

NAMIBIAN ELECTIONS - SOME MISGIVINGS

How the South African government would try to influence the outcome of Namibia's independence elections has puzzled progressive organisations and commentators alike. But the recent exposé by daily newspaper The Namibian of the existence of a top secret National Security Council has added weight to the argument that, despite initial appearances to the contrary, the forthcoming independence elections in Africa's last colony will be a case of Swapo versus Pretoria.

The security council (NSC) scandal has also cast serious doubts about the supposed impartiality of the civil service, police and South Africa's Administrator-General who have been entrusted with running the country in an unbiased fashion before and during the elections.

Minutes of one NSC meeting reveal that members of the now disbanded interim government - politicians appointed by South Africa and opposed to the liberation movement Swapo - met with top civil servants, police and army chiefs to draw up a plan to prevent Swapo from winning the elections, due to be held in November this year.

Amongst those civil servants involved in the NSC were the recently appointed Chief Electoral Officer for the forthcoming "free and fair" elections, Andries Visser, and head of the South West African Police (Swapol), Lieutenant General Dolf Gouws. The Administrator-General, Louis Pienaar who, under the United Nations independence plan for Namibia, wields supreme executive power in the country until a constituent assembly has been voted in, has also admitted attending NSC meetings, though denies having played any part in discussions about the anti-Swapo plan.

The revelations sparked a hunt for the source of the leak, security police seizing the document from The Namibian's offices and taking it away for "further investigations". "The post of Chief Electoral Officer is one which demands the utmost impartiality," commented one leading Windhoek lawyer. "Mr Visser is aware of the NSC plan to prevent a Swapo victory, so how can Namibians possibly have confidence that this will act without political bias in the execution of his duties?"

Umbrella labour organisation, the National Union of Namibian Workers, said there was "no way" the civil servants involved in the NSC should stay in office as their "impartiality is seriously in question".

Meeting

The NSC minutes which fell into the hands of The Namibian were of a meeting held on September 7 last year, a time when US-brokered talks between South Africa, Cuba and Angola designed to bring peace to south-western Africa and independence to Namibia were at an advanced stage. Sources have, however, confirmed that the NSC meetings went on until at least March, three months after the angolan-Namibian peace plan had been

signed in New York and weeks after the United Nations (UN) military commander, General Prem Chand, had arrived in Namibia.

The meeting of September 7 referred to a seminar held at a remote resort on Namibia's Skeleton Coast at which a General Lloyd, secretary of South Africa's all-powerful security council, briefed the NSC on South Africa's "security considerations". The aim of the seminar, said the minutes, was to "establish what could be done to beat Swapo in an election".

Fanie Gouws, a high-ranking civil servant, went on to say that civil service heads of departments wanted to "become involved in the future of their country".

"They feel that the department heads and cabinet must work together as a team to give urgent attention to an overall strategy (to beat Swapo). The committee also felt that South West Africa itself should present South Africa with a long term plan," Mr Gouws continued.

South Africa's involvement was also touched upon by the then cabinet chairman, and leader of the supposedly independent Democratic Turnhalle Alliance (DTA) party, Dirk Mudge, who said Pretoria had two options; war or "democracy".

Chief of National Security, Brigadier Gert van Niekerk, went on to say that South Africa wanted the territory to be independent as soon as possible but wanted a "friendly" government to rule Namibia. The question was whether SWA was ready for independence elections or whether "steps had to be taken to ensure that Swapo did not win the election", he continued, adding that "only when certain plans for the election had been tabled by SWA could funds then be sought". Civil servants alone could not draw up such a plan he concluded.

The overall plan of action taking shape at the meeting was that the civil service - which now comes under direct control of the Administrator-General - would work hand in hand with the parties opposed to Swapo to draw up a strategy to try and deny the liberation movement of victory at the polls.

The Namibian's article sent shock waves through government and DTA circles. Both Pienaar and Mudge held hurriedly convened press conferences to clear their names and defend the civil service. Not once, however, was the existence of the NSC and the counter Swapo plan denied.

During the time the security council met, Pienaar was effectively head of state vested with the power of veto, and every piece of legislation drawn up by the interim government had to receive his approval before becoming law.

An ice-cool Pienaar, flanked by an anxious looking Visser, admitted they had both attended NSC meetings, the Administrator-General on two occasions but only in order

to sort out disagreements between the interim government and members of the South African delegation. He said the NSC no longer met and denied that either he or Visser had attended council sessions when the anti-Swapo strategy was discussed.

"My administration is an impartial one," Pienaar declared "It has been established in terms of Resolution 435 and it is supposed to be as objective as humanly possible," adding that he was not prepared to fire any of the officials involved in the NSC, Visser above all.

He also wished to assure the country of the impartiality of the police while pointing out that no "politically contaminated persons" served on his administration's committees. Asked what he meant by "politically contaminated persons", he quickly replied: "Look at me and you might see one," before biting his lip and refusing to elaborate further.

Mudge also defended the impartiality of the civil service and claimed the NSC had been "essential" because of the "state of the war" in Angola and northern Namibia, and a "campaign of terror" being carried out by Swapo.

Yet, when the NSC started meeting, the war had ground to a virtual halt after the signing of a ceasefire, while the "terror campaign" amounted to three bomb explosions in the space of two months which claimed five lives. Swapo denied responsibility for all three blasts.

Backing

Details of the NSC meeting - particularly the references to presenting South Africa with a plan, the need for funding and South Africa's "democratic" option - has further strengthened the belief that the DTA and other major alliances opposed to Swapo receive substantial backing from Pretoria.

It appears the alliance has an unlimited source of funds. The party has bought its own jet plane for R3.8 million while one exasperated car buyer went to a major Windhoek dealer to find 200 four wheel drive vehicles, costing as much as R40 000 each, had been bought up by the DTA.

DTA supporters attending party rallies receive free transport to and from all parts of the country. At the meetings, they are further treated to free food and drink in the shade of a huge marquee painted in the red, blue and white colours of the party. Here too, free T-shirts, tracksuits, badges and hats are handed out to rally-goers.

At a DTA demonstration organised at the end of March to greet United Nations Special Representative for Namibia, Marti Ahtisaari, the DTA transported an estimated 3000 supporters to Windhoek Airport, over distances of up to 700 miles, in lorries, coaches and even three chartered trains.

And in almost every town, the DTA is renting spacious, prime-site offices. In Windhoek's Katutura township alone, the party has two offices less than a kilometre apart.

Asked where their funding comes from, DTA leaders say from "business sources" within and outside the country and refuse to elaborate further. It is believed that much of the party's cash used to be canvassed in West Germany by the late Bavarian Prime Minister, Frans-Josef Strauss.

But this flow of funding is thought to have eased off since the latter's death last year.

There also seems to be no shortage of money for groups opposed to Swapo to start up their own newspapers. Three such publications have hit the streets in the past month, including one put together by the vehemently anti-Swapo group of students, the Academy Students' Organisation (ASO), using the latest computer technology and printed in costly - though impressive - glossy paper. New arrivals on the publishing scene take to 10 the number of newspapers printed in Namibia (population 1,4 million), only one of which is sympathetic to Swapo.

Badges

But more ominous than the DTA's blank-cheque spending is the blatant bias of some of the security forces in favour of the alliance. Soldiers openly wear DTA T-shirts and badges, while giving the DTA's V-sign salute to passers-by and even newspaper photographers.

At the trial of two soldiers accused of the murder of an Ovamboland priest - suspected of being a "terrorist" and who died from wounds sustained in a severe beating by the troops - one of the accused wore a DTA badge on his jacket lapel. The soldiers were acquitted of murder and fined 50 pounds for assault as they were judged to be acting in the course of duty.

Questions have also been raised about apparent police bias towards the DTA. Police were recently called to break up fighting between unarmed Swapo supporters attending a fund-raising rally and a pro-DTA group wielding guns, pangas, kieres, bows and arrows in the northern town of Okatope. Having fired warning shots and driven their armoured Casspirs through the melee, the police - including former members of the supposedly disbanded paramilitary Koevoet counter insurgency force - arrested 13 Swapo supporters while none of the DTA crowd were detained.

There is little doubt South Africa would view a DTA government as "friendly". South Africa is familiar with the party's leadership, the majority of which was on Pretoria's pay-roll in the days of the interim government. The alliance's cross between free enterprise, and state control programme, combined with its sizeable support makes the DTA the only viable alternative to the socialism of Swapo, and thus the party Pretoria - taking the "democratic" option mentioned in the NSC minutes - would be likely to back in what will effectively be a two horse election race.

While the DTA has been campaigning vociferously since the beginning of the year, Swapo's election campaign has only just started now the majority of exiles and the party's leadership have returned to their homeland. It is therefore difficult to gauge whether the DTA has made inroads into Swapo's support which, in the past, has accounted for the vast majority of Namibians.

While the DTA is loud, brash and apparently omnipresent, routine Swapo rallies consistently draw much bigger crowds than those of their opponents and there is little danger that the liberation movement is losing its bed-rock of popular support. What is at stake for Swapo is an election victory by a two-thirds majority, needed if the party is to have complete control over the writing of the constitution for an independent Namibia. □