



INNOVATIONS FOR SUCCESSFUL SOCIETIES

MANAGING SPOILERS AT THE BARGAINING TABLE: INKATHA AND THE TALKS TO END APARTHEID, 1990-1994

SYNOPSIS

In the talks to end apartheid in South Africa, 19 parties sat at the negotiating table. At least 10 of the negotiators had armed wings, and almost all had demands that they were prepared to back up with violence. One in particular possessed the ability to destabilize the country: Mangosuthu Buthelezi, leader of the Inkatha Freedom Party. To get him on board, negotiators employed a number of tactics, including splitting him from his backers, offering compromises and refusing to allow the momentum of the process to be slowed by his boycotts. This memo examines the negotiators' efforts to manage Buthelezi's demands and draw him into a coalition, as well as the longer-term consequences of those moves.

Daniel Scher drafted this policy note on the basis of interviews conducted in Johannesburg, Durban and Cape Town, South Africa, in February 2010.

INTRODUCTION

"I think the dominant factor in our minds was that we realized that if we didn't progress ... there would have been blood in the streets in South Africa," recalled Roelf Meyer, chief negotiator for the National Party during the talks to end apartheid. Meyer was confident that if progress was not made at the negotiating table, large numbers of citizens would take to the street and demand an immediate takeover. The chance for a stable, controlled transition would be lost. Chaos was a very real possibility.

If there had been only two players—the National Party representing the apartheid

government and the opposition in the form of the African National Congress (ANC)—the task of refashioning the apartheid state into a new, democratic system would have been difficult enough.

But the National Party (NP) and the ANC, while the biggest players, were not the only ones. At several stages of negotiations, 19 parties held seats at the negotiating table. At least 10 of these parties had armed wings.

Lead negotiators for the ANC and the NP had to contend with demands made by small groups prepared to back their appeals with violent action. These demands ranged from a desire for

linguistically defined homelands to specific requests about the structure of the post-apartheid state.

Among these potential spoilers, Mangosuthu Buthelezi, leader of the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP), stood out clearly. According to a report submitted to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission by the Human Rights Committee, from 1990 until the April 1994 elections, 14,000 deaths and 22,000 injuries occurred as a result of political violence. Of these, the report estimated that 90% occurred during clashes between Buthelezi's supporters and supporters of the ANC.

THE CHALLENGE

Buthelezi refused to participate in the first democratic elections in South Africa until the last minute and boycotted the negotiation process on a range of issues, including federalism and the role of the Zulu monarchy in the post-apartheid state. To get him on board, negotiators employed a number of tactics, including splitting him from his backers, offering reasonable compromises, and refusing to allow the momentum of the process to be slowed by his boycotts.

In 2010, Buthelezi, at 84 years old, believed that he was one of the most misunderstood people in contemporary South African history, viewing himself as a patriot who was constantly looking to improve the lot of the average South African, irrespective of race. But those who interacted with him had a different perception. They saw him as a man whose constant brinkmanship endangered the negotiation process.

During the negotiations, Buthelezi's relationship with the ANC was bitter. But it had not always been so. As a student, Buthelezi was in the ANC Youth League and had enjoyed strong relationships with the party. However, in the 1970s this relationship grew strained,

primarily because Buthelezi participated in the apartheid government's homeland system. Because of his prominence as a traditional Zulu leader, in 1970 the apartheid government appointed him the leader of the KwaZulu territory.

Buthelezi had the title of prince, part of the Zulu royal family, and he saw himself as the leader of the Zulu people: "One must understand in the first place that I'm a hereditary leader of my people, I am a traditional leader by birth." The area known then as KwaZulu¹ was home to the bulk of South Africa's Zulu population. In the mid-1990s, the Zulu population totaled about 9.2 million, or 23% of the population.² (By comparison, the population of white South Africans was around 3.4 million at that time.³)

After assuming leadership of the KwaZulu territory, Buthelezi formed a Zulu cultural

movement, *Inkatha Yenkululeko Yesizwe*, which was the forerunner to the Inkatha Freedom Party. Both Inkatha the movement and the party remained inextricably linked to Buthelezi, who led Inkatha for 35 years and even in 2010 gave no intimation of stepping down. Mike Sutcliffe, an ANC

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—Mike Sutcliffe,
ANC politician

politician and veteran of politics in the province of KwaZulu-Natal, said, "The real irony of the IFP is that it is not a party. It's a set of interests which are held together by their leader."

In 1976 the apartheid government nominated Buthelezi for chief minister of the newly formed KwaZulu Bantustan. Bantustans were ethnically defined homelands for black South Africans and an integral part of the apartheid system. Buthelezi claimed that he consulted with the ANC, who encouraged him to take the position. Buthelezi said in an interview, "Albert Luthuli and Mr. Oliver Tambo [top ANC leaders at the time] had to speak to my sister—my late sister, Princess Morgina—in Benoni,

requesting her to plead with me that if the people elected me in the framework of this system which the apartheid regime was imposing on us I should not refuse, because they knew I rejected it.”

Buthelezi took up the mantle of chief minister. However, he soon found himself at odds with emergent ANC leaders. They saw cooperation with the apartheid government as a betrayal of the liberation struggle. They branded Buthelezi a collaborator and he came under increased criticism.

The issue came to a head at a meeting between the ANC, led by Oliver Tambo at the time, and Buthelezi in 1979 in London. The ANC and Buthelezi clashed over his role in the Bantustans, and his opposition to both the armed struggle and sanctions. So bitter was the clash that shortly thereafter Buthelezi severed all ties between Inkatha and the ANC. From this point forward, the relationship between the two organizations was characterized by antagonism.

The antagonism boiled over into violence between Buthelezi’s supporters and ANC supporters in the mid-1980s. In 2010, debate continued about the causes of the violence, in which people were killed on both sides. Buthelezi maintained that his people were defending themselves from onslaught by the reconstituted Umkhonto weSizwe, the armed wing of the ANC. The ANC’s Sutcliffe claims, on the other hand, that “ANC areas were clearly targeted.” Uncontested statistics of numbers killed on both sides are hard to find. One reason for this is that many of those killed were unaffiliated.

The ANC blamed much of the violence on a shadowy third force operating out of the apartheid security structures and directing a campaign of so-called ‘black-on-black’ violence intended to undermine the negotiation process. The Inkathagate scandal, revealed by a leading South African newspaper, showed that elements of the state security apparatus had illicitly funded

Inkatha and had provided military training to a group of Inkatha members. The president at the time, F.W. de Klerk of the NP, claimed no knowledge of the support provided by the apartheid state, and fired his ministers of defense and law and order. Buthelezi acknowledged the training but claimed no knowledge of the funding, and he fired Inkatha’s secretary-general.

The media labeled the Inkatha groups that had received training as hit squads. Buthelezi contested this characterization: “Many times they wanted to assassinate me and those who worked with me in the [KwaZulu] cabinet ... and because of that I appealed to the central government for people to protect [us]. And there were those two hundred young people that were actually trained by the South African defense force for us. Because I was a sovereign citizen, I was entitled to protection by the South African government—nothing hanky-panky about it.”

Neither side contests that thousands died in violence that pitted Inkatha supporters against ANC supporters.

Buthelezi was never conclusively linked to acts of violence, and he consistently denied involvement. “There was not a single meeting of the central committee of the IFP, which ever decided that we should kill anybody or embark on a war,” he said in 2010.

However, there were indications that the scale of violence was related to Inkatha’s fortunes at the negotiating table. For example, after the announcement of the election date—which Inkatha was aggravated about since party members had not been consulted—a Human Rights Committee report noted that there was an “instantaneous reaction in terms of the level of political violence.”

FRAMING A RESPONSE

It was within this context that Buthelezi made demands of the negotiators, and the

negotiators had to respond. Two demands emerged as his most central. The first was Inkatha's advocacy of a federal state, and the second was his demand for safeguarding the role of the Zulu monarchy.

Federalism

Buthelezi had been advocating federalism as a solution for post-apartheid South Africa for almost as long as Inkatha had existed. "I have always admired the federal state," he said. "I believe it is the form of government that is best. ... This country is multi-ethnic, and the interests of people everywhere are served best by self-determination and provinces doing most things." Peter Smith, Inkatha strategist during the negotiations, said federalism was demanded because it was the best form for the new government: "It wasn't as if it was something that was being sucked out of thin air. It was a proven, tried, tested model that succeeded."

When asked for models of federal states that he admired, Buthelezi said, "Well, I admired all the federal states in the world, I think whether it's the United States or it's India or it's Canada, whether it's Germany, I've always thought that the federal form of government is the best for us, for this country, for our people."

With a support base so securely situated in what would become KwaZulu-Natal, Inkatha had a much more self-interested agenda in advocating regional devolution of power. Although Buthelezi and his chief advisers deny that they were merely a regional party advocating for what was in their best interests, their lock on support in the region meant they stood to gain from a federal model.

GETTING DOWN TO WORK

Meyer, the chief negotiator for the National Party, recalled that this calculus was obvious to everyone at the table: "I think the problem was the people that argued strongly in favor of regional and/or federal system were doing it for the wrong reasons. They were doing it for their

own political vantage, or advantage and benefit and not so much for the real issue that was relevant, namely strong regional government in order to deliver better services to the people, etcetera. ... Everybody knew that at the back of it was ... a case of how they could gain as much political position in the whole situation."

The ANC advocated a more centralized, unitary state. Sutcliffe recalled, "We really had a view that our struggle was firstly for national democracy and to not really waste our time in trying to think of sub-national democratic forms." The ANC favored a central state with no provinces, and just local administrations that would, according to Sutcliffe, act as "post boxes of national government."

Debate raged over this issue but was subsumed by other events. In June 1992, Inkatha supporters killed 46 people aligned with the ANC in the township of Boipatong outside of Johannesburg, allegedly in retaliation for prior attacks on Inkatha supporters. The ANC accused the National Party of complicity in the massacre and walked out of the negotiations. Meyer of the National Party and Cyril Ramaphosa of the ANC scrambled to get the negotiations back on track. A further massacre of ANC supporters in September 1992, this time perpetrated by security forces of the Ciskei homeland in its capital Bisho, forced the ANC and National Party into an agreement to avert further bloodshed.

In late September 1992 the ANC and National Party signed the Record of Understanding, a bilateral agreement that laid out a roadmap for continuing with the negotiation process, including a set of agreements that Inkatha had understood to still be under negotiation. Inkatha was furious. Smith articulated Inkatha's view at the time: "The Nats and the ANC ... were seemingly engaged in a parallel process that would, in fact, determine both substantive and procedural matters on a bilateral basis and on the basis of private arrangements." Even though actions by Inkatha

supporters had been the cause of the breakdown in the talks, Inkatha withdrew from the negotiation process.

The National Party's Meyer recalled: "Immediately, once that Record of Understanding was signed between [Nelson] Mandela and de Klerk, the IFP turned everything on us, on both sides, and said, 'You excluded us. We'll walk away. We're not going to participate in multi-party talks.'"

In December 1992, in a move that aggravated the ANC, Inkatha said it had established the state of KwaZulu-Natal within the Federation of South Africa. Mario Ambrosini, an Inkatha strategist at the time, described the situation: "So, not having a seat or a saying on that table, we spoke very loudly from the side. Theoretically, perhaps symbolically, with half a measure of wanting to be real about it, [we established] the entire KwaZulu-Natal province, unilaterally, as a member state of a federation to be established at a later time."

The Inkatha move had little impact on the situation. Ambrosini recalled that it was "an absolute flop because it didn't produce the type of mobilization we thought it would, especially the white population was very indolent. ... [It] was addressed by ignoring it."

Inkatha attempted to mobilize more support for federalism by forming the Concerned South Africans Group, or COSAG, later renamed the Freedom Alliance. COSAG was an unlikely political alliance. It brought together white right-wingers pushing for an Afrikaner *volkstaat*, Bantustan puppet leaders eager to secure their own places in the sun, and Inkatha. Regarding the makeup of the alliance, Buthelezi conceded, "It is true that it was quite a motley gathering."

As pressure grew to move forward with the negotiation process and amid continuing worries about the possibility for a large-scale revolution or uprising, the NP and ANC agreed to accommodate Inkatha's and COSAG's demands on the hot-button issue of federalism. Meyer and

other lead negotiators accepted the inclusion of a provincial level of administration.

"This was the complicated part in this. We all know between the government and the ANC, if we didn't make that agreement between them and us we would not have progressed with the negotiations at all," Meyer said. "It was in the interest of the country, of the bigger picture, that we made that agreement because otherwise there would have been no progress."

The decision was viewed by many as a generous concession to Buthelezi and the Inkatha.

The role of the king

Having secured a concession on the federal nature of the post-apartheid state, Buthelezi shifted his focus to the issue of the representation of the Zulu monarchy in the post-apartheid constitution. He wanted the role of the king provided for and safeguarded. This demand had been a consistent theme during the negotiation process, but it became more prominent later in the negotiations.

Buthelezi felt a strong connection to the historical Zulu royal family. Buthelezi's mother, Princess Magogo kaDinizulu, was the granddaughter of King Cetshwayo, the last king of the independent Zulu nation. When King Goodwill Zwelithini acceded to the throne in 1971, Buthelezi, a royalist at heart, took control of the young king. The previous king had been a hard-drinking man who had damaged the image of the monarchy. Though the restoration of the monarchy was an end in itself, Buthelezi also had pragmatic political reasons. With the backing of the king, Buthelezi could command the loyalty of the 300-odd chiefs of the various Zulu clans and the traditional authority structures over which they presided.

Buthelezi's strong stance in favor of the king also reflected the clash between tradition and the forces of change. Smith, the Inkatha strategist, said there was "a strong fear that the ANC was so against any form of traditionalism, culture,

traditional culture and so on that it would do everything it could to obliterate the entire institution.”

Large swaths of the population generally supported traditional authorities. Many of these structures had been in place for centuries and in the more rural areas they were the only form of government. Buthelezi was a product of this system and had used it for his own political benefit.

Ranged against him was an urbane, sophisticated ANC elite that included anti-traditional leaders. The ANC considered tribal authorities to be tainted by their history of manipulation by colonial powers and minority-controlled governments. Women members of the ANC were opposed to traditional patriarchal practices. Traditional authorities also had no place in the ideology of the ANC’s communist and trade-union allies.

In June 1993, when he failed to get the assurances he wanted on the role of the Zulu monarchy in the post-apartheid state, Buthelezi vowed to boycott the negotiations through the upcoming elections. “This is the issue that almost cost our participation in the election,” he said.

Smith defended the decision not to participate: “We could choose to participate or not participate. Nobody forces you to participate in something. You’re invited to participate and you choose to do so. So we went as far as we wanted to. We saw the futility in proceeding any further, so we elected not to go any further.”

Dealing with the king

Negotiators for the NP and ANC approached this issue on two fronts. While making some concessions to Buthelezi, they moved to drive a wedge between him and the king. This strategy was largely orchestrated and managed by Joe Slovo, long-time leader of the South African Communist Party and a leading

member of the ANC, and de Klerk, president at the time. Jacob Zuma, chief of the ANC’s intelligence wing at the time, played a significant role behind the scene, interviewees said.

ANC members covertly approached the king and other Inkatha members, suggesting that Buthelezi’s actions would cost the king his position and privileges. Sutcliffe, of the ANC, suggested that Zuma, a Zulu, was an important factor: “Jacob Zuma, probably given his intelligence background, really focused on the peacemaking process. If you actually look at what he did, he took the IFP leadership, particularly that leadership immediately below Buthelezi, by the hand...[but]...Jacob Zuma’s not the sort of person who will ever tell you whether this was the case.”

Meyer, the National Party chief negotiator, echoed this sentiment, “I keep on thinking today that the role that Jacob Zuma and others played in KwaZulu-Natal to calm down the aspirations, so to speak, of the traditional communities in KwaZulu-Natal, was very fundamental in realizing a peaceful transition.”

Zuma and others found the king, tired of being dominated by Buthelezi, receptive to their arguments. A popular anecdote recounted by a number of people went that on meeting Mandela after his release from prison on Robben Island, King Zwelithini said, “I sympathize with your experience of jail, since I, too, have been imprisoned for the past 20 years.”

Meanwhile, de Klerk and Slovo publicly wooed the king in campaign speeches. In one of these addresses, Slovo said: “We have proposed to give the Zulu monarchy more powers than those of the Queen of England. But Buthelezi is cynically manipulating the Zulu monarchy.”⁴ Public perceptions shifted, along with the king’s, pushing Inkatha to participate in the elections. Looking back, Buthelezi sighed and claimed that his opponents “were able to pull the wool over the

king's eyes," although the king's position did not suffer in any measurable way after the advent of democracy.

OVERCOMING OBSTACLES

At the same time as the various parties were driving a wedge between the king and Buthelezi, they also provided accommodation for the role of the king in the interim constitution, which was intended to pave the way for the elections. Following the elections a constituent assembly would be established to ratify a new constitution. Buthelezi feared—rightly—that the extensive protections provided for the king in the interim constitution would be left out of the final constitution. He wanted some assurance that the role of the king would be assured, and he refused to join the elections without this. However, with just weeks to go before the elections, lacking the king's backing, and with the demands he made met by the interim constitution—the only document available at the time—his position was increasingly tenuous.

Just before the elections, there was an international attempt to pressure the government and ANC into delaying the elections so that the IFP could take part. The international community feared that violence that could ensue if the IFP was not allowed to join. A seven-person team visited South Africa under the leadership of former U.S. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger and former British Foreign Secretary Lord Carrington, seeking to persuade the NP and ANC to delay the election. Meyer, the negotiator for the NP, recounted their first meeting: "In the very first meeting I had with them, I said to them, 'I'm sorry; you're missing the point. You're wasting your time. We're not going to have the election delayed. You came to cause a conflict in South Africa that we've never had before.' I could see in their faces, both Kissinger and Carrington, how taken aback they were at this arrogance—saying to them, you're missing the point. You're

not going to get what your mandate is. I guess the ANC said to them the same."

Meyer and ANC negotiators were both acutely aware that slowing the momentum of the process could plunge South Africa into violence. In their estimation, the danger of delaying the election was greater than the danger of moving ahead without the IFP. Just a day and a half later, Kissinger called Meyer to say he and Carrington were leaving.

Several people said that Buthelezi raced after the delegation and literally caught them at the airport. According to Meyer, Buthelezi had hoped that the arrival of Kissinger and Carrington would be his "big moment," but the two had just come and gone. Buthelezi asked for their assistance, and Washington Okumo, a high-level official from Kenya, agreed to stay and help. He facilitated a meeting between Buthelezi, Mandela and de Klerk in Pretoria. De Klerk made a commitment to Buthelezi that if Buthelezi participated in the elections, after the elections the issue of the role of the Zulu monarchy would be put to international mediation. Buthelezi agreed to participate.

With the elections back on track, the level of violence never reached the scale that some had feared. After the elections, the issue of the king was not put to mediation and not addressed. Some have suggested that de Klerk never intended to honor this agreement and that it was merely a means to get Buthelezi back into the process while allowing him to save face.

In 2010, Buthelezi remained scornful of what he considered a betrayal. "I feel very bitter about the fact we were actually led down a primrose path by the ANC and in particular Mr. Mandela," he said. However, having participated in the election, won the province of KwaZulu-Natal and been appointed Minister of Home Affairs in a new, democratic Government of National Unity, Buthelezi found himself locked into the process. "How could I be the one who wrecks what is

called the Government of National *Unity?*,” he asked. “Because then they would say that ... I’m sabotaging something that is meant to promote national unity.”

RESULTS AND REFLECTIONS

Using a combination of tactics, negotiators were able to defuse the threat of widespread violence by supporters of the Inkatha Freedom Party. By compromising on Inkatha’s call for a federal state and sidestepping other demands, they were able to get Inkatha and its leader, Mangosuthu Buthelezi, back to the negotiating table.

Negotiators also helped to neutralize the Inkatha threat by giving Buthelezi a big enough stake in the post-apartheid government that he had little to gain from further disruptions.

In 2010, Inkatha members maintained that their major legacy to South Africa was the establishment of provinces in South Africa. However, the provincial governments have not fared well. In 2010, with the exception of the Democratic Alliance-led Western Cape, the provinces were generally regarded as under-performing. All the people interviewed, from Inkatha strategist Mario Ambrosini to ANC veteran Mike Sutcliffe, agreed that the provinces in their current form entailed massive waste and showed little initiative. The provinces suffered from a basic lack of human resource capacity,

exacerbated by a re-drawing of provincial boundaries that separated competent administrations from incompetent ones.

[For more on the provinces, see ISS memos, “Negotiating Divisions in a Divided Land: Creating Provinces for a New South Africa, 1993” and “Refashioning Provincial Government in Democratic South Africa, 1994-96”.]

After the first elections, the ANC extended its influence into KwaZulu-Natal, wresting the province from Inkatha’s control in the 1999 elections. By putting forward a Zulu candidate, Jacob Zuma, for the 2009 elections, the ANC won even more support from Inkatha’s traditional base. In 2010, many South Africans thought that the party would be lucky to survive the next elections.

Indeed, Inkatha’s clout at the ballot box has weakened. In 1994, Inkatha received 10.54% of the votes cast and won the province of Natal, but the party received just 4.55% in the 2009 elections.

Gavin Woods, an Inkatha member of Parliament, was ousted in 2004 after summarizing the party’s problems in an internal memo that was leaked to the media. The memo stated, “Inkatha has no discernible vision, mission or philosophical base, no clear national ambitions or direction, no articulated ideological basis and offers little in the way of current, vibrant original and relevant policies.”

¹ Now part of the province of KwaZulu-Natal

² 1996 STATS SA figures: <http://www.statssa.gov.za/census01/Census96/HTML/CIB/Population/28.htm>

³ Ibid

⁴ De Klerk and ANC aim to split Zulus. Jonathan Steele In Cape Town. The Guardian Manchester (UK): Apr 11, 1994.

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