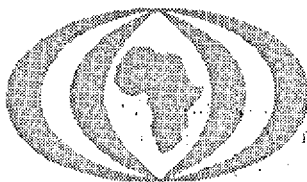


# DIE SUID-AFRIKAANSE INSTITUUT VAN INTERNASIONALE AANGELEENTHEDE THE SOUTH AFRICAN INSTITUTE OF INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

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## SWAZILAND: THE CURRENT STATE OF PLAY

(To be read in conjunction with Brief Report No. 45, of October, 1982)

The March dismissal of Prime Minister Mabandla Dlamini (53) and the appointment of Bhekimpi Dlamini (57) as the new Prime Minister, reveals ongoing tensions in Swazi politics. This Brief Report examines the leadership change and assesses its significance.

The death of King Sobhuza II (August, 1982) set in motion a power struggle which surfaced in March over the continued Premiership of Mabandla. Even before the death of Sobhuza, observers in Swaziland suggested a tension between Traditional/Royalist values and the growing demands for modernisation and management in the country. The recent crisis was primarily the result of this tension.

### 1. THE RULING STRUCTURES

In essence, two structures of government currently operate together in the country, one Traditional and the other Constitutional.

The Traditional structure is presided over by the current Head of State, Queen Regent Dzeliwe. Despite her age (57) and prestige, the Queen has no experience in either politics or management. She relies, therefore, on two close channels of advice. The first is a recent innovation in the form of the "Authorised Person", the Queen's special adviser. The present incumbent is Prince Sozisa, one of the late King's closest advisers and a strong figure in the ranks of the Traditional camp.

The second Traditional source of advice is the Liqoqo - an established organ of some considerable power - which has been described as equivalent to a "Supreme Council of State". It is made up of 12 Princes, Chiefs, Councillors, or Ndvunas with actual or close ties to the Royal Family. This triad - the Regent, the Authorised Person and the Liqoqo - forms the basis of Traditional power.

Since the Independence Constitution was suspended (see Brief Report No. 45), effective Constitutional government has been exercised through a Cabinet presided over by the Prime Minister. The Cabinet is nominated by the Crown, and the role of Parliament (Senate & House of Assembly) has become simply that of a debating chamber.

A complicating factor in Swazi national life is that, because of the size of the country, rumours are apt to spread rapidly. This should be borne in mind when assessing developments in that country.

## 2. THE MABANDLA FACTOR

It was in the Constitutional setting that Mabandla threatened the Traditionalists. Appointed in 1979, Mabandla broke the accepted mould of Swazi Prime Ministers, for in Western terms Mabandla would be seen as a technocrat having had extensive administrative experience. He was Chief Executive of the Sivunga Swazi National Sugar Cane Project in Big Bend and prior to this appointment he occupied similar managerial positions in the agricultural sector. Although a nephew of the late King, Mabandla was not thought to be a candidate for high government office, and his appointment as Prime Minister was totally unexpected.

From that time on, Mabandla was in conflict with the Traditionalists. In 1980 for example, he set up a Commission to investigate corruption in the Kingdom. This investigation fingered many in high places in Swaziland, and Traditionalists close to the late King pressurized him to terminate it, which he eventually did.

In 1981, following the Ingwavuma/KaNgwane land deal, Mabandla took a stand-off position thought to indicate opposition to the idea; this posture was in clear opposition to the Traditionalists who favoured the deal.

Early in this year these tensions came to a head. In January, Mabandla demoted a Cabinet Minister, Dr. Polycarp Dlamini - a strong Traditionalist by appointing him Ambassador to Washington. Three days later, on the insistence of the Liqoqo, this appointment was cancelled.

In mid-February, Mabandla suspended Parliament claiming that there had been a coup attempt against him. In the wake of this claim, he arrested two members of the Liqoqo. They were charged with sedition and appeared in court.

In this climate of growing political uncertainty and tension, the Queen called a meeting of the Liqoqo and surprisingly confirmed her confidence in Mabandla. This expression of confidence was, however, withdrawn 48 hours later and Mabandla was sacked. He fled the country with his family and is now living in Pretoria.

## 3. RELATIONS WITH SOUTH AFRICA

Despite Mabandla's aloofness towards South Africa, he was well known to government officials in Pretoria. He had brought pressure to bear on the ANC in Swaziland, but maintained close relations with Presidents Samora Machel and Julius Nyerere. Some quarters in Pretoria have suggested that Mabandla even wished to use Swaziland's relative neutrality to bring about a meeting between Nyerere and the South African Prime Minister.

His successor, Bhekiimpi Dlamini, is firmly in the Traditional Swazi mould and, interestingly enough, seem relatively unknown to South African officials.

Quite clearly, Pretoria does not believe that Mabandla is a spent force in Swazi politics, having offered him a relatively safe and easy exile. Faced with certain support from Swazi Traditionalists, Pretoria probably believes it should keep a foot in both camps and await the outcome of the current tension in Swaziland.

JAN SMUTS HOUSE,  
JUNE, 1983.