

THE CAUSES OF TRANSITION IN SOUTH AFRICA

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INTRODUCTION

Discussions on this question reflect a curious ambivalence. The one argument implies that given the set of circumstances beginning to impinge on the South African regime : "De Klerk had no choice but to do what he did." The other argument implies that De Klerk caught everybody (perhaps even himself) by surprise at what he did. Both positions cannot be true; the one thing about the inevitable is its lack of surprise. The obvious point is that there is nothing inevitable about the transition in South Africa - it came about, or was precipitated by deliberate political choice.

This implies two things : the regime was in a position to exercise this choice, i.e. it could choose to do so or not to do so, and furthermore, its leadership preferred to exercise this option in favour of transition. One can avoid a whole host of deterministic fallacies about the "strategic", "final" or "inevitable" contribution of a particular cause of transition if this simple fact is kept in mind.

In other words, given the same set of circumstances confronting P W Botha and F W De Klerk and given the risks involved in making a certain choice in favour of transition, the one calculated these risks differently to the other. In this sense, and importantly so, one of the "causes" of transition must be in the differences in psychological pre-disposition, intelligence and leadership style between Botha and De Klerk. Of course, neither was an entirely "free agent". Although individual characteristics play an important role in making a decision, the decision itself is shaped by social, economic and political factors beyond the control of those who exercise the choice. One of the most important factors influencing De Klerk's choice was the political legacy Botha left him.

BOTHAS LEGACY TO DE KLERK

The Botha decade, 1979 to 1989, was also the decade of "reform". Reform was the regime's attempt to respond to the ideological collapse

of Apartheid/Seperate Development due to its goals being undermined by the unfolding social, economic and political developments in and outside South Africa. The National Party that De Klerk inherited from Botha had lost its sense of ideological purpose, its unity and solidarity and its role in executive government. The governing establishment under Botha had alienated the intellectual, cultural and spiritual leadership of the Afrikaners as well as its growing economic elite. More and more the regime fell back on security and authoritarian control to maintain stability.

Botha sacrificed the hallowed NP goal of partition with the constitutional shift to tri-cameralism. This not only highlighted the untenable constitutional position of the Black majority, but precipitated the breakaway of the right wing from the NP thus finally destroying unity.

Botha also sacrificed Afrikaner NP civilian control over political decision making by using Presidential executive authority to bypass, not only Parliament, but the NP caucus and Party as well and vesting more and more decisions in running the country in the State Security Council.

The ideological justification for these reforms was a self-fulfilling and tautological "Total Onslaught" ideology that necessitated a "Total Strategy". One of the extraordinary consequences of a Total Strategy ideology was that it was the first non-racial encompassing or inclusivist ideology put forward by the NP, thus further undermining the goal of constitutional partition.

Botha never considered the option of partitioning the "Onslaught" into thirteen types with thirteen "total strategies" to meet them.

The political consequences of these "reforms" was that at the end of the Botha decade the idea that South Africa was going to become

one country with one constitution and one citizenship had become unshakeable conventional wisdom in international, regional and (with the exception of the white right), domestic politics. Botha believed that this had to be done by maintaining white control over the political system but with co-opted participation of previously excluded groups. This logically implied an extension of repressive control over those who would not comply. Consequently, De Klerk inherited a deadlocked situation in which maintaining an inconclusive cycle of repression, X reform, reaction, reaction, revolt, repression was the one option, or breaking out of it the other. De Klerk chose to break out of it.

An important consequence of this choice was that white control would have to be sacrificed. In accepting this consequence De Klerk for the first time since Union precipitated serious transition away from white minority domination in South Africa. But, it could be argued, why did he not reconstitute the NP by healing the break Y to the right, re-establish NP civilian control and re-affirming partition as the only viable constitutional model for resolving the problem of white minority domination? In other words, why not do what the right wing currently insist has to be done? For De Klerk to have done this would be to ignore the very pressures which persuaded Botha to "reform" in the first place, and which prevented De Klerk (that is apart from possibly personal ambition) from joining the breakaway Right when Botha began to reform. It is amongst these "pressures" that we have to look for the other "causes" of transition.

SOME ANALYTICAL DISTINCTIONS

If we make "transition away from white minority domination" the dependant variable, i.e. that which has to be explained, then it is useful to distinguish between different categories of independent variables, i.e. possible causes. I prefer to distinguish between external and internal pressures to South Africa and planned and unplanned pressures.

This can be presented in the following simple diagram :-

TRANSITION AWAY FROM DOMINATION		
	EXTERNAL	INTERNAL
Planned	e.g. Sanctions	e.g. Mass Mobilizing
Unplanned	e.g. Gold Price	e.g. Birth Rate

External pressures obviously refer to factors that have a direct bearing on the nature and extent of transition and that can be located outside the boundaries of South Africa as a country, whereas internal ones can be located inside these boundaries.

The distinction between planned and unplanned pressures refers directly to the presence, or absence, of an identifiable agent or actor that desires to bring about or prevent transition in South Africa. Unplanned pressures for change or transition are extremely important in the sense that although no particular agent with the intention of effecting transition can be identified, the response of the regime to these pressures has a direct relationship to transition.

By deliberately focussing on internal pressures for transition first, I wish to emphasise the fundamental point that the nature, extent and outcome of transition in South Africa will be determined primarily by the internal dynamics of our situation and not by external pressures.

Without proper research (and perhaps even with it), it is impossible to determine the relative importance of each factor in relation to the other in being responsible for a probable outcome. It never fails to amaze me however, with what ease propagandists can isolate a single factor, e.g. sanctions, or Thatcher, or "the market" and with dogmatic confidence explain a wide variety of consequences. An additional reason for emphasising the primacy of internal pressures is that unlike the transitions in Zimbabwe and Namibia, South Africa's international status precludes an "acceptable" external agent, e.g. Commonwealth or U.N.O. from deliberately precipitating and implementing a formula for transition, such as Lancaster House or Resolution 435.

INTERNAL PRESSURES FOR TRANSITION

(a) Unplanned

- (i) Population Growth : The disproportionate increase between the white and black population in South Africa consistently highlighted the untenability of white minority domination and compounded the contradictions which flowed from it. One of those contradictions became acute when the regime abandoned partition as a constitutional model, namely, consolidating a state structure geared for white minority domination but dependant on a black majority to administer it. This contradiction is in turn compounded by a state expenditure program which blatantly reflects its racially discriminating nature and which flows from the demographic differences between white and black.
- (ii) Urbanization : The accelerating flow of black people to the cities undercut the regime's policy on land use and the provision of social services such as housing, education, health, pensions etc. Squatting became one of the most massive and largely unintended acts of civil disobedience and passive resistance in South Africa and the regime's intolerant response to it became one of the most important contributing factors to external pressure and isolation and to domestic revolt and mobilization
- (iii) Unintended Consequences of Seperate Development : Rural desertification and poverty stimulated urban drift; black education compounded the shortage of skilled labour in the economy and the revolt of black youth, influx control broke up family life and aggravated crime and normlessness in the cities; the multiplication of social services and bureaucracies put an enormous drain on the fiscus without in any way relieving the central problem.

- (iv) The Demands of the Economy : Increasingly it became apparent that the South African economy could not carry the ideological costs that Apartheid/Seperate Development demanded. Because of this, political goals like Homeland Consolidation, Job Reservation, Seperate Amenities, temporary Black Urban Status etc. were abandoned. In addition, the imperatives of economic growth demanded the circumvention and undermining of political goals set by the regime.

By now the point I am making should be obvious. No doubt many other such pressures can be identified, but however many they are, and imporant relative to each other, and to the problem of transition, they provide the domestic backdrop against which the planned forces for change responded to them and to each other. It is in this current interaction between the planned forces for and against domination that the process of transition is being shaped.

(b) Planned

- (i) The Regime : I have already referred to the internal dynamics of the NP and its impact on the leadership. Essentially what De Klerk did with his February 2nd speech, was to destroy the conventional political base of the NP and split the white community between those who were in favour of transition and those who were against it - (the "soft liners" and "hard liners" if you will.) Those in favour of transition are more diffuse, less organised and at this stage even less committed than those against. Their lack of conviction and commitment are very largely dependant on the coherence of the response of the ANC, PAC and other opposition groups.

(ii) The Opposition : There is no doubt that, as planned forces for change, those involved in "the struggle" against white domination from as far back as 1910 had, and are still having, the most profound impact on the current transition. The resistance to domination revealed itself on many levels and many different strategies and tactics, but by the end of the eighties the politics of domination opposed by the politics of liberation was epitomized by the juxtaposition of the Regime with the ANC. This does not deny the relevance of other organisations in the struggle against domination, but as far as De Klerk was concerned, the relationship particularly between the Regime and the ANC had to be "normalized" before serious transition could commence. This was perhaps the most important unintended legacy of the Botha decade. Not despite his efforts, but precisely because of them, he put the ANC squarely on the map as an agent for transition. Botha and Malan gave "the struggle" international prominence and domestic popularity - both welcome rewards for the efforts of those engaged in it.

But there is no doubt that De Klerk's commitment to transition caught the opponents of the regime by surprise. If they regarded the outcome of their struggle as reflected in De Klerk's commitment to transition as inevitable, then they are no doubt the most illustrious victims of their own success. They were simply not prepared for the speed of De Klerk's shift to transition, despite the fact that the Harare Declaration was in place as a formula for normalizing domestic politics. Until February 2nd the conventional paradigm of change prevalent, in at least the ANC, was one of

revolutionary transition and seizure of power, not one of negotiated transition.

One of the major challenges facing both the regime and the ANC is to stop trafficking across contradictory paradigms: for the Regime between consolidating white minority domination and negotiating it away; for the ANC between bringing it down through revolutionary collapse and negotiating it away. Both have to come to terms with the fact that the State is not going to collapse or be partitioned away, and that it will have to be transformed through negotiation as the major process of transition. So far this has not become evident and the transition phase is still locked into position bargaining and posturing. This in turn increases white anxiety and black expectation and feeds the volatile political climate of the present - particularly on the white right.

- (iii) The White Right : The white right, riddled with ideological and political confusion and nurtured with white anxiety, use every opportunity to exploit the uncertain relationship between the Regime and the ANC (and similar opponents) in order to cast doubt on, and prevent transition. In a very real sense their efforts underscores for De Klerk the irreversibility of the process he has precipitated, but unless this is also taken seriously by his major partners in transition, e.g. the ANC, the white right have the potential to derail the process. In other words, De Klerk alone cannot placate white fears about the dangers of transition, he needs at least the ANC to help him. If they do not, he is left twisting in the wind in the face of mounting white anxiety.

(iv) Other Special Interest Lobbies :

- (i) The Democratic Party : it falls on the side of transition in white politics that De Klerk has created. By effecting this split, De Klerk has invaded the DP's political space and usurped its support base. Electorally the DP cannot survive with De Klerk increasingly appropriating its political rhetoric and Mandela encouraging whites to support De Klerk. The DP epitomizes the agony of realignment that all organisations, parties and movements will undergo during the politics of transition. For them the short term challenge is to be useful and relevant in this process.
- (ii) The SACC, Black Sash, SAIRR Etc. : A very important role can be played in facilitating communication and transferring reliable information during transition. Already there are signs that these organisations are adjusting to transition and re-arranging strategies and tactics. Particularly important and interesting in this regard is the actions of the SACC which played a very prominent role in the "politics of struggle" prior to the onset of transition.
- (iii) The Private Sector : The political approach of "Business" has always been to keep both ears to the ground, tuck in behind power and economically exploit stability for as long as it endures. When those in power commit themselves to transition i.e. to uncertainty and possible instability, and those to the right wish to return to an untenable past, business has no choice, for the sake of its own survival, to become interested

in the political future. Particularly if those to the left of those in power ostensibly support policies repugnant to business. One of the most important forces for successful transition will be the kind of relationship developing between the Regime, the ANC, and the private sector. Periods of political transition do not automatically create climates conducive to investment and growth and if these three cannot get their acts together, further economic stagnation seems more than likely. There is no inevitably positive relationship between transition and economic growth and many historical examples show that rapid transition more often than not leads to capital flight and galloping inflation.

CONCLUSION

The interaction between internal pressures for change, whether planned or not, will drive the politics of transition. This does not deny that external pressures have no role to play. On the contrary, the extent to which such external pressures link up with or impinge upon the internal dynamics of the South African situation, can have an important bearing on the outcome of transition. However, if we keep in mind that we are going to have to "pull ourselves up by our own bootstraps" we will be better able to evaluate external pressures for transition.

EXTERNAL PRESSURES FOR TRANSITION

(a) Unplanned

- (i) The Changing Relationship between USA - USSR : There is no doubt that the 8 years of Reagan's Presidency and the ascendancy of Gorbachev in the USSR saw a profound change come about in international relations.

→ One of the consequences of the rapprochement between

them was the changing significance of what they perceived to be regional conflicts. They accepted that such conflicts should not be allowed to become flashpoints between them and that as far as possible they should be settled politically, i.e. peacefully, rather than violently. This policy shift led to a different approach to conflicts in Afghanistan, the Middle East, Angola, Namibia, Mozambique and South Africa. Antagonists in these areas could no longer play these powers off against one another in prolonging the conflict on their own terms, nor did either of the super powers perceive their roles in these conflicts as important for their respective spheres of influence.

These shifts in regional policy had an important bearing on the developments in Angola, Namibia and South Africa.

- (ii) The Collapse of Eastern Europe : There is no doubt that De Klerk saw in the collapse of regimes in Eastern Europe a strategic opportunity to precipitate transition on the domestic front. This much he made clear in his February 2nd speech. There is also no doubt that events in Eastern Europe had a profound ideological and strategic effect on the ANC/SACP. This much was made clear by Joe Slovo in his paper "Has Socialism Failed?"

- (iii) The Decline of South Africa as Gold Producer : South Africa's share in international gold production has slipped from 60% to 40%. In addition, countries like Canada, USA and Australia can produce gold significantly cheaper per ounce than we can. This coupled with the current unreliability of the gold price underscores

the necessity for the South African economy to mature beyond its reliance on its mineral base and to expand manufacturing. This in turn has a host of implications for broadening our skilled base and becoming internationally competitive.

(iv) The Decline of Africa as an Area of Geo-Political Influence

The latest IMF Report is a telling reflection of the non-African world's growing disenchantment and disillusionment with Africa as a sphere of influence and concern. There is a growing realisation that Africa is "on its own" and will have to fend for itself. Certainly, as far as the South African regime is concerned, (and particularly some African states), there is a strengthening of the conviction that we have to "pull ourselves up by our own bootstraps".

(v) Others : No doubt there are other perhaps more important unplanned pressures that have a direct bearing on transition in South Africa. Those mentioned serve to make the point that quite apart from the high profile of planned external pressures there are unplanned pressures that have important unintended consequences for transition in South Africa.

(b) Planned Pressures

(i) The War in Angola : The South African Regime engaged in a war with arrogant myopic foresight and disengaged with humiliating hindsight. It epitomized more than anything else that which was part of the total strategy, namely, the waste of lives, time, energy and resources. The escalating costs of the war, the unanticipated resistance of the Cubans, as well as the increasing unpopularity of it at home speeded up its end. In doing so the focus fell on Namibia.

- (ii) The Costs of Administering Namibia : International and domestic action for the independence of Namibia coupled with escalating costs to South Africa for its continued administration of the territory, speeded up the implementation of Resolution 435. The South African regime's role in ending white minority domination in Namibia vividly underscored the untenability of its continuation at home.
- (iii) Sanctions : The sanctions debate on South Africa is a quagmire of confusion, half truths, platitudes, provocation and deception. It is also riddled with laudable intentions frustrated by reality. It is boring beyond redemption, but it will endure, if only because of its ability to generate more heat than light. At best the debate consists of competing ideological preferences parading as theories of change. All the analytical distinctions I have so laboriously drawn you are instantaneously collapsed into a single generalisation for, or against, the efficacy of sanctions bringing about, or preventing transition. To add analytical distinctions to the debate on sanctions itself is to add insult to injury to those who are unqualifiedly for or against it. But it has to be done :-

- Sanctions are the punitive actions of one state in relation to a target state to effect a political outcome.
- Sanctions can be political, social, economic or cultural but need not be all of them.
- States differ in their capacity and resources in relation to target states in bringing about sanctions.

(Therefore there is no world community with a collective consciousness "out there" that has made up its mind on sanctions.)

- The reason for a state instituting sanctions are not necessarily the same as the reason a business or organisation disinvests or divests.
- Without sanctions a society can experience massive disinvestment and capital flight.
- Sanctions play a vastly different role in revolutionary transition than in evolutionary transition;
- Sanctions can be turned on and off; sanctions can be turned on but not off; a state can neither turn sanctions on or off, but pretend to be able to do both.

In other words, what I am saying is that the relationship between sanctions and the desired political outcome is a matter of empirical analysis not apriori pontification for or against it. As far as South Africa is concerned I think it is fair to say that :

- Sports isolation had a direct bearing on the changes in sport if not necessarily on the desired political outcome;
- The arms embargo certainly had an impact on the war in Angola as well as domestic arms production;

- Financial sanctions certainly affected the South African regime's fiscal and monetary policy;
- X the international climate created by the campaign for isolation and sanctions promoted both a sense of siege and transition in the white community;
- Some trade and economic sanctions (i.e. disinvestment) weakened the economic power of the workers in relation to the regime and management.
- The most significant form of economic sanctions was not instituted by any particular state but was the voluntary flight of capital out of South Africa through X loss of confidence in the polity and the economy.
- Whatever the nature of sanctions there is a significant difference between Botha and De Klerk's response to pressure, whether external or internal, planned or unplanned. The one would have deepened siege with a smile on his face; the other instituted transition.
- Finally, the most dangerous illusion created by the sanctions debate is that when De Klerk and Mandela agree on the irreversibility of transition, and both agree to end the call for sanctions, untold millions of investment capital will be unleashed to pour into South Africa. Nothing of the kind will happen. If the process of transition does not lead to confidence X in the economy and the future polity in South Africa, no turnabout on the sanctions debate will have any effect whatsoever. It is far more important to persuade investors on the viability of the society that will result from transition than to score debating points

in the campaign for or against sanctions.

One of the major negative consequences of the sanctions debate as far as the process of transition is concerned, is that it diverts attention and energy towards external pressures for change and elevates them to prime movers for domestic transition. This is not only false, but acts as a paralysis on domestic initiatives.

CONCLUSION

In looking at the causes for transition and distinguishing between external/internal and planned/unplanned pressures that bring this about, I have stressed the following :

- (a) There is an obvious interaction between external and internal pressures for transition and the exact relationship is a matter of analyses at a particular period. In other words, there are no historical inevitabilities guaranteeing predictable outcomes.
- (b) This means that the progress and outcome of transition is open ended. There is no fixed agenda. The agenda is created and develops as a consequence of the interaction between the regime and those planned forces for or against transition.
- (c) Precisely because the process of transition is largely a consequence of political choice relating to the internal dynamics of the South African society, external factors can inhibit or promote the process of transition depending on how the internal actors respond to external pressures. At present most of the external planned pressures for change urge a positive outcome even if some of them pursue contradictory tactics in wanting to assist the process.

- (d) The next phase in transition depends to a very large extent on whether the regime and its potential allies in transition can consolidate the process in the centre, contain opposition on the perimeters and begin to share responsibility for managing the process away from domination towards (what at this stage appears to be) an uncertain democratic outcome.

SOME IMPONDERABLES

In relating dependant and independant variables, i.e. "cause and effect", to the problem of transition (and I hope I have made it clear what a risky business this is intellectually), there are some imponderables or intervening variables which could have a direct bearing on the outcome of the process :-

- (i) The Security Apparatus : It is almost a conventional rule of thumb that no sudden regime change is possible in a society without a significant defection in the security establishment. Equally, it is difficult to envisage a viable and negotiated transition without the role of the security establishment being sanitized or made to be acceptably non-partisan to the major parties in transition. Thus there has to be an agreement on violence as an instrument of political change as well as to the acceptability of the agents to prevent its abuse. We have not reached this situation in South Africa. This is obvious from the way in which the right wing can mobilize militantly; violence continues in Natal and uncertainty prevails as regards the continuation of the armed struggle as a strategy for change. At present this remains one of the most dangerously unresolved areas in the politics of transition. The responses to the conclusions of the Harmse, Hiemstra and Goldstone Commissions of Inquiry will be important indicators of progress in this problem area.

(ii) The Organisational and Strategic Preparedness of Unbanned Organisations for Transition Politics : The South African regime under De Klerk had the advantage of foresight in initiating transition. In addition it has formidable resources at its disposal in preparing for the bargaining table. The ANC, PAC and other organisations emerging from a political culture of "illegal", "exiled" liberation politics have had to :-

- adjust to legal political activity;
- prepare to organise for constituency politics;
- outbid opponents for support; and
- be ready for participating and bargaining in the "normal" world of conventional politics.

This is a tall order by any standards but one that will have to be faced if transition politics is going to progress. Radical outbidding and "regime impatience" could be major sources of discontent that could frustrate the process.

(iii) Private Sector Abandonment of Transition : If economic decline should sap business confidence and thus compound stagnation, the forces of polarization could be strengthened and the business community could abandon all interests in becoming involved in successful transition. In this respect the movement of transferable skills and wealth would be a clear indicator of business abandoning transition.

FINAL CONCLUSION

What am I saying? Perhaps a parable can say it better. Two youngsters in a village in India decided to test the wisdom of an old sage living in a cave above the village. They agreed that one of them would hold a live pigeon behind his back with the head in one hand

and the body in the other. They would then ask the old man whether the bird in the hands of the boy was alive or dead. If the sage said "Alive", he would rip off its head and present him with a dead bird. If he said "Dead" they would present him with the live bird. And so they put the question to the sage. He thought for a while and quietly said to the boy, "The answer is in your hands." And so is also the nature of our transition. It is in our internal dynamics that we have the capacity to kill it or keep it alive. Nowhere else.

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