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 . ' 1'. Johannesburg
 Allister Sparks
 POTENTIALLY the most
 damaging scandal ever to
 threaten the South African gov-
 ernment is unfolding in a Port
 Elizabeth courthouse, where an
 inquest into the murder of four
 black activists eight years ago is
 revealing a trail of dirty tricks
 leading right to the Cabinet.
 It has emerged that the kill-
 ings may have been part of a
 broader political conspiracy that
 directly involved chiefs of the
 defence force and military intel-
 - - t, intelligence and at least one Cabinet
 Minister and that the outlines
 were known to members of the
 State Security Council, who
 included the then President
 P.W. Botha and the current
 President, F.W. de Klerk.
 The first fragment of evi-
 dence appeared a year ago when
 a Johannesburg newspaper
 published a copy of a signal
 message sent by the military
 commander in troubled Eastern
 Cape province, Brig Christoffel
 Van der Westhuizen, to the
 State Security Council in 1985
 requesting permission for the
 permanent removal from soci-
 ety, of a local black political
 leader; Matthew Goniwe, and
 two colleagues. Two weeks
 after the date on the signal mes-
 sage, the mutilated and burnt
 bodies of Goniwe and three col-
 leagues were found in the weld.
 In an attempt to damp down
 the uproar that followed publi-
 cation of the signal, De Klerk
 ordered a new inquest into
 Goniwe's death. This began
 sedately enough last Monday,
 with the handing in of a sworn
 affidavit from Van der Westhu-
 izen, now a general in charge of
 military intelligence, insisting
 that the words permanent
 removal did not mean kill but
 merely prolonged detention.
 Van der Westhuizen was ada-
 mant that he had never sought
 to have anyone assassinated or
 done anything illegal.
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 message on Van der Westhu-
 izen's instructions, former
 Lieut Lourens du Plessis, gave
 evidence supporting this. So did
 the man who received the mes-
 sage, Gen Johannes van Rens-
 burg, then secretary of the State
 Security Council.
 But three days later came the

bombshell. Du Plessis changed his story. He applied to the court for indemnity from prosecution and submitted an affidavit saying Van der Westhuizen had explicitly ordered him to send a message requesting permission to kill Goniwe. The euphemistic wording had been his own. The affidavit did not stop there.- Du Plessis gave details of an elaborate operation devised by Van der Westhuizen to quell the black uprising in the Eastern Cape in which Goniwe was a central figure.

The plan, set out in a document handwritten and signed by Van der Westhuizen, called for a coup in the nominally independent homeland of Ciskei. The homeland president, Lennox Sebe, was to be taken out and a close aide, General Fikile Zibi, was to disappear permanently. Sebe's estranged half-brother, Charles Sebe, would take over as president - but he would first have to be sprung from prison. The coup would be blamed on a neighbouring black homeland, Transkei. The actions should not be traced back to South Africa; Van der Westhuizen wrote.

Charles Sebe would then merge Ciskei with Transkei to form a single Xhosaland where a new party, the Xhosa Resistance Movement, modelled on, Chief Mangosuthu Buthe's Inkatha movement, would be formed. This would be armed and financed by the South African Defence Force under the cover of a front organisation. It would then counter the ANC in its Eastern Cape stronghold and permanently damp down the revolution there.

The document was addressed to Gen A.G. Kat' Liebenberg, 21: :...q. .LvulJt Que .t 'i... m...

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then head of military intelligence, now chief of the defence force, and codenamed Operation Katzen - presumably after his nickname. In a further twist the present head of Transkei, Maj-Gen Bantu Holomisa, revealed on Thursday that he, too, had documents implicating Van der Westhuizen and Liebenberg in the plot.

It turns out Holomisa, who toppled the original Transkei regime in a coup in 1987 and is now allied to the ANC, was the source of the original signal message being published. He

claims to have 12 more secret documents, which he is threat-

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THE OBSERVER

Trall of Intrigue: Brigadier Van der Westhulzen, top left, Goniwe, right, and Transkei's General Holomisa,

enough to release periodically whenever disclosure of the government's dirty tricks activities flags. Where Holomisa obtained this smoking gun is not known, but it seems likely the documents originated from a disaffected source high in the defence establishment.

Holomisa's documents reveal that the coup plot was known to at least one Cabinet member, Tertius Delpont, the Minister of Local Government, who was then a legal adviser to the military. It was also discussed by the State Security Council. President Botha was chairman and De Klerk was a member.

accused of ordering the death of black activist Matthew

Events bear out what the documents contain. In the early hours of 6 September 1986, six white men brandishing rifles burst into Ciskei's Middelburg Prison, fought their way to Charles Sebelo's cell and released him. Five months later a commando attack was launched on Lennox Sebe's palace, but the palace guard beat off the attackers. Transkei was blamed for the coup attempt.

The De Klerk government is trying to brazen out the allegations. The President's spokesman, David Steward, issued an angry statement on Thursday accusing Holomisa of pursuing who says he has proof of more dirty tricks, with bodyguard.

an opportunistic political agenda and denying that the Cabinet or the State Security Council had ever ordered or approved anything illegal. But the government has not explained why Van der Westhuizen and Liebenberg remain in their top jobs, particularly since the disclosure last December of a covert operation within the military intelligence establishment to sabotage the reform process. De Klerk fired 23 top officers, but not Van der Westhuizen and Liebenberg, prompting speculation that they are in a position to make embarrassing disclosures, , '

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