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## Defining “Third Force” Activity: The South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission and Eugene de Kock

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Defining “Third Force” Activity: The South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission and  
Eugene de Kock

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the  
University of New Orleans  
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in  
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by

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## Abstract

This paper examines claims about a purported “third force,” individuals and organizations that operated in South Africa during the “transitional period,” from 1990 to 1994, who aimed to destabilize the country and prevent a democratic election. This paper focuses on the findings of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and testimony contained in the official Amnesty Committee’s transcripts of former Colonel Eugene de Kock. This paper argues that the “third force” was not a designated government agency and former President F.W. de Klerk did not order “third force” violence. This paper further argues that numerous governmental and non-governmental organizations worked collectively to disrupt a transfer of power.

third force, transitional period, Eugene de Kock, C-10, Vlakplaas, National Party, Inkatha Freedom Party, African National Congress

*The early 1990's saw unprecedented levels of violence: more people died in political conflict during this time than for the whole of the earlier mandate period. Numerous allegations were made that a 'hidden hand' or 'third force' was involved in orchestrating and fomenting such violence in order to derail the negotiation process. This 'third force' was seen to involve covert units of the security forces acting in concert with other individuals or groupings, such as the IFP [Inkatha Freedom Party] and various rightwing paramilitary structures.*

- Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Finding on the "third force."<sup>1</sup>

## **Introduction**

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission's (TRC) finding underlines charges that a "third force" engaged in violence during South Africa's "transitional period" (1990-1994). Many organizations and individuals have been blamed for the violence that took place during the "transitional period," but perhaps the most infamous name of the period is Eugene de Kock, also known as "Prime Evil."<sup>2</sup> De Kock was the commander of C-10, a South African Police (SAP) unit that specialized in counter-insurgency and his Amnesty Committee (AC) testimony proves that he and C-10 were involved in some of the violence of the "transitional period." Throughout the "transitional period," the African National Congress (ANC) and former President Nelson Mandela used the term "third force" to describe the violence perpetrated by de Kock, C-10, and other organizations that aimed to disrupt a transition to majority rule. The ANC first used the term "third force" in September of 1990, in the wake of seemingly random violent attacks in the Witwatersrand and Vaal areas.<sup>3</sup> The violence continued after 1993, and the ANC continued to

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<sup>1</sup> Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa Report, vol. 5, p. 237 (South Africa, 1998), <http://www.justice.gov.za/trc/report/finalreport/Volume%205.pdf> (accessed February 19, 2012).

<sup>2</sup> Allister Spark, "The Status of the Dream," *The Wilson Quarterly* 23, no. 2 (Spring 1999): 87. De Kock earned the nickname "Prime Evil" when he served as commander of Vlakplaas. De Kock and Vlakplaas' tactics of murder are infamous. Members of Vlakplaas regularly disposed of bodies by tying dynamite around them and blowing them up. In addition, they mailed poisons and bombs hidden in pens, radios, and manuscripts to exiles living in Swaziland, Tanzania, and Zambia.

<sup>3</sup> Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa, Report, vol. 6, p. 579 (South Africa, 2003), <http://www.justice.gov.za/trc/report/finalreport/vol6.pdf> (accessed February 19, 2012).

blame a “third force” for fomenting the violence that undermined the ANC’s efforts to consolidate its political presence.<sup>4</sup>

Allegations of “third force” activity peaked in the wake of the Boipatong massacre in June of 1992. Mandela blamed former President F.W. de Klerk for the massacre when he stated, “I am convinced we are not dealing with human beings but animals. We will not forget what Mr. de Klerk, the National Party and the Inkatha Freedom Party have done to our people. I have never seen such cruelty...”<sup>5</sup> At a rally three days later in front of thousands of ANC supporters Mandela declared that he had halted negotiations, compared the National Party (NP) to the Nazi regime, and threatened to reignite the armed resistance if he felt de Klerk and the NP were continuing to engage in violence.<sup>6</sup> Mandela’s accusations lumped together organizations and individuals, but did not specifically state what roles they played in “third force” activity. However, Mandela’s statements regarding “third force” activity are important historical claims, because the “third force” activity of the “transitional period” was significant and, because said activities spread fear amongst hundreds of thousands of township residents.<sup>7</sup> However, the TRC found that there was little evidence to support a claim that the NP instituted a formal “third force.”<sup>8</sup> Moreover the TRC concluded that, “...The Commission therefore believes that further enquires and investigations regarding ‘third force’ allegations are an essential part of a broader process in terms of developing our understanding of past conflict and those responsible for it.”<sup>9</sup>

This paper undertakes an in-depth analysis of de Kock’s 1999 and 2000 AC testimony. This paper examines said testimony to provide a further investigation regarding “third force”

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Robert Harvey, *The Fall of Apartheid: The Inside Story from Smuts to Mbeki* (Houndmills, UK: Palgrave, 2001), 236.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> TRC Report, volume 6, p. 581.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 584.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 588.

activity allegations. In addition, this paper seeks to illuminate a more complete understanding of those responsible for the violence of the “transitional period.” This paper examines claims about a purported “third force” in South Africa by focusing on the findings of the TRC and testimony contained in the official AC’s transcripts of former Colonel Eugene de Kock. This paper argues that the “third force” was not a designated<sup>10</sup> government agency, that numerous governmental and non-governmental organizations worked collectively to disrupt a transfer of power, and that former President F.W. de Klerk did not order “third force” violence. This paper seeks to illuminate the history of “third force” activity through a previously untapped resource, the AC testimony of de Kock. The aim of this paper is to support accusations of government, security, SAP, and military involvement in “transitional period” violence, while at the same time dismissing accusations that cannot be proved, such as de Klerk’s knowledge of “third force” activity.

This paper begins with a discussion of the history of the “third force” and South Africa’s “transitional period.” Next, the paper gives a brief overview of what the TRC was and what findings the TRC made regarding the “third force.” A historiography of the debate surrounding the TRC’s findings regarding the “third force” is included to illuminate the different “truths” that emerged in historical works. Finally, the heart of the paper is a specific discussion of the author’s original arguments regarding the “third force.”

### **The Origins of the term “Third Force”**

Mandela and the ANC coined the term the “third force” during the “transitional period.”<sup>11</sup> The “third force” was simply that, a term, used by some to describe pro-apartheid organizations

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<sup>10</sup> The NP never created and/or instituted an organization named the “third force.”

<sup>11</sup> TRC Report, vol. 5, p. 579. The ANC first used the term “third force” in September 1990.

that engaged in violence during the “transitional period.” The “third force” was not a secretive government organization unlike organizations such as the CIA, Mossad, or even South Africa’s former C-10. C-10 was a highly classified unit of the SAP’s counter-insurgency unit however members of C-10, including de Klerk, never considered themselves members of an organization named the “third force.” The “third force” garnered both media and government attention during the “transitional period,” despite the lack of an organized body with central leadership. The threat of “third force” violence and accusations from Mandela and the ANC regarding “third force” violence propelled de Klerk to setup a commission to investigate claims of “third force” activity.

In 1991, de Klerk enacted legislation that provided for the creation of the Goldstone Commission (GC). Judge Richard Goldstone, known as a liberal judge, headed the Commission. GC’s task was to discovery direct evidence of a “third force.” Initially the GC had difficulties gathering evidence of a “third force.” During its first year, the GC had some success gathering evidence through investigative reporting, insider informants, and court hearings.<sup>12</sup> In November 1992, the GC’s investigators raided a Pretoria office building that Military Intelligence (MI) used as an operational headquarters. GC investigators seized documents that contained information that MI was running a dirty tricks campaign against the ANC. The goal of the MI secret operation was to frame ANC members for criminal activities. De Klerk appointed General Pierre Steyn to investigate the GC’s findings and a month later de Klerk fired or suspended twenty-three senior Defense Force officers, but he did not fire the chief of MI.<sup>13</sup>

In 1994, the GC, through interviews with informants, compiled evidence that it claimed proved that SAP officers and the chief of police of counter-intelligence were involved with “third

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<sup>12</sup> Allister Sparks, *Tomorrow is Another Country: The Inside Story of Africa’s Road to Change* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1995), 160-61.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 174-75.

force” activity. The GC claimed that those officers gave orders to C-10 and de Kock to build a weapons manufacturing plant. In addition, the GC claimed that C-10 provided some of those weapons to the IFP and directly engaged in violent activities aimed at destabilizing South Africa, thus making an election impossible.<sup>14</sup>

The GC had some success uncovering evidence of a “third force” during the “transitional period” when Mandela and the ANC made accusations of a “third force.” The GC provided credibility to Mandela and the ANC’s claims regarding a “third force” and forced de Klerk to remove senior officials of the Defense Force. Despite the successes of the GC, it never led to any indictments or convictions. The GC discovered that Major General Krappies Engelbrecht, the last chief of the SAP’s counter-insurgency unit, order the destruction of all documentation related to the SAP’s involvement with Inkatha.<sup>15</sup> In addition, the TRC concluded that senior members of the SAP ordered police officers not to cooperate with the GC’s investigation. Unfortunately, the GC’s investigations did not stop “third force” activity, however its investigations laid the framework for the TRC’s investigation into “third force” activity. Moreover, the GC exposed the violent activities of de Kock, C-10 and the SAP’s counter-insurgency unit.

After South Africa’s transition to democracy the TRC picked up from where the GC left off and continued to investigate “third force” activity. The TRC concluded in its report, that there is little evidence to support the existence of formal “third force.” The TRC found that, “...little evidence exists of a centrally directed, coherent and formally constituted ‘third force.’”<sup>16</sup> Despite the non-existence of a formal “third force,” there is evidence of “third force” activity. I define “third force” activity as organizations working together to destabilize South Africa during the

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. 174-78.

<sup>15</sup> TRC Report, vol. 6, p. 580-81.

<sup>16</sup> TRC Report, vol. 5, p.238.

“transitional period” for the common purpose of delaying a democratic election and a transfer of power to the black majority. My definition is in conformity with the TRC’s conclusion that,

The Commission finds that a network of security and ex-security force operatives, often acting in conjunction with right-wing elements and/or sectors of the IFP, fomented, initiated, facilitated, and engaged in violence which resulted in gross violations of human rights, including random and targeted killings.<sup>17</sup>

The TRC produced little evidence that the NP implemented official policy regarding “third force” activity. However, there is some evidence that high-ranking military and government officials unofficially supported “third force” activities. Specifically, de Kock and members of C-10 often received orders and support from political and military superiors. The TRC concluded,

Thus, while the involvement of security force individuals and structures in ‘third force’ violence was to some degree corroborated, lines of command and accountability, were not established. It is not clear whether senior security force personnel so involved represented their own, state or right-wing agenda. In a rapidly changing political situation with shifting alliances, it is probable that there were several agendas involved.<sup>18</sup>

While many aspects of “third force” violence are not clear, the TRC report showed that de Kock and senior Security Branch personnel received orders to carry out violence. In addition, de Kock gave orders to members of C-10 to carry out violence.

The TRC reported, “Central to the whole operation was Colonel Eugene de Kock, former commander of the C-10 Security Branch unit, Vlakplaas. However, weapons stored at Vlakplaas were transported to another venue and a number of former members of the unit continued to work under de Kock in various destabilization operations.”<sup>19</sup> Moreover, Vlakplaas, C-10, the Security Branch, and the SAP engaged in non-political violence. The aforementioned

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa Report, vol. 2, p. 709 (South Africa, 1998), <http://www.justice.gov.za/trc/report/finalreport/Volume%202.pdf> (accessed February 19, 2012).

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

organizations and others attacked train passengers on the Rand and in Natal.<sup>20</sup> The TRC found, “...that train violence was initiated by groupings opposed to a democratic transition and the possibility of an ANC led government.”<sup>21</sup> Moreover, the TRC found that, “...the IFP, the SAP, and the SADF responsible for the killings that took place during train violence attacks and thereby the commission of gross human rights violations.”<sup>22</sup> Ultimately, the TRC’s findings regarding “third force” activity supports to claims of a “third force” made by Mandela and the ANC during the “transitional period,” and expands on the investigation into “third force activity that the GS began during the “transitional period.”

### **The Origins of de Kock’s Security Background and the “third force”**

It is vital to dovetail de Kock’s security background with the origins of the “third force” to illuminate the extensive counter-insurgency tactics that both de Kock and the apartheid regime engaged in prior to the “transitional period.” De Kock’s security background coincides with the covert counter-insurgency that developed in South Africa from the 1960’s through the 1980’s. In addition, de Kock’s security background offers an insight into his vast knowledge of South Africa’s former security units and emphasizes the importance of his AC testimony.

Arguably, the “third force’s” roots date back to the massacre at Sharpeville, South Africa on March 21, 1960, when the SAP murdered sixty-nine unarmed black citizens.<sup>23</sup> Sharpeville was the turning point when the NP used the SAP for more than just patrolling the streets of South Africa. Following Sharpeville the government created special units of the SAP to combat

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p. 707.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p. 708.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Stephen Ellis, “The Historical Significance of South Africa’s Third Force,” *Journal of Southern African Studies*.24, no. 2 (June 1998): 264; TRC Report, volume 6, p. 579. Ellis argues that the “third force” was a substantial and organized group that played a primary role in the violence of the “transitional period.”

“terrorism”<sup>24</sup> in and outside of South Africa. The government dispatched SAP personnel, including de Kock, to Rhodesia and there they learned counter-insurgency tactics from Rhodesian military units. Specifically, the South African government admired the effective tactics of the Selous Scouts<sup>25</sup> and in the 1970’s the apartheid regime created similar South African units.<sup>26</sup>

De Kock spent as many as eleven tours in Rhodesia when he was in the SAP.<sup>27</sup> While in Rhodesia de Kock trained with several Rhodesian military units including the Special Air Service and the Rhodesian African Rifles.<sup>28</sup> In 1979, de Kock helped to found a Security Branch unit named Koevoet.<sup>29</sup> De Kock and other founding members of Koevoet had similar training in Rhodesia so they modeled Koevoet’s tactics after the tactics they observed the Selous Scouts use. De Kock served with Koevoet in Namibia until 1983.

De Kock returned to South Africa in 1983, after his service with Koevoet ended. He later alleged that he had suffered from post-traumatic stress, and insisted that his symptoms had gone

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<sup>24</sup> Throughout the “transitional period” the South African government considered terrorism to include any action taken by an individual or group that was in direct opposition to the apartheid government and/or the apartheid government’s interest. This included the apartheid government’s interest to support white rule in Rhodesia.

<sup>25</sup> The Selous Scouts was an intelligence-gathering unit that operated in Rhodesia. Selous Scouts were black Rhodesians who posed as guerillas fighting for independence from white rule, but in reality worked with the Rhodesian government. The Selous Scouts captured guerilla fighters and allowed the captured guerilla fighters to choose death or join the Selous Scouts. Captured guerilla fighters who joined the Selous Scouts were called *askaris*. *Askaris* provided intelligence regarding the activity of guerilla fighters.

<sup>26</sup> TRC Report, volume 6, p. 580. “The development of intelligence-gathering units with an offensive capacity had proved effective in the Rhodesian situation and was subsequently adapted to South African context by both the police and military. The devolution of decision-making powers resulted in police units such as Vlakplaas and the Namibian-based hunter-killer unit Koevoet operating with virtual impunity, making it extremely difficult to establish lines of command and accountability.”

<sup>27</sup> Ellis, p. 268. De Kock served in Rhodesia between 1968 and 1972.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Koevoet operated similarly to the Selous Scouts. Koevoet operated in rural areas of Namibia (former South-West Africa) consisted largely of Ovambo (The Ovambo are a number of ethnic groups that inhabit northern Namibia and southern Angola), and included a few hundred white officers and commandos. Koevoet aimed to locate, kill, and capture black guerilla fighters who were members of the South West Africa’s Peoples Organization (SWAPO). The goal of Koevoet was to eliminate guerilla soldiers (SWAPO) and uphold South African rule in Namibia.

untreated.<sup>30</sup> In addition, in 1983, he was drafted into C-10, a SAP counter-insurgency unit.<sup>31</sup> C-10's headquarters was located at the infamous farm named Vlakplaas. At Vlakplaas members of C-10 brutally interrogated blacks whom they suspected were "terrorists."<sup>32</sup> Members of Vlakplaas would kidnap ANC member and threaten them with death if they did not become informants, or askaris, for Vlakplaas. The aforementioned counter-insurgency tactic allowed Vlakplaas to fuel the political violence without having to appear publicly. Anonymity was crucial for maintaining the secret operations of Vlakplaas.<sup>33</sup> Eventually the rise in political violence caught the attention of the ANC.

Mandela publicly used the term "third force" for the first time in September of 1990.<sup>34</sup> The ANC believed there was a police or paramilitary force that was exacerbating already existing political violence between ANC and Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) supporters in Natal Province and on the Rand. Moreover, Mandela and the ANC made direct accusations that the NP and de Klerk were aware of a "third force," and provided funding to it.<sup>35</sup> Mandela, the ANC, and later the TRC would focus their attention on the SAP and the leaders of its Security Branch, namely de Kock, as the key players in the "third force."

ANC members accused the "third force" of monetarily supporting the rival IFP and supplying its members with guns and military training. In addition, the ANC accused de Klerk of

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<sup>30</sup> Ellis, p. 268.

<sup>31</sup> Truth and Reconciliation Commission Amnesty Hearing, *De Kock Hearing 1*, part 1 (South Africa, 1999), [http://www.justice.gov.za/trc/amntrans/1999/9905240623\\_pre\\_990525pt.htm](http://www.justice.gov.za/trc/amntrans/1999/9905240623_pre_990525pt.htm) (accessed February 19, 2012). De Kock reported for duty at Vlakplaas on June 1, 1983, though he took a month leave and returned on July 1, 1983.

<sup>32</sup> A terrorist is defined as someone who participated in terrorism that included any actions taken by an individual or group that was in direct opposition to the apartheid government and/or the apartheid government's interest. This included the apartheid government's interest to support white rule in southern Africa.

<sup>33</sup> Ellis, pp. 267-268.

<sup>34</sup> Patti Waldmeir, *Anatomy of a Miracle: The End of Apartheid and the Birth of the New South Africa* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1997), pp. 182-183; TRC Report, volume 6, p. 581.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

involvement with the “third force.”<sup>36</sup> De Klerk was not a military man and was not directly involved with aspects of the SAP or Security Branch. He has always denied that a “third force” was behind promoting ANC and IFP violence, and if there were a “third force,” he was adamant that he was not aware of it and that he did not support it in any way.<sup>37</sup> However, the “third force” grabbed headlines and shifted international favor the way of Mandela and the ANC. In addition, continued political violence caused the international community to believe in a “third force” and the ANC accused the NP and the SAP of not preventing or even attempting to stop acts of violence, including the massacre at Boipatong.<sup>38</sup>

The massacre at Boipatong was the apex of the political violence in KwaZulu and on the Rand, and many blamed the SAP of involvement in the massacre. Bill Keller’s June 1992 article “39 in South Africa Die,” describes the massacre at Boipatong. The *New York Times* published Keller’s article only a day after the massacre and there were already reports of SAP involvement. Witnesses reported that armored SAP vehicles helped break open holes in people’s homes in order for IFP members to enter and kill the residents. Keller quotes Cyril Ramaphosa, the secretary general of the ANC, who blamed de Klerk and the government for the massacre at Boipatong. Ramaphosa stated, “We charge de Klerk and his Government with complicity in the slaughter that has taken place in this area.”<sup>39</sup> Mandela was also angered with de Klerk and the NP over the massacre. He stated at a funeral, “I can no longer explain to our people why we continue to talk to a regime that is murdering our people and conducting war against us.”<sup>40</sup> Both de Klerk and IFP officials denied any role in the massacre.

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<sup>36</sup> *Anatomy of a Miracle*, pp. 182-184.

<sup>37</sup> Ellis, pp. 285-291; Hermann Giliomee, *The Afrikaners: Biography of a People* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2003), 640-641. In 1992, de Klerk appointed Judge Richard Goldstone to investigate the political violence. In that same year, de Klerk fired top military generals and twenty-three military officers.

<sup>38</sup> *Anatomy of a Miracle*, p. 185.

<sup>39</sup> Bill Keller, “39 In South Africa Die In a Massacre,” *New York Times*, June 19, 1992.

<sup>40</sup> *Anatomy of a Miracle*, p. 206.

The ANC offered the alleged police involvement in the Boipatong massacre as a motive to withdraw from negotiations with the NP.<sup>41</sup> The TRC never undertook a detailed investigation of the massacre, and the Commission alleged that, “there had been direct collusion between the security forces and the IFP, and that the security forces’ direct participation in the massacre was alleged.”<sup>42</sup> “However, the AC rejected the idea of security force involvement. The AC accepted the version of most applicants that denied security force involvement in the massacre.”<sup>43</sup> The Boipatong massacre almost derailed the negotiation process between the NP and ANC. Unfortunately Boipatong was just one of many acts of violence that took place during the “transitional period.”

### **South Africa’s Transitional Period (1990-1994)**

The Unlawful Organisations Act No. 34 of 1960 commenced on April 7, 1960 and allowed the NP to ban any unauthorized political parties. The NP banned the ANC the following day on April 8, 1960 and two years later Mandela was arrested for sabotage.<sup>44</sup> In 1990, the apartheid government released Mandela from prison and unbanned the ANC. The reemergence of ANC activity and the release of Mandela ushered in a new period in South Africa. The NP also made internal changes by electing de Klerk as head of the NP and president in 1989. De Klerk was not a military man like his predecessor, P.W. Botha, and many within the NP thought of him as liberal. De Klerk did not immediately turn over control of the nation to majority rule, but shortly after Mandela’s release, he negotiated with him and the ANC. South Africa

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<sup>41</sup> *The Afrikaners*, p. 652.

<sup>42</sup> TRC Report, vol. 6, p. 585.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.* The AC rejected the evidence of Andries Matanzima Nosenga, the one applicant who supported victims’ assertions that the security forces were complicit.

<sup>44</sup> Sampie Terreblanche, *A History of Inequality in South Africa 1652-2002* (Pietermaritzburg, South Africa: University of Natal Press, 2002), 348.

transformed immensely between 1990 and 1994. The negotiations between the NP and ANC and an eventual transition to majority rule in South Africa makes the “transitional period” a unique period in South African history. The NP took strides by 1990 to present a chance for majority rule, however over the next four years violence plagued South Africa as the ANC negotiated with the NP for a transfer of power, and ultimately majority rule.

South Africa’s “transitional period” was a period plagued by murders and disappearances.<sup>45</sup> ANC leaders blamed some of the violence on the “third force,” Chief Mangosuthu Gatsha Buthelezi, and the IFP. Buthelezi formed Inkatha in 1975. Originally, stated that it was not a political party, and instead he insisted that it was an organization focused on promoting Zulu culture and history.<sup>46</sup> Inkatha and the ANC had friendly relations until the 1980’s, but that changed when Inkatha negotiated with the NP for political leadership in KwaZulu.<sup>47</sup> The ANC viewed Buthelezi’s actions as direct opposition to the freedom movement. ANC and Inkatha tensions continued to develop into the early 1990’s, and in July 1990, Inkatha became an official political party, the IFP.<sup>48</sup> The political rivalry between the two parties flared during the “transitional period.”

At the same time in South Africa the NP, ANC, and other political parties, including the IFP, negotiated at the Convention for Democratic South Africa (CODESA) with the hope of creating a democratic government. Negotiations between the NP and the ANC became the focal point of CODESA and other political parties were swept to the side, including the IFP. The IFP

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<sup>45</sup> Leonard Thompson, *A History of South Africa* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000), 248. Murders committed during the “transitional period:” 3,699 in 1990; 2,706 in 1991; 3,347 in 1992; 3,794 in 1993; and 2,476 in 1994.

<sup>46</sup> Daphna Golan, “Inkatha and Its Use of the Zulu Past,” *History in Africa* 18 (1991).

Roger Southall, “Inkatha and the Politics of Compromise,” *African Affairs* 80, no. 321 (October 1981).

Nicholas Cope, “The Zulu Petit Bourgeoisie and Zulu Nationalism in the 1920s: Origins of Inkatha,” *Journal of Southern African Studies* 16, no. 3 (September 1990).

<sup>47</sup> J.D. Omer-Cooper, *History of Southern Africa* (London: James Currey Publishers, 1994), 139-40.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

withdrew from CODESA when it determined a power sharing government was not a viable reality.<sup>49</sup> Arguably, CODESA was not a democratic process. The negotiations were private and the ANC negotiated with the NP prior to CODESA. In addition, the ANC did not consult South Africa's wider black population, but instead only consulted ANC members. However, that is not to say that an unfair negotiation system cannot lead to a democratic state.<sup>50</sup>

Several outbursts of violence erupted during CODESA that threatened to halt negotiations. Mandela and the ANC blamed the IFP and Buthelezi for the attacks on ANC supporters. In addition, Mandela and the ANC blamed de Klerk, the NP, and the "third force" for supporting the political violence in an attempt to destabilize the nation and the negotiation process.<sup>51</sup> The negotiations broke down in May of 1992 due to the ongoing violence.<sup>52</sup> The ANC enacted its "Leipzig" plan when the negotiations stalled due to political violence, some of which the ANC blamed on the "third force." The plan called for mass action in the form of street and industrial protests. The "Leipzig" campaign lasted from August to September of 1992 and it had mixed results. The ANC was unable to force a change of the government and the ANC did not remove the security forces from active duties. However, the ANC was able to cripple the economy and the ANC showed that it was able to make South Africa ungovernable.<sup>53</sup>

The political violence was constant throughout CODESA and the entirety of the "transitional period." The supporters of apartheid, specifically the Security Branch and the IFP, worked to end the negotiation process and prevent a democratic change in South Africa. Violence was a tool used throughout the "transitional period" by apartheid supporters to uphold the apartheid regime. Later the TRC was tasked with discovering who and what was responsible

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<sup>49</sup> *Tomorrow is Another Country*, pp. 130-132.

<sup>50</sup> Vincent Maphai, "Prospects for a Democratic South Africa," *International Affairs* 69, no. 2 (April 1993): 224-25.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 139-141.

<sup>52</sup> James Hamill, "South Africa: From Codesa to Leipzig," *The World Today* 49, no. 1 (January 1993): 12.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.* p. 14.

for the violence of the “transitional period” and the numerous crimes against humanity that occurred during apartheid.

### **What was the TRC?**

*[This Hearing] is the beginning of giving the voiceless a chance to speak, giving the excluded a chance to be centred and giving the powerless an opportunity to empower themselves.*

- Thenjiwe Mtshozi, former chairperson on the Commission on Gender Equality and currently Deputy Secretary General of the ANC, at the opening of the TRC’s hearing on women in Johannesburg, 29 July 1997.<sup>54</sup>

The question of how to deal with the breakdown of a criminal regime became a major issue in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The first issue is whether the new democratic sovereign should punish members of the former regime. New democracies must decide whether to criminally punish or grant amnesty to members of the former regime, or grant said members amnesty. If a transitional justice system punishes members of the former regime then said system is using new law as the basis of punishment, or using law to punish that did not exist at the time the crimes were committed.

The Nuremberg trial is a famous example of how the international community criminally prosecuted former regime members. Leaders of the Nazi regime received death as their punishment. Both the Nazis and the apartheid regime moved their citizens to do “bad” with propaganda of what was “good.” Therefore, it is difficult for former followers of the old regime to distinguish between right and wrong in a new democracy. Thus, arguably, criminal prosecution is not effective in shaping a new democracy, and a better option is a transitional justice system that incorporates uncovering past crimes, amnesty, and educating former regime

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<sup>54</sup> Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa Report, vol. 1, p. 103 (South Africa, 1998), <http://www.justice.gov.za/trc/report/finalreport/Volume%201.pdf> (accessed February 19, 2012).

followers.<sup>55</sup> South Africa decided to adopt a transitional justice system, the TRC, and it is because of what the TRC discovered that makes this paper possible.

The TRC became an official quasi-judicial body in April of 1995, appointed to discover the truths regarding the crimes committed during apartheid. Law established the TRC and its' goal to, "... promote national unity and reconciliation in a spirit of understanding which transcends the conflicts and divisions of the past."<sup>56</sup> The TRC gave the black majority and other groups silenced during apartheid a voice to speak out against the NP's crimes against humanity. Providing a platform for apartheid victims to speak was essential to the reconciliation process. Moreover, the TRC offered victims an avenue to pursue the truth of what happened to their deceased friends and family members. The extensive report produced by the TRC is an example of its attention to detail and its ability to make objective findings.

The TRC consisted of two independent bodies. First, the Human Rights Violation Committee (HRVC) provided a platform for victims to tell their stories. Second, the Amnesty Committee (AC) allowed those responsible for a crime to explain their side of the story. The accused had to be entirely truthful about the events of the crime he committed in order to receive amnesty.<sup>57</sup> This meant a South African police officer who shot an ANC activist could explain why said person was murdered, how, when, where, and their reasons for doing so. During the "transitional period" members of the NP and security force demanded that they be granted

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<sup>55</sup> Nenad Dimitrijević, "Justice beyond Blame: Moral Justification of (The Idea of) A Truth Commission," *The Journal of Conflict Resolution* 50, no. 3 (June 2006): 371-72.

<sup>56</sup> National Unity and Reconciliation Act, Section(3)(1); Marek M. Kaminski and Monika Nalepa, "Judging Transitional Justice: A New Criterion for Evaluating Truth Revelation Procedures," *The Journal of Conflict Resolution* 50, no. 3 (June 2006): 383-408. "New" law established the TRC and "new" law became retroactive to punish individuals for "old" laws. There is a debate as to whether a new regime should maintain "new" law in the strictest sense and not apply its "new" law retroactively, thus avoiding retribution.

<sup>57</sup> Anurima Bhargava, "Defining Political Crimes: A Case Study of the South Africa Truth and Reconciliation Commission," *Columbia Law Review* 102, no. 5 (June 2002): 1304-1339.

amnesty if they agreed to a transfer of power.<sup>58</sup> Ultimately, if an individual was forthcoming and truthful about the crime he committed then the AC could grant that individual complete immunity.<sup>59</sup> The TRC conducted most hearings in public and gave the press an opportunity to film the hearings.<sup>60</sup>

The TRC made several findings of facts related to the “third force” and concluded that, “...little evidence exists of a centrally directed, coherent and formally constituted ‘third force.’”<sup>61</sup> In addition, the TRC found that:

The Commission finds that a network of security and ex-security force operatives, often acting in conjunction with right-wing elements and/or sectors of the IFP, fomented, initiated, facilitated, and engaged in violence which resulted in gross violations of human rights, including random and targeted killings.

The Commission finds that such networks had established ‘partnerships’ during the 1980’s with pro-government individuals or groups at a local level which then acted in concert to perpetrate such violations. The Commission finds further that the sanction of illegal activities by security force operatives during the 1980s provided the basis for their continuation in the 1990s.

The Commission finds that such network, at times, functioned with the active collusion and/or knowledge of senior security force personnel, and that the former government, either deliberately or by omissions, failed to take sufficient steps to put an end to such practices.

The Commission also finds that the success of ‘Third Force’ attempts to generate violence was at least in part a consequence of extremely high levels of political intolerance, for which both the liberation movements and other structures such as the IFP are held to be morally and politically accountable.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> James L. Gibson, “The Truth about Truth and Reconciliation in South Africa,” *International Political Science Review* 24, no. 4 (October 2005): 343.

<sup>59</sup> The AC had no obligation to grant a truthful applicant amnesty. In some instances, the AC did not grant amnesty to truthful applicants who were guilty of multiple murders, such as Eugene de Kock.

<sup>60</sup> Frances Reid and Deborah Hoffmann, *Long Night’s Journey into Day*, DVD (2000); John Boorman, *In My Country*, DVD (2004); Tom Hooper, *Red Dust*, DVD (2004). Films provide a dramatic point of view regarding the TRC. These films allow the viewer to visualize the images and emotions associated with the TRC process. All three films focus on crimes white South African committed against black South Africans. However, this gives the viewer an inaccurate or “unreal” portrayal of the TRC, considering roughly 80% of the trials involved black individuals seeking amnesty and attesting to their crimes.

<sup>61</sup> TRC Report, vol. 5, p. 238.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*

In other words, reading within the four corners of the its findings regarding the “third force,” then the TRC conclude that:

- (1) There was not an organization named the “Third Force,” but instead a network of organizations that came under the umbrella term “Third Force;”
- (2) Groups involved with “Third Force” activities worked for the common goal of destabilizing South Africa to prevent a democratic election and;
- (3) The TRC does not accuse former President F.W. de Klerk of involvement in “Third Force activity.”

South African historians still debate the aforementioned issues related to the “third force.” Specifically, historians argue about the existence of a “third force,” what organizations made up the “third force,” and whether or not de Klerk played a role in “third force” activity. The historians involved in the “third force” debate often use the same sources to support their arguments. Specifically historians use the TRC’s report to support their arguments related to the “third force.” Despite the efforts of the TRC, the historical “truths” regarding the “third force” are still a topic of debate among historians.

### **The “Third Force” Debate Among Historians**

Historians began to incorporate the “third force” into their works in the 1990’s.<sup>63</sup> Discussions of the “third force” appear in works that encompass South Africa’s history from the arrival of Europeans to the present, works that focus on apartheid, and works that focus on specific issues such as the “transitional period,” Afrikaners, and the NP. Historians who discuss the issue of the “third force,” often support their arguments with similar sources. The diverse literature provides a spectrum of arguments related to the “third force.” At one end, historians argue that a “third force” organization existed and operated based on commands from high-

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<sup>63</sup> *Anatomy of a Miracle; Tomorrow is Another Country*. Waldmeri and Allister are not historians, but they are professional journalists. Their works are firsthand accounts of the “transitional period” violence and are keystone works to a discussion of “transitional period” violence and the “Third Force.”

ranking political officials, including de Klerk. At the other end, historians argue that there is no concrete evidence to prove that a “third force” existed, moreover they suggest de Klerk had no knowledge of covert operations aimed at preventing a transfer of power. Finally, the majority of historians take a middle ground that does not deny the existence of “third force” activity, but falls short of claiming that a coherent “third force” existed, and that de Klerk had knowledge of a “third force.” The aforementioned historians choose to use neutral language and avoid terms such as, “third force.” The entirety of the spectrum addresses the violence that plagued South African during the “transitional period,” and discusses the major events and actors that encompassed said violence.

Nigel Worden represents the minority that argues that the existence of a “third force” is an absolute truth. Worden argues that Mandela’s claim in 1990 that a “third force” existed was a credible one.<sup>64</sup> Worden states, “Accusations made by the ANC that a ‘third force’ was at work became credible when it was revealed in 1991 that the government had provided Inkatha with financial backing and military training.”<sup>65</sup> The existence of a “third force” is central to Worden’s argument of government involvement in the violence that took place on the Rand and KwaZulu during the “transitional period.” Worden states,

Such violence by the army and police against ANC supporters was a continuation of the deliberate government policy of elimination and destabilization of its opponents through Botha’s National Security Management System.

Other historians support Worden’s arguments. Historian Leonard Thompson takes Worden’s argument further when he directly accuses the state of violent involvement.<sup>66</sup>

Thompson states, “It was the South African state in the form of the government, the civil service,

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<sup>64</sup> Nigel Worden, *The Making of Modern South Africa: Conquest, Apartheid, Democracy* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), 154.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Leonard Thompson, *A History of South Africa* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000); Nancy L. Clark and William H. Worger, *South Africa: The Rise and Fall of Apartheid* (Harlow, UK: Pearson Longman, 2004), 117.

and the security forces that was largely responsible for the killings.”<sup>67</sup> In addition, historians Nancy L. Clark and William H. Worger bolster Thompson’s argument when they state, “As became publicly known only a year later, de Klerk’s government created a secret slush fund to support Inkatha, and encouraged the organization to disrupt ANC meetings and intimidate Mandela’s supports.”<sup>68</sup> The aforementioned historians take a hard stance on the existence of a “third force,” and direct government involvement with “third force” activity.

Historian Hermann Giliomee represents the minority view that dismisses the existence of a “third force,” and insists that de Klerk played no role in “third force” activity. He argues that the TRC concluded that there was no evidence of a “third force.” Giliomee argues that the violence during the “transitional period” played an important role in the negotiation process.<sup>69</sup> He describes the violence as a “low-level civil war,” in which one side would perpetrate a massacre and the other side would retaliate through violent means.<sup>70</sup> He argues that the TRC concluded that there was little evidence of a formally instituted “third force.”<sup>71</sup> He cites the TRC report to support his argument. Giliomee goes on to use the TRC to argue that de Klerk was not involved in “third force” activities. In addition, he attempts to illustrate that Mandela and the ANC created the term the “third force,” and used the media to spread the concept. Giliomee states:

The South African Communist Party, which played such a key role in the ANC propaganda machine, made it its main objective to discredit the security forces.

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid., p. 248.

<sup>68</sup> *South Africa: The Rise and Fall of Apartheid*, p. 153. Clark and Worger do not use the term “Third Force,” however they argue that government-sponsored violence was a major factor that made the transition to democracy difficult.

<sup>69</sup> *The Afrikaners*, p. 640.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

The propaganda surrounding the Boipatong massacre, which Tutu cited as evidence that De Klerk knew, illustrated this tactic.<sup>72</sup>

It is difficult to find another historian who dismisses the idea of a “third force,” or “third force” activity, however Robert Harvey supports Giliomee’s argument that de Klerk was not involved with “transitional period violence.”<sup>73</sup>

Harvey states, “In fact Mandela’s reaction was well over the top. Blame for the Inkatha campaign, even though abetted by hard-line members of the security force, could in no sense be laid at de Klerk’s door.”<sup>74</sup> Harvey does not take a hard stance against the “third force,” like Giliomee, however his adamant stance regarding de Klerk’s non-involvement with “transitional period” violence groups him in the same spectrum as Giliomee.

The majority of historians discuss the complexities of “transitional period” violence, but abstain from using terms such as the “third force” and refrain from making accusations of de Klerk’s involvement with the violence.<sup>75</sup> P. Eric Louw offers an argument that fits in the middle of the aforementioned two groups of arguments regarding the “third force,” and depicts the massacre at Boipatong as a nighttime raid that led forty-nine people dead. He places the blame for the massacre on Zulu hostel workers, and he avoids making a generalization that all the killers involved were IFP supporters. In addition, he draws attention to the fact that both the ANC and NP pointed fingers accusing one another of inciting the violence.<sup>76</sup> Louw chooses neutral language and argues that both the ANC and NP were responsible for the massacre. Other

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid., p. 652. Giliomee dovetails his discussion of the “Third Force” with the ANC’s control over the media. He is insistent that Mandela and the ANC created the term the “Third Force,” and that they used the media to spread said mythical idea.

<sup>73</sup> Robert Harvey, *The Fall of Apartheid: The Inside Story from Smuts to Mbeki* (Houndmills, UK: Palgrave, 2001).

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., p. 236.

<sup>75</sup> P. Eric Louw, *The Rise, Fall, and Legacy of Apartheid* (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishing, 2004); Robert Ross, *A Concise History of South Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Roger B. Beck, *The History of South Africa* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2000); Heather Deegan, *The Politics of the New South Africa: Apartheid and After* (London: Pearson Education Limited, 2001).

<sup>76</sup> *The Rise, Fall, and Legacy of Apartheid*, pp. 166-167.

historians follow Louw's middle of the road approach when discussing the "third force." Like Louw, historians Robert Ross, Roger B. Beck, and Heather Deegan all use the Boipatong massacre to illuminate "transitional period" violence. They all discuss accusations of government involvement, but they all fall short of directly blaming a "third force" or de Klerk for the violence.

The historiography regarding the "third force" illuminates how divided the issue is among historians. This paper seeks to provide clarity to the "third force" argument by examining the TRC report and AC transcripts of de Kock. These primary sources illuminate "transitional period" violence, and de Kock's AC transcripts offer a firsthand account of an individual involved with "transitional period" violence. The aforementioned spectrum of historians use TRC reports to bolster their diverse arguments, but none uses de Kock's AC testimony itself as a viable source to support their arguments. This paper's examination of de Kock's testimony will both support and counter several of the arguments that fall in the spectrum of discussion related to the "third force."

### **Examining "Third Force" Activity Through the AC Transcripts of Eugene de Kock**

*My personal attitude and the attitude of some of my members was that we would rather fight to the bitter end, that we would rather enter a war and run to the mountains before we reached any point of compromise.*

- Eugene de Kock's testimony to the Amnesty Committee, February 22, 2000.<sup>77</sup>

The TRC was not the only judicial body used by South Africa to propound justice on persons who committed crimes against humanities during apartheid. South Africans knew about the crimes committed by some individuals, including de Kock, during apartheid. The infamous

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<sup>77</sup> Truth and Reconciliation Commission Amnesty Hearing, *Attack on Transit House in Swaziland*, part 1(South Africa, 2000), <http://www.justice.gov.za/trc/amntrans/2000/200222pt.htm> (accessed February 19, 2012).

assassins of apartheid, such as de Kock, faced criminal charges when the “transitional period” ended and South Africa became a democracy in 1994. In 1995, South Africa’s Supreme Court charged de Kock with numerous criminal crimes including murder, conspiracy to commit murder, fraud, and illegal possession of weapons and ammunition. De Kock’s defense team argued that he was a government employee and acted of his superiors’ orders. His defense team also attempted to illustrate that an intense fight existed between the NP, ANC and other political parties that threatened to overthrow the government. After an eighteen-month trial, the Supreme Court found de Kock guilty of eighty-nine charges, including six charges of murder.<sup>78</sup> The Supreme Court sentenced him to a prison term of 262 years.<sup>79</sup>

De Kock sought to avoid a lengthy prison term even before the Court sentenced him. First, de Kock’s defense is evidence that he wanted to avoid a prison sentenced. His defense at his 1995-1996 trial illustrates that he wanted to shift the blame of his crimes to his superiors who ordered him to commit those crimes. Second, de Kock attempted to mitigate his sentence prior to the Court rendering its final judgment of a prison term. De Kock informed the Court that he planned to pursue amnesty via the TRC and he vowed to divulge more information regarding his past crimes and his superiors’ orders for said crimes. He stated to the Court, “The end result of my amnesty application is to go free.” He stated further that, “Had I not been sitting in this court, I would have already applied for amnesty.”<sup>80</sup> De Kock planned to testify in front of the AC and, based on his statements to the Supreme Court, it appears that he looked forward to providing his amnesty testimony. Testifying to the AC was de Kock’s only way out of prison. The AC

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<sup>78</sup> “De Kock Trial to Conclude on Wednesday,” *South African Press Association*, October 29, 1996. “The murder charges relate to the deaths of give would-be robbers in an ambush outside of Nelspruit in 1992 and the murder of askari Goodwill Sikhakhane, who was killed near Greytown in 1991 on de Kock’s orders to prevent him from revealing police involvement in the disappearance of ANC members who were part of Operation Vula.”

<sup>79</sup> Sudarsan Raghavan, “Trial tests South Africa’s will to forgive,” *Christian Science Monitor* 88, no. 214 (September 1996).

<sup>80</sup> Corinna Schuler, “South Africa: wrestling with forgiveness,” *Christian Science Monitor* 91, no. 156 (July 1999).

provided de Kock with a platform to place blame for his crimes on the NP, however de Kock fell short of blaming many high ranking officials, include de Klerk. Arguably, de Kock's failure to accuse high-ranking officials, whom he had no contact with, of ordering the crimes that he committed, bolsters the credibility of his AC testimony. Despite his failure to accuse de Klerk of ordering him to commit crimes, de Kock indicated that the NP involved itself with "third force" activity.

De Kock carried out the wishes and orders of the government, but he did not always agree with the government's policy, specifically the government's treatment of the ANC during the "transitional period." De Kock staunchly supported white rule in South Africa, but by the "transitional period" he became disenchanted with NP policy. He continued to work with NP officials, however he also worked with the IFP. Allegations that the NP and IFP worked together to destabilize the ANC are well documented, however Buthelezi always denied that the IFP supported violence.<sup>81</sup> De Kock testified in front of the AC that he never received orders from Buthelezi to commit a violent act.<sup>82</sup> De Kock became an IFP member in 1991, despite Buthelezi's stance of non-violence.<sup>83</sup> De Kock's status as an IFP member and his status as C-10 commander support the allegations that the IFP and NP collaborated to destabilize South Africa during the "transitional period." This relationship links political parties, the former South African government, and the Security Branch as perpetrators of violence for a common purpose – prevent democratic elections and destabilize the country.

The unbanning of the ANC on February 1, 1990 was central to de Kock's decision to leave the NP. De Kock testified that the role of Vlakplaas officially switched after the unbanning

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<sup>81</sup> Truth and Reconciliation Commission Amnesty Hearing, *De Kock Hearing 1*, part 2 (South Africa, 1999), [http://www.justice.gov.za/trc/amntrans/1999/9905240623\\_pre\\_990525pt.htm](http://www.justice.gov.za/trc/amntrans/1999/9905240623_pre_990525pt.htm) (accessed February 19, 2012).

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*

of the ANC. He testified that Vlakplaas was supposed to switch from committing political violence to combating crime. However, he testified that Vlakplaas' role never changed in practice.<sup>84</sup> De Kock questioned his superior, General Engelbrecht, as to why C-10 did not disband. De Kock testified that,

General Engelbrecht's response to me was that it could be that the negotiations would be unsuccessful and that we would have to be prepared for immediate action against the organizations such as the ANC, SACP, as well as the PAC and that is why we were to remain in that organisation as such.<sup>85</sup>

De Kock's testimony underlines how that high-ranking military officials sought to destabilize the nation in order prevent successful negotiations between the ANC and NP.

Tensions between the IFP and the ANC flared after the unbanning of the ANC. De Kock and other members of Vlakplaas chose the side of the IFP. An AC chairperson asked De Kock, "You have already mentioned the conflict between the IFP and the ANC at that time [transitional period], did you choose any side in this regard?"<sup>86</sup> De Kock responded, "Me and some of my members, not all of them, chose a side and it was the side of the IFP."<sup>87</sup> De Kock believed black majority rule was inevitable, but he did not want to see the ANC in power. He testified, "I had no doubt that we would have a black government, but I did not want a communist government."<sup>88</sup> In addition, he believed the ANC threatened to exterminate the IFP. De Kock testified, "...it was a question of enabling the IFP to defend themselves before they were wiped out, because they were on their way to being wiped out and it was a matter of sympathising with a group."<sup>89</sup> Arguably, de Kock's support of the IFP was "third force" activity as defined by the TRC.

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<sup>84</sup> Truth and Reconciliation Commission Amnesty Hearing, *De Kock III Hearing*, part 2 (South Africa, 1999), [http://www.justice.gov.za/trc/amntrans/1999/99081631\\_pre\\_990818pt.htm](http://www.justice.gov.za/trc/amntrans/1999/99081631_pre_990818pt.htm) (accessed February 19, 2012).

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> Truth and Reconciliation Commission Amnesty Hearing, *De Kock III Hearing*, part 7 (South Africa, 1999), [http://www.justice.gov.za/trc/amntrans/1999/99081631\\_pre\\_990825pt.htm](http://www.justice.gov.za/trc/amntrans/1999/99081631_pre_990825pt.htm) (accessed February 19, 2012).

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

After De Kock and members of Vlakplaas sided with the IFP, they then supplied the IFP with weapons.<sup>90</sup> De Kock and Vlakplaas supplied sections of the IFP, located in the former Transvaal Province, with weapons from 1990 through 1993.<sup>91</sup> Historical political tensions existed between the IFP and ANC prior to 1990, however those tensions climaxed during the “transitional period,” and intensified when de Kock and Vlakplaas supplied the IFP with weapons. Supplying the IFP with weapons is a typical example of “third force” activity associated with the political violence of the “transitional period.” De Kock and Vlakplaas encouraged the violence without actively being present at violent events, and that allowed them to avoid the media spotlight. However, de Kock and C-10 engaged in violent acts themselves.

De Kock believed that the ANC continued to engage in revolutionary tactics even after the unbanning of the ANC.<sup>92</sup> De Kock explained to the AC that credible evidence proved that the ANC was smuggling weapons into South Africa. De Kock launched an operation called “Operation Ex-calibre” and its goal was to arrest suspected ANC gun smugglers.<sup>93</sup> By the time the operation concluded, De Kock and other members of Vlakplaas seized a tremendous amount of weapons that were smuggled into the country.<sup>94</sup> De Kock received commendations for his role in the operation. De Kock testified that the operation was a success and stated, “. . .in the process a total of 28 persons were arrested, 24 went to Court and 4 died, and all of them were Mozambicans, who had been involved among others.”<sup>95</sup> “Operation Ex-calibre” is a prime example of the diverse tasks that de Kock and members of Vlakplaas engaged in. Moreover, it is another example of “third force” activity that de Kock and C-10 directly engaged in.

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<sup>90</sup> *De Kock III Hearing*, part 2.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>92</sup> Truth and Reconciliation Commission Amnesty Hearing, *De Kock III Hearing*, part 3 (South Africa, 1999), [http://www.justice.gov.za/trc/amntrans/1999/99081631\\_pre\\_990819pt.htm](http://www.justice.gov.za/trc/amntrans/1999/99081631_pre_990819pt.htm) (accessed February 19, 2012).

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*

Even if de Kock's claims of ANC revolutionary tactics are true, the ANC also participated in peaceful negotiations at CODESA. De Kock, members of C-10, and members of the SAP sought to derail the efforts of CODESA. The ANC alleged that there was "third force" activity operating and inciting violence during CODESA. De Kock believed that the secrecy of Vlakplaas became critical during CODESA. He believed that if the media could link the NP, the government, to the violence then the NP could no longer deny the existence of a "third force."<sup>96</sup> The AC questioned de Kock about the effect that evidence of a "third force" would have on the ANC, the Security Branch, and the government. De Kock testified that,

Well the Security Police and the government could then have stopped negotiating and just handed it over. It would have been put to them in a very bad light and there would have been no situation in which they stand, in which they could have said that it was no third force...<sup>97</sup>

Government involvement was necessary to keep the actions of de Kock and Vlakplaas a secret, and de Kock offers testimony of government knowledge regarding the operations of Vlakplaas.

The ANC made allegations about the existence of Vlakplaas, but it was never able to prove the existence of Vlakplaas during the "transitional period." At the same time parliament and other Ministers denied the existence of a "third force." De Kock offered the AC testimony that contradicted the denials of the government. He described to the AC how government and military officials visited him and other members at Vlakplaas. He testified that government Minister Vlok, General Kat Liebenberg, and General of Special Forces Joop Joubert all visited Vlakplaas, and that the government had full knowledge of their visits. De Kock testified that he only knew that Minister Vlok was aware of Vlakplaas and its violent operations.<sup>98</sup> De Kock's testimony does not conclusively prove government involvement in "third force" activity,

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<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

however it illustrates how de Kock and C-10 were able to operate without government interference.

Throughout the “transitional period,” de Kock gave orders to members of Vlakplaas to carry out “third force” activity. De Kock and members of Vlakplaas collaborated with the SAP, Security Branch, military, the NP, and the IFP with the common purpose of destabilizing South Africa. Vlakplaas operated inside and outside of South Africa with help of high-ranking government and military officials. The TRC found that,

...the success of the ‘Third Force’ attempts to generate violence was at least in part a consequence of extremely high levels of political intolerance for which all parties to the conflict are held to be morally and politically accountable.<sup>99</sup>

Despite evidence of government involvement with “third force” activity, it remains impossible to link former President de Klerk with “third force” activity.

De Kock testified to the AC that de Klerk ordered “third force” activity in 1993, however de Kock had retired from C-10 by that time. He testified that de Klerk ordered Special Forces to launch an attack on a house in Umtata.<sup>100</sup> Special Forces killed seven people in the attack. De Kock did not offer evidence to support his claim against de Klerk. Moreover, the TRC did not produce evidence linking de Klerk with the attack in Umtata.

De Kock testified in front of the AC on several occasions and testified that he and members of Vlakplaas conducted operations in Lesotho and Swaziland. He testified that the government awarded him decorations for his actions in those operations. The AC asked de Kock,

...you have mentioned the names of people like Mr. F.W. de Klerk, Cabinet Ministers, MP’s my understanding is that you are not implicating these people in the sense of suggesting that they had a knowledge of a specific operation before they were carried out, but they generally knew what was happening, am I correct?<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> TRC Report, volume 2, p. 710.

<sup>100</sup> *De Kock Hearing* 1, part 2.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*

De Kock responded with,

Chairperson, yes and also no, because in the case of the operation in Lesotho, where those decorations were issued, those decorations could only be issued by the State President. As far as I know the SOE decorations can only be issued by the State President, so there would be a request for why this decoration is to be awarded. Somebody would say this is for the bomb in London and somebody else could say there was an operation in Swaziland or in another case, there was an operation in Lesotho, so by nature of the situation, I had no doubt within myself that they did know about these operations.<sup>102</sup>

De Kock attempted to link de Klerk to “third force” activity on the two aforementioned occasions. However, on both occasions he offered little evidence to the AC to support his testimony, although it is reasonable to conclude that “extremely high levels of political intolerance” existed. In addition, it is also reasonable to conclude that a high-ranking government official approved the decorations awarded to de Kock for his involvement in the two aforementioned C-10 operations. There is a lack of conclusive evidence linking de Klerk to “third force” activity and the TRC could not produce evidence of the link.

Dovetailing de Kock’s AC testimony with the TRC report offers a unique glimpse of the “third force” activity that took place during the “transitional period.” De Kock’s testimony shows that a united “third force” organization did not exist. However, several organizations collaborated and engaged in “third force” activity in order to destabilize South Africa during the “transitional period.” His testimony illuminates the numerous organizations that played a role in “third force” activity, including but not limited to, the SAP, Security Branch, Vlakplaas (C-10), MI, the military, the IFP, and the government (NP). In addition, his testimony depicts the complexity of “third force” activity. “Third Force” activity included violent operations carried out by Vlakplaas, non-violent operations carried out by Vlakplaas – providing the IFP with weapons and military training, and political warfare – inciting violence between the IFP and

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<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

ANC. Furthermore, de Kock's testimony provides a frame of reference for the high-ranking government, military, and security officials involved with "third force" activity.

## **Conclusion**

Mandela used the term "third force" publicly in 1990, and by that time white resistance to a transfer of power was already entrenched in some high-ranking officials of the military, Security Branch, government, and de Kock. De Kock spent over twenty years with the SAP and counter-insurgency units before he became the commander of Vlakplaas in 1985. Moreover, he spent over twenty years killing for the NP. De Kock's SAP and counter-insurgency background illustrates his first hand knowledge and experience with "third force" activity.

Arguably, de Kock, or "Prime Evil" is the face of "third force" activity. His AC testimony provided the TRC with invaluable insight into the security operations conducted throughout the "transitional period." However, de Kock was not the only individual responsible for "third force" activity throughout the "transitional period," as many other higher-ranking officials were involved, but never held responsible for their participation in the violence. Unfortunately for historians it has not been easy to accumulate credible sources regarding the "third force," because the NP left little to no documentation of such an organization and high-ranking officials, specifically former President P.W. Botha, refused to give testimony to the TRC.<sup>103</sup>

The TRC's report and the testimony provided by individuals to the AC helped historians understand what "third force" activity consisted of and who participated in said activity throughout the "transitional period." De Kock's testimony to the AC is a keystone element to the

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<sup>103</sup> Botha's refusal to testify is significant, because he was the chief of the South African Defense Force in the early 1980's. He had a close relationship with the military and Security Branch, unlike de Klerk who did not have a military or security background. In addition, de Kock became commander of C-10 when Botha was president.

understanding of “third force” activity. His knowledge of the SAP, Security Branch, military, and NP politics is immense. In addition, the AC found his testimony credible.<sup>104</sup> His aforementioned testimony is extensive and detailed, and more elaborate than interviews he gave in the past to journalists. De Kock’s AC testimony provides the framework to understand the actions of Vlakplaas and the violence perpetrated by the apartheid regime. Moreover, the TRC’s report provides clear and precise conclusions related to “third force” activity.

The TRC concluded that there was not an organization named the “third force,” but instead a network of organizations that came under the umbrella term “third force;” groups involved with “third force” activities worked for the common goal of destabilizing South Africa to prevent a democratic election; and the TRC does not accuse former President F.W. de Klerk of involvement in “third force” activity.”<sup>105</sup> De Kock’s testimony supports the aforementioned conclusions. De Kock named high-ranking officials who knew about the operations of Vlakplaas; his testimony provides the names of several organizations that Vlakplaas conducted “third force” activity with and he did not provide any conclusive testimony that linked de Klerk to “third force” activity. De Kock’s AC testimony provides the imagery of the violence and reveals the names of the players involved with the violence of the “transitional period,” and the TRC’s report provides documentation that summarizes the violence. If one dovetails the two sources, then one can obtain a colorful and insightful understanding into the issue that is the “third force.”

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<sup>104</sup> Truth and Reconciliation Commission Amnesty Decision, *AC/99/0354* (South Africa, 1999), <http://www.justice.gov.za/trc/decisions/1999/ac990345.htm> (accessed January 24, 2012); Truth and Reconciliation Commission Amnesty Decision, *AC/2000/084* (South Africa, 2000), <http://www.justice.gov.za/trc/decisions/2000/ac20084.htm> (accessed January 24, 2012).

<sup>105</sup> Organizations working together to destabilize South Africa during the “transitional period” for the common purpose of delaying a democratic election and a transfer of power to the black majority

The debate surrounding the “third force” and the “third force’s” existence in the violence of the “transitional period” will likely rage on. However, this paper argues that the role of the “third force” should not continue to be analyzed, but instead “third force” activity should be analyzed. It is misleading for historians to use the term “third force.” The “third force” did not exist as an organization, but was a way to categorize specific “transitional period” violence that spawned from Mandela publicly using the term “third force.” However, it useful to group organizations and individuals who conspired together during the “transitional period” and engaged in and facilitated violence within South Africa, and sought to create instability within the country and delay a transfer of power. This paper suggests using the phrase “third force activity” to describe the aforementioned, but other phraseology will suffice so long as it is well defined and dovetailed with supporting sources.

It is clear from de Kock’s testimony that C-10 played a significant role in “transitional period” violence. His testimony shows that C-10 engaged in violence as an organization and facilitated the violence by providing funding and military training to the IFP. There were several organizations involved with “third force” activity, but arguably, the party most to blame is the NP. The NP was the government and the government was behind ordering and facilitating the violence of the “transitional period.” Despite the government’s role in the violence, it is impossible to prove the claim that de Klerk supported “third force” activity.

Ultimately, this paper provides a starting point for future “third force” debate by deconstructing the term “third force” and exposing it as an umbrella term for organizations that participated in violence for a common goal during the “transitional period.” This paper debunks the existence of a formal “third force” organization, but supports arguments that the apartheid regime engaged in covert violence during the “transitional period.” In addition, this paper holds

those accountable for “third force” activity, and challenges accusations against individuals who were not involved with “third force” activity. De Kock certainly earned the term “Prime Evil,” but perhaps his valuable testimony will help a nation heal and its people reconcile after decades under a regime responsible for crimes against humanity.

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