COHP Transcript Mr RF 'Pik' Botha: APPENDIX TWO

Content:

Additional material provided by Mr RF 'Pik' Botha on 18 April 2013.

Key:
RB: Mr RF 'Pik' Botha

RB: A serious schism broke out into the open within the National party towards the end of 1969, when a right-wing faction broke away as the Reconstituted National Party. They were overawed, inter alia, by Prime Minister John Vorster's willingness not to restrain an All Blacks team which included Maoris from playing in South Africa. They shuddered at the prospect of allowing the Malawian Ambassador and his staff to attend white schools. Inane as this might sound, it illustrates the magnitude of the task awaiting those of us who strove for the removal of at least the more reprehensible sides of apartheid.

For years to come, the right-wing factions embedded themselves in forming a severe stumbling block in the way of progress in reform, right up to the 1992 referendum in which the white voters were asked whether they supported the Government's reform process, aimed at a new constitution through negotiations.

After the break-away of 1969, a general election was called for April 1970. I had already been informed, then, by Dr Brand Fourie, Head of the Department, that I had to prepare for my next assignment as Ambassador to and Permanent Representative of South Africa at the United Nations. Shortly before I had been promoted to Under-Secretary. Dr Hilgard Muller, Foreign Minister at the time, and Prime Minister Vorster persuaded me to make myself available for election. They trusted that I could assist in lessening the lack within the party ranks of grasping the danger to South Africa of the awakening international campaign of isolating the country economically. I acceded and special dispensation had to be granted by top management to stand as an NP candidate; I was not a member of the NP and would not have qualified due to the shortfall in the prescribed membership time for all candidates.

Some four years later I was appointed Ambassador to the United Nations in New York and subsequently Ambassador to the United States in Washington. That ended with my recall to Pretoria in 1977 and appointment as Minister of Foreign Affairs – the position I held until 1994, when the portfolio of Mineral and Energy Affairs was awarded to me in Mr Mandela's Government of National Unity. On the international front, South Africa's position was severely threatened and the country's security was under increasing strain. Other than the repugnance of apartheid, key foreign policy challenges were in our immediate neighbourhood: Rhodesia, Namibia, Mozambique, and Angola. The outstanding pioneering work that the Department of Foreign Affairs had done in establishing informal contacts and dialogue with several leaders of Africa was being undermined by the lack of convincible political change in South Africa and the ongoing pursuit of apartheid. This had been further hampered by Ian Smith's Unilateral Declaration of Independence in Rhodesia, and the escalating conflict in Mozambique and Angola. Into this turmoil I was thrust as Minister of Foreign Affairs and, from the early 80s, a steadily growing number of us came to realise that bringing peace and stability to Southern Africa – and ultimately to South Africa itself – would not be possible until apartheid was dismantled and a new democratic order was established. But this, in turn, would be opposed by a large segment of the white voters.

Apartheid was not [invented] overnight by the NP. Colonialism and racism had come a long way. Ironically, the barbaric nature of slavery was questioned long after the permanence of stars. [sic] Not even General JC Smuts could gauge the long-term consequences of the inclusion, on the UN General Assembly's agenda, of an item, "the treatment of Indians in South Africa," as well as the UN's rejection of South Africa's proposal to incorporate South West Africa into the Union of South Africa. The immense intensity of the trauma suffered by our Boer forefathers in the most destructive anti-colonial war ever fought on the African continent moulded an inflexible determination amongst Afrikaners to regain their republican statehood. Unfortunately, in pursuing this objective, hindsight was lost that Blacks were also victims and also suffered under colonial rule. To safeguard [themselves], the Whites ruled democracy – since 1910 – against Black demands for political and social equality; the then-prevalent repressive laws were expanded in the NP concept of apartheid. To escape the internal political threat, the independence of the traditional Black homelands became an impelling objective. Enormous amounts were invested in the establishment of capitals, fit and proper buildings to accommodate governments and parliaments, universities, schools, hospitals, roads, and even airports. But the dream turned into a nightmare. Economic integration could not be unmeshed. The 'non-permanence' of Blacks in 'white' South Africa had come to end. Only by reaching out to each other, unburdened by racism, could our country survive and move forward. Apartheid could not be transformed. It had to be removed in its entirety to eradicate the injustices and free the Whites from their incarceration. The challenge was how to accomplish this without plunging our country into chaos and devastation.

Moreover, we did not have the luxury of time nor sufficient control of events to deal with each of these issues in isolation. They had to be dealt with simultaneously, and the country's vital interests and very existence [had to be] secured in order to ensure that any future political dispensation would stand a chance of success.

By 1980, Rhodesia had become the independent Zimbabwe, which brought to an end the threatening violence on our northern border. The Department of Foreign Affairs participated in the strenuous negotiations which resulted in a peaceful democratic election in Zimbabwe after years of strife and bloodshed, which followed on Mr Ian Smith's UDI in 1965. By 1984, we had largely secured our eastern border between South Africa and Mozambique by way of the Nkomati Accord. The definitive and historical breakthrough came in December 1988, with signature of the Trilateral Agreement in New York between South Africa, Cuba and Angola, which saw the departure of more than 50,000 Cuban troops from Angola and the ending of the war in that country, opening the way for independence to be brought to Namibia. The governments of Namibia and Zimbabwe came into power through peaceful democratic elections recognised by the world; in Mozambique, through an agreement between the freedom movement led by Samora Machel and the colonial power.

The resultant independence of Mozambique was recognised worldwide as well as by South Africa. Thus, the way was opened for the unqualified dismantling of apartheid and the unfolding of a new era of constitutional democracy in South Africa. The NP Government, acknowledging the iniquities of apartheid, and the ANC leadership agreed that the continuation of violence as a means to retain or attain Governmental power would inevitably lead to the destruction of the country. The decades of conflict in the southern African region of Africa, had come to an end. This was the sequence we had in mind, and although dealing with numerous, complex negotiations simultaneously, we never lost sight of the sequence of solutions that had to be found in our neighbourhood, to ensure that democracy could flourish in our own country.

All this was done in an atmosphere of growing crisis. South Africa found itself subject to increasing economic sanctions which, had they succeeded, could have so crippled the country that negotiations towards a democratic future could have become impossible to initiate. Added to that, the internal unrest had seen much of the country fall under a state of emergency, and it was clear to me and my staff in the Department of Foreign Affairs that events could rapidly spin out of control unless political and diplomatic solutions were found to address the crippling questions our country faced. These were our primary objectives, among a myriad others that daily confronted our diplomats, requiring the tireless efforts of some of the country's finest minds and dedicated professionals working round the clock in many different parts of the world, to achieve success. During those years, as I went from one African capital to another, probing for the formulae that would bring peace to our region, I found myself the beneficiary of the hard work that my senior colleagues had done so many years before. Indeed, their work had not been in vain: they had left a foundation on which I and my younger colleagues could later build.

Indeed, it should be recalled that the culture of Foreign Affairs encouraged original and independent thinking, without fear of political consequences. Officials were not deployees [sic] of a political party: they were non-political civil servants whose job it was to advise the Government of the day, regardless of whether or not the Government liked what it heard. For Foreign

Service officers of those days, most of their careers were spent telling the Government what it really did not want to hear.

The Department of Foreign Affairs had to carry the brunt of the condemnatory international campaign emanating from apartheid. Of course, the Department's work also encompassed all the issues relevant to international relations and membership of a host of international organisations. Our officials persisted in performing their tasks proficiently, despite the sordid circumstances created by the animosity against apartheid.

Let me mention some examples. In 1960, Ethiopia and Liberia – acting on behalf of the OAU – instigated legal proceedings in the International Court of Justice with a view to obtaining a judgement placing the administration of South West Africa under the trusteeship of the United Nations. After almost 6 years of litigation, the court handed down judgement, rejecting the claims of Ethiopia and Liberia. A judgement against South Africa would have held disastrous consequences for South Africa, as the Security Council of the UN would have been entitled to enforce the judgment through drastic economic sanction and even forceful means. Thus sanctions were delayed at a time when the country required substantial economic progress.

Our uranium enrichment programme – although not planned for tactical offensive purposes at all – was met, as was to be expected, by international suspicion and rejection. In 1977, South Africa was denied its designated seat on the International Atomic Energy Agency's Board of Governors as the most advanced nuclear country in Africa. The seat was given to Egypt. In 1979, we were barred from the IAEA General Conference in India.

In reply to a question from President Ronald Reagan during my first meeting with him in the White House early in 1981, I acknowledged that we had the capacity to produce a nuclear device, but I made a commitment that we would not execute an explosive test without first consulting the American Government. This persuaded the President to agree to the upliftment [sic] of the impediments on the production and delivery by France of the fuel elements required by Koeberg.

This did not interrupt the regular and heated discussions with the Americans – at their insistence – aiming at persuading us to sign the Non-Proliferation Treaty. We signed the NPT on 11 July 1991 after the dismantling process of our devices was completed in June and enjoyed the shower of worldwide salutations. Recently, President Obama lauded South Africa's voluntary decision as historically unique, claiming that it should serve as a model for the world.

Although apartheid remained the burning issue, both abroad and inside our country, threatening our peaceful existence as a country, the officials of the Department refused to throw in the towel because they believed that they had to remain true to their innermost wish to serve the interests of all South African without inviting retaliatory chagrin from Government. That was not an easy task. I pay homage to them.