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NATIONAL WILL WITH SPECIFIC REFERENCE TO THE RSA*

1. INTRODUCTION

There is relatively little research on the concepts of 'political will' and 'national will'. These topics have, however, drawn significant media attention recently because of the international coverage given to the war in Iraq, and the political and national will involved in the waging of that war on the part of the United States (US).

The 2010 World Soccer championships which are scheduled to take place in South Africa have hopefully increased the national and political will to combat crime and corruption in South Africa. Both the Government and a large segment of the population are motivated to host a soccer festival worthy of such an event. The media is clearly playing a leading role in focusing the organisers on the preparation for the event. At the same time media coverage focuses the public and the business sector on the possibilities of financial gains,

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as well as the national prestige involved should the championship be a success.

2. THE CONCEPT OF NATIONAL AND POLITICAL WILL

The concepts 'national will' and 'political will' seem so obvious that they are often used without explanations concerning their meaning when used in deliberations about international relations, military operations, good governance and a host of other related subjects. 'National will' has been described as the degree of resolve that can be mobilised among the citizens of a nation in support of governmental decisions about internal good governance, foreign policy and defence. As such it forms the foundation for national strategy.¹⁾

The exact difference in meaning between 'political will' and 'national will' is often vague. The term 'political will' seems to be used primarily, if not exclusively, to refer to the attitudes and conduct of presidents and prime ministers.²⁾ At the same time it is also used to refer to the will of parliaments, the law courts, the business community and the public in support of national strategies and goals. In some usages, it is therefore a synonym for national will.

A nation has been defined as "a group of people living in a specific territory, who share a common sense of history, customs and (often) language". A state is also described as "nominally a sovereign body politic". At the same time it is emphasised that although many modern states are homogeneous nations and many nations form sovereign states, there are also many states that are multinational.³⁾ The multinational states which contain religious, ethnic and linguistic factions such as India, Belgium, Canada and South Africa, have greater problems to contend with when national will is being developed in support of national strategies. Homogenous nation states have strength in their cohesion but are not necessarily powerful states. In its African context South Africa has a relatively high level of power. The opposite could be Norway or Austria which have strength in cohesion, but little regional power.

A state's level of power sometimes described as national capability, consists of a mixture of strategic, military, economic and political strengths and weaknesses. It is determined by the size and location of

its territory, its raw material resources, its economic structure, technical development, financial strength, ethnic mix and social cohesiveness, as well as its established stable political procedures, decision-making, and an intangible quality, which can be described as national spirit.⁴⁾

The national spirit of the population includes elements such as national morale and national character. National character has been described as the "relatively enduring personality characteristics and patterns that are modal among the adult members of society".⁵⁾ It is thus made up of intellectual and moral qualities which influence national power. National morale is said to be less stable than national character which fluctuates and which influences the extent to which a nation supports government initiatives and policies.⁶⁾

The conclusion can thus be drawn that the national will of a nation and/or state, is strongly influenced by the national character and national morale of its people. National character and morale are in turn influenced by the quality of the state's government and the government's strategic purpose, particularly over a long period of time.

3. NATIONAL AND POLITICAL WILL — THE US EXPERIENCE

If one accepts that political will is the will of presidents or prime ministers and their cabinets, and that national will is the public's support for government decisions, as described earlier, then the US which is the leading role player in the war in Iraq and the 'war on terror', is virtually a perfect test case to apply to political and national will theory.

Initially in 2003, national will did support political will to proceed with military activities in Iraq. The US Administration achieved this because the widely publicised intelligence reports claimed that the Iraqi government had weapons of mass destruction and was developing more of them. A regime such as that of Saddam Hussein was also seen as an out-of-control enemy which could possibly threaten the West. The successful operations in Afghanistan also led the US public to believe that Iraq could be defeated as easily, and thereafter result in the acceptance of a democratic Western type government and lifestyle. However, as the internal security phase has dragged on and the civil war between Sunnis and Shiites has escalated, the national will to continue the war has significantly declined.

The war in Iraq began in March 2003. Within a month, President Bush made a speech on the aircraft carrier, Abraham Lincoln, in which he declared the end of major combat in Iraq. Thereafter the internal security phase began, escalating into a Sunni-Shiite civil war, which by the end of 2006 was out of US and Iraqi security forces' control. Within this timeframe opinion polls show how US public support declined as follows:⁷⁾

- In March-April 2003, 73 per cent supported the war and 23 per cent were against it.
- By July 2003, 56 per cent were in support and 42 per cent against it.
- In June 2004, the polls indicated 44 per in support and 56 per cent against the war.
- In September 2004, the tendency reversed somewhat with 55 per cent in support and 42 per cent against, and significantly 53 per cent of the public were in favour of sending more troops.
- An opinion survey dated June 2005 indicated that 41 per cent of the public were in favour of a US troop withdrawal. As many as 53 per cent were of the opinion that the war was not worth fighting. However, 58 per cent still felt that the troops should stay until civil order in Iraq was restored.
- In October 2005, 61 per cent of those surveyed thought that US policies in Iraq would not succeed, 53 per cent that the war was the wrong thing to do, and 44 per cent that the situation was becoming worse for the US troops. Merely 34 per cent still supported the war effort and 19 per cent indicated that the situation was improving.
- By May 2006, a poll showed 39 per cent support, and 66 per cent had no faith in the ability of the President to end the war successfully.
- In October 2006, media reports rated support for the war at 34 per cent and 64 per cent against.

Nevertheless, national will in support of the war in Iraq has virtually remained consistent as from about October 2005, at about 35 per cent.

The opposition has stood quite firm at about 65 per cent. However, an Annual Transatlantic Trends survey done in the US, records that the public's concern about Islamic fundamentalism which stood at 72 per cent in 2005, has risen to 79 per cent in 2006. This poll even found a high level of support in the US, and significantly also in Europe, for military intervention in Iran to stop that country from developing a nuclear weapons capability, if diplomacy should fail.⁸⁾

In spite of the attempts to maintain public support for the war in Iraq, the midterm elections in the second term of the Bush Administration have shown that a large segment of the US population has lost faith in the likelihood that the US strategic goals will be realised and that the war will end successfully. This was shown when the Democratic opposition gained control of both the Senate and the House of Representatives as result of the elections, and the Defence Secretary resigned to allow space for the Administration and Congress to cooperate in the further management of the war. The voters obviously intended a change in policy and strategy, and by voting as they did, the Administration is being forced to adapt to some extent to the views of the Democrats. However, the new much publicised early 2007 US strategy to field an additional 20 000 US troops in order to stabilise Baghdad together with Iraqi forces, has been set in motion in spite of opposition to it. Since it is unlikely to succeed, this may well be a strategy which has more to do with internal US politics than results in Iraq.

Studies of public attitudes have shown that the vast majority of people, even in highly literate societies, are uninformed, uninterested and apathetic with regard to most issues regarding world affairs.⁹⁾ In this case the media has given the war in Iraq a tremendous amount of coverage and the cost in lives and money have been accented continuously. This has led to a marked divergence in the political will of the US Administration, and the national will of the voting public.

4. MEDIA INFLUENCE ON POLITICAL AND NATIONAL WILL

After the US involvement in the Vietnam war an enormous amount of publicity was given to the debate about the role and influence of the media on public opinion, by inference on national will, and national

policy. A type of general conclusion was drawn that violent scenes depicting own force casualties, led to the withdrawal of US public support for further ongoing military operations.

Research on the subject of media influence, however, shows that it is not quite that simple. Evidently the study of media influence on public opinion has not produced credible proof that there is a direct relationship between media coverage, with its so-called media bias and news slanting, and the resultant public impressions and opinions. Irrespective of media influence, the public are very likely to withdraw support for extended military deployments or other major projects, which may bankrupt their country.

An important consideration when evaluating media influence on national will is the fact that transnational news media organisations such as Cable News Network (CNN), Sky News, and the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), have become prominent in shaping the relationship between states, and that of governments and societies within states. A term coined the 'CNN effect' has come into research usage to describe the effect which CNN's coverage of events such as the Tiananmen Square Massacre in China in 1989, had on US public opinion and foreign policy. Governments around the world are reported to have monitored CNN for information about the uprising, and the US government not only condemned the Chinese government's actions, but also briefly imposed trade sanctions. The Gulf War of 1991 also established CNN and mass news media as a communication channel between the world's leaders, diplomats and the public, as result of the international audience which the news coverage of the war engendered.¹⁰⁾

However, there is little agreement among researchers about the scope, importance and implications of a 'CNN effect', or whether it exists at all. Media coverage clearly has a major influence on political decision-making, if only because of its immediacy and wide coverage, but many other factors can influence foreign policy and public opinion, such as religion, culture, economics and historical alliances. Case studies have shown that mass news media influence is conditional, unsystematic, and is noticeable in some circumstances but not in all cases.¹¹⁾

The influence of the written media, in the form of major news magazines and newspapers, giving their versions of events and their

conclusions should, however, not be underestimated. Political advisors, intelligence staff, academics, researchers and the public, who peruse them diligently, will make their own conclusions from written material and in turn influence their areas of influence.

The converse of the conclusion that the media influences political decision-makers and public opinion is the supposition that the media can, and is manipulated by politicians, who in turn influence and form public opinion. In this way national will can be fostered to support government policy.¹²⁾

5. COMBATING CRIME: NATIONAL AND POLITICAL WILL IN SOUTH AFRICA

The extent of South African lawlessness can be illustrated by some recent crime statistics showing the high occurrence level it has reached. Between April 2005 and March 2006 there were 18 545 murders; 54 926 reported cases of rape; 226 942 assaults with the aim of causing grievous bodily harm; 9 805 indecent assaults; 12 825 car hijackings; 262 535 burglaries at residential premises and 10 173 robberies at residential premises. The murders are evidently perpetrated by friends or relatives in roughly 62 per cent of the cases, and the rapes in approximately 60 per cent of the cases.¹³⁾ This presupposes nothing good for the future and shows how lawlessness has entered the very fabric of South African society. It means that 51 people are murdered per day in South Africa, and that does not even include deaths due to other forms of lawlessness, as a result of for example road accidents due to reckless driving. There are 719 burglaries at residential premises and 149 burglaries at business premises per day. The financial losses due to these burglaries are extensive, not to mention the anger and hopelessness felt by the owners and entrepreneurs involved.

NEPAD has instituted a project known as the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM), in which a panel of elders are tasked to assess the state of the countries that are members of NEPAD, and who have agreed to be evaluated by their peers. A 300-page APRM report was submitted by such a panel to the South African government in late 2006. It drew the attention of the South African media in early December 2006 in which some of the following were reported as

threats to South Africa's stability:¹⁴⁾

- The high level of violent crime which discouraged investment and resulted in many skilled people emigrating.
- Particularly high levels of abuse of women and children which included rape and school violence.
- Unemployment which alienated young people from society and caused more crime.

The APRM panel had also written that according to various sources which it had perused, South Africa had either the highest or second highest rates of murder and rape in the world. It made the point that a "distinctive feature of crime in South Africa is not its volume but its violence".¹⁵⁾ The panel concluded that the high levels of crime in the Black communities during *apartheid*, had inculcated and developed a culture of violent lawlessness which still fed violent crime.¹⁶⁾

In November and December 2006 written media repeatedly argued that the Government should reverse the process which it instigated as a revolutionary movement. Now that it is a political party in power, it is considered that this should be possible if an aggressive all-encompassing strategy to combat crime is compiled and then implemented.

However, the South African public seems to have lost faith in the Government's ability to combat crime. The tendency to rationalise the threat on the part of the authorities, has led to the public's convictions that the Government lacks the political will, and the means to successfully combat it. As in the US where the political and national will are diverging in respect of the war in Iraq, the political and national will seem to have diverged in respect of crime in South Africa.

The divergence was demonstrated clearly when the public outcry against the level of lawlessness due to crime was given daily prominence in all forms of media in early 2007. On 4 February 2007, the *Sunday Times* gave front page attention to an anti-crime initiative of First National Bank. The bank did not proceed with the initiative to show just how strongly the public felt about the crime wave, for various reasons, but the publicity led to further public outrage in respect of crime.

In his State of the Nation Address on 9 February 2007, President Mbeki consequently gave the topic of crime more attention. The result is that *inter alia*, new strategies are to be drawn up in which the security industry and the SAPS are to combine their means to satisfy the public's expectations in the campaign to combat crime.¹⁷⁾ Unfortunately previous strategies did not result in the crime wave abating. The emphasis on greater means may result in greater success.

6. CONCLUSION

Although national will in a heterogenic society such as South Africa is a complex phenomenon, it does seem as if a more unified national will is emerging, especially regarding unacceptable levels and characteristics of violent crime. The question is, to what extent will political will among the leadership converge with national will?

Early in 2007 a survey was released at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, which found that 63 per cent of South Africans thought their leaders were dishonest, and 43 per cent thought they were incompetent. Nearly 50 per cent felt that South African leaders had too much power and were unethical, while more than 40 per cent thought that improved transparency and good governance were needed to restore the people's confidence in their leaders.¹⁸⁾

On 15 January 2007, the South African President stated on an SABC television channel that crime was not out of control, and that although the public was worried about crime, people did not perceive it as being out of control either.¹⁹⁾ Once again a threat to national stability is rationalised. Hopefully the 2010 World Cup Soccer championship will invigorate the political will to combat crime. It will also help if solutions to national problem issues are appreciated, planned and executed holistically. There is a strong tendency to view issues only from ethnic or ruling party viewpoints, and not from the viewpoint of South African national interest.

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