

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Just after midnight on 30 October 2002 eight bomb blasts rocked Soweto, South Africa's largest black township. Seven of the blasts destroyed commuter railway lines running through the township, inconveniencing more than 200,000 commuters. The eighth blast occurred at a mosque forcing parts of the building to collapse. A hitherto unknown organisation, Die Boeremag (Boer force/power), claimed responsibility for the bombings.

During 2002 almost two dozen alleged Boeremag members—including serving military officers—were arrested and charged with terrorism-related offences, sabotage and high treason. After uncovering a Boeremag weapons cache, the national commissioner of police, Jackie Selebi, revealed that there were about 100 key Boeremag members in the country, many of whom have access to defence force weapons. Selebi pointed out that most of the suspects were young—all between the ages of 17 and 40 years—and that many of the suspects were qualified professional people and prosperous farmers.

South Africa's industry, wealth and human capital are concentrated in a few metropolitan areas. A number of powerful bombs, strategically placed, could cause considerable harm to South Africa's fragile economy. Alternatively, the assassination of a handful of cabinet ministers and popular black political or religious leaders could take the country to the brink of a race war.

To evaluate the threat the contemporary white right poses to South Africa's internal security, it is vital to understand the historical context in which the white right—and more particularly the Afrikaner right—came about. The emergence of the contemporary white right must be understood against the background of the rise of Afrikaner nationalism in the twentieth century. Throughout their history Afrikaner nationalists believed that the only way to protect the status and identity of the Afrikaner, and to prevent the group from being dominated by other ethnic groups or races, was to exercise power through self-determination in an ethnically homogenous territory.

Important weaknesses of the white right are its internal divisions on issues of policy and strategy, and personality-driven differences. Notwithstanding such divisions, however, Afrikaner nationalists argue that they share three common ethnic attributes: the Afrikaans language, Calvinist religion and Afrikaner history with its claim to an own territory or *volkstaat* (people's state). While race is not specifically mentioned as an attribute, it is implied in the Afrikaner right's understanding of ethnicity.

In the late 1980s the white right had significant support among Afrikaners. In the 1989 election the white right enjoyed the support of the majority of Afrikaners in the then Transvaal and Orange Free State provinces. In 1992 close to a million white South Africans voted against sharing political power with black people at central government level. In the run up to the country's first democratic election based on universal adult suffrage in 1994, the white right arguably had the capacity to push the country into a civil war and unilaterally establish an exclusive white, Afrikaner *volkstaat* in a part of South Africa.

In the post-1994 era most right wing whites, disillusioned by the political impotence of right wing organisations and leaders, have withdrawn from political activity. Some try to withdraw from the realities of the new South Africa by moving into gated communities. Others—especially the younger generation—are emigrating.

Yet a few isolated, but significant, violent incidents after 1994 reveal that there is some activity on the fringes of the white right. The most significant of these have been the actions of the Boeremag. The unexpected appearance of the Boeremag showed that there are groups of hardcore right wingers who are tenaciously devoted to creating an Afrikaner state.

The story of the Boeremag makes a fascinating case study of how the extreme right mixes religion and politics. The Boeremag's sabotage campaign was driven by a philosophy based on extreme nationalist views and a sense of God-given purpose: a lethal cocktail, given the damage religiously-inspired terrorism has caused in other parts of the world. The Boeremag makes a good case study for another reason. Initially underestimated by the police and the intelligence community, the danger posed by the organisation grew to become South Africa's primary security threat in late 2002.

The police successfully identified and arrested key Boeremag suspects, bringing to a halt the bombing campaign before it resulted in any major loss of life.

The police's success was largely based on good intelligence work. With the arrests the police seriously disrupted the plans of the Boeremag. However, if the Boeremag is organised in a cell-like structure (which seems likely), it is probable that some individual cells have gone unnoticed by the police.

The number of extreme right wingers who are prepared to use violence to achieve their aims is likely to be small and unlikely to ever engender the active participation of most Afrikaners. It is a sobering fact, however, that for a sabotage campaign to be successful and create long term instability this is not necessary. At the height of its activities the IRA (Irish Republican Army) did not have more than a few hundred active members. The secret of the IRA's success was that it had a large number of sympathisers who provided the organisation with logistical support. In South Africa a small group of right wing saboteurs will be difficult to apprehend if they enjoy widespread sympathies among the general Afrikaner community.

A confiscated Boeremag document reveals how the organisation seeks to give a populist spin to its activities. The document cites post-1994 levels of crime, unjust affirmative action policies and the sidelining of Afrikaans as reasons why an independent Afrikaner state is justified. Given the real high levels of violent crime, rising white unemployment, and the state-sponsored campaign against farmers in neighbouring Zimbabwe, such arguments may be capable of eliciting widespread sympathy among conservatively minded Afrikaners.

The extreme white right cannot attract sufficient popular support, and develop the organisational capacity, to execute a coup d'état. However, under certain circumstances, and a right wing organisation capable of exploiting popular Afrikaner grievances, it is possible that a right wing sabotage campaign could be condoned—and even tacitly supported—by a significant number of Afrikaners.

To crack an isolated terror cell is possible. To defeat a band of terrorists who are abetted in their actions by a growing group of sympathisers spread across large parts of the country is almost impossible. The former can be done through good police and intelligence work alone. The latter requires a political solution.

To ensure their long-term success, terrorists need the support of parts of the community in which they live. Terrorists—besides the exceptional loner who works on his own—are members of bigger groups and gangs that provide them with logistical support and finances to further their cause. Terrorists who

live and hide among people who do not co-operate with law enforcement agencies can be a state's biggest nightmare. Such a scenario must be avoided at all costs in South Africa.

Map 1: South Africa with provincial boundaries

