

## Interview with General Constand Viljoen, Pretoria, 19 September 2015

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TT: Could you speak about how you Nelson Mandela's impact on the transition to democracy.

#### **Afrikaner quest to regain independence**

CV It is important to understand the history of South Africa, the situation that developed let us say from the Anglo-Boer war, when part of the Afrikaans speaking people – I'm talking about Smuts and Louis Botha and those people – decided to side with the British, and many, many of the people that fought with Smuts and Botha in the Anglo Boer war then decided that though they had lost the war, they wanted to regain their independence as soon as possible. Thereafter came the efforts of Louis Botha and Smuts towards closer relations with Britain which was not in line with many Afrikaner people.

Then we had the fact of the influence of the gold and diamond rush. In one year I know that more foreign speaking people came in than the total population of the Boer republic. I am trying to explain to you the view of the Afrikaner as it developed during the history.

Then we had the First World War and the problems of South West Africa when the British government asked Botha and Smuts to participate on their behalf by capturing the territory of the then South West Africa. My father was part of that fight. He was a Botha Smuts man, so was my brother but I diverged completely. As a very young child I broke away from the political views of my family. I was much more in line with those who thought about regaining our independence.

Then came the rebellion which was a result of the feeling amongst the Afrikaners that they wanted to regain their independence that they lost in 1902. I don't think it was well planned, it was doomed to disaster, and we had some very senior leaders of the rebellion killed in different ways. The then chief of the defence force, General Beyers, was killed fleeing from his own people. He sided with the rebellion and the then South African Defence Force of which he was head was used partly in order to eliminate him too. He died fleeing from his own people, swimming the Vaal River.

I am explaining my political views.

Then came the Second World War, again the Allies against the German people. The same thing happened. Botha and Smuts again sided with the Western world, and many, many Afrikaner people also wanted to use this, the Second World War, to regain their independence from the British, to remove us from the Commonwealth. So in 1948 Afrikaner politics changed. The National Party took charge, led by D F Malan. Botha was dead by then and Smuts was rejected, which was a very hard blow for him. And then we had an even deeper rift between the English speaking liberal group including the richest people in the towns and cities, the people that owned and ran the mines and dominated the economy; and the Afrikaner people still battling to survive from the poverty arising from the Anglo Boer war and the depression as well as the big drought of 1933.

The National Party carried on with one thing in mind, to get independence from the Commonwealth and in 1961 after Verwoerd had gone to London, he decided to withdraw from the Commonwealth, which we did, and this brought to the other part of South Africa, the Afrikaner people, a feeling of victory. It took us more than half a century, but we regained our independence which we had lost in the Anglo Boer war.

### **'Missing the bus' in 1960**

The other day I received a book from a guerrilla fighter from Frelimo. The book was about how he got involved with Frelimo and how they fought. In the introduction he made a remark which really struck me: he said we all missed the bus in 1960.

In 1960 the National Party, at first under DF Malan followed by other leaders, and eventually Verwoerd, then worked for independence. They failed to see

the greater and more important and more imminent danger, and that was black nationalism, they wished it away. And I must say, if I can use the wisdom of hindsight, I would say the National Party leaders lacked vision.

This is what this chap from Frelimo said: he said we made a mistake, we should never have taken sides after the Second World War when you had the western bloc and the eastern bloc differing on economic and ideological issues. He said, had we in 1960 had the political wisdom, to find a way for Southern Africa – the old Rhodesia, Angola, Mozambique, South West Africa, South Africa, Lesotho – had we had the wisdom to say, we are not part of this fight in Europe, we have a big job to find some way of co-existence, some way of reconciliation in Southern Africa; had we done this, he said, Frelimo would have been much further.

When I read this I said, for us too we also would have been further. I am building up to my situation with Mandela.

### **The role of the military in an insurgency war**

In 1960 I was an officer in the defence force, and my first mission on a very senior course was to write a paper about which path the South African Defence Force should take in order to be prepared for whatever we expected in the next twenty to thirty years. We studied all the insurgency wars. I went to Rhodesia and talked to the Rhodesians. We talked to the Portuguese, we read about the Far East experiences of Britain, the French experiences in Africa and so on.

We very soon came to the conclusion that this kind of war is not a war which a defence force wins. It is a war in which you gain enough time for politicians to win the war because as a military you cannot determine political direction, but as a military you can maintain the peace and the real burden of finding a new solution lies with the political parties in Parliament.

The problem we had in this period was to find enough time in the context of an insurgency war, which we did. But we also had to prepare for conventional war. Therefore in our preparation for war in the post 1960 period we were completely ready for either insurgency war or the other.

From the Rhodesian experience we also concluded that the SA Defence Force had not only to fight or to protect our own people or to deny the insurgents military success, but also to win the hearts and minds of the South African people and we developed the idea of civic action. Whenever we operated, whether it was in the homelands or whether it was in South West Africa, we always bore in mind the importance of winning the hearts and minds of the people without getting involved in politics. Because as professional soldiers to involve ourselves in politics was completely wrong.

We had the National Party sterile in their political thinking. We in the military had been involved in South West Africa and Angola and inside South Africa. We followed the line which I have explained, gaining enough time for the political solution, but to not allow the situation to get worse and further the aims of the insurgents. Remember, we were not political animals, we were pure soldiers. The Angolan war was not just for the sake of waging war. It was part of a change taking place in the direction of détente, slowly but surely inside the political world.

However the euphoria of being independent again after the Anglo Boer war still dominated the thinking of most National Party people.

### **Briefing the cabinet**

But we in the army having studied more about the insurgency wars and how to win and how to fight them than the politicians, we kept the security situation under control and we also talked to the politicians. On at least two occasions I remember briefing the Cabinet when I was the chief of the army and chief of defence force. I remember the last time I saw them was about 1983 and I said to them that day that 'The South African Defence Force is very strong, we can carry on for a very long time provided you are prepared to support the idea but', I said to them, 'this kind of war is not a military war, the final victory must be sought on the political side'. And I said to the Cabinet, 'Every year that you wait to come to some sort of agreement with black nationalism towards finding a new way', as the chap in Mozambique said, 'we will miss the bus'.

### **Angola**

The Angolan war started, and I was personally involved, when I was called in by Van der Bergh and briefed about a request from certain members of the OAU saying that after the Portuguese left Angola, a big vacuum was developing, and the idea of the OAU people was that the best solution for Angola would be a government of national unity, a government of UNITA, MPLA and FNLA. But the eastern bloc jumped the gun before 9 Nov 1975, the date that Angola would become independent and by when the government of national unity would have to be in place.

We never attacked Luanda. We were never given the instruction to capture Luanda, we were given a political instruction to prevent the overrunning of areas by the MPLA which did not really belong to them so that there could be a future government of national unity which I personally thought was a good idea, and I was thinking too of South Africa at that stage.

### **Getting involved in politics in 1993**

Having studied this I could see the political importance of what was taking place. I don't think that the National Party ever took us seriously when we talked about these things. Leading the quest for self-determination in the 1990s

I retired in 1985. By 1993-94 when the National Party caved in without consulting the defence force, I was a farmer. Politically they caved in.

I was not at all against change. As a farmer, I participated in agricultural organisations and we were very unhappy with the way that Mandela and de Klerk were taking negotiations at Kempton Park. If I say I was not against change it was true, but naturally a lot of my people were very much against change and that caused me great problems in the couple of years that I was in politics.

Because I had the background of being a soldier, of having known that you don't win this kind of war militarily, you don't lose this kind of war militarily, you make sure the politicians do the right thing, and the politicians couldn't do the right thing. I warned them, I warned de Klerk. I had a number of meetings with de Klerk in the 1993 situation and I said to them, 'You can never hand over South Africa as a sophisticated land and allow them to come in as government, uncontrolled, one man one vote, a unitary state.' I was against the unitary state I fought for self-determination for the Afrikaner.

## **COSAG**

That was when I got involved into politics, in 1993. I did so as a way to lessen the impact of what I expected would take place in the post-Mandela era, because to me it was clear that Mandela was the ANC and the ANC was Mandela. He was a black man with all the power in the world, the people loved him, they treasured him. If Mandela said 'No', it was no; if Mandela said 'Yes' it was yes. I started out without ever having met Mandela.

With the assistance of Buthelezi and with the assistance Mangope we organised an organisation called COSAG, Concerned South African Group. And COSAG sort of started to become a multiracial counter to the ANC being in a position to dominate the whole of the 1994 talks. But it was dependent on the National Party sacrificing their idea of homelands, and working with the ANC towards re-establishing the homelands and against the idea of one man one vote in a unitary state, that was what I was against, the idea of one man one vote in a unitary state.

In one discussion with de Klerk I said, 'Please Mr De Klerk, negotiate a changeover period of 20 years and for the 20 years we go to the cost of putting mentors with all the important in persons in government', making sure we would be able to maintain the development taking place in South Africa.

## **Making contact with Mandela and the ANC**

COSAG then started negotiating. I refused to go to the Kempton Park negotiations because had I done so I would have had to fight the ANC and I would have had to fight the National Party, and it would not have been

possible for me. In fact I would have driven the National Party even further away from my ideas about political change and development in South Africa.

So then I called my four generals. We were all retired, we had no contact with the South African Defence Force, I would say no official contact, of course we would meet and talk. I said to them, look here, this is the game of negotiation whether we like it or not. Let us talk to the enemy, which I then said is the ANC, and not to de Klerk and the Kempton Park negotiations.

That is how I met Mandela. I used my brother Abraham. I had many people approaching me saying, 'We want to take you to Mandela, we want to take you to Mandela.' But I didn't trust them. My brother I knew. Politically we differed vastly but in his integrity I had little doubt. It was a great political risk for me to enter into meeting Mandela.

And having arranged the first meeting with Mandela, I think it was 14 August 1993, up to 18 September it was kept completely secret, by us and also by the ANC because the ANC had the same problem as we had because in many ways we were regarded as right-wing. I was never a right-winger although I had a lot of right-wingers under my command, and I also had a lot of sensible centre-wingers under my command.

So Abraham arranged the meeting with Mandela in Johannesburg and from the very first moment I really got to believe in Mandela. I grew up with black people, the local people, I fought with black people, I'm on record saying to the coloured battalion, that if people are prepared to fight for South Africa, they have the right to vote for South Africa – it is not fair to expect a man to risk his life for a country in which he does not have a say.

We had a number of secret meetings, not with Mandela but with a team that he appointed under the leadership of Thabo Mbeki. My brother was part of that negotiation also on my request, because I used my brother's knowledge, he had been to Dakar, and he knew a lot of ANC people.

### **Afrikaner Volksfront**

My idea was to find a better solution than a one man one vote in a unitary state, because I regarded that as impossible. I could speak for nobody except for those people that elected me, and I was elected by a farmers meeting of 15 000 people in Potchefstroom asking me to become part of the negotiation to save South Africa from de Klerk's disaster. But it was not really an issue between me and Mr de Klerk. I think Mr de Klerk was under immense international pressure. But the fact is, he was a poor leader, he didn't have guts. He had a strong defence force – but it was completely taken out of the negotiations. The defence force was, I think on the insistence of Mandela and those people, completely taken out and confined to barracks, whereas in my days the government used to negotiate with us and used to consult us when

they had certain big things. It was not the case here. It was the unitary state solution, one-man one vote, immediate changeover and I said 'This is a disaster – there is no quick solution.'

When I saw Mandela, I was really impressed by this man's vision for South Africa. But Mandela was in many ways also a slave to his people; and the thinking of Mandela after 27 years in jail to that of the National Democratic Revolution, with a very strong input by the South African Communist Party. Mandela didn't have the power, nor would it have been wise for him at that stage, to work against it. I saw Mandela on many occasions before the election. I also got along very well with Thabo Mbeki before the election.

As I said earlier on, I had the problem in my organisation, the Volksfront, of a large group of very far right people which I kept because I needed their support. But they left me completely in the lurch – I am referring to the AWB in Mmabatho where they acted not on instructions, in fact they acted against instructions, and the storming of the Bastille at Kempton Park. It was becoming clear to me that it was impossible.

### **Establishing a military force to back negotiation**

Now, I have to explain my position. I decided to establish my own military force and I did so because de Klerk had nullified the influence of the South African Defence Force. When you argue with a wolf and you are a lamb, you do so with a pistol in the hand and I didn't have a pistol in the hand because I was out of the defence force already, but I was well known in the country.

The leadership I gave them was very far away from hate. I started to organise right through all the farming communities, with the help of a few people, and at the end had a total force of about 52 000 people, very lightly armed: hunting guns and maybe a couple of commando weapons. I could never with that force have taken on the old South African Defence Force, and having had the hindsight and wisdom of studying the rebellion of 1914, I would not have been so silly as to really start a complete big war.

But I had a second requirement, the pistol in the hand, and the pistol in the hand paid off because it really frightened off de Klerk and it also frightened off many black people and it put me in a position to negotiate and that is what I wanted.

I negotiated not for re-establishment of the old apartheid. I said 'No, let us find a solution that will involve all the people of SA but not a solution that will lead again to the suppression of one group by another group.' In the past we used to have the white group suppressing the black group politically and now we switch that over to oppression of the majority group over the minority group which is a much more dangerous situation than what we had before.

## **Talks with Mandela before the election**

Mandela called me in on many occasions before I was involved in Parliament. I met him in my capacity as a representative of certain Afrikaner people, not all of them because I could not speak for the National Party, and I could not speak for some other groups within the National Party. I had many discussions with Mandela.

I can sum it up this way: I remember one day when Mandela said, 'The Afrikaner people, especially the farming community, is an indispensable group for South Africa, we cannot do without them.' And he said that if I would work with him to find a solution so that we do not allow a clash between the white right-wing people as they were called at that stage - but it was not right-wing people, it was conservative people - if we could make sure that the switchover to democracy would bear in mind also the desires of the white people, the conservative people, then the country would gain.

And he said to me, 'You Afrikaner people on the farm are very humane.' He said 'If a worker would come to you and say, this child is sick, you would put the worker and his child in the bakkie and drive 60 kilometres to the nearest doctor or hospital, have him examined or treated or if necessary have him hospitalized and you would go back and phone every now and then to find out how the child is and when the child is ready you would fetch the child again.' He said 'This is what I call very humane', and he said it is not the same with the English speaking people.

And he also said to me, 'What is important is that the economic contribution of the Afrikaner people is also indispensable, the Afrikaner people is an indispensable people.' And he then asked me if I would work with him towards finding a solution of reconciliation between the Afrikaner people and him.

By now Mandela had realized that de Klerk had no support amongst the Afrikaner people any more. De Klerk could claim support from the liberal group of South Africans but not from the more conservative group that I came from.

## **Accord on self-determination**

We negotiated with them for seven or eight months, and in the last meeting Thabo Mbeki threw his hands in the air and said, 'If self-determination is something that has to be addressed, then it will be.' That's the way the VolkstaatRaad came into existence because I then said to Thabo Mbeki, 'Look, the international requirement for self-determination is that the group that requests self-determination must have proven support.'

I had told de Klerk who was then the President before the election, 'I want a plebiscite amongst Afrikaners on the issue of self-determination, there are different kinds of self-determination, territorial self-determination, cultural self-

determination and so on.' But de Klerk refused. He said, no, he's too busy with the big 27 April election and it's not going to be possible.

So I said to Thabo Mbeki, 'This is the situation: I will not participate in the election and my people will not participate in the election unless we know that the idea of self-determination is acceptable.'

So he said, 'Okay, you need proven support; if you participate in the election on the issue of self-determination' - that was the proviso - 'we count every vote for the Freedom Front.'

By now I'd had a very difficult situation with the far right breaking away from me because I was not prepared to irrevocably say that I would go to war. I said I would wage war if that's the very last solution, I am against war because I had studied the rebellion and I know that with the great part of Afrikaans people and the National Party etc. not supporting me it would be foolish of me to go to war.

Thabo Mbeki then said, 'Let us go for a solution like this: you vote and we count the votes and we see if you have proven support.'

I said to him 'No, it's not that easy, I want to know now, are we talking about fifty per cent or what?' He said 'No let us be reasonable, let us talk about 35 per cent, if you have 35 percent of the Afrikaans speaking vote support in the election of 27 April, we also accept that.' I said, 'We need to have an accord on this, a written accord, because then I can go back to my people and I can say "You can participate in the election."'

Remember, from my military side I was for a peaceful solution, I was not for keeping on with the military fight, because I realised that this kind of war demands from you that you gain time to find a solution politically. The election then took place

### **Delay in signing the accord**

TT: Mandela describes a meeting with you and Hartzenburg at which this issue of a referendum was put, and he said he put three conditions: the first that there is a referendum; the second was that the ANC would not be bound by the outcome but consider it; and the third was clarity about who is an Afrikaner – do you recall that meeting?

CV: That's what Thabo Mbeki and myself decided, it would be Afrikaans-speaking votes. I don't recall such a meeting with Mandela. I very seldom negotiated with Mandela together with Hartzenberg. Remember, when we formed the Afrikaner Volksfront, we were told, 'Establish a directorate of five retired generals', and we were given the task to give political and strategic direction to the Afrikaners' interests in the 1994 changeover. It was specifically said that there was not enough confidence in any party, including the Conservative

Party, to entrust them with this negotiation and that is why it was given to us as five generals.

TT: Mandela also said that he then went to see PW Botha and asked him to persuade you to participate – did Botha speak to you about this?

CV: No, it's the first time I hear of it.

For clarity, let me go back to December 1993 when Thabo Mbeki said, 'If self-determination needs to be addressed, then it will be'. We then decided that there would be an accord formally signed between the Volksfront and the ANC and that would include the idea of self-determination and sum up the seven months of negotiations. We were then part of COSAG and Ferdie Hartzenburg phoned me the evening before the signing ceremony which was booked for the 16 or 18 December 1993 – he said, 'Because the ANC is not prepared to give the same to COSAG members' - meaning Buthelezi and Mangope - 'we are not going to sign the declaration.' So we did not sign this declaration.

But Mandela wrote me a letter – I think it was dated 18 December – in his own handwriting saying he appreciates the negotiations we have been having over so many months and they accept the idea, and it is not only he himself that approves this, but the whole National Executive Committee of the ANC is in agreement. That was in place of the signature which would have taken place on 18 December.

So then – in March – I had the terrible problems with Bophuthatswana and after the Bophuthatswana issue I decided the idea of a largescale war is not on, it will not be good for the Afrikaner people, it will not be good for the country, and we will fail in the whole situation.

We then went on to negotiate on self-determination, which we achieved, but this commitment to an accord didn't work out soon. Mbeki said to me 'Yes, sure, we will have a signing ceremony.'

### **Accord signed after disruption threat**

The election was 27 April. The week before that I had a meeting in Meyerton and the people were very difficult - they disagreed with me that we should go for a negotiated settlement at this stage and not for war. There was this agreement about participating in the elections and using the votes for a plebiscite to show substantial proven Afrikaner support for self-determination, that was in the first half of March but the ANC kept on postponing the signing of the document and at that meeting in Meyerton I said to my wife, 'I'm going to let the dogs loose, I'm going to disrupt this election.' I was in a position to do so, because I had 50,000 people and to disrupt an election with 50,000 people is not difficult.

But I had a very good relationship with Princeton Lyman who was then the ambassador of the United States. We had many discussions, he understood our position. He said to me one day, before you do something drastic won't you please come and discuss it with me.

And I remembered this and I said to my wife, I will go and to see Lyman. I saw him the next day and put it to him, 'I am going to let the dogs loose, the ANC is playing the fool with me.' And he said, give me half an hour. I went back to the office and Lyman phoned me in the office, it was about a week before the election, and he said, it will be signed and it was signed, with two witnesses, Ambassador Lyman and Jurgen Kogl.

What is more this accord on Afrikaner self-determination was also signed by the National Party which was a great advance for me because the worst thing that could have happened to me would have been proof for the Afrikaans people that the majority of the National Party is against me on the principle of self-determination So then we had the election. Interaction with Mandela after the election

### **Interaction with Mandela post-election**

TT What interaction did you have with Mandela after the election?

CV After the election I had a most emotional moment at the opening of Parliament. Now this is what Mandela was. I was in the second row and the whole procession came in to Parliament, Mandela in front. Walking down the aisle towards his position he saw me and he broke away from the ceremonial procession, walked towards me and shook hands with me saying, 'I'm so glad that we could find each other and that we could solve the issue', which to me was a great encouragement but in one way also a very detrimental factor as far as the far right was concerned. You can't always win the war – sometimes you win sometimes you lose!

Then Mandela called me in as the new state president and said, 'My office is open to you. I have a great desire not to be a president only of the ANC but to be a president of everybody and I wish to give you free access to my office. If you have anything for the Afrikaner you would like to come and discuss, you can ask.' Believe me, it never took more than two days for me to see the president if there was something I wanted to discuss. We had very deep discussions.

One discussion over breakfast one day was about the wisdom – or not wisdom - of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. I said, 'It is just going to divide us, sir, and make us relive the horrors of both sides, the side of the police or the security police doing bad things, and also the necklace murders.' I said, 'Why do you want to relive that, we have reached a new situation.' I really very nearly convinced him and then he saw De Klerk and I was told De Klerk said

you mustn't believe me and then they decided they will run with the commission. I really believe that thing didn't really serve any purpose. In any case, after Mandela had gone what was left over of the reconciliation was due to come from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

So this is what I am saying about Mandela: the way he was open to me; his view of the Afrikaner people and my dedication to what I had learnt in the defence force that this kind of war is solved politically and not militarily. So although I had prepared a military force, it was with two things in mind: one a big war which I abandoned after the AWB let me down in Mmabatho, and the other one just having a pistol in the hand. Reduced support for a volkstaat.

TT Then came the negotiation of the final constitution, and the establishment of the VolkstaatRaad. Did you interact with him during that period on those issues?

CV Very much so, and not only on those issues, also on the assistance to Mozambique. He gave me R15m which he called seed money, for my initiative to establish an Afrikaner growth point in Mozambique.

#### **Dwindling support for a volkstaat**

TT You've spoken about how, because the Afrikaners were divided, the generals were called to provide an umbrella organisation. But in a way that division went right through. You negotiated measures in the final constitution providing for the idea of cultural councils, but nothing seemed to come of it. Why was that? Was it that the Afrikaners had fears about the change but weren't ready to take advantage of what was negotiated?

CV No, it was Mandela. Mandela mesmerised the Afrikaners. He was so acceptable. He created such a big expectation towards a real solution in South Africa that even the Afrikaner people accepted the idea. His whole public image, his participation in the Rugby World Cup of 1995, he had the knack of speaking to the people's rights. This is what Mandela was. Mandela has all the credit for the peaceful changeover in 1994. But I must say I don't think even Mandela realized how shallow the reconciliation was. Our conversation is not about the woes of today, but the problem we have today on both sides is that reconciliation is not very deep.

TT You say he mesmerized the Afrikaner people – might you have helped in a way because you set up one of the first meetings with Afrikaner organisations after the election. When you initiated that did you see that as part of the development of opinion on self-determination or part of bringing Afrikaners into the larger society?

CV We could not before 1994's election come to an agreement as to the exact type of self-determination, because there are many kinds of self-determination

and the quest for self-determination must come from the people. Part of the accord was that the VolkstaatRaad would be established. The VolkstaatRaad couldn't find clarity amongst Afrikaners about what exactly did they want. And I still believe that the solution is not a Volkstaat. I believe that there are other ways of organising this and I firmly believe that we have to find the way. I think that's more towards cultural self-determination, not grinding all the cultures into one new grey feature, but to allow all the different cultures, Zulus, Tswanas, the Afrikaners, to practice their own self-determination but having a federal or confederal linking for the sake of national unity.

TT That possibility was built into the provision for cultural councils and yet there seemed to be no will to use them. To ask it in a sharper way, was it perhaps that when the Afrikaners were looking for self-determinations it was more an emotion of fear and when that fear wasn't realised, the call for self-determination diminished – the transition didn't produce what was feared?

CV You have a point, I'll tell you why. In 1994 my support was 640 000 votes from Afrikaners, that was calculated as giving me 37.5% of the Afrikaners vote which is not a lot. If you think of the Scottish election, where they were going for 50%. You must bear in mind that my 37.5% does not include many National Party members who remained loyal towards de Klerk and who all hoped for the idea of a new South Africa, a new dispensation. If you allowed them to vote again it would be completely different. Had we put the vote for a Volkstaat in 1998 the Afrikaners would not have voted for a Volkstaat, because of Mandela. He was such a hope because there was not even a white leader with the image of Mandela and in any case there was not a white leader with the support which Mandela had.

Then when Mandela went I was still in Parliament. Mbeki sent me a note saying, 'You have had the arrangement with Mr Mandela of making appointments with his personal secretary; in my term I would like it if you would rather not do it that way but approach my parliamentary counsellor.' It was Charles Nqakula, an SACP man. Naturally, I never did that because I was so much against communism that I rejected the idea completely. And then my link to the president on behalf of the Afrikaners fell away and soon after that I decided that in my political lifetime I would not be able to do more about the Afrikaners and I went farming again.

### **A security threat post 1994?**

TT: Mandela kept a very close interest in security and stability. Do you think he might've overestimated the potential for counter-revolution and destabilisation or was there still a real possibility?

CV No, I don't think so, the closest we came was my decision to disrupt the election and up to today if I can talk personally of my mistakes, I think it was a personal mistake.

TT Were you surprised at the attitude of General Meiring?

CV: No, he was a professional soldier – because remember what I said, that we in the military had studied this kind of war and had a firm belief that change was necessary. But I as a commander and having studied this kind of war and also as having been a farmer living with the people of this country, believed that the solution that de Klerk and Mandela wanted was the wrong solution.

TT You say with hindsight that you think you may have made a mistake

CV I have the claim for self-determination; I have a claim for two Afrikaans universities; I have a claim for our language not to be pushed off, etc. But what has happened in the twenty years made us all unhappy. I could have foreseen that, in fact I did, that is why I said to Mandela 'You can't switch over in one instant.' And thank God for Mandela because if you had started this kind of attitude which we have today in those days it would have been a disaster. There isn't the making of what Mandela said to me after the election, I really want to be a President of all the people of South Africa, in other words to be fair and responsible.