

# Conflict flares when reality

Law and order takes on different meanings to the various communities that co-exist in South Africa. STEVE COLLINS tries to make sense of a senseless war in Natal.

FOR MANY of the Natal communities the season of joy which inspired the province's name must appear as a cruel joke. For the last 11 years victims of political violence have mourned the deaths of family and friends while the rest of South Africa celebrated Christmas.

This year is likely to be worse, with the province on the brink of a full scale civil war that will destroy any hope of prosperity for years. How can this be the case when everybody is talking about peace? What is at the root of this violence that no one seems capable of stopping?

In trying to explain the violence, analysts often end up pointing at every possible explanation to avoid focusing on the overarching issue few want to see. This is: what is happening in Natal, and what has spread to the Transvaal, is a violent conflict over future political power. Normally, this kind of conflict is called a war.

In South Africa we have avoided admitting that a political conflict is taking place which is claiming more lives than either Beirut or Northern Ireland. This avoidance is not new. During the State of Emergency



People experience this reality by being afraid to commit a crime, be it tax evasion or murder, for fear of being caught and punished by legitimate guardians of justice, the SA police.

The other reality is one where most people have lost any fear of being charged, never mind found guilty, of serious crimes. In fact

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can talk and argue "peacefully".

However, the existing system is a part of the problem and the peace accord does not change this. An interdict against the KwaZulu Police failed in Kwa-Makutha because the KZP were unlikely to enforce it against themselves. In practice, when decisions are made about action to curb the violence they are not made by the people who are affected by the violence. This means that the steps taken are misdirected and half-heartedly applied.

The most recent example is the flooding of certain areas with the SA Defence Force. Their most publicised role is to confiscate illegal weapons and, in particular, automatic rifles which are being used in the conflict. It sounds very commendable until one realises that the KwaZulu government has legally issued an assortment of weaponry, including G3 automatic rifles, to tribal authorities who support the IFP.

These cannot be taken away by either the SAP or SADF as they are simply returned as property of the KwaZulu government. The short term result of applying law and order is that one side is disarmed and, in the absence of a commitment to peace, the final outcome is obvious.



***'Multiparty control of the instruments of security with international observation must occur as soon as possible'***

What then is the answer? Perhaps an enforceable ceasefire that includes all the weapons legally issued in Natal/KwaZulu.

It seems clear that we cannot rely on outside security forces to stabilise the situation. Until the National Party gives up sole control of the security forces, the SADF and SAP will not be acceptable nor effective. Multiparty control of the instruments of security with international observation must occur as soon as possible.

Of course for this to be achieved will take more than courage on the part of the present government. It will take good faith which, by this stage, very few believe still exists.

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**What role is there for foreign monitors**

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