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Nelson Mandela: What If Alive and Well and Free in South Africa? (C/NF)

Summary

Imprisoned African National Congress leader Nelson Mandela is the most popular leader among South African blacks, many of whom view him as the "president-in-waiting" of a postapartheid South Africa. Mandela, who was in his midforties and already had well-established views when he entered prison in 1962, is an African nationalist and a socialist. Although time and incarceration have undoubtedly had their impact, his fundamental political philosophy has not changed. Before his imprisonment Mandela worked closely with many South African Communists (most of whom were not black), but the evidence on whether he is a Communist, although not conclusive, tends to support his claim that he never joined the South African Communist Party. Mandela's writings reveal an affinity for Marxist economic tenets and an appreciation for the Soviet Union but stop short of endorsing Communist political systems. Pretoria has often charged

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Mandela with being a Communist, but it has never been able to substantiate its allegation, in court or otherwise. ~~(C-NF)~~

If the 68-year-old Mandela were released from prison without conditions--as he has insisted--he very likely would immediately emerge as the acknowledged leader of most South African blacks. He probably would also reassume a top position in the ANC. If Pretoria agreed to negotiate, we would expect Mandela to support the suspension of violence and to seek the dismantling of apartheid; the creation of one-man, one-vote representation; and the implementation of a socialist economy. He would probably leave some room for compromise, particularly concerning the role of whites in a black-ruled South Africa. We believe his age and his perception of his place in history would drive him to move quickly, but he would probably approach talks well aware that they might fail and would thus be prepared to use the threat of renewed violence to keep Pretoria at the bargaining table. ~~(C-NF)~~

Introduction

No single individual enjoys more popular support among South African blacks than Nelson Mandela, whose popularity crosses all ethnic and geographic lines. Public opinion polls indicate that most blacks regard him as their "leader" and that they still identify him with the outlawed African National Congress even though he no longer holds an official position in the organization. During 24 years of imprisonment he has become an almost mythical figure to blacks, embodying their aspirations and goals and becoming a symbol of black strength and black resistance to the white regime. He has also become a "cause celebre" for international critics of the South African Government. His image has been transformed from that of a prominent leader of a protest movement to that of the unofficial "president-in-waiting" of a postapartheid South Africa. ~~(C-NF)~~

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[redacted] South African officials have been considering Mandela's release primarily because they fear that the death in prison of the aging leader (he is 68) would trigger massive upheavals and would intensify international criticism.¹ Pretoria has other reasons to consider releasing him. Some South African officials believe that his release could produce a public relations bonanza. It also might exacerbate existing ideological divisions in the black community and throw the ANC and other opponents off stride as they adjust to his return to the political fray. ~~(C-NF)~~

The government has toyed with the idea of banishing Mandela to his native Transkei (one of four independent black homelands) or expelling him from the country, but he has steadfastly refused to consider these options. He has stated that his release must be

¹ Despite Pretoria's concerns, Mandela is currently in relatively good health and receives excellent medical attention. According to press [redacted] he has several health problems. [redacted]

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unconditional, and he has rejected State President P. W. Botha's offer to release him in exchange for his renunciation of violence. ~~(C-NE)~~

We do not think that Mandela will change his mind on the issue of his unconditional release. He almost certainly believes that his remaining in prison serves the black cause better than his accepting a conditional release. He evidently calculates that his continued imprisonment keeps international attention focused on the South Africa problem and discredits government reform efforts that do not include him. He also probably believes that, if Pretoria released him unconditionally, it would be prepared to negotiate with him. We expect, given his statements, that Mandela would insist that his release be accompanied by the legalization of the ANC. ~~(C-NE)~~

There are several scenarios under which Mandela could be released, including that involving a drastic deterioration of his health. What follows is both an analysis of what we know about Mandela's ideology and views and a projection of how we believe he might act if he were released unconditionally and he and Pretoria agreed to negotiate. It is in this latter scenario that we believe he would have the greatest impact on the resolution of the South African crisis. ~~(C-NE)~~

Who Is Nelson Mandela?

Painting an accurate picture of Mandela after his 24 years in prison is not an easy task. Most of our information on his views comes from the many public statements he made before 1962 and during the early years of his incarceration. Although time and imprisonment have undoubtedly altered his views and embittered him somewhat, he says he remains fundamentally unchanged. ~~(C-NE)~~

Mandela was a mature (44), experienced man with well-established views when he entered prison; he had held several high ANC offices (he had been president of the Youth League, deputy president of the ANC, and commander of the military wing). Mandela says that he is as committed today to the ANC and to the vague socialist goals sketched out in its Freedom Charter as he was before his incarceration. ~~(C-NE)~~

Imprisonment has not prevented Mandela from keeping in touch with the outside world. A voracious reader, he is well informed on current events and is fully aware of black demands and expectations, many of which predate his imprisonment. He probably receives additional information on outside conditions from occasional visitors and friendly prison warders as well as through the prison grapevine. Throughout his incarceration he has communicated his views to supporters and other ANC leaders by using family members and press interviews to publicize his opinions, by having letters smuggled out of jail, and by using released prisoners as messengers. ~~(C-NE)~~

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His Ideology

Since beginning political life in 1944, Mandela has been variously described as a nationalist, a socialist, a Communist, a terrorist, or some combination of these. We believe that he is a nationalist with strong socialist convictions who is committed to a nonracial South Africa. Mandela, however, has never spelled out his views, perhaps intentionally leaving them open to interpretation. ~~(C-NF)~~

Mandela describes himself as an African nationalist and as a socialist who is attracted to the idea of a classless society. His ideals are partly a product of his romanticized view of African history and culture. In a court statement in 1962, for example, he said, "The structure and organization of early African societies in this country fascinated me very much and greatly influenced the evolution of my political outlook. The land, then the main means of production, belonged to the whole tribe, and there was no individual ownership whatsoever. There were no classes, no rich or poor, and no exploitation of man by man. All men were free and equal and this was the foundation of government." ~~(C-NF)~~

Mandela clearly stated his commitment to socialism during his 1964 trial when he declared: "I am attracted by the idea of a classless society, an attraction which springs in part from Marxist reading and in part from my admiration of the structure and organization of early African societies in this country. [We in the ANC] all accept the need for some form of socialism to enable our people to catch up with the advanced countries of this world and to overcome their legacy of extreme poverty." ~~(C-NF)~~

Although socialism and one-party political systems in Africa often go hand in hand, Mandela has been ambivalent about the one-party system. In 1960, for example, he declared: "If democracy would best be served by a one-party system then I would examine the proposition very carefully. But if democracy could best be expressed by a multiparty system then I would examine that carefully." We believe that Mandela would bow to white demands and to South African political and social realities and accept a multiparty system, at least for the short term. ~~(C-NF)~~

Many observers have labeled Mandela a Communist because of his close working relationship with many members of the South African Communist Party. He had ample opportunity to join the SACP before his incarceration, but he has stated that he never did so, possibly because the ideology did not mesh with his deep attachment to nationalism and to the socialist, quasi-democratic ideals that he believes characterize traditional African culture. ~~(C-NF)~~

Although the evidence on whether Mandela is a Communist is not conclusive, it tends to support his claim that he never joined the South African Communist Party. Pretoria, which has for years accused Mandela of being a Communist, has never been able to substantiate its charge, in court or otherwise, despite its considerable intelligence collection capabilities and its unconcealed desire to display such proof before the West. The government, in fact, now appears to be backing down from its allegation. Minister of Law and Order Louis Le Grange this year publicly distanced himself from Pretoria's contention that Mandela was "Communist controlled" (the term the government had begun to use) and stated his belief that Mandela was a "nationalist." ~~(C-NF)~~

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Mandela nevertheless has longstanding ties to many Communists and has approved the ANC's close working relationship with the SACP. During his 1964 trial, he acknowledged his association with Communists and sought to explain the nature of the ANC's relationship with them: "It is true that there has often been close cooperation between the ANC and the Communist Party. But cooperation is merely proof of a common goal, in this case the removal of white supremacy, and is not proof of a complete community of interests." Continuing his defense, he asserted: "I joined the ANC in 1944, and in my younger days I held the view that the policy of admitting Communists to the ANC, and the close cooperation, which existed at that time on specific issues between the ANC and the CP, would lead to a watering down of African nationalism. At that stage I was a member of the ANC Youth League and was one of a group which moved for the expulsion of Communists from the ANC." He went on to say that he was later convinced that the ANC had to accommodate people of various political convictions. ~~(C~~

Mandela supports some Marxist tenets and, according to his statements, regards the Soviet Union more highly than the United States. He has often expressed his admiration for the theoretical nonracialism and social and economic equality of Marxism and for the active opposition of Communist states to the white minority government. His kudos for the Soviet Union include a comment he made last year: "I appreciate the Soviet Union only because it was the one country that long ago condemned racialism and supported liberation movements." Mandela's published writings, however, say little about Marxist political systems and instead reveal an appreciation for Western democratic institutions. ~~(C-NF)~~

Views on Violence

Mandela advocates the violent overthrow of the white minority government because of its refusal to negotiate with blacks. He was a major force in the formation in 1961 of the ANC's military wing Umkhonto we Sizwe (Spear of the Nation--MK), and, during his trial in 1964, admitted that he helped plan sabotage. In his statement he declared that the South African Government had by its refusal to redress black grievances driven him to adopt violence as a means of engineering change: "I do not deny that I planned sabotage. I did not plan it in a spirit of recklessness, nor because I have any love of violence. I planned it as a result of a calm and sober assessment of the political situation that had arisen after many years of tyranny...by whites." At the same trial he stated that "only when all else had failed, when all channels of peaceful protest had been banned to us, was the decision made to embark on violent forms of political struggle, and to form MK." ~~(C-NF)~~

Views Toward the United States

Few of Mandela's thoughts about the United States have been published in recent years, but what is available indicates that he is critical of US policy toward South Africa and probably considers the United States a supporter of the white regime. Most of his published comments were made during the 1950s and appeared in Communist-funded publications. In those articles, which portrayed the United States as an imperialist power that posed a serious threat to independent African states, Mandela comes across as strongly anti-American. ~~(C-NF)~~

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Mandela has, however, been complimentary of the United States. In 1964 he spoke highly of the US system of government and praised the Bill of Rights, separation of powers, and judicial independence. We believe that if he were released from prison, he would be willing to talk with US officials but would probably insist on a high-level meeting and resist suggestions that he modify his basic demands or agree to a lengthy transition to black-majority rule. (C NF)

After His Release

We believe that Mandela, if released unconditionally, would quickly assume the leadership of the black protest movement. Almost all black opposition figures, describing him as a legitimate representative of their aspirations, have demanded his release. Most black leaders would welcome his release, and the few who privately do not would find it politically difficult, perhaps even dangerous, to come out against him. (C NF)

Relations With the ANC

An unconditional release might also heighten the ANC's popular backing, which, although significant, is not as broad as Mandela's. In recent press interviews Mandela has reaffirmed his commitment to the ANC and his complete support for the policies of ANC President Oliver Tambo, a close friend whom he met almost 50 years ago. If Mandela were released, he would almost certainly reassume a top ANC post. In fact, Tambo, who is in poor health, might step aside and push for Mandela's election as his successor. (C NF)

Mandela's reintegration into the ANC would not be without its difficulties. Some observers have speculated that his release might exacerbate existing tensions in the ANC's nationalist, Communist, and young militant factions. We believe, however, that the resulting euphoria and Mandela's strong claim to leadership would push differences below the surface--at least for the short term. In our view, Mandela would not hesitate to work with those ANC Communists whom he considered tried and loyal supporters of the "cause." (C NF)

Allies and Rivals

The already popular Mandela could count on many allies in the black community. Among those who would probably rally around his banner are the two-million-strong United Democratic Front (the country's leading antiapartheid movement) and the 600,000-member Congress of South African Trade Unions. As the excitement surrounding his release died down and his reputation assumed human proportions, however, some individuals and groups (Gatsha Buthelezi and his Zulu organization, Inkatha, as well as Colored, Indian, and homeland leaders) would probably emerge as rivals. Mandela might also clash with black consciousness advocates and with young ANC militants if they thought he was too accommodating to whites. (C NF)

Mandela would probably come down hard on nonwhite critics whose opposition threatened his cherished goal of black unity. He would be likely, however, to handle more gingerly powerful black leaders with large constituencies in order to avoid a

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significant split among blacks. The ambitious Buthelezi, because he has strong support among South Africa's six million Zulus, would probably be Mandela's major concern. ~~(C-NF)~~

Mandela and Negotiations

Mandela's demands for change in South Africa are major, but his statements suggest a willingness to talk and some flexibility in his negotiating positions. His demands, as stated over the past two years, have included the dismantling of apartheid; the abolition of the homelands system; one man one vote; and the creation of a socialist economy. Earlier this year, however, he told a liberal white parliamentarian that he had committed himself to creating a climate for negotiations and that the ANC shared this commitment. Moreover, in a recent interview with a US citizen, he noted that balance and restraint were essential to the dismantling of apartheid and the building of a cohesive multiracial society. In a statement meant to allay white fears on an issue particularly sensitive for them, he declared: "We are willing to maintain separate living areas until there are enough new employment opportunities and new homes to allow blacks to live in Johannesburg in dignity." ~~(C-NF)~~

In our view, Mandela, who worked closely with whites for many years before his imprisonment, would almost certainly approach negotiations with an eye toward convincing whites that there will be a place for them in a black-ruled South Africa. Much of what he says and implies now is probably tactical in nature, but we believe he is sincere about multiracialism and recognizes that retaining whites is important to South Africa's economic prosperity. At the same time, however, we do not believe that he would compromise on the fundamental demand of black-majority rule, although he would probably accept a voting system that guaranteed some white representation. ~~(C-NF)~~

Mandela's age and his perception of his place in history are likely to push him to move quickly on talks. His perception that there is relatively little time left to him might enhance his willingness to compromise on secondary issues. At the same time, however, young militants might regard concessions as a sign of weakness and challenge Mandela; he would thus probably insist that whites make most concessions. Mandela would also, in our view, approach talks in the awareness that they might fail and would therefore be prepared to support a resumption of violence if he believed that was the only way to wrest real change from Pretoria. ~~(C-NF)~~

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Nelson Mandela is the son of a prominent chief of the Xhosa ethnic group. After studying at a local Methodist school, he went to the University of Fort Hare in the late 1930s but was expelled in 1940 for organizing the boycott of a student council whose powers had been stripped away. He settled in Johannesburg and held a variety of jobs, including those of real estate agent and policeman for a mining company, while studying law by correspondence. He later became articled to a firm of white attorneys and also took law courses at the University of Witwatersrand. During the 1950s he and Oliver Tambo ran a joint law practice in Johannesburg. (U)



Mandela joined the ANC in 1944 and soon emerged as a prominent member of the organization, becoming secretary general of the ANC Youth League, which he helped found that year. The victory of the Afrikaners' National Party in the 1948 elections and the ensuing implementation of its apartheid policies led Mandela, who was already known as one of the ANC's most militant leaders, to urge the older, moderate members to engage in strikes, boycotts, and civil disobedience. His increasing prominence led to his election as president of the Youth League in 1950, and in 1952 he was elected deputy president of the ANC and president of the its Transvaal branch. In that same year he was one of 20 ANC leaders convicted for their Defiance Campaign, a mass civil protest against apartheid. Mandela was charged with treason in 1956 but acquitted five years later. (U)

Not until the early 1960s did Mandela decide that equal rights for blacks could be obtained only through violence. The events that apparently triggered this decision were the Sharpeville massacre of 1960 (in which 69 blacks protesting government policies were killed by police), the banning of the ANC that year, and the 1961 whites-only referendum that transformed the Union of South Africa into a republic. (C-NF)

Soon after the dismissal of the treason charges in 1961, Mandela left South Africa to drum up international support for the ANC. His stopovers included Algeria, where he received military and guerrilla warfare training. He returned to South Africa to lead the ANC's sabotage campaign, but in 1962 he was arrested and sentenced to five years' imprisonment for inciting a strike and illegally leaving the country. In 1964 he was tried again; after pleading guilty to many of the government's charges, he was sentenced to life imprisonment for sabotage, treason, and other crimes. Since 1982 he has been at Pollsmoor Prison outside Cape Town. He spends most of his time gardening, reading, exercising, and, undoubtedly, planning for the future. (C-NF)

Personal Data

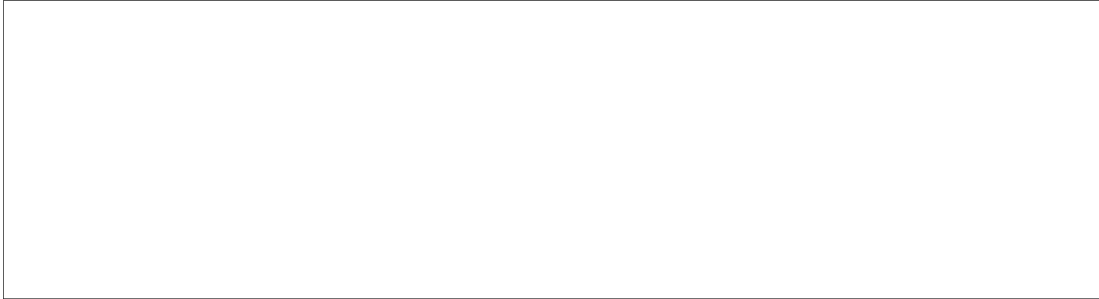
Mandela has been married twice. He divorced his first wife, whose current whereabouts are unknown, in the mid-1950s. The marriage produced two sons and a daughter. The older son died in a car accident in 1970. The younger son works in Johannesburg; the daughter attends graduate school at the University of Massachusetts. The children are not politically active. (C-NF)

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Mandela married his current wife, Winnie, in 1958. This marriage produced two daughters. The elder is married to a member of the Swazi royal family; she maintains a low political profile. The younger daughter, like her parents, actively opposes Pretoria's policies. Mandela has at least five grandchildren. ~~(C/NF)~~



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