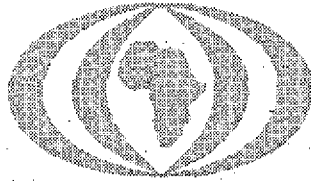


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BOTSWANA : RECENT HISTORY AND CURRENT DEVELOPMENTS

Botswana, one of South Africa's closest neighbours, has recently been subject to some press interest. At the end of 1981, the focus was on Botswana's military capability and the possibility that Botswana had received arms from the Soviet Union. In May this year, it was reported that Botswana's President, Dr Quett Masire, had declared a State of Emergency in the face of widespread drought in Botswana. This Brief Report deals with recent developments in Botswana and is divided into :

- 1) Background Information and Statistics
- 2) Political Background
- 3) Economic Developments
- 4) Foreign Policy Issues
- 5) An Assessment

1. BACKGROUND INFORMATION AND STATISTICS

Political Status : Formerly the British Protectorate of Bechuanaland and one of the three High Commission Territories, gained independence from Britain on 30 September 1966, under the leadership of the late Sir Seretse Khama.

Present Ruling Party : Within a Multi-Party system is the Botswana Democratic Party (BDP).

President : Dr Quett Masire, who took office on 18 July 1980, is an Executive President and also Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces.

The National Assembly : Legislative power vested in the 36-member National Assembly and 15-member Advisory House of Chiefs. Life of Assembly is 5 years.

Population : 936 600 (October 1981) - 63% increase since last census (1971).

Languages : Tswana and English.

Currency : The "pula" = 100 thebe (P0.8850 = R1).

Economy : GDP at market price rose from R43.8 million, 1967/8, to R345 million in 1977/8 at 1979 prices. GDP for 1979/80 was at R670 million. Per capita Gross National Product grew by 13.2% per year in real terms in the eight years to 1978. Estimated growth rate for 1981 was 1%.

Main Exports : Diamonds, largest source of revenue. Productivity will double to 4 million carats a year. (Estimated 1982 - 80% of foreign revenue; Beef - 17% of foreign revenue).

Developments : The most significant developments in Botswana since independence have occurred in diamond mining and the more recent discovery of important coal deposits.

2. POLITICAL BACKGROUND

After nearly 16 years of Independence, in spite of many obstacles, Botswana enjoys a high degree of political stability with its democratic institutions functioning well. In the four General Elections since Independence, the Botswana Democratic Party (BDP) has emerged victorious. Chief opposition comes from the left-leaning, Botswana National Front (BNF), which only managed to capture 12,9% of the popular vote in the General Election of October 1979. Thus, while Botswana claims to be a multi-party state it is a de facto one-party state.

In July 1980, Sir Seretse Khama - the father of Botswana Independence - died and was succeeded by Dr Quett Masire. The new President has followed the same policies as his predecessor, but has yet to test his popularity in a General Election and, constitutionally, does not have to call one for another 3 years.

Of particular interest in the African setting, is the fact that Masire belongs to the Bangwaketse, a minority tribe. Khama, on the other hand belonged to the majority Bamanwato Tribe. There is no indication, however, that the different tribal affiliations of the two men have generated any serious political complications.

3. ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENTS

Despite Botswana's poverty, some significant and promising economic developments have occurred in recent years.

In the main, the agricultural sector dominates the economy, with beef as the most important element in agriculture. However, half the national herd is owned by a mere 5% of households. Industrialization, essential for mass employment, is still in its infancy and Botswana's employment statistics show that only half of the economically active population are in gainful employment, but that most of these work only a part of a single calendar year.

The economic progress made in Botswana can be viewed in a clearer perspective when a comparison is made with the position at Independence. In 1966, Botswana was regarded amongst the poorest countries of the world; there was the worst drought in living memory with an estimated 20% of the population near starvation; the national herd was decimated and; the national income was from workers in South Africa and from grants-in-aid from the United Kingdom. The national infrastructure was negligible (only three miles of tarred road), and there were very few skilled people.

Today there are many tarred roads linking the main population centres, and schools and health services are numerous. Some 90% of schoolgoing children have primary facilities within their reach and it is estimated that health facilities are accessible to 85% of the population.

The thrust of the "National Development V" (the current development plan) is aimed at boosting productivity and the creation of employment. It is thus clear that the Botswana Government, having devoted its resources in the past 16 years to the welfare of its people, is now devoting increasing resources to infrastructural development.

Gross Domestic Product (GDP) increased sevenfold in the years to 1979, and Gross National Product (GNP) grew by 13,2% in the same period (compared to South Africa's 0,7%, Zambia's minus 0,9% and oil-rich Nigeria's 4,4%). These growth rates have meant that Botswana's ranking has moved to that of a middle income Developing Country.

Despite these promising upturns, there are many residual problems for the Botswana economy. First, there is a political necessity to close the income gap between expatriates and Botswana, and the accompanying need to close the gap between the mining people and the rural sector.

Secondly, despite its impressive recent growth, Botswana's economy has structural weaknesses and it is necessary to attempt diversification (as the depressed price in the world diamond market reveals, Botswana's income revenue is slipping because of the recent over-reliance on diamond production).

A third problem involves slow growth rates in job creation. Presently, the biggest single employer is the public service, followed by the copper - nickel mine at Salibi-Pikwe; 20 000 Botswana work in the Republic of South Africa, and small numbers are employed in the country's own diamond mines. However, the majority of the population still depend on agriculture as the sole source of employment.

A fourth problem involves the extreme vulnerability of meat - Botswana's principle agricultural export. The earning potential of this product is susceptible to drought and diseases and, in recent years, been considerably complicated by the restrictive importing practices of the EEC through the Common Agriculture Policy.

A final major economic problem for Gaborone is the movement of population from the rural to the urban centres. As in the case of other developing countries, this shift will have to be stemmed or accommodated as it creates a significant sociological and political burden on any government, particularly, on city infrastructure.

4. FOREIGN POLICY ISSUES

While the vital economic links with South Africa constitute the most important aspect of Botswana's foreign policy, its attitude to the "White South" has changed as events in the region have unfolded. For example, Zimbabwe's independence and Gaborone's involvement in the Southern Africa Development Co-ordinating Conference (SADCC) have drawn Botswana closer to Black Africa.

As a Front Line State, Botswana supports the drive for an Independent Namibia, particularly as an escalation of that conflict might involve Botswana in another refugee problem. A further consideration is that an independent Namibia could strengthen the Front Line States, by providing them with a west coast outlet to the sea at Walvis Bay. Indeed, the need for a convenient port has prompted Botswana's most ambitious development plan to date, the building of a railway across the Kalahari to the Atlantic coast.

An important political and foreign policy issue for the Gaborone Government has been the willingness of Botswana to provide political asylum to southern African refugees. The policy is clearly not without some cost, for figures indicate that at the height of the Zimbabwean War (1978 - 1979) there were more than 25 000 refugees in Botswana. (An increase of 21 000 over the 1969 estimate!)

The reports that indicate that the Botswana Defence Force (BDF) has been upgraded and has received arms from the Soviet Union need to be considered. Both these developments are linked to Botswana's internal and external security needs. The BDF came into existence as a result of cross-border raids into Botswana by the then Rhodesian Forces during the Rhodesian Bush War. While

it may be argued that this role for the BDF has diminished, a fundamental security concern still involves the need to patrol the country's extensive borders and, it has been suggested, to keep the large refugee population in check.

The reports that Botswana has received small arms and armed personnel carriers from the Soviet Union have been admitted by the Botswana Government. However, faced with accusations that this indicated a shift in their world view, Dr Masire argued that financial considerations had swayed their decision to turn to Moscow for these arms. He indicated, however, that Botswana would continue to acquire some arms from the West and, as a non-aligned country, was free to choose with whom it had links, including military ones. There is little supporting evidence to suggest that a large number of Soviet technical advisers accompanied the arms consignment. On the contrary, reliable reports indicate that Indian military experts have been assisting Botswana in the consolidation and training of the military forces. Current estimates indicate that the Botswana army is between 2 000 and 3 000 strong.

Quite understandably, in the turbulent southern African situation, Botswana has what it considers to be legitimate security concerns. Frequent reports from Gaborone accuse the South African Defence Force (SADF) of overflying Botswana airspace en route to Namibia. In addition, there have been well publicised cases of border clashes between the SADF and the BDF. Unconfirmed reports also indicate that there has been poaching on the border and a senior Botswana Government Official claimed that some anti-South African refugees had been abducted from his country.

5. ASSESSMENT

The turbulent politics of the region have caused Botswana, in its strategically important position, to fall between two contesting forces, and despite its firm attempt to remain neutral in the conflict, this may prove impossible.

Recently, Dr Masire has taken a stronger public stand against South Africa, reflecting a nervousness about increased regional conflict. He has claimed publicly that South Africa wants to turn Botswana into another Lebanon. This position falls far short of permitting either ANC or Swapo bases on Botswana soil. On the other hand, the position reflects an understanding that Botswana will continue to rely heavily on South African economic prosperity for its own economic wellbeing, and this dependence will perpetuate the uneasy relationship between Gaborone and Pretoria.

Finally, it is generally thought that Masire himself has not yet established the degree of political authority held by Sir Seretse. Consistent speculation indicates the possibility of conflict between Dr Masire and Brigadier Ian Khama (Sir Seretse's son), who is Deputy Commander of the Botswana Defence Force. While both men have publicly denied any animosity, it seems clear that the way in which Masire responds to regional events will determine his political future.

JAN SMUTS HOUSE

June 1982