organizations], in an effort to establish a very good process of consultation and also to convince donors that their money will be used effectively, and that their donations can be put to the best possible use within the framework of this well-planned and well-structured and well-coordinated Reconstruction and Development Program. It was a great success and we are grateful for the very wide support our reconstruction and development aims are getting from across the world.

We realize that the shelf life of South Africa's popularity obviously is limited, that somehow or other we won't remain at the top of the crest of the wave for too long—that is how it goes in international affairs—and that we must make the best possible use of the commitment of the international community to help us succeed. We know this commitment is not just an altruistic one. The international community needs a successful South Africa, and Africa needs a successful South Africa. They need a partner there in loco, on the spot, with all the applied technology available, with
managerial and other expertise, fully understanding the problems and the challenges and the conditions in Africa. South Africa fits this role admirably. And we are ready, willing, and able to play this role constructively, not in the sense that we want to tell our neighbors in southern Africa or in sub-Saharan Africa what they should do, not in the sense of us wanting to become a dominating factor, but in the sense that we accept a responsibility to play a constructive role in stabilizing our whole region, in ensuring there will be economic development and job creation throughout the whole southern African region. It is also in the best interests of South Africa that that should happen.

And we believe from this region the rest of the continent will benefit if this new market of about 110 million people can be stabilized, can become a growing market, if multiparty democracy can successfully be established throughout the region, and if the basic approach toward free enterprise economic principles can be successfully implemented throughout our region. So we see for ourselves a specific role in our region.

Against this background, a few specific comments. I've basically dealt with the role of the National Party in the Government of National Unity. It is a complicated role. In the Government of National Unity, there are three possibilities when decisions are taken:

(1) The best option is that we reach accommodation with each other, that we find consensus, and that decisions carry the full support of the whole Government of National Unity; that those decisions are then enthusiastically implemented, defended by everybody in the Government of National Unity. This is the pattern which has developed and things will go well as long as it continues.

(2) The second possibility is that we don't reach consensus with regard to matters not of fundamental importance. This will, from time to time, happen. It has happened already with regard to the appointment, for instance, of a specific individual in a specific post. It is very difficult always to reach full consensus on that. But the world won't stop and South Africa won't topple if Mr. A is appointed to a specific post and not Mr. B, who might have been our candidate. And here the convention is developing that a participant has the right to reserve his party's position and to criticize publicly such a decision—not to block it, but also not to accept full responsibility for it.

(3) The third possibility—the one that must be avoided at all costs—is that we fail to reach consensus on an issue that goes to the root of matters, an issue that might make it impossible for my party or the IFP to remain part of the Government of National Unity while retaining our integrity, in terms of our own conscience and the principles, the fundamental principles in which we believe. There's only one way to avoid this, because it must be avoided: the commitment under such circumstances at all costs to find consensus should be a living commitment to which all the parties should adhere. At this point in time, there is no indication that any of the parties are wavering in fully living up, in practice, to this commitment. And therefore I am confident the Government of National Unity will retain its inherent unity and cohesion in the realization that this is what South Africa and all our people need.

But then, being the leader of a party that strives to improve its position substantially in the next election, will be striving to become the biggest party in the country, has to remain active and retain a party political profile in public debate, and has a duty continuously to present the electorate with choices and options, I am at times duty-bound to take public positions critical of my partners in the Government of National Unity. I find there is somewhat of a lack of understanding of this necessity and too great a sensitivity at times when I perform that public duty I have to perform.

For these reasons, debates in Parliament are quite dynamic and it is there where the political parties continue to cross swords. But I must say, in general—there are exceptions—there is also in Parliament a striving in this typical cut-and-thrust of party political debate to conduct it in such a way that it is constructive and won't be disruptive to the continued successful working of a partnership in a Government of National Unity.

On the prospects for economic development and foreign investment, I would like to deal with a few

Although F.W. de Klerk has long been a significant player in the politics of South Africa, it was not until 1989 that he captured and held the attention of Washington's Africa-watchers. He became head of the National Party in February of that year and State President in September.

Equally significant was the manner in which he finessed his predecessor, P.W. Botha, one of the more tempestuous personalities of the twentieth century, into retirement. Relying on his political skills, courage, and ability to gain the unanimous support of a very fractious National Party caucus, Mr. de Klerk accomplished this transition without a scintilla of public humiliation of Mr. Botha.

The sense that President de Klerk was a harbinger of a new style of politics in South Africa was strengthened in September 1989, when he permitted the political opposition to hold legal protest marches in the streets of Cape Town, Johannesburg, and Durban, an activity previously unheard of in South Africa. By February 1990, the world was mesmerized by what was taking place in South Africa, and our attention has rarely strayed since.

— Excerpted from the introduction of Deputy President de Klerk by Witney Schneidman, director of the CSIS Working Group on South and Southern Africa
specifics. First, present investors and future investors can be assured that the government will go out of its way to create an ever more investor-friendly climate.

This includes a commitment, generally speaking, not to increase taxes but rather to look at ways and means to reduce tax ceilings. Second, it includes a very strong commitment to fiscal discipline and a commitment to continue with an effective fight against inflation. We have succeeded at one point in bringing inflation to below 7.5 percent, from 16 and 17 percent. There has again been a fairly sharp rise over the past two months in food prices, which on a month-to-month year-on basis brings us once again just into double-digit figures—about 10 percent. We are concerned about it. We will continue to address the issue to ensure we won't fall back into a spiraling inflation.

It will also simultaneously include privatization. This has been a major development where, vis-à-vis the Reconstruction and Development Program, consensus has been reached in the Government of National Unity that it will also need a third source of income apart from the amounts I've mentioned from savings and from good fiscal discipline and apart from foreign aid and foreign donations. Therefore, although we have not agreed upon details as to what will come first and exactly how far we will go with it, the principle of privatization has been accepted for capital investment where we have important priorities.

I am therefore confident the business community can bank on sound and balanced economic policy-making and policy implementation. We know that for foreign investors, the question of exchange controls and the dual exchange rate rand system, the financial and commercial rand, and our tariff protections are looked upon as stumbling blocks. There is no longer a debate in South Africa that all this has to go. The debate is when must it go, what preconditions should be met before it goes, how the phasing out should be exactly constructed and managed. With regard to the abolishment of the financial rand, two of the most important preconditions identified by the governor of our Reserve Bank refer to the narrowing of the gap between the financial and the commercial rand, and at the moment this is happening very fast. At a certain point in time the gap was in the vicinity of 36 or 37 percent; it has narrowed to about 12 and almost, on one or two days recently, to 10 percent.

The second precondition that has been set was that our foreign reserves should improve further, and the present trend is that our foreign reserves are in a growing phase and are improving from quarter to quarter. I therefore foresee that, hopefully sooner rather than later, we will reach the stage where we can in a responsible manner start to remove these stumbling blocks. Now that we're back in the international community and have become a part of the whole new GATT arrangement of the Uruguay Round, we will be phasing out the tariff protection that sanctions and other circumstances forced us to install.

So everything is in place for reforms that will result in a much more open economy and in mobility of capital, We often read about the “factors” behind the dramatic changes we see around us. Less often do we read about the role of individual human beings in transforming their times. In this age of supposed domination by invisible “cognitive elites,” it seems somehow unsophisticated to attribute great things to a specific person in high office. Exceptions are granted to great personalities who shaped their age (e.g., Winston Churchill) or to great liberators whose vision, courage, and healing power uplift us (e.g., Nelson Mandela).

Hagiography becomes mere history when it comes to a leader who transforms from within an evil empire or a one-party ethnic dictatorship. There remains a residual ambivalence in characterizing the roles of Mikhail Gorbachev and F.W. de Klerk in the history of their countries and time. But history will come to recognize the special vision and moral strength that is required of the incumbent leader who would begin a process of fundamental change and pursue it to the point of irreversibility and unforeseen consequences.

In the end, the extraordinary personal and political risks of attempting a negotiated revolution from above will be acknowledged, especially when, as in the South African case, the attempt succeeds. De Klerk stayed on the course he charted and brought the ship to port. This required world-class political will and steely nerves. A more parochial person, one less open to learning from history and from his fellow South Africans, would have failed. Nor is there any doubt that de Klerk's voyage was an act of deepest conviction and, yes, faith.

Thus, I heard these November 8, 1994 remarks by F.W. de Klerk at two levels. They are, first, a briefing by one of South Africa's two deputy presidents some six months after the historic transition of April 1994. And, second, they are a testimonial by one of the most important political figures in modern African history.

—Chester A. Crocker
Landegger Distinguished Research Professor
Georgetown University

factors regarded as so fundamentally important by foreign investors.

In conclusion, therefore, my message to you this morning is an upbeat one of confidence that we will continue to concretize the miracle of the April 1994 election into a stable, prosperous South Africa with a growing sense of nationhood. A nation at peace with itself. A nation where, because of its complex cultural diversity, there should be in the final constitution room for all the cultural building blocks making up the South African nation—room to cherish that which is dear to them, effective protection with regard to fundamental collective rights such as language rights, religious rights,
the rights in this regard of culturally based, language-based, religiously based education. Those are the sorts of things which need to be accommodated if you want to give to each of our cultural groups (also within the cultural diversity of black South Africans) a feeling of sufficient security that they will not be putting those spiritual assets of their nation, of their Afrikaner nation, their Zulu nation, at risk by being part enthusiastically of the new South African nation—the "Rainbow Nation," as Bishop Tutu has called it.

With regard to our minorities, not defined now on the basis of race or color but defined on the basis of culture, language, and religion, if we don’t put their minds at rest, then at the root of the new South Africa we will have a disease that has the capacity to threaten its growth and stability. And this balance we need to strike in further refining our new bill of rights and in the constitutional structures we are building.

A specific area I think should be looked at in bringing this feeling of security across the communities would be the refinement and renewal of our municipal third-tier level, a third-tier government system, where some lessons can be learned from countries such as Belgium that are successfully accommodating their cultural diversity in a way that does not undermine the cohesion of the country and the nation as a whole.

A Sampling of Questions From the Follow-Up Discussion

• Q. I would like to press you to give us a little more insight as to how the Government of National Unity works in practice, and particularly your role in it. In our own system, the vice president’s role is very much a function of what the president wants it to be and hangs very much on the relationship between the president and the vice president. In your situation I'm sure that’s true as well, and there are additional complications. There are two deputy presidents, and, as you indicated, you have a dual role of being both the leader of the opposition as well as a partner in the government. Do you have any specific areas of responsibility as the deputy? How do you lay out, or map out in your own mind, the particular areas you’re going to pursue, and what mechanisms do you use to pursue them?

A. First, on the structural side, we agreed very early on, and we are successfully implementing it, to have a number of standing cabinet committees. There are three: the Economic Affairs Cabinet Committee, the Social and Administrative Affairs Cabinet Committee, and the Safety and Security Cabinet Committee. I’m the chairman of Safety and Security and Social and Administrative, and Deputy President Mbeki is chairman of Economic Affairs.

The two deputy presidents, on the basis of rotation, chair the cabinet meetings when President Mandela is not present. And what I do find—and I think my colleague, Deputy President Mbeki, finds the same thing—is that all ministers, including ANC ministers, accept the authority of the chair. I chair in very much the same way I used to chair the cabinet when I was president, in the sense of style and trying also at times to lead the discussions from the chair, to give them better direction if a fairly wide-ranging debate ensues. And there is very good cooperation. Another interesting facet is that there is no indication whatsoever that parties in the cabinet caucus before cabinet meetings. They come—the ANC comes, the National Party comes, the IFP comes—on the basis of the documentation, the memoranda, and the proposals that have been distributed beforehand, and there is a very open discussion and a very open debate.

My relationship to President Mandela is obviously different from the relationship of Deputy President Mbeki. I’m not privy to everything that takes place between President Mandela and Deputy President Mbeki. They’re both leaders in the same political movement. Because of this natural link, they would stand in the same relationship that would exist between the U.S. president and vice president. They’re from the same team. I’m the captain of another team, and the convention that is developing is that I don’t get orders of whatever nature; I do get requests. I don’t ask for permission. I didn’t ask for permission for this visit but obviously, from a courtesy point of view, I informed the president I would be away. And if he were to come back—which he didn’t—to say that for a specific reason, because of his absence or whatever, couldn’t I maybe look at shifting the dates, I would try my level best to accommodate. But I’m independent, although I’m executive deputy president, and there is no threat to this independence from President Mandela whatsoever. He recognizes it, and we have established, I think, almost a silent understanding of this and we do not have any tensions in this regard.

• Q. And in terms of issues, are there any issues?

A. In terms of issues, I regard each and every issue from my vantage point as an issue we as a party must analyze and look at. I have six ministers—National Party ministers—in the cabinet. Some of them serve on some of the cabinet committees; altogether we are represented in each and every meeting that takes place. And with regard to specific issues, because one or three persons can’t do everything, we successfully use the concept of smaller committees from time to time. When we see there are some fundamental differences of opinion, we would refer to it a four-man or five-man small committee, and say, "please go and try and sort it out and come back to us with proposals with regard to how we could compromise on issues." And this is working rather well.

The result is that all ministers are working very hard, because, apart from the hard work cabinet ministers usually...
have to do, there is the additional—and I wouldn’t call it a burden—but the additional constant negotiation taking place in the civil service, which is not normally part of decision-making by a cabinet, but is normally part of decision-making by a coalition government.

Q. I wonder if you could comment on recent statements by your fellow deputy president, Mr. Mbeki, and the premier of the PWV [Pretoria-Witwatersrand-Vaal] region, Mr. [Tokyo] Sexwale, that seem to indicate their desire to restrict press freedom in South Africa. Do you think that this reflects thinking in the ANC and what are the implications of this?

A. Well, first, can I maybe just at this point in time say that I’m here as executive deputy president and I don’t want to misuse this platform for any party political gain. I don’t want to enter into a party political debate with my political opponents here today, so I will be avoiding trying to score any political points against anybody.

In their defense, I have heard, after those allegations were made and the interpretation was made of what Deputy President Mbeki said, that he disagrees with this interpretation, and his point of view is that it is wrong to interpret what he was saying as any threat whatsoever to press freedom. He explained that he was trying to get across the need, in this period of nation-building, for the press to shift its emphasis toward the positive and the constructive and to identify its role in the rather unique process of transition in which we find ourselves.

As far as press freedom is concerned, the official policy of all the parties is that they are committed to it, and the bill of rights already contains clauses that rather effectively protect the freedom of the press. And any effort to undermine this through legislation or restriction will be testable in the newly appointed constitutional court within the framework of our fairly detailed bill of rights. I, therefore, am confident the press has nothing to fear with regard to continued press freedom in South Africa. I see that freedom being expanded rather than restricted.

Q. How does the Government of National Unity foresee to increase savings, especially when it is going to downsize the increasing white civil servant population? How does it proceed to do this without causing problems to the white population?

A. There are three main categories where savings can be achieved:

1. We can save on the interest that we have to pay on loans by privatizing and using part of the money to reduce our debts, which will reduce our interest account which is already the second highest item in the budget.

2. In an orderly way, without firing people left, right, and center, by reducing the size of the civil service. The biggest single budget item is the salary account of the state. How to do this? By not filling all vacancies where the normal process of attrition takes place. Every year so many people resign, so many people go on pension. And what we are looking at is adopting a policy to only fill—let’s say in a particular year we have 30,000 people resigning or going on pension—by only reappointing at the bottom end 15,000. And thus we are constantly every year reducing the size of the civil service, and thus bringing down the salary account.

3. Each department of the government must reevaluate everything it is doing and ask whether we must continue to do this. Deregulation in itself offers savings. Every time Parliament makes a law, that law needs to be administered. And every new law usually leads to the need for appointment of new people to administer the law. So if you deregulate, then you create space, because now you have people who used to administer the law and you no longer need them to do that, and you can once again reduce.

Certain things we as a government must stop doing. Inherent in saving is the implication that we must move toward less government. Instead of trying to regulate every aspect of our people’s lives, we should stay out of areas where civil society can arrange its own affairs, where individuals can look after themselves, where families can look after themselves, where communities can play an important role. I think communities have an important role to play in education, in welfare, and in many other spheres. So we won’t do it in a disruptive way. We won’t suddenly just cut off things that will result in revolt amongst the people because they’ve been ill-treated. The position of those who are now civil servants is adequately protected in the transitional constitution. It would be unconstitutional just to fire people.

This brings us to the challenge to which you also indirectly referred in your question, and this is how do we manage affirmative action. It is one of the biggest challenges we face. We supported, all of us in the Government of National Unity, the idea that we must move to a point where the civil service looks much more like our South African nation, which means many more black South Africans and brown and Indian South Africans should become part of the civil service at all levels from top management down to the most junior level. This is the position of the moment.

But we also have in our constitution the most fundamental clause, and this is that there will be in South Africa no discrimination on the basis of race, color, creed, sex, or religion. And in achieving this upward mobility of our civil service, we dare not fall into a new pattern of institutionalized racial discrimination, where because of the color of his or her skin a civil servant is discriminated against or a possible entrant to the civil service is discriminated against. We dare not fall into a situation where a white or an Indian father and mother will be forced to tell their child who says, “I want to become a policeman, is there a future for me?” that “There is no future, unfortunately, my child, because you are white; you will be discriminated against.” Because discrimination on the basis of color, whatever the color involved, is wrong and is unconstitutional.

We’ve got to strike a balance between the need on the one hand to make our civil service more reflective of the nation, and on the other hand not to fall into the trap of doing it in a way that will result in racial discrimination.
• Q. As you seem quite pleased and upbeat about how things are going in your country, I wonder if you would say in retrospect whether you think the United States played any role in bringing about the changes, and more specifically did the bank sanctions in 1985, pulling out the short-term debt, and the commercial sanctions in 1985 and 1986 in this country play a role in persuading the white population, particularly the business population, to press for change, which now seems to be turning out quite positively?

A. Yours is a question I have to deal with quite often, and there is no definite reply, in the sense that surely it played a role in stimulating the debate on the need for change. Surely it focused the minds of people on the need for change. Surely it made people realize that we were in a dead-end street, that there would be ever-growing isolation, and therefore surely it influenced people.

But there is also another scenario that is simultaneously true, namely that in some respects it was counterproductive. It delayed reforms at times. It resulted in twists in our economy that were harmful to all the people in South Africa. We developed a whole armaments industry, which we would not have done if it weren't for sanctions, and we were quite successful at it. But the country and all its people paid a heavy price. We stored oil in great quantities so we could withstand a successful oil embargo for years on end without a drop of oil coming into South Africa. In fact, the oil embargo was never successful. A lot of money just lay there that could and would have been spent for socioeconomic development. Such development is not just getting under way now. We've been building houses from way back. We've been building one school per school day, 150, 200 new schools every year. We've been building clinics. We've been establishing technikons [tertiary polytechnic institutions providing job-oriented instruction in applied sciences, technology, and related skills] and universities, etc., etc. All this could have been taken much farther. The living standards of all South Africans could have been higher if the road of engagement had been chosen by the international community rather than the stick.

In conclusion, I would say sanctions in themselves are a measure the international community should use exceedingly sparingly. You always get an account later on for sanctions. All the aid now pouring into South Africa is part of this account. It is now being given to repair the damage done through sanctions. But if you were to ask me what was the greatest reason for reform, it was definitely not sanctions and international pressure. From my vantage point, the fundamental two things that led to reform were:

1) It was a matter of conscience. We—that which I represent—went through a period of deep self-analysis and came to the conclusion that we have dismally failed in bringing justice to all South Africans through the erection and establishment of nation-states as the original goal was, and that, instead of achieving justice and full political rights of equality for all South Africans, it has just resulted in racial discrimination and in minority domination over the majority. And it was a matter of conscience to say we were wrong. It didn't work out, we admit it was wrong, it led to injustice, we are sorry about the injustice, and it was an initiative not prodded by sanctions primarily to say, "let us make a 180-degree turn on this."

2) In a very concrete manner, it was economic development and not economic starvation which brought apartheid to its knees. The goal of apartheid was to decentralize and to cut South Africa up into so many different countries, so many different distinct economies with just a general cooperation as they have in Europe. But it was the thousands and millions of people moving to the cities where the real job opportunities were, where the economic growth was, where the investment continued to take place, where the new jobs were created through new investments (which could have been so many more if it weren't for sanctions) that created the demographic and economic realities that made the application of separate development impossible. It was the feet walking into our cities and into our factories, and the interdependence that developed from economic development, which played the major concrete role, and not starvation and not pressure.

• Q. What you have said about the functioning of the Government of National Unity strikes one as a very delicate balance in which individual leaders are playing a critical role. What would be your assessment of the degree to which this is dependent on the leaders now at the top, and what prospects or dangers are there if, God forbid, anything should happen that shakes this leadership at the top? In this connection, I think it is fair to say that internal developments in South Africa have been very dynamically interconnected with the external situation and the support you have received from the international community, which you have rightly emphasized. To what extent is this a support for the level of leadership you and President Mandela are offering? And how sustainable or reliable is it beyond the support for the individual leaders?

A. On the first question, let me say I agree with your analysis. What is missing in the Government of National Unity but present in all other coalitions is that in other coalitions no single party has an overall majority. Only through coalition can Chancellor Kohl govern, can the minister president in Holland govern, and the same applies to all the other coalitions in Europe.

In our case, it is theoretically possible for the ANC to govern, since it has an overall majority. And therefore, because it is not compulsory for me and for Buthelezi to be in the Government of National Unity, it could be a strategy of the ANC to drive us out so they can have their way. They have it within their grasp. And, therefore, you are quite right to say that the commitment of South Africa's leaders to make the coalition work is fundamentally important.

I don't foresee, should anything happen to any of the three of us who are now leaders of the three parties, that this would result in a different situation. I think there is
relative depth of leadership in all three parties and the most probable candidates for leadership in all three parties have been active in formulating those agreements and are also part and parcel of the agreements reached. It is also part of their labors, and the fruit of their labors, and they are as committed to this concept as are the three present leaders. And I, therefore, would expect continuation under such circumstances.

Obviously the internal situation within a party is affected when a well-established leader vacates the position and a new leader is elected. In our system, where there is strong party political cohesion, a party operates much more like parties do in Great Britain and in Europe than in the United States, where I get the impression lines between the parties are not always so sharply drawn. It’s more the swords against each other on an individual basis. I prefer the party system because you needn’t be so personal in your attacks upon your opponents. The resignation of a leader might lead to some realignment in party political loyalties, but I don’t think there will be fundamental realignment to the extent that it will be destabilizing in any way whatsoever.

Then the second part of your question: The international support is important for us, but I don’t think it is so personalized that it will suddenly disappear if there were to be a change in leadership. The confidence the international community is showing in specific leaders helped in defining the size and the warmth and the timing and the speed of decision making, but, generally speaking, I think those decisions have now been taken. And I wouldn’t foresee that governments, if A or B goes, if President Mandela were to go, if I were to go, will suddenly say, “Well, now we will change our positions and we withdraw and we won’t fulfill our commitments.” I really don’t expect that.

Q. I’m interested in your views on the Truth Commission. This is clearly an important issue in South Africa, and one imagines that a Truth Commission by nature has to be a win-lose situation. My question is: Can it be otherwise in South Africa? And how do you see this issue playing out?

A. Yes, the Truth Commission [Commission for Truth and Reconciliation], up to a certain stage, had the capacity to put the cohesion and the very existence of the Government of National Unity under great pressure. We have negotiated for weeks on end. From the beginning, our stance was that we don’t have a problem in principle with a commission. We need a mechanism to finalize the question of indemnity. And right from the start we were sympathetic toward the concept of some form of reparation within the framework of what can be afforded to victims. This in itself justified the establishment of a mechanism, and if it is called a Truth Commission, no problem.

We also have no problem if that Truth Commission can make a contribution in a constructive manner toward putting the past into perspective so that we can close the book—inasmuch as one ever can—on the past and get everybody focused on the future. But in the original draft bill and in later editions thereof, we had serious reservations about a number of fundamental aspects, about procedures, about the question of whether it makes inroads on some of the fundamental human rights now contained in our bill of rights (such as the right to remain silent and the right to be properly represented). These and a number of other important procedural aspects bothered us, and here and there continue to bother us.

There was also the question of double standards being applied. Different tests were written into the legislation. The latest draft has been finalized since my departure, but I believe that some improvements have been achieved in negotiation. I don’t want to go into too much detail. We have bridged a substantial percentage of the problems, to the extent that we said let the bill now go to the parliamentary committee. But we reserve the right to try to improve the bill further and (through our party representatives there) deal with those aspects where we still have concerns in the legislative process.

The consensus reached and supported by many public statements from all sides is that this Truth Commission will have reconciliation as its objective, and should not be allowed to develop into a witch hunt of any nature. Since something comparable has been fundamentally achieved in Chile, we think it can be done. But a lot of inherent dangers are involved and whether we can successfully prevent this investigation from becoming a negative factor in the reconciliation process will depend very much—apart from what we write into the terms of reference and how the legislation is formulated—on the members of such a commission and their wisdom.

Q. During the middle months of 1992, after the CODESA talks had stopped and before they resumed in September of that year, would you describe your personal contacts with Mr. Mandela and Chief Buthelezi, and tell us how those contacts helped or hindered the resumption of talks?

A. I think I’ll be a little bit less than frank with you on that, because maybe this is the type of detail one reserves maybe for memoirs or when you no longer serve together in government. But I can say that the basic pattern was not to bring the top leaders (and specifically now in the case between us and the ANC) together too soon or too often, because if you then fail to reach accommodation you really have a crisis. We have rather pursued the exploration and development of the movement back to real negotiations through intermediaries, but with our own representatives talking to each other, reporting back, getting new instructions.

We have learned. We’ve burned our fingers a few times. When the regular negotiators couldn’t find a solution, they tried to dump it on my shoulders and Mr. Mandela’s shoulders and Buthelezi’s shoulders, and on one or two occasions this didn’t work out. It created a bigger problem, because suddenly a problem that could have been solved through further negotiation earlier on became a confrontational situation where one of the two or three leaders said, “No, I cannot live with this.” And once this is said, it is difficult for anybody to retract. So I
think as a general rule, when dealing in sensitive negotiations, one should restrain regular contact between the top final decision makers and plan very well ahead before you really bring them together. You must be near to a solution.

This doesn’t mean that, at times, Mr. Mandela and I didn’t settle very difficult questions on specific issues through a telephone call. And there was always free access, where he took the initiative to phone me on a specific situation, about an eruption of violence in place A or B, and where I would take the initiative to contact him on a specific issue. On such matters, we never broke off talking to each other.

**Q.** You mentioned the problem of inflation, and I wondered how the government plans to deal with it and whether you think a rise in interest rates is necessary and what the impact would be on unemployment.

**A.** One of the wise decisions we’ve taken in the Government of National Unity is that we won’t decide on the rise or fall of interest rates. We’ll leave this where it should be—for the governor of the Reserve Bank. When there is a definite and sustained rise in inflation, then obviously there will be an effect on interest rates. But this decision and the timing of such a decision and the extent of such a rise (or a reduction if such is called for) is in the hands of the financial authorities, and the government has decided to give this autonomy to our Reserve Bank, which should build the confidence once again of investors.

**Q.** My name is Raila Odinga. I am a member of Parliament from Kenya. The Government of National Unity is being seen in a number of other African countries as an ideal solution for countries that are emerging from single-party dictatorships to multiparty arrangements. Renamo in Mozambique is demanding a government of national unity even ahead of elections. Listening to you here, I see that you have a common program that has been agreed upon by all the parties and that you are bound by a collective responsibility to defend what has been jointly agreed. To what extent has this kind of arrangement compromised individual party identities, and do you think that the absence of effective political opposition compromises transparency and accountability?

**A.** One of the challenges is to ensure that this type of cooperation in a government of national unity will not result in compromising the position of the individual parties participating, and this is a tightrope one has to walk. Of course, there are other ways in which to establish this sort of collective responsibility. In our case, it was agreed that a fairly rigorous situation would be contained in our constitution. There is no substitute for engagement and consultation. Something like this (not necessarily our exact version) would be a good recipe for Africa and for any country troubled by deep divisions and by violent conflicts of the past. And the more you can assure that decisions by majority parties will also be reflective of the needs of the supporters of minority parties, and that such decisions are taken after consultation and preferably agreement with other important parties so as to ensure that they won’t be politically divisive or controversial—this is the way to defuse conflict. It is the only way to defuse conflict.

The ethos behind it is to say that all important decisions affecting the lives of all South Africans must have maximum support. This must not be interpreted as a majority imposing its will on big and important minorities. This is the essence. And how you structure it, to overcome the negatives involved, is in the hands of those who have to negotiate such structures. Yes, there is a problem. To maintain this political identity, a very active Parliament and parliamentary system and a very well-organized and active party political machine are the best instruments to overcome the negative aspects of losing a profile. The party faces the challenge of keeping its name in the headlines, of remaining visible, and of interacting at the grass-roots level with the public in such a way that they always remember that there is also this party.

That’s my last word. One particular way of doing it is to say, “We’ve entered into this compromise because it’s in the best interests of the country at this point in time that we make this compromise. But if you vote for us next time we’ll change this and this, because our plan was actually the better plan and the compromise has certain negatives built into it.”

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