INTRODUCTION

Violent political conflict has been part of South African history for centuries. When the first European settlers arrived in Cape Town in the mid-seventeenth century, a conflict that had been part of the existence of the indigenous groups—namely, the struggle for control over land—took on a new dimension because of the settlers' superior firearms and their completely different understanding of the concepts of ownership and control of land. Early colonial settlers met with resistance from indigenous inhabitants. The Boers, who were farmers of Dutch, German, and French origin, trekked into the interior in search of grazing land for cattle and to escape Dutch and British colonial rule. They encountered ongoing resistance from indigenous tribes such as the Xhosa and Zulu, resulting in fierce battles of subjugation. British imperial designs on the two independent Boer republics established in the interior—the Transvaal and the Orange Free State—led to Afrikaner resistance and culminated in the South African War of 1899 to 1902 (also called the Boer War).

The 1910 constitution of the Union of South Africa was premised on white supremacy and provided the stepping-stones for the implementation of apartheid soon after the Afrikaner-based National Party won the general election in 1948. Resistance from the black population against white minority rule changed from weak and tentative at the beginning of this century to intense but mainly nonviolent in the 1950s. Violent state oppression and popular resistance and revolt reached unprecedented levels during the 1970s and 1980s. The white minority government responded with coercive security measures in its effort to cling to power, while the antiapartheid struggle changed its focus from political protest to popular insurrection and the "armed struggle." By 1989, a political and strategic deadlock between the state and the antiapartheid forces had developed. The government controlled substantial resources

and had its hands on the levers of power, but it had little public support or legitimacy and was isolated internationally. On the other hand, the leading opponent of apartheid, the African National Congress (ANC), was still banned, had meager resources, and was unable to get its hands on the levers of state power, but it enjoyed broad legitimacy, public support, and wide international recognition and support. It became clear to the government that its coercive security option would not provide lasting solutions, and the ANC realized that its armed struggle was incapable of delivering victory.

Nelson Mandela had begun, from 1986 onward, to prepare the ground for possible negotiations, something that at that stage must have seemed a remote possibility. From prison he began corresponding with key players outside, including President F. W. de Klerk's predecessor, P. W. Botha. Secret meetings were held with cabinet ministers such as Justice Minister Kobie Coetzee.

A breakthrough came on February 2, 1990, when President de Klerk made his now-famous speech during the opening of the South African Parliament. This was the month that saw South Africa extricating itself from the political cul de sac into which apartheid had led it. The political and strategic deadlock was broken when de Klerk announced the unbanning of political organizations, the release of political leaders from prison, and free political activity for all. When, a few days after these announcements, Mandela left prison a free man after twenty-seven years of incarceration, South Africans from all walks of life felt great optimism. He received a tumultuous welcome from supporters in Cape Town. In Natal, the province in which Chief Minister Mangosuthu Buthelezi has his power base, Mandela addressed a rally in Durban shortly after his release, attended by an estimated 100,000 people.

Business leaders hailed President de Klerk's February speech, predicting that it would lead to improved foreign perceptions of South Africa and ease pressure for further economic sanctions against the country. The dramatic political events provided a welcome justification for South Africans to move their focus away from the debilitating political violence of the previous year. Measured in fatalities, 1989 had been the worst year of political violence in modern South African history. A total of 1,403 persons had been killed. Good news about South Africa was what both South Africans and the world wished for. Preliminary negotiations between the white government, led by the National Party, and the ANC, South Africa's largest and oldest liberation movement,

provided reason to believe that proper multiparty constitutional negotiations were not far off.[2] The sudden real prospects for a negotiated settlement and the hope that political violence would abate instilled a sense of optimism and hope.

Violence did not abate, and some of the hope that had been generated was shown to have been misplaced. In fact, the year that many thought would be the precursor to liberation, democracy, and stability became a year of unprecedented political strife and violence: 1990 replaced 1989 as the worst year of political violence in modern South African history, with 3,699 persons killed (a 163 percent increase over 1989).[3]