



Publikasie nr. 0 1 1 6

Datum 8.10.81 5.2.2.7

Onderwerp nr. 32.9

Dokument nr. 17.54

181 8. 15.

THE FRIEND

Jg. 132 Nr. P. 6 Dat.



SATURDAY VIEW

Robbie Robertson

Terrorism: the new reality

IT wasn't the Budget, in spite of its importance, that dominated the news this week. It wasn't even the prospect for today's rugby test match in New Zealand.

Far more significant for most South Africans were two events, one in Windhoek and one in Pretoria, that preceded and followed the Budget.

In Windhoek, early in the week, the General Officer Commanding the South West Africa territory force, Major-General Lloyd, made a statement about the situation on the northern border.

It seemed to many people to be a warning that hot-pursuit thrusts into Angola against Swapo might escalate into something considerably more serious if the Angolans and their Cuban allies were to become involved.

The Minister of Defence, General Malan, was quick to comment that General Lloyd's statement was "of no specific meaning" and that obviously any security force has to be prepared to defend itself against a potential enemy.

Since then, however, he himself has spoken of the dangers facing South Africa.

There is nothing really new in the suggestion that our perfectly legitimate pursuit of Swapo into Angola might lead to trouble with that country and no one doubts our ability to take on the Angolans and Cubans if the need arose, but the international repercussions of such a clash would not make life any easier for us.

The sooner we can achieve a

South West African settlement the better.

In mid-week the Budget, with its massive increase in defence expenditure, emphasised the cost of guarding the border. By the grace of God we have the money, the skill, the courage and the determination to do it, but, if peace could be achieved, they could all be diverted much more beneficially to serving national needs.

On the very night of the budget came the rocket attack on Voortrekkerhoogte, just outside Pretoria. It mercifully did little damage, but the sheer effrontery of it, so soon after bomb explosions in East London and Port Elizabeth shopping centres, has quite understandably got most people worried.

"What next?" and "where next?" are the questions that are inevitably being asked.

The possibility of an escalation in urban terrorism has, of course, been on the cards for some time. That does not make it any less unpleasant when it actually happens, and particularly when it comes so soon after concern about the border.

What lies ahead? Intensified border hostilities accompanied by a carefully orchestrated intensification of urban terrorism? Certainly, if our enemies can arrange it.

It's not a nice prospect, but ignoring the possibility won't make it go away. It need not daunt us if we face up to it — and face up without delay, to the realities of our national situation and the need for reforms that will bring peace to the land.

TREFWOORDE

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