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TITLE **CONSCRIPTS TO THEIR AGE: AFRICAN NATIONAL
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CONSCRIPTS TO THEIR AGE:

**AFRICAN NATIONAL CONGRESS
OPERATIONAL STRATEGY, 1976-1986**

**By Howard Barrell
St Antony's College**

**Thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements
for the degree of D.Phil. in Politics in the Faculty of
Social Studies, University of Oxford, Trinity Term, 1993.**

Length: 99,457 words

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**CONSCRIPTS TO THEIR AGE:
AFRICAN NATIONAL CONGRESS
OPERATIONAL STRATEGY, 1976-1986**

By Howard Barrell, St Antony's College
D.Phil. thesis in Politics, University of Oxford, Trinity, 1993.

ABSTRACT

There was a consistency to ANC operational strategy between 1976 and 1986 even when there was a change in tactics. The ANC always treated armed struggle as the central feature of operational strategy, the ultimate aim of which was the forcible overthrow of the South African state. As a result, military imperatives invariably dictated the form the ANC sought to give to political deployments.

The ANC's stress on armed struggle often, paradoxically, seemed to undermine its efforts to wage armed struggle. Its armed struggle remained at a low level of intensity and posed little military threat to the South African state. A determination to correct this weakness motivated most ANC attempts to reshape operational structures and political mobilisation. By the mid-1980s, however, the ANC's armed struggle was, patently, a military failure. Moreover, mobilisation by political means posed a more serious challenge to the state. Yet the ANC persisted with armed struggle, and its operational strategy still accorded armed force the crucial role in attempting to secure fundamental change.

If armed struggle was a failure, in the context of state-induced reforms in the 1980s why did the ANC persist with it and accord it priority? One reason was the ANC's choice of strategic discourse: its discourse held that fundamental political change required violent confrontation with the power of the state. Another reason was that the brutal humiliations of apartheid appeared to require an armed response. A third was that, as it made strategy in the present, the ANC tried to justify its past as much as frame intentions. But the main reason for persisting with armed struggle was the political dividend derived from it. The authority and popularity that armed struggle gave the ANC explains the paradox in its trajectory: the more the ANC seemed to fail, the more it apparently succeeded.

CONTENTS

List of Figures and Charts.....	iv
Acknowledgements.....	v
Introduction.....	1
Note on Sources and Footnoting.....	18
Postscript Ante.....	26
ONE: <i>Old Battle Cries and Borrowed Language</i>	32
TWO: <i>You Only Win Once</i>	73
THREE: <i>Unprepared</i>	127
FOUR: <i>A Turn to the Masses</i>	178
FIVE: <i>Armed Propaganda and Non-Collaboration</i>	209
SIX: <i>Towards a Broad Front</i>	261
SEVEN: <i>Planning for People's War</i>	297
EIGHT: <i>Leading from Behind</i>	344
NINE: <i>Tactics of Talks, Tactics of Confrontation</i>	387
CONCLUSION.....	449
SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	469

LIST OF FIGURES

1. ANC operational structures: Basic lines of command & co-ordination, 1976-1978.....	156
2. ANC operational structures: Basic lines of command & co-ordination, 1978-1979.....	158
3. ANC operational structures: Basic lines of command & co-ordination, 1980-1982.....	237
4. ANC operational structures: Basic lines of command & co-ordination, Area Political Committee Document, Sept 1981-Sept 1982.....	268
5. ANC operational structures: Basic lines of command & co-ordination, 1983-June 1985.....	300
6. ANC operational structures: Basic lines of command & co-ordination, July 1985-1986.....	381

LIST OF CHARTS

1. Insurgent Armed Activity: Annual total of incidents, 1976-1988.....	454
2. Insurgent Armed Activity: Incidents/MK Casualties, 1976-1988.....	454
3. Insurgent Armed Activity: Incidents/MK Casualty Rate, 1976-1988.....	454
4. Insurgent Attacks: Target Types, 1976-1979...	455
5. Insurgent Attacks: Target Types, 1980-1982...	455
6. Insurgent Attacks: Target Types, 1983-1984...	455
7. Insurgent Attacks: Target Types, 1985-1986...	455
8. Insurgent Hand Grenades: Thrown/Captured, 1976-1988.....	457
9. Insurgent Limpet Mines: Detonated/Captured, 1976-1988.....	457
10. Insurgent Firearms: Incidents in which Used/Captured, 1976-1988.....	457
11. Insurgent Land Mines: Detonated/Captured, 1976-1988.....	457

(v)

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(vi)

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Without Jeremy Brickhill I would not have realised

(vii)

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I reserve a different order of thanks for three people.

Jean Knox hosted regular picnics across the Styx for the last two and a half years of the preparation of this

(ix)

To Kate -

History is now and England.¹

¹TS Eliot, 'Little Gidding', *Four Quartets*.

(x)

*For we are conscripts to our age
Simply by being born, we wage
The war we are; ...*

- W H Auden¹

¹W H Auden, *New Year Letter*.

INTRODUCTION

ENEMIES DEPEND UPON EACH OTHER to sustain their wars and, if neither is a clear-cut winner, no less so if they make peace. So it was on February 2 1990 when President F W de Klerk acknowledged that his government could find no solution to South Africa's crisis unless the African National Congress, its foe for 30 years, was a partner in that search. De Klerk announced the unbanning of the ANC (and other, lesser organisations) and called for an end to confrontation over white minority domination in favour of negotiations.

It was an acute national crisis that De Klerk wanted the ANC's involvement in solving. The South African economy was in a parlous state. Although South Africa had successfully rescheduled its debts, there was a net capital outflow as it struggled to meet huge foreign debt repayments with a declining currency. Economic growth was falling behind population growth. Already dangerously high levels of unemployment, estimated at about 30 per cent, were rising. New foreign investment had dried up and pressures for tighter international trade and financial sanctions against South Africa were growing.

The security situation was no less forbidding. The state had clearly established its military domination over

the ANC's military wing, Umkhonto we Sizwe, and rolled back the insurrectionary tide which had risen in 1984. Yet social upheaval, labour unrest, revolutionary armed activity and apparently anomic violence appeared endemic, seemed likely to increase and were, evidently, subject to dangerous periodic surges. The militant black and left-wing opposition was regrouping for a new campaign of civil disobedience which had the potential to provoke slaughter. Sections of the black population which had formerly been compliant to the government, such as security force members in the bantustans, were becoming restive. Although the ruling National Party had won another convincing victory in a whites-only general election, fractures in the bedrock unity of white South Africans were widening, and some right wing elements were threatening final confrontation with black South Africans.

In this crisis neither the government nor the militant opposition appeared capable of realising their political goals using old methods. They were deadlocked in a sort of unstable equilibrium. On the state side, applying security forces' awesome firepower in a concerted campaign to crush opposition was now, in early 1990, politically, economically and diplomatically unfeasible. Moreover, reform of the kind promoted by President P W Botha and his security chiefs, which had seemed to be motivated primarily by counter-insurgency considerations, no longer satisfied the major Western powers. To retain the protection of these

powers from tighter trade and financial sanctions, Pretoria had now to usher in changes on an altogether different scale.

Within the ANC, rhetorical habit asserted the need for armed struggle and held out the prospect of a seizure of state power by force. But an increasingly influential ANC faction doubted that armed struggle any longer offered any chance of progress and that revolution was in any sense a realisable objective. Moreover, the process of collapse of communist governments in the Soviet Union and eastern Europe meant the erosion of the international (and African) network of states on which the ANC's armed struggle had depended for arms, skills training and rear bases. It also meant a change in both the balance of forces and atmosphere in southern Africa, neither of which favoured violent resolutions to regional disputes.

A new set of circumstances had developed. In it, there seemed no solution to either the government's or the militant opposition's strategic hiatus - save via a turn to the politics of negotiation to formulate a new socio-political contract in South Africa which reconciled the two sides to some degree within a new institutional framework. De Klerk considered the ANC his indispensable adversary in this new contest - to set the terms of peace.

That the ANC should have achieved this centrality in

South Africa's affairs - in either war or peace - was a remarkable outcome. It was remarkable not merely because the ANC had been outlawed, exiled and forced to operate underground for 30 years. It was also surprising because the ANC's record as an armed revolutionary movement was such a poor one.

Even a superficial examination of the ANC's operational activities as a revolutionary movement over the three decades between 1960 and 1990, particularly consideration of its armed struggle,¹ shows the ANC seldom achieved what it set out to in its operations against the state. Indeed, the evidence invites the question: how did the ANC 'succeed' when it so evidently 'failed'?

The 11-year period of ANC history chosen for this study, from 1976 to 1986, provides material for a curious and paradoxical tale of revolutionary struggle. The story shows that the ANC, in common with many other revolutionary movements, believed that intentions or strategies were important to outcomes. Yet, there were chronic discrepancies between what the ANC intended should happen and what did happen. In an attempt to cope with this variance, the ANC often recast old intentions once unintended outcomes had become apparent - the better to justify and explain its actions and shortcomings to itself,

¹For example, Howard Barrell, *MK. The ANC's Armed Struggle* (Johannesburg: Penguin, 1990).

its members and others. The journey from 1976 to 1986 shows that the road to apparent revolutionary success may be paved with apparent failures.

This thesis may well throw some light on current developments in South Africa. But this is not my intention. Nor does this study purport to provide a full history of the ANC's rise in the years to 1990, although it refers continually to the wider context. This thesis has a narrower focus.

After it was outlawed in 1960, the ANC followed a number of other twentieth century insurgent movements in trying to orchestrate a number of different forms of struggle to achieve its ends. These included non-violent diplomatic, economic and moral pressures in addition to confrontational political and military operations associated with attempts at revolution. This dissertation has limited interest in the ANC's broad range of strategies. Its focus falls on the design the ANC sought to give to its domestic political and military operations, which it regarded as the central aspect of its revolutionary struggle. This dissertation is a study of ANC operational strategy. It examines the kind of revolutionary war the ANC attempted to wage in South Africa.

Since it is concerned with official strategy, the thesis is concerned in the first instance with

organisational *policy*. It is, therefore, concerned mainly with those individuals, bodies and processes in the ANC that produced policy. This puts much of the focus on the ANC leadership, who were located in exile outside South Africa over the period of study.

That period of study is 1976 to 1986. It is easier to explain why 1976 is suitable as a starting point for this study than why 1986 provides an appropriate place to end it.

For 13 years after the destruction of the ANC and allied opposition organisations in South Africa in 1963-64, the ANC was marginalised to exile. Its operational strategy over this period was, by and large, paper planning. The ANC seldom acted out strategy over this period; when it did, this often occurred outside South Africa, such as in then-Rhodesia in 1967-1968. Over this time, bar a handful of isolated units, mainly concerned with leafleting, the ANC had no organised presence inside South Africa; and, despite its commitment to armed struggle, it managed to mount no domestic military attacks. The 13 years to 1976 are relevant to this dissertation mainly for the theoretical foundation the ANC laid for its operational strategy in the course of them; the opening two chapters show how it did so.

After the 1976 uprisings, however, ANC strategising

became less speculative. To sustain credibility with foreign supporters and win some among its potential domestic constituency, the organisation was desperate to reassert itself inside South Africa. As in the past, it identified armed activity as the primary means to secure its international and domestic objectives. The ANC achieved a resumption of armed activity inside South Africa thanks to several developments, the most important of which was the influx into the ANC in exile of thousands of angry young black militants who had been the foot soldiers of the uprisings.

As the ANC returned small numbers of these men and women to South Africa on military missions from late 1976, its marginalisation to exile was mitigated. The ANC registered some influence, at first mainly via the power of its symbols, inside South Africa.

The year 1976 is generally considered a turning point in South African history. Part of its significance lies in the transformation of the ANC that it initiated.

In late 1985, nine and a half years later, the ANC's name resonated through a series of localised insurrections which appeared to have brought South Africa to the brink of revolution. Uprisings which had begun a year earlier were spreading in veld-fire fashion across the segregated black townships and rural settlements. ANC armed activity,

although it remained limited in its dimensions, reached unprecedented levels of efficacy. State controls and policing broke down in many areas, and political divergences deepened among the white minority as they searched for an appropriate response. The South African economy was plunged into crisis in a bewildering series of setbacks in August and September of 1985, as foreign banks and creditors refused to roll over the country's international debt just as a large portion of it became due. And the ANC, without a serious rival for the loyalty of black and left-wing militants, called directly for preparations for national insurrection.

But that revolutionary 'moment', such as it was, proved to be inconclusive. The ANC and, indeed, the entire gamut of South African political militants proved incapable of the decisive challenge to state power which they themselves and others expected of them. They failed to seize a moment in which popular militancy, together with weakness and confusion within the apartheid state, was at unprecedented levels.

Until then, within the ANC, no serious alternatives to a strategy of revolutionary confrontation had been advanced - not for many years. ANC leaders and members treated a negotiated path to change as a residual, or speculative, option - and often derided it as dishonourable. But this attitude began to change. Negotiations gradually became a

plausible option within the ANC from 1986 - although the option was still some years away from achieving respectability. Thus 1986 was another turning point, perhaps no less important than 1976, albeit less dramatic.

Whereas for 20-odd years to 1986 ANC strategy can be said to have been premised on the pursuit of violent revolution, thereafter it became increasingly confused. On one hand, the ANC stressed the centrality of maintaining revolutionary pressures; on the other, an increasing share of its leadership's energies was devoted to exploring the option of negotiation. The two paths were not necessarily divergent, and ANC intellectuals went to some lengths to argue that they could be complementary. But the ANC did not succeed in narrowing this bifurcation.

A study of ANC operational strategy from 1976 must address this divergence, as this dissertation does towards its end. But an account of how this divergence worked itself out, of how the ANC came to suspend its pursuit of revolution in favour of negotiated change in 1990, and of the train of events towards a negotiated settlement in South Africa is subject matter for another dissertation, not this one.

This dissertation is concerned with revolutionary strategy; as such, it is about intentions. For, whatever else a strategy may be, it is, in conception, a

programmatically formulated intention. This focus on intentions does not imply that I believe that we can explain the pace, direction or outcome of a political or revolutionary process by concentrating on the actors' intentions (or strategies) - common as this view may be among revolutionaries, including many in the ANC. Intentions are dubious guides to understanding outcomes. Indeed, the primary theme of this dissertation is the strange, and often paradoxical, relationship between the ANC's intentions and the actual outcomes of its actions.

I am similarly sceptical about attempts to explain revolutionary struggles by appeal to generalising theories of revolution - in which the antagonists are usually presented as being (at best, only partially self-conscious) bearers of structurally defined interests and forces moving inexorably towards a predeterminable end. This kind of thinking was prevalent in the ANC, particularly within its influential incorporated ally, the South African Communist Party (SACP), between 1976 and 1986; and, as this dissertation will show, it had a considerable effect on ANC operational strategy.

While it may do much to motivate a group of political actors, this kind of thinking is of less certain value to our understanding of political change. To have any value, a general theory of revolution would have to be able to predict revolution with some precision - under what

conditions it would occur and when, as well as where. Moreover, it would have to be able to provide the reasons for either outcome - before revolution occurred or manifestly failed to do so. To provide such reasons would require us to have identified firm regularities or 'laws' of historical development.

Developing such laws requires us first to choose instances from which we can derive regularities or generalisation, or against which to test a theory. If our instances concern the experiences of countries, are any two countries' histories or political and economic experiences sufficiently similar to allow comparison of like with like? I suggest not. Moreover, generalisations which claim to state minimum necessary conditions for revolution are scarcely more valuable than theories purporting to explain revolution. They, too, depend on the notion that there are persistent regularities, or 'laws', of human motion; and that these can be identified and applied to predict, if not what *will* happen, then what *will not* happen, and why.

Just as this dissertation does not advance a theory of revolution so, too, it does not evaluate different theories of revolution or engage in essentialist arguments about what a 'revolution' is or is not: whether or not it necessarily involves displacement within the organs of state of one class by another; whether or not it necessarily entails the forcible overthrow of an existing

regime; or whether or not revolution is necessarily an act of the political Left, whereas the Right can lay claim only to mounting 'counter-revolution' or 'reaction'. 'Revolution' is used throughout to mean what an insurgent movement like the ANC would customarily mean by it - the forcible and fundamental reconstruction of the political relations of a country. What is relevant in this regard, however, is how the ANC viewed revolution and how this influenced its strategic thinking and behaviour.

Our approach will be narrative. Little of value has been made public about how the ANC's inner councils tried to shape ANC political and military operations inside South Africa between 1976 and 1986, probably the 11 most crucial years in the ANC's advance. What has been said publicly has often been rendered bland by the requirements of security or been coloured by the needs of propaganda. There is a pressing need to go behind these distortions and return with a version of what happened. Others will provide different accounts. In this early phase in the recovery of secret South African histories, narratives must be the priority - even though these narratives will contain many implicit assumptions and unresolved arguments. Self-conscious attempts to organise argument over causality, and the choice between the accounts provided by different narratives, can come later. The most valuable contribution I can make now is to tell a story. Ideas and theories are considered as they form an integral, indeed central, part

of the narrative.

The focus of this dissertation is operational strategies and tactics. These are condition-specific phenomena: strategies and tactics are neither chosen in abstract nor can they be assessed in abstract. It is, therefore, necessary to examine the development of ANC strategic policy within its unfolding context.

Much changed in the 1970s and 1980s. The southern African region experienced five armed revolutionary struggles - in Angola, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa and Zimbabwe. South Africa itself went through many political, security and economic changes. All were in some degree relevant to the ANC's elaboration of strategic policy.

My primary story line is what ANC operational strategic policy was. Since strategy changed, I trace these changes, suggesting reasons for them, and describing the processes by which they occurred.

Strategies which the ANC decided upon were, frequently, not acted upon. That is the first discrepancy this dissertation demonstrates. It was most evident in the ANC's attitude to military forms of struggle. Over the 1976 to 1986 period, the ANC viewed armed struggle as the central and supreme feature of its operational strategy.

The ANC leadership, nevertheless, took a number of decisions to lessen the supremacy of armed struggle over other forms of non-violent, political struggle and to bring them into a closer, or a symbiotic, relationship. Yet decisions along these lines were seldom implemented.

There is a second, important sort of discrepancy on which this dissertation focuses. A strategy may, or may not, achieve its goals, whether of a short-, medium- or long-term kind. ANC operational strategy seldom achieved its goals. There were chronic disparities between, on the one hand, what the ANC set out to achieve operationally, and, on the other hand, what it in fact achieved or what incidentally happened.

Between 1976 and 1986, the ANC was merely one actor in the South African conflict. A range of other actors and factors influenced developments. Some were domestic to South Africa, others were regional or international. Some constraints were social or economic, some were topographical

This dissertation can only allude to, but does not provide a full account of, this broader context. Much historical work remains to be done on its various elements. For example, we still lack a scholarly account of the rise of militant opposition to apartheid inside the country in the 1980s, best expressed in the emergence of the United

Democratic Front (UDF) and the Congress of South African Trade Unions (Cosatu).²

In its attempts to deal with this wider context and in its elaboration of operational strategic policy, the ANC self-consciously sought to be rational. It based this policy upon its analysis of conditions at any one time. In any set of circumstances the ANC identified, it detected the presence or absence of possibilities for advance. It then tried to develop strategies and tactics which it believed could best secure its progress. Usually, in its formulation of operational strategy, the ANC was guided by a purportedly scientific theory of social and historical motion, Marxism-Leninism. It also drew on strategic derivatives of this theory developed in China, Cuba, Vietnam and Russia. ANC strategists endorsed this theory's claim to be able to factorise comprehensively the total equation bearing on the outcome in South Africa, indeed anywhere. This claim extended to being able to anticipate the broad line of march of forces opposed to revolution.

The theory prophesied as inevitable the outcome the ANC sought: armed revolution. Moreover, ANC strategists accepted the injunction of this body of theory that their task was to read 'correctly' the constellation of factors

²In the case of the UDF, this may soon be corrected by work being done by Jeremy Seekings. We are more fortunate in the case of Cosatu, where we have Jeremy Baskin, *Striking Back. A History of Cosatu* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1991) and Steven Friedman, *Building Tomorrow Today* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1987).

bearing on the outcome in South Africa and to act in ways which fostered or hastened the pre-determined outcome. To ensure a 'correct' reading of history's entrails, the ANC produced its own South African variant of the Marxist-Leninist theory of revolution in *Strategy and Tactics of the ANC* in 1969. Seven years earlier, its integral ally, the South African Communist Party (SACP), had done the same with *The Road to South African Freedom*.

When it was confronted with evidence of the chronic failures of its political and military operations between 1976 and 1986, the ANC never fundamentally revised its operational strategy. It would concede that it had made mistakes, but it deemed these to be mistakes made merely at the margins: they were errors of technique, or failures to ascertain 'correctly' the stage reached in the unfolding revolution or the 'correct' measures required to hasten the process along. Throughout the 1976-1986 period, in the making of operational strategy, the ANC remained trapped in the same set of assumptions - assumptions about particular means producing particular outcomes, and about particular outcomes requiring particular means. Changes to operational strategy, far from abandoning these assumptions, actually re-asserted them. The more ANC operational strategy seemed to change, the more it seemed to stay the same.

For the ANC, strategy was not only, or even mainly, about intentions for the future. Strategy was also as much

concerned with making sense of the past. Making operational strategy was a process in which the ANC re-ordered or justified past actions and recast past failures into milestones on the road to victory in order to reconcile the ANC's contemporary predicament with its hoped-for future.

Beyond this introduction, this dissertation comprises a note on sources, nine chapters and a conclusion. The first two chapters outline the development of ANC operational strategy to June 1976. Chapters Three to Nine tell the story of the development of operational strategy within successive periods between 1976 and 1986. The conclusion summarises the set of arguments making up the thesis.

By the end of 1986, conditions were evidently changing to the ANC's advantage in South Africa. Where this was so, however, this change was not necessarily of the ANC's making. The change was often a consequence of developments or actions independent of the ANC. Where this change was of the ANC's making, it was often only paradoxically or incidentally so. The ANC's most evident failures often, ironically, engendered its greatest successes; and the ANC's non-involvement in political developments in which it would have preferred to be a determining influence often wrought developments highly favourable to it. A central underlying question of this dissertation thus is: How did the ANC apparently succeed when it so evidently failed?

NOTE ON SOURCES AND FOOTNOTING

THE EXTREMITY OF CONFLICT in a revolutionary struggle can create a number of difficulties for someone attempting a study of such a struggle.

First, the antagonists, for reasons of their security, tend during their struggle to release for public consumption little of value about their actual intentions and plans. What they do release in this category tends to be coloured by rhetoric and considerations of propaganda. Moreover, the constant danger of infiltration by the enemy means that much information of real value to the student - what the antagonists decided upon in secret - is not only not readily available to a student but may not have been committed to paper. Furthermore, at the conclusion of their struggle, the antagonists' accounts of earlier events may be self-justificatory or tend, with hindsight, to attribute a consistency or meaning to events which, at the time that they occurred, lacked any appearance of coherence.

Second, many, though not all, histories or biographies published in the course of, or shortly after, such a struggle are often evidently partial.

Both these sets of difficulties have been present in this study. I have sought to overcome them in various ways.

Whilst I have examined and drawn on ANC and SACP publications - periodicals as well as bound collections - as well as the available histories and biographies,¹ I have not relied upon them as my main primary source. Instead, I have sought to penetrate the mask of rhetoric and propaganda and to inform myself about events and important decisions for which documentary evidence is either unavailable or non-existent. In order to do so, I have conducted a number of interviews with leaders, strategists and members of the ANC who were in exile in the 1976-1986 period; with leaders and members of the pro-ANC 'mass democratic movement' who lived inside South Africa over that period; and with the South African Security Police's leading 'expert' on the ANC, Major-General Herman Stadler, who also headed the Security Police Intelligence Department for much of the period.

I conducted all but two of these interviews in the 1989-1990 period,² that is after the events with which they are concerned. My interviewees consequently had considerable opportunity to rationalise their actions and to engage in self-justification. They seldom, however, seemed to do so. Rather, my interviewees are often highly critical of themselves, of their colleagues and of the ANC.

¹Listed in the Bibliography.

²The exceptions being two interviews with ANC president Oliver Tambo, conducted in 1981 and 1985 whilst I was a journalist.

There appear to have been a number of reasons for the independence of mind and self-critical disposition evident in many of the ANC interviews. First, as interviewer I was a former member of the ANC. I knew some of my interviewees well and had worked with, or under them, on clandestine ANC projects; they trusted me as a result. I had told my interviewees that my intention was to write an independent and critical examination of ANC operational strategic policy, and they seemed to respond positively to this approach. Some of my interviewees also knew that I had enough personal knowledge to be able to correct them, in some cases, if they engaged in hindsighted rationalisation or self-justification.

Second, I continually stressed to interviewees the need to recall their views, actions and reasons for decisions at a particular time, and to avoid the apparent clarity afforded by hindsight. Interviewees appeared to have no difficulty in understanding the need for this and conducting themselves accordingly to the best of their abilities.

Third, I was fortunate to find myself conducting the bulk of my interviews in two periods of considerable ferment in the ANC. The first of these periods, mid-1989, was a time of unusually anxious and intense self-criticism in the ANC in exile, as the movement felt itself being drawn inexorably into negotiations with the South African

government. Many members of the ANC appeared to feel at that time that some 29 years of clandestine revolutionary struggle had left their organisation remarkably weak at an operational level, notwithstanding its huge popular legitimacy and support inside South Africa. The second of these interviewing periods was the latter half of 1990, a few months after the ban on the ANC had been lifted. Newly-returned ANC exiles and their pro-ANC allies inside South Africa were finding out about each other's strengths and weaknesses, and both were debating their movement's achievements and failures as it prepared for a consultative conference due in December of that year. Whilst one might have expected this latter period to have been one in which interviewees sought to bolster old myths about the ANC and its leaders, this was not my experience.

And fourth, I was given access to some confidential ANC and SACP strategy documents in the course of my research. These documents were dated, covered the 1976-1986 period and were, in my estimation, clearly authentic. They provided me with a 'control' of sorts. The documents enabled me to assess what some of my interviewees told me and to challenge some hindsighted rationalisation.

The documents fell into two categories. I was given only conditional access to the first and most valuable category. These were strategic plans adopted between 1976 and 1985 by the ANC's chief operational organ (until 1983

the Revolutionary Council, and then the Politico-Military Council). I was allowed, under supervision over two nights in mid-1989, to copy extracts from this first category of documents and I was told I could present these extracts as 'answers' to questions, as if in an interview. These questions and 'answers' comprise the first of two interviews with Joe Slovo - the person who kindly made these documents available. In these 'answers', I changed tenses to give the authentic ring of an interview; I also added the occasional bridging phrase or date to specify the time period being referred to. This first 'interview' with Slovo is, in all respects, a faithful reflection of the extracts which I considered important at that early stage in my research. I was, however, not allowed to copy the documents in their entirety. But, after the unbanning of the ANC, I was promised full copies of these documents. The first promises came from ANC individuals. When these promises were not fulfilled I approached the South African Security Police, who claimed to have their own copies. They also promised delivery. But delivery never came. I felt I needed the full versions of the documents to guard against distortions that might have resulted from my initial selection of extracts. This may, unintentionally, have affected this dissertation's presentation of ANC strategic decisions. But any researcher is bound by the realm of the possible. And I am reasonably confident that my interviews have considerably broadened the perspective of this dissertation, filled in many gaps and prevented distortion

on any significant scale.

The second category of confidential ANC documents covers the ANC conference in 1985 and a variety of debates and developing strategic perspectives.

I have very occasionally in the chapters that follow footnoted items to 'Personal knowledge'. This means I have no reference for the item other than my own direct personal knowledge as a one-time ANC member or journalist reporting on the ANC; I usually also explain how I came by the information. Where I very occasionally footnote to 'Confidential information', this means my informant considers the item too delicate for its source to be identified.

At various points I provide statistics of ANC armed activity. The statistics used are usually those provided by the South African Police, and are footnoted as such. Where there are major discrepancies between police and other figures, I provide the alternatives as well. The ANC itself did not systematically keep statistics on its armed activity - not until 1987. My attempts to get those figures the ANC did keep before 1987 were unsuccessful. I use police statistics largely to illustrate ANC strategic debates and my arguments about the progress or setbacks of the ANC's armed activity - something which they do remarkably well. I seldom depend upon these statistics as

evidence, although I consider it would not be misguided to do so.

My interviews and a range of rare or hitherto confidential documents on which this dissertation relies are listed in the Bibliography. Full transcripts of the interviews and these documents have been deposited in the collection of Rhodes House Library, University of Oxford.³ There are four volumes of interviews and three of additional papers and publications. I can testify to the substantive accuracy of the transcripts, which total some 1,370 pages, as I transcribed them myself. Occasionally, in citing material from the interviews, I have, however, improved upon the punctuation I initially inserted in the transcripts. Each transcript states where and when each interview was conducted.

For the sake of brevity, I have developed my own style for referencing to my interviews and those unpublished documents on which I rely.

A footnote denoting one of my interviews as a source carries the prefix IV/; this is followed by the name of the interviewee, for example Slovo; and this is followed by a page number/s reference, which accords with the pagination of my interview transcripts. Thus IV/Slovo, p.980 denotes a reference to the interview with Slovo at page 980 in the

³They can be examined upon application to the librarian.

transcripts.

Where I have made reference to a document in the additional papers and publications, I use the prefix *App/*. This is followed by the letter *A, B* or *C*, indicating in which of the three volumes the document can be found. After this, there is a document number. If necessary, I also provide a page number within that document. Thus *App/A/3, p.4* denotes Additional Papers and Publications, Volume A, Document Three, at page 4.

POSTSCRIPT ANTE

In July 1990, five months after the South African government had unbanned the ANC, security police in Durban raided a local house. An informer had tipped them off about a group of externally trained ANC cadres giving military training to township militants. The way in which one breakthrough now led quickly to another gave police no reason to believe they were dealing with anything out of the ordinary - except perhaps that this training was taking place six months into what was supposed to be a new era of negotiation. But police were astonished at what they stumbled upon.

Their initial prize was Sphiwe Nyanda, the ANC's most successful regional military commander. Under the *nom de guerre* of Gebuza, Nyanda had headed the Transvaal urban machinery of the ANC's military wing, Umkhonto we Sizwe (or MK), since 1977. Based mainly in Swaziland, he had sometimes crossed into South Africa on operations. The last that South African intelligence, or most of his ANC comrades, had heard of him - in 1988 - was that he had been sent to the Soviet Union for an advanced military training course. They guessed the move was to prepare him for a senior post in the defence force of a putative post-apartheid South Africa.

The police haul of documentation indicated a worrying degree of ANC penetration of South African intelligence, the existence of an incipient national underground leadership of the ANC, as well as there having been regular three-way communication between Nelson Mandela in his cell at Pollsmoor Prison and the ANC leadership abroad, via this underground leadership; between the latter two, this communication had sometimes been daily. And it was clear that Nyanda and his associates had control over a large network of arms caches.

Another discovery followed: that the commander of this internal underground leadership was Mac Maharaj, a member of the ANC's national executive committee, one of Mandela's closer colleagues in Robben Island prison between 1964 and 1976, between 1978 and 1983 the head in exile of the ANC's internal reconstruction and development department and, since then, a leading member of the ANC's main operational organ, the Politico-Military Council. Maharaj, police found, had lived underground inside South Africa since July 1988 - for some 18 months before the ban on the ANC had been lifted. Before his disappearance from the ranks of ANC exiles in 1988, ANC members had heard Maharaj was desperately ill with a kidney complaint in the Soviet Union.

Police also discovered that Maharaj and Nyanda had been joined inside the country by Ronnie Kasrils in early

1990, a few weeks before the ANC's unbanning. Kasrils, also a member of the ANC national executive, had headed ANC military intelligence between 1983 and 1988 and, after that, had served as secretary of the ANC's internal political committee. Shortly before his disappearance from the ranks of exiles, ANC colleagues heard he had been seriously injured in a Jeep accident in Vietnam.

Moreover, police investigations revealed that, after the unbanning of the ANC on February 2 1990, Nyanda had remained in place underground inside the country, while Maharaj and Kasrils had, in order to preserve the security of their project, clandestinely left the country, returning to it publicly by a circuitous route.

In July 1990, in the midst of delicate opening moments in the new era of negotiations, security police arrested first Nyanda, then Maharaj, followed by a number of other key figures in the operation. Kasrils went underground again.

State security officials were seriously embarrassed at having failed for so long to detect the project, known as 'Operation Vul'indlela' (meaning 'Open the Road'). I shall call it by its shorter name, 'Operation Vula'. Nyanda, Maharaj and Kasrils, perhaps the South African security system's three most effective operational opponents, had long outwitted them. For its part, the De Klerk government

was furious. It alleged the operation, particularly its persistence after the ANC's unbanning, indicated ANC bad faith in the talks about talks then under way. Moreover, the government charged that the fact that most of the key individuals involved in the project were members of the South African Communist Party indicated the source of this bad faith. Ill-informed journalists took up the cry that Operation Vula was an attempt by the Communist Party to undermine both moderates within the ANC and the talks process. The result was that the fragile fabric of contacts between the government and the recently unbanned ANC looked, momentarily, close to unravelling.

The government attended the next meeting with the ANC a few weeks later - in Pretoria in August - determined to use Operation Vula as a stick with which to beat concessions out of the ANC. In the event, this proved unnecessary. The ANC had itself decided before the Pretoria talks to offer a suspension of armed activity by its military wing. This concession, perhaps more than any other, saved the momentum towards negotiations.

A common view of Operation Vula is, one, that it was an episode which nearly unravelled the peace process of the early 1990s in South Africa and, two, was the most successful attempt by the ANC to construct a national internal underground leadership in the three decades after the disaster of 1963-4, when Nelson Mandela and almost the

entire ANC leadership were jailed.

Operation Vula was both of these. But it also had another significance. Operation Vula was a fairly complete expression of the operational strategic crisis in which the ANC found itself after 1986. The clue to my claim lies in the response of many ANC leaders to the government's disclosures about Operation Vula in July 1990. Many ANC leaders were, privately, enraged. Their fury was not a response (not in the first instance at any rate) to the fact that the state had wound up an ANC project. Rather, they were enraged because they felt they had not known about Operation Vula at all. They, too, had believed that Maharaj was on a dialysis machine in the Soviet Union, Nyanda was in a Soviet military training camp and Kasrils was languishing in plaster of paris in a Vietnamese hospital bed.

Among those who had never been told about Operation Vula was Joe Modise, who was none other than the over-all commander of Umkhonto we Sizwe, the very man whose task it was to direct all ANC armed activity in South Africa. When the news of Vula broke in July 1990, Modise was, according to one of my interviewees, a senior operative in Vula, 'the moer in' - euphemistically translated as 'extremely angry'.

The exclusion of key ANC and MK leaders from the secret that was Operation Vula lay not merely in

considerations of security. It lay in a long and bitter history of failures, frustrations and rivalries in ANC operational affairs and strategy. It is to this history that I now turn, and I will end my review with a description of when and how the decision to launch Operation Vula was taken.

CHAPTER ONE*OLD BATTLE-CRIES AND BORROWED LANGUAGE**- The ANC's operational strategic heritage, 1960-1975*

The tradition of all the dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living. And just when they seem engaged in revolutionising themselves and things, in creating something that has never yet existed, precisely in such periods of revolutionary crisis they anxiously conjure up the spirits of the past to their service and borrow from them names, battle-cries and costumes in order to present the new scene of world history in this time-honoured disguise and this borrowed language.

- Karl Marx¹

The Other Casualties of Sharpeville

Police shot dead 69 unarmed anti-apartheid protesters in the African township of Sharpeville on March 21 1960. Nine days later, the South African government declared a state of emergency. On April 8, the government outlawed the ANC and its offshoot, the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC). International opinion shouted disapproval. Foreign investment fled the country. The Johannesburg Stock Exchange crashed. Flamboyant promises of support reached the ANC and PAC from newly-independent African states. The government deployed troops and police to secure white power and privilege. It arrested or detained more than 11,000

¹Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1983), p.12.

people under emergency regulations. The ANC's 48 years of non-violent protest against apartheid had apparently come to this. Together with a heady brew of white fear and black excitement, this bewildering train of events gave the impression that South Africa was on the brink of revolution.

Much of the rest of the world also appeared to be on the brink of revolution in 1960 and 1961. The air was redolent with anti-colonial and revolutionary struggles. Armed revolutionary wars were germinating in Portugal's African colonies where independence had not been readily conceded. First accounts from Cuba said a dozen men armed with guns and a rudimentary revolutionary theory had survived a landing on the island's coast in an old boat and, a mere two years later, ruled the country.² By mid-1961, native Algerians seemed on the verge of victory in a bloody national liberation war against an almost indigenised French settler population plus metropolitan troops. And the Soviet Union and China stood proud, the sentinels of international revolution, offering their services as tribunes and quartermasters to those among the downtrodden elsewhere in the world who had the will to challenge the misfortune that three centuries of

²Pre-eminent among them Che Guevara, *Guerilla Warfare* (Harmondsworth: Pelican Books, 1969). It was first published in English by Monthly Review Press in the United States in 1961. Analyses of the Cuban and Algerian revolutionary experience were also published and distributed in ANC circles inside South Africa in the early 1960s. IV/Goldberg, p.212; IV/Bunting, p.62.

imperialism had visited upon them.

Inside South Africa, a few excitable and some calmer minds had discussed the prospects for revolution for some years. Within the ANC, members had long speculated when they might take up arms, and some had, since about 1957, experimented with petrol bombs and the like.³ Within the South African Communist Party (SACP), reconstituted in secret in 1953 three years after being outlawed, there had been constant debate around the issue.⁴

In 1958-1959, in an opposition journal of the time, *Africa South*, three leading radical white opponents of apartheid became inveigled into this debate.⁵ Julius Lewin,⁶ a prominent academic at the University of the Witwatersrand, argued that it did not follow from the patent injustice meted out to the African majority that South Africa was 'ripe for revolution'. Several prerequisites of successful revolution were absent: most important, the South African government showed no signs of losing control of its armed forces. Moreover, argued Lewin,

³ *IV/Maharaj*, p.374.

⁴ *IV/Bunting*, p.60.

⁵ See Julius Lewin, 'No Revolution Round the Corner', and H J Simons, 'An Addendum', in *Africa South* 3 (1), 1958; and Michael Harmel, 'Revolutions are not Abnormal', in *Africa South* 3 (2), 1959. See also Colin Bundy, 'Around Which Corner?: Revolutionary theory and contemporary South Africa', in *Transformation* 8, 1989.

⁶ Julius Lewin is reputed to have described himself as South Africa's last Fabian.

there was no prospect that the conditions for revolution would develop; instead, white power and apartheid were likely to persist 'almost indefinitely'. The radical opposition should leave off thoughts of revolution as the means to achieve fundamental change, concentrating instead on non-violent popular organisation among the majority, particularly trade unions.

Lewin's views found an echo with Jack Simons, a leading SACP theorist with a reputation for independence of thought. Simons argued, however, that conditions might change quickly: increasing urbanisation, industrial employment and education among blacks might rapidly sharpen racial and class cleavages. He predicted that an alliance of workers, urban youth and intellectuals might emerge to challenge white power.

Michael Harmel, another SACP theorist, sidestepped the issues raised by Lewin and Simons. He defined revolution in a way which contradicted Marxist-Leninist orthodoxy as 'fairly rapid and fundamental change in a society, involving the displacement of the ruling class, whether there is fighting or not'⁷. Having done so, he declared that it was 'certain' in South Africa. He predicted that it would resemble anti-colonial struggles in Africa and Asia, arguing that the 'wave of revolutionary change and upheaval' that had been sweeping eastern

⁷My emphasis.

Europe, Asia and Africa must soon begin to wash South Africa.

The debate indicated that, even as South Africa moved seemingly inexorably towards confrontation, there were serious radical thinkers who did not consider revolutionary violence the preferable, let alone the only, means to achieve the fundamental changes which the major black organisations sought. Moreover, these thinkers were pessimistic about the prospects for armed revolution. Elsewhere in the ANC-led Congress Alliance - which also comprised the South African Indian Congress, the Coloured People's Organisation (later Congress), the Congress of Democrats and the South African Congress of Trade Unions - there was a tradition of passive resistance, sustained perhaps at least as much by moral conviction as by black South Africans' lack of armaments.

Beyond the cautions against revolutionary violence which had been voiced by contributors to *Africa South* lay a long list of others. The territories bordering on South Africa, then still under British or Portuguese colonial control, were unlikely to provide rear bases for a military campaign against the South African government. Conditions inside South Africa were scarcely more favourable for revolutionary violence. There were very few of the remote, heavily wooded areas which had been shown elsewhere to be convenient, if not necessary, to mount the style of warfare

then favoured in most small revolutionary wars - guerilla warfare. South Africa had only the remnants of a black peasantry - the class on which a number of post-World War Two guerilla campaigns had been based. Other blacks working on the land were often strictly-controlled labourers on white farms. In South Africa's cities, the pass laws and rigid residential segregation placed tight security constraints on the black population. Apart from a few socialists and liberals, South African whites were evidently politically united in the maintenance of their political and economic domination. Many whites' attitudes were coloured by their view of themselves as indigenous to South Africa and by their inability to emigrate to the countries from which their ancestors had originated. The security forces, in addition to being loyal to the government of the day, were relatively efficient, mobile and familiar with South Africa's terrain and conditions. Black military traditions and skills had been systematically repressed since the early years of the century and, in practice, there were severe restrictions on black ownership of firearms. Moreover, white domination was based on a relatively advanced industrial economy and system of communications which black labour had, hitherto, shown no significant ability to disrupt.

These cautions against resort to revolutionary violence as the means to achieve fundamental change soon, however, joined the fatalities of Sharpeville.

The Rise in Influence of the SACP

The government's banning of the Communist Party of South Africa (CPSA) in 1950 appears to have produced a paradoxical effect. Rather than diminish communist influence, the banning advanced it within the ANC and its still-legal allies. After reviving underground in 1953, the South African Communist Party (SACP)⁸ diverted more energy into national liberation politics - a course consistent with theoretical perspectives emerging within the SACP.

When the ANC was also outlawed, SACP members working in and with it already had some of the experience of clandestinity it now most needed. Indeed, in the months of the 1960 emergency, between April and August, the *de facto* national command centre for most ANC and Congress Alliance activities comprised a handful of SACP members who had evaded police and who moved as a group from one safe house to another in Johannesburg.⁹

It was in one of the group's safe houses in about April or May 1960,¹⁰ according to one of their number, Ben

⁸The party underwent a slight change of name upon its resuscitation.

⁹At various stages, the group comprised Yusuf Dadoo, later SACP chairman, Michael Harmel, Moses Kotane, SACP general secretary, and Ben Turok. Sometimes visitors included Ruth First, Bram Fischer, Bartholomew Hlapane, Jack Hodgson and Joe Matthews, *IV/Turok*, pp.1,295-1,298.

¹⁰*IV/Turok*, p.1,298.

Turok, that the first formal proposal came within the ANC nexus for a resort to armed revolutionary struggle. Its author was Harmel. Turok recalls:

Harmel wrote a document...[T]he message [was] that peaceful methods of struggle were over; that one had to now look at alternatives; and that the alternative was armed struggle - violence. And it set this in the context of Marxist theory and communist theory, and revolutionary practice...¹¹

Harmel's argument was communicated to other ANC and SACP networks that had evaded the police dragnet, and Turok implies it was influential.¹²

A full and formal SACP decision to resort to armed activity followed, predating the ANC's decision, which was taken in June 1961, by between one and six months.¹³ Party members concluded that armed struggle was feasible because, according to a senior SACP member at the time, Brian Bunting, they believed it would have 'massive support from

¹¹IV/Turok, pp.1,296, 1,299. This is supported by Harmel writing under the pseudonym A Lerumo, *Fifty Fighting Years. The South African Communist Party 1921-1971* (London: Inkululeko Publications, 1971), p.95.

¹²IV/Turok, p.1,298.

¹³Turok maintains that the SACP took the decision 'very soon after the emergency', which ended in August 1960 - IV/Turok, pp.1,298-1,301; Rob Lambert says the SACP took the decision in December of that year - Rob Lambert, 'Black resistance in South Africa, 1950-61: an assessment of the political strike campaign', a University of London, Institute of Commonwealth Studies, seminar paper, February 25 1978, p.6., cited in Tom Lodge, *Black Politics in South Africa Since 1945* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1983), p.234. Mac Maharaj, an SACP member who played a leading role in Umkhonto we Sizwe from 1963, maintains the SACP made the decision a month before the ANC took its position in favour of political violence. IV/Maharaj, pp.368-369.

the oppressed people particularly'. They anticipated problems arising from the lay-out of the country and the physical strength of the state. In general, however, their feeling was that, because they were not a small group of extremists who were out of touch with ordinary people, there was a good chance that armed struggle would succeed.¹⁴ The SACP duly established small squads of saboteurs employing rudimentary methods, which became the forerunners of the armed force Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK).¹⁵

Some - including the authors of the MK manifesto, plus Nelson Mandela, MK's first commander in chief, and ANC historian Francis Meli - have implied that the ANC leadership, as such, was not initially involved in a decision to form MK; rather, that the decision was taken by individual leaders of the ANC - by Mandela and others, together with leading figures in the SACP. They have stated that, while the ANC national executive committee as a whole said it understood these individuals' decision to form MK and would not act against them, the executive did not support the decision or commit the ANC as a whole to it.¹⁶

¹⁴IV/Bunting, pp.59-60.

¹⁵IV/Maharaj, pp.368-369.

¹⁶See Command of Umkhonto we Sizwe, 'Umkhonto we Sizwe', in Thomas Karis and Gail M Gerhart, *From Protest to Challenge. A Documentary History of African Politics in South Africa 1882-1964*, Volume 3 (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1977) pp.716-717; Nelson Mandela, 'Second Court Statement, 1964', in Nelson Mandela, *The Struggle is My Life* (London: International Defence and Aid Fund, 1986) p.166; Francis Meli, *South Africa Belongs to Us. A History of the ANC* (Harare: Zimbabwe Publishing House, 1988) p.146; Brian Bunting, *Moses Kotane. South African*

Other evidence, however, suggests otherwise. According to Mac Maharaj, who served on MK's second (*ad hoc*) high command following the arrest of most of MK's original leadership in 1963, MK was, from the outset, an integral part of the ANC and its formation was unanimously approved by the ANC executive in mid-1961.¹⁷ The executive distanced itself from MK for tactical reasons.¹⁸ Slovo has publicly supported this view. He has indicated that projecting MK as independent of the ANC was a deliberate fiction promoted to serve two purposes.¹⁹ One was to protect members of the ANC and other ANC-aligned organisations from being implicated in MK's armed activities.²⁰ Maharaj adds a related reason: that Moses Kotane, SACP general secretary, insisted that the resort to armed activity should not undermine the ability of members of the outlawed ANC to mobilise their constituency by non-violent political means under some other guise.²¹ Slovo says the second reason was that ANC leaders needed to introduce gently the resort to violence to those in the Congress Alliance who had long been committed to passive

Revolutionary (London: Inkululeko Publications, 1975) pp.266-268.

¹⁷ IV/Maharaj, pp.371-372.

¹⁸ IV/Maharaj, pp.371-372.

¹⁹ Joe Slovo, 'The Sabotage Campaign', in *Dawn Souvenir Issue*, 25th Anniversary of MK, n.d. [circa 1986], p.24, in App/A/1, p.24.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ IV/Maharaj, p.368.

resistance.²²

Joe Modise, a founder member of MK who later became its commander, implies that ANC president Albert Luthuli was party to, and in some senses hosted, the decision to form MK. Some accounts have suggested that Luthuli opposed MK's formation.²³ Modise reports that the formation of MK as an ANC project was endorsed when leaders of the Congress Alliance partners and SACP were 'officially brought together in Stanger, Natal, at Chief Albert Luthuli's place'.²⁴ Maharaj insists that Luthuli supported this basic shift in strategic outlook.²⁵ He adds that an additional reason for pretending that the ANC and Luthuli were removed from MK was to safeguard Luthuli's chances of being awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. Luthuli had been nominated for the prize and his receipt of it held out the prospect of a leap in the ANC's diplomatic, political and moral standing.²⁶ Maharaj adds that some Congress Alliance individuals mistakenly inferred that Luthuli opposed the resort to arms from the fact that, at the Congress Alliance meeting in late 1961 to consider the ANC executive's secret

²²Slovo, 'Sabotage Campaign'.

²³See, for example: Brian Bunting, *Moses Kotane*. pp.268-269; Lodge, *Black Politics*, p.233; Mary Benson, *South Africa. The Struggle for a Birthright* (London: International Defence and Aid Fund, 1985), p.237; and including my *MK*, pp.4-5.

²⁴Joe Modise, 'The Happiest Moment in My Life', in *Dawn Souvenir Issue*, p.10.

²⁵*IV/Maharaj*, pp.368-370.

²⁶*IV/Maharaj*, pp.368-370.

full endorsement of armed struggle, Luthuli insisted that there again be completely open debate on the ANC executive's decision. This meant that ANC executive members were individually free to renege. Maharaj argues that Luthuli encouraged free debate on this second occasion not in order to undermine the ANC executive's earlier decision but, rather, to ensure maximum unity around that decision. Some of Luthuli's senior ANC colleagues did not recognise this subtlety and became irate.²⁷

The crucial point emerging from the account given by Maharaj, Modise and Slovo is that there was no deep disagreement within the ANC national leadership over the resort to armed activity, though there were probably different degrees of enthusiasm for it and its prospects. In the regions, however, elements of the Natal provincial ANC leadership and some members of Congress Alliance organisations, particularly of the Indian Congress, either questioned it or wanted to distance themselves from the decision.²⁸

²⁷*Ibid.* Maharaj adds that, in subsequent years, some ANC leaders debated disclosing Luthuli's support for MK's formation to equip them to deflect attempts by the Inkatha leader, Chief Mangosutho Buthelezi, to use Luthuli's alleged opposition to armed activity as a basis for attacking the ANC. *IV/Maharaj*, p.372. No clarification of Luthuli's attitude was, however, released.

²⁸See, among others, Edward Feit, *Urban Revolt in South Africa 1960-64. A Case Study* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1971), pp.259-260; *IV/Goldberg*, pp.191-193; Slovo, 'Sabotage Campaign'.

The extent of the role and influence of the SACP in the formation of MK was an additional factor in the ANC's dissimulation. Turok has pointed to Harmel's early intervention. Maharaj says that the debate over the extent to which the ANC and other Congress Alliance organisations should be identified with the resort to arms first occurred in the SACP.²⁹ Moreover, it was the SACP which set up MK proto-units. But the most important factor in SACP influence came through individuals. Maharaj has implied that more than three members of this initial high command were SACP members.³⁰ Those known to have been SACP members were Govan Mbeki, Raymond Mhlaba³¹ and Slovo.³² The other two on the original high command were Mandela, MK's first commander in chief, and Walter Sisulu, who was initially in charge of political structures in the first underground high command but took over the military side in an acting capacity after Mandela's arrest in 1962.

The SACP felt the need to hide the extent of its role in order to prevent the ANC being divided by anti-communism or falling victim to Cold War propaganda. This, according

²⁹IV/Maharaj, p.369.

³⁰IV/Maharaj, pp.370-371.

³¹Mhlaba was already in the SACP central committee and had been earmarked to take over formally as MK commander-in-chief. IV/Maharaj, p.376.

³²According to Maharaj, Andrew Mlangeni and Joe Modise were not members of the original command, but were coopted into its structures very soon after it had been established. IV/Maharaj, pp.374-375.

to Maharaj, was an additional, important reason for projecting the fiction that MK was a quasi-independent organisation decided upon by Mandela and a few close associates.³³ MK's ostensible independence also meant that non-Africans could participate fully within it. Had MK been publicly and formally an ANC body, non-Africans could not have joined because, at that stage, the ANC was an Africans-only organisation.

The conception of MK was as much a decision of the SACP as it was of the ANC, if not more so. MK's veneer as an orphan gave it a freedom it would not otherwise have had and enabled its parents to deny responsibility for it until circumstances made it advantageous to claim their child. MK's parentage dictated that its schooling would draw on the texts which combined the Marxist-Leninist with the anti-colonial revolutionary experience, the predominant school of revolutionary thought given international developments at the time.

The Roots of Strategy

Revolutionaries invariably fight wars that are, as Rapoport has termed it, 'not symmetrical'.³⁴ They generally do not, initially, possess the technology, resources and

³³IV/Maharaj, pp.370-371.

³⁴Anatol Rapoport, 'Introduction', in Carl von Clausewitz, *On War* (London: Penguin, 1968), p.53

organisation, particularly in the military sphere, of the state they are seeking to overthrow. Revolutionaries are, therefore, challenged to find way to redress, and ultimately reverse, this a-symmetry. Revolutionary strategists and commentators have long debated how to do so. Various answers have resulted, often influenced by the conditions in which a specific revolutionary struggle has been waged. The most frequent answer has been that the revolutionary organisation should secure the support, involvement or compliance of its potential constituency.

Marx and Engels, confronted by the suppression of the 1848 revolutions in Austria, Hungary and the German states, and by Louis Bonaparte's rise to power in France, recognised the need for the urban proletariat to gain the support of the peasantry lest peasant levees, or voters, be turned against urban revolutionaries.³⁵ Lenin took these lessons to heart and insisted on the centrality of an alliance of workers and peasants to the 'democratic revolution'.³⁶ Nevertheless, the Bolsheviki, an urban group, focused their efforts on carrying through an insurrection which combined armed and other forms of struggle in a sharp assault on the citadels of state power

³⁵Marx, *Eighteenth Brumaire*; Sigmund Neumann and Mark von Hagen, 'Engels and Marx on Revolution, War and the Army in Society', in Peter Paret (Ed.), *Makers of Modern Strategy from Machiavelli to the Nuclear Age* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986).

³⁶V I Lenin, 'What is to be Done', in V I Lenin, *Selected Works. Volume One* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1977); V I Lenin, 'Two Tactics of Social Democracy in the Democratic Revolution', in Lenin, *Selected Works. Vol One*.

in Petrograd, Moscow and certain other cities.

Mao Dzedong moved the primary site of confrontation from the urban metropolis to the rural areas,³⁷ in the process drawing attention to the political significance of the peasantry in China. Moreover, he argued that the best way to hasten the inevitable was to do so slowly. Whereas previous military and revolutionary doctrine had sought a quick victory over an enemy, Mao saw protracted struggle as the best method by which to redress the asymmetry between revolutionary forces and more powerful state forces. Guerilla forces would seek to attenuate and wear down state forces over a long period while gathering their own political and military strength, to the point where they could contend decisively for state power.³⁸

³⁷Ho Chi Minh, a young agent in the Comintern Agitprop division in Moscow in the 1920s, who was sent on a secret mission to China in 1924, may have anticipated Mao in this by about 10 years. Ho contributed an essay to the Comintern's propaganda blueprint for insurrection; the collection was published under the pseudonym A. Neuberg, first in German in 1928 and then in French in 1931. It was published in English in 1970. See [Ho Chi Minh], 'The Party's Military Work among the Peasants', in A. Neuberg, *Armed Insurrection* (London: New Left Books, 1970), particularly p.255. Another of the contributors to the collection, Erich Wollenberg, explains that Ho's views were 'not taken seriously' within the Comintern and that Ho 'had to struggle against the prejudices of the Comintern parties from the industrial countries, who denied the revolutionary role of the peasantry in the proletarian liberation struggle'. Wollenberg reports that Ho himself considered he was a 'voice crying in the wilderness'. See Erich Wollenberg, 'How we wrote *Armed Insurrection*', in Neuberg, *Armed Insurrection*, pp.22-23.

³⁸Mao Tse Tung, 'On Protracted War' and 'Problems of Strategy in China's Revolutionary War', in Mao Tse Tung, *Selected Military Writings of Mao Tse Tung* (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1967), particularly pp.187-267 and pp.109-123.

E L Katzenbach has shown that Mao's doctrine stressed a trio of intangibles: time, space and will. Taber summarises Katzenbach's insight thus:

Lacking the arms with which to confront well-equipped armies in the field, Mao avoided battles by surrendering territory. In so doing...he traded space for time, and used the time to produce [political] will: the psychological capacity of the Chinese people to resist defeat.³⁹

Furthermore, Mao, placed a new order of emphasis on the need for prior political work among the revolutionaries' potential constituency. Guerillas, from their initial position of weakness, had little chance of success without popular support for, or involvement in, their activities. Shy and Collier note that, for Mao,

the first phase of revolutionary warfare must be political mobilization - the lengthy, painstaking process of recruiting and organizing popular support, building a dedicated and disciplined revolutionary cadre at the village level. During this first phase, only the most limited and selective use of violence is permissible; overt military action is better avoided altogether because it risks awakening the government to its peril and bringing armed repression down on an unready revolutionary organization.⁴⁰

Moreover, for Mao, no clear distinction could be drawn between political and military tasks in revolutionary warfare. In 1929, Mao wrote:

[T]he Red Army should certainly not confine itself to fighting; besides fighting to destroy

³⁹Robert Taber, *The War of the Flea. A Study of Guerrilla Warfare Theory and Practice* (London: Paladin, 1970), pp.47-48.

⁴⁰Shy and Collier, 'Revolutionary War', p.850.

the enemy's military strength, it should shoulder such important tasks as doing propaganda among the masses, organizing the masses, arming them, helping them to establish revolutionary political power and setting up Party organizations.⁴¹

Vietnamese revolutionaries under Ho Chi Minh and General Vo Nguyen Giap largely followed Mao's doctrine.⁴²

Much Marxist-Leninist orthodoxy on revolution was challenged as a result of the Cuban revolution in the 1960s. Dubious accounts of it, particularly books by Che Guevara and Regis Debray,⁴³ implied that it was not necessary to await the maturation of conditions for revolution suggested by Marx, Lenin and others; nor were the preparations advocated by Mao a requirement for success. Rather, the injection of a small armed revolutionary force, or *foco*, into a situation of political discontent could, through its use of violence, quickly muster a political base and catalyse revolution.

Those involved in developing operational strategy in the ANC, MK and SACP in the 1960s drew on facets of this Marxist-Leninist tradition. Their discourse depended on the

⁴¹Mao Tse Tung, 'On Correcting Mistaken Ideas in the Party', in Mao Tse Tung, *Selected Military Writings*, p.54.

⁴²Shy and Collier, 'Revolutionary War', pp.846-849. Giap's two major texts bear this out: General Vo Nguyen Giap, *People's War People's Army* (Hanoi: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1961); and General Vo Nguyen Giap, *Banner of People's War, The Party's Military Line* (London: Pall Mall Press, 1970).

⁴³See Che Guevara, *Guerilla Warfare*; Regis Debray, *Revolution in the Revolution? Armed Struggle and Political Struggle in Latin America* (New York: Grove Press, 1967).

notion that fundamental change entailed the use of revolutionary violence. Like Lenin, they believed the policy of a state depended upon force or the outcome of warfare - whether class struggle or imperial/colonial conquest. Overthrowing the state likewise depended upon force; repression in South Africa evidently supported this conviction. Political activity was necessary in the course of revolutionary warfare in order to redress military asymmetry. In contrast to Von Clausewitz's aphorism that war was a 'mere continuation of policy by other means',⁴⁴ their theoretical heritage implied that policy and politics were simultaneously the offspring and servants of warfare.⁴⁵ The role of political mobilisation and organisation in revolutionary conflict was merely to service military imperatives. Those situating their politics within this discourse who have claimed that they have employed warfare as an instrument of politics⁴⁶ have promoted a rhetorically useful fiction at variance with the implications of their own theory.

Other conceptual developments in the international communist movement also encouraged the ANC and SACP towards

⁴⁴Clausewitz, *On War*, p.119.

⁴⁵The best example of this kind of thinking are: V I Lenin, 'The State and Revolution'; and V I Lenin, 'The Military Programme of the Proletarian Revolution', in Lenin, *Selected Works Volume 1* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1977).

⁴⁶See, for example: Lenin, 'Military Programme', p.742; Vo Nguyen Giap, *People's War People's Army*, p.41A; Mao Tse-Tung, 'Problems of Strategy in China's Revolutionary War', p.78; Mao Tse Tung, 'On Correcting Mistaken Ideas in the Party', pp.53-56.

a military emphasis in strategy. The concept of 'national democracy' was one. It resonated through the ANC and SACP's policy and strategy from the late 1950s onwards.⁴⁷ Deemed a lodestar for underdeveloped societies seeking independence from colonial or neo-colonial relations after World War Two, the concept was basically anti-imperialist. It suggested that class or sectoral differences should be subordinated to an over-riding effort to transform patterns of political participation in these societies and to bring their economies under national control. Moreover, it was thought of as a transitional phase between capitalism and socialism. The simultaneity of its anti-imperialism/colonialism and its limited programme for economic transformation provided a point of convergence for nationalist and socialist objectives.

This convergence was most clearly stated in the South African case in the SACP's theory of 'colonialism of a special type', which was first fully formulated in 1962,⁴⁸ but which was incipient in SACP thinking before then. Programmatically, it held that the revolutionary moment in South Africa would probably comprise insurrection. It

⁴⁷See, for example, Peter Hudson, 'Images of the Future and Strategies in the Present: The Freedom Charter and the South African Left', in Phillip Frankel, Noam Pines and Mark Swilling (Eds.), *State, Resistance and Change in South Africa* (London: Croom Helm, 1988); Gavin Williams, 'Review Essay', in *Social Dynamics* 14 (1) 1988; Bundy, 'Around Which Corner?'

⁴⁸SACP, 'The Road to South African Freedom', in SACP, *South African Communists Speak. Documents from the History of the South African Communist Party 1915-1980* (London: Inkululeko Publications, 1981), pp.284-320.

argued that the central characteristic of South African society was that, within the borders of one country, there were the features of both an imperialist state and a colony; that black South Africa was white South Africa's 'colony'; that, in response to political and economic suppression, black South Africans experienced no acutely antagonistic class divisions among themselves but were driven towards uniting around a strong national identity; and that the challenge to this special type of colonialism had to be mounted primarily around nationalist issues and at a political level, rather than around issues of economic class.

Colin Bundy has identified the militarist implications of this kind of thinking. He has argued that:

An analysis which viewed class conflict as subordinate to the national question looked to guerilla action not only for its military gains but also for its contribution towards politicising and mobilising the masses.⁴⁹

Evolving Strategy, 1960-61

Sheridan Johns believes that guiding the formation of MK in 1961 was a coherently phased strategy, one which envisaged

a long term, multi-staged campaign of disciplined violence in which a hard core of trained militants, supported by mass-based political activity and crucial external aid, [would] confront state power with the ultimate goal of

⁴⁹Bundy, 'Around Which Corner?'

seizing it.⁵⁰

Slovo has made the same claim to coherence. The sabotage campaign, with which MK began, was supposed to provide both a political and military bridge to a confrontational, revolutionary outlook.⁵¹ Limited sabotage would make people aware of the break with the non-violent past and, it was hoped, win their approval for the new methods; it would provide a transition in which recruits and new methods could be tested en route to the development of an armed force eventually mounting a broad revolutionary assault.

But Slovo's account contradicts that of the MK manifesto. An eloquent assertion of innocence, the manifesto not only declared that the government had to bear moral responsibility for the resort to violence because repression had made armed resistance unavoidable; it also expressed the hope that MK's limited sabotage would convince the government to make fundamental political changes to avoid a descent into civil war. If that hope was entertained at all within the Congress Alliance and SACP, Slovo's account suggests it was probably negligible in its significance. Strategic questions rapidly centred on how to develop a popular armed struggle for the seizure of state power in South Africa. Moreover, armed activity came to be

⁵⁰Sheridan Johns, 'Obstacles to Guerilla Warfare: A South African Case Study', in *Journal of Modern African Studies*, No 2, 1973, p. 272.

⁵¹Joe Slovo, 'South Africa - No Middle Road', in Davidson B., Slovo J. & Wilkinson A.R., *Southern Africa: The New Politics of Revolution* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976) pp. 186-187.

viewed not only as the primary means by which eventually to overthrow the South African state but also as the major means by which to advance in each phase of escalation towards that goal.

The origins of this early emphasis on armed activity lay in the interplay of three factors. One, traced above, comprised the roots of the revolutionary strategy of the ANC and SACP after 1961 - roots firmly embedded in Marxist-Leninist soil. Secondly, there was a fairly general desire in successive ANC and SACP generations to retaliate against what they saw as a brutal, violent state. Non-violent political work often seemed a decidedly second-best response to conditions of severe repression.⁵²

The third factor was that strategists drew their guidance most heavily from those revolutionary precedents which most explicitly emphasised military activities. ANC and SACP members in the 1960s list Algeria, China, Greece, Russia, Vietnam and Yugoslavia as the precedents to which they referred.⁵³ But none, initially, was as influential as the Cuban revolution. They accepted Che Guevara's *foco*, or detonator, theory of revolution. MK founder members report that Guevara's book, *Guerilla Warfare*, was an

⁵²IV/Maharaj, p.381. This was also true of later ANC generations. IV/Matshakiza, pp.582-583; IV/Molefe, p.622; IV/Rabkin, p.808.

⁵³IV/Bunting, pp.62-64; IV/Goldberg, pp.210-218, IV/Turok, pp.1,310-1,313, 1,325-1,327.

important reference.⁵⁴

Notwithstanding ANC and SACP explicit and implicit protests to the contrary,⁵⁵ this Guevarist 'detonator' approach underlay much ANC operational strategic practice in this early period. The two organisations largely ignored mass-based political activity, concentrating their most gifted and talented organisers in armed activity.⁵⁶ The caution voiced by, pre-eminently, Kotane that political work by political means be vigorously pursued alongside armed activity was drowned in the excitement over the

⁵⁴IV/Goldberg, pp.212-213; IV/Turok, pp.1,325-1,326.

⁵⁵See ANC, *Strategy and Tactics of the ANC*, in ANC, *ANC Speaks. Documents and Statements of the African National Congress* (ANC, n.d. [circa 1979]), p.175; Joe Slovo, 'Latin America and the Ideas of Regis Debray', in *African Communist*, Second Quarter 1968; and Joe Slovo, 'Che in Bolivia', *African Communist*, Third Quarter 1969. The first of the two essays was later reprinted in amplified form as a pamphlet, Joe Slovo, *The Theories of Regis Debray* (London: Ellis Bowles, n.d. [circa 1969]), in App/A/2.

⁵⁶The inclusion of Nelson Mandela, Govan Mbeki, Raymond Mhlaba, Walter Sisulu, Joe Slovo on the original high command meant that many of the ANC's and SACP's most robust up-and-coming leaders had been detailed to armed activity. The pattern was replicated at MK regional command level. The organisation worst affected by the diversion of officials to military work was the South African Congress of Trade Unions (Sactu). Sactu was, at the time, arguably the only Congress Alliance organisation that had a 'mass base' and could still operate in the legal sphere. The key figures in MK regional commands in the Border, Eastern Cape, Natal and Western Cape were Sactu officials. Barrell, *MK*, p.9. Similar arguments are made by Bruno Mtolo and Edward Feit. See Bruno Mtolo, *Umkhonto we Sizwe. The Road to the Left* (Durban: Trakensberg Press, 1966), p.15; and Edward Feit, *Workers Without Weapons* (Hamden: Archon Books, 1975). One of MK's earliest recruits, Eric Mtshali, says that he and other trade unionists used their positions to 'recruit the best out of the working class'. Eric Mtshali, 'December Sixteen, '61, in Durban', in *Dawn Souvenir Issue*, p.13. The best evidence of the diversion of talent to MK is provided by hindsight: the way in which, once MK was smashed in 1963-1964, most Congress Alliance organisation collapsed with it.

resort to arms.

By 1963, the ANC had drawn up a plan to commence a rural guerilla struggle, 'Operation Mayibuye'. The Chinese, Cuban and more recent Algerian guerilla struggles provided foreign precedents. Domestically, the revolt against the local state in the hills and mountains of Pordoland in 1960 seemed to indicate a potential for rural guerilla warfare in South Africa. Govan Mbeki, a member of the high command, drew his colleagues attention to this in his writings, later collected in his *Peasants' Revolt*.⁵⁷

Operation Mayibuye was premised on the belief that black popular support for MK, alongside international isolation of the South African government and 'massive assistance' for the ANC from abroad, would redress the military a-symmetry between MK and the state. The plan also assumed that hitherto passive support for MK would rapidly translate into actual involvement in revolutionary activity immediately MK turned from sabotage to guerilla struggle. In this sense, the draft plan for Operation Mayibuye echoed Guevara. Indeed, it declared that the

general uprising must be sparked off by organised and well prepared guerilla operations during the course of which the masses of people will be

⁵⁷Govan Mbeki, *South Africa. The Peasants Revolt* (London: IDAF, 1984), pp.127-134. Mbeki's writings, edited and prepared for publication by Ruth First, were first published by Penguin African Library in 1964.

drawn in and armed.[my emphasis]⁵⁸

Under the operation, guerilla struggle would be launched by the infiltration of four foreign-trained groups of some 30 men each into four rural areas; simultaneously 7,000 auxiliaries would be mobilised inside the country. The externally-trained groups were envisaged as a sort of elite, whose task it would be to attack targets of major strategic importance. The auxiliaries, on the other hand, would combine sabotage with agitation and would succeed in drawing ordinary people into anti-state activity. Underlying the rural bias of the proposed operation was an assumption that topography, together with the attitudes of the peasantry and others living on the land, made the rural areas the more favourable terrain in which to conduct armed struggle in South Africa. This was, evidently, an assumption Mao could safely make about China, the FLN about Algeria and Guevara about Cuba; but there were serious grounds on which to question it in the South African context.

In the event, the question remained hypothetical, as no variant of Operation Mayibuye was executed. Following Mandela's arrest a year earlier, the remaining high command was arrested in mid-1963 by state security forces before it could initiate any actual guerilla warfare. At that stage,

⁵⁸'Operation Mayibuye', in Karis and Gerhart, *From Protest to Challenge*, Vol.3, p.761.

MK membership inside South Africa did not exceed 250,⁵⁹ and the number was probably substantially less than that. MK members had been organised into regional commands which comprised four or five leaders. Many, if not most, regional commanders had occupied important or public positions in still-legal Congress Alliance organisations. MK operations had been restricted to sabotage, of which there had been about 190 cases, most of them small-scale.⁶⁰ In preparation for Operation Mayibuye, a group of senior ANC members had been sent abroad under Mhlaba's command for training in China;⁶¹ and an estimated 300 ordinary members were also undergoing training abroad.⁶²

In the three years following the arrest of the high command on July 11 1963, ruthless security force action destroyed the organisational capacity of MK, the ANC and SACP inside South Africa.⁶³ The three organisations' only functioning components were in exile. There, the debate within the organisations themselves over the reasons for their near extinction did not prompt any fundamental revision of operational strategy. The debate reasserted

⁵⁹*IV/Kasrils*, p.331.

⁶⁰Edward Feit, *Urban Revolt*, pp.325-328.

⁶¹ These included Joe Gqabi, Wilton Mkwayi and Andrew Mlangeni. Barrell, *MK*, pp.11-13.

⁶²Feit, *Urban Revolt*, pp.234-235; Lodge, *Black Politics*, p.237.

⁶³A point conceded by the ANC, in ANC, 'Statement of the NEC of the ANC on Heroes Day, December 16, 1986 on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of MK', in *Dawn Souvenir Issue*.

that revolutionary action (of which the chief feature should be armed struggle) remained the way to achieve fundamental political and economic change in South Africa.

ANC and SACP strategists concluded that they had incorrectly read international conditions. They had over-estimated the support that they would receive from newly independent African states and other allies, and exaggerated the significance of condemnations of South African government policy by Western nations.⁶⁴ Locally, they had grossly under-estimated the resolution and the coercive capacity of the state.⁶⁵

These strategists, among them Slovo, appeared to realise that the consequences of their under-estimation of the state had been made all the more serious by their failure to engage, to any significant extent, in popular political mobilisation by political means once they had decided to form MK.⁶⁶ When MK was placed under extreme pressure in 1963-1964, its members could find few places to hide. Contrary to Kotane's injunction, the ability of Congress Alliance organisations to continue political or trade union work had been much diminished immediately MK was launched. Slovo also concluded that MK cadres were

⁶⁴ Slovo, 'No Middle Road', p.190.

⁶⁵ Joe Slovo, 'The Sabotage Campaign', in *Dawn Souvenir Issue*, p.25; Slovo, 'No Middle Road', p.192.

⁶⁶ Slovo, 'South Africa. No Middle Road', pp.192-193.

inadequately prepared for the rigours of detention, which often included torture after 1962.⁶⁷ This meant that one security force breakthrough in tracing MK's membership often led quickly to another. In this sense, MK probably failed in one of its early objectives - to identify which activists had the mettle for the 'new tactics'.⁶⁸

Certainly, the sabotage campaign of 1961-1963 failed to build a bridge to popular armed struggle, which Slovo identified as one of its central objectives.⁶⁹ The low level of simultaneous political work considerably diminished its chances of doing so. The campaign did, however, facilitate the recruitment of some 300 people for guerilla training abroad by mid-1963. From then, hopes of a popular armed struggle rested with these trainees. To realise these hopes, the trainees had to be able to return to South Africa, where they had to be received by intact clandestine structures. But return was extremely difficult and, inside South Africa, the devastation that security forces wreaked upon MK and related structures, together with despondency among the ANC's potential constituency, deprived intending returnees of any realistic prospect of secure operating conditions.

⁶⁷Slovo, 'No Middle Road,' p.192; Slovo, 'Sabotage Campaign', p.25.

⁶⁸Slovo, 'No Middle Road', p.187.

⁶⁹Slovo, 'No Middle Road', p.187; Slovo, 'The Sabotage Campaign', p.24.

Lodge has argued that, if the conclusion that armed struggle was possible under South African conditions in the 1960s was justified, then 'the preparations for a guerilla insurgency were, to say the least, premature'.⁷⁰ Feit has suggested that the weakness of the revolutionary challenge meant the ANC's potential constituency was not convinced it was worth its while to participate in it.⁷¹ Johnson has argued that a better course for the ANC might have been to lie low while building clandestine organisation and limiting public political involvement to developing trade unions.⁷² The criticisms raised by these commentators can be summarised in terms of Mao's three intangibles - time, space and will. The ANC did not secure for itself the time and space in which to create popular will.

There was an additional fundamental weakness in the approach of the ANC, MK and SACP. It was that, in the resort to arms, little, if any, attention was given to the different grievances or demands of various black strata. Instead, strategy was premised upon a belief that the ambitions of different sections of black society could be subsumed and homogenised in one national struggle pursued principally by force. Lodge argues convincingly that what popular inclination to revolt was evident in the early

⁷⁰Lodge, *Black Politics*, p.238.

⁷¹Feit, *Urban Revolt*, p.75.

⁷²R W Johnson, *How Long Will South Africa Survive?* (Johannesburg: Macmillan, 1977), p.23.

1960s had 'to be understood in the context of often very localised and specific conditions', which made generalisation very difficult.⁷³ Had the ANC and SACP been more particular about the interests of different sections of black society and their readiness to suffer in pursuit of them, they might have been more cautious in strategising armed struggle - if, that is, they still considered armed struggle feasible. The roots of this analytical failure lay partly in the subsumption of sectoral and class struggles evident in the theory of 'colonialism of a special type'.

Evolving Strategy, 1965-74

With their domestic political and military base destroyed, the ANC, MK and SACP plotted from exile, mainly in Tanzania, where ANC headquarters were initially based, Zambia, the Soviet Union and the United Kingdom. They had about 800 people who had either undergone or were undergoing guerilla training abroad.⁷⁴ In addition, small groups of exiles survived in the territories adjoining South Africa, but their capacity for clandestine activity was severely constrained.

After 1965, exiled strategists saw their difficulty in the following terms: without an internal revolutionary

⁷³Lodge, *Black Politics*, p.239. Lodge makes a convincing empirical case for this argument in his book.

⁷⁴IV/Kasrils, p.331.

political base it was extremely difficult to mount an armed struggle; and, without the beginnings of armed combat, it was, under South African conditions of the time, equally difficult to build a domestic revolutionary political base. Between 1965-75, the ANC's and SACP's answer to this chicken-or-egg problem was to emphasise armed activity. Slovo recalls:

[The ANC] entered a phase in which it became necessary, however long it was going to take, to find ways of getting back into the situation and to demonstrate that we were able to hit the enemy as an important factor in helping to stimulate the process of political regeneration.⁷⁵

Campaigns in the Wankie (1967) and Sipolilo (1967-1968) areas of Rhodesia testified to this military emphasis. SACP leaders, some of whom had been obliged to base themselves in the United Kingdom and elsewhere in Europe because of newly-independent African states' objections to communists,⁷⁶ say they were not consulted on the campaigns.⁷⁷ At the ANC's request,⁷⁸ its guerillas were infiltrated into the north-western corner of Rhodesia in the company of fighters of the Zimbabwe African People's

⁷⁵Joe Slovo, 'The Second Stage: Attempts to Get Back', in *Dawn Souvenir Issue*, p.33.

⁷⁶*IV/Slovo*, p.1,003. *IV/Maharaj*, pp.400-401.

⁷⁷SACP, 'Central Committee Report on Organisation, March 1970, quoted in *Ikwezi*, London, ii, 1, March 1976, p.34, cited in Lodge, *Black Politics*, p.299.

⁷⁸Dumiso Dabengwa, 'Zipra and Zipa in the Zimbabwe War of National Liberation', paper presented to the *Conference on the Guerilla War in Zimbabwe*, University of Zimbabwe, Harare, July 1991, unpublished, pp.9-10, in App/B/19 (forthcoming in Bebe, N. and Ranger, T. (Eds.), *Zimbabwe's Liberation War: Soldiers*).

Union (Zapu). The ANC objective was to build a bridgehead for military infiltration into South Africa. While one section of the ANC contingent was to find or fight its way into South Africa itself, a second was to establish in then-Rhodesia (Zimbabwe) an infrastructure for future transit to South Africa.⁷⁹

Little, if any, political work had evidently been done among the black population of then-Rhodesia to prepare receiving structures for the guerillas. Some ANC members blame Zapu for this, maintaining that Zapu had said it had the necessary political contacts and base.⁸⁰ The standard of the reconnaissance work was also evidently abysmal. The guerillas did not know there was no water to be had on the Zambezi Escarpment.⁸¹ They had, therefore, to expose themselves to the local populace earlier than they would have wished.⁸² Some ANC members also allege that the training the guerillas had received, mainly in the Soviet Union following the Sino-Soviet split after 1965, had emphasised mobile warfare, the deployment of semi-conventional large columns of fighters, as opposed to guerilla tactics which would have been more suitable for

⁷⁹Chris Hani, 'The Wankie Campaign', in *Dawn Souvenir Issue*, p.35.

⁸⁰*IV/Kasrils*, p.332.

⁸¹Hani, 'Wankie', p.34.

⁸²*Ibid.*

the campaign.⁸³

The campaign was a military disaster. The ANC achieved neither of its objectives. No ANC guerillas made it back to South Africa in a condition to fight.⁸⁴ The remaining scores were killed, arrested or fled into neighbouring Botswana where they were jailed.⁸⁵

At a crisis conference of the ANC in Morogoro, Tanzania, in 1969 following the disastrous Rhodesian campaigns, delegates questioned neither the primacy of armed struggle in ANC strategy nor its feasibility. Indeed, in its newly formulated document, *Strategy and Tactics of the ANC*,⁸⁶ the conference declared that armed struggle was the 'only' form of struggle open to the ANC. It held out the vision of an eventual 'conquest of power' in South Africa. Contemporary conditions, it stated, did not promise a seizure of power in the short term, by insurrection or

⁸³IV/Jele, p.229.

⁸⁴IV/Slovo, p.1,002. One MK member, Joseph Ndluli did eventually make his way to South Africa but ended up operating from Swaziland, as will become apparent in the next chapter.

⁸⁵For fuller accounts of the Wankie and Sipolilo campaigns, see: Hani, 'Wankie'; Thomas Nkobi, 'Crossing the Zambezi'; Comrade Rodgers, 'Basil February'; and R M T Ngqungwana, 'Zambezi took a share' - all in *Dawn Souvenir Issue*. See also Dennis and Ginger Mercer (Rec. & Ed.), *From Shantytown to Forest. The Story of Norman Duka* (Richmond: LSM Information Center, 1974). I provide a very brief summary in Barrell, *MK*, pp.20-26; see also Lodge, *Black Politics*, pp.299-300; Stephen Ellis and Tsepo Sechaba, *Comrades against Apartheid. The ANC & the South African Communist Party in Exile* (London: James Currey, 1992), pp.47-51.

⁸⁶ANC, *Strategy and Tactics*, in ANC, *ANC Speaks*, p.177.

any other means; consequently, the ANC should involve itself in a protracted struggle to create favourable conditions for it. Armed activity should initially take the form of guerilla warfare, situated mainly in the rural areas, proceeding in time to mobile warfare and, eventually, to a 'future all-out war' which would bring victory. Successful guerilla struggle would depend upon political mobilisation to muster guerilla recruits and to ensure that the state was harassed politically and its forces were attenuated. In other words, it considered that political forms of struggle should be subject to the imperatives of armed struggle.

At an extended meeting of the SACP central committee a few months after Morogoro, the party was in full agreement with the ANC's *Strategy and Tactics*. Party members Joe Slovo and Joe Matthews had, in fact, played the key roles in drafting the ANC's *Strategy and Tactics*.⁸⁷ Meeting in 1970, the SACP rejected the vestigial hope, contained in its 1962 programme, 'The Road to South African Freedom', that there could be a peaceful and negotiated transfer of power to the black majority. The SACP also retreated from what it termed the 'pure detonator theory' of the past and proclaimed that armed struggle 'far from occupying the only place in the arena of struggle' was 'only one of the means to be used to raise the tempo of

⁸⁷IV/Maharaj, p.407; Ellis & Sechaba, *Comrades*, p.58.

revolutionary - action'.⁸⁸ Yet the party resolved that henceforth 'every political action, whether armed or not, should be regarded as part of the build-up towards a nationwide people's armed struggle leading to the conquest of power' [my emphasis].⁸⁹ The SACP also agreed with the ANC that armed struggle should initially take the form of guerilla warfare situated mainly in the rural areas. But, said the SACP, this did not mean it conceived of armed struggle in South Africa as a peasants' war.⁹⁰

The conclusions reached at the ANC conference in 1969 and the SACP central committee meeting the next year reasserted the two organisations' central assumptions about revolution and armed struggle, the detonator theory among them. In the year before the conference, Slovo had mounted a devastating attack on the 'detonator' approach to armed struggle in the pages of the SACP's journal, the *African Communist*.⁹¹ His efforts were rewarded when, in its opening remarks to *Strategy and Tactics*, the ANC not merely distanced itself from the 'detonator' approach but maintained it had never subscribed to the doctrine or

⁸⁸IV/Slovo, pp.961-962. The SACP also agreed with the ANC that armed struggle should initially take the form of guerilla warfare situated mainly in the rural areas. But, said the SACP, this did not mean it conceived of armed struggle in South Africa as a peasants' war. IV/Slovo, p.963.

⁸⁹IV/Slovo, p.961.

⁹⁰IV/Slovo, pp.961-963.

⁹¹Slovo, 'Ideas of Regis Debray'; Slovo, 'Che in Bolivia'; Slovo, *Theories of Regis Debray*.

employed it.

In their 1969-1979 consultations, both the ANC conference and the SACP central committee set out a distinction which facilitated the process of rationalising their mistakes. They distinguished between actions intended to foster a revolutionary situation and a revolutionary situation as such. The distinction provided a basis upon which arguably precipitate actions - the sabotage campaign, the plans for Operation Mayibuye and the Rhodesian military campaigns - could be justified as attempts to foster a revolutionary situation; in the course of mounting such attempts serious reverses could be expected.

As the 1970s dawned, practical attempts to re-instate an ANC presence in South Africa in the early 1970s continued to reflect the emphasis on military activity. Some ANC, more precisely SACP, energies were devoted to developing a handful of young South African intellectuals plus a few foreign left wing sympathisers into leaflet squads inside South Africa.⁹² But the greater portion of ANC and SACP operational energies went on trying to return a military presence to the country. This included an attempt to infiltrate a group under the MK commissar Flag Boshielo. But the group were ambushed as they crossed the Zambezi River from Zambia and Boshielo was killed. Another

⁹²IV/Kasrils, pp.295-306; IV/Cronin, pp.122-145; IV/Suttner, pp.1,213-1,223.

project aimed to land a group of guerillas and a large quantity of weapons on the Transkei coast, in an apparent attempt to resurrect a variant of the stillborn Operation Mayibuye. But the mission was aborted when a tramp steamer which the ANC had chartered developed engine trouble off the coast of Somalia.⁹³ The guerillas were then infiltrated into South Africa from Botswana, but none managed to establish themselves securely and a number were captured.

The ANC blamed the absence of an underground for its failures in the early 1970s to develop an MK guerilla presence in rural areas. The guerillas were told, upon infiltration, to integrate themselves under false identities with local folk and organise local MK networks. 'Scores', according to Slovo, were successfully put across borders into South Africa but none survived for more than a short period. They were quickly exposed to the state's network of officials and informers.⁹⁴ The frustration of the ANC's and SACP's efforts at developing armed struggle seemed to have no end.

⁹³IV/Kasrils, pp.307-310; Ronnie Kasrils, 'The Adventurer Episode' in *Dawn Souvenir Issue*, p.43.; Slovo, 'Attempts to get back', pp.33-34.

⁹⁴IV/Slovo, p.967.

Conclusion

The Sharpeville massacre, the state of emergency and the banning of the ANC in 1960 were the immediate stimulants of the turn to armed struggle, which the ANC announced publicly on December 16 1961. Once taken, that decision seemed to lock the ANC into a cycle. The disasters that soon beset the ANC, from the capture of its leadership at Rivonia to the complete suppression of radical opposition and the move into exile, seemed only to confirm its the new course. Lacking any alternative conception of how to challenge the South African state, the ANC presumed on the central importance of armed struggle and devalued other forms of political activity.

ANC armed activity between 1961 and 1974 was a failure. If the ANC benefited by this failure - perhaps via others' recognition that it had at least tried to confront the South African state - that advantage remained well hidden in 1974. The ANC had come close to being completely destroyed in 1963 and 1964 and, 10 years on, it was a near irrelevance inside South Africa.

The reasons for the failure of the ANC's armed activity between 1961 and 1974 fell into four categories: under-estimation of its enemy, the South African state; over-estimation of its own abilities and the degree of active support it could expect to receive from the black population; under-estimation of the topographical and

geopolitical difficulties it faced in trying to wage an armed struggle; and over-estimation of what armed activity was capable of achieving.

Notwithstanding the failure of armed struggle, the ANC launched no concerted effort to develop a clandestine internal political programme. Rather, to the extent that it conceived of political work as having any importance between 1961 and 1974, it saw political work as being stimulated by, or as separate from, or as subject to the imperatives of, or as being of less importance than, armed combat.

Why did the ANC persist with armed struggle despite its early failure? Why did it so devalue political activity and subordinate it to military imperatives? Part of the explanation lay in the influence of the SACP, the ANC's intimately integrated ally. The ANC appropriated Marxist-Leninist strategic discourse and imbibed one of its central tenets - that fundamental, or revolutionary, change entailed the use of violence against the state.

Once the ANC had opted for armed struggle, it was unable to resist armed struggle's organisational appetite. Many, perhaps most, of the ANC's most able organisers were pressed into ensuring that armed struggle succeeded. Other contemporary examples - Castro in Cuba, the FLN in Algeria and, earlier, Mao in China - encouraged this heavy

commitment to armed struggle. In one or other degree, these other examples seemed to suggest that it was not only fundamental change that came through the barrel of a gun; so, too, did self-respect.

Securing both restitution for the humiliations of apartheid and fundamental change seemed to require armed struggle. When the first attempts at armed struggle led to a setback of an even starker kind for the ANC, the ANC was entered upon a cycle in which this second humiliation had also to be avenged. The only means of redress seemed to be the very method that had caused this second humiliation: armed struggle.

As the next chapter will show, the ANC would continue in this consuming cycle for some time.

CHAPTER TWO*YOU ONLY WIN ONCE*

Prioritising armed struggle, January 1974 - June 1976

*A struggle is made up of failures essentially.
It's true. You only win once, and that's at the
end.*

- Joe Slovo¹

Introduction

THE ANC'S PROSPECTS as a national liberation movement changed considerably over the 30 months between January 1974 and June 1976. In 1974 the ANC was almost wholly exiled or jailed, organisationally weak, disunited and geographically fractured. Moreover the ANC lacked any domestic presence worthy of the term 'underground organisation'. By June 1976, however, the ANC was poised to break out of the near irrelevance to South African affairs into which its miscalculations of the 1960s and the state's success had thrust it. Several developments delivered this change. The ANC itself was a causal agent in only two.

The left wing coup d'etat in Portugal in April 1974 led to the independence of Angola and Mozambique the next year under governments dominated by, respectively, the MPLA and Frelimo. The ANC had a diplomatic alliance with these two liberation movements, as well as sharing with them a

¹IV/Slovo, p.1,004.

close ideological affinity and common backing from the Soviet Union and its allies. The independence of these two territories breached South Africa's regional *cordon sanitaire* which had curtailed the ANC external mission's ability to interact with South African political developments.

Inside South Africa, legal and semi-legal political activity against apartheid among black people at large re-emerged following the quiescence of the latter 1960s. The black consciousness movement was, by 1974, exciting the political aspirations of some black strata, notably the intelligentsia and youth. Church groups were also actively servicing organisation around black grievances. Black industrial workers had begun to reassert themselves through industrial action and trade union organisation, and were receiving significant assistance from young, left wing intellectuals.

The ANC external mission improved its capacity to engage in domestic struggle from abroad. It began to establish an operational organisation in Mozambique, and increased its cadre presences in other black-ruled independent states adjoining South Africa.²

Inside South Africa, small groups of individuals, notably recently released ANC political prisoners, who had

²IV/Slovo, p.1,005.

been jailed in the 1960s, began rebuilding embryonic ANC underground structures.

Between 1974 and 1976, these developments facilitated ANC attempts to establish the kind of organisational axis it had needed ever since its setbacks in the 1960s. The small domestic underground had the potential to become a channel of communication between the ANC in exile and its politically renascent potential constituency inside South Africa. ANC operational strategic policy did not, however, enhance the workings of this axis. Instead, it seriously damaged the axis' key element, re-emergent underground political organisation. Yet, the very setbacks operational strategy caused also paradoxically benefited the ANC.

This chapter sets out to explore this paradox.

The ANC External Mission Environment in 1974

In early 1974, the ANC external mission comprised a scattered and loosely-connected set of individuals and groups in various countries in Africa, Europe, Asia and North America. Its major concentrations were in Africa, particularly in Zambia and Tanzania. ANC headquarters in Lusaka, Zambia,³ lay 500 miles from the closest South African border, which could be reached only by traversing the territory of one or more other countries. Small groups of ANC members lived in Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland.

³Ellis & Sechaba, *Comrades*, p.59.

Mozambique and Angola remained under Portuguese colonial control, Namibia was under South African rule and Rhodesia under a white minority government, with continued assistance from South African police units⁴ - a legacy of the ANC's Wankie and Sipolilo campaigns.⁵

In late 1974 the ANC and Pan Africanist Congress (PAC) achieved 'observer status' at the United Nations (UN), while the general assembly suspended South African government representation. The government conceded that its 'enemies' had 'succeeded in isolating South Africa in some respects' but had failed to do so 'in the important spheres'⁶ - reference to the failure of the campaign for international trade sanctions by the liberation movements and their allies. South Africa's major trading partners, namely the Western powers and Japan, resisted the campaign, while support from African governments for the ANC was largely rhetorical or diplomatic. The Liberation Committee of the Organisation of African Unity provided only limited financial and military support to the ANC;⁷ the bulk came

⁴*The Star*, 6/8/74.

⁵Although Dumiso Dabengwa says South African security forces were present in Rhodesia before the ANC infiltration. Dabengwa, 'Zipra and Zipa', p.9.

⁶Hansard 6 col. 2629, September 11 1974, cited in Muriel Morrell et al, *A Survey of Race Relations, 1974* (Johannesburg: South African Institute of Race Relations, 1975), p.191.

⁷Its budget for 1968-1969 was reported to be £750,000, of which only a fraction was paid in by OAU member states. Richard Gibson, *African Liberation Movements. Contemporary struggles against white minority rule* (London: Oxford University Press, 1972), p.8. There were some dozen liberation movements, of which

from the Soviet Union and its allies.⁸

The ANC external mission had an overwhelmingly African membership. Its active complement totalled probably about 1,200 people. Drawing on Rivonia trial evidence, Edward Feit and Tom Lodge estimate that about 300 recruits had left the country for training abroad by about mid-1963.⁹ In 1964, according to Ronnie Kasrils, a founder MK member, he joined about 500 ANC members undergoing training in Odessa in the Soviet Union.¹⁰ In 1965, he says, the ANC had between 800 and 1,000 people based at MK camps at Kongwa and Morogoro in Tanzania or on courses in Czechoslovakia, Odessa in the Soviet Union and in China (until the Sino-Soviet split).¹¹ There is no evidence of any major exodus of anti-apartheid militants from South Africa between 1965 and 1970. By 1966, South Africa had returned to apparent quiescence. An attempt by Bram Fischer, Griffiths Mxenge and others to resuscitate the remnants of the ANC and SACP

the ANC was only one, all of which were claimants for OAU assistance.

⁸Davis boldly estimates - without explaining his sourcing - that Umkhonto we Sizwe controlled some \$50-million in resources in the early 1980s and 'more than half of the ANC's external manpower'. He estimated that two-thirds of the in-kind donations (like clothing, food, medicines, etc) also came from the Soviet Union. Stephen M Davis, *Apartheid's Rebels. Inside South Africa's Hidden War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), pp.66, 72-73.

⁹Feit, *Urban Revolt*, pp.234-5; Tom Lodge, *Black Politics*, p.237.

¹⁰Ronnie Kasrils, *Untitled Draft Autobiographical Manuscript* p.6, in App/A/3.

¹¹IV/Kasrils, p.331.

inside South Africa had been destroyed by security police, so making subsequent large-scale recruitment for guerilla training unlikely. Grundy's estimate that MK had 2,000 guerillas in 1970 appears to be an over-estimate.¹²

The national consultative conference in Morogoro in 1969 had opened membership of the external mission to non-Africans from the SACP and Congress Alliance member organisations; non-Africans were still excluded from membership of a notional 'internal ANC'.¹³ The external mission was presided over by a national executive committee (NEC), membership of which remained restricted to Africans.¹⁴ The NEC had about a dozen members, following a severe reduction in its size at the Morogoro conference,¹⁵ and met only sporadically.

The decision to admit non-Africans as members of the ANC external mission adjusted the alliance around the ANC. There was no longer any reason for the existence abroad of the three other 'national' organisations that had been the ANC's partners in the old Congress Alliance. They were the South African Indian Congress, the Coloured People's Congress and the (white) Congress of Democrats. Exiles from

¹²Kenneth Grundy, *Guerilla Struggle in Africa* (New York: Grossman, 1971), p.195.

¹³IV/Tambo, pp.1,250-1,251.

¹⁴IV/Tambo, pp.1,250-1,251.

¹⁵Lodge, *Black Politics* p.300. See also Gibson, *African Liberation Movements*, p.73.

these bodies, most of them communists, could now join the ANC, and many did. As this happened, a tight and highly integrated alliance reformed to replace the old. But, tight as it was, the alliance would always remain an informal one. Its leading public component was the ANC. As the national liberation movement, the ANC provided the alliance's common forum. The South African Congress of Trade Unions (Sactu), the only other survivor from the Congress Alliance, remained the new alliance's trade union arm. And the secretive South African Communist Party (SACP) was the common factor, perhaps the 'glue' of the alliance: it had a highly influential membership in both the ANC and Sactu.

Operational Structures after the Morogoro Conference, 1969

The consultative conference in Morogoro in 1969 had established a central operational body, the Revolutionary Council (RC), to oversee all political and military activities into South Africa on behalf of the NEC.¹⁶ The RC initially comprised about a dozen members, but membership increased to about 20 by the time it was disbanded in 1983.¹⁷ This increase resulted from the cooption of new members as the RC spawned specialised military departments dealing with operations, ordinance and

¹⁶SACP, 'The Enemy Hidden Under the Same Colour', in SACP, *Communists Speak*, p.409.

¹⁷IV/Kasrils, p.332

the like.¹⁸

The RC was the most senior ANC body to reflect the external mission's multi-racial character after 1969. RC membership was mainly African, though it included one white, Joe Slovo, one 'coloured', Reg September, and one Indian, Yusuf Dadoo¹⁹ - all SACP members. Oliver Tambo, as ANC acting president, was RC chairman; Dadoo, an SACP politburo member (and later SACP chairman) was RC vice-chairman;²⁰ Moses Mabhida, who had served in the late 1960s as MK's political commissar²¹ (and who would later be SACP general secretary), had by 1974 succeeded Joe Matthews as RC secretary. Thabo Mbeki served as RC assistant secretary in the early 1970s,²² before being succeeded by Simon Makana. All of them, bar Tambo, were SACP members.

Tambo's and Dadoo's involvement in the RC was more nominal than actual. Tambo was continually distracted by ANC diplomatic and administrative tasks. Dadoo was based in London, having long found travel to Africa difficult because of anti-communist attitudes among African

¹⁸IV/Maharaj, pp.396-397, 420, 427.

¹⁹SACP, 'The Enemy', pp.411-412.

²⁰SACP, 'Landmarks in a Life of Struggle', in *African Communist*, First Quarter, 1984, p.18.

²¹IV/Jele, p.229

²²Sheila Gastrow, *Who's Who in South African Politics No.3* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1990), p.191.

governments.²³ Slovo, who experienced similar difficulties as a non-African communist,²⁴ was to overcome them.

Apart from Tambo, one of the few identifiable non-communists on the RC in 1974 was Joe Modise. Modise had headed Umkhonto we Sizwe's exiled military administration since 1965,²⁵ had commanded the disastrous Wankie and Sipolilo campaigns in 1967-1968²⁶ and continued as administrative military chief on the RC.²⁷

The formation of the RC represented an important advance for some in the SACP leadership, particularly Dadoo and Slovo.²⁸ It bolstered their influence over operational strategy. Distinctive SACP control over MK had been weak between 1965 and 1969;²⁹ that is, during the Wankie and Sipolilo campaigns, which a number of London-based SACP leaders had considered ill-conceived.³⁰ Membership of the RC promised Slovo an end to his isolation from the ANC's and SACP's main cadre concentration in Africa³¹ and, for

²³IV/Slovo, p.1,003; IV/Maharaj, p.401.

²⁴IV/Maharaj, p.401

²⁵IV/Kasrils, p.328; IV/Jele, p.229.

²⁶IV/Kasrils, p.328. IV/Jele, p.229

²⁷Ibid.

²⁸IV/Maharaj, p.407.

²⁹IV/Slovo, pp.1,002-1,003

³⁰IV/Slovo, pp.1,002-1,003.

³¹IV/Maharaj, p.407

Dadoo, greater influence.³² Slovo and Dadoo were keen to counter a tendency which they had detected among Africa-based SACP cadres to submerge the party almost totally within the ANC.³³ The SACP leader most closely associated with this tendency was Moses Kotane, both party general secretary and ANC treasurer-general. Dadoo and Slovo believed Kotane was following too literally the logic of the SACP's theory of 'colonialism of a special type' in privileging national liberation over the 'struggle for class emancipation.

Although the RC's task was to oversee both political and military operations, its emphasis fell overwhelmingly on the military side. Organisational dynamics within the ANC bolstered the military emphasis long evident in strategic formulations.

Reliable estimates of the numbers of ANC members given military training are impossible to obtain - whether for this or any other period between 1961 and 1990.³⁴ But the indications are that, in 1974, the ANC had between 800 to

³²IV/Maharaj, p.407

³³IV/Maharaj, pp.398-404

³⁴ I understand that the ANC and MK never consistently kept reliable records; after 1976, the ANC's security and intelligence department, known as Nat, maintained some records of new recruits at its Luanda station but these, too, were incomplete. IV/Anderson, pp.52-56; IV/Kasrils, pp.289-294. After the ANC's unbanning in February 1990, those ANC leaders whom I approached and who were competent to do so were unwilling or unable to provide accurate statistics.

1,000 people who had undergone military training. A significant number would since have been deployed in other, non-military ANC structures, while some had been casualties in the Wankie and Sipolilo campaigns and a few had deserted.³⁵

In 1974, the external mission's most evident political work inside South Africa was that undertaken by a London-based SACP committee. Chaired by Dadoo, with Slovo as secretary, it also comprised MK founder members Jack Hodgson and Ronnie Kasrils.³⁶ This committee had, via Slovo's and Dadoo's RC membership, a link into ANC operations. Other SACP members, including the trade unionist Ray Simons, then based in Lusaka, maintained tenuous lines of contact to a handful of SACP members in the Western Cape.³⁷ There were also sporadic cross-border links between ANC members in Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland and groups of ANC-aligned individuals inside South Africa.³⁸

The Domestic and Regional Environment, 1974

By 1974, inside South Africa, there was a potential for

³⁵Gibson, *African Liberation Movements*, pp.70-71.

³⁶*IV/Kasrils*, pp.295-296.

³⁷*IV/Kasrils*, pp.303-304, 307.

³⁸Unrecorded conversations with Chris Hani, Botswana and Zimbabwe, December 1985.

popular anti-apartheid political organisation employing legal and semi-legal means. The political mood among some black strata indicated that popular resistance might grow substantially - despite extreme legislative strictures, administrative repression, very limited resources and the absence of both revolutionary underground structures of any significance and of armed activity for 10 years.

Organised ANC participation in this resistance was marginal in early 1974. Residues of ANC policy traditions were sometimes evident and its minuscule, scattered underground presence occasionally contributed. But the resistance then emerging arose overwhelmingly autonomously of the ANC, out of the black consciousness movement, the churches or the newly re-emergent black trade union movement.

In 1974, South African government policy pursued four centralisations: first, of South Africa's four 'colour' groups along separate political and social paths; second, of the African population, and its political and economic aspirations, into ethnically derived and geographically separate bantustans; third, of white-controlled industrial development away from the 'white' South African metropolis towards areas adjoining the bantustans; and, fourth, of black labour to sectors of the white-controlled economy as and when required.

Government policy significantly influenced the character of anti-apartheid resistance. A tightening of the social and political exclusion of blacks, including coloureds and Indians, thrust the black intelligentsia and youth towards their own exclusivist nationalism. From modest beginnings on segregated university campuses in 1968-69 as the South African Students' Organisation (Saso), the black consciousness movement had by 1974 spawned a number of organising arms. The Black People's Convention (BPC) constituted the movement's national political umbrella; the Black Community Programmes (BCP) oversaw a number of modest but symbolically important community development projects; and several loosely organised groups for black school students had been founded, the most important of them being the South African Students' Movement (Sasm).

Black student clashes with university administrations and police in the early 1970s had disabused the South African government of its fancy that black consciousness' racial exclusivity was consistent with grand apartheid strategy, and the government banned the movement's two leading voices, Steve Biko and Barney Pitso, and others in 1972 - ironic tribute to the movement's success in mobilising black opinion.³⁹

³⁹Senior South African security police officers felt the black consciousness movement's concentration on political mobilisation, particularly its targeting of the youth, was 'very well done' and more appropriate to achieving revolutionary goals than the ANC's early military-centric activity. IV/Stadler,

The black consciousness movement also promoted African worker militancy, mainly through the Black Allied Workers' Union (Bawu), a general workers' union founded in 1973. But the black consciousness movement's involvement in trade unions was less influential than parallel groups of young white left-wing intellectuals. By 1974, the latter, who organised themselves into Wages Commissions on white university campuses, had spawned embryonic industrial trade unions. They did so through off-campus organisations, which included the Johannesburg-based Industrial Aid Society (formed in 1974), the Durban-based Institute for Industrial Education (1973) and General Factory Workers' Benefit Fund, plus the Cape Town-based Western Province Workers' Advice Bureau (1973). By mid-1974, the two Durban-based organisations had made considerable advances: the benefit fund had 22,000 members; they had formed four unions with a total membership of more than 10,000; and they had formed an umbrella body to oversee their efforts, the Trade Union Advisory and Coordinating Council (Tuacc).⁴⁰

Low-level government harassment and the exclusion of any trade union with African members from official industrial relations procedures failed to halt dramatic growth in black industrial organisation. The number of

pp.1,045-1,046.

⁴⁰Johann Maree, 'Overview: Emergence of the Independent Trade Union Movement', in Johann Maree (Ed.), *The Independent Trade Unions, 1974-1984* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1987), pp.2-3.

African workers in industrial employment had increased during the 1960s and early 1970s and they had suffered sharp increases in the prices of essential commodities⁴¹. This gave rise to renewed impulses towards collective worker action and trade unionism, which had become evident in strikes in Natal in 1973.

Within some church circles a similar radicalisation was under way, notably through a small ecumenical centre concerned with social issues, the Christian Institute, and a network of independent African churches. A number of orthodoxies came under challenge from amongst the black clergy resulting in with the emergence of a South African variant of 'liberation theology'.

By 1974, this array of popular, student, political and workers' organisations, together with radical church groups, occupied an insecure intermediate status between legality and illegality. State action against them tended to be administrative rather than judicial, and included banning orders on individuals and state commissions of inquiry into their activities.⁴² Their survival indicated,

⁴¹David Hemson, 'Trade Unionism and the Struggle for Liberation in South Africa', in *Capital and Class*, No.6, 1978, p.19., cited in Sampie Terblanche and Nicoli Nattrass, 'A periodization of the political economy from 1910', in N Nattrass and E Ardington (Eds.), *The Political Economy of South Africa* (Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 1990), p.15.

⁴²Of which the Schlebusch Commission of Inquiry, appointed in 1973, was the major vehicle. It investigated the affairs of the University Christian Movement, the National Union of South African Students, the Christian Institute and the South African

first, that a tenuous legal 'space' existed for organisations of their type and, second, that broader popular anti-apartheid mobilisation might be possible.

For the South African state, Angolan and Mozambican independence prompted 'a hasty reformulation of regional strategy'.⁴³ The new strategy had two basic elements: considerable new investment in South African military capacity and deployment, together with a diplomatic search for potential allies among conservatives in the Organisation of African Unity (OAU).⁴⁴ But the South African invasion of Angola in 1975 with about 2,000 troops⁴⁵ rebounded on Prime Minister John Vorster. He called off the invasion when the United States withdrew tacit diplomatic support for it,⁴⁶ when furious rows erupted in his cabinet and between his intelligence services,⁴⁷ and when heavy South African casualties seemed likely in confrontations with Cuban and Angolan MPLA

Institute of Race Relations.

⁴³Rob Davies, Dan O'Meara and Sipho Dlamini, *The Struggle for South Africa. A Reference Guide*, Vol.1 (London: Zed Books, 1988), p.44.

⁴⁴Deon Geldenhuys, *The Diplomacy of Isolation: South African Foreign Policy Making* (Johannesburg: Macmillan, 1984), p.39.

⁴⁵Colin Legum, *Battlefronts of Southern Africa* (New York and Letchworth, Herts.: Africana Publishing Company, 1988), p.177; Geldenhuys, *Diplomacy of Isolation*, p.77.

⁴⁶Geldenhuys, *Diplomacy of Isolation*, p.77.

⁴⁷Unrecorded conversation with General Hendrik van den Berg, retired head of the Bureau for State Security (Boss) on his farm outside Johannesburg, August 1991.

forces.⁴⁸

The invasion seriously damaged the credibility of Vorster's attempts to adjust South Africa's regional defence by diplomatic means.⁴⁹ Moreover, some militant opponents of apartheid drew inspiration from Pretoria's withdrawal from Angola interpreting it as an actual military defeat⁵⁰ - a dubious conclusion. Whatever the factors behind South Africa's withdrawal, a shift in the regional balance of forces had indeed resulted from Angolan and Mozambican independence - and was recognised as having occurred by the ANC⁵¹ and South African government.

On April 24 1974, one day before the Portuguese coup, the National Party was returned to power for the seventh consecutive time, and with an increased majority.⁵² The government soon made clear its intention to move ahead in a practical way to dismember the South African political community. It announced that Transkei would be the first

⁴⁸Conversation with Van den Berg.

⁴⁹Geldenhuys, *Diplomacy of Isolation*, p.39.

⁵⁰Common in left wing circles in South Africa at the time which I personally frequently heard. It is still evident in Keith Mokoape, Tenjiwe Mthintso and Welile Nhlapo, 'Towards Armed Struggle', paper presented to a symposium on The Legacy of Bantu Stephen Biko, Harare, June 17-22 1990, p.3, in App/A/9.

⁵¹Slovo, 'No Middle Road', pp. 201-205. ANC, 'Forward to Freedom', in *ANC Speaks*, pp.155, 158.

⁵²The National Party won 122 seats in an enlarged parliament (up from 118), the United Party 41 (down from 47), and the Progressive Party six (later increased to seven, up from one).

bantustan to be given 'independence', and that this would occur within five years.⁵³ Government statements on the coloured and Indian sections of the black population stressed their future exclusion from the central polity. Notwithstanding its appointment of the Theron Commission in 1973 to investigate the political future of the 'coloured' community and calls from even conservatives in the powerless Coloured Representative Council for an end to coloured debarment,⁵⁴ the government insisted in 1974 that its policy ruled out full citizenship for 'coloureds'.⁵⁵ And, in August 1974, the government extended the life of the purely advisory and unrepresentative South African Indian Council.

Faced with the prospect of apparently indefinite political exclusion and growing economic pressures, black discontent forced a space for itself in the legal and semi-legal spheres of political and economic activity. ANC members, however, worked mainly clandestinely.

⁵³Hansard, 1974, 6, cols. 415-9, cited in Horrell et al, *Survey of Race Relations 1974*, p.191.

⁵⁴Rand Daily Mail, 8/4/74.

⁵⁵Rand Daily Mail, 20/8/74.

The Re-emergence of an Underground

Although (as the ANC has recognised)⁵⁶ thousands of one-time members of the ANC and allied organisations lived in cowed quiescence through the latter 1960s and early 1970s, a few individual ANC members and isolated cells remained steadfast through their organisation's bleakest years. In Cape Town, a handful of SACP members and trade unionists maintained tenuous links with the liberation movement abroad through Ray Simons, then in exile in Lusaka.⁵⁷ In Natal, an attempt to reconstitute ANC organisation in 1965 had been destroyed by security police with the imprisonment of Griffiths Mxenge and others. But, upon his release in 1969, Mxenge, then a lawyer, recommenced efforts at slow rebuilding together with other ANC sympathisers and members.⁵⁸ In the Transvaal, a residue of active ANC members around Winnie Mandela - including Samson Ndou, Lawrence and Rita Ndzanga and Solomon Pholoto - had, in a two-year ordeal from May 1969, been detained, tried, acquitted and then re-detained for attempting to reconstitute ANC organisation.⁵⁹

⁵⁶ANC NEC, 'Victory or Death. Statement on occasion of the 5th anniversary of MK', *Dawn*, Souvenir Issue (n.d. [circa 1986]), p.2, in App/A/1.

⁵⁷*IV/Kasrils*, pp.303-4, 307.

⁵⁸Confidential information.

⁵⁹International Defence and Aid Fund, 'Trial by Torture - the Case of the 22', pamphlet, International Defence and Aid Fund, May 1970.

The release in the early 1970s of a number of ANC political prisoners, some of whom had commanding personalities, reinvigorated the tiny residual ANC underground presence. Among those freed who were to play key roles in rebuilding an ANC underground presence in the 1974-76 period were, in Natal, Harry Gwala (released in 1972⁶⁰), Judson Khuzwayo (1973⁶¹), Shadrack Maphumulo (1974), and Jacob Zuma (1973⁶²); and, in the Transvaal, Joe Gqabi (1975⁶³), who in 1961 had been one of the first group of MK members to receive military training, in China⁶⁴, and Martin Ramokgadi (1973⁶⁵).

The Natal ex-prisoners established contact with old comrades.⁶⁶ Jacob Zuma and Joseph Mdluli, who was later to die in security police detention in 1975, comprised an underground cell of the ANC-aligned South African Congress of Trade Unions (Sactu) at Bolton Hall in Durban, headquarters of Tuacc activities.⁶⁷ Harold Nxasana, a former Sactu official and ANC political prisoner worked for

⁶⁰Idaf, *Prisoners of Apartheid* (London: Idaf, 1978), p.20.

⁶¹'Hamba Kahle, Judson Khuzwayo', in *Sechaba*, July 1985, p.32.

⁶²IV/J.Zuma, p.1,361.

⁶³*Sechaba*, September 1981, p.30.

⁶⁴IV/Maharaj, p.375

⁶⁵Idaf, *Prisoners*, p.98.

⁶⁶Confidential information.

⁶⁷Jacob Zuma (Interview by Julie Frederickse), pp.27-29, in App/A/8.

the Institute for Industrial Education.⁶⁸ Khuzwayo was a researcher attached to the University of Natal in Durban.⁶⁹ Key Tuacc figures, such as Halton Cheadle, David Davis and David Hemson, discussed their work with Mxenge and Khuzwayo but the three had no organisational link with the ANC or SACP.⁷⁰

Jacob Zuma says that the Natal underground recruited and established units among African and Indian university and schools students, plus community development workers.⁷¹ It found most black consciousness adherents receptive to the ANC.⁷² For their part, the ex-prisoners' felt no hostility to black consciousness, believing its emergence owed much to ANC influence and combativeness since its banning.⁷³

By 1975, this small Natal network had units in the Durban-Pinetown complex, Pietermaritzburg and Hammarsdale, was expanding south and north of Durban and had plans for

⁶⁸Howard, J., *Judgement, State versus Themba Harry Gwala and Nine Others*, Case No. CC 108/76, in the Supreme Court of South Africa, Natal Provincial Division, 14-15/7/77, p.135, extracts, in App/A/11.

⁶⁹Shadrack Maphumulo, *Unpublished Autobiographical Manuscript*, p.380, in App/B/20.

⁷⁰Unrecorded conversation with David Davis, London, 1991.

⁷¹J. Zuma (Interview by JF), pp.29, 32; Brooks and Brickhill, *Whirlwind*, p.87.

⁷²*Ibid.*

⁷³*Ibid.*

expansion throughout the province.⁷⁴ It communicated with the external mission in adjacent Swaziland,⁷⁵ among whose members was Joseph Nduli, a guerilla who had fought in the Wankie Campaign.⁷⁶ He, like Zuma and others based in South Africa, regularly travelled illegally into and out of South Africa.⁷⁷ This clandestine traffic opened up a trail between the Natal and Eastern Transvaal regions of South Africa via Swaziland to Mozambique which would become the main conduit for the ANC's resumption of armed struggle.

In the Transvaal, Gqabi, Ramokgadi and John Nkadimeng, a former prisoner who had been banned for a number of years, formed a similar command committee after Gqabi's release in 1975.⁷⁸ Chaired by Nkadimeng, it met clandestinely each weekend in different locales around Johannesburg.⁷⁹ Its small network resembled Natal's. Ramokgadi recruited in the embryonic trade union leadership then developing in the Johannesburg-based Industrial Aid Society.⁸⁰ Gqabi⁸¹ and Nkadimeng⁸² had contacts with

⁷⁴IV/J.Zuma, p.1,363.

⁷⁵IV/J.Zuma, pp.1,361-2, 1,370-3.

⁷⁶IV/J.Zuma, pp. 1,372-3.

⁷⁷IV/J.Zuma, pp.1,362, 1,372-1,373. Howard, *Judgement*, pp.134-136.

⁷⁸John Nkadimeng (Interview by Julie Frederickse), p.36, in App/A/5.

⁷⁹*Ibid*, pp.43-44.

⁸⁰Confidential information. IV/Tsiki, p.1,292.

⁸¹Jacob Zuma (Interview by JF), p.30.

individuals in black consciousness student groups, who sometimes called upon them for advice,⁸³ and some ANC cells might also have been established within Sasm.⁸⁴ Through Ramokgadi, the Gqabi group also had contacts in parts of the Northern Transvaal.⁸⁵

The Natal and Transvaal leaderships maintained contact with each other over the 1974-76 period.⁸⁶ The Transvaal command unit used Natal's link to the external mission in Swaziland,⁸⁷ which became increasingly important after Mozambique's independence in mid-1975, and also maintained contacts in Botswana.⁸⁸ The Natal group had a link with the Eastern Cape-Border regions,⁸⁹ where a number of ANC ex-prisoners were also active.⁹⁰ A small external mission presence in Lesotho also serviced the Eastern Cape.⁹¹

A number of other underground leafleting units,

⁸²Ibid. p.36.

⁸³Ibid. p.31.

⁸⁴Brooks and Brickhill, *Whirlwind*, p.87.

⁸⁵IV/J.Zuma, p.1,363. IV/Tsiki, pp.1,275-1,276, 1,292.

⁸⁶IV/J.Zuma, pp.1,362-1,363, 1,371.

⁸⁷IV/J.Zuma, p.1,362-1,363.

⁸⁸Confidential information.

⁸⁹IV/J.Zuma, pp.1,362, 1374.

⁹⁰Brooks and Brickhill, *Whirlwind*, pp.81, 87. IV/J.Zuma, p.1,374.

⁹¹Unrecorded conversations with Hani, Botswana and Zimbabwe, December 1985.

comprising mainly young white intellectuals, were active in the late 1960s and early 1970s in the Transvaal, Natal, Eastern and Western Cape. Each operated clandestinely and entirely separately from any other ANC presence inside South Africa, answering only to the London-based SACP committee under Dadoo and Slovo, and avoided any legal or semi-legal political work. They included Anthony Holiday, who operated for about six years to mid-1976;⁹² David and Susan Rabkin, plus Jeremy Cronin, who distributed copies of some 14 different leaflets over the 1973-76 period;⁹³ Timothy Jenkin and Stephen Lee, who distributed copies of some 18 leaflets in the three years after August 1975;⁹⁴ and Raymond Suttner, who distributed leaflets until 1975 when he, too, was jailed.⁹⁵

Influences on ANC Operational Strategic Policy

In line with positions agreed at the Morogoro conference in 1969, the ANC believed that armed struggle would eventually win it state power. Moreover, the ANC proclaimed that the success of this putative armed struggle would depend upon an organised ANC political base inside South Africa. In

⁹²Unrecorded conversations with Anthony Holiday; Idaf, *Prisoners*, p.23.

⁹³Idaf, *Prisoners*, p.96.

⁹⁴Ibid. p.25.

⁹⁵Ibid. p.113. Another propaganda unit comprised Jan Malatji and Kerwin Chiya. Glenn Moss, *The Wheels Turn. South African Political Trials: 1976-1979* (Geneva: International University Exchange Fund, n.d [circa 1980]), p.44.

practice, however, the ANC gave little attention to possibilities for political organisation by political means; instead, it continued to behave as if military activity would build for it an organised political base.

In his influential tract, 'South Africa: No Middle Road', Slovo recognised that changes in the subcontinent,⁹⁶ among them the Portuguese coup, promised new possibilities for ANC advance. Pending Mozambican and Angolan independence and progress in the black nationalist armed struggles in Namibia and Zimbabwe were outstanding among these changes. The ANC executive believed they presaged the encirclement of white South Africa before the 'final and decisive confrontation'.⁹⁷ For Slovo 'signs of a significant upswing in political awareness and militancy' inside South Africa⁹⁸ were as important as these regional changes. Domestic popular militancy needed to be encouraged by all means.⁹⁹ But the most important determinant of progress, Slovo reasoned, would be developing 'an underground leadership presence within the country itself'. In an oblique reference to the activities of Gqabi and others, Slovo wrote that the development of a real internal underground leadership was now 'closer than at any time

⁹⁶Slovo, 'No Middle Road', pp.201-205.

⁹⁷ANC, 'Forward to Freedom', *ANC Speaks*, pp.155, 158.

⁹⁸Slovo, 'No Middle Road', p.202.

⁹⁹*Ibid.* p.204.

since the pre-Rivonia Trial period'.¹⁰⁰ But, added Slovo, state repression necessitated that political work, open or clandestine, be backed by 'offensive and defensive force'.¹⁰¹ In practice, this would mean that ANC operational strategy again stressed the military component. A number of contemporary factors help explain this military stress.

The structure of the RC provides part of the explanation. The RC, although charged with overseeing both political and military operations¹⁰², lacked any functioning subcommittee specialising in political work. (None would exist until after the Soweto uprising in 1976.)¹⁰³ But, in 1974, the RC did have an organised group overseeing military matters - the MK administration headed by Modise, which also served as an operations and planning department.¹⁰⁴ This military group dominated the RC's operational agenda.¹⁰⁵

Geographical dispersal of the ANC, particularly of its senior members, also facilitated military predominance.

¹⁰⁰Ibid. p.205.

¹⁰¹Ibid. p.203.

¹⁰²IV/Maharaj, p.396. IV/Slovo, pp.1,005-1,006.

¹⁰³IV/Slovo, p.1,006.

¹⁰⁴IV/Slovo, p.1,005.

¹⁰⁵IV/Kasrils, p.328. IV/Maharaj, pp.397, 427.

Members of the RC often lived in different countries, which made attendance at meetings difficult in a time of some penury for the ANC. Some RC members often also absented themselves from RC meetings in order to fulfil other administrative and diplomatic tasks.¹⁰⁶ The RC consequently seldom met in full complement; moreover, between meetings there was no administrative centre for continued political work. RC members concerned to see the ANC advanced inside South Africa by political means were, thus, poorly placed to ensure it did.

Clandestine political work was further undermined throughout the 1970s because some ANC leaders serving on both the NEC and RC played one organ off against the other.¹⁰⁷ This denuded the RC still further of its capacity for political work. The ANC's secretary general until 1969, Duma Nokwe, did the most damage in this respect. He kept the ANC's main propaganda organ, the department of information and publicity (Dip) outside of RC control.¹⁰⁸

The ANC's diplomatic difficulties in this period also encouraged it towards a stress on military activity. In the mid-1970s, some international allies of the ANC became impatient with it. Whereas armed activity was under way in

¹⁰⁶IV/Slovo, pp.972, 1,009, 1,016

¹⁰⁷IV/Maharaj, pp.396-7.

¹⁰⁸IV/Maharaj, pp.396, 406-7, 457.

Zimbabwe, had borne fruit in Angola and Mozambique, and had taken root in Namibia, in South Africa there had been none for more than a decade. According to Slovo, these allies had begun to use the absence of any internal ANC military operations 'as an explicit or implicit excuse to deprive [it] of the kinds of help which would enable [the ANC] to begin operations'.¹⁰⁹

A second set of diplomatic developments also seemed to demand a military response from the ANC. Some African states' responded positively to Vorster's secret diplomatic initiatives after April 1974, which sought an accommodation between Pretoria and black-ruled African states that might compensate for the loss of buffer territories in Angola and Mozambique. In response, the ANC called on the international community to reaffirm 'the legitimacy of the armed struggle' in pursuit of a 'seizure of power' in South Africa.¹¹⁰ The RC, according to Slovo, felt that the ANC had to give its 'own answer in action so as to confront the reformists both inside and outside the country with the liberation movement's alternative'.¹¹¹

At this point, a long-festering leadership crisis in the ANC came to a head. Its public impact added to doubts

¹⁰⁹ IV/Slovo, p.966.

¹¹⁰ ANC NEC, 'Declaration of the African National Congress Executive Committee - Morogoro, 17-20 March 1975', in ANC, *Speaks*, p.168

¹¹¹ IV/Slovo, p.971.

about the ANC's efficacy. Its end result was the expulsion in October 1975 of eight ANC leaders and senior members, who then formed a short-lived separate organisation, ANC-African Nationalist (ANC-AN).

The precise causes of this split are difficult to assign. The dissenters alleged that the SACP, dominated by whites, had 'hijacked the ANC' at the Morogoro Conference by 'pushing a call for "integration of revolutionaries"'.¹¹² They charged that the RC was the cockpit from which communists were steering the ANC. But Lodge argues, credibly in my view, that the split 'did not seem to involve questions of strategy or considerations of a more obviously ideological dimension'.¹¹³

Rather, the explanation for the di-sent seems to have lain in the vicissitudes of exile politics, in inadequate democratic procedures in the ANC and in frustrated personal ambitions. The ANC's situation did not encourage open accountability. Its membership was spread over many countries between which communication was very limited. Moreover, the organisation was haunted by the requirements of clandestinity, particularly in regard to the RC. The fact that most RC members were also SACP members would have

¹¹²ANC (AN), 'How the South African Community Party [sic] (SACP) attempts to use Non-African Minorities to Confuse Fundamental Questions of Our Struggle', in *The African Nationalist*, Vol.1. No.2., December 1976, p.25, in App/A/12.

¹¹³Lodge, *Black Politics*, p.304.

added to suspicions of a conspiracy-within-the-conspiracy.

The SACP pointed out that two of the dissenters had, in fact, been party members. Both the SACP and the ANC alleged the eight had a history of factionalism.¹¹⁴ The split caused serious confusion among middle-ranking ANC cadres.¹¹⁵ There were reports of internal feuding in MK camps in Tanzania,¹¹⁶ where many had spent a largely inert decade. The expulsion of the dissidents added to pressures on the ANC to break out of its inertia.

The Organisational Axis at Work

The ANC was favourably placed to advance by non-military means at a political level inside South Africa over this period. The external mission was rapidly improving its capacity to reinforce domestic struggles from abroad. The ANC had seasoned political organisers rebuilding an underground and developing links into incipient popular and working class movements. But the ANC's stress fell on military activity.

¹¹⁴SACP, 'The Enemy Hidden Under the Same Colour', in *Communists Speak*, pp. 400-417; Alfred Nzo, 'Statement by African National Congress (SA) on the Expulsion of a Conspiratorial Clique' (photocopy), December 11 1975, in *App/A/13; IV/Tambo*, p.1,252.

¹¹⁵Unrecorded conversations with Peter Magebane (alias Pila Mola), acting chief representative of the ANC, Harare, 1981.

¹¹⁶*Sunday Times*, 27/7/75, cited in Lodge, *Black Politics*, p.303.

1. Winning black consciousness:

The ANC external mission was not alone in seeing its salvation in armed activity. The same tendency developed among some members of the black consciousness movement. As it did so, an increasing number drifted towards the ANC. In the process, the ANC's predisposition towards a stress on armed activity was strengthened.

In the early 1970s, clandestine discussions within the black consciousness movement exhibited a 'strong trend' towards armed struggle, according to three prominent members, who later joined the ANC.¹¹⁷ Some individuals studied whatever literature they could obtain on armed struggles in Guinea Bissau, Mozambique, Namibia and Vietnam, among others.¹¹⁸ But they had difficulty envisaging how they could actually involve themselves in armed activity. One option seemed to be continuing open political mobilisation in the hope that either the ANC or PAC would eventually 'approach' them. A second was 'to form a secret underground, train and arm [themselves] and launch an armed struggle from within the country'.¹¹⁹ But, following repression on black student campuses in 1972 and the banning of Saso leaders, a third option emerged as the most promising: an 'organised movement into exile' in order

¹¹⁷Mokoape et al, 'Towards Armed Struggle', p.2; N.Zuma (Interview by Julie Frederickse), p.12, in App/A/4.

¹¹⁸Mokoape et al, 'Towards Armed Struggle', p.2.

¹¹⁹*Ibid.*

to develop a capacity for armed struggle alone or together with the ANC or PAC.¹²⁰

A 'small trickle' of black consciousness members left the country in the early 1970s.¹²¹ In September 1973 their number included a few leading officials: Onkgopotse Tiro, a former permanent organiser of Saso, Ranwedzi Nengwenkulu, another former Saso official, and Bokwe Mafuna, a BCP organiser.¹²² Bigger groups left thereafter.¹²³ Tiro's assassination by a parcel bomb in Botswana in February 1974 apparently indicated the seriousness with which the South African security services now viewed black consciousness.¹²⁴ The exodus of members surged after black consciousness movement rallies in September 1974 to celebrate Frelimo's impending accession to power in Mozambique were broken up by South African police. The state saw the rallies as an endorsement of armed struggle - as indeed they were.¹²⁵ After the rallies, security police raided the offices of many black consciousness organisations nationwide and detained more

¹²⁰Ibid; Mosibudi Mangena, *On Your Own: Evolution of Black Consciousness in South Africa/Azania* (Braamfontein: Skotaville, 1990), pp.117-118.

¹²¹Ibid.

¹²²Rand Daily Mail, 31/1/74.

¹²³Mokoape et al, 'Towards Armed Struggle', p.2.

¹²⁴Mangena, *On Your Own*, p.92.

¹²⁵Mokoape et al, 'Towards Armed Struggle', p.3.

than 20 of their leaders.¹²⁶

In exile, mainly in Botswana, some black consciousness members formed the Azanian People's Revolutionary Front (APRF) under Mafuna.¹²⁷ They and others contacted the ANC, PAC and Non-European Unity Movement (NEUM) to explore the prospects for cooperation on armed struggle. The two NEUM factions then in existence rejected armed struggle, which ruled them out.¹²⁸ The ANC said it would provide military training only to those who joined the ANC.¹²⁹ It gave the same response to a black consciousness delegation who travelled to Botswana from inside South Africa as Steve Biko's emissaries to ask if the ANC would provide training to a distinctly black consciousness guerilla force.¹³⁰ This ANC response 'proved a problem' for many black consciousness members.¹³¹ But it made sense for the ANC, which was concerned to prevent black consciousness from developing its own military capacity or becoming a rival.¹³²

¹²⁶Daily Dispatch, 28/9/74. Rand Daily Mail, 30/9/74.

¹²⁷Mangena, *On Your Own*, pp.150-151.

¹²⁸Mokoape et al, 'Towards Armed Struggle', p.2.

¹²⁹Ibid. p.2.

¹³⁰IV/Maharaj, pp.386-388.

¹³¹Mokoape et al, 'Towards Armed Struggle', p.2; IV/Maharaj, pp.386-388.

¹³²ANC NEC, 'Political Report of the National Executive Committee to National Consultative Conference, June 1985', in ANC, *Documents of the Second National Consultative Conference of the African National Congress. Zambia, 16-23 June, 1985* (London

In the case of the PAC, one of its two main factions, headed by its military commander Templeton Ntantala, facilitated military training for a small black consciousness group in Libya. But tensions between the PAC leadership and black consciousness trainees led to some of the latter's expulsion from Libya. On their return to Botswana, the PAC divulged their presence to the Botswana government, which created further difficulties for them.¹³³ The APRF then collapsed, with some members regrouping as the Isandlwana Revolutionary Effort,¹³⁴ which was also short lived.

The predominant shift within black consciousness exile circles in Botswana was, however, towards the ANC, notably among those who had received military training earlier in Libya. This trend became more marked after the 'challenge' posed by the uprisings in Soweto and elsewhere which started on June 16 1976 after police opened fire on a protest march by black school students.¹³⁵

Meanwhile, ANC recruitment of black consciousness members inside South Africa was under way by 1975. Natal-based N.Zuma, who was elected Saso vice-president in 1976, worked in ANC cells with a number of other black

and Lusaka: ANC, n.d. [1985]), p.12, in *App/B/5*.

¹³³Mokoape et al, 'Towards Armed Struggle', p.3.

¹³⁴Mangena, *On Your Own*, pp.150-151.

¹³⁵Mokoape et al, 'Towards Armed Struggle', p.3.

consciousness members recruited as early as 1974. She herself had been recruited by Thabo Mbeki while on a visit to Swaziland in 1975.¹³⁶ A young University of Zululand law student, Mduduzi Guma, was another of those recruited at this time. After going into exile after the 1976 uprising, Guma commanded MK's Natal machinery from Swaziland. In the Transvaal, Nkadimeng had relationships with a number of black consciousness individuals. They would often approach him for advice on political direction which they seemed to consider 'authoritative'.¹³⁷

Ideological tensions between the inclusive nationalism of the ANC and the exclusivism of black consciousness dissipated somewhat in this period. The amenability towards black consciousness of individuals in the ANC underground was probably a factor in this. Like Jacob Zuma and the Natal underground leadership,¹³⁸ Nkadimeng in the Transvaal felt that black consciousness had a 'legitimate' case, though he felt it was necessary to 'handle [it] with care'.¹³⁹ According to N.Zuma, ANC policy on whites as well as white involvement in the ANC were becoming lesser issues. What was exercising the minds of her generation more acutely was armed struggle, how to develop it and ANC

¹³⁶N.Zuma (Interview by JF), pp.2, 10, 20.

¹³⁷Nkadimeng (Interview by JF), p.36.

¹³⁸J.Zuma (Interview by JF), p.29.

¹³⁹Nkadimeng (Interview by JF), p.36.

strategic thinking on it.¹⁴⁰ The ANC's 'good working relations' with Frelimo and the MPLA, both of which had evidently made progress through armed struggle, gave the ANC some lustre within black consciousness circles.¹⁴¹ The arrest of much of the Natal underground command, including Gwala, in 1975 and (what were for that time) sensational disclosures about the extent of ANC operations and armed preparations also gave the ANC prestige.¹⁴²

ANC members working within Saso, like N.Zuma, were instructed to recruit others to the ANC, form ANC cells and 'influence debates and discussions within BC' towards ANC positions.¹⁴³ This caucusing coincided with theoretical divergences within black consciousness. According to Diliza Mji, a black consciousness leader from a prominent Natal ANC family, fractures developed in about 1975 over the black consciousness movement's analysis of apartheid and post-apartheid vision. He and some others now sought answers in class analysis,¹⁴⁴ rather than the more race-based emphasis associated with early black consciousness, which aligned them more closely to the ANC-SACP alliance.

¹⁴⁰N.Zuma (Interview by JF), p.13.

¹⁴¹*Ibid.* p.20.

¹⁴² This, in any case, is the opinion of Jacob Zuma, who escaped the arrests in 1975, and who based himself in Swaziland and continued working with remnants of the Natal underground. IV/J.Zuma, pp.1,369-1,371.

¹⁴³N.Zuma (Interview by JF), p.11.

¹⁴⁴Diliza Mji (Interview by Julie Frederickse), pp.2-3, in App/A/6.

There was a major dispute at Saso's congress in Hammanskraal in 1976.¹⁴⁵ In N.Zuma's estimation, there was a definite swing under way within Saso towards ANC perspectives,¹⁴⁶ which is perhaps borne out by Mji's election that year to the Saso presidency and her own election as his deputy.

The trend within black consciousness over the 1974-76 period towards armed activity reinforced the ANC's own military stress. A generation from which the ANC had been removed was now approaching it for military training. Indeed, winning over this generation seemed substantially to depend upon the ANC's commitment to armed struggle.

2. Towards armed struggle:

Between 1974 and 1976, the ANC external mission improved its organisations in Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland,¹⁴⁷ moving in some of its most competent individuals. Mozambican independence in June 1975 and Angolan independence in November greatly facilitated this,¹⁴⁸ as the ANC got facilities in both countries. Slovo based himself in Mozambique, surrounding himself with some of the ANC's best operational talent.

¹⁴⁵Ibid. pp.2-3.

¹⁴⁶N.Zuma (Interview by JF), p.10.

¹⁴⁷IV/Slovo, pp.1,004-1,005.

¹⁴⁸IV/Slovo, pp.1,004-1,005.

In 1974, Chris Hani, a veteran of the Wankie campaign, crossed through South African territory where he made contact with a few former ANC members before establishing himself in Lesotho. There, he headed operational structures which were to deal with the adjoining Cape Province.¹⁴⁹ Thabo Mbeki, then emerging as an outstanding young ANC and SACP intellectual, spent much of 1973-74 in Botswana¹⁵⁰ where he had dealings with the early black consciousness exiles.

ANC exiles from the 1960s were firmly established in Swaziland by the early 1970s. Their leading members included Wankie veteran Nduli, Stanley Mabizela, Ablon (Bafana) Duma and Albert Dhlomo, a former Natal trade unionist. Mbeki also arrived in Swaziland as acting chief representative in 1975, and one of the ANC's first recruits from the black consciousness movement, Keith Mokoape, also moved to the area.

The external mission's military stress influenced the tasks it gave the embryonic domestic underground. Whatever lip service it paid to the need for political organisation by political means, it told underground structures to concentrate on recruiting youths for military training abroad. The ANC felt it needed new blood to replace

¹⁴⁹Unrecorded conversations with Hani, Botswana and Zimbabwe, December 1985; Shelagh Gastrow, *Who's Who in South African Politics No.3* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1990), p.100.

¹⁵⁰Gastrow, *Who's Who. No.3*, p.191.

guerillas from the 1960s, who had aged in exile and were out of touch with conditions inside the country.¹⁵¹ Jacob Zuma recalls:

What we were doing [through our underground work] was...to create the necessary political base so that the armed struggle takes off and is dependent upon a political base. This [had] been my thinking all the time. But, when [Angola and Mozambique were liberated], since we had a link with the outside, the comrades had ideas that then an opportunity had come to take the armed struggle, or struggle in totality, some steps forward. Then the comrades said: The recruitment must begin. They gave the reasons. Now, of course, once you undertake recruitment, that is a very touch and go task.¹⁵²

It was, indeed, to prove touch and go.

More than 200 recruits were smuggled abroad between 1974 and 1976, according to members of the Natal and Transvaal undergrounds.¹⁵³ Jacob Zuma says that the Natal command unit sent 'more than a hundred' recruits for military training through Swaziland. Most were from the province, but others were from the Eastern Cape.¹⁵⁴ Zuma reports that enthusiasm among potential recruits was 'so high' that Natal exceeded the quota it had been set by the ANC external mission.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵¹IV/Slovo, p.972.

¹⁵²IV/J.Zuma, p.1,362.

¹⁵³It is a figure which then-Major (now General) Herman Stadler, the South African Security Police specialist on the ANC, finds credible. IV/Stadler, p.1,062.

¹⁵⁴IV/J.Zuma, p.1,362.

¹⁵⁵IV/J.Zuma, p.1,362.

In the Transvaal, an ANC underground unit, Esther Maleka and David Pule Thate, both eventually jailed,¹⁵⁶ recruited 'more than a hundred' people for military training abroad between 1974 and 1976.¹⁵⁷ Similar recruitment was undertaken by Siphwe Nyanda, a sports reporter on *The World*, a newspaper in Johannesburg. He made an average two trips a month to Swaziland and Mozambique escorting recruits, before he himself left for military training abroad in February 1976.¹⁵⁸ Nyanda was linked to another recruiting network involving Naledi Tsiki and Christopher Manye,¹⁵⁹ whose experience is recounted below.

By the end of 1975, a number of the Natal network's recruits were already undergoing actual military training.¹⁶⁰ The Natal-Swaziland connection also began over this period 'giving some people crash courses in Swaziland and sending them back to go and strengthen the underground structures', according to Zuma.¹⁶¹ Slovo confirms this. He reports 'the spontaneous emergence of groups, some of which [the ANC] had been in touch with, who

¹⁵⁶Moss, *Wheels*, pp. 36-37.

¹⁵⁷Esther Maleka (Interview by Julie Frederickse), p.6, in App/A/7.

¹⁵⁸*New Nation*, 23-29/11/90.

¹⁵⁹IV/Tsiki, p.1,260.

¹⁶⁰IV/J.Zuma, p.1,362.

¹⁶¹IV/J.Zuma, p.1,362.

were anxious to play a part in the armed struggle'.¹⁶² The ANC external mission did not, however, succeed in systematically developing the potential for quickly training these groups, which were conceived of as 'MK auxiliary units'. Slovo and others rued this failure.¹⁶³ They recognised that this type of unit could have placed at the ANC's disposal military combatants living legally inside the country, whose absence during training had not been noticed by security forces¹⁶⁴ and who, moreover, had not lost touch with domestic conditions. The bulk of recruitment between 1974 and 1976 resulted in long periods of training abroad.

The story of one group of intelligent and mobile young men who sought recruitment to MK - Naledi Tsiki, Mosima (Tokyo) Sexwale and a group of friends from Soweto - shows the ANC's limitations on the Witwatersrand in the years before 1975.

Tsiki tried to get revolutionary military training from 1972 and, notwithstanding visits to Lesotho where he attended school, had been unable to do so.¹⁶⁵ His friend, Sexwale, went to Botswana in 1973, where he managed to meet members of the Zimbabwean liberation movement, Zapu, but

¹⁶²IV/Slovo, p.968.

¹⁶³IV/Slovo, p.972.

¹⁶⁴IV/Slovo, pp.967-968.

¹⁶⁵IV/Tsiki, pp.1,254-1,255

not the ANC. He and Sexwale could also make no progress with Winnie Mandela, then living in Soweto, who told them her links with the ANC had 'broken down', something they were later able to confirm.¹⁶⁶ Tsiki, who with Sexwale 'tried very hard' to find an ANC underground in Soweto in 1972-73, concludes one did not exist at that time.¹⁶⁷ He recalls:

As far as we were concerned, we were struggling on our own. If there was an underground, it was altogether too underground for us. We definitely struggled for years, I mean for years, really for years, trying to make contact and we couldn't.¹⁶⁸

The group made contact with the ANC only when Sexwale visited Swaziland in 1975. There he met Mbeki.¹⁶⁹ In 1975, on their own initiative, Tsiki and a third young man, Christopher Manye, formed an underground unit which discussed politics, later distributed ANC literature clandestinely and which subsequently spawned further units. A visit by Manye to Swaziland resulted in a plan to set up MK auxiliary units inside the country. Trainees would receive only three to six months instruction abroad before deployment again inside the country¹⁷⁰. According to Tsiki:

We felt that we shouldn't go out and stay

¹⁶⁶IV/Tsiki, pp.1,255-1,256.

¹⁶⁷IV/Tsiki, p.1,256.

¹⁶⁸IV/Tsiki, p.1,257.

¹⁶⁹IV/Tsiki, p.1,257.

¹⁷⁰IV/Tsiki, p.1,259.

outside. We must actually go out, come back into the country and work inside the country.... From the readings...I had done in guerilla warfare, I had come firmly to believe that the only effective way in which you can be able to build up the structure was to make sure that people have got the necessary equipment but they must be inside the country, and legally inside the country if possible, to work in such a way that they can do their work without being seen to be doing their work.... This was the thinking...we had developed before we actually met the [ANC].¹⁷¹

Tsiki's group started recruiting to service this perspective.¹⁷²

In late 1975, however, security police attention meant Tsiki had to leave South Africa. The ANC told the newly-exiled Tsiki that giving him military training and returning him to South Africa in three to six months was 'no problem'. But Tsiki was frustrated by an apparent lack of planning and coordination. He spent a week waiting in Mozambique and a further few weeks waiting in Tanzania, leaving for the German Democratic Republic only in January 1976.¹⁷³

Tsiki found a few score other recruits in transit camps in Tanzania - reflecting a 'reasonable flow of people'.¹⁷⁴ Sexwale, whose training in the Soviet Union

¹⁷¹IV/Tsiki, p.1,259.

¹⁷²IV/Tsiki, pp.1,260-1,261.

¹⁷³IV/Tsiki, p.1,262.

¹⁷⁴IV/Tsiki, p.1,263.

also began in January 1976,¹⁷⁵ had 12 others in his group - five each from Soweto and Natal and two from the Orange Free State.¹⁷⁶ His Soviet trainers told him there were also other ANC groups receiving instruction in Crimea.

Tsiki and Sexwale would return to South Africa much later than he had hoped to - almost a year after leaving - a story which is taken up in the next chapter.

Recruiting for military training was, as Jacob Zuma indicates, hazardous. The toll exacted from the embryonic underground structures was high. Many involved in Tsiki's various units had to leave the country.¹⁷⁷ Esther Maleka and David Pule Thate were jailed in 1976.¹⁷⁸

But nowhere in the 1974-76 period was the cost higher than in Natal. With a few exceptions, among them Zuma, almost the entire Natal leadership had been neutralised by early 1976. Recruitment for military training had exposed the few underground workers at a very early stage to many people upon whose discretion or loyalty they could not reasonably count. Recruitment comprised a large and

¹⁷⁵Mosima (Tokyo) Sexwale, Legal Deposition Made to South African Police, December 1976, p.20, in App/A/14.

¹⁷⁶*Ibid.* p.47.

¹⁷⁷IV/Tsiki, pp.1,261-1,262, 1,278.

¹⁷⁸Idaf, *Prisoners*, pp.40, 115.

critical portion of the evidence against them.¹⁷⁹

The Natal underground considered the prospects for, and various ways of, involving itself in political organisation by political means. It was aware that Natal students were not alone in being receptive to the ANC. Conditions for ANC political work were also promising in the emerging trade unions. In 1975, support for the ANC and its allies among workers within the emergent Natal-based unions was substantial - about 66 per cent, according to one survey.¹⁸⁰ The Natal underground also had the advantage that many of its members were one-time trade unionists.¹⁸¹

Among underground members there were discussions on how members should involve themselves in popular legal organisations.¹⁸² Nxasana, who was involved in just such work at the Institute for Industrial Education, and Dhlomo, a former colleague in the trad. union movement, had opposed ANC concentration on military activity in the early

¹⁷⁹This is apparent from Howard, *Judgement*.

¹⁸⁰Eddie Webster, 'A Profile of Unregistered Union Members in Durban', in Maree, *Unions*, p.28.

¹⁸¹Of the 10 men tried for being part of the Natal underground, eight had some contemporary or past association with *factu*; of them only William Khanyile was acquitted. Howard, *Judgement*, pp.526-531. See also IDAF, *Prisoners*, pp.20, 55, 78, 79, 81, 121.

¹⁸²*Ibid.* pp.139-140.

1970s,¹⁸³ believing trade union organisation was more important. But, after Dhlomo went into exile in Swaziland in late 1972, Dhlomo had changed his views.¹⁸⁴ William Khanyile, another of the trade unionists in the Natal underground, proposed in 1975 reviving Sactu. But Nxasana opposed this, arguing that the government would immediately crush any trade union which associated itself openly with Sactu,¹⁸⁵ which, though itself not formally outlawed, was seen by the state as indistinguishable from the ANC and SACP. In July or August 1975, Nxasana attended a clandestine Sactu conference in Johannesburg. The general opinion there, too, was that Sactu should be revived if possible.¹⁸⁶ At one meeting - with Jacob Zuma, Khuzwayo and Khanyile - Nxasana was told to form youth clubs, train shop stewards and join the Umlazi Residents Association.¹⁸⁷ The underground also discussed, inconclusively, what to do about Inkatha Ye Nkululeko Ye Sizwe, the Zulu cultural movement dating from the 1920s which had been resuscitated in 1975 by Mangosuthu Buthelezi.¹⁸⁸ And plans were discussed for a public commemoration meeting on December 16 1975, the anniversary

¹⁸³Who testified in court against his former comrades in the Natal underground leadership in 1976-77.

¹⁸⁴Howard, *Judgement*, p.133.

¹⁸⁵*Ibid.* pp.138-139

¹⁸⁶*Ibid.* p.141.

¹⁸⁷*Ibid.* pp.139-140.

¹⁸⁸*Ibid.* p.140.

of MK's formation, for former ANC president Albert Luthuli.¹⁸⁹

Despite these discussions, there was no prioritisation of political organisation by political means. Nor, apparently, did the Natal underground energetically oppose involvement in military work - which might have been advisable given the degree of exposure many of its members had to the security police because of their political histories. The external mission instruction to begin recruitment and military tasks went substantially unchallenged.

That instruction was emphatic and repeated. According to Nxasana, in January 1974, Nduli, the Wankie veteran based in Swaziland, entered South Africa clandestinely and directed the underground to reorganise itself into cells of two or three people to recruit others for military training.¹⁹⁰ In April 1974, Nxasana met with Jacob Zuma and Khanyile, and the same message was conveyed, this time from Dhlomo. Zuma said that the functions of cells would be to find recruits, send them to Mozambique and to hide returning MK combatants. In August 1975, Nxasana met Gwala, Jacob Zuma and two others. A letter from Swaziland reiterated the importance of recruiting youths for training in Mozambique and it suggested arrangements for transport.

¹⁸⁹*Ibid.* p.140.

¹⁹⁰*Ibid.* p.135.

A document, entitled 'To All Leading Cadres', was read at this meeting of the Natal underground in August 1975. Under the heading 'Current tasks in our struggle', it stated that

The principal strategic aim of our struggle is the forcible capture of power from the white minority regime by the combined revolutionary forces of the black majority and all other democratic forces in the country.¹⁹¹

It argued that the way to achieve this was to develop MK into a force capable of defeating, or rendering ineffective, government armed forces. It added that this armed assault had to be carried out in a context of overall and continuous political guidance. But its weight was that repression inside the country and Vorster's detente exercise among African countries imposed priorities. It stated:

in these conditions, it has become very urgent that we begin to engage the enemy in armed combat inside the country.¹⁹² [my emphasis]

In the military sphere, the document said:

Our immediate tasks in this area are:-
 - further expand the network of MK units, drawing in the youth in particular;
 - to train these units;
 - to arm these units;
 - to activate them, actually to begin confronting the enemy.¹⁹³

And it exhorted the underground to prepare to receive military cadres and to hide arms. The message was unmistakable: the practical priority was military-type

¹⁹¹Ibid. p.143.

¹⁹²Ibid. p.144.

¹⁹³Ibid. pp.143-144.

activity. The Natal underground complied.

Security police swooped on the Natal underground in December 1975. Nxasana's impression during interrogation was that police knew almost everything.¹⁹⁴ Gwala, Khanyile and eight others went on trial. A deeply distressed Nxasana gave evidence against his comrades; Joseph Mdluli died in detention at the hands of security police; and a procession of people who had helped in military recruitment and transportation testified against the accused. All but Khanyile were eventually jailed in 1977 at the end of a long trial, four of them for life.

The core of the Natal underground had been destroyed. Only a few units survived, mainly south of Durban.¹⁹⁵ Among the survivors were Khuzwayo and Petros Nyawose. Jacob Zuma escaped arrest, and continued working in Swaziland. Military recruitment had denuded domestic soil of potential candidates for long-term internal political reconstruction. The assumption underlying the recruitment of young militants had been that the ANC would be able to return them to South Africa after their training to extant underground reception structures.

The trial of Gwala and the nine others, and the scandal surrounding Mdluli's death in detention in March

¹⁹⁴Ibid. p.163

¹⁹⁵IV/J.Zuma, p.1,363.

1976, gave widespread publicity to the resurgence of ANC activities. This fed into what was an increasingly volatile political context. The Natal underground had been alive to the changing political mood inside the country. In 1975, according to Jacob Zuma, the Natal underground had, in fact,

analysed the situation and realised that there was a political explosion coming, and we thought it [would] come in 1975, and our thinking was that it [would] come from the workers' front. I think we analysed that - even put it on paper. And, indeed, as we saw the situation developing, there was a lot of resistance at different places.¹⁹⁶

Underlying this mood were a number of combustible ingredients. Black industrial wages increased quite dramatically,¹⁹⁷ in particular just after the 1973 strike wave.¹⁹⁸ But during the 1970s, there was a rapid increase in unemployment among blacks and a serious deterioration in rural resources.¹⁹⁹ Increasing numbers of rural work seekers were evading prohibitions to try to obtain employment in urban areas. Urban black townships were becoming more seriously overcrowded as the government strictly limited further housing development. Large urban

¹⁹⁶Jacob Zuma (Interview by JF), p.27.

¹⁹⁷Merle Lipton, *Capitalism and Apartheid: South Africa, 1910-1986* (Aldershot: Wildwood House, 1986), pp.65-66.

¹⁹⁸J Hofmeyr, 'Black Wages: the post-war experience', in Matrass and Ardington (Eds.), *Political Economy*, p.130.

¹⁹⁹S Marks and S Trapido, 'South Africa since 1976: an Historical Perspective', in S Johnson (Ed.), *South Africa: No Turning Back* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1988), p.21.

squatter settlements developed to cater for the new influx of work seekers as services for the black townships, among them schools and transport, sagged under the burden. And, in Soweto, the largest of the segregated black townships, the proportion of residents in wage employment was declining.

Marks and Trapido add that:

the relative success of the workers' strikes, the independence of Mozambique and Angola and the subsequent humiliation of the South African invasion of Angola inspired the black consciousness movement. It was the state's determination to impose Afrikaans on school students, however, in the context of a rapid expansion of high school numbers in urban areas, which provided the flashpoint.²⁰⁰

Between March and May 1976, students at a number of black junior schools in Soweto demonstrated against the enforced use of Afrikaans, considered the language of the oppressor, as a medium of instruction in their schools. In late May, Sasm, the black school students organisation, rejected Afrikaans as a medium of instruction. At a meeting on June 13 in Soweto, a Soweto regional branch of Sasm was formed and a demonstration was planned for three days later, June 16.²⁰¹

When police opened fire on this demonstration, rioting broke out. Soweto was plunged into a state of insurrection. In subsequent days, inchoate uprisings broke out in black

²⁰⁰Marks and Trapido, 'Historical Perspective', p.21.

²⁰¹Moss, *Wheels*, p.74.

townships in many urban areas and some bantustans. The country as a whole was plunged into crisis. Full accounts of the uprisings in Soweto and other black townships are available elsewhere.²⁰² Although there is no evidence to suggest that the ANC instigated or influenced these uprisings, none the less, as I will show in the next chapter, it was to be the major beneficiary of them.

Conclusion

Over the 1974-76 period, four developments were particularly influential in improving the ANC's fortunes. They were the rupture of the South African government's regional *cordon sanitaire*, the emergence of an incipient anti-apartheid mass movement inside South Africa, improvements to ANC operational structures in neighbouring states, and the resuscitation of an embryonic ANC underground. These developments enabled the ANC to establish the kind of organisational axis it had needed ever since its setbacks in the 1960s if it was to return to South Africa as a significant revolutionary force. This axis turned on the small domestic underground, which promised a channel of communication between the external mission and its politically reascent potential constituency inside South Africa. Moreover, the underground

²⁰²Brooks and Brickhill, *Whirlwind*; Baruch Hirson, *Year of Fire, Year of Ash; The Soweto Revolt: Roots of a Revolution?* (London: Zed Books, 1979); John Kane-Berman, *Soweto: Black Revolt, White Reaction* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1978).

was the bedrock upon which the ANC could hope to build an extensive and organised domestic presence capable of supporting the sustained armed struggle which the ANC hoped to wage.

ANC operational strategy over the 20 months to June 1976 did not, however, enhance the workings of this axis. Rather, it led to the near destruction of its key element, the re-emergent underground. The major reason for this was the ANC's precipitate stress on armed activity. This stress forced its embryonic underground to involve itself in the highly risky business of recruitment for military training at a point when it was not sufficiently well-organised and resilient to survive probable security force interest. Thus the ANC's prioritisation of armed activity paradoxically harmed its potential eventually to develop a sustained armed struggle. It had not seen the need to hasten slowly.

Whatever the ANC's verbal protests to the contrary, its practice over this period indicated that actual ANC operational strategy still identified armed activity as the key to advance in all phases of developing a revolutionary challenge. Three positions obtruded through its practice. First, the ANC saw armed activity as the means by which it would eventually seize state power. Secondly, it viewed armed activity as the major method by which it could stimulate an organised political constituency inside South Africa. And, thirdly, the ANC saw the overriding purpose of

any political mobilisation, whether the product of military action or of non-violent political methods, as being to serve armed activity.

However, ANC strategy and the setbacks it caused the organisation operationally seemed paradoxically to benefit the ANC politically. The setbacks provided public evidence of the ANC's efforts. The stories of its activities which emerged in security police briefings to the media or in court proceedings evinced a defiance which had not only survived defeat in the 1960s but which might very well survive the latest setback as well. The ANC's determination to mount military activity gave it a particular lustre and resonated to powerful effect within deeply frustrated sections of the black population. The ANC's defiance and patent will to struggle - most evident over this period in its losses of personnel - guaranteed its resurrection, phoenix-like, to growing acclaim from a potential constituency inside South Africa desperate for leadership.

The crucifixion came in successive political trials, exile and, particularly, in Soweto on June 16 1976 when, in the words of Nolutshungu, the South African state

invoked the *ultima ratio regum*, carelessly and wantonly, when the right of revolt had merely been asserted and barely exercised.²⁰³

The ANC's resurrection was delivered by a generation of

²⁰³ Stan C Nolutshungu, *Changing South Africa* (Cape Town: David Philip, 1982), p.185.

black youth who, enraged by the brutality of the state and attracted to the ANC by its stress on military activity became the foot soldiers of its resumption of armed activity inside South Africa after October 1976. How that youth was won to the ANC, how it bore that resumption of armed activity and returned the ANC to relevance are the subject of the next chapter.

CHAPTER THREE*UNPREPARED*

Soweto and All That, June 1976 - October 1978

Fifteen years after our commitment to armed struggle, we could mount no organised retaliation by armed groups using modern techniques.

- Joe Slovo¹

Introduction

The uprisings in Soweto and elsewhere in June 1976 created the opportunity for the ANC to break out of its 13-year strategic impasse. From exile, it was able to re-register as a significant actor in South African politics, primarily by sporadic armed activity inside South Africa from October 1976.

The previous chapter sought to show how the ANC's strategic emphasis on armed activity attracted to it elements of its potential constituency, particularly from within the black consciousness movement. Yet this military emphasis, which contributed to the destruction of the ANC's small underground inside South Africa between 1974 and June 1976, harmed the ANC's ability to organise an internal political base, which was not only desirable for a movement pretending to national leadership but was also necessary if the ANC was to be able to wage a sustained armed struggle.

¹IV/Slovo, p.970.

In the 28 months after June 1976 this paradox recurs, but more sharply.

ANC Operational Strategic Policy after the Soweto Uprising

The ANC felt the 1976 uprisings made the re-introduction of armed activity inside South Africa yet more urgent. Its military unpreparedness during the rebellion added to its earlier international embarrassment.

The Revolutionary Council recognised that the ANC's international allies were infected by 'a mood of scepticism' about the ANC's military capacity. So, too, were 'many of [the ANC's] own MK cadres' abroad.² A more serious source of embarrassment was how the ANC's potential domestic constituency felt about its military impotence during the uprisings.

Joe Slovo recalls that the Revolutionary Council (RC) concluded in the months after the uprisings that it was an

indication of serious failure that against the background of the biggest massacre in our modern history, we could count only two policemen killed in the six-odd weeks after the uprisings started. Fifteen years after our commitment to armed struggle, we could mount no organised retaliation by armed groups using modern techniques.³

The RC believed that whatever 'confidence and support' the ANC enjoyed inside South Africa could not survive further

²IV/Slovo, p.971.

³IV/Slovo, p.970.

inactivity on the military front.⁴

In the ANC's view, the uprisings not only demanded armed activity; they also improved both the context within which, and provided the means with which, it could be waged. The uprisings had created new possibilities, which the ANC recognised.

First, the South African government was in retreat diplomatically on a number of fronts as a result of the uprisings. There was international outrage at its ruthless action against rioters. Prime Minister John Vorster's attempts to win conservative African states into an amenable relationship with South Africa had received a setback,⁵ and the ANC reasoned that armed activity could further undermine any African rapprochement with Vorster.⁶ Moreover, Vorster felt he had to accede to United States' demands that he pressure the white minority government in Rhodesia into conceding the principle of black majority rule.⁷ In consequence, a further hole appeared likely in South Africa's regional *cordon sanitaire*. Meanwhile, Frelimo had consolidated its rule in Mozambique, and the ANC its operational presence there. The MPLA government in Angola had survived the South African invasion of late 1975

⁴IV/Slovo, p.966.

⁵IV/Slovo, p.972.

⁶IV/Slovo, p.971.

⁷Geldenhuis, *Diplomacy of Isolation*, p.214.

and was being buttressed by Cuban and Soviet military assistance; and the ANC had offers for military training in engineering (i.e. sabotage) and other specialisations in Angola.⁸

The uprisings also provided the ANC with largest-ever inflow of new recruits to MK. Some 4,000 young blacks went into exile over the 18 months after June 16 1976, about 3,000 of them to the ANC,⁹ and most of the latter into MK.¹⁰ The RC recognised that, for the first time since the early 1960s, 'the prospect existed for creating a trained fighting force of real youth'.¹¹ Its guerilla forces, recruited mainly in the early 1960s, had been 'growing into middle age and [were] becoming more and more cut off from home conditions'.¹²

Three central factors help explain why most of this new generation of young black exiles joined the ANC external mission rather than its rivals. ANC ideological penetration of black consciousness appears to have been one of the lesser reasons, although some years later the ANC claimed that the black consciousness movement's leading spokesman, Steve Biko, and others had concluded by 1976

⁸Ellis & Sechaba, *Comrades*, p.85.

⁹ Moss, *Wheels*, p.4.

¹⁰*Ibid.*

¹¹*IV/Slovo*, p.972.

¹²*IV/Slovo*, p.972.

that

the ANC [was] the leader of the [South African] revolution; that the Black People's Convention should concentrate on mass mobilisation; that the BPC should function within the context of the broad strategy of [the ANC];... ¹³

Arrangements for a meeting between Biko and the ANC leadership fell through when 'it proved impossible to bring [Biko] out of the country for the meeting'.¹⁴ Apparently reflecting the same tendency, black school student leaders, including a number of the pre-1976 South African Students Movement (Sasm) leadership, had joined the ANC in exile *en bloc*.¹⁵ Moreover, a series of trials involving young white intellectuals in late 1976 on charges of working for the ANC and SACP visibly challenged the view that whites were, as black consciousness suggested, definitionally 'part of the problem' of apartheid, personified 'the enemy', and would not join in a revolutionary challenge to apartheid. Indeed, Jeremy Cronin, one of the young whites arrested, believes that his unit's capture was, paradoxically, a 'victory':

[It] was important that we got caught... [I]t stood for something at a particular conjuncture, where [black consciousness] was rampant... [O]ne [SACP] comrade who I met again now in the underground...in Cape Town said to me: That trial was very important; we were picking up on the youth and channelling them out of the country for military training, and that was happening while your trial was happening...and we used the trial

¹³ANC NEC, 'Political Report', p.17.

¹⁴*Ibid.* p.17.

¹⁵Nolutshungu, *Changing South Africa*, p.170.

to say the enemy's a white system.¹⁶

It is doubtful, however, that clear political preferences determined the youths' choice of organisational home in exile.

A more important factor in their alignment was the ANC external mission's superior organisation in adjacent states. Its exile networks had been much improved after Mozambican independence in April 1974. At this crucial moment, the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC) was riven by serious leadership disputes. The chief antagonists were its chairman, Potlako Leballo, its military chief, Templeton Ntantala, and another central committee member, Vus Make. It culminated in 1978-79 first in Ntantala's and then in Leballo's expulsion from the PAC, followed by the murder of another central committee member, David Sibeko.¹⁷ Moreover, black consciousness members who had gone into exile in neighbouring Botswana in the early 1970s and obtained military training via the PAC in Libya would not have recommended the experience to the new exiles.

At the same time, the organisational coherence of pre-1976 black consciousness exiles who had established an independent presence in neighbouring states was breaking

¹⁶IV/Cronin, p.144.

¹⁷Series of unrecorded discussions and interviews with PAC leaders and members in Harare, 1981-83. See Howard Barrell, 'The Outlawed South African Liberation Movements', in Johnson (Ed.), *So Turning Back*, pp.73-74.

down in 1976.¹⁸ Many decided to join the ANC after the uprisings.¹⁹ And the ANC continued its efforts to throttle international assistance to a 'third force' of the kind that the black consciousness movement had the potential to become.²⁰

Inside South Africa, ANC organisation appears also to have been superior to the PAC's in 1976, notwithstanding the serious setbacks the ANC's underground had suffered. The relations which Joe Gqabi's Transvaal underground network established with the students leading the Soweto uprisings, recounted below, helped steer this generation towards the ANC. Moreover, a number of people were involved in ferrying youths specifically to ANC external mission networks in neighbouring states, as subsequent political trials evinced.²¹

The major factor explaining the attraction of the ANC for this new generation of exiles appears to have been the ANC's commitment to armed activity. This commitment had been most recently evident in police disclosures following Joseph Mdluli's death in detention and the trial of members of the Natal underground. Senior ANC officials believe most

¹⁸Mangena, *On Your Own*, pp.150-151; Mokoape et al, 'Towards Armed Struggle', p.3.

¹⁹Mokoape et al, 'Towards Armed Struggle', p.3.

²⁰ANC NEC, 'Political Report', p.12.

²¹Moss, *Wheels*, pp.14, 33-34, 51-52, 58-60.

of the new exiles had no particular ideological loyalty - to black consciousness, the ANC or the Pan-Africanist Congress (PAC). They were 'up for grabs', according to Slovo.²² The ANC external mission could, credibly, offer them military training - moreover, it wanted to give them military training - and military training was what the newly-exiled generation wanted. Armed struggle was the ANC's 'trump card'.²³

Within about a year of the 1976 uprisings, the numerical strength of Umkhonto we Sizwe increased dramatically, by a factor of at least three to about 3,000; the ANC by only slightly less. Equipped with a new generation of foot soldiers, the RC set about analysing the new possibilities created by the uprisings and by Mozambican and Angolan independence, which offered the possibility of operational bases in countries contiguous with or close to South Africa.²⁴

The RC formulated its strategy in much the same general terms as the ANC had seven years earlier in its *Strategy and Tactics* document at the Morogoro conference. The RC reasoned that it had to proceed from two premises:

Firstly, we could expect no quick victories. Our planning had to be based on the assumption that the struggle would be difficult and protracted.

²²IV/Slovo, p.1,004.

²³IV/Slovo, p.1,004; IV/Rabkin, p.808.

²⁴IV/Slovo, p.966.

Secondly, the type of people's war we waged would require a continuous combination of political action with armed action. In particular, the mobilisation of the workers and peasants was of fundamental importance.²⁵

But, in the event, the ANC neither prepared itself for a protracted struggle nor seriously sought to combine political with military action over the next 28 months. Rather, the ANC's practice was to betray the existence of a different premise: injecting MK combatants from bordering countries would slowly weaken the South African state and, in some undefined way, of itself stimulate, organise and dovetail with popular resistance.²⁶

The RC elaborated plans for both rural and urban MK infiltration. The ANC was, the RC considered, now 'in the early stages of people's war'. As such, the primary activity should be

engaging, harassing and dispersing the enemy's armed and police forces, and hitting enemy installations (administrative, economic, military, communications, etc.) in order to reduce its will and capacity to pursue the struggle.²⁷

But the RC equivocated over the main terrain for its military thrust: whether it should be in the rural areas, as argued at Morogoro in 1969, or in the urban areas. The uprisings had exposed the ANC's earlier disregard for the potential for urban guerilla warfare; it was now an 'urgent

²⁵IV/Slovo, pp.966-967.

²⁶IV/Strachan, p.1135.

²⁷IV/Slovo, p.968.

priority' to remedy this.²⁸ According to Slovo,

a few, well-chosen sophisticated armed actions against the enemy's forces and other major targets during the Soweto events would, we considered, have been of obvious political importance for the people and for our movement.²⁹

Whatever the terrain chosen, there was one central weakness: the ANC lacked an underground with which guerillas could link up. RC analysis blamed the failure of attempts to develop an MK guerilla presence in rural areas in the early 1970s on this factor. Guerillas involved in those earlier missions had been instructed to integrate themselves under false identities with local folk and organise local MK networks. 'Scores' had been successfully returned into the country but hardly any had survived for more than a short period. They had soon been exposed to state networks of officials and informers.³⁰ Now, in order to avoid early detection, the RC decided that MK cadres sent into the rural areas should henceforth avoid contact with local people in the early stages of their penetration. MK units 'should initially operate from effective hide-outs in mountains, forests, caves or in tunnels of the Vietnam type'. Initially, they should be supplied from exile. The RC envisaged that this pattern would eventually change: 'politico-military guerilla combat actions would win over

²⁸IV/Slovo, p.970.

²⁹IV/Slovo, p.971.

³⁰IV/Slovo, p.967.

the local populace and attract the best elements to join [the MK unit in the area]'.³¹ This thinking went well beyond acknowledging the likely inspirational effect of armed attacks; it appeared to assume that armed activity was itself capable of organising the political base on which the long-term success of sustained armed struggle depended.

The RC believed that MK's presence in the rural areas could grow to the point where

the people's forces could look forward to achieving varying degrees of local and regional dominance, at which stage we might be able to talk of liberated zones of varying degrees of permanence.³²

Moreover, rural guerilla action could 'be seen to be challenging the enemy for actual control of territory and, by clear implication, be seen to be engaged in a protracted struggle for people's power'.³³

The urban vision was not much different. Here, the RC considered it was possible to 'aim at eventually transforming the [black] townships into [a] special sort of "no go" area for the enemy'. The local population would become MK combatants' "'mountain" and "jungle"' in which they could hide.³⁴ From those hideouts, urban combatants

³¹IV/Slovo, p.967.

³²IV/Slovo, p.968.

³³IV/Slovo, p.970.

³⁴IV/Slovo, p.969.

could then penetrate the surrounding 'white' areas where most state targets were situated.³⁵ But, according to Slovo,

we were clear that serious planning for urban guerilla warfare on any major scale could not be undertaken by groups of MK cadres who were known to the authorities, either through their long absence from the country or through other means.³⁶

Consequently, the RC resolved to develop properly the potential for MK 'auxiliary units', who would receive short military training courses in neighbouring countries and return to South Africa to live 'legally' and operate as part-time combatants.³⁷

The RC reasoned that the state would have to employ restraint in counter-insurgency operations in black townships, so as not to endanger 'the allotted function of the township as a pool of labour power for the white metropolis'.³⁸ Nonetheless, the RC estimated that it would have to undertake considerable political work in these townships to ensure residents defied the 'terror' the state would unleash in response to guerilla activity.³⁹

The RC saw rural and urban guerilla activity as

³⁵IV/Slovo, pp.968-969.

³⁶IV/Slovo, p.968.

³⁷IV/Slovo, p.968.

³⁸IV/Slovo, p.969.

³⁹IV/Slovo, pp.969-970.

mutually re-inforcing. The two needed to be simultaneous in order to disperse security forces to the maximum so that the ANC could be seen by its potential constituency to be engaged in a 'protracted struggle for people's power' which was national in its dimensions.⁴⁰ The strategic perspective developing was one of protracted people's war.

Others in the ANC believed the Soweto uprisings suggested a different strategic perspective. According to Pallo Jordan, then one of a small group of younger intellectuals in the external mission, the uprisings indicated a new and different revolutionary potential. Political general strikes in the 1960s had never carried the intensity and distribution now evident in 1976. Two worker stayaways in Soweto in August had demonstrated an altogether new potential for the political general strike. An insurgent spirit was abroad among ordinary people. A more urban-centric outlook seemed likely to be better able to exploit this spirit than the doctrine of protracted people's war with its traditional rural bias. Some felt there needed to be a closer look at the work of revolutionary theorists like Carlos Marighella who had advanced an approach to urban insurrections, which included, in quasi-Bolshevik style, combining strikes and a wide range of other political actions by ordinary people

⁴⁰IV/Slovo, p.970.

closely with military activities.⁴¹ In short, Jordan and others began in late 1976 to 're-think the possibilities' for a revolutionary outcome in South Africa.⁴² Jordan recalls that some people

began talking in terms of the possibilities of insurrection because one had had and seen a combination during 1976 of a number of tactics that are associated with insurrectionary situations: extensive street fighting for one thing, and times at which the regime lost control (very brief periods, of course) of townships. Then, apart from that, the sort of veld fire effect of the mass uprisings spreading from centre to centre to centre very rapidly in a matter of a few weeks, in some cases days. This was unlike anything one had seen in the past.⁴³

The revision which Jordan and others were tentatively suggesting in the months after June 1976 had important implications for the ANC. The insurrectionary approach required a leadership with the ability to combine a variety of specialisations - from non-violent political work in popular organisations and trade unions to combat work. It was highly improbable that an exiled leadership could provide this level of tactical guidance.

This as-yet inchoate strategic perspective would, in the 1980s, crystallise into one side in a long and enervating dispute within the ANC. At times, the dispute seemed to divide the ANC along generational lines - with

⁴¹See Carlos Marighella, 'On Principles and Strategic Questions,' in *Les tempes modernes*, November 1969.

⁴²IV/Jordan, pp.232-233.

⁴³IV/Jordan, p.232.

the older generation generally insisting (if not always verbally then certainly in practice) on a protracted people's war approach, while the younger insisted on an insurrectionary emphasis.

The generational dimension of this disagreement was fuelled by the fact that many, if not most, MK guerillas from about 1976 received training in 'Military and Combat Work (MCW)', an operational strategic doctrine centred on stimulating urban insurrection which was developed by the Soviet Union's security services.⁴⁴ The ANC leadership, however, who were trained in the 1960s, did not receive MCW instruction;⁴⁵ rather, their training seems to have been mainly in aspects of rural guerilla warfare or semi-conventional 'mobile warfare', which were better suited to the development of 'protracted people's war' in an underdeveloped, mainly peasant society. Most of the leadership appear to have had an extremely poor understanding of what the younger generation of guerillas had been taught⁴⁶ and, hence, what strategic and tactical assumptions cadres were making.

The central assumption of MCW was the existence of an

⁴⁴IV/Anderson, pp.1-2. A number of ANC members trained in MCW collated the notes of their MCW training in 1988. These were combined by Ronnie Kasrils and Bill Anderson into a confidential ANC training manual, MCW, available in App/A/21.

⁴⁵IV/Anderson, p.2.

⁴⁶IV/Anderson, p.2.

in-place underground, covering a city, region or country, able to coordinate an array of operational specialities as well as provide over-all political leadership to whatever struggle was being waged. The doctrine determined that there were basically two categories of operational tasks. In MCW, 'combat work' referred, not surprisingly, to actual combat with the enemy. The other aspect of MCW, though known as 'military work', was more of a political or intelligence task. 'Military work' referred to work to undermine, sabotage or win over the enemy's armed forces. The doctrine had a vision far removed from guerilla bands wandering the countryside; it was designed to overthrow a local or central government via a short, sharp and decisive combination of various forms of struggle. It was also not designed to service an operational leadership sitting in headquarters more than 500 miles from the action; it needed hands-on *in situ* command.

In 1976, however, ANC strategic policy continued to be based on the doctrine of protracted people's war. And, in the months after June, the RC took a series of decisions on what structures and organisational principles should service this approach. But, before it had established the necessary structures,⁴⁷ the RC hurriedly infiltrated a number of MK cadres whose brief was to mount immediate combat actions in addition to carrying out a range of other longer-term tasks. The first infiltrations had

⁴⁷IV/Tsiki, pp.1,267-1,268.

contradictory results: they were a considerable propaganda victory for the ANC but, in terms of increasing its organised internal presence, they proved a disaster.

The First Combat Actions

The first to break MK's 13-year silence in South Africa was a unit commanded by Naledi Tsiki, the young Soweto militant and MK recruiter of the mid-1970s. He had returned to Tanzania from training in the German Democratic Republic in May 1976. Neither Joe Modise nor Joe Slovo, the two key military figures on the RC, was expecting his group back so soon, so no plans had been made for their deployment. Initial discussions in Tanzania resulted in plans to locate the group in Botswana, from where they were to organise armed activity in the entire Transvaal.⁴⁸ But, in the end, the group was sent via Mozambique to Swaziland from where Moses Mabhida, the RC secretary, told them they were to establish and oversee MK activity in both the Transvaal and Natal - a 'tall order', as Tsiki notes.⁴⁹

Initially Modise and Slovo had insisted that Tsiki's unit should operate only in Swaziland, overseeing from there the setting up of MK structures inside South Africa, and later leave Swaziland to assist with political

⁴⁸IV/Tsiki, p.1,268.

⁴⁹IV/Tsiki, p.1,268.

education in training camps,⁵⁰ which were then being established in Angola to house the thousands of new recruits. But Tsiki and his unit argued they themselves had to be involved in actual combat, saying:

it would be improper for us to send people into the country to go and fight when we have got no combat experience ourselves... We should go into the country, have the experience, so that if and when we teach people about political education we are teaching them about something...we have experienced.⁵¹

The compromise was that they could enter the country, on authorisation, on specified missions. Their chance came in October 1976. Tsiki's unit entered the country twice, once to reconnoitre a section of railway line near Pietersburg and a second time to blow it up with plastic explosive.⁵² It was the first MK attack inside South Africa since the 1960s. Tsiki had returned to the country very nearly a year after leaving for what was supposed to be a three- to six-month course.

Inside the country, Tsiki's unit was serviced by members of Joe Gqabi's and Martin Ramokgadi's Transvaal 'machinery'⁵³ (as a cell network came to be known in the ANC). Immediately after this first operation, the Gqabi-Ramokgadi machinery helped them stay briefly in Alexandra township, Johannesburg, before they returned to Swaziland.

⁵⁰IV/Tsiki, pp.1,268-1,269.

⁵¹IV/Tsiki, pp.1,268-1,269.

⁵²IV/Tsiki, pp.1,269-1,271.

⁵³IV/Tsiki, p.1,272

Tsiki's unit concluded they could survive based inside South Africa itself. Back in Swaziland they pressured Mabhida into allowing them to establish themselves in Alexandra.⁵⁴

After making arrangements in Swaziland that they would be joined later by reinforcements, who were to include Mosima Sexwale, Tsiki's unit established itself in Alexandra with assistance from the Gqabi-Ramokgadi machinery. But, no sooner had they settled there than a dispute developed over who should decide what the MK unit did, how and when. Should it be the MK unit itself or the Gqabi-Ramokgadi political machinery? Tsiki recalls that Gqabi and Ramokgadi argued that

All military units must be under political direction... [T]hey had the political machinery and therefore they needed to be in charge of this unit and tell us what operations to perform, when and how.

So we said: No, there is the ANC political structure; there is the military structure; we have come here under instructions from a military structure which takes its orders from the political structure; but at the level of operations we cannot be told that we must actually get mixed up with the political structure; it would not be proper. But, in terms of having to obey political orders, we have to; but those orders will be conveyed to us by our military commanders.⁵⁵

MK's very first armed attacks in its resumption of military activities had raised an issue that would haunt it henceforth. The two sides decided to take the matter to

⁵⁴IV/Tsiki, p.1,271.

⁵⁵IV/Tsiki, pp.1,289, 1,274.

adjudication by the external mission.⁵⁶ Its response would come rather too late.

Meanwhile, the unit set about its work as it saw fit, with continued cooperation from the Gqabi-Ramokgadi machinery. The unit quickly established contact with members of the Soweto Students Representative Council which, to the extent that any group was able to, exercised some measure of influence over the continuing unrest around Johannesburg townships. Tsiki's unit provided introductory political and military instruction to SSRC members Billy Masethla, Super Moloi, Murphy Morobe, Titi Mthenjane as well as Khotso Seathlolo, who served briefly as SSRC president and whose uncle, Jacob Seathlolo, was part of Ramokgadi's machinery.⁵⁷ Through Mthenjane and others, the unit also had contact with Paul Langa, head of the SSRC's Soweto Suicide Squad,⁵⁸ which carried out a number of attacks, among others on a Soweto nightclub.⁵⁹ Langa was also convicted for an attack on Jabulani police station in Soweto on October 24. Security police themselves blamed the ANC for this attack,⁶⁰ and a member of Tsiki's unit,

⁵⁶IV/Tsiki, p.1,273.

⁵⁷IV/Tsiki, pp.1,286-1,287; Sexwale, 'Legal Deposition', pp.60, 61, 64-65, 67, 74-75, 83; Moss, *Wheels*, pp.7-8.

⁵⁸IV/Tsiki, pp.1,286-1,287.

⁵⁹Moss, *Wheels*, pp.63-64.

⁶⁰General Herman Stadler, 'Dade van Terrorisme Sedert 1976' [Acts of Terrorism Since 1976], South African Security Police office summary, p.1, in App/A/16.

Charles Ramusi, claimed it for the ANC on a visit to Swaziland in December 1976.⁶¹ Through Ramokgadi's links into Sekhukuniland, which centred on another former ANC political prisoner, Petros Nchabaleng, the group also provided training to a handful of youths there.⁶² Tsiki estimates his unit trained about 20 people in all.⁶³

Sexwale, in the first of two attempts to enter the country to take over command of Tsiki's unit, clashed with police on the Swaziland border on November 30 1976 and seriously wounded two constables when he threw a grenade at them,⁶⁴ so spilling the first blood in MK's resumption of armed activity. On his second entry, Sexwale took over command of the unit, then based mainly in Alexandra, on December 6.⁶⁵

The unit operated in a hurry⁶⁶ to achieve a near-impossible list of tasks: ranging from the short term, like immediate combat and the training of militant youths, to the long term, such as establishing MK machineries in both the Transvaal and Natal. They travelled persistently,

⁶¹Sexwale, 'Legal Deposition', p.55.

⁶²IV/Tsiki, pp.1,275-1,277, 1,292; Sexwale, 'Legal Deposition', pp.68-73, 80; Moss, *Wheels*, pp.7-11.

⁶³IV/Tsiki, p.1,292.

⁶⁴Rand Daily Mail, 12/1/76; Sexwale, 'Legal Deposition', pp.51-2; Moss, *Wheels*, pp.7-8, 14.

⁶⁵Sexwale, 'Legal Deposition', pp.57-58.

⁶⁶Their haste is clear from Sexwale, 'Legal Deposition'.

conducting a blizzard of meetings. The unit - behaving entirely in accordance with the overriding operational importance given on the RC to military matters and imperatives - felt unable to accept the political command of an in-place underground political structure which was familiar with local conditions, led by two men of considerable experience, Gqabi and Ramokgadi, and which would probably have demanded more moderate behaviour of it.

When the end came for the unit through a series of security police arrests on December 30 1976, the entire Gqabi-Ramokgadi machinery was also destroyed. At the end of a long trial, Sexwale, Tsiki, Ramokgadi, Jacob Seathlolo and two others were imprisoned; Gqabi had to leave for exile after his surprising acquittal; and scores of other members and contacts of the group were exposed.⁶⁷ In Tsiki's words, what was left of the machinery in Transvaal was:

nothing...worth speaking of. There were some people who didn't go to jail. I remember two people - one a trade unionist⁶⁸ and another one an intellectual person - they remained in Alexandra. The rest had to run.⁶⁹

⁶⁷John Nkadimeng, the other prominent member of the Gqabi-Ramokgadi command structure, had left for exile in Swaziland shortly after the uprising in Soweto. See Nkadimeng (Interview by JF), pp.43-44.

⁶⁸Sipho Khubeka, an official of the Metal and Allied Workers' Union associated with the Industrial Aid Society in Johannesburg, banned in 1976 for his trade union activities.

⁶⁹IV/Tsiki, p.1,292.

The external mission's adjudication on whether the unit should accept the Gqabi-Ramokgadi machinery's command came only once they were in custody on trial.⁷⁰ Apparently because of Gqabi's military record dating back to the 1960s, the unit should have accepted his command. The decision was an irrelevance - not only because the MK unit had now been picked up, but because, now that the Gqabi-Ramokgadi machinery had been detained, 'there was no question of control from inside the country' anymore.⁷¹ There was no longer any capacity for underground political leadership in the Transvaal - or anywhere else in the country for that matter.

Precipitate and ill-designed military action, decided upon and prioritised by an external leadership with little sense of its practical difficulties, and mounted with courage and keenness by a group of young MK combatants, had propagandised the ANC's name and advertised its will to fight but destroyed a significant segment of the ANC's organised domestic presence - the very basis on which the ANC had to depend if it was to develop a sustained armed struggle.

As awaiting trial prisoners, the MK combatants, Gqabi and Ramokgadi wrote a document outlining how they saw the lessons of their experience. They argued that, without a

⁷⁰IV/Tsiki, p.1,278.

⁷¹IV/Tsiki, p.1,278.

well-developed underground and organised domestic political base armed activity should not be commenced. Gqabi, who was acquitted at the end of the long trial, would take the document with him into exile.⁷²

A similar armed venture in the months after the Soweto uprisings had a similarly devastating effect on the residue of the Natal underground, which had still not recovered from huge losses in December 1975. Judson Khuzwayo, Shadrack Maphumulo and Petros Nyawose (alias Nzima) were among the more prominent and experienced survivors of the 'smashed' network.⁷³ They had re-established contact with the external mission in Swaziland.⁷⁴ They had also linked up in Natal with Mac Maharaj, who had been a leading member of the ANC's underground command in the months following the Rivonia arrests in 1963 and had been released from Robben Island shortly after the June uprisings.⁷⁵ The survivors had developed a 'well-oiled' though small structure by the time they spirited Maharaj out of the country in early 1977.⁷⁶

Maphumulo became the major link man between the

⁷²*IV/Tsiki*, p.1,285.

⁷³*IV/Maharaj*, p.393.

⁷⁴Maphumulo, Manuscript, p.384.

⁷⁵Maphumulo, Manuscript, p.383; *IV/Maharaj*, pp.391-392.

⁷⁶*IV/Maharaj*, p.394

regrouping Natal underground and the ANC in Swaziland.⁷⁷

He was told on his first visit to Swaziland that

I was to create MK...cells within the country, recruit cadres willing to undergo military training abroad and create suitable conditions for survival for trained cadres returning to the country from abroad.⁷⁸

Maphumulo himself had been jailed for MK activities in the early 1960s and must therefore have been a prime target for security police surveillance.

Maphumulo and others leased a small farm to be used 'as a place for cadres hiding from the system, or...as a training base for crash courses in urban and rural guerilla warfare'.⁷⁹ He also bought three vehicles for MK cells. In about June 1977, the group tried to take advantage of the glut of traffic to a royal wedding in Swaziland to smuggle a large quantity of weaponry back into South Africa. But their loaded van encountered an army roadblock, tried to evade it, overturned, and two of the occupants were arrested.⁸⁰ A good portion of the newly renascent Natal underground was again in panic.⁸¹ The ANC in Swaziland was 'frantic'.⁸² Maphumulo was told to leave the country, and instructed to ensure that Khuzwayo and two others did the

⁷⁷Maphumulo, Manuscript, p.385.

⁷⁸*Ibid.* pp.384-385.

⁷⁹*Ibid.* pp.386-387.

⁸⁰*Ibid.* pp.388-9.

⁸¹The panic is clear from Maphumulo, Manuscript, pp.389-418.

⁸²*Ibid.* pp.389-390.

same.⁸³ Maphumulo did not, however, leave in time and he and a number of others were detained and thus exposed (Maphumulo himself was not brought to trial), and Khuzwayo and several others fled into exile.⁸⁴

Precipitate armed activity had again led to the destruction of an important segment of the ANC's underground in Natal. It had been well-placed, if given time, to build a significant organised ANC presence.

ANC Operational Structures after the Soweto Uprising

In the 1976-78 period, the RC continued to pay lip service to the need for ANC political work by political means inside South Africa. But its behaviour indicated it believed that non-violent political work inside South Africa had little to contribute towards organising support among the ANC's potential constituency for armed activity. The underlying premise, sometimes contradicted verbally,⁸⁵ though starkly evident in practice, was that armed activity could deliver all - whether it was an organised political

⁸³Ibid.

⁸⁴Ibid. p.425. Maharaj, who had already left the country by the time the arrests occurred, maintains the departure of this group into exile was orderly. IV/Maharaj, p.394. This is not the impression conveyed by Maphumulo, Manuscript, pp.389-418. But Maharaj is apparently correct in maintaining that Maphumulo himself later left South Africa in a planned way after his release from several spells in detention.

⁸⁵The most appropriate case is the 1976 claim that the ANC would have to engage in 'a continuous combination of political action with armed action', in IV/Slovo, pp.966-967.

base or ultimate revolutionary victory. These elements of actual ANC strategic policy after the June uprisings obtrude through both the design and workings of new operational structures that were brought into operation in late 1976 and early 1977.

The RC took a series of decisions on what structures and organisational principles should service it through 'the early stages of people's war'.⁸⁶ The new structures and principles were intended to avoid a repeat of the destruction of the Transvaal and Natal undergrounds. Yet they reproduced a number of the old problems and introduced a few new difficulties. To show how they did so it is necessary first to examine how the new structures were supposed to operate in the ideal.

The RC accepted that it had to improve its own hitherto lackadaisical operation. It accepted that it had to increase coordination among its members and monitoring of its decisions. There had also to be an end to demands on its members to perform other administrative or diplomatic tasks; members had to be free to give their full attention to operational work.⁸⁷

Shortly before the 1976 uprisings, the RC had decided to revamp its military administration which also served as

⁸⁶IV/Slovo, p.968.

⁸⁷IV/Slovo, p.972.

an operations and planning department. Implementation of this decision began in the following months.⁸⁸ The overhauled military operations section became known as central operational headquarters (COH).⁸⁹ Joe Modise, who had headed its precursor, became its commander; Slovo was his deputy.⁹⁰ Formally, COH did not constitute a 'high command' or military headquarters. It did not have overall command and control over MK; full command over MK still resided in the RC as a whole (See Figure 1, overleaf).

The RC also resolved that its propaganda and political work inside the country had to be improved.⁹¹ Accordingly, it decided to end the amorphous arrangement under which the entire RC had in the past been responsible for doing non-violent political work inside South Africa. But it would be the end of 1977 before it created a specialised committee for political work, known as the internal reconstruction and development department (IRD).⁹² It gave the chairmanship to John Motshabi,⁹³ a member of the National Executive Committee (NEC). Until early 1978, the link

⁸⁸IV/Slovo, pp.971, 1,005-1,006.

⁸⁹IV/Maharaj, pp.396-397, 505. It was known by various names among ANC members, including the 'Operations Unit' of MK and by some still as 'Operations and Planning Department'.

⁹⁰IV/Jele, p.229. It was not a 'High Command' of MK, as Ellis and Sechaba suggest in *Comrades*, p.87.

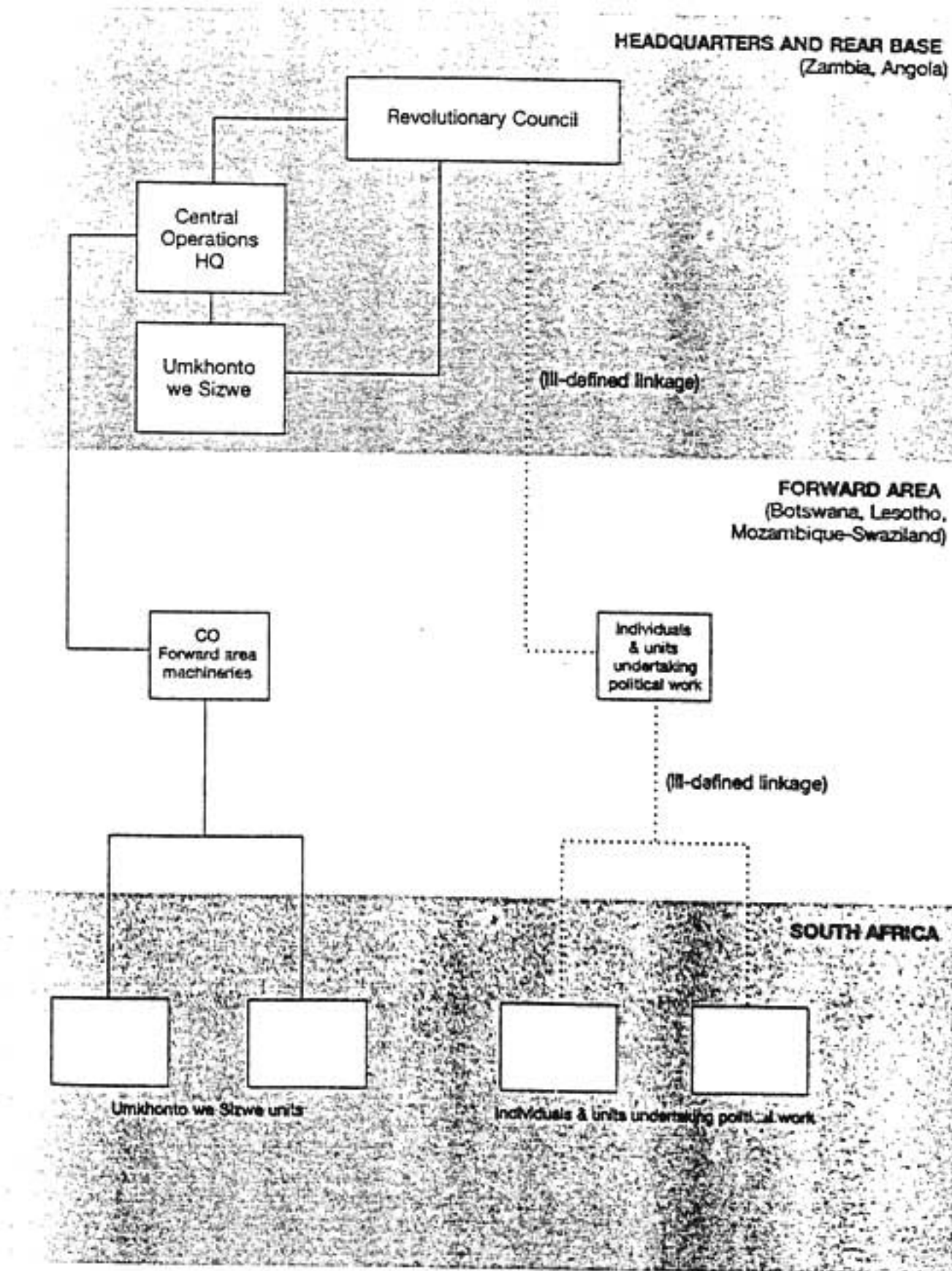
⁹¹IV/Slovo, p.972.

⁹²IV/Slovo, p.1,006; IV/Maharaj, pp.397, 432.

⁹³IV/Slovo, p.1,006; IV/Maharaj, pp.397, 432.

ANC operational structures

Basic lines of command & co-ordination 1976 – 1978



between the RC and ANC members doing political work in the forward areas or inside South Africa remained ill-defined.

Once IRD was functional, the design of subsidiary implementation structures ensured that political and military operational personnel operated completely separately from, and in parallel to, one another.⁹⁴ On the military side, COH set up subsidiary regional military 'machineries' in the independent African states immediately adjacent to South Africa - 'forward areas' in ANC parlance - Botswana, Lesotho, Mozambique and Swaziland.⁹⁵ Each COH forward area machinery tended to oversee armed activity within the adjoining region of South Africa,⁹⁶ so that Botswana was responsible for the western Transvaal and northern Cape, while Swaziland oversaw the eastern Transvaal and Natal.

On the political side, IRD's structures operated in similarly separate fashion (See Figure 2, overleaf). Once IRD had set up structures and started operating coherently, from about early 1978, it had its own lines to forward areas and into South Africa. There was no provision for coordination between COH and IRD machineries at forward

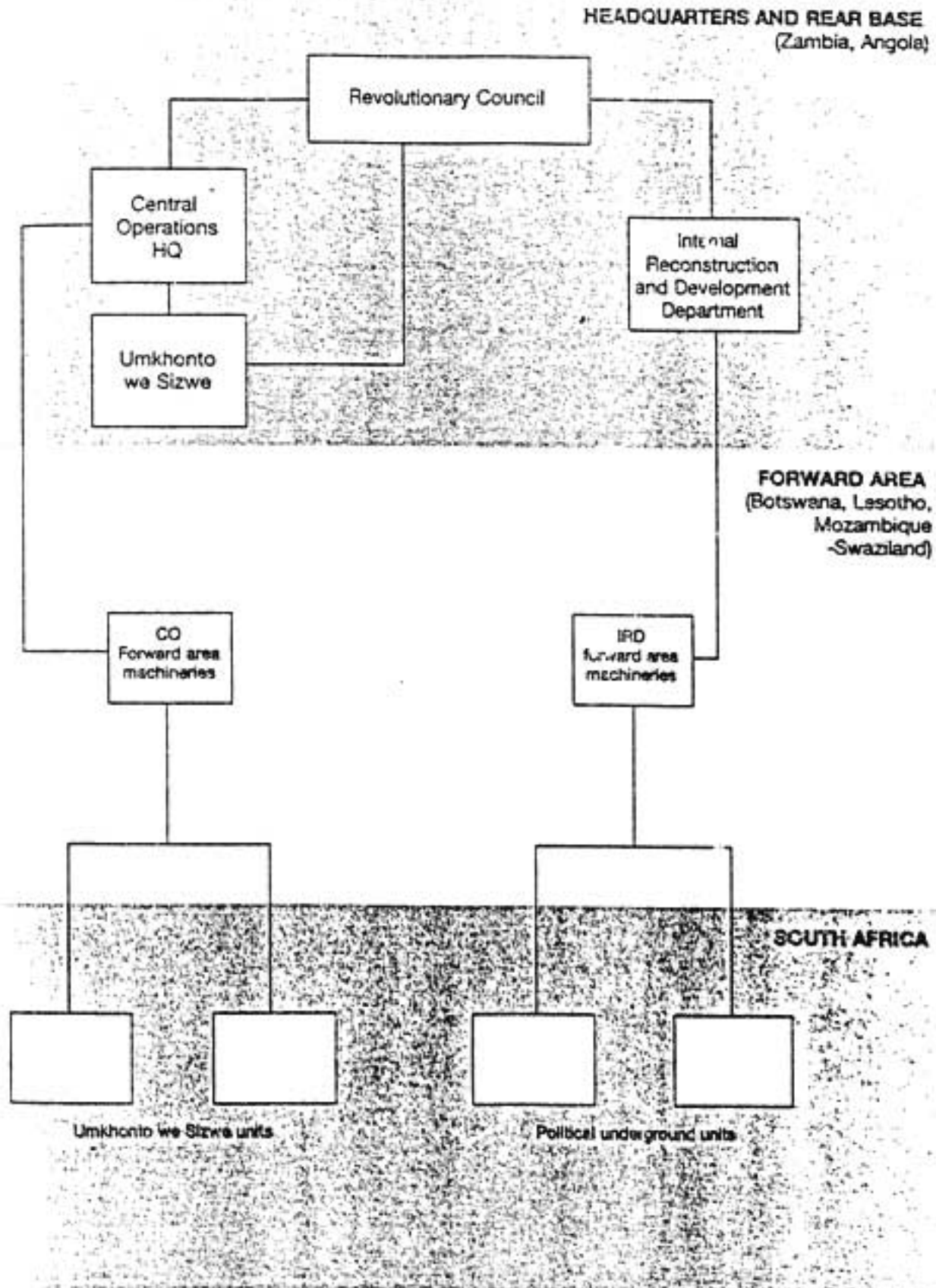
⁹⁴IV/Slovo, pp.982, 1,006. IV/Strachan, p.1,139.

⁹⁵Mozambique and Swaziland comprised a single machinery now, and in later years. Swaziland provided mainly the implementation structures, while Mozambique was a sort of planning and logistics headquarters. IV/Kasrils, pp.318, 320-321,

⁹⁶IV/Slovo, p.973.

ANC operational structures

Basic lines of command & co-ordination 1978 – 1979



area level.⁹⁷ let alone inside South Africa. What formal coordination there was of political and military activities could occur only at the top; that is, on the RC itself.

In the year after the uprisings, COH developed operational rules for MK units infiltrated into the country. They were intended to avoid a repeat of the disasters visited upon the Natal and Transvaal undergrounds. They certainly appeared capable of doing that - not that there was any underground left to protect. They had unintended consequences, however. The major problem was that they made it near impossible to rebuild an underground. On the face of it, the rules merely reflected standard requirements of clandestinity. They were based on the assumption that, upon capture, every person would be forced to divulge everything he or she knew. First, the principle of 'vertical communication' applied: a combat group operating inside South Africa could be commanded by, and could communicate with, only the regional COH machinery in the forward area under which it fell; the forward area machinery alone could take the decision to put two combat groups inside South Africa in touch with each other. Second, the forward area machinery was responsible for supplying each combat unit inside South Africa with its finances and arms. Third, communication was to be kept to a minimum; couriers would be provided by the forward area machinery; and, if personal communication was necessary, it

⁹⁷IV/Slovo, pp.982, 1,006; IV/Strachan, p.1,139.

was to be achieved through a member of the combat unit leaving South Africa to visit the forward area machinery, not the other way around. Fourth, each combat unit was itself responsible for creating the conditions for its own survival inside the country and depots for the storage of its armaments. Fifth, the combat unit itself had to reconnoitre suitable targets, and plan and execute attacks.⁹⁸

Target designation was up to a combat unit, but COH laid down certain priorities:

railway networks, though avoiding civilian casualties; oil, petrol and power installations; established informers; and police and other enemy personnel and installations. We also specified that combat groups would from time to time need to decide to undertake actions against targets with special local or national significance, such as supporting mass political actions, hitting enemy personnel during any Soweto-type upsurge, or dealing with particularly hated officials. The general guideline was that any action undertaken had to have an ideological content...it had to be consistent with our political aims and should be clearly an attack against the ruling class, its property and personnel.⁹⁹

Combat units had also to be influenced in their selection of targets 'by the fundamental principle of [the ANC] that [the] fight was not a racial one but one for national liberation'.¹⁰⁰ In other words, whites should not be attacked merely because they were whites. Moreover, combat units were to undertake operations only if they were

⁹⁸IV/Slovo, p.973.

⁹⁹IV/Slovo, p.974.

¹⁰⁰IV/Slovo, p.969.

satisfied they had a safe escape route to their base. The frequency with which a combat unit mounted attacks was its decision, but COH cautioned them against being over-ambitious.

Finally, combat units were to remain completely separate from any domestic ANC or SACP networks which included cadres known to government security forces, 'except where the cadre known to the enemy was completely underground or could not possibly deduce the whereabouts or identity of the combat group'.¹⁰¹ This last stipulation was an attempt to avoid the string of disasters that had resulted from involving well-known activists and ex-Robben Island prisoners in illegal and military work.¹⁰² The RC felt it had to assume that 'all known leaders and activists who were leading normal lives were under perpetual surveillance by the Special Branch [security police]'.¹⁰³ It was an accurate assumption, according to then-major Herman Stadler of the security police.¹⁰⁴ But all this caution, much of it justified, left the ANC without any strategy to build a domestic political base capable of integrating an armed presence or sustaining armed struggle in the medium to long term.

¹⁰¹IV/Slovo, p.973.

¹⁰²IV/Slovo, p.971.

¹⁰³IV/Slovo, p.971.

¹⁰⁴IV/Stadler, p.1,061.

The Fundamentals of State Counter-Insurgency Strategy

state security agencies appear to have worked from the premise that the ANC's most important objective must be to establish an organised presence inside South Africa.¹⁰⁵ As a consequence, security forces' main objective was to prevent the ANC doing so. Herman Stadler, a young security police officer in the 1960s and 1970s,¹⁰⁶ who was one of a number of South African state security officials seconded to work with then-Rhodesian security forces in combating ANC-Zapu insurgency after the start of the Wankie Campaign, says South African counter-insurgency was greatly affected by the Rhodesian experience.¹⁰⁷ The South Africans concluded that '[the Rhodesians'] problem was eventually there were so many terrorists inside the country, they didn't know who they were'. So South Africans set out to avoid a repetition of this.

Stadler believes the security police's task was made much easier in the 1960s and 1970s by misconceived ANC strategies, in particular by the ANC's precipitate stress on infiltrating guerillas. As a result, the ANC had, by the 1970s, 'lost control of the internal dimension...[a]nd the vacuum was filled by the black consciousness ideology and

¹⁰⁵IV/Stadler, p.1,046.

¹⁰⁶In his later career, he was chief investigating officer in a number of the most celebrated trials of ANC members, he was the in-house security police 'expert' on the ANC, and he was head of the security police intelligence department. He retired with the rank of Major General in 1990.

¹⁰⁷IV/Stadler, p.1,048.

groupings'.

The three pillars of counter-insurgency were, according to Stadler, 'an effective intelligence network', a system of security legislation which had a strong deterrent effect and allowed for effective interrogation of suspects, and having 'the general population on your side'.¹⁰⁸ The evidence suggests security police had extremely effective intelligence; the Terrorism Act, which came onto the statute book in 1967, was, on Stadler's criteria, a very effective piece of legislation - it allowed for indefinite incommunicado detention of suspects for interrogation and stipulated sentences ranging from a minimum five years to death; and Stadler maintains that, on balance, police could rely on significant levels of support from the black population until about 1984-1985.¹⁰⁹

Post-1976 Strategy and Structures at Work

The RC's resolution in 1976 to improve its own performance continued to be hampered by frequent absenteeism.¹¹⁰ The RC's long-standing prioritisation of military work persisted. Past ANC strategy had conceived of political work as satisfying overriding military imperatives, and this did not change.

¹⁰⁸IV/Stadler, p.1,047.

¹⁰⁹IV/Stadler, p.1,047.

¹¹⁰IV/Slovo, pp.972, 1,006

In practice, COH controlled MK. In coming years, at any one time, MK had about six camps operating in Angola and used about nine locations in all until 1989.¹¹¹ It established MK training camps in newly independent Angola initially at Fundo and Nova Katenga and later also at Viana, Quibaxe, Pango and Quatro.¹¹²

It is difficult in this as well as in subsequent periods to develop a full and clear picture of MK activity. Available statistics either come from South African security forces or rely on information gleaned from trials conducted under security laws. The ANC has not released comprehensive statistics of its own, and the indications are that it never consistently kept any reliable statistics of MK's actions.¹¹³ Fortunately, however, the best available independent statistics correlate largely with those made public by the South African Police. According to Stadler of the security police, the PAC managed 'not more

¹¹¹ *IV/Kasrils*, p.288; Ellis & Sechaba, *Comrades*, pp.85, 87, 128-137.

¹¹² Ellis et al, *Comrades against Apartheid*, p.85. For a brief, if sunny, account of life in some of these camps, see Barrell, *MK*, pp.42-45, which is a summary of *IV/Kasrils*, pp.279-288. For an account of quite how unsunny things could be, see Bandile Ketelo et al, 'A Miscarriage of Democracy: The ANC Security Department in the 1984 Mutiny in Umkhonto we Sizwe', in *Searchlight South Africa* (5), July 1990.

¹¹³ Bill Anderson, a middle-ranking MK Intelligence official, indicates the level of the ANC's ignorance of its own military deployments and operations in *IV/Anderson*, pp.20-25, 52-56. It is also apparent in *IV/Kasrils*, pp.288-294. Kasrils was head of MK Intelligence from 1983-1988.

than 10' attacks over the 1976-90 period;¹¹⁴ the PAC is, consequently, only a minor statistical complication.

Under its new operational structures, MK attacks into South Africa gradually gathered pace from October 1976. It mounted two modest pre-planned attacks in 1976, both associated with Tsiki's unit, one rural and one urban.¹¹⁵

The next year there were 20 incidents involving MK,¹¹⁶ three of which appear to have been battles which guerillas had not themselves sought.¹¹⁷ Fifteen of these incidents occurred in the latter half of the year,¹¹⁸ indicating that infiltration of cadres was increased as the first of the 1976 generation completed their training. All but two of the 1977 incidents occurred in urban areas.¹¹⁹ And there were 13 MK attacks in 1978.

The cost to MK of the reintroduction of armed activity

¹¹⁴IV/Stadler, p.1,035.

¹¹⁵Stadler, 'Dade' ['Acts'], p.2. See also, Wim Booyse, 'Monthly Breakdown of Terror in SA 1976-89' [Table], in App/A/18. The third armed incident on the Swaziland border, involving Sexwale, was an unplanned engagement. See Sexwale, 'Deposition', pp.51-52. And a fourth incident, involving the explosion of a home-made device at the Carlton Centre, Johannesburg, involved Isaac Seko who had no known connection with the ANC. Moss, 'Wheels', pp.30-31. Seko was believed associated with the PAC.

¹¹⁶Stadler, 'Dade' ['Acts'], pp.2-5. Booyse, 'Monthly Breakdown'.

¹¹⁷Stadler, 'Dade' ['Acts'], pp.2-5.

¹¹⁸Booyse, 'Monthly Breakdown'.

¹¹⁹Stadler, 'Dade' ['Acts'], pp.2-5.

proved high. COH believed that news of some MK incidents was being suppressed by the state. The Minister of Police appeared to concede this in February 1978 when he said that a number of clashes between ANC guerillas and security forces had remained unpublicised.¹²⁰ But Stadler insists that all guerilla incidents are reflected in his statistics,¹²¹ kept during his career in the security police, which included his posting as head of the security police intelligence department. Whatever doubts there are about the final accuracy of the statistics,¹²² it is reasonable to conclude that, in the 1976-1978 period, between two and three guerillas were captured or killed for every three attacks.¹²³

¹²⁰Cited in Moss, *Wheels*, p.3.

¹²¹IV/Stadler, pp.1,038-9. The statistics referred to are those contained in General Herman Stadler, *Documentary Evidence of the South African Police, presented to the Commission of Inquiry into Certain Murders and Other Unlawful Acts Committed for Political or Constitutional Aims (Harms Commission), Vol. No.14, Harms Commission Statistics: 1. Acts of Terrorism 2. Arrest Incidents*, pp. 1,021-37, in App/A/15; Stadler, 'Dade' ['Acts']; Herman Stadler, 'Terrorism in the RSA: Target Selection. Period: 1 January 1976 - 30 September 1990' [Table], in App/A/17.1; Herman Stadler, 'Statistics: Terrorism in the RSA. Period: 1 January 1976 - 30 September 1990' [Table], in App/A/17.2. The various categories used by Stadler in his statistics do not appear to raise any serious difficulties. I explored these categories with him in IV/Stadler, pp.1,035-1,044.

¹²²I believe they are a useful indicator and illustration.

¹²³Lodge says there were 30 insurgent incidents in 1978, in Tom Lodge, 'State of Exile: The African National Congress of South Africa, 1976-86' in *Third World Quarterly*, 9 (1), January 1987, p.4. It is appreciably higher than the figure calculated by Stadler and Booyse - 13. See Stadler, 'Dade' ['Acts'], pp.2-5; Stadler *Harms Commission Statistics*, pp. 1,021-1,024; Booyse, 'Monthly Breakdown'. Lodge is himself unable to explain the discrepancy. See his Fax/Letter to the author explaining a discrepancy in insurgent attack statistics for 1978, in App/A/19. I, too, am unable to explain, or resolve, this discrepancy. In

By mid-1978, according to COH, a 'good proportion' of new recruits from the 1976 exodus of militant black youths who had already completed their guerilla training had been deployed.¹²⁴ The low intensity of MK activities in 1976 and 1977, delays caused by the need to set up camps in Angola and elsewhere before training could commence, and other problems of exile, suggest that the 'good proportion' referred to probably embraced no more than about 100 to 200 trained personnel out of the 3,000-odd who had joined the external mission since June 1976. A few of the 100 to 200 would have been in combat groups inside South Africa. Other deployments would have been in service functions - reconnaissance or ordinance work inside or outside the country and in various other COH sub-departments in the forward areas.¹²⁵ Some of these newly-trained recruits were, much to the satisfaction of COH command, already

his letter, Lodge says that he has excluded the discovery of arms caches from his figures for guerilla attacks. This appears to rule out the possibility that there is a basic difference in the kinds of incidents included in Lodge's as opposed to Stadler's and Booyse's figures. Moreover, Lodge says that most of the incidents making up his figure were drawn from newspaper cuttings. This seems to exclude a second possibility: that Lodge succeeded in uncovering insurgent attacks hidden by the state for propaganda or other reasons, and hence not included by Stadler. In my own perusal of newspapers from 1978, I failed to find more than 13 incidents readily classifiable as insurgent attacks. For the previous year, Lodge's total insurgent attacks was 23, whereas the security police and Booyse both put the total at 20. In addition, there were an undisputed four insurgent incidents in 1976. Therefore, we can probably conclude that the total number of MK strikes between 1976 and the end of 1978 fell somewhere between 37 and 57, many of them very modest in character. Over that period, according to police statistics, the total number of ANC guerillas killed or captured was 35.

¹²⁴IV/Slovo, p.974-975.

¹²⁵IV/Slovo, pp.974-975.

'beginning to show a capacity to discharge leadership and command duties'.¹²⁶

RC members felt in mid-1978 that 'the flow of combat actions had significantly raised the prestige and following of the ANC both inside and outside the country'.¹²⁷ A number of leading anti-apartheid activists, some of whom had their political origins within the black consciousness movement testify to this.¹²⁸ Such propagandising had been one purpose of renewed armed activity. Other formulations of it included: to spread the ANC's name, to 'raise and sustain the level of morale and militancy among the masses inside the country', and to maintain 'the battle-readiness and level of morale of [the ANC's] own cadres'.¹²⁹

But the weakness of MK activity was apparent to some RC members who felt they had to 'find a way of overcoming both objective obstacles and obstacles which we ourselves had created by a bad style of work'.¹³⁰ By mid-1978, some major urban areas still had no MK combat presence.¹³¹

¹²⁶IV/Slovo, p.975.

¹²⁷IV/Slovo, p.975.

¹²⁸IV/Molefe, p.621-622; IV/Narsoo, pp.660-661; IV/Nkondo, pp.689-90. Support for the ANC showed a general increase. See Mark Orkin, *Disinvestment, the Struggle and the future. What Black South Africans Really Think* (Johannesburg: Ravan, 1986), p.37.

¹²⁹IV/Slovo, p.971.

¹³⁰IV/Slovo, p.974.

¹³¹IV/Slovo, p.975.

RC practice in 1977 and 1978 reveals it attached little importance to IRD's domestic political reconstruction work. This work was important to most RC members only to the extent that it facilitated military work - because it was a 'precondition for the long-term success of armed struggle'.¹³²

IRD was inappropriately staffed to carry out its tasks and starved of resources. Military considerations still predominated on the RC when IRD commenced work in late 1977. Whereas several emergent military sub-departments were bunched around COH, IRD was alone in being concerned with political work.¹³³ The choice of Motshabi as chairman of IRD was disastrous for IRD. He had a reputation for tribalism and incompetence. Politically he was no match for the military chiefs, Modise and Slovo.¹³⁴ IRD's other members also lacked the organisational influence of their RC military counterparts.¹³⁵ Moreover, Motshabi carved out a peculiar position for IRD: he claimed IRD was answerable to the NEC when it suited his purposes of evasion and, at other times, that it was answerable to the

¹³²IV/Slovo, p.968.

¹³³IV/Maharaj, pp.396-397.

¹³⁴IV/Maharaj, pp.397-398, 416.

¹³⁵its other members were John Nkadimeng, the deputy chairman, recently exiled to Swaziland; Henry Makgothi; Florence Xophosho; Tebello Motoponyane; a young former student leader at the time of the June 1976 uprisings; Indres Naidoo, based in Mozambique; Reg September; and Ray Simons (Alexander).
IV/Maharaj, p.410.

RC.¹³⁶

Financial and other resources earmarked for operational work were channelled mainly into military tasks and training. The great majority of the ANC's new recruits from the 1976 generation had wanted to go into MK, and that was where they had been sent.¹³⁷ Those of the 1976 generation who did display political maturity and aptitude also ended up in MK. Attempts to transfer some promising cadres from military to political work could involve 'tortuous' difficulties.¹³⁸ The result of this shortage of resources and personnel was a remarkable failure: between the 1976 uprisings and mid-1978, while COH was regularly putting MK members over the border, IRD did not infiltrate a single trained cadre into South Africa specifically to do political work.¹³⁹

From early 1978, this imbalance was very gradually moderated through a series of bitter disputes. The appointment as IRD secretary of Mac Maharaj, newly arrived in exile, was a major factor in this. A combative and innovative personality, Maharaj soon became a major antagonist in chronic battles over strategy waged on the RC from early 1978. Their root cause was the RC's

¹³⁶IV/Maharaj, p.397.

¹³⁷IV/Rabkin, p.808; IV/Strachan, p.1,121.

¹³⁸IV/Strachan, p.1,144.

¹³⁹IV/Slovo, p.978.

prioritisation of armed activity. Maharaj argued that internal political reconstruction work had to be given priority to secure any kind of progress, military or political.¹⁴⁰

When Maharaj became IRD secretary in 1978, he called for the department's file of operational reports from inside the country. The file comprised two covers; inside, it was completely empty.¹⁴¹ IRD had to start, as if for the first time, with the most basic political spadework. At that stage the size of the formal domestic political underground in 1976 numbered less than 50 units¹⁴² - and quite probably only a fraction of that. Maharaj recalls reasoning with himself about just how basic its work would have to be:

For the first phase, we will not touch the known [people]; we will have to get to another layer that the enemy does not know. That must be the thing. And therefore we need to compartmentalise ...internal work. We need what I called 'functional units' - propaganda, etc. - completely cut off from each other, not in any relationship with each other on the ground. I saw, to be quite frank, propaganda as a detonator... I saw propaganda distribution as enabling [us] to go into the community and probe and listen [to] who was impressed by it and how they were reacting to it - to guide [us] to who we could consider for cultivating, to recruit.¹⁴³

¹⁴⁰IV/Maharaj, pp.405, 410.

¹⁴¹IV/Maharaj, p.410.

¹⁴²IV/Jordan, p.234, with each unit comprising one, two or three people.

¹⁴³IV/Maharaj, pp.414-415.

Apart from propaganda units, IRD decided on other specialisations for these 'functional units': dealing with border crossings, internal reception, trade unions and 'mass work' in emergent popular organisations.¹⁴⁴

Another Strategic Impasse

IRD's attempts to develop a working perspective for political reconstruction were repeatedly frustrated on the RC during 1978 in the course of disputes which saw COH caught in a strategic vice essentially of its own making.¹⁴⁵ The disputes centred on the absence of an organised ANC political base inside South Africa. This absence, COH argued, was the main reason it could not develop armed activity beyond sporadic cross-border incursions. Maharaj agreed that there was no organised political base. But that was as far as agreement went. The antagonists were divided on how to build that political base, what proportion of ANC resources should be assigned to doing so, and the extent to which the purpose of that base should be solely to service armed struggle.

In mid-1978 COH officials opined that casualties in confrontations with South African state security forces 'represented a small proportion of those on active

¹⁴⁴IV/Maharaj, p.415.

¹⁴⁵IV/Maharaj, pp.415-421.

service'.¹⁴⁶ The casualty rate was, however, evidently high in relation to the number of often modest armed incidents MK mounted. Moreover, COH's successes were, some two years after resuming armed activity, being scored mainly through short-term cross-border incursions by MK units into urban areas. Attempts to achieve longer-term penetration by guerillas and to settle them inside the country, particularly in the rural areas, developing a classic guerilla war in the process, were proving notably unsuccessful.¹⁴⁷

Problems of guerilla settlement were mitigated to some degree by the RC's improved ability to provide false documentation to infiltrating units.¹⁴⁸ Some regional COH machineries had also improved their capacity to provide short-term military training, but still very few recruits were being given crash courses in neighbouring states and being returned to South Africa as 'legal' MK auxiliaries. These limited improvements could not substitute for the serious lack of reception and settlement networks inside the country for returning MK combatants. Correcting these internal inadequacies was all the more urgent given that COH had long recognised that a huge practical obstacle to its envisaged protracted people's war was its 'lack of

¹⁴⁶IV/Slovo, p.975.

¹⁴⁷IV/Slovo, p.975.

¹⁴⁸IV/Slovo, p.975; Sexwale, 'Deposition', p.61.

sufficient facilities in adjacent territories'.¹⁴⁹

In Mozambique, the ANC's main operational bridgehead, ANC political and military units had a relatively free hand. The ANC had an understanding with the Frelimo government under which it was free to conduct military operations into South Africa provided it did so indirectly via Swaziland and not directly across Mozambique's borders.¹⁵⁰ There had been 'some innovation' to overcome stringent constraints on ANC military activities imposed by other forward area governments¹⁵¹ - Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland. This had involved mainly the use of underground methods of operation by some ANC and all MK cadres in these forward areas.¹⁵² But COH activities were concentrated in Mozambique, where Slovo was based, which simplified considerably the South Africa security services' surveillance tasks. And these 'innovations' did not offer a solution to the ANC's operational difficulties, which required an ANC organisational capacity inside South Africa - as Slovo himself was arguing.¹⁵³

¹⁴⁹IV/Slovo, p.975.

¹⁵⁰Confidential information. It is also implied in [ANC], 'Fraternal Message from the African national Congress to the Frelimo Party, n.d. [circa March 1984], particularly at the end of point 8 on p.5, in App/A/26. See also IV/Rabkin, pp.913-914; IV/Strachan, pp.1,194-1,195. For this reason, Mozambique and Swaziland operational structures were united in a single machinery.

¹⁵¹IV/Slovo, p.975.

¹⁵²IV/Slovo, p.1,005; IV/Strachan, pp.1,194-5.

¹⁵³IV/Slovo, p.975.

Again and again, the explanation for the weaknesses of COH's armed activity returned to the lack of an organised political base inside South Africa. The irony in this was that COH, which had prioritised armed activity, given itself a virtual monopoly of operational resources and undermined IRD's attempts to build a domestic base, now criticised IRD most vigorously for its failure to provide such a base. Moreover, COH had largely been responsible for structures which ensured there was a complete dislocation between political and military operational structures, the better ostensibly to be able to conduct military activities. The effect of these structures was to render impossible any political-military symbiosis and hence redress of military asymmetry between the South African state and the ANC, even if IRD were to succeed in building a political base.

Conclusion

The ANC's 13 years of near irrelevance to South African domestic developments ended after the uprisings in Soweto and elsewhere in June 1976. The upsurge of political conflict within South Africa led to a demand from within for military training and a concern by the ANC to embark upon military action. By October 1978, the ANC had re-established itself as a significant actor in South Africa. The major means by which it had achieved this relevance was its recommencement of armed activity inside South Africa

from October 1976. This military activity exercised a powerful attraction on the ANC's potential constituency although it remained very sporadic.

Armed activity appeared to create fertile conditions in which the ANC could develop an extensive domestic political presence. Yet, while ANC authority and popularity increased as a result of its armed activity, the organisation failed to engage in the political work necessary to develop an *organised* internal political base.

The ANC conceived of its early armed activity as the opening phase of a 'people's war' for the seizure of state power, but an important subsidiary purpose was to establish the ANC's political credentials. As in the two years before 1976, so in the two subsequent years, the ANC's response to a political upsurge was to give priority to armed struggle and the recruitment of cadres for military training.

To the extent that ANC saw (non-violent) political work as having any importance, the ANC continued to conceive of it in much the same way as it had in the 1960s: as stimulated by, or as separate from, or as subject to the imperatives of, or as of less importance than, armed activity. The ANC's failure to act upon the importance it sometimes attached, in theory at least, to domestic political work curtailed its involvement in the mobilisation by political means in the gamut of emerging

popular organisations and trade unions. This detachment also had military implications. It undermined the ANC's prospects of developing a sustained and significantly internally reliant armed struggle, since this would depend upon the existence of an organised internal political base.

By late 1978, some ANC strategists had begun to see that they were imprisoning themselves in another impasse. The paradox was that the ANC's very emphasis on armed activity was harming its ability to develop a sustained armed struggle. How the ANC tried to unravel this paradox is the subject of the next chapter.

CHAPTER FOUR

A TURN TO THE MASSES

The Quest for a Political Base, October 1978 - August 1979

[I]f our own independent efforts had taught us anything in the recent period, it was that our efforts would reach a dead end unless they had a broader political base.

- Joe Slovo¹

Introduction

Between October 1978 and August 1979, the ANC tried to understand how its very emphasis on armed activity was undermining its efforts to mount a sustained armed struggle. The ANC attempted to unravel this paradox in the course of a formal review of strategy.

ANC operational strategy between the early 1960s and 1978 centred on the development of a popular armed struggle for the seizure of state power in South Africa. The strategic review of 1978-79 would not alter this basic perspective. What the review would change was the ANC's understanding of the means it should employ to build an organised revolutionary political base for itself inside South Africa. Whereas in the past the ANC had behaved as if armed activity could develop such a political base, the review concluded that the main means should rather be

¹IV/Slovo, p.979.

political organisation by political means - legal, semi-legal and underground. The ANC's ultimate interest in developing such a popular political base remained what it had been earlier - to equip itself to mount a sustained revolutionary armed struggle for the seizure of state power. This popular base was supposed to help it redress the military asymmetry between itself and the South African state. In other words, by the end of the strategic review the ANC still viewed (non-violent) political work as subject to military imperatives. But traces of ambivalence would emerge in some later formulations.

The ANC's 1978-79 strategic review was a formal exercise instituted by the ANC's national executive committee (NEC) and it occurred in two stages. In the first stage, from late 1978, sections of the ANC leadership made concerted attempts, which included a visit to Vietnam, to find remedies for their organisation's difficulties. These inconclusive attempts led to a second stage: the appointment in January 1979 of a commission to review ANC strategy, tactics and operational structures. This commission reported in March of that year and most, but not all, of its central recommendations were formally adopted by the ANC five months later in August.

Factors stimulating the Strategic Review

A number of developments between 1976 and 1978 challenged ANC strategic policy and practice.

The uprisings in Soweto and elsewhere in 1976 indicated an immediate potential for popular insurrectionary activity in urban areas. The ANC had long largely disregarded such potential in favour of a vision of a protracted people's war waged in, primarily, a rural context. The ANC's influential and incorporated ally, the SACP, had spoken in general terms of the possibilities of a popular insurrection in its 1962 programme, 'The Road to South African Freedom', as well as in 1970 in its central committee document, 'The Party and the Armed Struggle'.² But, since then, the SACP had not sought to develop this perspective.

The 1976 uprisings had also shown that, contrary to ANC and SACP assumptions, armed struggle was not a necessary 'detonator' of, or precondition for, popular upsurge. There had been no ANC armed activity inside South Africa for 13 years before 1976. Moreover, since the uprisings, despite severe state repression, the domestic political ferment had continued, indicating persistent potential for legal and semi-legal popular mobilisation. This potential had, arguably, been apparent since the early

²SACP, 'The Road', in SACP, *Communists Speak*, p.315; IV/Slovo, p.962.

1970s with the rise of the black consciousness movement and new militant trade unions. But the ANC had given scant attention to exploiting it. Instead, the ANC had left this legal and semi-legal ground open to these new forces. Now it was expressing fears that these new forces might jeopardise the struggle against apartheid through inappropriate policies or strategies. For example, the ANC disagreed with the refusal of some black consciousness supporters to engage in solidarity in action with anti-apartheid whites,³ and it disagreed with the avoidance of national political issues by some of the emerging industrial trade unions. The external mission was also concerned at the tenuousness of its link with Mangosuthu Buthelezi's Inkatha, which was now employing ANC symbols and attempting in 1978 to develop a national political base in alliance with so-called coloured and Indian parties which, like Buthelezi, were working within state-created structures. Internationally, the ANC was fighting attempts to create a 'third force' liberation movement mainly out of some exiled black consciousness supporters.⁴ And Sactu was playing a spoiling role abroad to ensure that the emergent unions did not receive the kind of resources that might enable them to develop into a working class political

³See, for example, ANC NEC, 'Statement of Second Session of the National Executive Committee of the African National Congress in 1973', in ANC, *ANC Speaks*, p.141.

⁴ANC, 'Political Report', in ANC, *Documents of Second National Consultative Conference*, p.22.

project independent of the ANC-led alliance.⁵ These concerns, and the weak tactics the ANC was obliged to employ to address them, evinced quite how divorced the ANC was from a vital part of the action in South Africa.

By late 1978, there were indications that, under its new Prime Minister, P W Botha, the South African state was embarked upon a programme of serious reform, albeit one perhaps motivated primarily by considerations of counter-insurgency strategy rather than by an intention to destroy the fundamentals of white political and economic domination. The state was adapting a range of political and economic institutions to dissipate the threats to white rule and capitalism which it identified in the anti-apartheid ferment of the mid-1970s.⁶ These adaptations formed part of a comprehensive new security doctrine, 'Total Strategy'.⁷

⁵Unrecorded conversations with David Davis, London, 1991 and 1992.

⁶The 'reform' programme of the Botha government seemed to owe much to the *guerre revolutionnaire* school of counter-insurgency developed by military thinkers in France in the late 1950s and early 1960s in response to their country's withdrawal from Indochina and later from Algeria. Among its more prominent exponents was Roger Trinquier. A central element of Trinquier's argument was that, when faced with an insurgency, a state needed to develop not merely a military but also an ideological basis for total war. See Peter Paret, *French Revolutionary Warfare from Indochina to Algeria* (London: Pall Mall Press, 1964), pp.114-115. South African military strategists, who rose to policy-making prominence with P W Botha's accession to the prime ministership, regarded Trinquier's writings as their 'bible', according to remarks cited in Kenneth W Grundy, *The Militarization of South African Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), p.27.

⁷The remainder of this paragraph reflects a view of state reforms which was influential from 1978 among anti-apartheid radicals. It is well-represented in Rob Davies, Dan O'Meara and Sipho Dlamini, *Struggle for South Africa*, Vols. One & Two, pp.32-

One thrust of the strategy was to co-opt some sections of the black population into alignment with the white minority. In 1978-79, one of several commissions of inquiry covering a range of topics was appointed to look into constitutional change and the possibility of the creation of separate chambers of Parliament for so-called coloureds and Indians, alongside the white House of Assembly. Coloured and Indian statutory political expression had hitherto been confined to ethnically-constituted councils limited in both powers and popular support.

No plans were advanced for a similar chamber for Africans. Instead, 'national' African political aspirations could, the state persisted in arguing, be satisfied by the bantustan system. Two of the 10 bantustans had been given nominal independence by 1978 - Transkei and Bophutatswana. And this dismemberment of South African nationality was due to result in the creation of more satellite ethnic states. But African township dwellers in 'white' South Africa were to be given a new form of local government, community councils, with greater powers than the urban bantustan councils which had in many cases been rendered defunct by the 1976 uprisings. The Wiehahn Commission advanced proposals to recognise legally the new independent trade unions and incorporate them into the statutory industrial relations framework. The Riekert Commission explicitly recognised the permanence in 'white' South Africa of Africans with

¹⁴, 208-209, 325-329, 353-358.

urban residential rights, while seeking to constrain more effectively the influx of others into the cities, except as temporary migrants. Neither set of commission recommendations were implemented as originally intended, but Wiehahn did open the way to radical changes in the system of industrial relations. Riekert's proposals culminated in 1986 in the abolition, rather than the intended restructuring, of the pass system.

Within the region, South African state strategy was deploying military, economic and diplomatic pressures to ensure that neighbouring independent African states declined to support the ANC. Pretoria's ideal was the recreation of a geopolitical buffer against threats to white minority rule. In pursuance, it floated the idea of a 'constellation of southern African states' dominated by South Africa whose other members might include Botswana, Lesotho, Swaziland, Zimbabwe/Rhodesia, SWA/Namibia and the nominally independent bantustans.⁸

In response to these South African and regional developments, the ANC was, in effect, offering only armed struggle. Yet this armed struggle was almost stillborn, as the ANC battled unsuccessfully to develop it beyond sporadic cross-border incursions.

⁸See Geldenhuys, *Diplomacy of Isolation*, pp.38-42; James Barber and John Barratt, *South Africa's Foreign Policy. The search for status and security, 1945-1988* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), pp.224-69.

Arguments within an Impasse

Armed activity was not, of itself, succeeding in building a popular revolutionary political base inside South Africa. The sensible assumption underlying ANC operational strategic policy was that such a base was necessary if COH, which oversaw MK, was to settle a military presence inside South Africa and gradually to redress military asymmetry between its own and the state's armed forces.

Mac Maharaj, appointed IRD secretary in early 1978, accused COH leaders like Joe Modise and Joe Slovo of having not only ignored the urgency of political reconstruction by political means but of repeatedly frustrating attempts to achieve it.⁹ Added to this was a second problem. Even had IRD made more progress with political reconstruction, the design of operational structures under the RC ensured that political machineries and COH's military cadres were so divorced from each other inside South Africa and in the forward areas that it was doubtful the military would have been able to derive any benefit from it. Operational structures and rules made it nigh impossible for a group of guerillas to be received and settled by in-place political underground units.

Arguments over how to take ANC military operations out of this impasse took a number of forms but were invariably

⁹IV/Maharaj, pp.398, 405, 409-410, 414-422.

circular. They ended where they had begun: at the absence of an organised ANC political base inside South Africa. One argument was that COH had been choosing targets that were often inappropriate to political needs;¹⁰ that is, that they were not patently designed to stimulate or reinforce political organisation. Another criticism was that there was little sense in relying solely on cross-border incursions by combat groups; this entailed a waste of time and energy for a host of special operations - surveillance teams, logistics and ordinance departments - and for the combatants themselves; it made more sense for COH to organise people inside the country to mount attacks. A further argument was that the pattern of cross-border hit-and-run attacks encouraged the ANC's potential constituency inside South Africa to wait passively for exile-based ANC military activity instead of participating in armed activity themselves.

COH responded that it was almost impossible to involve members of the ANC's potential constituency inside South Africa in military activities because IRD had failed to build an adequate organised political base inside South Africa.¹¹ Yet, added COH, it could not wait for the IRD to produce the political goods. It had to meet an immediate demand; it had to ensure that the ANC was seen to be

¹⁰IV/Jele, pp.229-230, to the end of the paragraph.

¹¹IV/Jele, pp.229-230.

striking at the South African state.¹² COH argued that the solution to almost all of its problems in expanding armed activity lay in increased political mobilisation and organisation inside South Africa.¹³

A view gradually developed among RC members that underlying their difficulties, primarily on the military front, were basic questions of revolutionary theory, strategy and practice. Rhetorically, the ANC had usually maintained that political leadership provided overall direction for military work. But Maharaj was forwarding a compelling argument that ANC operational practice evinced a militarist bent.

Visit to Vietnam

A small RC delegation, led by ANC President Oliver Tambo, visited Vietnam in October 1978.¹⁴ Their purpose was to draw such lessons as might be creatively applied to the ANC's struggle.¹⁵ A report on the visit, written by Slovo, identified a number of general propositions which it said had guided Vietnamese revolutionaries, adding that they could, indeed, be adapted to the ANC's situation. Propositions of particular relevance were:

¹²IV/Jele, pp.229-230.

¹³IV/Slovo, p.978.

¹⁴IV/Slovo, p.982.

¹⁵IV/Slovo, p.982.

- * that political struggle was primary in all phases of revolution;
- * that revolution could succeed only through the united strength of the 'masses' of people expressing itself in organised political activity;
- * that it was necessary to build the broadest possible national front around a minimum programme to unite all classes and strata in revolutionary struggle;
- * that it was necessary at all times to try to create legal and semi-legal organisations, and for the revolutionary vanguard to try to lead these different forces on the basis of what it considered to be the correct policies;
- * that the revolutionary vanguard should maintain its own independence while working with other broader forces;
- * that revolutionary armed struggle could succeed only if it grew out of a mass political base;
- * and that revolutionary violence was necessary for revolutionary victory, but that this violence had to be constantly assessed and controlled to maintain a correct relationship with the political struggle.¹⁶

In Vietnam, Slovo seems to have undergone a night-Damascene conversion to views long forwarded by Maharaj. His report argued that the ideas exchanged in Vietnam indicated that much ANC practice hitherto had been militaristic. The ANC had started from the premise that military activity would help to regenerate conditions for

¹⁶IV/Slovo, p.983.

political work but had subsequently behaved as if armed action was perpetually the movement's primary task.¹⁷ He wrote that, after 1976, military activity had been taking place in something of a void; most of it could not be related to an organised political base or to regional or local political issues and ANC tasks.¹⁸ Moreover, without effective political mobilisation and organisation, and without a mass political base, the military struggle could not ultimately challenge the enemy for state power. Worse, added Slovo, the ANC lacked not merely an organised internal base but also a clear and detailed strategy for developing one.¹⁹ The ANC was close to encouraging 'militarist illusions among the people: of the struggle being carried out by specialist armed fighters'.²⁰ Much ANC practice and propaganda were, Slovo wrote, in fact 'fostering this mistaken view and had not projected the armed struggle as growing out of, and being linked with mass political struggle'.²¹

Slovo and others felt the ANC had to reopen the debate on how to achieve an organised domestic political revolutionary base. In the past, the ANC had not paid sufficient attention to the militant

¹⁷IV/Slovo, pp.977-978.

¹⁸IV/Slovo, p.978.

¹⁹IV/Slovo, p.976.

²⁰IV/Slovo, p.976.

²¹IV/Slovo, p.976.

political struggle inside the country, to the possibilities of combining legal and illegal actions and relating them to our political-military strategy. We had not given proper weight to the significance of the many mass organisations which had recently arisen; and we had sometimes taken sectarian positions towards them ...²²

Behind these shortcomings lay a more serious one: the ANC had not in any sense effectively addressed 'the fundamental precondition of national democratic revolution': 'the requirement that the widest possible mobilisation must be undertaken of all classes and strata of the oppressed'.²³ The ANC and SACP had ignored the potential for sectoral political and economic struggles which existed under South African conditions.

Important voices in COH now began to argue that the ANC's war had not really begun at all, whatever the contrary claims of ANC propaganda and the commitment to 'peoples war' by COH and the RC shortly after the 1976 uprisings.²⁴ Slovo's report argued that the ANC was at a stage when the 'main task was to concentrate on mass political organisation and legal and illegal mobilisation'.²⁵

Amidst the excitement over their rediscovery of

²²IV/Slovo, pp.976-977.

²³IV/Slovo, p.977.

²⁴IV/Slovo, pp.968, 977.

²⁵IV/Slovo, p.977.

politics by political means, Slovo and others went into temporary retreat on the issue of armed struggle. They now suggested that armed activity should, in the short term, be designed to perform merely a propagandistic role in support of non-violent political work aimed at constructing a popular revolutionary base.²⁶ The main means for developing this base should be political, particularly the creation of a broad front of organisations on issues of immediate and material relevance to the ANC's potential constituency inside South Africa²⁷. This front could lead to a 'mass upsurge [which], together with armed confrontation, would lead to the winning of people's power'.²⁸

A copy of the report on the Vietnam visit was presented to an NEC meeting in late 1978. A special meeting of the NEC and the RC was then held in Luanda, Angola, from December 27 1978 to January 1 1979 to consider the ANC's strategic impasse.²⁹ The context of the meeting was that the IRD was 'not producing the goods'.³⁰ The Luanda meeting elected a commission, which it named the Politico-Military Strategy Commission (PMSC), to consider

²⁶IV/Slovo, p.978.

²⁷IV/Slovo, pp.977-979.

²⁸IV/Slovo, p.977.

²⁹IV/Slovo, p.982.

³⁰IV/Maharaj, p.420.

new strategic options.³¹ This heralded the second stage of the strategic review.

The Politico-Military Strategy Commission

The members of the PMSC, responsible for the second stage of the review, were:³²

Oliver Tambo as chairman.

Joe Gqabi. He was a member of the SACP who had received guerilla training in China as part of the first MK High Command group sent abroad for instruction in the early 1960s. He had been jailed on Robben Island and, after his release, had been an important figure in the small, re-emergent ANC underground in the Transvaal in the mid-1970s where he had established links into youth and worker organisations. He had also been involved in some of the first attempts after June 1976 to indigenise an ANC military presence. He had gone into exile following his acquittal in the 'Pretoria Twelve' trial in 1978, and now served on the NEC.

Moses Mabhida. He was a member of the NEC, was RC secretary, a former political commissar of MK, a senior SACP and South African Congress of Trade Unions (Sactu) leader, and a former trade union official inside South Africa.

Thabo Mbeki. He was a member of the NEC and a one-time

³¹IV/Slovo, p.982.

³²IV/Slovo, p.982.

assistant secretary of the RC, a member of the SACP, and a former ANC representative to Swaziland and later Nigeria, who was emerging as an increasingly important political voice.

Joe Modise. He had served on MK high command structures in the early 1960s and, following the arrests of Nelson Mandela, Raymond Mhlaba and Wilton Mkwayi, had headed an MK administration in exile between 1965 and 1969. In 1967-8, he had headed the MK command set up for the Wankie and Sipolilo campaigns in north west Rhodesia. He was a member of the NEC and the RC, and commander of COH.

Joe Slovo. He was a leader of the SACP involved in setting up the original MK High Command in the early 1960s, had been a member of the RC since its formation in 1969 and was deputy commander of COH. He was the only non-NEC member to serve on the commission.³³

The commission's composition appears to have been largely appropriate to its task. It combined political and military leadership. It included Gqabi with his recent experience of underground reconstruction and popular political resurgence inside South Africa. And it reflected the SACP's crucial role in the ANC, notably in its operational structures.

The notable absentee from the commission was Maharaj.

³³Immediately the ANC opened NEC membership to whites in 1985 Slovo was elected to the ANC's top executive organ.

He was apparently not interested in serving on it. He considered it more important to continue doing IRD's practical work. He anticipated that membership of the commission would keep him tied up in meetings whereas he was at the time travelling between forward areas meeting up with visiting home-based activists.³⁴

The PMSC's terms of reference covered the ANC's political and military perspectives' and operational structures.³⁵ It received submissions from a range of ANC sections which were not usually consulted on operational matters, among them the youth and women's sections and Sactu.³⁶ It made its recommendations to the NEC in March 1979.³⁷ These suggestions echoed the main perspectives for political mobilisation already being enacted by IRD under Maharaj and contained in Slovo's report to the NEC on the Vietnam visit. The NEC accepted many of the PMSC's central recommendations and approaches in August 1979³⁸ - with one crippling exception, dealt with below.³⁹

The NEC endorsed the four strategic lines recommended by the PMSC. They were that the ANC should: elaborate an

³⁴IV/Maharaj, pp.422-423.

³⁵IV/Slovo, p.983.

³⁶IV/Jordan, p.238; IV/Slovo, p.984.

³⁷IV/Slovo, p.983.

³⁸IV/Slovo, p.983.

³⁹IV/Maharaj, pp.429-432.

over-all strategy based on the mobilisation of 'the masses' inside South Africa; create the broadest possible national front of organisations and people inside the country for national liberation and win this front into alignment with the ANC; draw into ANC underground structures those promising activists thrown up in popular organisations and anti-apartheid struggles; and accept that military operations developed out of political activity and should be guided by the needs and level of political mobilisation and organisation.⁴⁰

Of these, the PMSC identified the first and second, political mobilisation and the creation of a broad front of organisations, as requiring most urgent attention.⁴¹ It reasoned that the ANC had to relate politically to the majority of its potential constituency. This meant becoming deeply involved in popular organisations operating in the legal and semi-legal spheres. The major theme of the PMSC report was that the ANC

had to make a deliberate turn to the masses for the purpose of teaching them and learning from them. We had for too long acted as if the repressive conditions made mass legal and semi-legal work impossible. If the people had taught us anything through the initiatives they had taken in the preceding five years, it was that the potential for political struggle [had] never [been] exhausted. And, if our own independent efforts had taught us anything, it was that our efforts would reach a dead-end

⁴⁰IV/Slovo, pp.983-984

⁴¹IV/Slovo, pp.979-980.

unless they had a broader political base.⁴²

The militaristic vanguardism of the past had manifestly failed. If the ANC neglected to 'turn to the masses', some RC members now felt, it would become one of the 'spectators in the years to come'.⁴³ A broad popular front comprising popular organisations inside South Africa operating legally and semi-legally was to be the channel for the necessary dialogue. Eligibility for membership of the front, the PMSC recommended, should depend on an organisation's basic commitment to the struggle for political freedoms.⁴⁴ The front should express the broadest possible working together of all organisations, groups and individuals genuinely opposed to racist autocracy.⁴⁵

To realise this breadth, the PMSC said that ANC activists would have to be present wherever and whenever people took action against apartheid - little matter how inchoate that popular resistance might appear to be - in order to steer popular organisation in a revolutionary direction.⁴⁶ The ANC 'had to grasp that every organised act of opposition and defiance to tyranny and racism, every struggle for better conditions', was a 'blow struck for the

⁴²IV/Slovo, p.979.

⁴³IV/Slovo, p.980.

⁴⁴IV/Slovo, p.979.

⁴⁵IV/Slovo, p.979.

⁴⁶IV/Slovo, pp.978-979.

revolution'.⁴⁷ It meant the ANC 'could not shun any organisation engaged in such activities merely on the ground that it did not embrace [the ANC's] long-term revolutionary aims or criticised part of [the ANC's] strategy'.⁴⁸

Building the front should be the primary task of the ANC underground for the foreseeable future, said the PMSC.⁴⁹ Clandestine forms of political work would remain a necessity because of the ANC's illegality. But the popular movement would provide the basis for the growth of the underground. The underground would be able to identify within the ranks of the popular movement a number of recruits to its ranks.⁵⁰

The ANC's illegality meant, however, that it had to develop a subtle relationship with the front:

The guiding hand of our liberation movement did not always have to be seen publicly or acknowledged. Our work had to proceed in a way which could not unnecessarily expose the legal and semi-legal organisations to more intense enemy harassment and provide the excuse to destroy these public bodies. This required, among others, an intelligent assessment of how far such bodies could be expected to go in publicly associating themselves with some of our more long-term and radical policies.⁵¹

⁴⁷IV/Slovo, p.978.

⁴⁸IV/Slovo, p.978.

⁴⁹IV/Slovo, p.979.

⁵⁰IV/Slovo, p.984.

⁵¹IV/Slovo, p.980.

The PMSC argued it would be impossible to achieve popular mobilisation if sectarian behaviour by some ANC members continued. The state's reform programme, which was in part intended to win over a substantial portion of the ANC's potential constituency, meant the ANC had to show greater openness to views that differed from its own. Accordingly, the PMSC reasoned that

We could not infer sinister motives on the other's part merely from the fact of such a difference. In any case, no serious revolutionary movement could afford to shun cooperation with forces in the immediate political struggle merely because it feared the possibility that, in the long term, there would be a parting of the ways.⁵²

The ANC and its allies, the SACP and Sactu, had to stand at 'the core of the revolutionary struggle'.⁵³ The PMSC saw their over-all task in relation to the envisaged front as being to

ensure that the most revolutionary classes among the black oppressed - workers and peasants - maintained their position as the dominant force, and [to] guide the masses towards the winning of power.⁵⁴

To do so, this revolutionary core had to maintain 'its independence' in relation to the envisaged broad front.⁵⁵

The broad front should, in line with ANC political

⁵²IV/Slovo, p.979.

⁵³IV/Slovo, p.980.

⁵⁴IV/Slovo, p.980.

⁵⁵IV/Slovo, p.980.

traditions from the 1950s and the days of the Congress Alliance, 'foster new bonds of struggle between Africans, coloureds and Indians as well as progressive and democratic forces among the whites.'⁵⁶ The ANC had to 'encourage joint action and organisational cooperation cutting across racial boundaries and engaging the masses of the people'.⁵⁷ The struggle waged by the different communities had to 'find common ground in mass action and in the vision of a unified state with one parliament based on one person one vote'.⁵⁸

The PMSC initiated an examination of the experiences of a number of popular organisations which had developed over the previous two years in the black communities.⁵⁹ Organisations already in existence should receive encouragement from the ANC. It should also stimulate the formation of trade unions, civic organisations and internal committees of Sactu, among others.⁶⁰ The PMSC suggested that ANC external mission's youth and women's sections should turn towards the development of internal counterparts.⁶¹ And the PMSC criticised the ANC for its past inability to develop any strategic approach on the

⁵⁶IV/Slovo, p.984.

⁵⁷IV/Slovo, p.984.

⁵⁸IV/Slovo, p.984.

⁵⁹IV/Slovo, p.980.

⁶⁰IV/Slovo, p.984.

⁶¹IV/Slovo, p.984.

bantustans⁶² - a lacuna the IRD had raised in its evidence to the commission.⁶³

The PMSC suggested a number of campaigns and tactics for ANC involvement in legal and semi-legal political struggle. In the first place, a campaign should be launched to re-popularise the ANC's non-racial vision for South Africa contained in the Freedom Charter. For its part, MK should choose targets highlighting demands made in the 'Freedom Charter'.⁶⁴ The ANC should help escalate campaigns against the bantustans and local government structures for the black population. These campaigns should culminate in the

permanent destruction [of these structures]. This process of realising this aim included impeding their effective functioning and reducing the capacity of the enemy to govern our people. Where people lacked the capacity at any time to immobilise these institutions, we concluded they should attempt to divert them from the purposes for which the enemy had created them. We saw mass mobilisation as the key to this offensive.⁶⁵

This formulation echoed an approach elaborated 27 years earlier by Nelson Mandela.⁶⁶

⁶²IV/Slovo, p.977.

⁶³IV/Maharaj, p.426.

⁶⁴IV/Slovo, p.988.

⁶⁵IV/Slovo, p.984.

⁶⁶Nelson Mandela, 'Press Statement, released by Nelson R. Mandela, Honorary Secretary of the All-in African National Council, June 26, 1961' in Karis & Carter, *From Protest to Challenge*, vol.3, pp.651, 699-701.

The PMSC believed that the black tradition of boycotting elections for state-created institutions was a tactic which could be developed further. It advocated flexibility in the use of boycotts. These bodies should be attacked from within as well as from without. Boycotts could take a variety of forms: outright rejection and non-participation; registration without exercising the vote; or putting up candidates on a ticket that pledged them to immobilise the institutions from within. Boycott tactics should be adapted to suit circumstances.⁶⁷ The PMSC specifically advocated action over the forthcoming elections to the government-created South African Indian Council, the near-powerless, ethnically constituted body supposed to provide a forum for political expression to the Indian population.⁶⁸

The PMSC argued that the ANC had to lend all possible support to the struggle to 'build a progressive trade union movement inside the country which rejected all attempts to isolate the workers from the struggle for national liberation'.⁶⁹ This reflected ANC suspicions about the position evolving within a number of the better organised trade unions (later brought together in the Federation of South African Trade Unions - Fosatu) that they should, at least temporarily, hold back from a national political

⁶⁷IV/Slovo, p.984.

⁶⁸IV/Slovo, p.984.

⁶⁹IV/Slovo, p.984.

commitment.

The PMSC identified an immediate insurrectionary potential in the urban black townships. It suggested that this insurrectionary potential should be developed within a perspective of protracted struggle. Popular uprisings, the PMSC suggested, would probably punctuate this protracted struggle and raise it to a higher plane - without necessarily being decisive. The PMSC's central strategic formulation was that

people's power in South Africa [will] be won by revolutionary violence in a protracted armed struggle which must involve the whole people and in which partial and general mass uprisings [will] play a vital role.⁷⁰

Within this perspective, the role of the envisaged front was to

engage the mass of our people in ever-growing political struggle to weaken the enemy, to create effective revolutionary bases as the foundation of a developing armed struggle, and to win the aims of our national democratic revolution.⁷¹

Strategic Implications of the Review

The perspective developed by the 1978-79 strategic review still turned on popular armed struggle for the seizure of state power. It laid more emphasis on political struggle by political means than any ANC strategic formulation since

⁷⁰IV/Slovo, p.997.

⁷¹IV/Slovo, p.980.

1961. The perspective saw only a secondary role for armed activity in an interim period in which a popular revolutionary base would be constructed. But, still, this base was intended to service eventual decisive revolutionary armed struggle. The strategic vision remained one in which political organisation was seen as ultimately subject to military imperatives - notwithstanding traces of ambiguity in some formulations.

Where there was ambiguity, it would later be settled in practice in favour of armed struggle. A major reason for this was the military bias in ANC operational organs which persisted after 1979. The NEC refused to accept one of the PMSC's key recommendations to change the composition of the RC which might have redressed this military bias (which is dealt with in the next section).

The PMSC's recognition of the insurrectionary potential in South Africa's townships implied a shift towards the view that urban rather than rural areas should constitute the main terrain for a revolutionary challenge. Simultaneously, the ANC's understanding of the concept of 'revolutionary political base' was changing. Classic, rurally-based guerilla struggles tended to conceive of a 'base' in terms of control over geographical space and whatever else occupied it. But this was giving way to a view in the ANC that a base was primarily a measure of people's political consciousness and organisation. This

shift in perception would, some years later, find expression in the statement that the revolutionary political base was 'the people in political motion'.⁷²

The ANC had also (re-)discovered the importance of sectoral and local political struggles. It now recognised that the full development of these struggles was crucial to revolutionary success. But there was a tension in this change since the ANC remained intent on subordinating these sectoral political struggles to both an over-arching national project whose terms it could substantially dictate and to military imperatives. Yet, although the ANC's previous stress on military struggle had prevented its committed involvement in these struggles, the ANC was now determined that this would no longer be the case.

Furthermore, the ANC had pragmatically conceded there were limits to the vanguard role it could play. Before 1978 ANC behaviour had implied that it expected its potential constituency merely to follow its prompting. Now, however, it sought a more symbiotic relationship with that constituency. The ANC recognised that its potential constituency had a significant degree of autonomy as well as creative energies from which it could derive considerable benefit.

⁷²A formulation generally credited within the ANC to Slovo.

ANC Operational Structures after the Review

The PMSC recommendation rejected to disastrous effect by the NEC was one in favour of a smaller, more muscular and more cerebral RC. Before 1979 the RC had been afflicted by problems of military predominance, absenteeism and inter-departmental tensions which had adversely affected its ability to monitor successes and failures and to coordinate the work of political and military structures. The PMSC report recommended that the size of the RC be reduced from about 20 to about 10 members, including only the ANC's most talented political and military strategists. They should be freed from all non-operational ANC tasks, such as diplomacy and general administration, and be deployed solely to lead a more closely coordinated political-military offensive. The new council should reflect a much stronger political presence. Crucially, it should have increased quasi-executive powers of decision-making on internal work.⁷³

The main reason for the NEC's rejection of this recommendation in 1979 was fear among some NEC members, among them ANC treasurer general Thomas Nkobi, that a new central operational organ of the kind being suggested might develop into a locus of power to rival the NEC.⁷⁴ The rejection would have far-reaching and damaging results, as subsequent chapters will show. The RC continued after 1979 essentially as before, with much the same membership,

⁷³IV/Slovo, pp.980-981; IV/Maharaj, 429-432, 437-438.

⁷⁴IV/Maharaj, p.431.

personal and interdepartmental rivalries. There was only marginal improvement in political-military coordination. And improvements in IRD representation on the RC after 1979 did little to reduce military predominance.⁷⁵

What improvements there were within operational structures resulted from another PMSC recommendation: to establish mini-RCs in each of the forward areas, to be known as 'senior organs'. These senior organs were intended to overcome the dislocation that had bedeviled the activities of the entirely separate political and military machineries in the forward areas. The senior organs would enable these separate political and military machineries, for the first time, to coordinate their operations at forward area level. Until now, coordination of political and military operations had been possible only at the level of the RC itself; but chronic absenteeism and other shortcomings had made this very difficult.

These moves towards coordination of political and military operations were, however, to be offset by another development. Arising out of the PMSC proposals, Slovo was given the go-ahead to form a military special operations unit (SOU), something for which he had long argued.⁷⁶ Its task would be to mount spectacular armed propaganda

⁷⁵IV/Slovo, p.1,007; IV/Maharaj, p.432.

⁷⁶IV/Kasrils, p.328; Slovo had been calling for it since 1976. IV/Slovo, p.971.

attacks. Its effect would be to worsen political-military parallelism in ANC operational structures.

Conclusion

The ANC embarked upon a formal review of strategy in 1978 and 1979 to unravel the paradox of how its very stress on armed struggle appeared to be undermining its ability to mount a sustained armed struggle. Phase one of the review consisted of a visit to Vietnam by a leadership delegation, as a result of which the ANC recast its operational strategy without, however, getting rid of its military orientation.

The ANC concluded that its emphasis on armed activity had failed to foster an organised domestic political base. Yet it needed such a base in order to wage a sustained armed struggle. The main change achieved by the review was the conclusion that the way to build the necessary organised political base was by engaging in political organisation by non-violent political means - legal, semi-legal and underground. The ANC's interest in such a base remained what it had been earlier, namely to equip itself to mount a sustained armed struggle for the seizure of state power. In this sense, ANC operational strategy after the review still conceived of (non-violent) political work as serving overriding military imperatives.

The strategic review formally sanctioned and lent rhetorical support to the style of political work already decided upon and being undertaken by political operational structures under Maharaj. The motive for doing so was not to see political struggles waged by particular sectors of the oppressed or in particular areas of the country flourish at their own pace and in line with their own dynamics. Rather the intention was to harness the various campaigns into one. This single struggle would be represented by a front led from the underground by the ANC and would be progressively transformed into a popular armed challenge for state power.

In the event, sectoral political struggles would develop a variety and a dynamism which the ANC would be unable to homogenise or subjugate to military imperatives. How this outcome resulted is the major part of the narrative of the five chapters that remain.

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CHAPTER FIVE*ARMED PROPAGANDA AND NON-COLLABORATION*

Rationalising weakness, August 1979 - December 1980

We defined the purpose of our armed activity at the time as being to create a network of political revolutionary bases which would become the foundation of our people's war.

- Joe Slovo¹

Introduction

The ANC had concluded in 1979 that it had to take one step back in the conduct of armed operations if it was eventually to be able to mount a sustained armed struggle. Its strategic emphasis should temporarily fall on organising by political means inside South Africa. This would enable it to create an organised domestic political base with two basic components: one, a front of popular organisations operating in the legal and semi-legal spheres; the other an underground organisation operating clandestinely but relating to, recruiting within and maintaining a presence inside public bodies. Military activity should be of a kind that facilitated political mobilisation. Coordination between political and military operational structures should be improved. The ANC hoped that the political base so created would serve as the foundation for a sustained armed struggle (interspersed

¹IV/Slovo, p.985.

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with popular insurrectionary activity) for the seizure of power. Under this perspective, political organisation remained subject to military operational imperatives.

This chapter examines the extent to which the ANC carried forward this perspective in the period to December 1980.

Internal Reconstruction, January 1978 - August 1979

The South African state's banning of black consciousness organisations² and the detention of their leading activists in October 1977, a month after Steve Biko's death in detention, created more fertile domestic ground for the growth of the ANC. Some 47 leading black activists of different political views found themselves locked up in communal cells in preventive detention. There they held lengthy discussions on the way forward. The detainees considered, among other things, the need to form a new black school students' organisation to replace the outlawed South African Students' Movement (Sasm). Those involved in the discussions included Diliza Mji, the pro-ANC president of the now-outlawed Saso, the black university student's organisation, and Jackie Selebi, a member of the formal

²Of which the most important were the Black People's Convention (BPC), Black Community Programmes (BCP), South African Students Organisation (Saso), South African Students Movement (Sasm) and Soweto Students' Representative Council (SSRC).

underground in the Transvaal.³ Another was Curtis Nkondo, who had chaired the Soweto Teachers' Action Committee during the 1976 uprisings and who had maintained contact with Joe Gqabi's Transvaal underground network.

With the bannings and detentions in October 1977, the state appeared to have closed off much of the narrow legal space for popular non-violent resistance which had opened up since the early 1970s. To many young black militants, clandestine forms of organisation, particularly armed struggle, appeared indispensable. The ANC was widely considered experienced in both.⁴ Popo Molefe,⁵ a young Soweto political activist at the time, recalls the views of his political circle:

[B]y 1977, it was becoming quite clear that the only instrument through which our freedom could be attained was the African National Congress and in particular through its armed wing, Umkhonto we Sizwe. It was clear to all of us at that stage that the movement [i.e. the ANC] was the only organisation which had the facilities to train us, to prepare us to fight for our freedom.⁶

Armed activity gave the ANC an image of seriousness among political activists which the remnants of the black consciousness movement and the Pan Africanist Congress

³IV/Nkondo, p.692.

⁴By September 1977, when Biko died, MK had evidently mounted 20 of the 21 incidents of revolutionary armed activity recorded since the 1976 uprisings. Booyse, 'Monthly Breakdown'; Stadler, 'Dade' ['Acts'], pp.2-3.

⁵Molefe became national secretary of the United Democratic Front (UDF) in 1983.

⁶IV/Molefe, pp.621-622.

(PAC) could not match.⁷

Before the ANC developed the confidence to exploit this lustre openly it hid much political reconstruction work inside South Africa after 1976 under the cloak of black consciousness. This involved astute ANC penetration of black consciousness organisations and the capture of leadership positions that might enable it to steer these organisations in directions it favoured. Only later, from about 1980, did ANC involvement in some popular organisations begin to give them a distinctive political profile.

Two categories of people were involved in this domestic ANC political reconstruction. The first was an extremely small formal political underground working clandestinely and illegally. After the Natal and Transvaal setbacks, the underground had no extended networks of units. Rather, it comprised an array of isolated units which, though they seldom communicated with each other, did maintain irregular contact with various external mission structures. The second category might be termed an 'informal underground';⁸ it comprised a larger and expanding group of political activists working in the legal

⁷IV/Nkondo, p.690; IV/Narsoo, pp.660-661.

⁸This term draws on a useful distinction made by Jenny Cargill, a journalist over this period on *The Financial Mail* and *Sunday Post*, who later served in the ANC underground and in the ANC in exile.

and semi-legal spheres who did what they inferred the ANC's bidding to be, although they had no direct or conscious contact with it.⁹

Mac Maharaj, appointed secretary of the RC's internal reconstruction and development department (IRD) in early 1978, estimates that the formal political underground in 1979 comprised between 300 to 500 individuals working mainly in the larger urban centres.¹⁰ Its number fluctuated in subsequent years. New members were recruited, old members fell into inactivity, often because the external mission did not have the capacity to service and maintain contact with scores of discrete units, and others were absorbed into popular organisations operating in the legal and semi-legal spheres.¹¹

Maharaj's programme for internal reconstruction had anticipated the 1978-1979 strategic review. He had concluded in 1978 that it was vital to precipitate popular

⁹Ismail Momoniat, who became an important ANC-aligned political activist in this and the later period is a good example of a member of the 'informal underground'. He formally joined the ANC only in the latter 1980s. He formulates one of the principles guiding his activities thus: '[F]or us, it was more important to do movement [i.e. ANC] work, rather than to say to someone: I'm a member of the movement'. *IV/Momoniat*, p.649.

¹⁰Maharaj's usage of the term 'urban' included places such as Mdantsane and King William's Town in the Border region. The underground's rural presence included units in Ciskei, Transkei and the northern Cape. The ANC political underground had 'about zero' presence in the Orange Free State in 1979. *IV/Maharaj*, p.495.

¹¹*IV/Maharaj*, p.495.

organisation inside South Africa.¹² His method was to stimulate organisation around whatever issues were of practical importance to people in specific areas or sectors of the population. Sue Rabkin,¹³ who worked in Mozambique-Swaziland political machineries in 1978, recalls Maharaj instructing underground cadres whom he met clandestinely in Mozambique and Swaziland:

[Y]ou go down to the people. This is a people's struggle. You know we have to build from the grassroots... [I]f people are moaning about their window panes (this is the most famous example - window panes!); if people are complaining about their window panes being broken, take it up, write a leaflet. Deal with it. Organise around it. There is no issue that is too small.¹⁴

Among Maharaj's more important underground units was one headed by an attorney, Pravin Gordhan. Maharaj had first had dealings with this unit in Durban immediately after his release from prison in late 1976.¹⁵ Then, the unit had been providing 'rudimentary' support to local ANC structures.¹⁶ But it had since grown in importance. It comprised a number of prominent professionals¹⁷ and, by

¹²IV/Maharaj, p.415.

¹³She had been in an underground propaganda unit with her husband, David Rabkin, and Jeremy Cronin, but she was sentenced to only 12 months imprisonment (of which 11 months was suspended) at their trial in 1976 because she was pregnant. The other two received 10 and seven-years respectively.

¹⁴IV/Rabkin, p.810.

¹⁵IV/Maharaj, p.391.

¹⁶IV/Maharaj, p.391.

¹⁷Who included Yunus Mahomed and Zac Yacoob, both also lawyers, and Professor Gerry Coovadia, an academic.

late 1978, had extensive political links into the Natal and Transvaal Indian communities and with popular organisations emerging in African areas. After the setbacks to the Natal underground in 1975 and 1977, the unit avoided involvement in issues, such as education, which might immediately draw security police attention. Instead, it built popular organisation around civic and welfare issues, initially in segregated Indian areas.¹⁸ Their approach accorded with Maharaj's evolving perspective.¹⁹ According to Rabkin, the Gordhan unit was

held up as an example of how to do work in the political machinery... They sent people out for training...they were efficient and they were prepared to do the muck work, the hard slog. They were almost perfect.²⁰

Other individuals in the Transvaal who aligned themselves with the ANC, such as Cassim Saloojee, also involved themselves in civic and welfare issues, apparently autonomously of the Gordhan unit's immediate influence.²¹

Whereas the Gordhan unit and a few others concentrated on sectoral organisation, other underground members addressed problems at a national level. Various tendencies in black politics - echoing the outlooks of the ANC, Pan

¹⁸IV/Maharaj, p.483.

¹⁹Though Maharaj criticised the unit at times for not consistently linking local issues to the question of national political power. IV/Maharaj, p.483.

²⁰IV/Rabkin, p.905. The 'training' referred to would have been non-military.

²¹IV/Cassim Saloojee, p.943. Cassim Saloojee is another typical example of a member of the ANC's informal underground.

Africanist Congress (PAC) and black consciousness²² - decided in May 1978 to form a new national black political organisation to replace the banned Black People's Convention, national umbrella of the black consciousness movement. They included Molefe, who recalls:

We agreed to form [the Azanian People's Organisation] on the understanding that what was required was to unite the masses of our people regardless of ideological inclination and harness them in the struggle for national democracy and freedom.²³

Members of the formal ANC political underground, encouraged Nkondo, the former Soweto teachers' leader who considered himself an ANC member, to stand for election as Azapo's first president.²⁴ The underground wanted to ensure that the new organisation did not grow into a rival of the ANC. Nkondo recalls being told by some members of the underground:

Because of your influence, because you are known by the teachers and students and the community, perhaps if you become president you will be able to maintain the balance so that the organisation does not become a third force.²⁵

Ham-fisted security police action helped place Nkondo

²²IV/Molefe, p.621.

²³IV/Molefe, p.621. Molefe later became Johannesburg district chairperson of Azapo.

²⁴Among those to do so was Jackie Selebi, a member of the underground in contact with the external mission. IV/Nkondo, p.686; IV/Molefe, p.621.

²⁵IV/Nkondo, p.686. 'Third force' was a term used to refer to any opposition movement that might rival the ANC. It is not clear whether the origin of this usage is a 'third force' interposed between the ANC and the state, or a 'third force' in addition to the ANC and PAC.

at the head of Azapo. Shortly after his release from preventive detention in mid-1978, police again detained him because, in his capacity as an educationist, he had encouraged a female pupil to continue her schooling in Swaziland. Unbeknown to Nkondo, the girl was being taken abroad for training by the PAC. Police evidently concluded that Nkondo was an underground treasurer of the PAC, as did PAC-inclined individuals. Consequently, PAC supporters also backed his bid for the Azapo presidency!²⁶

While Nkondo was Azapo's first president from 1979,²⁷ he consulted regularly with members of the ANC's formal underground in Soweto. Among them were Samson Ndou, Rita Ndzanga and Solomon Pholoto - veterans of attempts at ANC reconstruction since the late 1960s.²⁸ Nkondo was in the process of becoming a prominent front man for the formal ANC underground in the Transvaal.

Nkondo says he learned from his ANC contacts that Joe Gqabi, the former Transvaal underground leader who by June 1979 was in exile in Botswana, played an important role in the formation at this time of the Congress of South African Students (Cosas), the school students organisation set up

²⁶IV/Nkondo, p.591.

²⁷Azapo became operative only in 1979, a year after the decision to form it because many of its founders were detained in 1978 shortly after they had announced their plans to form it.

²⁸IV/Nkondo, pp.687-688.

to replace the outlawed Sasm.²⁹ Gqabi involved himself in developments via his wife, Aurelia, who remained in South Africa. The perspective behind Cosas' formation was, according to Nkondo, that

[I]t became important to form a student movement which [would] establish organisation at schools...so that the schools [became] a terrain of struggle. [Students had to] wage their struggle, educational struggle within the schools... [T]he protests against Bantu Education or against the regulations should not be seen in isolation from the broad political dynamics... [T]he protests there [had] a link, directly...to the national democratic struggle.³⁰

In November 1979, five months after Cosas' formation, a similar organisation was established for black university and college students to replace Saso, the outlawed university students body. According to Nkondo, ANC underground members (who now included his son)³¹ helped form the Azanian Students' Organisation (Azaso).

Like Cosas, Azaso also initially appeared to fall under the wing of Azapo and hence of the black consciousness movement. But this was merely a flag of convenience for what the underground always intended should be an ANC front.³² Over the next two years, both Cosas and Azaso threw off the trappings of black consciousness,

²⁹IV/Nkondo, p.692.

³⁰IV/Nkondo, p.692.

³¹Reaval Nkondo, who later worked in exile for the ANC's security and intelligence department, known as Nat.

³²IV/Nkondo, p.694.

eventually adopting the Freedom Charter, the ANC's programmatic lodestar.

In black townships, prototype civic organisations began to develop outside the framework of state-created local government structures, concerned with bread and butter issues. These civics were responses to real community problems; their formation seldom depended upon ANC stimulation. In some cases, however, individuals who either had formal links with, or an informal allegiance to, the ANC helped initiate them. The ANC wanted to ensure that communities linked their local struggles to the struggle for democracy at national state level - as part of a national democratic struggle.

In October 1979, ANC underground members in the eastern Cape, who were in touch with RC structures in Lesotho headed by Chris Hani,³³ helped form the Port Elizabeth Black Civic Organisation (Pebco). It brought together a number of civic associations in, initially, local African, but also in coloured and Indian, townships.³⁴ A similar body, the Durban Housing Action Committee, was established that same year with input from the Gordhan unit.³⁵ And in the Transvaal, the Soweto Civic

³³Conversations with Hani in Botswana and Zimbabwe, 1985-1986.

³⁴When Pebco's leader, Thozamile Botha went into exile in Lesotho in 1980, he did so as a member of the ANC.

³⁵Confidential information.

Association was established.

Military Operations, November 1978 - March 1980

Between the ANC delegation's return from Vietnam in November 1978 and March 1980, there were 17 recorded incidents of armed insurgent activity inside South Africa,³⁶ of which the ANC was responsible for at least 15.³⁷ Nine incidents amounted to sabotage, and had been aimed at economic installations such as railway lines and fuel depots; four were against police stations or personnel; two involved civilian targets; one court building was bombed; and there was one bomb attack against a building administering the pass laws. The two hit-and-run attacks on police stations in Soweto and on a third in the small northern Transvaal town of Soekmekaar were major news events. All the attacks were, however, modest in their dimensions and military consequences.

The incident which evidently proved most popular within the ANC's potential constituency was an attack directed against civilians - the 'Silverton Siege' in January 1980, in which three MK combatants took customers hostage at a branch of Volkskas Bank near Pretoria. The attack contradicted ANC policy which eschewed the targeting of civilians. COH, MK's operational command, deduced that

³⁶Booyse, 'Monthly Breakdown'.

³⁷Stadler, 'Dade' ['Acts'].

the three combatants had probably been surrounded by police and had taken hostages in response.³⁸ Slovo recalls:

Our immediate reaction as leadership [was] one of uncertainty about this type of tactic. Individual reactions within our movement tended to be generally negative. The formal statement issued by our leadership on the raid was ambiguous in the sense that it did not specifically endorse the action of our MK cadres involved. Yet there could be no doubt that the overwhelming majority of our people inside the country responded positively to the siege.³⁹

The funeral in Soweto of one of the MK combatants, who were all killed when police stormed the bank, drew 10,000 mourners,⁴⁰ and an opinion survey revealed that three out of four residents of Soweto felt some sympathy with these MK men.⁴¹ The ANC leadership faced two challenges: Could it allow MK units now to target civilians? And could it plan for, or allow, the taking of hostages in support of political demands? Its answer was, apparently, No in both cases.⁴²

The vulnerability of the three combatants involved in the Silverton siege resulted at least partly from the enforced separation between military and political structures in the forward areas and inside South Africa. The three, and many MK cadres like them, had no organised

³⁸IV/Slovo, p.991.

³⁹IV/Slovo, p.991.

⁴⁰The Citizen, 11/2/80.

⁴¹The Daily News (Durban), 22/2/80.

⁴²IV/Slovo, p.991.

internal base - no proverbial forest in which to slip away, no sea in which to swim - and, had they had such a base, the design of ANC operational structures would have deprived them of a way of linking up with it. Rabkin recalls guerillas reporting back to base in Mozambique and Swaziland, arguing:

Wait, wait, wait, we can't do it like this. We can't just go in and hit. What are we doing it for? We've got to get the people to help us. We've got to get them involved. Because only then can we be protected.⁴³

IRD and the Strategic Review, September 1979 - March 1980

For Maharaj, the strategic review, largely endorsed by the NEC in August 1979, represented a qualified advance.⁴⁴ He no longer had to argue against the kind of formulation found in *Strategy and Tactics* (1969), among others that only armed struggle could bring liberation.⁴⁵ Second, the review had approved, *post facto*, IRD's approach to political organisation.

The review did not alter IRD's approach in any way. For Maharaj, the review dealt in generalities, whereas he was concerned with practicalities. IRD was not working for the front of organisations which the review envisaged, as

⁴³IV/Rabkin, p.814.

⁴⁴IV/Maharaj, p.429.

⁴⁵IV/Maharaj, p.429.

far as Maharaj was concerned.⁴⁶ Rather, his department was, as before, 'working for the revival of any and every possible mass organisation that could carve a space for legal existence'.⁴⁷

The review had condoned flexibility on internal reconstruction, something Maharaj welcomed.⁴⁸ It had suggested that state-created structures, such as the bantustans and black local government, be attacked from within and/or without.⁴⁹ Hence, IRD was not restricted to boycotts of elections for state-created institutions. A range of circumstances in late 1979 and early 1980, however, combined to make the boycott the main tactic and standard of ANC-aligned domestic political organisations. There was to be no assault from within; it would all come from without.

IRD units were involved in several campaigns in late 1979 and early 1980. The more important included a campaign to popularise the Freedom Charter,⁵⁰ a campaign for the

⁴⁶IV/Maharaj, pp.438-439, 443.

⁴⁷IV/Maharaj, pp.438-439, 443.

⁴⁸IV/Maharaj, p.426.

⁴⁹IV/Maharaj, pp.426, 473.

⁵⁰1980 was the 25th anniversary of the Freedom Charter's adoption at the Congress of the People in Kliptown, Johannesburg. In line with decisions taken in 1979, the ANC called for a campaign for popularise the charter. See Oliver Tambo, 'Let us Rise to the Occasion', *Sechaba*, March 1980, p.12.

release of Nelson Mandela and other political prisoners,⁵¹ and a campaign against the South African Indian Council (Anti-SAIC).⁵²

During the anti-SAIC campaign, IRD began to develop a scale of influence in domestic politics which the ANC had lacked since the 1950s. The Gordhan unit was crucial in this. So, too, was the Natal Indian Congress, historically an ally of the ANC which had long lain dormant and never been outlawed.⁵³

Under 1978 legislation,⁵⁴ the state had originally planned the first direct elections for the SAIC for late 1979. But, apparently sensing opposition, the government postponed the elections to March 1980. One ANC-aligned

⁵¹Which was taken up most visibly by the two largest black-readership newspapers, *Post* and *Sunday Post*, edited by Percy Qoboza, who had been among those black leaders held in preventive detention after Biko's death. *Sunday Post* later published the Freedom Charter but only after Qoboza had initially angrily refused to run the it and fired, for his political views, his chief sub-editor, Graham Watts, who had made the suggestion. Unrecorded conversation with Graham Watts, London, 1993.

⁵²Until then, the SAIC, set up under the SA Indian Council Act of 1968 had no directly elected members; they were appointed by the government or indirectly elected by members of Indian local government structures which were themselves often heavily boycotted by many Indian voters. Although almost purely an advisory body, the SAIC was supposed also to serve as the vehicle of Indian political aspirations.

⁵³Attempts had been made since 1971 to revive the Natal Indian Congress, an ANC ally since the 1940s. But the ANC became an 'active movement' again only 'following an influx of younger members' after the 1976 uprisings. Shelagh Gastrow, *Who's Who in South African Politics* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1985), pp.66, 256-257.

⁵⁴SA Indian Council Amendment Act, No 83 of 1978.

faction in the Indian community wanted a boycott of the elections. The other, which included Gordhan's unit, favoured what was termed 'rejectionist participation' - taking part in the elections in order to take over the SAIC and destroy it from within.⁵⁵ The latter was the position the ANC NEC had, in fact, decided on in relation to the SAIC when it had considered the strategic review's recommendations in August 1979.⁵⁶

The two factions were at loggerheads. Maharaj intervened, with crucial backing from Dr Yusuf Dadoo who, apart from being chairman of the SACP, was a former leader of the South African Indian Congress held in very high esteem within the Indian community. Maharaj summoned the antagonistic groups to London for two weeks of meetings in late 1979.⁵⁷ Maharaj told them that there were two basic considerations in deciding tactics for the anti-SAIC campaign: ensuring 'the involvement of the masses' and 'maximum unity' among them.⁵⁸ This meant what was 'done on one front in one community' had to 'dovetail with the rest'.⁵⁹ But, he argued, rejectionist participation would not dovetail with the current tactics in African areas,

⁵⁵As the Labour Party had partly done in the case of the 'coloured' equivalent of the SAIC, the Coloured Persons' Representative Council.

⁵⁶IV/Maharaj, p.473.

⁵⁷IV/Maharaj, p.473.

⁵⁸IV/Maharaj, p.474.

⁵⁹IV/Maharaj, p.474.

which favoured boycotts of all elections for state-created structures.⁶⁰ The black consciousness movement's view that any participation in government-created structures amounted to collaboration⁶¹ - still predominated. Maharaj dissuaded the Gordhan unit from 'rejectionist participation'. Maharaj knew that this highly disciplined unit was more capable of accepting compromise than its opponents.⁶² The unit was pacified with a letter to take back to South Africa, signed by both Dadoo and Maharaj, recommending a total boycott of SAIC elections but adding that the final decision had to be taken by activists inside South Africa.⁶³ The eventual decision favoured a complete boycott of elections. Maharaj reported to the NEC that he had contradicted its decision of August 1979. There was some embarrassment on the NEC but no recrimination.⁶⁴ The incipient trend in the ANC was that unity between sectors of the emergent popular movement required uniform boycott of state-created institutions.

⁶⁰IV/Maharaj, p.474.

⁶¹The non-collaborationist tradition is traceable in black politics mainly to positions developed within the Non-European Unity Movement. It was flexibly adapted by the ANC, but the black consciousness tradition was closer to the NEUM in the way it equated any participation in government-created structures with collaboration.

⁶²IV/Maharaj, p.474.

⁶³IV/Maharaj, pp.474-475. Yacoob Abba Omar, a young ANC-aligned activist in Durban at the time, gives an account of the resolution of this dispute which tallies with Maharaj's. IV/Omar, pp.718-720.

⁶⁴IV/Maharaj, p.475.

A second attempt to intervene in emergent domestic organisation in late 1979 had a less favourable result for the ANC. ANC policy was now to attack the bantustan system from within and without and to work with and through organisations basically opposed to apartheid. The external mission saw Chief Mangosuthu Buthelezi's Inkatha movement, which claimed about 300,000 members, as a candidate for this approach - despite growing tensions between Inkatha and ANC-aligned individuals who objected to Buthelezi's participation in state-created structures. The external mission (which had held earlier informal meetings with Buthelezi and his lieutenants)⁶⁵ met formally with Inkatha in London in late 1979. Oliver Tambo headed the ANC delegation. Many ANC supporters inside South Africa were horrified.⁶⁶ As their anguish reached the external mission, talk of destroying government-created structures from within evaporated.⁶⁷ The entire assault should, henceforth, be from without.

A month later, in the 1980 ANC New Year address to South Africans, the ANC executive tried to steer a way out of its embarrassment over its meeting with Buthelezi. It

⁶⁵Gerhard Mare and Georgina Hamilton, *An Appetite for Power: Buthelezi's Inkatha and South Africa* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1987), pp.77-8, 136-42.

⁶⁶Dr Nthato Motlana, chairman of the Soweto Committee of Ten, for example, reacted with disbelief when he heard news of the meeting, remarking that the ANC would not 'collaborate with traitors' like Buthelezi. *The Star*, 2/11/79.

⁶⁷IV/Maharaj, p.426.

argued that, while many who did work within state-created institutions were 'irretrievable traitors and fortune seekers', there were others working there 'in pursuance of patriotic objectives'. 'Patriotic participation' entailed trying to destroy an institution from within, or using that institution to halt the apartheid programme, or exploiting that institution's resources 'to wage mass struggles'. But, contended the executives, it was an illusion to think 'that we will win our demands by dialogue and conciliation with the fascist regime'.⁶⁸ Those working in government-created structures should, rather, struggle from without 'for the seizure of power by the masses of our people through a combination of political and armed struggle'.⁶⁹ The ANC's drift towards a uniform boycott of state-related institutions strengthened.

The ANC's Trade Union Confusion, 1979-1980

This drift also affected relations with the emergent trade union movement, where intervention by the ANC had divisive results. Trade union policy became the main blind spot in the political strategy of the ANC and its allies, the SACP and Sactu in this period.

The ANC-led alliance's contribution to the rebuilding of black trade unions in the early 1970s had been

⁶⁸Tambo, 'Let us rise', p.6.

⁶⁹Ibid. p.7.

interrupted by the alliance's prioritisation of armed activity. The SACP, which definitionally saw itself as the political vanguard of the working class, was preoccupied with strengthening the ANC as a multi-class national liberation movement - in line with a theoretical approach which de-emphasised working class organisation.⁷⁰ And Sactu's external representation had almost no sources of information inside the emergent trade union movement in the late 1970s.⁷¹ While there was considerable political support for the ANC and SACP among the emerging unions' officials and members in the 1970s,⁷² the alliance had almost no organisational presence within the emerging unions.

These weaknesses fed fears that the new unions might develop into a working class centre independent of the alliance's influence and susceptible to state co-option. Abroad, some Sactu officials promoted their organisation as the sole legitimate representative of South Africa's (black) trade union movement, actively lobbied against

⁷⁰This same emphasis was a major factor in the suspension from alliance organisations in late 1979 and early 1980 of Paula Ensor, David Hemson, who had been prominent in the formation of trade unions in Natal in the early 1970s, Martin Legassick and Bob Petersen, who edited Sactu's journal, *Worker Unity*. The four were highly critical of the de-emphasis of class. They and others went on to form the Marxist Workers' Tendency of the ANC, which remained theoretically influential among pockets of activists for some years.

⁷¹Unrecorded conversations with former Sactu official David Davis, London, 1991-1992.

⁷²See Jeremy Baskin, *Striking Back*, pp.20-32.

direct contacts between external agencies and the emerging unions and demanded that all funds for domestic union reconstruction pass through it.⁷³

By early 1980, there were four main tendencies within the emerging trade union movement. They were defined more by differences of organisational style and tactics than by fundamentally antagonistic political currents.

The first of these tendencies had cohered in April 1979, when many of the best organised emerging trade unions grouped together in the Federation of South African Trade Unions (Fosatu).⁷⁴ Although it originated mainly from the Natal-based Trade Union Advisory Coordinating Committee (Tuacc) unions of the early 1970s, Fosatu had presences in the Cape and on the Witwatersrand.

A second tendency was based in the Western Cape. There, by 1979 the Western Province General Workers' Union (WPGWU) had developed out of the Workers' Advice Bureau, and the Food and Canning Workers' Unions (FCWU),⁷⁵ a former Sactu affiliate, had been resuscitated after a

⁷³Unrecorded conversations with David Davis, London, 1991-1992.

⁷⁴They were 12, mainly industrial unions, with a total paid-up membership of 20,000. Baskin, *Striking Back*, p.25.

⁷⁵Because of African workers' exclusion from the official industrial relations procedures, it was necessary formally to have two unions - one for Africans, the other for workers of other races - but the two operated as one.

period of decline. A third tendency developed out of a breakaway from the black consciousness-aligned Black Allied Workers' Union's (Bawu) in 1979. It resulted in the formation of the South African Allied Workers' Union (Saawu) and, a year later, of the General and Allied Workers' Union (Gawu).⁷⁶

These three tendencies shared a commitment to non-racial organisation consistent with policies of the ANC-SACP-Sactu alliance. But, whereas the Fosatu unions, FCWU and WPGWU tended to emphasise strong factory floor organisation, Saawu and Gawu sought to organise workers in black communities. Moreover, Fosatu avoided political campaigning, arguing it was not yet strong enough to advance worker political interests and survive a hostile state response. Fosatu's tactical perspective, which emphasised sectoral (in this case, working class) struggle challenged the multi-class nationalist project at the heart of the ANC-led alliance's perspective. Indeed, Fosatu's temporary avoidance of politics was based upon a critique of Sactu's subsumption within the nationalist movement during the late 1950s and early 1960s.

Two of the other tendencies, however, were less inhibited on political questions. The FCWU and WPGWU,

⁷⁶After these breakaways, Bawu slid into irrelevance. Samson Ndou, an important figure in the ANC's Soweto underground, and a number of his young proteges, including Sydney Mufamadi, were key figures in Gawu.

together with Saawu, sought community support for consumer boycotts of products produced by companies at which their members were engaged in industrial action.⁷⁷ IRD units, and attendant informal ANC underground structures, played important roles in organising these boycotts.⁷⁸

From 1980, Saawu actively sought a popular political role and led opposition to Ciskei bantustan 'independence', which meant that its leaders were regularly detained. On the other hand, Fosatu's motor union refused to support calls for strike action in Port Elizabeth in 1979 in support of political demands by the local black civic, Pebco. This led to the formation of a breakaway motor union, Macwusa, which supported calls for direct union involvement in political issues.

A fourth tendency among the emergent unions, based mainly on the Witwatersrand, was centred on the Consultative Committee of Black Trade Unions. It tended to organise only African workers and largely avoided direct political involvement. In 1980, most Consultative Committee unions formed a rival federation to Fosatu, the Council of Unions of South Africa (Cusa), which emphasised 'black

⁷⁷FCWU got community support in 1979 for a boycott of products of the food processing company, Fattis & Monis; WPGWU's dispute with meat processors in Cape Town resulted in a similar community boycott of red meat.

⁷⁸IV/Narsoo, pp.661-662, 674-675; IV/Momoniati, p.640. Barbara Hogan, one of the key figures in organising the boycotts, received a 10-year jail sentence for ANC activities in 1982.

leadership' while being formally non-racial.

Tensions between the tendencies were exacerbated by government labour reforms, the gist of which became apparent in May 1979. In its first report, the Wiehahn Commission of inquiry into industrial relations recommended that African workers be allowed to belong to trade unions that were registered participants in the official industrial relations system. The emerging unions believed the purpose of this suggested reform was to control them, or prevent them from being 'driven in a revolutionary direction'.⁷⁹

The state issued two provisos to this envisaged reform. The first, quickly dropped, sought to exclude 'contract' or 'foreign' workers (which included all workers from the 'independent' bantustans) from membership of registered unions. The government initially indicated it would insist on a second condition: that no racially mixed unions could be registered. This contradicted the non-racial principle espoused by most emerging unions.

The emerging union movement split over whether unions should register. Fosatu decided its affiliates would register, but only if they could do so as 'non-racial' unions. Several unions argued against registration,

⁷⁹Baskin, *Striking Back*, p.27; Steven Friedman, *Building Tomorrow Today*, p.156.

claiming that state controls would far outweigh the benefits of participation in the official industrial relations system, and that the unions would lose autonomy in order to acquire bureaucratic bargaining rights which would corrupt their internal democracy.⁸⁰

At root, the issue was whether or not the emergent unions were strong enough to gain practical advantages within state-approved bargaining structures. Fosatu believed its unions were. Moreover, its unions were industrial unions competing for workers' loyalties against a variety of less militant alternatives. There was a prospect that registration might help particular Fosatu unions achieve a position from which they could eventually negotiate wages and conditions across an entire industry. But the WPGWU, soon joined by Saawu, Gawu, Macwusa and others, argued the emergent unions were not strong enough to frustrate the state's designs.

The ANC-SACP-Sactu alliance's response to this debate was confused. The SACP politburo had endorsed Fosatu's formation in April 1979 and also its eschewal of political involvement. According to Maharaj, the SACP's reasoning behind this position was eccentric. Moses Mabhida, a senior member of both Sactu and the SACP,⁸¹ had managed to

⁸⁰Baskin, *Striking Back*, pp.27-28.

⁸¹Mabhida was elected SACP general secretary in late 1980. The SACP had no general secretary between the death of Moses Kotane in May 1978 and Mabhida's election. SACP, 'Moses Mabhida -

convince the politburo that, if Fosatu avoided politics, it could more easily be used as a recruiting ground for MK.⁸² It was 1960s thinking all over again.

Followed to its logical conclusion, this reasoning would have meant SACP support for union registration since the party would have wanted Fosatu to project a compliant political image to the state. This is not, however, the position the party evolved. Maharaj, a senior SACP member though not on the politburo, objected to its endorsement of Fosatu, arguing that Fosatu's leadership was 'economistic'⁸³ - that is, that it separated political from economic forms of struggle and concentrated on the latter. Maharaj was, strangely, denying Fosatu tactical flexibility in a situation which he recognised required much subtlety.

Sactu, meanwhile, chastened by a revolt in exile by the small group which became the Marxist Workers' Tendency of the ANC rejected registration and backed the least well-organised of the emerging trade unions, which were also the unions most responsive to ANC positions. So, too, did the ANC and SACP. The three allies assumed that the government's intentions behind the labour reforms would

Our New General Secretary', in *African Communist*, First Quarter, 1981, p.21.

⁸²IV/Maharaj, pp.418-419.

⁸³IV/Maharaj, pp.418-419.

necessarily prevail: trade unions that registered would be coopted and neutralised. Hence registration was equivalent to 'collaboration' with the state.

New Operational Structures, March 1980

New operational structures suggested by the strategic review and approved by the NEC in August 1979 were established only in March 1980. There were two significant breaks with the past (see Figure 3 overleaf).

The first was intended to improve coordination between political and military operational structures. Hitherto, operational political and military machineries had been obliged to operate entirely separately from each other in the forward areas and inside South Africa. Coordination of political and military operations could occur only at top level - that is, in meetings of the RC itself. Absenteeism and other weaknesses on the RC had meant that this arrangement had not worked well.

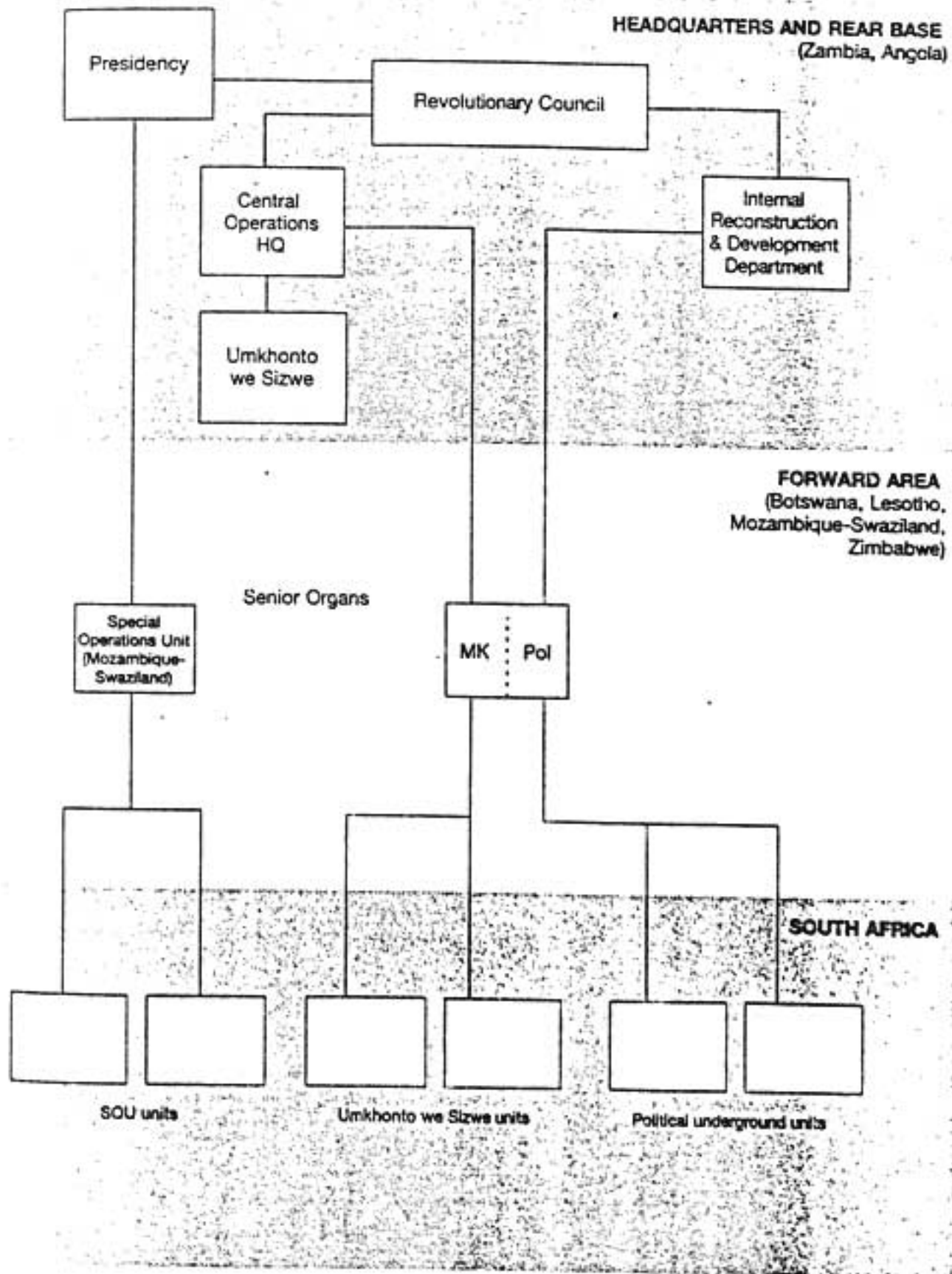
The new arrangement sought to make possible coordination at forward area level.⁸⁴ A new kind of operational organ would be established in each forward area. Known as the 'senior organ' it would be a sort of regional mini-revolutionary council.⁸⁵ It would bring

⁸⁴IV/Slovo, p.982.

⁸⁵IV/Slovo, pp.981-982.

ANC operational structures

Basic lines of command & co-ordination 1980 - 1982



together the most senior political and military operational officials (as well as the security and intelligence department, known as Nat)⁸⁶ in a forward area in order to coordinate their various specialisations.⁸⁷ Each senior organ would have responsibility for operations in a particular region of South Africa. The NEC, however, elaborated no plan at this stage to institutionalise coordination between political and military units inside South Africa.⁸⁸

The second change reflected a contradictory set of intentions and had contradictory results. It was the establishment of a military special operations unit (SOU),⁸⁹ for which Joe Slovo, deputy commander of COH, MK's operational command, had long lobbied and of which he was appointed head.⁹⁰ SOU was supposed to be the main vehicle for a campaign of armed propaganda suggested by the strategic review. It would mount spectacular armed actions to back up ANC political work and to keep alive the perspective of armed struggle as the ultimate means by which the ANC would achieve state power.⁹¹

⁸⁶IV/Maharaj, p.518.

⁸⁷IV/Slovo, p.982.

⁸⁸IV/Slovo, p.982.

⁸⁹IV/Kasrils, p.328; IV/Slovo, p.987.

⁹⁰IV/Slovo, p.328.

⁹¹IV/Slovo, p.971.

SOU did not fall under the RC, as might have been expected. Instead, it was answerable directly to the ANC president, Oliver Tambo.⁹² This line of command undermined attempts to improve coordination between political and military activities at forward area level.

The intention behind SOU's armed propaganda was not to substitute for attempts to root military formations firmly inside South Africa for a sustained popular armed struggle. Rather, armed propaganda actions were intended to complement these efforts at long-term building. But SOU could perform this complementary role only if it remained a sideshow to the main drama. Yet hit-and-run special operations came to dominate and drew energies and resources away from the painstaking business of building foundations for a protracted military campaign.

As it gripped the imagination of the ANC, the notion of armed propaganda provided the organisation with a rationalisation for the weaknesses of its military activity. Back in 1976, the ANC had seen a propagandistic purpose in armed activity, but the main objective was to engage its enemy in combat in what it considered the early stages of 'people's war'. In the course of the strategic review, however, Vietnamese revolutionaries had introduced

⁹²IV/Slovo, p.987; IV/Kasrils, p.328.

the ANC to armed propaganda as a formal concept.⁹³ And the ANC now seized upon it to recast the past. It began to redefine almost all its armed activity - not as heralding the early stages of people's war but rather, as being, and as *having been*, primarily propagandistic in its purpose. This recasting accurately reflected the limitations of ANC armed activity and the primary benefit the organisation had derived from it, namely popular acclaim, but it was a less than frank statement of original ANC intentions.

The notion of 'armed propaganda' was, however, consistent with the past. The detonator approach resonated through it. Kasrils' notes of this period:

[W]e always felt that we had the people; there was this militancy; and that all that was needed was a little bit of a spark to light a prairie fire. So, you know, if you believe in that,..you are looking for the...guerilla strike, rather than the long-term approach to building the base.⁹⁴

For Maharaj and a few other officials, notwithstanding the improved coordination promised by the senior organs, the new structures condoned damaging separation and parallelism between political and military operations. Maharaj, while acknowledging that 'coordination' between political and military structures was preferable to no

⁹³Vietnamese armed propaganda had comprised incidents such as guerillas boarding a bus and, with weapons in hand, addressing its passengers; or an armed group taking over a cinema and addressing its patrons. *IV/Maharaj*, pp.429-430; *IV/Slovo*, p.988.

⁹⁴*IV/Kasrils*, p.313.

cooperation at all, now argued that operational structures would be further improved if they were 'integrated'. Coordination meant that political and military structures were first drawing up their operational plans separately and 'marrying' them into one plan.⁹⁵ Maharaj wanted to reverse this order of planning. The 'integration' he proposed meant two things. It meant the leadership would analyse the situation, identify operational needs and determine operational plans for political and military structures.⁹⁶ Second, political structures had to set the parameters of military operations at all levels - on the RC, in the forward areas and inside South Africa.⁹⁷ In Maharaj's opinion, structures arising out of the review still allowed military commanders to behave as if the purpose of political work was merely to facilitate armed activity.⁹⁸ Moreover, the RC would - and did - retain a perspective and a balance favouring the military.⁹⁹

From August 1979 to March 1984, as in the past, ANC machineries in Mozambique and Swaziland mounted most ANC

⁹⁵IV/Maharaj, p.430.

⁹⁶IV/Maharaj, p.429-30.

⁹⁷IV/Maharaj, pp.429-430.

⁹⁸IV/Maharaj, p.446.

⁹⁹IV/Maharaj, pp.430-433. The IRD's RC members were its chairman, John Motshabi, its deputy-chairman, John Nkadimeng, who was on the RC in his own right rather than as an IRD representative, Maharaj, and Reg September.

operations into South Africa.¹⁰⁰ ANC structures there were still twinned in a single operational entity.¹⁰¹ From March 1980, these operational structures came under the command of the newly-created Mozambique-based senior organ.¹⁰² The scale of this senior organ's activities and the rank of its members gave it unrivalled influence in strategic debates in this period.¹⁰³

The chairman of the Mozambique senior organ was John Nkadimeng,¹⁰⁴ who also headed its subsidiary political machinery. Chairman of the ANC's Transvaal underground leadership in the mid-1970s, he now also served on the NEC¹⁰⁵ and RC,¹⁰⁶ where he was deputy chairman of IRD.¹⁰⁷ Jacob Zuma was secretary of both the Mozambique senior organ and its political machinery.¹⁰⁸ Formerly a key figure in the Natal underground, he was now also a

¹⁰⁰IV/Pillay, p.797.

¹⁰¹IV/Kasrils, pp.318, 321; IV/Rabkin, p.827 (Contribution in course of interview by Mohammed Timol [alias Farouk]).

¹⁰²IV/Kasrils, p.315.

¹⁰³Senior organs were also established in Botswana and Lesotho. None was set up in Zimbabwe after it achieved independence on April 17 1980.

¹⁰⁴IV/Maharaj, p.432.

¹⁰⁵Shelagh Gastrow, *Who's Who Number 3*, p.275.

¹⁰⁶IV/Maharaj, p.432.

¹⁰⁷IV/Maharaj, p.432.

¹⁰⁸IV/Maharaj, pp.432-433.

member of IRD¹⁰⁹ and the NEC.¹¹⁰ The other representative of the political machinery on the senior organ was Ronnie Kasrils,¹¹¹ who had spent several years in ANC camps as a political commissar after the Soweto uprisings.

The military machinery on the Mozambique senior organ was headed by Slovo. Other military members included Peter Sello Motau (alias Paul Dikeledi),¹¹² Lennox Lagu, a Wankie campaign veteran,¹¹³ and Bob Tati.¹¹⁴

Slovo also headed SOU, the new special operations machinery, on which he concentrated. In SOU, he gathered around him 'the best' of the new ANC recruits.¹¹⁵ They included Motso 'Obadi' Mokgabudi¹¹⁶ and Richard 'Barney' Molokoane, both highly regarded military commanders. Slovo also secured first call on operational resources for SOU in

¹⁰⁹IV/Maharaj, p.433.

¹¹⁰Gastrow, *Who's Who Number 3*, p.368.

¹¹¹IV/Kasrils, p.314; IV/Maharaj, p.433.

¹¹²IV/Kasrils, p.315; IV/Rabkin, pp.882-883.

¹¹³IV/Kasrils, pp.315, 328; IV/Rabkin, pp.882-883.

¹¹⁴IV/Kasrils, p.315; IV/Rabkin, pp.882-883.

¹¹⁵IV/Strachan, p.1,142; IV/Maharaj, p.457.

¹¹⁶IV/Kasrils, p.333. Mokgabudi was recruited to MK a few months before the Soweto uprising. SACP, '65 Years'. Some considered him a potential future commander of MK. IV/Maharaj, p.504.

this period.¹¹⁷ This created some bitterness among political machineries. A member of the political machinery recalls: 'You just had to say, "We can blow up such and such", and all the money was directed there.'¹¹⁸

Parallel to Slovo's SOU in Mozambique was the other military structure, COH, charged with rooting an ANC military presence inside South Africa en route to a popular armed struggle. Its leading commanders in Mozambique-Swaziland included Mduduzi Guma (alias Nkululeko), a lawyer who worked in the ANC's Natal underground before the Soweto uprising who now commanded the machinery of MK in Natal covering both urban and rural areas;¹¹⁹ Zweli Nyanda (alias Douglas) who worked with Guma in Natal; and his brother, Siphwe Nyanda (alias Gebuza), formerly a recruiter for MK in Johannesburg in 1975 who now commanded the Transvaal urban machinery of MK.¹²⁰

Whatever the improvements to coordination at senior organ level, members of the new body were severely stretched trying to coordinate the activities of at least six machineries from Mozambique down lines of communication that had to pass through Swaziland into South Africa. To

¹¹⁷IV/Strachan, p.1,142; IV/Rabkin, p.812.

¹¹⁸IV/Rabkin, p.812.

¹¹⁹Umsebenzi, Volume Two, Issue No.4, Fourth Quarter 1986; IV/Rabkin, pp.893-894; IV/Kasrils, p.332.

¹²⁰IV/Kasrils, p.328, 333.

cover the urban areas of the Transvaal, there were separate political and military machineries. To cover Transvaal rural areas, there were similarly separate political and military machineries. And in Natal, there were separate political and military machineries.¹²¹ In addition, Slovo's SOU had its own line of command up to Tambo, the ANC president, and down to his units.

Early Debates in the Mozambique Senior Organ

Tambo visited Mozambique as the senior organ was being established in March-April 1980. Addressing its members, he called for an end to the dislocation which had previously afflicted operational structures. Kasrils recalls that Tambo

outlined some of the problems...comrades not being able to work with each other, particularly the military and political underground... [He said] we needed to find a way of overcoming this problem which, he said, had been raised as a problem time and again, the fact that we were operating like virtually two different organisations... [T]he trip to Vietnam had shown that what was essential was that we find a way of building...integrated forces, and of building our base at home... [U]nless we had that underground base, it was not going to be possible to really develop the armed struggle... [He said] it was up to us... We should not be hidebound by the past...¹²²

Encouraged by Tambo, Zuma and Kasrils argued for

¹²¹IV/Kasrils, p.320.

¹²²IV/Kasrils, p.315.

integration of political and military structures¹²³ - along lines suggested by Maharaj, but taking matters further. They argued that there needed to be a *single, integrated* political-military command in the senior organ engaged in building a *single* underground in the region of South Africa for which that senior organ was responsible; in turn, the command structure of that underground should oversee all specialisations in that region, including military activity.¹²⁴ Whereas Maharaj was prepared to countenance separate political and military lines of command at both RC and senior organ level,¹²⁵ Zuma and Kasrils were not.

Zuma and Kasrils' proposals received majority support on the Mozambique senior organ.¹²⁶ But Slovo strongly opposed them, saying that they could not be implemented without RC approval.¹²⁷ A month later, the senior organ received the RC's decision: it had rejected the proposals.¹²⁸ Kasrils was enraged. He and Slovo had a fierce confrontation.¹²⁹ Cassius Make, assistant secretary of the RC, and Maharaj were dispatched from RC

¹²³IV/Kasrils, p.315.

¹²⁴IV/Kasrils, pp.315-317.

¹²⁵IV/Kasrils, p.317.

¹²⁶IV/Kasrils, p.316.

¹²⁷IV/Kasrils, p.315.

¹²⁸IV/Kasrils, pp.315-316.

¹²⁹IV/Kasrils, p.316.

headquarters in Lusaka to Maputo, according to Kasrils, 'to try to sort things out because of the way we had argued with their decision...to continue with separate structures'.¹³⁰ Zuma and Kasrils might have hoped for Maharaj's support. But they did not get it. Maharaj was fighting his own particular battles on the RC and was livid about a comment that Kasrils had made - that political structures were in a 'chaotic' state. According to Kasrils, Slovo and Maharaj 'really went for' him.¹³¹

Years later, Kasrils was to conclude that the explanation for the defeat lay in the vagaries of 'exile politics': the recommendations had threatened certain individuals' positions, the existence of their departments and their 'empires'; his and Zuma's criticisms were interpreted as attacks on these individuals; and these individuals had responded accordingly.¹³²

Military operational policy after the Strategic Review

Slovo, meanwhile, was developing his own perspective on the way forward. He produced a document, 'Our Military Perspectives and Some Special Problems', which the RC adopted shortly after Zimbabwe's independence in April 1980. It dealt with armed activity under two headings. The

¹³⁰IV/Kasrils, p.316.

¹³¹IV/Kasrils, p.316.

¹³²IV/Kasrils, p.316.

first was armed propaganda; the second, the longer-term objective of developing a sustained armed struggle inside South Africa. It contained an implicit endorsement of the *coordinated* approach to operational structures, making no concession to the integrated approaches suggested by Maharaj or Kasrils and Zuma.

In line with the strategic review, Slovo's document accepted that armed activity was temporarily of 'secondary' importance and that political mobilisation by political means remained 'the main task'.¹³³ But armed activity had a vital contribution to make towards domestic political mobilisation¹³⁴ and had to be guided by the requirements of it.¹³⁵ MK attacks should be tailored to IRD's political campaign to popularise the Freedom Charter inside South Africa.¹³⁶ Slovo reasoned that

Every clause in the Freedom Charter pointed to a target which would serve to highlight a particular demand. For example, the blasting of a court, of a government Bantu Education building, a rent office, of a pass office, would assert the principle that there should be justice for all, that there should be free and equal education, that there should be houses for all, and that there should be freedom of movement.¹³⁷

¹³³IV/Slovo, p.985.

¹³⁴IV/Slovo, p.985.

¹³⁵IV/Slovo, p.985.

¹³⁶IV/Slovo, pp.987-988.

¹³⁷IV/Slovo, p.988.

MK's high rate of casualties, which was now admitted,¹³⁸ did not mean it should temporarily suspend armed activity. The RC endorsed Slovo's view that 'People's revolutionary violence [was] the ultimate weapon for the seizure of power'.¹³⁹ The 'key perspective' was 'the creation of a national liberation army with popularly-rooted internal rear bases'.¹⁴⁰ According to Slovo,

We defined the purpose of our armed activity at the time as being to create a network of political revolutionary bases which would become the foundation of our people's war.¹⁴¹

The ANC believed the recent independence of Zimbabwe vindicated this military approach in the eyes of the ANC's potential constituency.¹⁴² The RC, like Slovo, also believed that an increase in MK's 'quality and striking power' over the previous 18 months made this perspective realistic.¹⁴³

How many combatants were active in South Africa in 1980 is unclear. But the rate of MK attacks and casualties,¹⁴⁴ suggests there were no more than a few

¹³⁸IV/Slovo, p.986.

¹³⁹IV/Slovo, p.985.

¹⁴⁰IV/Slovo, p.987.

¹⁴¹IV/Slovo, p.985.

¹⁴²IV/Slovo, pp.985-986.

¹⁴³IV/Slovo, p.986.

¹⁴⁴In 1979 and 1980, police recorded 31 incidents of insurgent armed violence. In the same period, the state arrested or killed 51 ANC combatants. Stadler, *Harms Commission Statistics*, pp.1,021, 1,024.

score MK cadres operating inside the country at any one time. MK was still experiencing 'particularly severe' difficulties in situating guerillas in rural areas, and had approached Vietnam for training on adapting to the terrain.¹⁴⁵ In urban areas, the problem of survival for MK combatants had been only 'partly solved'.¹⁴⁶

MK was still 'unable to act effectively in support and defence of our people', according to Slovo.¹⁴⁷ This limited the kinds of attacks MK could mount against security forces. Slovo recalls:

We were considering...the role of armed activity in relation to mass demonstrations... We were still a long way from having sufficient armed strength to defend the people in the mass against the armed terror of the enemy. An ill-judged military intervention on our part...during a mass assembly of people could lead to a massacre with little hope of effective retaliation.¹⁴⁸

The alternative was to '[hit] the enemy at his points of muster and rendezvous'.¹⁴⁹

The RC also concluded that it had to prepare for another round of uprisings inside South Africa. According to Slovo,

We recognised that, in such an upsurge, the conditions under which we survived and operated

¹⁴⁵IV/Slovo, p.990.

¹⁴⁶IV/Slovo, p.990.

¹⁴⁷IV/Slovo, p.988.

¹⁴⁸IV/Slovo, p.988.

¹⁴⁹IV/Slovo, p.988.

would...dramatically change. The normal law enforcement agencies of the enemy would be either weakened or break down altogether - as happened at times during the Soweto revolt... We had to be ready for a situation in which we could enter a region in large numbers, relying on the massive and overwhelming mood of militancy to provide cover and protection. Depending on the character of this upsurge, we believed that this perspective would apply with equal force for political cadres, from the leadership to the rank and file. So we had to be prepared. It was, in our view, particularly important to build up within the country adequate supplies of ordinance which would be protected and adequately preserved for use when such a time came; stores which would be sufficient for our professional cadres, as well as material such as hand grenades and small arms which could be distributed to selected groups of people.¹⁵⁰

The RC now also haltingly asserted the need for MK attacks in the bantustans. Hitherto, MK had been restrained from mounting attacks in bantustans because the ANC feared that MK attacks might confuse local populations who, given the almost complete absence of ANC political work in these areas, believed the bantustans might be the first step towards black liberation. Moreover, the ANC had hoped to be able to develop the bantustans as survival bases for MK units.¹⁵¹ By early 1980, however, the RC believed that local populations recognised the bogus character of bantustan 'independence'.¹⁵² Moreover, any MK presence in the bantustans would lead to direct reoccupation by South African security forces, which would further expose the

¹⁵⁰IV/Slovo, pp.988-989.

¹⁵¹IV/Slovo, p.989.

¹⁵²IV/Slovo, p.990.

bantustans' fraudulent political promise.¹⁵³

The RC also drew up plans to take advantage of Zimbabwe's independence by opening up a new front of MK infiltration along the 250-odd kilometres of border with South Africa. The RC aimed to use Zimbabwean territory as a springboard for a classic rural guerilla war in two zones of the northern Transvaal: a western zone from Messina to the area just south of Botswana's Tuli Block; the eastern zone from Messina through Venda to the Kruger National Park.¹⁵⁴ The RC envisaged that guerillas would move from Zimbabwe through Botswana into the western zone; and, for the eastern zone, directly into South Africa from both Mozambique and Zimbabwe.¹⁵⁵ The RC planned to infiltrate guerillas in large numbers - up to platoon¹⁵⁶ and eventually company strength¹⁵⁷ - and settle them in the terrain. They were to undertake armed actions, begin to contact local people and train them.¹⁵⁸ At the time, the ANC had about 100 MK members inside Zimbabwe itself under the command of Zapu's guerilla army, Zipra, with perhaps another 150 in gorges on the Zambian side of the Zambezi River moving periodically into Zimbabwe, again under Zipra

¹⁵³IV/Glovo, p.990.

¹⁵⁴IV/Strachan, pp.1,184-1,185.

¹⁵⁵IV/Strachan, p.1,184-1,185.

¹⁵⁶About 30.

¹⁵⁷About 100.

¹⁵⁸IV/Strachan, pp.1,184-1,185.

command.¹⁵⁹

The general RC view was that armed activity gave the ANC unrivalled credibility among its potential constituency.¹⁶⁰ IRD machineries, on the other hand, while not disputing that armed activity helped to create favourable domestic conditions for the ANC in a general sense, believed it was not helping to organise an ANC domestic political-military base - the single most important task given that the ANC was unlikely ever to enjoy reliable bases in states adjacent to South Africa, a point which the RC conceded in its 1980 deliberations.¹⁶¹

Military Operations, April - December, 1980

Armed operations inside South Africa in 1980 reflected the continued absence of a domestic network for absorbing guerillas. MK was responsible for at least 16 of the 19 insurgent incidents reported in 1980.¹⁶² But the price was high: police captured or killed 28 MK personnel.¹⁶³ This meant about three MK guerillas were neutralised for

¹⁵⁹IV/Strachan, p.1,185.

¹⁶⁰IV/Slovo. p.986.

¹⁶¹IV/Slovo, pp.991-992.

¹⁶²Stadler, 'Dade' ['Acts']. Booyse, 'Monthly Breakdown'. Southern African Research Service, 'Chronology of Conflict', in *Work in Progress*, No.18, 1981.

¹⁶³Stadler, *Harms Commission Statistics*, p.1,024.

every two attacks, most of them modest.

Little progress was made towards a guerilla war in the northern Transvaal. The ANC sent probing missions into Lebowa, Venda and Pietersburg, among others.¹⁶⁴ But tensions between political and military leaders on a commission overseeing the project undermined progress. Whereas the political machinery wanted slow preparations, the military were impatient for action.¹⁶⁵

A string of spectacular acts of armed propaganda in early June - mounted by SOU - obscured MK's weakness. They included attacks on South Africa's Sasol oil-from-coal plants at Sasolburg and Secunda. An attack on Booyens police station, two kilometres from the centre of Johannesburg was similarly dramatic. The Sasol attacks - in early June, in the build-up to the anniversaries of both the Soweto uprisings on the 16th and the adoption of the Freedom Charter on the 26th - were timed for militant black South Africa's political 'high season'. In the Booyens attack in early April, MK combatants left behind them leaflets demanding the release of Nelson Mandela and other political prisoners, which fed into the political campaign on the issue.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶⁴IV/Maharaj, p.499.

¹⁶⁵IV/Maharaj, p.499.

¹⁶⁶IV/Slovo, p.987; *Sunday Post*, 6/4/80; This connection was also made by the head of the security police in *The Star*, 5/4/80.

These attacks indicated that MK now had new arms better suited to its tasks. The Sasol attacks appear to have been the first instances in which limpet mines were used inside South Africa.¹⁶⁷ Likewise, the Booyens attack was evidently the first recorded instance of an RPG rocket launcher being used in an insurgent attack in the country.¹⁶⁸

Political reconstruction, April - December, 1980

During 1980, school boycotts started among African and 'coloured' students in the Western Cape and spread across the country. The origins of the boycotts lay in the lower per capita expenditure on education for blacks and grossly unfair schooling for Africans. They prompted yet another exodus of militant young blacks into the ANC, a number of whom were inspired to join by the attacks on Sasol.¹⁶⁹ The boycotts enabled ANC front organisations, such as Cosas and Azaso, to take some political lead. However, when the boycotts spread to African schools in Natal in April 1980, Buthelezi set about suppressing them, so precipitating a conflict with the ANC which ended any pretensions of friendship between the two. The ANC's attempt to draw Buthelezi and Inkatha into a close relationship gave way to

¹⁶⁷Stadler, *Harms Commission Statistics*, p.1,034.

¹⁶⁸*Sunday Post*, 6/4/80; Stadler, 'Dade' ['Acts'], pp.2-9.

¹⁶⁹Conversations with a young ANC cadre, who used the *nom de guerre* Afrika, in Harare in 1987-1988.

mutual vilification. Buthelezi alleged that the ANC planned to kill him.¹⁷⁰ In fact, Tambo, in response to calls from some ANC members for Buthelezi's assassination, ordered that no ANC member was to try to kill Buthelezi - a restraint some found difficult.¹⁷¹ Tambo insisted Buthelezi should be defeated politically.¹⁷²

The enmity with Buthelezi and the Inkatha leadership created considerable problems for the ANC in Natal.¹⁷³ The ANC's presence among Africans in Natal was weak; its political organisation there was strongest among the Indian community.¹⁷⁴ Political machineries had to begin a protracted process of eating away at the edges of Inkatha's support. Ivan Pillay, who worked in the ANC political machinery in Swaziland, recalls:

Throughout this period, one of the ways [we] advanced in combating Inkatha was to try to cut the ground from under their feet by drawing ordinary Inkatha membership into struggle over ordinary bread and butter issues.¹⁷⁵

Housing and civic associations in the Natal area and trade unions were the main vehicles of this creeping ANC offensive.

¹⁷⁰Sunday Tribune, 20/7/80.

¹⁷¹IV/Rabkin, pp.811, 904; IV/Pillay, p.795.

¹⁷²IV/Pillay, p.795.

¹⁷³IV/Rabkin, p.904; IV/Pillay, pp.769, 791-795.

¹⁷⁴IV/Rabkin, p.904.

¹⁷⁵IV/Pillay, p.794.

For MK cadres operating into Natal, Inkatha's hostility entailed greater costs. The ANC had acquired an additional, well-organised and ruthless enemy who inhabited a large part of the terrain MK combatants had to traverse after passing through Mozambique and Swaziland. The prospects for progress towards a 'people's war' had received another serious setback.

Conclusion

Between August 1979 and December 1980, the ANC had mixed success in carrying forward the perspective developed in its strategic review. Armed activity continued to give the ANC unrivalled authority in militant circles, which benefited ANC or crypto-ANC attempts at political organisation. But the ANC's political and armed struggles merely encouraged separate, parallel development of each. They did not develop the symbiotic relationship required by the doctrine of 'people's war'.

This continued political-military parallelism had much to do with ANC operational structures, which remained inappropriate to the objectives they were intended to service. The 'senior organs' in the forward areas helped introduce a modicum of operational coordination between political and military structures. But rivalries and insecurities on the NEC and the RC obstructed closer cooperation.

IRD, the political reconstruction department, became more active inside South Africa at both underground and popular legal levels. The strategic review did not induce this increase in IRD activity; rather, IRD's approach and initiatives predated the review, which merely endorsed them *post facto*. Nor did the increase in IRD's activities result from significantly more resources being put at its disposal. There does not seem to have been any marked reallocation of resources away from military structures towards political reconstruction; the opposite may even have been the case. Moreover, the review did not alter IRD's priorities; IRD was not working for the formation of a front of popular organisations allied to the ANC, an idea suggested in the review; instead, at the level of popular politics, IRD sought to stimulate ANC-aligned organisation in any form possible.

The small ANC underground moved skilfully to secure its presence within legal, national popular bodies, such as Azapo, Azaso and Cosas. Its involvement in helping develop local civic and welfare organisations would prove to be perhaps more important. Here, the ANC's modest efforts were helped by the view then developing among various black strata that, repression notwithstanding, popular organisation in the legal and semi-legal spheres could produce tangible gains. Some emergent trade unions were particularly credible instances of this. But the pattern was not restricted to industrial workers. Prototypical

civic organisations began to develop in townships, some with ANC involvement, pre-eminent among them Pebco in Port Elizabeth.

But the weakness of the ANC and its collection of allied popular organisations (relative to the state and the ideological residue of the black consciousness movement) pushed the ANC towards a strategy of non-participation in, and boycott of, state-approved institutions. The decision to boycott elections for the SAIC was an example, rationalised by reference to the principle of non-collaboration.

The ANC would gradually become locked into two assumptions. The first was that any participation in state-created or state-approved institutions would necessarily entail the corruption or cooption by the state of the participant's own purposes. The second followed from the first: that participation in state-approved institutions therefore amounted to collaboration with the state.

Insisting upon a strategy of boycott, despite the risks of alienating possible allies, was vital if the ANC was to be able to justify its past and its present. The ANC could not defend its current armed struggle if, as Fosatu and Inkatha were claiming in their different ways, participation in state-approved bodies provided a credible path to achieving meaningful progress or fundamental

democratic change.

On the military side, the concept of 'armed propaganda' provided a basis for rationalising the weaknesses of the ANC's armed struggle, the pattern and results of which remained much the same as before the review. Armed struggle still comprised mainly sporadic sabotage attacks mounted by hit-and-run units that were usually commanded and supplied from abroad. The only difference after the review was that a few spectaculars, such as the Sasol attacks, disguised MK's actual weakness while having a very considerable propaganda effect. ANC armed activity still posed a minimal military threat to the South African state while it exacted a high cost in casualties among MK cadres.

Armed propaganda appears also to have been a ruse of sorts against political operational structures. Slovo's newly-created SOU provided a cover under which operational resources would be allocated to the military in terms of a decision to bolster political organising!

Yet, whatever the talent for rationalisation and manoeuvring on the RC, the victory of politics by political means was imminent - as the next chapter will reveal.

CHAPTER SIX

TOWARDS A BROAD FRONT

And Other Desirable Accidents, January 1981 - January 1983

[B]y sheer accident, despite the [ANC] military's wishes, for the first time, military work was a complement to political work... [V]isibly through the media, the matter became presented as a unified thing: that military action was complementing political action, and political action facilitating military action.

Mac Maharaj.¹

Introduction

The two rationalisations central to ANC strategy, armed propaganda and the boycott of state-approved institutions, would serve the ANC well over the next two years. The former would continue to give it considerable political authority, while the latter would become the main criterion for the building of a popular political alliance in the legal and semi-legal spheres. There would, however, be no improvement in the ANC's ability to coordinate the political and military sides of its operations. Political mobilisation over this period would gradually achieve its own separate dynamic and, almost imperceptibly, perhaps a greater significance than the armed activity it was supposed to service.

¹IV/Maharaj, p.439.

The Anti-Republic Campaign

In early 1981, the South African government announced a month of festivities to culminate on May 31 in a celebration of the 20th anniversary of the declaration of a republic. Some on the Revolutionary Council (RC) saw an opportunity. The advance notice of the festivities - 'a critical blunder' by the state, in Maharaj's view² - gave the ANC time to organise a counter-campaign. The state's scheduling the celebrations to last a month only compounded the error of the early announcement.³ The ANC could now 'take every little pocket of activity' which it and its allies had developed inside South Africa 'and give it a sense of belonging to something central'.⁴

More than 50 organisations - including churches, universities, political and student organisations - committed themselves to boycotting the celebrations.⁵ In exile, the separate political and military structures of the RC - internal reconstruction and development department (IRD), central operations headquarters (COH) and the special operations unit (SOU) - planned their campaigns.

The result was the ANC's most successful year inside South Africa since the Rivonia setback in 1963. MK mounted

²IV/Maharaj, p.471.

³IV/Maharaj, p.439.

⁴IV/Maharaj, p.471.

⁵The Star, 28/5/81.

more than twice the number of attacks in any year since 1976. It was responsible for most, if not all, of 55 attacks in 1981.⁶ Ten of these were mounted in May, as the state-sponsored celebrations neared their climax.⁷

The year also saw MK end its unofficial moratorium on attacks against the bantustans. MK combatants in East London mounted three attacks on Ciskei bantustan security forces living in the township of Mdantsane;⁸ in Venda in October, they destroyed a police station at Sibasa, killing two constables; and, at Schoemansdal, in the KaNgwane homeland in November, guerillas attacked a small South African Defence Force barrack house with RPG rockets, grenades and rifles.

For the first time since 1976, the number of attacks (55) clearly exceeded the number of MK combatants arrested or killed by police (21).⁹ At least eight incidents involved the use of limpet mines, introduced the previous

⁶Booyse gives a total of 55 attacks, against Stadler's 59. But Stadler's total appears to include three attacks on offices of the Progressive Federal Party mounted by an independent group of white radicals, plus another incident which does not, in my opinion, qualify as insurgent armed activity. Booyse, 'Monthly Breakdown'; Stadler, 'Dade'; General Herman Stadler, 'Terrorism in the RSA. Target Selection. Period: 1 January 1976 - 30 September 1990', in *App/A/17.1*.

⁷Interestingly most of these 10 attacks occurred in Durban and were carried out by one of the few MK 'auxiliary units' MK managed to establish. *IV/Pillay*, p.764.

⁸Stadler, 'Dade'.

⁹Stadler, *Harms Commission Statistics*, Vol.No.14, p.1,024.

year; one involved RPG launchers; and one, an attack on the town of Voortrekkerhoogte outside Pretoria, the use of a 122mm rocket launcher, the largest piece of insurgent weaponry yet detected in South Africa.

On January 30 1981, however, South African security forces exacted a heavy blow. In an attack on the headquarters in Matola, Mozambique, of SOU and the Natal machinery of MK, they killed, among others, Slovo's right hand man in SOU, Obadi Mokgabudi, and the commander of MK in Natal, Mduduzi Guma.

For Maharaj, the success of the Anti-Republic Campaign lay in how,

[b]y sheer accident, despite the [ANC] military's wishes, for the first time, military work was a complement to political work... [V]isibly through the media, the matter became presented as a unified thing: that military action was complementing political action, and political action facilitating military action.¹⁰

The campaign evinced, for Maharaj, how much could be achieved with a modicum of political-military coordination. Progress could be accelerated, he argued, if political-military integration was achieved in operational structures. But the MK command believed that the success of the anti-Republic campaign vindicated the status quo in operational structures.¹¹

¹⁰IV/Maharaj, p.439.

¹¹IV/Maharaj, p.531.

First Call for a United Front

The alliance-building that occurred during the Anti-Republic campaign convinced some in the political underground that new conditions were developing, creating new possibilities. In May 1981¹², the young ANC-aligned Soweto activist, Popo Molefe, called in a speech to the national conference of the South African Council of Churches (SACC) for 'a united front'. He said:

The broad front envisaged here is the major challenge of the day and can be pursued in the following manner: By formulating initially an *ad hoc* committee consisting of all social, political, religious and cultural organisations from all sections of the oppressed masses. It must be noted that we are talking of political bodies, sports bodies, churches, teachers organisations, workers, nurses associations, etc. We mention the following few organisations as an example: Azapo, Azaso, The Committee of Ten and the [Soweto Civic Association], [Media Workers' Association of South Africa], [Teachers' Action Committee]... The purpose of the *ad hoc* committee would be to consult in order to formulate similar stances on national issues like commemorations, boycotts, etc...¹³

Molefe now discloses that behind his call lay much clandestine discussion. There had been an ongoing debate in the ANC underground about the possibility of building a front. He and others believed that the ANC needed to draw a wide range of non-members into the struggle against

¹²State versus Baleka and Others. Supreme Court of South Africa. Transvaal Provincial Division. Record, in Department of Historical Papers, Cullen Library, University of Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, at AK2117, Vol.247 pp.13,154-13,156. See also Exhibit DA13.

¹³Ibid.

apartheid, and a front might provide the best way of doing so.¹⁴ Moreover, says Molefe, ANC external mission officials, who included Maharaj¹⁵, had also been involved in the discussions which dated back to about 1978¹⁶ - the year before the strategic review reported. Participants found there was broad agreement on the need for a front; but at no stage on this (or on any other) issue did the external mission issue an instruction to underground members.¹⁷

Molefe says that, when he called for a united front in May 1981, he had not been briefed on the 1978-79 strategic review - although he cannot discount the possibility that ANC external mission personnel 'might have used the contents of that document without expressly stating so'.¹⁸ In the event, Molefe's call in May 1981 for the formation of the broad united front in South Africa came to nought.

The Programme for Area Political Committees

Some in the external mission were also seized with exploiting the new conditions they saw opening up.¹⁹ In

¹⁴IV/Molefe, p.625.

¹⁵IV/Molefe, p.629.

¹⁶IV/Molefe, pp.626, 628-629.

¹⁷IV/Molefe, p.626.

¹⁸IV/Molefe, p.625.

¹⁹IV/Maharaj, p.440.

September 1981, a few months after the end of the anti-Republic campaign, the Revolutionary Council held an extended meeting²⁰ to consider the way forward.²¹ The major problems remained the fractured character of the ANC domestic presence and the absence of internal underground leadership.²²

The meeting suggested a remarkable remedy for these problems, which promised complete victory for the 'integrationists'. It recommended that the RC develop in each area of South Africa an underground leadership, or area political committee (APC), controlling all operational specialisations locally including military activity (see Figure 4, overleaf).²³ Other specialisations under each APC's control would include intelligence and security, labour, logistics, mass mobilisation and propaganda.²⁴ The area to be covered by each APC would be determined by

²⁰'Extended' in the sense that individuals from forward area operational machineries who would not normally attend an RC meeting were invited. *IV/Maharaj*, p.440.

²¹*IV/Maharaj*, p.439. In the same interview [pp.451-452], Maharaj has doubts about the date of this meeting, suggesting it may have been a year earlier. But Kasrils and Pillay back up 1981 as the date of the adoption of the APC document and the development of its principles. *IV/Kasrils*, pp.318-319. *IV/Pillay*, pp.751, 757. In a London-Johannesburg telephone call to Maharaj to clarify the issue on 15/3/92, Maharaj was able to confirm September 1981 as the month in which the RC adopted the APC document.

²²*IV/Strachan*, p.1,142.

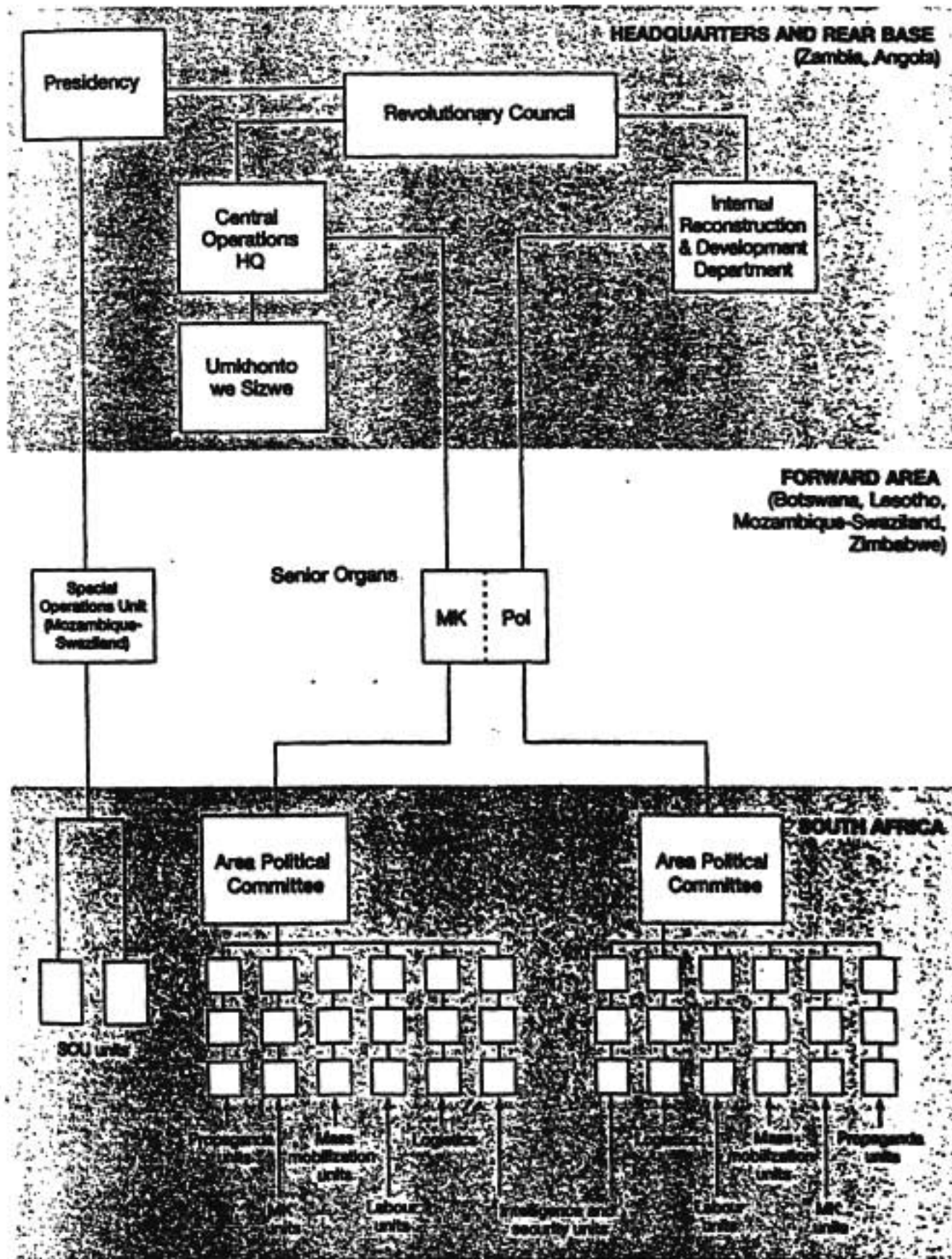
²³*IV/Maharaj*, pp.440-444.

²⁴*IV/Rabkin*, p.876.

ANC operational structures

Basic lines of command & co-ordination

The Area Political Committee Document Sept 1981 – Sept 1982



'political cohesiveness'.²⁵ Each APC would reflect the overall leadership of a political structure.²⁶ Military membership of an APC would probably be restricted to the political commissar of an MK group in an area.²⁷ The remarkable aspect was that the MK command accepted it, so conceding that military units in the field could be controlled by domestic political structures.²⁸ It is not clear if the military realised what it had done at this stage.

To ensure the APC programme worked, the RC decided that 'senior members' of the external mission should be sent into the country for short periods to help build these new organs.²⁹ It believed the conditions now existed in which this could be done.³⁰ Moreover, past failures meant the direct involvement of senior leadership necessary. Young political organisers and military commanders sent

²⁵IV/Maharaj, p.450.

²⁶IV/Maharaj, p.440, 444. IV/Rabkin, p.874.

²⁷IV/Maharaj, p.444. IV/Rabkin, p.874.

²⁸IV/Maharaj, p.446. One exception was allowed to this, however - although, for security reasons it could not be openly discussed at the extended RC meeting. It was decided to exclude from the ambit of the APC document the Transvaal urban machinery of MK, headed by Sphiwe Nyanda (alias Gebuza), which had recently made some progress in situating its command inside the country. Rather than disturb its progress by imposing an APC structure upon it, the meeting, with Maharaj's agreement, allowed for an unspecified exception to the APC rule. IV/Maharaj, p.443-444.

²⁹IV/Maharaj, p.440-441.

³⁰IV/Maharaj, p.448.

into the country to build underground structures in the past had usually lacked the authority and maturity for the task.³¹ A number of people on the RC were moving towards the opinion that building the underground required 'top-down' building³² - first building a central command structure staffed by heavyweights and then recruiting for, and setting up, subsidiary structures.

The ANC's unusual generational profile had long complicated its attempts to build an internal underground. The ANC was short of middle-level cadres of personal and political maturity. The reason was that the ANC lacked a 'middle generation'. Between 1965 and 1974, the external mission had received very few recruits, while inside South Africa the ANC's minuscule presence had not developed a new generation of militants. There had been some 200-odd recruits to the ANC between 1974 and June 1976. But the vast majority of ANC members - and even a greater proportion of ANC members involved on the operational side - were teenagers and individuals in their early 20s who joined after the 1976 Soweto Uprising. They were, in 1981, still young and inexperienced.³³ Hence, to engage in top-down building seemed to imply sending in very senior leadership from the 1960s generation to build the APCs. The RC did not define what it meant by 'senior' - it did

³¹IV/Maharaj, p.441.

³²IV/Maharaj, p.450.

³³IV/Pillay, pp.776-778; IV/Maharaj, p.441-442.

not necessarily mean members of the RC or NEC but it did not exclude them.³⁴

The 'APC document', as the record of this meeting became known, was a flexible guideline which ran to a mere three-quarters of a page. It had been painstakingly debated phrase by phrase before the extended RC meeting eventually adopted it³⁵ after about a week of discussion.³⁶ The RC also decided there would be a review of progress in implementing it one year later, in September 1982.³⁷

In Maharaj's view, the document was based on the recognition that

in some areas [of South Africa] we had a viable underground and military presence: these had to be the building blocks. But, in other areas...we had no infrastructure, and yet we had to move. So it accepted that there should be no common blueprint. What was important...[was] that the APC should constitute a leadership which truly emerged outside and inside. Because the Anti-Republic campaign had indicated a viable underground leadership that had grown up, with all its blinkers, and outside a leadership with its own blinkers. And that, if we merged the two, we would have something...of quality. It would be a problem to get this merged body really learning to work together as an integrated and unified body, as a collective. Hence also the need for senior people who would bring the stamp of authority of [the ANC].³⁸

³⁴IV/Maharaj, p.442.

³⁵IV/Maharaj, p.440.

³⁶IV/Maharaj, p.445.

³⁷IV/Maharaj, p.441.

³⁸IV/Maharaj, p.450.

The APC document, in Maharaj's view, took the ANC's thinking 'well beyond' the terms of the 1978-79 strategic review to 'grapple with the actualities'.³⁹

External Strategic Debates, September 1981 - September 1982

A successful boycott of elections for the South African Indian Council (SAIC),⁴⁰ when these elections eventually came in November 1981, represented a serious reversal for Prime Minister P W Botha and a considerable advance for the ANC. His attempts to draw sections of the Indian population into alignment with government policy lay in tatters. For the ANC the coalition-building approach of the Anti-Republic campaign had been greatly advanced. Moreover, public projection of the Freedom Charter had been a major tactic of the campaign.⁴¹ A national anti-SAIC conference in Durban shortly before the elections had attracted 109 organisations (of vastly different sizes and significance) which had declared their sympathy with the Freedom Charter and their intention to boycott any institutions and constitutional arrangement which did not arise out of national negotiations involving all interested parties (by implication, including the ANC).

³⁹IV/Maharaj, p.443.

⁴⁰About 90% of those eligible to vote boycotted. *Rand Daily Mail* 5/11/81.

⁴¹IV/Momoniati, p.641.

Via the Gordhan unit and other individual linkages into the Natal Indian Congress and other allied organisations, the ANC exercised a significant degree of influence in this campaign. An important young Anti-SAIC activist, Ismail Momoniat, who was not himself a member of formal ANC underground structures, recalls the form of contact with the ANC external mission during the campaign:

[O]ur attitude was that we didn't need to have formal contacts in the sense where you would be a member. But clearly there were links with the movement. And one knew that; and we would get feedback. So, say we would have a grouping of a few people, we would meet, we would discuss things. If we felt there was a need to, we would send things out...we would then decide to approach one or two individuals... I think it was a very slow form of contact; it wasn't very reliable. Now and again we would get answers... And I must say, to the credit of the [ANC]...we never got the advice: "Do one, two three". Rather, it was: they would leave it to us to decide... Maybe offer their own advice and so on, but ask us to decide finally.⁴²

A handful of MK attacks in the run-up to the SAIC elections, which included the bombing of the Durban offices of the Department of Indian Affairs on November 3, suggested the link between political and military forms of

⁴²IV/Momoniat, p.643. Momoniat indicates that his Transvaal circle's linkages with the ANC underground came through, among others, Johannesburg-based activist Prema Naidoo, Barbara Hogan (jailed for 10 years for treason for her ANC activities in October 1982), Samson Ndou (a key figure in the ANC underground in Soweto) and the Durban-based Gordhan unit with whom the Johannesburg-based activist Mohammed Valli Moosa maintained close contact. IV/Momoniat, pp.638-642. The leadership of the Transvaal Anti-SAIC elected in 1980 was entirely ANC-orientated. IV/Momoniat, pp.638-639. In Natal, the Anti-SAIC campaign was dominated by the Natal Indian Congress in whose leadership a number of ANC underground members served at the time of the Anti-SAIC campaign.

struggle which the ANC wished to convey. But the political-military symbiosis of the Anti-Republic campaign was not repeated.

The Anti-SAIC campaign also highlighted at least one serious political lacuna. It showed that ANC-aligned popular organisation among Africans remained weak.⁴³ Maharaj and others believed the formation of civic organisations in African townships might remedy this. But the process needed to be accelerated. With this in mind, the RC decided to encourage the setting up of a national civics association which might stimulate the development of local civics.⁴⁴

In exile, a variety of factors were bedeviling establishment of APCs. First, separate political and military lines of command continued to run into South Africa from the forward areas, which militated against the development inside the country of a *single* integrated underground structure.⁴⁵ Second, a range of squabbles and conflicts between various external mission operational structures created havoc. One was a continuation of the earlier row between Maharaj and the political committee of the Mozambique-Swaziland senior organ, whose most forceful

⁴³IV/Maharaj, p.472.

⁴⁴IV/Maharaj, p.472.

⁴⁵IV/Kasrils, p.319.

members were Zuma and Kasrils.⁴⁶ Moreover, senior organs in various forward areas demanded 'a free hand' and independence of headquarters in Lusaka in implementing the APC concept, whereas IRD felt equally strongly that it should be involved.⁴⁷ And third, the MK leadership apparently belatedly realised that they had conceded operational leadership inside South Africa to political structures, began to stonewall on implementation of the APC concept,⁴⁸ and persisted in mounting its attacks as before.⁴⁹ To Maharaj's mind this meant that

the military comrades, if they did appreciate the significance of it, still clung to the belief that the job of the political, and even of [the] leadership [of an APC], would be merely to facilitate [the] military.⁵⁰

Meanwhile, MK's plan to mount a rural guerilla campaign in the northern Transvaal was making no progress. Critics maintained it was because MK's commander, Joe Modise, and other MK commanders were too impatient to begin military activities. Garth Strachan, Maharaj's personal assistant and later a senior official in operational structures in Zimbabwe, argues:

[The MK command] didn't have any understanding of the mechanisms and processes of establishing a political underground first and foremost to

⁴⁶IV/Maharaj, pp.427-429, 437, 445.

⁴⁷IV/Maharaj, p.445.

⁴⁸IV/Maharaj, p.446. IV/Kasrils, p.319.

⁴⁹IV/Pillay, p.759-760.

⁵⁰IV/Maharaj, p.446.

create the conditions for military work. So...what tended to happen was that people were sent in with political-military tasks and, unless they took initiatives themselves (as happened in Moutse),⁵¹ they very often quickly carried out military operations, or didn't spend enough time establishing themselves really well on the terrain before carrying out military operations. They also carried out military actions very close to their bases, which meant the enemy was able to locate and surround them very quickly. That is, they didn't have transport...so that they couldn't, for example, base themselves in Alldays and carry out an operation 100km away... The other problem...is that the lines of communication and supply were never worked out. So...supply and communication broke down. They therefore had this kind of imperative to carry out actions and then retreat, because they had problems of communication and supply. So that was a very serious problem - not to speak of the enemy's capacities, defence networks, etc.⁵²

MK's plans to extend its armed activity from Zimbabwe received an unexpected setback in February 1982 when the Zimbabwe government used the discovery of huge arms caches on farms belonging to Zapu to crack down on the ANC's old ally. MK cadres, who enjoyed close relations with former fighters in Zipra,⁵³ were also rounded up, a number were jailed briefly, and some were tortured. ANC weaponry in Zimbabwe was among that seized.⁵⁴ Tight restrictions were

⁵¹From 1982, successive groups of MK cadres, some of whom were initially from the Moutse area, succeeded in locating themselves there and developing around them a support structure. They did so on their own initiative. *IV/Strachan*, pp. 1,186, 1,189, 1,208-1,210.

⁵²*IV/Strachan*, p.1,189-1,190.

⁵³Zimbabwe People's Revolutionary Army, Zapu's military wing.

⁵⁴*IV/Strachan*, p.1,187.

placed on the ANC in Zimbabwe.⁵⁵ It was not allowed to set up even 'minimal bases' for the transit of men and materiel from Zambia.⁵⁶ MK's infrastructure in Zimbabwe was neutralised.

MK's armed activity in 1982 dropped off - down from about 55 incidents in 1981 to about 39, while it suffered the capture or death of 28 cadres.⁵⁷ Apart from the limpet mine attack on the Koeberg nuclear power station outside Cape Town in December 1982, dealt with below, all attacks were modest in their dimensions.

When, in September 1982, the RC reviewed progress on APCs, it found senior organs had made next to no progress.⁵⁸ A major reason for the failure was that some senior organs had sent junior or middle-ranking cadres into the country to build APC's;⁵⁹ they had not known quite how senior their choice of personnel could be.

The commission investigating the failure to implement the APC concept 'ran into trouble', according to Maharaj, when discussion turned to naming external mission

⁵⁵Which lasted until late 1983. *IV/Strachan*, p.1,191.

⁵⁶*IV/Strachan*, p.1,190.

⁵⁷Booyse, 'Monthly Breakdown'. Stadler, *Harms Commission Statistics*, pp.1,021, 1,024.

⁵⁸*IV/Maharaj*, p.447.

⁵⁹*IV/Maharaj*, pp.447-448.

individuals who might or might not be suitable for deployment inside the country on the APC project. Matters became personalised. The commission's report to the RC was inconclusive and no new mandate was given to senior organs about building APCs.⁶⁰ Squabbles, rivalries and a lack of strategic clarity had neutralised the APC plan and delivered a serious blow to the 'integrationists' in ANC operational debates.

The MK leadership began to reassert itself. In late 1982, COH lobbied strongly to become a proper military headquarters with full, formal control over MK. For all practical purposes, COH had long controlled MK, although strictly speaking it was merely an operational military agency of the RC, with the RC responsible for MK.

COH felt that it was being constrained by demands from some senior organ personnel that its activities be coordinated with political activities.⁶¹ It alleged there was uncertainty over lines of command and control flowing out of senior organs and that this was creating special problems for military operations.⁶² But COH conducted its campaign for a military headquarters largely on less

⁶⁰At this point, Maharaj was temporarily withdrawn from his normal IRD work to take forward a mainly military project, the nature of which he was prepared to disclose only off the record. It never came to fruition. *IV/Maharaj*, p.451.

⁶¹*IV/Maharaj*, pp.457-458.

⁶²*IV/Maharaj*, p.458; *IV/Slovo*, p.1,014.

well-contested ground. Various frontline states, among them Zimbabwe, which was now softening its hostility to the ANC, said they wanted to deal with a defined ANC 'military headquarters'.⁶³ COH seized upon this development to argue its case.

Maharaj recalls how, at an RC meeting on December 9 1982, external events destroyed the effect of his argument against frontline state pressure as a justification for a military headquarters. He was arguing:

That's not the reason why we need military headquarters; it can't be a good reason.

Others were saying: That's not the only reason...

[T]hen we [had] a break, I think [it was] a tea break in the morning. We receive a message; we [had] just finished tea; we reassemble.

The president announces the Maseru massacre [in which 42 people were killed by South African security forces when they raided Lesotho, 19 of them members of the ANC].

Now, when we come [back] to this item, I...haven't got the heart to say: No military headquarters. Because [one argument] on why we needed a military headquarters was to give ourselves better military capacity.⁶⁴

A military headquarters was conceded.

Ten days later, on December 19, explosions seriously damaged the Koeberg nuclear power station outside Cape Town. To many, the attack appeared to be a quick and effective MK response to the devastation the ANC had suffered in Maseru. The truth was more complex. The attack

⁶³IV/Maharaj, p.458. IV/Kasrils, p.256.

⁶⁴IV/Maharaj, p.458.

had been planned over many months before the Maseru massacre. Moreover, it would not have been possible had IRD not pursued political contacts which were initially rejected by MK; these contacts were eventually handed over to an individual in SOU.⁶⁵ Ironically, the changes to operational structures which the MK leadership now demanded would have made the kind of cooperation that had fostered the Koeberg attack more difficult.

The ANC and the Emerging Trade Unions, 1981-82

Developments among the emerging trade unions were similarly fractious. The question of union registration was, if not the actual *casus belli*, then the major issue over which underlying disagreements were fought out. At talks on forming a union super-federation held in Cape Town in August 1981 and at Wilgespruit in April 1982 unions, registration dominated proceedings.

Sactu,⁶⁶ and with it those most visibly associated with the ANC inside South Africa,⁶⁷ supported the most vociferous of the anti-registrationists. These included

⁶⁵The attack had been planned for December 16, anniversary of MK's first attacks, but operational difficulties meant its delay for three days. In 1991 I obtained a full account of the attack from the unit responsible. By agreement, their identity and details of how they mounted the attack must remain confidential.

⁶⁶Baskin, *Striking Back*, p.39.

⁶⁷My personal observation.

Saawu, Gawu and Macwusa which, while also among the most politically militant unions, were among the weakest in terms of their shop floor organisation. ANC approval of the anti-registration position was now seriously threatening its relationship with the better organised emerging unions - those in Fosatu, as well as the Cape Town-based Food and Canning Workers' Unions (FCWU) and General Workers' Union, whose suspicions about registration had now softened.

The death in police detention of FCWU organiser Neil Aggett in February 1982, rather than mitigate the conflict, exacerbated it in two instances. First, of the unions attending the unity talks, only Fosatu and FCWU unions honoured on any scale a pledge to hold a work stoppage to protest Aggett's death. Second, a large ANC banner was placed at the head of the procession through Johannesburg which took Aggett's body to its grave. Fosatu and FCWU unionists considered this an opportunistic ANC attempt to advertise itself and challenge their attempts to retain their political independence.⁶⁸

A United Front is Formed

In 1982, the government gave notice it intended to implement constitutional reforms which had first been hinted at in 1977, then been refined by a commission of inquiry into the constitution in 1980, then been

⁶⁸IV/Gemma Cronin, p.148.

reformulated by the President's Council in May 1982 and later been substantially endorsed by the ruling National Party in July. The central thrusts of the proposals were:⁶⁹

- * the creation of a three-chamber parliament comprising separate white, 'coloured' and Indian houses under an arrangement in which the predominance of the white chamber would be guaranteed;
- * persistent exclusion of the African majority from the central polity and the consignment of its political aspirations to the bantustan system;
- * and the creation of an executive presidency with wide-ranging powers.

The government also re-introduced into parliament three bills which promised to intensify the exclusion of many Africans from metropolitan areas, increase government control over residential resources in black African townships, and also provide for the establishment of a new black local authority structure⁷⁰.

In exile, IRD wanted to extend the coalition which had

⁶⁹The proposals are summarised in Peter Randall (Ed.), *Survey of Race Relations in South Africa, 1982* (Johannesburg: South African Institute of Race Relations, 1983), pp.1-4.

⁷⁰The three bills, which all originally appeared for the first time in 1980 but were revised and returned to the government's legislative programme in 1982, were The Orderly Movement and Settlement of Black Persons Bill, The Black Community Development Bill and the Black Local Authorities Bill (which was in fact passed by parliament in 1982).

developed out of the anti-Republic and anti-SAIC campaigns⁷¹. According to Maharaj, 'different people, without calling it a "united front", were seeing that something could gel together'. He thinks that, in late 1982, IRD sent a guideline to leading underground units on

the need now to pull all these groupings together in structures, maintaining their independence, creating the vehicle to [allow] more grassroots structures to grow, and yet having a centralised thrust and a decision-making capacity.⁷²

An additional motivation was, according to Maharaj, to ensure that ANC-inclined organisations eroded the black consciousness movement's support base, because there was a 'hell of a fight going on with Azapo'.⁷³ The directive would, if issued, probably have reached, among others, individuals like Molefe and the Gordhan unit inside the country before January 1983.⁷⁴

Meanwhile, in late 1982, leading Indian activists in the Transvaal decided on a conference in January 1983 of

⁷¹IV/Maharaj, p.472.

⁷²IV/Maharaj, p.480.

⁷³IV/Maharaj, p.480. Following Nkondo's fall-out with Azapo in 1980, other ANC-inclined individuals had also left it, among them Molefe in 1981.

⁷⁴IV/Maharaj, pp.480, 483. Maharaj gives contradictory accounts as to whether an IRD guideline of this kind was sent out to units before or after January 1983, the month of the call by Dr Alan Boesak for the formation of a united front, which subsequently becomes known as the United Democratic Front. It is only after what is, unfortunately, suggestive questioning by me that Maharaj says he believes the guideline might have been issued before January 1983. See IV/Maharaj, pp.470-473, 476-483.

Transvaal-based Anti-SAIC campaigners.⁷⁵ The intention of the convenors, a number of whom had links to the ANC and Communist Party (SACP), was to resuscitate the dormant Transvaal Indian Congress.⁷⁶ These activists were in irregular contact with the external mission.⁷⁷

When, in early January 1983, the 'coloured' Labour Party surprised the political community by endorsing the government's constitutional proposals, some anti-SAIC convenors argued successfully that the planned conference for the Transvaal should pursue a broader agenda and draw in a wider range of forces. Among those calling for broader participation was Cassim Saloojee, a prominent activist and ANC 'informal' underground member.⁷⁸ Anti-apartheid leaders from as far afield as the eastern and western Cape and Natal were invited.

During preparations for the conference, scheduled to start on January 22, Saloojee and others speculated about the potential which had been created by the growth of hundreds of popular anti-apartheid organisations and the success of the campaigns against the republic and SAIC.

⁷⁵IV/Cassim Saloojee, pp.945-946.

⁷⁶The Transvaal Indian Congress (TIC) had, historically, been the counterpart of the Natal Indian Congress (NIC). The two had combined into the South African Indian Congress which became the Indian constituent of the ANC-led Congress Alliance in the 1950s.

⁷⁷IV/Momoniati, pp.646-647.

⁷⁸IV/Cassim Saloojee, pp.940-944.

They began to suggest - Saloojee among them - that it might be feasible to form 'a united front' of some kind.⁷⁹ These discussions in mid-January 1983, says Saloojee, occurred 'outside the ANC context'.⁸⁰

Meanwhile, in his annual New Year address to the people of South Africa on January 8, ANC president Oliver Tambo⁸¹ outlined four basic tasks for ANC members and supporters:

- * we must organise the people into strong mass democratic organisations;
- * we must organise all revolutionaries into underground units of the ANC;
- * we must organise all combatants into units of Umkhonto we Sizwe;
- * we must organise all democratic forces into one front for national liberation.⁸² [my emphasis]

But, given the inefficiency of the ANC's Department of Information and Publicity and of its propaganda efforts

⁷⁹IV/Cassim Saloojee, pp.944-945.

⁸⁰IV/Cassim Saloojee, p.945.

⁸¹In the early 1980s, Thabo Mbeki, political secretary in the office of the president, usually wrote the initial draft of Tambo's New Year addresses - often after consulting a few key individuals. Tambo would then amend the speech up to the moment of its being recorded for a broadcast over Radio Freedom's Lusaka station, according to unrecorded conversations with Maharaj, Kasrils and other ANC members.

⁸²O R Tambo, "We Must Organise Ourselves into a Conquering Force", Speech given by Comrade President O R Tambo on behalf of the National Executive Committee of the African National Congress, on the occasion of January 8, 1983, the 71st anniversary of the African National Congress', in *Sechaba*, March 1983, p.5.

generally,⁸³ the contents of this address could have reached few people inside South Africa before the TASC conference began on January 22.⁸⁴

Saloojee recalls two arguments during preparations for the TASC conference. One centred on his suggestion that Dr Alan Boesak⁸⁵ be the guest speaker. Saloojee's reasons for suggesting Boesak were that he thought him a 'very articulate' person who might bring some 'freshness' which other, more familiar and 'exhausted' speakers could not

⁸³My personal judgment: I dealt with Dip almost daily for eight years.

⁸⁴Then based in Harare, I personally monitored the 1983 address as broadcast over Radio Freedom's Lusaka station on January 8. I made my own transcript and, shortly after my return to South Africa on January 26 1983 - three days after the call for a 'united front' at the TASC conference - I gave a copy to a senior member of the ANC underground in Johannesburg who was also a personal friend; he said he had not yet seen or heard the contents of the speech, adding he would pass it on to others. Usually, there was a delay of several days between the broadcast of the address over Radio Freedom's Lusaka station and its broadcast over other Radio Freedom stations. Receiving these stations clearly inside South Africa often depended upon having a fairly sophisticated radio or on favourable weather and other conditions. In exile in this period, it was unusual to receive a transcript of the full speech within a week. It usually took several weeks for cassette recordings of the annual New Year address to reach the forward area machineries, and the numbers of cassettes smuggled into South Africa successfully was invariably small. The ANC's main agitational pamphlet, *Mayibuye*, would not have been able to carry it before February. And the ANC's official organ, *Sechaba*, carried it only in its March edition. There is no evidence of large-scale ANC pamphleteering in mid-January 1983. It is, consequently, reasonable to assume that the contents of the 1983 New Year Address would have reached only a very small group of people inside South Africa before the TASC conference began on January 22.

⁸⁵Then a prominent and young Cape Town-based pastor in the 'coloured' Dutch Reformed Mission Church who had been elected president of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches in 1982.

give proceedings.⁸⁶ Other conference convenors eventually agreed reluctantly to Boesak.⁸⁷

A second argument continued late into the night before the TASC conference. It pitted Saloojee against most other activists involved in the planned TIC resuscitation, a number of whom were members of the ANC underground. The issue was a united front. Saloojee recalls:

[T]hey were saying: Look, man, this is no time for united fronts...

[The night before the conference], I was still arguing - I was the only person in the [interim] TIC executive committee arguing fiercely for a united front.

Without exception...they said: Forget anything else; what we have to do is to begin political work in the Indian community... The time is not ripe [for a united front].⁸⁸

At about 10pm that night, when the meeting adjourned briefly, prominent members of the Gordhan unit arrived.⁸⁹

Saloojee recalls:

[They] said: Listen man, we should really use this occasion to moot the idea of a broad effort against the tricameral system. and I said 'a front'... [T]hey said they had discussed it [in Durban] too, and, you know, they, too, are clear in their mind that we should...develop the idea of a front.⁹⁰

Other participants in the planning meeting shifted

⁸⁶IV/Cassim Saloojee, pp.946-947.

⁸⁷IV/Cassim Saloojee, pp.946-947.

⁸⁸IV/Cassim Saloojee, p.946.

⁸⁹Including Pravin Gordhan, Zac Yacoob and Yunus Mahomed.

⁹⁰IV/Cassim Saloojee, p.947.

position immediately, possibly because Saloojee later found out) some of the younger among them had connections with the Gordhan unit.⁹¹ Saloojee adds:

As soon as [Gordhan etc] said it's OK, suddenly [the embryonic TIC leadership] said it's OK.

Now, last minute, they tell me I must go and pick up Alan Boesak at the airport. And now, on the way from the airport, I must make quite sure that I tell Alan Boesak that he should make a call for the front...

I go and fetch Alan Boesak... On the way, you know, we are talking about what the Labour Party did and all that. I didn't want to sound like a commissar coming from some place and [saying], Now you must toe the political line for us and all that.

And Alan actually said: You know, the Labour Party's doing this; we can't be indifferent to it...this is not just a thing for the coloured people...

[H]e saw the political issues very clearly.

Then I just told him - you know, I was trying to be a little subtle - I said: We also met for the Anti-SAIC and thought it's a damned good idea, you know, if we try and call for a front of organisations and people against the tricameral system and all that.

He said, I am going to make a plea for that in my speech.

Now this, I think, history must know...⁹²

Excited at what was developing, Saloojee hurriedly ensured that as many local and foreign journalists as possible attended the opening of the conference on the afternoon of January 22 to hear the call for a united front.

When Boesak delivered his speech late that afternoon he outlined a manifesto for what he termed 'the politics of

⁹¹IV/Cassim Saloojee, pp.947.

⁹²IV/Cassim Saloojee, pp.947-8.

refusal'.⁹³ It was premised upon a boycott of all government-created institutions. Boesak argued that it was tactically senseless and immoral to maintain, as the Labour Party had, that it was possible to fight 'the system' of apartheid from within; participation necessarily amounted to a compromise of principles and collaboration. To take forward the politics of refusal, Boesak argued,

[W]e need a united front. Most of the Christian Churches and all of the democratically minded organisations in our communities have unequivocally rejected the proposals of the President's Council and our participation in them. We are all committed to the struggle for a non-racial, open, democratic South Africa, a unitary state with one nation in which all the people will have the rights accorded them by the ordination of Almighty God Himself.⁹⁴

Immediately Boesak had finished his speech, the conference convenors activated a plan to persuade the conference to set up a commission to look into the feasibility of a united front. Saloojee remembers:

We...put it to the meeting that, look, we can't wait, there is an urgency about it.

A group of people were selected to have a meeting that night, Saturday night.

We sat all night. I was chairman of that commission... And I know Zac Yacoob and myself worked out the declaration. We finished it in the

⁹³ Allen Boesak, 'Speech delivered by Dr Allen Boesak, President of the World Alliance of Reform Churches, at the 1st Congress of the Transvaal Anti-SAIC Committee, 22nd January 1983', in Transvaal Anti-SAIC Committee, *Congress 1983, Speeches and Papers delivered at the Congress* (n.p. n.d. [circa 1983]), pp.9-13.

⁹⁴Boesak, 'Speech at 1st Congress of TASC'.

early hours of the morning...⁹⁵

The statement of the commission, delivered in the form of a draft resolution, called for the rejection of the constitutional proposals and for the delegates to the TASC conference to 'form [them]selves into a united democratic front (UDF) to oppose the implementation of this devious scheme disguised to divide the people'.⁹⁶ Basic politico-moral positions of the ANC resonated through the document: among them a commitment to a 'non-racial, unitary state' and 'adherence to the need for unity in struggle through which all democrats regardless of race, religion or colour shall take part together'. The call for a united democratic front dominated the conference and elicited an excited response from other anti-apartheid organisations.

Saloojee considers that the decision to form a united front was 'not a conscious decision taken by the ANC outside or inside' South Africa. Rather it was a result of the 'broad talk that was going on' about the need for unity.⁹⁷ Momoniat, a leading activist at the Anti-SAIC

⁹⁵IV/Saloojee, p.948. Yacoob, a Durban attorney, was part of the Gordhan unit.

⁹⁶'Statement by the Commission on the Feasibility of a United Front against the Constitutional Reform Proposals', in TASC, Congress 1983, pp.86-88.

⁹⁷IV/Cassim Saloojee, pp.948-949. Told of the recommendation of the Report of the Politico-Military Strategy Commission in 1979, which recommended the formation of a front broadly to similar to the UDF, Saloojee responded that he had subsequently heard of it, but:

I want to suggest...that all those plans were being,

conference, agrees. He recalls no input from the ANC abroad about forming a front. He also doubts that leading members of the Gordhan unit - Pravin Gordhan, Yunus Mahomed or Professor Gerry Coovadia - had consulted the external mission on launching a front at the conference: communications to and from the external mission did not move sufficiently fast for that.⁹⁸ He believes people merely picked up on Boesak's idea.⁹⁹

Maharaj, who was in charge of ANC internal political reconstruction, substantially agrees with Saloojee and Momoniat. The idea of a 'united front' contained in the report of the politico-military strategy commission (PMSC) had been a 'passing' phrase as far as he was concerned.

right, worked out, right. And of course that is how they [the ANC] wanted to see things unfold and all that, right. But, you see, when the Labour Party decision became known, by that time [the ANC] didn't have clear ideas of when to begin, how to trigger it off and all that, right... So, when we got this thing off the ground here and got it accepted and announced and all that, there was tremendous political excitement outside, too... [W]hen a few of us went over and were briefing ANC people about this, I mean, you know, this was very real - it wasn't an act they were putting on - you could see there was this tremendous excitement because it was unfolding in a way that was well beyond anything that they had imagined at that time. Now, what I am actually saying [is] that look, ANC underground, ANC activists, ANC people committed to the ANC approach were all in favour of the idea, might have thought of it and all that, right. But the decision in the final analysis was taken here, within the country. *IV/Cassim Saloojee, pp.949-950.*

⁹⁸*IV/Momoniat, p.647.* My attempts to interview members of the Gordhan unit on their role in this and other developments were unsuccessful.

⁹⁹*IV/Momoniat, p.647.*

After 1979, he had not seen himself as working for the creation of a united front as such.

Maharaj adds that, despite the fact that Tambo and Mbeki had written the NEC's New Year address broadcast on January 8 calling for a united front, the birth of the UDF 'shocked' them. He adds: 'They didn't believe it [a united front] would happen.'¹⁰⁰

In Maharaj's view, what the ANC contributed to the genesis of the UDF, without appreciating the extent of its own influence, was its repeated emphasis in earlier years on the need for unity in action against apartheid.¹⁰¹ He believes that it amounts to reading history backwards to argue that the UDF resulted from the PMSC report or came at the direct instigation of the ANC *per se*.¹⁰² He believes that the strength of the UDF at its birth was that it had 'the primary appearance that it grew from the ground'.¹⁰³

Conclusion

The two rationalisations central to ANC strategy, armed propaganda and the boycott of state-approved institutions, served the ANC well in the two years from January 1981.

¹⁰⁰IV/Maharaj, pp.472-473.

¹⁰¹IV/Maharaj, pp.472-473.

¹⁰²IV/Maharaj, pp.472-473.

¹⁰³IV/Maharaj, p.481.

Armed propaganda gave the ANC the authority, and 'non-collaboration' gave it the basic platform, to build a coalition of organisations for the Anti-Republic campaign of early 1981. The two sides of operations, political and military, had seemed to benefit each other. The campaign raised the ANC's level of involvement in domestic politics beyond anything seen since the destruction of its internal organisation in 1963-1964.

Disagreements between ANC strategists on the lessons of the Anti-Republic campaign in 1981 resulted in a surprising victory for IRD. The military command had contended that the campaign vindicated existing operational structures and methods. IRD, however, had argued that there needed to be closer political-military cooperation. IRD got its way when the military leadership agreed to the APC concept, which planned to create area-based underground political leaderships inside the country, whose members would include senior ANC leaders, to give tactical direction to all forms of struggle, including armed struggle. The APC concept was the most ambitious programme to move operational leadership from exile into the country, and to move from political-military parallelism in operational structures towards 'integration'. Its underlying argument was that a putative revolution in South Africa required an internal and united operational leadership.

The APC concept, however, was starved to death mainly by military inertia, behind which lay rivalry between political and military operational structures. The MK command did nothing to set up APCs. And as the APC concept died in 1982, the MK command reasserted its independence and lobbied for the establishment of a fully-fledged military headquarters.

The demand for an MK headquarters was inappropriate to securing progress in the armed struggle and movement towards a 'people's war'. MK's successes during the Anti-Republic campaign had resulted from close planning from abroad of missions conducted from abroad; these successes had not stemmed from any qualitative improvement in MK's domestic armed capacity. The raid on the headquarters of SOU and MK's Natal machinery in Mozambique in January 1981 was only one of many indications, although perhaps the sharpest, that South African counter-insurgency sought to ensure that ANC operational leadership remained abroad and to disrupt its lines into South Africa. While general political support for the ANC was expanding dramatically inside South Africa, MK cadres were evidently unable to integrate themselves securely into it. In these circumstances, the MK command could not afford to do anything which might lessen MK cadres' ability to integrate themselves into the ANC's domestic political base. But that is precisely what a military headquarters threatened to do; it was likely to increase the separation between political

and military structures and so reduce the opportunities for cooperation in the field between political and military cadres.

Political structures, on the other hand, could, and did, thrive when operating on their own. The important role the political underground managed to play in building the coalition that launched the UDF evinced this. Although operating almost entirely separately from military structures, the political underground could, and did, benefit from the lustre and authority given the ANC by MK's attacks. Yet two years after the Anti-Republic campaign, it had less need of MK's imprimatur to flourish in a situation in which hundreds of thousands of people were evidently convinced of the potential advantages of open political organisation.

There was a certain irony to the debate over operational structures in this period. Those supporting separation between political and military operational structures, who were the commanders of MK, appeared blind to the fact that they had most to lose by such separation. On the other hand, those opposing this separation, mainly the political operational structures, had most to gain by it. For, with separate structures, there was no way that those who wanted to subject political struggle to military imperatives could actually do so. With separate structures there was, similarly, very little prospect of progress

towards a 'people's war' - a subject dealt with more fully
in the next chapter.

CHAPTER SEVEN*PLANNING FOR PEOPLE'S WAR*

'Blow on the embers and it will catch alight',

January 1983 - March 1984

It was...a way in which we could give real meaning to people's involvement; to once and for all take away this myth that MK is their highly trained, professional army which would liberate [them]...

- Cal Saloojee¹

Introduction

If the idea which actually spawned the United Democratic Front was not the ANC's, whatever the prescience of the 1978-1979 strategic review, the ANC wasted no time in bringing the front under its suzerainty. The report of the Politico-Military Strategy Commission (PMSC) had, after all, argued that a broad front of organisations allied to the ANC might greatly extend the ANC's catchment in the legal and semi-legal spheres of domestic politics and facilitate progress towards the 'people's war' which stood at the centre of ANC strategy.

This chapter examines the early development of the front, the strengthening of its relationship with the ANC and whether it did advance the notion of a 'people's war'.

¹IV/Cal Saloojee, p.934.

An ANC Front

Cassim Saloojee, who had chaired the commission into the feasibility of a united front, encountered 'tremendous excitement' when he went abroad to consult ANC external mission leaders on the proposed front shortly after the Transvaal anti-SAIC conference in January 1983. He felt that the way the front was developing 'was well beyond anything that they had imagined'.² Michael Stephen, a Scot involved in ANC operational structures in Swaziland, recalls a 'tremendous traffic of people from Natal' to discuss the front's formation.³

Back inside South Africa, an *ad hoc* national secretariat established to oversee the formation of a front had a strong ANC and pro-ANC presence. It decided first to form regional and provincial United Democratic Fronts before constituting a national UDF.⁴ Saloojee⁵ found himself working with people who were in more frequent contact with the external mission. They were, he says, influential in deciding priorities.⁶ He says that

²IV/Cassim Saloojee, p.950.

³IV/Stephen, p.1,105.

⁴Howard Barrell, 'The United Democratic Front and National Forum: Their Emergence, Composition and Trends', in Southern African Research Service (Ed.), *South African Review II* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1984), p.10.

⁵Who later became UDF national treasurer.

⁶IV/Cassim Saloojee, p.950-1. These included people involved with Pravin Gordhan's Durban unit and others linked to the Soweto underground around Samson Ndou and others.

ANC activists...began to play very conscious roles. And guys like me [who were 'informal underground'] ...made up our minds that, look, we must, within this movement as it evolves, we must build support for the ANC and we must be clearer what [the] ANC's politics are all about and its approaches and all that. We made quite sure we got the [ANC's] documents.⁷

New Operational Structures - again

Meanwhile, in early 1983,⁸ as regional UDF's were being formed inside the country, the ANC leadership instituted another set of far-reaching changes to operational structures. These changes followed the decision in December 1982 to establish a fully-fledged military headquarters.

The Revolutionary Council was disbanded as the ANC's main operational organ and was replaced by a Politico-Military Council (PMC) (see Figure 5, overleaf).⁹ The PMC, like the old RC, was to be chaired by ANC president Oliver Tambo, deputised by secretary general Alfred Nzo. Like the RC, it had two main operational arms, one political and one military.

On the political side, the PMC hierarchy consisted of

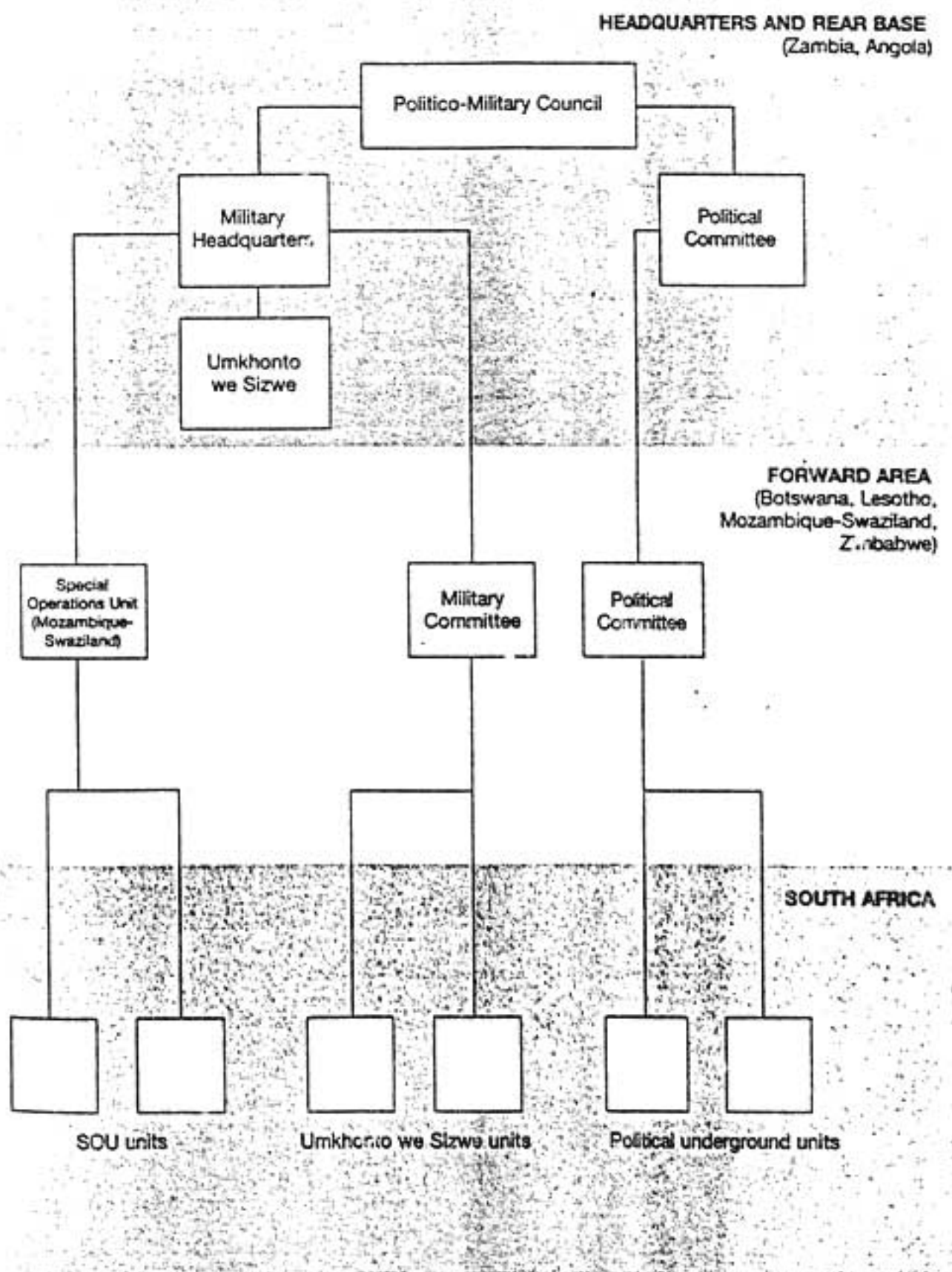
⁷IV/Cassim Saloojee, p.950.

⁸IV/Pillay, p.752. IV/Rabkin, p.827.

⁹IV/Maharaj, p.457.

ANC operational structures

Basic lines of command & co-ordination 1983 – June 1985



a political committee chaired by Joe Jele¹⁰, with Mac Maharaj as secretary.¹¹ The newly-created military headquarters was commanded by Joe Modise, deputised by Chris Hani, who was also MK political commissar. Third in the military hierarchy was Joe Slovo, who was chief of staff¹². The ANC's security and intelligence organ, Nat, headed by Mzwai Piliso, was also represented on the PMC¹³.

The 'senior organs', introduced in 1980 to promote political-military coordination in the forward areas, were disbanded. There was now to be no provision at all for coordination of political and military operations in the forward areas (or inside the country).¹⁴ Each forward area

¹⁰John Nkadimeng served very briefly as chairman before being appointed general secretary of the South African Congress of Trade Unions (Sactu). His successor, Joe Jele, had headed the ANC's International Department and had had no operational experience since a very brief foray into Mozambique as a guerilla in 1967.

¹¹Other members included, at various stages, Joel Netshitenzhe (alias Peter Mayibuye), Klaus Maphepha, Florence Mophosho, Jane Ngubane, occasionally Ray Simons, and Jacob Zuma (who was based in Mozambique). *IV/Maharaj*, p.460.

¹²*IV/Kasrils*, pp.328-9. Other members of the new military headquarters were Ronnie Kasrils as head of the newly-created military intelligence section; Wankie veteran Lennox Lagu as chief administrator; Jackie Molefe as head of communications; Lehlohonolo Moloi (alias 'Comrade A') as chief of operations; Bob Tati as chief of logistics; and Job Thlabane (alias Cassius Make) as head of ordinance. The special operations unit (SOU) which had previously answered directly to ANC president Oliver Tambo, now answered to military headquarters and, hence, to the PMC. It remained under Slovo's command. *IV/Kasrils*, pp.328-329.

¹³*IV/Maharaj*, pp.460-461.

¹⁴*IV/Pillay*, p.752.

would henceforth have a political committee and a military committee which operated separately. PMC military headquarters communicated with a military committee in each forward area, which then communicated with its MK units inside South Africa. And PMC political command had its own communications to a political committee in each forward area and, thence, to units inside South Africa. Coordination could occur only at top level, namely on the PMC¹⁵.

This imposed enormous responsibilities on the PMC - which it was unable to meet. Lines of communication into and out of South Africa were long and usually extremely slow. It inherited many of the RC's personnel and, with them, old mind sets and rivalries. While initially about the same size as the old RC, the PMC was soon larger than it.¹⁶ The PMC was not the small, muscular operational executive that had been recommended by the PMSC in 1979. The way ANC leaders were dispersed between different countries further complicated communications. On the military side, Modise often travelled in Africa; Hani had to spend much of his time in ANC camps in Angola; and Slovo was based in Mozambique. On the political side, Zuma's

¹⁵Briefing provided to me by Mzwai Piliso, head of the ANC security and intelligence organ, Nat, in Harare in early June 1983. See also *IV/Strachan*, p.1,145.

¹⁶The PMC grew from an initial 20-odd members. *IV/Maharaj*, pp.465, 517. The RC had about 16 people in full session and a group of about eight regular participants. *IV/Pillay*, p.758. See also *IV/Strachan*, pp.1,138-1,139.

domicile in Mozambique created similar difficulties.¹⁷ Slovo estimates that the key individuals on the PMC were not in one place together for more than 25 per cent of the time¹⁸. Key decisions had often to be taken without the individuals formally responsible for them.¹⁹

The declared purpose of the changes was to make political and military forms of struggle mutually reinforcing. According to Kasrils, the Soviet doctrine of 'military and combat work' (MCW) was the major influence on the changes - 'the need for a revolutionary movement to have a central leadership with direct command and control over all its forces and departments'. Kasrils believes that 'the [new structure] expresse[d] this desire...'²⁰

However, the effect of the changes was to worsen the dislocation between different operational arms. Within MK, preconceived notions of what a military headquarters consisted of meant a whole range of formal portfolios were created, each with its own head.²¹ And the new structures actually reduced the opportunities for coordination between military and political structures.

¹⁷IV/Maharaj, p.460.

¹⁸IV/Slovo, p.1,016.

¹⁹IV/Maharaj, p.459.

²⁰IV/Kasrils, p.256.

²¹IV/Maharaj, pp.458-9.

Ivan Pillay, who worked in political structures in Swaziland, considered the formation of the PMC 'a setback'²². The UDF had created new opportunities, and needs, to combine popular political struggles with underground political and military forms of struggle, but the ANC leadership had deprived itself of some the organisational mechanisms capable of doing so, particularly the senior organs.

Debating the UDF

Inside South Africa between January and August 1983, there were three important debates on the form the United Democratic Front should take. One concerned the front's ideological breadth. Some activists suggested that allegiance to the Freedom Charter, the ANC's lodestar, should be made a condition of membership. Though the Transvaal Anti-SAIC conference (TASC) in January had itself adopted the Freedom Charter,²³ the commission report on the feasibility of a front avoided making the Charter the basis for front membership;²⁴ Pravin Gordhan's Natal-based underground unit had helped ensure this.²⁵ Gordhan was

²²IV/Pillay, p.752.

²³Transvaal Anti-SAIC Committee, 'Adoption of Declaration', in Transvaal Anti-SAIC Committee, *Congress 1983. Speeches and Papers delivered at the Congress, 22-23 January 1983, Selborne Hall, Johannesburg* (n.p. [Johannesburg]: Transvaal Anti-SAIC Committee, n.d. [circa 1983]), p.89.

²⁴TASC, 'Statement on the Feasibility of a United Front', pp.86-88.

²⁵IV/Narsoo, p.678.

later supported by influential ANC underground members like Popo Molefe,²⁶ as well as by Maharaj.²⁷ According to Molefe:

Our perspective...was that [the front] should be capable of drawing in forces which had previously not been part of the Freedom Charter camp. It should [be] able to draw in the churches, even the Azapos and other black consciousness organisations like Cusa²⁸...and a number of civic associations which were a-political or had no definite political orientation. Now, any move towards the adoption of the Freedom Charter would have been a contradiction in terms - it would have defeated that purpose.²⁹

In the end, conditions for membership amounted to a restatement of the TASC commission report on the feasibility of a front. These were manifest opposition to apartheid and the constitutional reform proposals; a commitment to democracy, to non-racialism and to a unitary state in South Africa. Although these conditions were broad enough to draw Cusa briefly into the front, they failed to attract Azapo and other black consciousness organisations who objected particularly to any organisational unity with whites³⁰.

²⁶Who in August became UDF national secretary. On his opposition to the Freedom Charter as the basis for the UDF, see *IV/Molefe*, p.629.

²⁷*IV/Maharaj*, pp.476-477, 480.

²⁸The Council of Unions of South Africa, which contained an influential strand of black consciousness thinking which was suspicious of, if not hostile to aspects of the Freedom Charter, notably its view that anti-apartheid whites could be part of a single, united struggle with blacks.

²⁹*IV/Molefe*, p.629.

³⁰Barrell, 'The United Democratic Front', p.8.

A second debate arose around the compatibility of the front's non-racial principles with ethnically orientated political organisation. The TASC conference's decision to resuscitate the long-dormant Transvaal Indian Congress (TIC) as a vehicle for pro-ANC organisation among Indians in the Transvaal drew sharp criticism from black consciousness and the far-left.³¹ They alleged it was a 'retrogressive step' which would make the front a 'conglomerate of ethnically orientated groups', whereas 'the oppressed should be rallied together in a single organisation which is not structured on an ethnic basis'.³²

The debate irritated front activists.³³ 'Terror' Lekota³⁴ explained that the resuscitation of the TIC was not a legitimisation of apartheid's separation of the races but was, rather, a realistic response to it and an attempt to bring people into non-racial unity through joint activity: 'You cannot just declare non-racialism,' he remarked, 'you must build it'.³⁵

³¹Mainly from elements within the (Trotskyite) Non-European Unity Movement tradition.

³²*The Leader* (Durban), 28/1/83.

³³The debate degenerated into a semantic and essentialist quibble over who or what comprised the South African 'nation' and whether the 'anti-racism' being advocated by the black consciousness movement and far-left were preferable to the 'non-racialism' or 'multi-racialism' at the heart of front, and ANC, thinking.

³⁴Who later became UDF national publicity secretary.

³⁵Cited in Barrell, 'The United Democratic Front', p.10.

A third debate arose out of the decision of a number of the best organised of the emergent trade unions - the Food and Canning Workers' Unions, Western Province General Workers Union and those in Fosatu - not to join the front.³⁶ This debate centred on how a broad national democratic alliance should relate to the organised working class. The debate was conducted against the background of tensions between officials of these unions and ANC-aligned activists over the formers' avoidance of direct political involvement.

The unions' refusal to join the UDF was informed by their analysis of Sactu's history. They considered that Sactu's alliance with the ANC in the 1950s and 1960s had swamped working class interests in a broad nationalist struggle.³⁷ They argued that the unions had to build their own organised strength and develop one national trade union federation. Some of these union leaders did not rule out a subsequent alliance between a more powerful independent trade union centre and the front.³⁸

ANC-aligned activists were, consequently, not as successful as they had hoped to be in broadening the front's catchment. Black consciousness and Trotskyite organisations, as well as the best organised emergent

³⁶Barrell, 'The United Democratic Front', p.14.

³⁷Personal knowledge.

³⁸See Barrell, 'The United Democratic Front', pp.14-15.

unions, had declined to join.

There was deep concern among ANC-aligned activists in mid-1983 that the national launch of their front might be preempted³⁹ by an initiative launched by an unlikely alliance of the black consciousness movement and one faction of the Trotskyite Non-European Unity Movement.⁴⁰ The two planned to form a rival umbrella group, the National Forum, on June 11 and 12. The forum's inauguration drew several hundred delegates representing some 200 organisations, a number of them more naturally aligned to the future UDF.⁴¹ Organisationally the forum had an even looser structure than that proposed for the front.⁴² This organisational laxity, and the stridency and sectarianism of some of the forum's positions,⁴³ did not, in the event,

³⁹Personal knowledge.

⁴⁰Its unlikeliness lay in the black consciousness movement's traditional emphasis on race oppression as the determinant of conflict and Trotskyites' concentration upon Marxist class categories. Former Saso and BPC leaders, released from prison in December 1982 who became prominent in the Forum, had apparently undergone Damascene-like conversions from a race to a class analysis of South African society.

⁴¹Barrell, 'The United Democratic Front', pp.11-12. These organisations varied widely in strength: an organisation like Cusa, which attended, had a membership running into tens of thousands, whereas others had perhaps a handful of members.

⁴²Whereas the envisaged front could be described as a mechanism for joint activity, the Forum was a mechanism merely for consultation.

⁴³The draft 'Manifesto of the Azanian [South African] People' presented to the meeting ruled out most of the black middle class and anti-apartheid whites as potential political allies. It declared there would be a one-stage transition to socialism in South Africa; it treated the overthrow of apartheid as dependent upon the overthrow of capitalism. See Barrell, 'The

growth.⁴⁴

The eventual formation of the national United Democratic Front was the climax of a seven-month-long process. By the time delegates gathered at Mitchell's Plain in Cape Town on August 20 for its inauguration the UDF already had three constituted regions,⁴⁵ each with its own leadership, and several others were in the process of formation.⁴⁶ Probably the largest anti-apartheid propaganda campaign hitherto inside South Africa preceded the arrival of delegates from some 320 organisations at the launch. Some 400,000 copies of a UDF pamphlet were distributed nationwide in the two weeks before the launch, plus posters and other media.⁴⁷

The UDF restated its commitment to the broadest possible unity. It was intent on

uniting all our people, wherever they may be in the cities and countryside, the factories and mines, schools, colleges, and universities, houses and sports fields, churches, mosques and

United Democratic Front', pp.11-12.

⁴⁴Two years later, it had all but ceased to exist.

⁴⁵Natal and Transvaal regions with more than 68 affiliated organisations, formed in May, and a Western Cape region of 22 organisations, formed in July. Affiliates varied greatly in size and significance.

⁴⁶Border and Eastern Cape regional UDFs were established by the end of 1983 and a North Cape UDF was set up in early 1984.

⁴⁷Barrell, 'The United Democratic Front', p.12.

temples, to fight for our freedom.⁴⁸

sensitive to union suspicions, it declared it believed in 'the leadership of the working class in the democratic struggle for freedom'.⁴⁹

The tenor of the conference implied clearly that, at the apex of the UDF project, stood the ANC. The UDF's visible national officials, national secretary Popo Molefe and national publicity secretary Terror Lekota, had relationships with the ANC.⁵⁰ The conference elected a series of presidents and patrons whose political histories indicated the UDF's allegiance was to the ANC,⁵¹ while it coyly declared that it did not 'purport to be a substitute movement to accredited people's liberation movements'.⁵²

⁴⁸UDF, 'UDF Declaration', cited in Barrell, 'The United Democratic Front', p.13,

⁴⁹UDF, 'Inaugural Conference Resolutions', cited in Barrell, 'The United Democratic Front', p.13.

⁵⁰Lekota was well known as the only accused from the two-year-long trial of black consciousness officials which ended in December 1976 [State versus Cooper and Eight Others, Supreme court of South Africa, Transvaal Provincial Division], who, upon conviction, identified himself with the ANC on Robben Island.

⁵¹It elected three national presidents: Archie Gumede, a veteran ANC member and son of a former ANC president; Oscar Mpetha, a former Cape chairman of the ANC and leading Sactu trade unionist; and Albertina Sisulu, wife of then-jailed former ANC secretary general Walter Sisulu and a leader of the Federation of South African Women. Its patrons included Nelson Mandela and all the other Rivonia trialists, plus a number of other anti-apartheid activists identified with the Congress tradition.

⁵²UDF, 'UDF Working Principles', cited in Barrell, 'The United Democratic Front', p.13. This formulation had two purposes: to state clearly for the ears of government security organs that the UDF was not an ANC front; and to make clear to ANC supporters that the UDF was not seeking to displace the ANC as primary organisation. 'Accredited people's liberation

The formation of the UDF clarified three broad ideological currents within militant anti-apartheid politics.⁵³ All three declared that the working class should lead the political struggle against apartheid, but they differed on how this working class leadership should relate to race or national issues.

The ANC-UDF strand stressed the potential involvement of most sections of the community, regardless of race or class origins, in a broad political struggle against apartheid in which the interests of Africans should predominate. While rhetorically committed to working class leadership of this struggle, it nonetheless argued that, at this stage, distinct class mobilisation should be largely subsumed within a broader national democratic struggle; it postponed a putative working class struggle for socialism to a later phase. It insisted upon non-participation in state-created structures.

The second strand, the new alliance of black consciousness and the Trotskyite left stressed 'non-collaboration' more strongly. It emphasised the exclusion of whites from anti-apartheid struggle; it included the black middle class in its demonology; it stridently declared the leadership of the black working class in

movements' could be read to include the PAC, since both it and the ANC had Organisation of African Unity recognition; but, in context, the reference was to the ANC.

⁵³See Barrell, 'The United Democratic Front', pp.8-9.

national political struggle; and it conceived of a simultaneous overthrow of both capitalism and apartheid.

The third current, known as the 'independent worker' position,⁵⁴ insisted upon non-racialism; it held that industrial or political organisations of the working class should maintain their autonomy outside multi-class alliances, at least temporarily, whilst they developed their strength and distinctive political programme. And it considered that participation in state-approved or state-created institutions could be tactically justifiable.

The insistence upon racial or class exclusivity by the latter two currents left the ANC-UDF in almost proprietary control of an all-embracing unity project in the ranks of the militant opposition. It was a position the ANC moved to secure. As the national UDF was being launched,⁵⁵ the PMC released a formal guideline to forward areas and some underground units on its vision of the way forward for the UDF. According to Maharaj, the guideline

outlined what we needed. It talked about the need to pull together all these independent structures, allowing their independence to flourish, creating a vehicle that will encourage other independent locally-based bodies to grow, but not being slavishly a united front in the sense that it should have rapid decision-making

⁵⁴It was also referred to, pejoratively, as the 'workerist' tendency.

⁵⁵Maharaj cannot recall with certainty whether the guideline was issued just before or just after the August launch. It seems most likely it was a month or two after August. *IV/Maharaj*, pp.477, 482.

capacity...⁵⁶

The UDF Starts Campaigning

The UDF's first major campaign - for a boycott of elections for 29 black local authorities and community councils in African townships in November and December - was a success. There were lower percentage polls than usual in African local government elections in some areas.⁵⁷ In the process, the UDF helped undermine the legitimacy of a pillar of the state's constitutional reforms, namely Black Local Authorities Act and the Black Communities Development Bill. But the campaign's greater significance was the improvement it wrought in fledgling civic associations and popular organisation generally in the African townships.

At this early stage, the UDF supported a second campaign: for a No vote in the white referendum in November 1983 on the government's constitutional proposals. Its input was marginal to the outcome - a two-thirds endorsement of the reforms in a 75 per cent poll.

⁵⁶IV/Maharaj, p.477.

⁵⁷Lower polls were recorded in 14 of the 23 elections for which there existed a basis for comparison. See Carole Cooper et al (compls.), *Survey of Race Relations in South Africa 1983* (Johannesburg: South African Institute of Race Relations, 1984), pp.257-259.

'Planning for People's War'

Amid great expectations of what the UDF could deliver, Slovo prepared, and the PMC adopted,⁵⁸ a major new statement of operational strategy in late 1983, called 'Planning for People's War'.⁵⁹ It reasserted the formulation of the 1978-1979 strategic review, that

people's power in South Africa [will] be won by revolutionary violence in a protracted armed struggle which must involve the whole people and in which partial and general uprisings [will] play a vital role.⁶⁰

Moreover, it argued that conditions had ripened to the point where the ANC could move to 'people's war', namely

a war in which a liberation army becomes rooted amongst the people who progressively participate actively in the armed struggle both politically and militarily, including the possibility of engaging in partial and general uprisings.⁶¹

Since 1979, the document asserted, the 'broad base' of support for the ANC had 'widened immeasurably'.⁶² The ANC and its allies stood 'unchallenged in the eyes of almost all the oppressed as the guide of [South Africa's] revolution' and as 'the potential replacement for the racist regime'.⁶³ On occasions, people had virtually

⁵⁸IV/Maharaj, p.486.

⁵⁹IV/Slovo, p.994.

⁶⁰IV/Slovo, p.997.

⁶¹IV/Slovo, p.994.

⁶²IV/Slovo, p.994.

⁶³IV/Slovo, p.994.

legalised the ANC inside the country.⁶⁴ There had been a 'dramatic advance made...in the growth of mass organisations at regional and national level'.⁶⁵ At the same time, state strategy on black local government was provocative. It was shifting an increasing portion of the costs of administration and services in black townships onto residents.⁶⁶ As a result, there was growing resistance, with 'rent struggles and bus boycotts of a protracted nature...occurring with greater frequency'.⁶⁷

The underlying argument of the document was precisely that outlined by the SACP in 1970. Then the formulation had been that 'every political action, whether armed or not, should be regarded as part of the build-up towards a nationwide people's armed struggle leading to the conquest of power' [my emphasis].⁶⁸ Now 'Planning for People's War' asserted that the 'masses were receptive to violence as the only real answer to [their] situation'[my emphasis].⁶⁹ - a surprising conclusion given that the one clear contemporary pattern in anti-apartheid resistance was the growth of political organisation employing political means.

⁶⁴IV/Slovo, p.994.

⁶⁵IV/Slovo, p.994.

⁶⁶IV/Slovo, p.994.

⁶⁷IV/Slovo, p.994.

⁶⁸IV/Slovo, p.961.

⁶⁹My emphasis. IV/Slovo, p.994.

The document identified several factors circumscribing the ANC's ability to develop armed struggle on the scale necessary. It had very limited base facilities in countries adjoining South Africa. Inside South Africa there were no 'political revolutionary bases'⁷⁰ in which MK cadres could securely situate themselves. The ANC's ability to create them was constrained by the weakness of the underground and the failure of the APC programme.⁷¹

Nonetheless, according to Slovo,

we believed that the objective situation favoured preparations for the raising of our military struggle to a new level. We felt the political and military activities of the intervening years had helped to prepare the ground for the people's involvement in the armed struggle not merely as spectators but also as participants.⁷²

This could be done if two additional conditions were met. First, there needed to be closer cooperation between political and military operational organs.⁷³ Secondly, MK had to defy what had in the past been continuous pressures to 'meet deadlines for sabotage blows' and, instead, go in for some long-term preparations.⁷⁴

Both points were perhaps a little disingenuous coming from Slovo. MK had repeatedly opposed institutionalising

⁷⁰IV/Slovo, p.994.

⁷¹IV/Slovo, p.994.

⁷²IV/Slovo, p.995.

⁷³IV/Slovo, pp.994-996.

⁷⁴IV/Slovo, p.996.

closer political-military cooperation. Moreover, the MK command was as much to blame as any other section of the ANC for MK's seemingly perpetual resort to cross-border hit-and-run sabotage and armed propaganda attacks which had no military significance at all.

Slovo suggested creating a special structure in each forward area MK command structure charged with increasing attacks against enemy personnel, so that 'the remainder of the command could then concentrate on long-term tasks of entrenching [the ANC's] combat presence' inside South Africa.⁷⁵ And he suggested that SOU be strengthened to take on the former task.⁷⁶

Slovo also elaborated a plan for rural guerilla warfare in a 'people's war'. He argued that the PMC should identify areas of the country which could be developed as 'guerilla zones' - areas

which had the potential to safely accommodate, whether in the terrain or among the people, trained armed cadres and which could constitute the nuclei for the internal recruiting, training, formation and survival of guerilla units...⁷⁷

He envisaged the campaign in almost entirely military terms. Developing these guerilla zones would

[i]nitially...involve the infiltration of highly trained MK combat groups of a commando type, comprising a handful of cadres, with the capacity

⁷⁵IV/Slovo, pp.996-997.

⁷⁶IV/Slovo, p.997.

⁷⁷IV/Slovo, p.995.

to train and command local recruits. Our thinking was that in the early stages of its establishment, [a] unit would avoid military action or engagement with the enemy unless forced to defend itself or unless a specific action would facilitate its growth and entrench it among the people.⁷⁸

This was precisely the perspective which had failed in the 1969-76 period and ever since!

There was, however, a caveat:

It was vital that the selection and preparation of these zones had to involve the closest collaboration between relevant political and military machineries. This would, among others, make it possible to determine which areas needed a prior period of sustained political work before we could inject a military presence, and which areas should remain clear of military activity.⁷⁹

Yet this level of political cooperation - either within the proposed guerilla zone or the closest forward area - was all but impossible; the new operational structures made it so.

'Planning for People's War' also addressed the issue of insurrection.⁸⁰ Some in the ANC had long argued that it was unrealistic to hold out the prospect of insurrection in South Africa because of the persistent unity of security forces in their support of state policy. But, by late 1983, insurrectionary pressures in the Ciskei and elsewhere, the increasing number of blacks being drawn into combat roles

⁷⁸IV/Slovo, p.995.

⁷⁹IV/Slovo, p.995.

⁸⁰IV/Slovo, p.997-8.

in state forces, and the success being registered by the End Conscription Campaign (ECC) had led some to reconsider their opposition. Slovo was among them. His document argued that successful insurrection depended upon winning over, or neutralising, a portion of the state's armed forces. It suggested that, in the South African context, a 'fundamental transformation' was under way in the composition of state security forces. An increasing number of blacks were, indeed, being deployed in state armed forces in combat roles, as opposed to confinement to mere service functions. As a result, Slovo argued that there was a

potential for either neutralising or winning over the majority of black troops to the side of the revolution. We saw it as our task to begin immediately to devote all resources possible to the different sides of work in and among these forces.⁸¹

Similar efforts should be directed towards white members of the security forces to 'reduce their morale and will to risk their lives for white supremacy'.⁸² In the event, the PMC devoted no resources at all in concerted fashion to undermine the political cohesion of state security forces.⁸³ A central dictate of the doctrine of military and combat work (MCW) was ignored in practice.

On paper, the document sought a synthesis of the

⁸¹IV/Slovo, p.999.

⁸²IV/Slovo, p.999.

⁸³According to Bill Anderson, a middle-ranking MK intelligence official, in IV/Anderson, pp.14-15.

'people's war' approach and the basically insurrectionary MCW doctrine. As such, it also sought to marry the doctrinal experiences of different ANC generations: the 'people's war' orientation of the 1960s generation and the insurrectionary influence of MCW on the post-1976 generation. In practice it had little effect.

Slovo's document implied that the forces developed in the course of 'people's war' could readily be transformed into the forces of insurrection. But Slovo argued forcefully, that, whereas one could directly plan a 'people's war', one could not plan uprisings or a national insurrection; they were spontaneous chains of events which depended upon ordinary people; the ANC could only plan to be ready for them.⁸⁴

Being ready meant, said the document, echoing the 1980 Revolutionary Council resolution, having built up arms stores near major urban complexes inside South Africa and having a plan for distributing them as they could not be handed out 'indiscriminately...to whichever members of the oppressed wanted them'.⁸⁵ Readiness also meant having the ability to combine 'urban and rural action...at crucial moments'⁸⁶ in order to disperse state security forces. Being able to do so seemed to imply having a centralised

⁸⁴IV/Slovo, p.998.

⁸⁵IV/Slovo, p.998.

⁸⁶IV/Slovo, p.998.

underground leadership commanding all forms of struggle, political and military - as the MCW doctrine demanded. But the new operational structures, which enforced almost total political-military parallelism, made this impossible.

Responses to the 'Planning for People's War' document were mixed. The PMC accepted it. But some on the newly constituted political committee (which had replaced IRD) were intrigued by Slovo's drift towards the insurrectionary scenario and the inconsistencies between his writings and actions. They wondered whether Slovo was not preparing the ground, *sotto voce*, to discount the failure of years of ANC military planning which had produced no real military threat - and certainly no 'people's war' or anything approximating it. If, as Slovo suggested, insurrection was a *spontaneous* phenomenon engaged in by *ordinary people* which could not be planned, it followed that the burden of making insurrection must rest with ordinary people, that the revolutionary movement could play only a supportive role, and that the revolutionary movement thus had fewer obligations as an organiser - certainly fewer than were imposed by notions of protracted people's war. Maharaj detected a 'blow-on-the-embers-and-it-will-catch-alight' approach in Slovo's document, one in which:

all that [is necessary] for us to do is to be ready when the moment arrives; we have not been ready these previous times, but now let's get ready for the next one. [The document] doesn't say what work...we have to do to bring about the

next one.⁸⁷

The External Environment

Other developments seemed to demand more urgency in the ANC about building a senior underground leadership soon. South African assassinations of operational officials in neighbouring states, together with pressure on those states' governments, were seriously undermining the ANC's already limited ability to reinforce its domestic activities from abroad. To the list of members assassinated in earlier years was added, in November 1983, Zweli Nyanda, one of the commanders of MK's Natal machinery, who had been based in Swaziland.⁸⁸ Also in Swaziland, scores of exiles believed associated with the ANC had been rounded up and confined to a special camp.⁸⁹ About 120 ANC exiles had been obliged to leave Lesotho since the raid on Maseru in December 1982.⁹⁰ In Botswana, South African pressure led to the departure of several ANC exiles.⁹¹

South Africa did nothing to disguise its intention to

⁸⁷IV/Maharaj, p.492.

⁸⁸He and a Swazi citizen, Keith McFadden, were killed by unidentified gunmen in Mbabane.

⁸⁹Rand Daily Mail, 24/3/83.

⁹⁰Citizen, 13/3/83 and 27/8/83.

⁹¹Among them Marius and Jeanette Schoon, two middle-ranking ANC officials in the country. Star 5/10/83. Schoon was later assassinated in Angola.

remove the ANC from neighbouring states. The chief of the SA Defence Force, General Constand Viljoen, said as much in November.⁹² And, in February, Prime Minister P. W. Botha had made a public offer to neighbouring states of non-aggression pacts with South Africa.

A conference of ANC strategic planners met in Luanda in December 1983. It was presided over by Oliver Tambo and brought together members of the PMC and all senior military commanders from the forward areas.⁹³ Notwithstanding growing pressure on the ANC in the forward areas, there was a 'new enthusiasm' and optimism that MK could raise both its urban and rural combat presence 'to a qualitatively higher level'.⁹⁴

Armed Activity, 1983

MK actions had escalated in 1983 after a hiatus in 1982, in the course of which Modise and Cassius Make had been jailed in Botswana and MK's plans for the year had been seized.⁹⁵ The number of reported acts of armed insurgency in the latter half of 1983 (37) was double that for the earlier part (19).⁹⁶ Yet the old pattern of sabotage persisted:

⁹²In an interview with the *New York Times*, reported in *The Citizen*, 7/11/83.

⁹³*IV/Slovo*, pp.999-1,000.

⁹⁴*IV/Slovo*, p.999.

⁹⁵Ellis & Sechaba, *Comrades*, pp.119-120.

⁹⁶Booyse, 'Monthly Breakdown'.

over half of the 56 attacks (29) targeted economic installations; only six were directed at government security forces,⁹⁷ of which the most aggressive was an MK car bomb outside the headquarters in Pretoria of the South African Air Force in which 19 people were killed, at least four of them military personnel. With 43 ANC guerillas killed or arrested over the year, the statistics showed that about three MK combatants were being neutralised for every four attacks.⁹⁸

There were probably still no more than a few score active MK units inside the country at any one time. And the most optimistic estimate (from the ANC's perspective) of MK's total strength at the time was that it had, since 1976, trained about 8,700 men and women.⁹⁹ A number had since been deployed in other departments of the ANC. But most MK combatants remained in Angola where, since August, they had been engaged in a concerted campaign against Unita rebels. By late 1983, they were showing signs of discontent about fighting in Angola rather than inside South Africa, which became the genesis of a serious rebellion in a number of MK camps in Angola.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁷Stadler, 'Terrorism: Target Selection'.

⁹⁸Stadler, *Harms Commission Statistics*, p.1,024.

⁹⁹IV/Kasrils, pp.289-291.

¹⁰⁰Accounts of the mutiny and of its consequences are available in: Ellis & Sechaba, *Comrades*, pp.130-131; Bandile Ketelo et al, 'A Miscarriage of Democracy: The ANC Security Department in the 1984 Mutiny in Umkhonto we Sizwe', in *Searchlight South Africa*, 5, July 1990; Skweyiya, Z., *Mabandla*,

The South African state, on the other hand, could muster at full stretch a well organised force of some 400,000 troops¹⁰¹ and had a police force whose complement was projected to rise from 43,000 to 69,000 members.¹⁰² The loyalty of neither force was in question; they enjoyed a high degree of mobility; a proportion had gained battlefield experience in Angola, Namibia and inside South Africa; and they had an intimate knowledge of South African terrain. Moreover, the state was spending more than R3-billion a year equipping, training and paying them.¹⁰³

Grenade Squads and a Spirit of Rebellion

Slovo's document, 'Planning for People's War', provided some encouragement to moves within political machineries during 1983 to develop what were termed 'grenade squads'¹⁰⁴ - groups of militants systematically attacking state and state-related targets with petrol bombs and light

B. and Marcus, G., *Report of the Commission of Enquiry into Complaints by Former African National Congress Prisoners and Detainees*, Johannesburg, August 1992; Paul Trehwela, 'The ANC Prison Camps: An Audit of Three Years, 1990-1993', in *Searchlight South Africa*, 10, April 1993; Amnesty International, *South Africa: Torture, ill-treatment and executions in African National Congress Camps*, London, December 1992.

¹⁰¹Willem Steenkamp in *Leadership SA*, Summer 1983.

¹⁰²Carole Cooper et al, *A Survey of Race Relations in South Africa 1983* (Johannesburg: South African Institute of Race Relations, 1984), p.532.

¹⁰³*Ibid.*

¹⁰⁴*IV/Maharaj*, p.487.

explosives. The idea was a variant of the 'MK auxiliary' concept which MK had failed to develop. The grenade squads seemed to

answer the search for [a means by which] to involve the people and...to transform...[the] earlier...theoretical precept of classical guerilla warfare with liberated zones to what really we meant by people's war and the involvement of people - beyond the concept that people's involvement was merely infrastructural support, eyes-and-ears, to direct involvement in struggle.¹⁰⁵

Groups of young militants had banded together autonomously of the ANC inside the country by 1983 and started attacking targets associated with the state.¹⁰⁶ ANC political structures were trying to track them down in order to transform them into grenade squads while the first of these groups were, simultaneously, trying to contact the ANC.¹⁰⁷

Encouragement for the 'grenade squads' also came in the ANC NEC's New Year address on January 8 1984. The NEC said that it wanted 'a spirit of rebellion and frame of mind which puts to the fore the politics of revolutionary change' inside South Africa, adding that '[i]t is in the

¹⁰⁵IV/Maharaj, p.455.

¹⁰⁶IV/Maharaj, p.452. The first of the squads to link up with the ANC in Botswana in 1983, which styled itself 'The Soweto Suicide Squad', had been operating autonomously for three months before it came under ANC guidance, conducting a number of petrol bomb attacks. IV/Cal Saloojee, p.929-930.

¹⁰⁷IV/Cal Saloojee, pp.930-931.

attack that we shall find victory'.¹⁰⁸ The NEC said:

We must begin to use our accumulated strength to destroy the organs of government of the apartheid regime. We have to undermine and weaken its control over us, exactly by frustrating its attempts to control us. We should direct our collective might to rendering the enemy's instruments of authority unworkable. To march forward must mean that we advance against the regime's organs of state power, creating conditions in which the country becomes increasingly ungovernable.

You are aware that the apartheid regime maintains an extensive administrative system through which it directs our lives. This system includes organs of central and provincial government, the army and police, the judiciary, the bantustan administrations, the community councils, the local management and local affairs committees. It is these instruments of apartheid power that we must attack and demolish, as part of the struggle to put an end to racist minority rule in our country. Needless to say, as strategists we must select for attack those parts of the enemy administrative system which we have the power to destroy, as a result of our united offensive. We must hit the enemy where it is weakest...

...Having rejected the community councils by boycotting the elections, we should not allow them to be imposed on us. We do not want them. We must ensure that they cease to exist. Where administration boards take over their functions, then these must be destroyed too.¹⁰⁹

To take forward this perspective, people should form 'fighting organisations to organise and lead the struggle for the destruction of these racist institutions of oppression'.¹¹⁰

This pivotal section of the NEC's annual address

¹⁰⁸ANC NEC, 'The dream of total liberation of Africa is in sight', in *Sechaba*, March 1984.

¹⁰⁹*Ibid.*

¹¹⁰*Ibid.*

amounted to a call for a new round of uprisings and attacks against the local state in black areas. This was certainly the interpretation given the address by some ANC underground units inside South Africa.¹¹¹ In the weeks following the broadcast of the statement over the ANC's Radio Freedom, several hundred pamphlets were distributed, mainly to leading activists, putting across the message 'Destroy the outposts of apartheid administration'.¹¹²

The grenade squad idea caused excitement in the ANC. Cal Saloojee, an ANC member based in Botswana who was involved in training groups from inside South Africa to become grenade squads, found that 'every single individual who had any kind of responsibility or authority [in the ANC] was wanting to bring their particular individuals to us for training'.¹¹³ Saloojee's training unit comprised only three people and, since it had only minimal resources, it was soon overstretched.¹¹⁴ It found i-self training

¹¹¹Such as my own two-person unit and one or two others with which we were in touch through an intermediary.

¹¹²I monitored the broadcast and transcribed it. Through an intermediary, my unit made several cassette tapes of the broadcast plus full transcriptions available to selected Soweto underground units in January 1984. I then prepared and distributed about 600 copies of a one-page leaflet in the name of the ANC entitled 'Destroy the outposts of apartheid administration!'. About half went to selected UDF and other activists and their organisations, and the balance were distributed randomly to African names and addresses appearing in telephone directories in the Pretoria-Witwatersrand-Vereeniging complex.

¹¹³IV/Cal Saloojee, p.924.

¹¹⁴IV/Cal Saloojee, pp.925-926.

people on whom security checks had not been done. There was, in Saloojee's opinion, a lack of guidance from senior political and military officials.¹¹⁵

Despite the problems, Saloojee and his comrades considered their work too important to stop. Grenade squads seemed to provide a way forward for the ANC's armed struggle. In the field of military activity, the squads provided

a way in which we could give real meaning to people's involvement; to once and for all do away with this myth that MK is their highly trained, professional army which would liberate [them]...¹¹⁶

By late 1983-early 1984, the Botswana-based training group had several squads inside the country, of which about five were 'functioning properly'.¹¹⁷ A number wanted to identify themselves with the ANC, but the ANC leadership refused to allow this until it had assessed the response to the squads' attacks, among its potential constituency, from the state and within the ANC.¹¹⁸ The main reason for this reticence was that the squads were targeting some civilians, usually people serving in state-created black local government structures, who did not clearly qualify as legitimate targets under criteria laid down in 1976; they

¹¹⁵IV/Cal Saloojee, p.924.

¹¹⁶IV/Cal Saloojee, p.934.

¹¹⁷IV/Cal Saloojee, p.923.

¹¹⁸IV/Cal Saloojee, pp.923-924.

were not 'officially in enemy structures'.¹¹⁹

A number of the grenade squads chose to call themselves 'suicide squads' - something the ANC did not like. But the ANC accepted the name as it signalled grenade squad members' determination to the black community and might confirm white and state apprehensions.¹²⁰

Throughout the development of the grenade squads, the South African security services had, however, kept themselves well informed. Maharaj estimates that perhaps one in 10 of those trained in Botswana for the grenade squads from 1984 was an undercover South African agent.¹²¹ Saloojee believes that the very first squad that he trained - a group from Soweto - had been infiltrated by the security services.¹²² By mid-1984, the grenade squad campaign was facing serious problems.¹²³

Armed Struggle and Some Unjustified Assumptions

Conditions in MK camps in Angola had never been easy,¹²⁴

¹¹⁹IV/Cal Saloojee, p.928.

¹²⁰IV/Cal Saloojee, p.930.

¹²¹IV/Maharaj, p.454.

¹²²IV/Cal Saloojee, pp.924-925.

¹²³IV/Cal Saloojee, p.923.

¹²⁴For a somewhat favourable account of these conditions, see Barrell, MK, pp.42-45.

but had become increasingly difficult as the South African-backed Unita insurgency against the MPLA government gathered force. MK camps and personnel had come under attack but it was not until August 1983 that MK was committed to full scale operations against Unita. Then, the ANC had marshalled an entire brigade to clear Unita out of the Malange region, where MK had several camps.¹²⁵

By January 1984, six months later, the campaign against Unita had magnified grievances within MK: over shortages of food and supplies; over how few had been deployed inside South Africa; and over the brutality of the ANC security department which, ever since the chance discovery in 1981 of a plot against the ANC leadership, had operated as a law unto itself within the ANC¹²⁶. More than 900 MK combatants mutinied after their grievances were ignored by ANC president Oliver Tambo and other leaders, and the rebellion was brutally suppressed.¹²⁷ The mutiny,¹²⁸ together with wider frustrations over

¹²⁵Ellis & Sechaba, *Comrades*, pp.130-136.

¹²⁶Unrecorded conversations with Mac Maharaj, Harare, 1985-1988; Johannesburg, 1990-1991.

¹²⁷Accounts of the mutiny and its aftermath are available in Ellis & Sechaba, *Comrades*, pp.130-131; Bandile Ketelo et al, 'A Miscarriage of Democracy'; Skweyiya et al, *Commission of Enquiry into Complaints by Former African National Congress Prisoners*; Trehela, 'The ANC Prison Camps: An Audit'; Amnesty International, *Torture and executions in African National Congress Camps*.

¹²⁸Ellis & Sechaba, *Comrades*, p.148.

operational failures and administrative inefficiencies,¹²⁹ would apply very serious pressure on the ANC leadership to hold another consultative conference - the first since 1969.

The document on 'Planning for People's War', assumed a loyal and motivated guerilla force. The mutiny, and the brutality with which the ANC security department suppressed it, seriously undermined MK's morale.

Slovo's document also assumed that the ANC would be able to operate from countries like Mozambique. But this assumption disregarded contrary indications in this period. In February 1983, Prime Minister Botha had offered non-aggression pacts to neighbouring states, to which Tambo responded that he did not think neighbouring states would take up the offer.¹³⁰ Yet, by May 1983, Mozambique and South Africa had begun talks at ministerial level on security concerns and economic cooperation. At the time, Mozambique was facing extreme economic difficulties, a serious deterioration in its security situation and was receiving little economic assistance from the Soviet Union. It wanted an end to South African support for Renamo rebels. For its part, South Africa wanted an end to Mozambican support for the ANC.

¹²⁹Personal knowledge.

¹³⁰Guardian, 25/3/83.

The ANC sought, but was denied, a Mozambican briefing on its talks with South Africa.¹³¹ In July 1983, Tambo tried unsuccessfully to meet Mozambican president Samora Machel to give him an ANC intelligence report providing intimate details of South African Defence Force support for Renamo. Eventually the document was handed to Mozambique's Minister of Security.¹³² In October 1983, the *New York Times* reported that Swaziland had signed a secret anti-ANC pact with South Africa a year earlier.¹³³ By January 1984, it became publicly evident that Mozambique and South Africa might also be moving towards a comprehensive security agreement.

At this point, Tambo and ANC secretary general Alfred Nzo were invited to talks in Mozambique with Machel and his security minister, Mario Matsinhe. There, they were told that the impending agreement with South Africa would mean:

- * that the ANC would not be permitted to engage in any form of underground activity against the South African government from Mozambican soil;
- * that the ANC presence in Mozambique would be restricted to the requirements of a diplomatic mission;

¹³¹ANC, 'Fraternal Message from the African National Congress to the Frelimo Party' (No date [circa February 1984]), pp.2-3, in App/A/26.

¹³²*Ibid.*, pp.4-5.

¹³³This report was accurate, but seems not to have been given the credence it deserved. The secret pact was only made public in late March 1984.

* and that Slovo would have to leave Mozambique.¹³⁴

Tambo called an emergency meeting of the NEC upon his return to Lusaka, and another ANC delegation then returned to Mozambique to deliver the NEC's pained confidential response to Frelimo. The NEC recorded its 'deep regret' that it had not been briefed earlier on the direction that the Mozambican-South African talks were taking. Recalling its agreement with Frelimo not to infiltrate MK combatants directly across Mozambique's borders into South Africa and the ANC's acceptance of an embargo on arms deliveries to the ANC in Mozambique, the NEC said:

[W]e can think of no liberation movement in Africa which has been as modest in its claims for support facilities from its comrades-in-arms as the ANC has been in relation to Frelimo.¹³⁵

The ANC appealed to Frelimo to renegotiate the agreement with South Africa so that it merely outlawed military training facilities for insurgent groups on either countries' territory or either government's arming of insurgent groups.¹³⁶ The ANC said that eliminating the MK presence in Mozambique would be a grievous blow, as it would harm the ANC's armed struggle which was the 'root' of the 'dramatic and sustained upsurge which we are witnessing in South Africa'. Abandoning armed struggle, the ANC added, would amount to 'the complete surrender of the struggle for

¹³⁴ANC, 'Fraternal Message', pp.2-3.

¹³⁵*Ibid.*, pp.4-5).

¹³⁶*Ibid.*, pp.5-6.

national liberation'.¹³⁷

In February, South Africa and Angola signed a non-aggression pact in Lusaka. Within days, South African newspapers provided public confirmation that a non-aggression pact with Mozambique was imminent.¹³⁸ Yet the ANC remained strangely inert about seeking to protect, or move, its operational capacity in its main concentration, Mozambique.

But the inertia soon became panic. The ANC had only six weeks to cope with the devastating implications of the Nkomati Accord¹³⁹, signed on March 16 1984. The Accord shocked both the ANC's domestic supporters and its members in Mozambique, who could hardly believe what was happening.¹⁴⁰ Among senior ANC personnel, Chris Hani, Lennox Lagu, Joe Slovo as well as Ronnie Kasrils, who was hiding out in Swaziland after being trapped there,¹⁴¹ were expressly barred from Mozambique. More than 100 other operational personnel, who were in Mozambique at the time,

¹³⁷*Ibid.*, p.7. The ANC predicted that the Mozambican concessions would be in vain as South Africa would not honour its undertaking to end military support to Renamo.

¹³⁸See, for example, *Sunday Tribune*, 12/2/84.

¹³⁹*IV/Slovo*, p.1,000. The full text of the Nkomati Accord is contained in Legum, *Battlefronts*, pp.323-326.

¹⁴⁰*IV/Rabkin*, pp.857-859. *IV/Strachan*, p.1,146.

¹⁴¹I met Kasrils in Swaziland on the day the Accord was signed.

mainly MK members, were hurriedly spirited across the border into Swaziland,¹⁴² together with truckloads of arms.¹⁴³

According to Sue Rabkin, serving in the Mozambique-based political structures, the combination of the unsatisfactory new operational structures and the Nkomati Accord

tipped us upside down, so to speak. The prospect for rooting large numbers of cadres inside [South Africa] looked a bit bleak, and this was at the same time as this massive upsurge in political activity at home.¹⁴⁴

As MK combatants and arms flooded into Swaziland, Kasrils and the two key MK commanders in the area, Siphwe Nyanda (who headed the Transvaal urban machinery of MK) and Thami Zulu¹⁴⁵ (recently arrived from Angola to head the MK's troubled Natal machinery) decided to ditch the separation between political and military commands decreed by the PMC; they set up a combined political-military command in Swaziland to cope with the crisis.¹⁴⁶ Ivan Pillay, a member of the Swaziland political machinery, explains:

¹⁴²At least 120, according to *IV/Stephen*, p.1,099. It seems probable the figure was higher.

¹⁴³*IV/Kasrils*, p.334.

¹⁴⁴*IV/Rabkin*, p.828.

¹⁴⁵Also known as Muzi Ngwenya, according to Ellis & Sechaba, *Comrades*, p.170.

¹⁴⁶*IV/Pillay*, pp.752-753.

[P]eople in [Swaziland] felt that there should be an integrated approach, and saw the parallel structures created after the RC [in 1983] as a setback, or as a reinforcement of parallelism, even worse. But, now that Nkomati took place, firstly...it gave [Swaziland machineries] some independence because communication lines had broken down. We also had with us during that period Ronnie [Kasrils], who was there - he was trapped... [W]e took the decision and then implemented it on the ground, and then sought endorsement from HQ... We were cut off, there was a lot of pressure, there were a lot of cadres who were moved from Maputo into [Swaziland], pressure from the Swazis, etc. So there was no way but to coordinate...at the level of resources, personnel, security and so on...¹⁴⁷.

Rabkin echoes this:

It no longer made any difference if Sue from the political [machinery] was saving the guns or Keith [Mokoape] from the military was saving the guns. Those guns had to be [saved]. And, if Sue got there first, there was no-one who was going to say she was interfering.¹⁴⁸

Swaziland machineries soon received the PMC's endorsement for their exercise in political-military cooperation.¹⁴⁹

The ANC's main operational capability was caught in a three-jawed pincer between Mozambique, Swaziland and South Africa. Cases of indiscipline by MK members hiding out in Swaziland led to shootouts with Swazi security forces and the deportation of about 80 ANC members.¹⁵⁰ As pressures in Swaziland increased, the local ANC command decided to

¹⁴⁷IV/Pillay, p.760.

¹⁴⁸IV/Rabkin, p.860.

¹⁴⁹Pillay believes that the PMC's high regard for Kasrils' operational abilities was a major factor in their getting this approval. IV/Pillay, p.760.

¹⁵⁰IV/Slovo, p.1,000.

move as many people as possible into South Africa as quickly as possible.¹⁵¹ Scores of ill-prepared MK guerillas were put across the border with only 'few' internal receiving structures to head for.¹⁵²

Swaziland structures snatched a victory of sorts from the jaws of defeat. The fact that MK cadres managed to mount 39 attacks over the rest of the year after the chaos and panic caused by the Nkomati Accord created a false impression in the public mind, but a useful one from the ANC's perspective. It was that the ANC's military capacity had been largely undamaged by the Nkomati Accord. Underground propaganda units were also told to step up their activities.¹⁵³

But South African security forces killed or captured 77 MK combatants in 1984. Against this figure, the number of reported insurgent attacks over the year totalled a mere 45.¹⁵⁴ That meant an appalling casualty rate - of about five neutralisations for every three attacks.

Back at PMC headquarters, the dreams of December 1983

¹⁵¹IV/Strachan, p.1,146.

¹⁵²IV/Kasrils, p.333.

¹⁵³Personal knowledge. I was working inside South Africa under Kasrils' direction after the Accord and I was told to, and did, distribute a few thousand ANC and SACP pamphlets in subsequent months.

¹⁵⁴Stadler, Harms Commission Statistics, pp.1,021, 1,024.

had been shattered. The Nkomati Accord, recalls Slovo,

disastrously impeded the prospects that had existed at the beginning of 1984 to raise our urban and rural combat presence to a qualitatively higher level... It is no secret to concede...that Mozambique had been crucial to our ongoing efforts. We had also, despite numerous decisions, tended to make very little progress in developing other areas to a similar level.¹⁵⁵

The Accord would have been a blow to the ANC however minimal its reliance on Mozambique had been. The gravity of the setback it caused, however, resulted not from the ANC's failure to develop its operational capacity in other forward areas, as Slovo suggests. Rather, it was the result of the external mission's repeated failure to develop an underground leadership inside South Africa able to direct and combine political and military operations. The Nkomati Accord was a chilling vindication of those who had long argued for integration of political and military structures both in exile and inside South Africa.

In its New Year address a few months earlier, the national executive had enunciated the view that the ANC's revolutionary struggle rested on 'four pillars':

These are, first, the all-round vanguard activity of the underground structures of the ANC; second the united mass action of the peoples (sic); third, our armed offensive, spearheaded by Umkhonto We Sizwe; and fourth, the international drive to isolate the apartheid regime and win world-wide moral, political and material support

¹⁵⁵IV/Slovo, pp.999-1,000.

for the struggle.¹⁵⁶

The Nkomati Accord had exposed the weakness of the first of these pillars, the underground; it had been a serious setback for the third, armed struggle; and it had undermined the fourth, the campaign to isolate the Pretoria government. Political mobilisation by political means had proven most resilient.

Conclusion

The ANC quickly brought the UDF under its suzerainty. It succeeded in placing its standard at the head of this broadly-based coalition built around the principle of 'non-collaboration' and basic democratic demands. Through the UDF, ANC political influence increased significantly in the sphere of legal and semi-legal popular political resistance.

In the period from January 1983 to March 1984, however, there were few indications that the ANC would succeed in drawing this enlarged domestic political base into armed combat against the state en route to a 'people's war'. Rather, new operational structures which the ANC implemented early in 1983 seemed, strangely, designed to make this impossible; they actively reinforced political-military parallelism and made near impossible the

¹⁵⁶ANC NEC, 'Presidential Statement. The dream of total liberation of Africa is in sight. President's message for 1984', in Sechaba, March 1984, p.4.

establishment inside South Africa of a senior leadership combining different operational specialities. The campaign to create 'grenade squads' had the potential to draw hundreds, even thousands, of ordinary township militants into armed struggle. Yet the PMC, beset by rivalries, neglected to give the project a proper framework or backup and, thus, made the 'grenade squads' more vulnerable to police infiltration than they would otherwise have been.

There was increasing conjecture in the ANC over this period that revolution in South Africa might take the form of armed insurrection, spontaneous to some or other degree. Some in the ANC suspected that this talk was a rationalisation-in-the-making for the failure of past military strategy. Notwithstanding the fact that proposing insurrection as the climax of a 'people's war' was a respectable revolutionary position, some in the ANC suspected that an attraction of insurrection was that its 'spontaneity' might free the external mission leadership of many of the responsibilities it had hitherto assumed for planning and executing revolutionary activity.

Whether the envisaged 'people's war' was to climax in insurrection or not, the ANC's past failure to base a significant military capability inside South Africa had long made the movement vulnerable to Pretoria's military raids and diplomatic manoeuvres. The Botha government now exploited that vulnerability. The Nkomati Accord and the

earlier, similar security pact with Swaziland devastated the ANC's military capability.

What progress the ANC made in this period resulted from the diversion or defeat of its actual objectives. The ANC's actual reason for wanting a broad popular front, such as the UDF, was to make the front a recruiting pool for, and instrument of, 'people's war'. Yet, in the early days of the UDF, there was little prospect that it could perform these roles. Political-military parallelism in operational structures, which reached its zenith in this period, made a symbiosis between political and military activities nigh impossible. Rather, the UDF seemed destined to become, and remain, a vast pool of political support for the ANC.

The Nkomati Accord, while delivering a devastating blow to the ANC's armed capacity, also handed the ANC a few short-term, though ultimately illusory, advantages. Firstly, the Accord indicated the South African government took a serious view of the ANC's armed struggle. While any government is bound to take any armed insurgency seriously, the fanfare which greeted the Accord flattered the ANC's military capabilities and created in the public mind the image of a militarily competent organisation. Secondly, the serious setback which the Accord meted out to the ANC was transformed into a minor victory through the selfless and near suicidal courage of some of its cadres. The increase in armed activity these cadres achieved after the Accord

gave the impression that its military capacity was not externally reliant.

With an underground comprising a few hundred isolated and scattered units and with almost no domestic military capacity, the ANC was, whatever the extraordinary willingness of millions of South Africans to follow it, able to provide little practical or tactical leadership. Its limitations in this regard will become more evident in the next chapter.

CHAPTER EIGHTLEADING FROM BEHIND

Virtue and necessity, April 1984-June 1985

Victory is the sum total of the resolution of a whole succession of problems, a whole succession of factors. So [the Nkomati Accord] is a setback, but it does not take away from the certainty of the victory of our struggle.

- Oliver Tambo, July 1984¹

Introduction

'[T]he people inside South Africa,' ANC president Oliver Tambo told members of his organisation two months after the Nkomati Accord, 'have recognised that victory will come as a result of their struggle, their own efforts; as a result of their reliance on themselves.'² Tambo was making a virtue out of a necessity. The external mission's capacity to reinforce, let alone lead, anti-apartheid struggle from abroad had been drastically diminished by the Accord. The significance of MK's armed struggle was similarly diminished over the 15 months to June 1985. MK's activities exercised considerably less pressure on the South African state than either political activity by the UDF or political violence mounted by ordinary black township

¹The Monitoring Service of the BBC, *Summary of World Broadcasts. Part Four. The Middle East, Africa and Latin America*, ME/7688/B/4, July 6 1984.

²Oliver Tambo, 'We are a force', in *Sechaba*, October 1984, p.13.

residents. MK was very largely unable to integrate its armed cadres with the ANC's domestic political support; and the ANC's capacity to provide tactical guidance to the many thousands of ordinary people who involved themselves in uprisings inside South Africa from September 1984 was negligible. The diminution in MK's importance occurred notwithstanding the development inside South Africa of more favourable conditions than ever before for armed struggle.

Uprisings

The tempo of popular anti-apartheid struggle rose considerably in early 1984. This resulted mainly from poor conditions in black education, financial pressures on black urban local government and presidential assent in September 1983 to the new tricameral constitution.

Whilst in many respects the UDF was a product of struggles over these issues, it became a formative influence upon them.³ It stimulated the founding of new popular organisations and, through its affiliates, which numbered 648 by January 1984,⁴ it incorporated these grievances into a national focus. Its underlying message was that local or sectoral grievances could be satisfied only through an address to the issue of central state

³It seemed to consider few issues outside its brief.

⁴*Evening Post*, 5/1/84. By August it was claiming still more affiliate organisations. *City Press*, 29/8/84.

power.

In black education, the UDF, like the ANC underground, was well placed through its major educational affiliates - Azaso, Cosas and its new teachers' affiliate, the National Education Union of South Africa (Neusa)⁵ - to involve itself in the crisis. Sporadic disturbances and boycotts occurred in early 1984 in black schools and a few tertiary institutions in the Cape, Orange Free State, the northern Transvaal, Pretoria, Witwatersrand and Venda.⁶ By August 1984, some eight scholars had died in clashes with police.⁷ Azaso and Cosas, which led some of the protests, were also busy collating students' demands for an 'education charter' to amplify aspects of the national political and economic demands of the Freedom Charter.

In African townships, state policy sought to shift the financial burden for housing and services away from central government and onto local government structures, whose

⁵Of which Curtis Nkondo was president.

⁶In the first half of the year the protests affected some seven per cent of all black school pupils. Carol Cooper et al, *Race Relations Survey 1984* (Johannesburg: South African Institute of Race Relations, 1985), p.68. School pupils' demands, some dating back to 1976, included official recognition of elected students' representative councils, free textbooks, qualified teachers, the scrapping of both the prefect system and of age limits on school attendance, an end to corporal punishment and firm action against sexual harassment at schools. South African Students Press Union, *Saspu Focus*, Vol.3 No.2, November 1984.

⁷Carole Cooper et al, *Race Relations Survey 1984*, (Johannesburg: South African Institute of Race Relations, 1985), pp.68-70.

options for revenue collection were very limited. This suggested that a greater portion of the financial burden would be passed on to township residents. A new round of rent and service charge increases became unavoidable and, in the Pretoria-Witwatersrand-Vereeniging (PWV) complex, there were substantial rises between April and July 1984.

The increases were merely one among many inflationary pressures. General sales tax rose from 6 to 10 per cent over the six months to July 1984, and the rate of inflation for the year increased by some three percentage points to more than 13 per cent.⁸ The effect on industrial relations in 1984 was dramatic. The year was South African industrial relations' most turbulent on record.⁹ Nearly three times as many workers went on strike in 1984 than had done so in 1983, more than half of them for higher wages.¹⁰

The UDF campaigned at local and national levels. It stimulated the formation within the UDF fold of new organisations, particularly of civic organisation in

⁸The official estimation was that inflation rose from 10% in February to 13.26% by November; some commentators believed it might be higher. See Cooper et al, *Survey 1984*, pp.189-191.

⁹The number of striking workers in 1983 was 64,469 against 181,942 in 1984; the number of man days lost in 1983 was 124,596 against 379,712 in 1984. See National Manpower Commission, 'National Manpower Commission Report December 1984', cited in Carol Cooper et al, *Race Relations Survey 1985* (Johannesburg: South African Institute of Race Relations, 1986), p.195-197. These figures exclude the distinctly political stayaway on November 5 and 6 1984.

¹⁰See Cooper et al, *Survey 1985*, p.195-197.

townships and outlying areas. Its national leadership concentrated on regions where its affiliate base was weakest, such as the northern Orange Free State and northern Cape.¹¹ Leading UDF activists, including ANC-aligned individuals like Curtis Nkondo, helped develop a civic organisation in the Vaal-Vereeniging complex south of Johannesburg.¹²

The UDF's most visible campaign was at national level against the tricameral parliament. When the government announced that there would be elections for the envisaged 80-seat 'coloured' House of Representatives on August 22 and the 40-seat Indian House of Delegates on August 28, the UDF, with ANC support,¹³ called a boycott of the them.¹⁴

The ANC's contribution towards raising the tempo of resistance came mainly through its presence in the UDF, MK

¹¹IV/Cassim Saloojee, p.951.

¹²IV/Nkondo, pp.706-8. A Vaal Civic Association was formed in about August to lead resistance to rent and service charge increases.

¹³See, for example, ANC, 'Don't Vote! Campaign for a total boycott of the August elections' [leaflet], in App/A/25. See also Oliver Tambo, 'ANC Call to Indians and Coloured [sic] to Boycott Elections', in The Monitoring Service of the BBC, *Summary of World Broadcasts. Part Four. The Middle East, Africa and Latin America*, ME/7694/B/3, July 13 1984. In the months to July 1984, I also distributed leaflets and stickers inside South Africa promoting the ANC's and SACP's support for a boycott of the elections.

¹⁴Others that did the same included the labour federation Fosatu, religious organisations and several groups associated with the Non-European Unity Movement tradition, among them the Cape Action League (Cal) and the South African Council on Sport (Sacos).

attacks and through 'grenade squads'.¹⁵ Between November 1983, when elections for new black local authorities were held, and the end of August 1984, when elections were staged for 'coloured' and Indian chambers of the tricameral parliament, there were at least 20 petrol bomb and similar attacks on black local government councillors, on candidates for the tricameral elections and other individuals identified as sympathetic to state policy. The 'South African Suicide Squad' claimed responsibility for 16 of them.¹⁶

During the campaign against the 'coloured' and Indian elections for the tricameral parliament, the UDF held some of South Africa's largest-ever political meetings. Over the two days of the elections, about 800,000 students boycotted classes and demonstrators clashed in some Transvaal and Cape townships. Police were responsible for an extraordinary provocation when they detained 18 leaders of the UDF and other organisations during the few days separating the coloured from the Indian election days.¹⁷

¹⁵At this stage 'grenade squad' remained something of a misnomer as these groups were still using mainly petrol bombs.

¹⁶By the end of 1984, the South African Suicide Squad had claimed responsibility for 25 petrol bomb attacks on township councillors and former councillors, 24 of them in Soweto and one in Evaton on the east Rand. Carole Cooper et al, *Survey 1984* (Johannesburg: South African Institute of Race Relations), pp.82-86.

¹⁷Fourteen of those detained were senior officials of the UDF, including one of its three national presidents, three of its vice-presidents, its national publicity secretary, national treasurer, one of its two Transvaal secretaries, as well as officials of the UDF-affiliated Cosas, NIC, Release Mandela

The extent of the boycotts in the two elections greatly encouraged the UDF and ANC.¹⁸

Into this atmosphere of excitement and defiance was thrown a highly combustible element: further rent increases in African townships. The Lekoa town council, which incorporated six townships in the Vaal region, announced sharp hikes for residents who, in some instances, were already paying 20% more than in any other metropolitan township. Moreover, rents had already risen more than 400 per cent in the preceding six years.¹⁹

Protests failed to reverse the decision and the Vaal Civic Association, a UDF affiliate in whose formation ANC-aligned activists such as Nkondo had played an important role, called a stayaway from work and school on September 3, while a thousand miles away in Cape Town the government moved to implement the new tricameral constitution. Some 60 per cent of workers and nearly 100 per cent of pupils in the Vaal heeded the stayaway call and serious violence

Committee and Saawu. The UDF's national secretary, Popo Molefe, was detained in October.

¹⁸The official percentage poll for the 'coloured' chamber was 30.9 per cent and, for the Indian chamber, 20.29 per cent. These were calculated on the number of registered voters. Measured against the number of eligible voters, the percentage polls were 18.1 per cent and 16.2 per cent. Cooper et al, *Survey* 1984, pp.127-128.

¹⁹Jeremy Seekings, 'The Origins of Political Mobilisation in PWV Townships', in William Cobbett and Robin Cohen (Eds.), *Popular Struggles in South Africa* (London: James Currey, 1988), pp.60-69.

erupted between townships residents, on one hand, and councillors and police, on the other.

As the limited disturbances entered their second day, the ANC wanted them extended. It called upon people to

intensify the struggle and...open new fronts. We must render inoperative the ability of apartheid to exploit and oppress us further. The sharp confrontations now ranging in Sharpeville, Evaton, Sebokeng, Lenasia and other areas must be widened and extended to other areas.²⁰

South Africans should demonstrate their rejection of the new constitution and make 'the stooges feel the wrath of our people and be completely ostracised'.²¹ Repression during the elections had confirmed, added the ANC, 'that the way forward to victory lies in a systematic combination of mass action and organised revolutionary violence within the framework of a growing people's war'.²²

Over the next four weeks, 60 people died in the turbulence in Vaal townships, four of them township councillors. Damage amounted to some R30-million. Residents of Evaton, also protesting against rent increases, confronted police in a spiral of violence that had, by the

²⁰ANC Department of Information and Publicity, 'Statement of the African National Congress of South Africa on the farcical so-called new constitution', in App/A/30. My recollection is that I received this statement by telex on about September 5 in Botswana where I had gone into exile about five weeks earlier when I received a tip-off that I was about to be detained for my political activities.

²¹*Ibid.*

²²*Ibid.*

end of September, led to the death of at least another 21 people in this township.

From exile, the ANC tried to provide guidance. In a Radio Freedom address in early September, Thabo Mbeki, the ANC's director of information and publicity, sought to encourage confrontation while moderating expectations. He said:

[I]n our planning, in our thinking, in our mobilisation, we must proceed from the basis that we inflicted a humiliating defeat on our enemy [through the boycott of the coloured and Indian elections]...

[A]s revolutionaries, as fighters for liberation, [we] must plan how we should continue our offensive, knowing very well that the enemy will, as it must, hit back to stop the emergence and consolidation of the revolutionary situation that Pretoria fears so much.

The forces to carry out [our] offensive are daily demonstrating in action their readiness to march ever forward...

...[W]e must answer the question...without seeking to create illusions among ourselves: Are we - as a democratic movement which the people have accepted as their authentic representative - doing all that is necessary to move this organised, conscious and active mass army of liberation into a continuing all-round offensive for the seizure of power by the people?²³

In answer to his own question, Mbeki called for a

²³The full transcript of Mbeki's address is available in The Monitoring Service of the BBC, *Summary of World Broadcasts. Part Four. the Middle East, Africa and Latin America.* ME/7770/B/7, October 10 1984, and ME/7771/B/2, October 11 1984. The BBC Monitoring Service carried Mbeki's address in two halves in consecutive editions of its reports. The particular broadcasts monitored by the BBC were those over Radio Freedom's Addis Ababa station on October 5 and 6 1984. The address had, however, been broadcast about three weeks earlier over Radio Freedom stations. I first monitored it in Botswana (where I had recently gone into exile) within a fortnight of elections to the Indian House of Delegates on August 28.

campaign to make the country ungovernable. It recalled an appeal by Nelson Mandela in 1958.²⁴ Mbeki said:

We must destroy the enemy organs of government. We must render them ineffective and inoperative... In rejecting Botha's regime, we also reject his puppets. There is no reason that we should allow these puppets to control our lives...

In every locality and in all parts of our country, we must fight to ensure that we remove the enemy's organs of government...

All classes and strata among the oppressed peoples are adversely affected by the apartheid system... Accordingly, our offensive against the enemy's organs of government has to be carried out by the people in their entirety...²⁵

Apart from rhetorical urgings, the ANC's ability to provide tactical guidance to township militants was extremely limited, despite growing popular support for the outlawed movement. The ANC's main operational bridgehead in Mozambique had been largely dismantled; its Swaziland machineries were under heavy pressures; MK infiltration had all-but dried up; and those MK cadres hurriedly infiltrated after the Nkomati Accord were suffering appalling casualties. Moreover, the ANC's underground comprised scattered units without any internal command structure. And the detention of UDF leaders had netted members of the underground, further weakening the ANC's capacity to

²⁴Nelson Mandela, 'Press Statement, released by Nelson R. Mandela, Honorary Secretary of the All-in African National Council, June 26, 1961' in Kar's & Carter, *From Protest to Challenge*, vol.3, pp.651, 699-701.

²⁵Monitoring Service of the BBC, *Summary of World Broadcasts. Part Four. the Middle East, Africa and Latin America.* ME/7770/B/7, October 10 1984, and ME/7771/B/2, October 11 1984.

provide leadership.

The weakness of the underground in this critical period was illustrated when six senior UDF leaders sought sanctuary from detention in the British consulate in Durban in mid-September. Four of the six - Archie Gumede, Mewa Ramgobin, George Sewpersadh and M J Naidoo - had been among the 14 UDF leaders detained shortly before the Indian election in late August; but on September 7 the Natal Supreme Court had ruled their detention unlawful and they had been released before the state could serve amended detention orders. The UDF leaders then hid for a week before seeking refuge and publicity for their cause in the consulate. There they were joined by Paul David, a leading Natal Release Mandela Committee member. Three of them left the consulate on October 6 and were arrested, the remaining three did so on December 12 and two of them were also arrested. The men were leading members or associates of the ANC and/or SACP underground in Natal.²⁶ Whatever the propaganda value of their refuge, their action further weakened the ANC operationally at a critical moment. The consulate fiasco preceded the commencement in December 1984 of the first major trial of UDF leaders. Eight UDF leaders were charged with treason and refused bail; later, their number increased to 16. Again, this seriously affected the

²⁶Unrecorded conversations with ANC leaders and members in exile in 1984 and 1985.

ANC's and UDF's capacity to operate.²⁷

In the midst of the violence, confusion and absence of leadership, three stayaways served, however, to show the ANC and its allies a way forward. The first was called for September 17 in Soweto by the Release Mandela Committee (RMC)²⁸ to express solidarity with Vaal township residents. The RMC did not canvass the stayaway at all widely, apparently believing its merits were self-evident. As a result, the stayaway was a limited success and ended in confusion.²⁹

The second stayaway presaged a turning point in popular resistance. It did not repeat the mistakes made in Soweto. It originated in the east Rand township of KwaThema in October with Cosas' attempts to elicit adult support for

²⁷They were: Archie Gumede and Albertina Sisulu, both UDF presidents; Frank Chikane, UDF vice-president; Mewa Ramgobin, UDF national treasurer; Cassim Saloojee, also a UDF treasurer; Essop Jassat, UDF patron and Transvaal Indian Congress (TIC) president; George Sewpersadh, NIC president; M J Naidoo, Natal Indian Congress (NIC) vice-president; Curtis Nkondo, Release Mandela Committee chairman (RMC); Aubrey Mokoena, a leader of the Transvaal RMC; Paul David, NIC executive and Natal RMC member; Ismail Mohamed, Transvaal Anti-President's Council Committee chairman; Thozamile Gqweta, South African Allied Workers' Union (Saawu) president; Sisa Njikelana, Saawu general secretary; Sam Kikine, senior Saawu official; and Isaac Ngcobo, Saawu executive member.

²⁸An important front for the Soweto ANC underground. Personal knowledge.

²⁹Estimates of the numbers who stayed away varied from 35 to 65 per cent. There was confusion over how long the stayaway should last. See Labour Monitoring Group, 'The November 1984 Stayaway', in Johann Maree (Ed.), *The Independent Trade Unions 1974-1984. Ten Years of the South African Labour Bulletin* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1987), p.261.

the demands of black students, some 220,000 of whom were then boycotting classes nationwide.³⁰ At a meeting of about 4,000 people in KwaThema on October 14, a township parent-student committee was established. Its members included Fosatu president Chris Dlamini.³¹ The committee sent a list of students' grievances to the government, demanded that all township councillors resign and that all security forces withdraw from the townships. If the demands were not met, said the committee, parents would act in solidarity with students. When no response was received, residents held a highly successful stayaway from work and school on October 22.

Early the next morning, about 60km south of KwaThema, 7,000 South African Defence Force troops helped police seal off the three townships in the Vaal worst affected by unrest - Sebokeng, Sharpeville and Boipatong - mounted a big search operation and arrested about 400 people.³² 'Operation Palmiet', as it was called, was the most dramatic incidence since the 1960 emergency³³ of the use the Defence Force against domestic unrest.

The operation indicated the state's ability to

³⁰Rand Daily Mail, 6/10/84.

³¹Labour Monitoring Group, 'The November 1984 Stayaway', p.265.

³²The Star, 25/10/84.

³³Following the outlawing of the ANC and PAC.

contain, isolate and move through any one black township affected by unrest with a relatively small force. The location of black townships some distance from 'white' areas and from township residents' places of work, together with the few access routes to townships and the regularity and breadth of their streets facilitated this containment. It was clear that, unless government security forces were seriously attenuated, they could easily re-establish control over any township or small group of townships.

Further attempts by Cosas to gain adult support for student-led campaigns in the Transvaal now stimulated a turning point in resistance culture. A Fosatu committee in the Transvaal, set up to develop responses to the unrest and chaired by Dlamini, felt that the dividing lines between the struggles of the students, workers and township residents were becoming increasingly blurred. Significantly, they felt Fosatu's past avoidance of community-based struggles looked less defensible. On factory floors, there was also support for the students, who had supported earlier union calls for consumer boycotts in support of workers' demands. Moreover, many workers felt that the unions were sufficiently powerful to safeguard their class interests while participating in multi-class struggles.

At a meeting on October 27 in Johannesburg, 37 organisations, mainly UDF affiliates but also including

Fosatu, decided on a two-day stayaway in the PWV complex in support of students', unions' and civic organisations' demands.³⁴ The meeting established a Transvaal Regional Stayaway Committee to organise for action on November 5 and 6. Its composition reflected an easing of tensions between ANC/UDF activists and aligned unions and the 'independent worker' tendency, represented by Fosatu.³⁵

Abroad, at least one senior PMC official was unaware of the impending stayaway three days before it was due to start.³⁶ Inside the country, ANC influence was substantial via UDF affiliates and through Release Mandela Committee involvement on the stayaway committee. But at the level of organisation and delivery, Fosatu and Cosas would prove more significant.

³⁴The demands were: for the establishment of democratically elected SRCs; for an end to corporal punishment and sexual harassment in schools; for the withdrawal of security forces from the townships; for the release of detainees; for the scrapping of increases in rents, bus fares and service charges in the townships; and for the reinstatement of workers dismissed by a sweet manufacturer, Simba Quix. Labour Monitoring Group, 'The November 1984 Stayaway', pp.264-268.

³⁵The core of the committee comprised Moses Mayekiso of Fosatu's Metal and Allied Workers' Union, Themba Nontlane of the non-Fosatu but UDF-aligned Municipal and General Workers' Union of South Africa, Oupa Monareng of the UDF-affiliated Soweto Youth Congress (Soyco), and Thami Mali of the Release Mandela Committee. Black consciousness groups distanced themselves from the initiative. Labour Monitoring Group, 'The November 1974 Stayaway', p.267.

³⁶On November 3, I met Joe Jele, top PMC official, in an Harare street and he told me he had not been aware of preparations for the stayaway until he read an article I had written on it which appeared in *The Herald* the previous morning. 'If we had known earlier, we could have helped them,' he commented.

In a triumph of organisation, some 400,000 students boycotted classes on November 5 and 6, as about 800,000 workers absented themselves from work. South Africa's industrial heartland ground to a halt. The stayaway was one of the most effective examples of the political general strike in post-World War Two South Africa.

The stayaway revealed, in action, to leaders of the 'independent worker' tendency that they and ANC- and UDF-aligned activists could work together. Despite tensions between them, this presaged further cooperation between the two most powerful tendencies in the militant anti-apartheid opposition.

The stayaway also resolved a strategic hiatus within the UDF. Jeremy Cronin, a former ANC political prisoner working for the UDF in Cape Town in October 1984, recalls:

We had very successfully boycotted the tri-cameral elections and...black local authorities, which was the project which had assembled the UDF... [After that] there was a substantial strategic crisis of...how to go forward... And there were two threads coming through at that point. One was a return back into our affiliates, picking up on issues of wash lines and rents [although] we didn't attach the significance that [the] rent issue later assumed... But there were...strong feelings that you couldn't just retreat back into that. You had to, at the same time, be focusing on the national political issue of state power. But we didn't know how to do that. We were lost, I would say. And what the stayaway did - although it didn't provide the answer - [it] pointed to continuing mass surges, mass militancy. [It] also indicated that the mobilisation that had occurred through the UDF - [which] had, to some extent, particularly around the August period, had been focused on the coloured and Indian community - that this

heightened political climate had [also] affected quite dramatically the African townships... And from then on, from that November stayaway onwards, the real focus, the cutting edge of struggle, became the African township.³⁷

As serious disturbances continued in the Vaal area and east Rand through September and October, the ANC's Radio Freedom continued to urge attacks on the outposts of apartheid administration: 'What is happening today...in the African areas around the Vaal Triangle must be extended to cover the entire country,' it declared.³⁸ One week after the November stayaway, Radio Freedom said:

We must use all methods of struggle both legal and illegal, underground and above [board], mass political activity and revolutionary violence... We need to arm ourselves. We need to know how to prepare home-made explosives, Molotov cocktails, etc. Already these weapons have been used in clashes with the fascist police or in attacks against stooges. Those of us who have the know-how must teach others... Each and every white family has their weapons hidden somewhere. We work for these people. In some cases we even know where these weapons are hidden. Let us disarm the whites and arm ourselves. Let us organise raiding groups to break into shops that sell weapons. Let us fight back.³⁹

Radio Freedom added in the next breath, however, that it was important to attract whites to the ANC and to erode apartheid's political base.⁴⁰

³⁷IV/Jeremy Cronin, pp.100-101.

³⁸The Monitoring Service of the BBC, *Summary of World Broadcasts. Part Four. The Middle East, Africa and Latin America*, ME/7783/B/7, October 22 1984.

³⁹The Monitoring Service of the BBC, *Summary of World Broadcasts. Part Four. The Middle East, Africa and Latin America*, ME/7790/B/10, November 13 1984.

⁴⁰*Ibid.*

The White Response

The turbulence, together with increased deployment of white military conscripts in black townships, created considerable disquiet among the white liberal intelligentsia and business community. The End Conscription Campaign (ECC), a number of whose leaders had clandestine links with the ANC,⁴¹ intensified its activities, campaigned for the withdrawal of troops from African townships and underwent dramatic growth in membership.⁴² It claimed a big increase in the number of draft dodgers, although this was disputed by the Defence Force.⁴³

Voices within the white business community argued that only a new social contract could ensure stability and profitability. The chairman of one of South Africa's largest companies, Tony Bloom of Premier Milling, told businessmen shortly after the November stayaway that he had a 'feeling that the wheels have begun to come off'. He advocated negotiations with the ANC, which had 'very, very

⁴¹IV/Evans, particularly pp.158, 165, 173.

⁴²IV/Evans, pp.166-169.

⁴³The Minister of Defence said that whereas 1,596 conscripts had failed to report for their initial military training in 1984, the number for 1985 was 7,589. A subsequent Defence Force statement sought to explain the difference away by claiming that some 6,431 of the latter were university students or failed school pupils whose military service had been deferred. But the ECC and COSAWR reported a considerable increase in the numbers of young whites dodging the draft. Cited in Cooper et al, Survey 1985, p.419.

substantial support'.⁴⁴ Most business leaders questioned the state's response to the unrest, particularly the detention of trade union leaders involved in organising the stayaway, who included Fosatu president Dlamini and Piroshaw Camay, secretary of the Council of Unions of South Africa (Cusa). Unusually, the Afrikaanse Handelsinstituut, government-aligned in the past, joined the other major employer organisations, the Federated Chamber of Industries and Association of Chambers of Commerce, in criticising these detentions. Employers believed the detentions endangered the fragile *modus vivendi* they had with the emergent unions.⁴⁵

Insurrection Revisited

The November stayaway stimulated renewed interest in the question of insurrection in the external mission. The various ingredients for insurrection appeared to be materialising.

ANC theorists had long considered the winning over of a significant portion of state security forces to the ANC a necessary condition for successful insurrection. The seemingly impregnable unity of state security forces had

⁴⁴*Financial Mail*, 16/11/84.

⁴⁵*Sunday Star*, 18/11/84. *Citizen*, 19/11/84. In all, 18 people involved in organising the stayaway were detained.

thus delayed serious consideration of insurrection.⁴⁶ But Slovo now claimed to detect an increase black membership of bantustan armed forces, the SA Defence Force and police.⁴⁷ Moreover, there was increasing disenchantment among white conscripts.

The uprisings were producing other insurrectionary ingredients. Groups of militants were banding together to form combat units which were daily engaging security forces in the streets. Organised labour, under militant leadership, was showing an impressive ability to mount political general strikes. And the November stayaway indicated a potential for 'a combination of all forms of

⁴⁶IV/Maharaj, p.485.

⁴⁷Official figures appeared to bear out the former point. Whereas the total SADF personnel complement had increased by 5.8 per cent in the two years to July 1983, the increase in the number of black men was 13 per cent - which was substantial since it excluded the transfer during the same period of a battalion to the nominally independent Venda Defence Force. SADF, *White Paper on Defence and Armaments Supply, 1984*, cited in Cooper et al, *Survey 1984*, pp.744-745. The estimated maximum total of black troops in the SADF and bantustan units in 1985 was 7,500 Africans (of whom some 7,000 were permanent force), 7,500 'coloureds' (2,500), and 1,600 Indians (400). Black membership of the permanent force represented some 25 per cent of the strength of the total permanent South African complement. A number of black troops had seen active service in Namibia against Swapo forces since 1978. Gavin Cawthra, *Brutal Force: The Apartheid War Machine* (London: International Defence and Aid Fund for Southern Africa, 1986) pp.66, 70, 260, 264. By the end of 1983, 49 per cent of South African police were black: 39 per cent (21,731) were Africans, 7 per cent were Coloureds, and 3 per cent were Indians. Cooper et al, *Survey 1984*, p.786. Whereas the racial breakdown of personnel South African police force 10 years earlier was almost exactly the same as in 1984, there were in addition several thousand black policemen serving in the nominally independent bantustans - Transkei, Bophuthatswana, Ciskei and Venda. Muriel Horrell and Tony Hodgson (Cmpls.), *A Survey of Race Relations in South Africa 1975* (Johannesburg: South African Institute of Race Relations, 1976), p.196.

struggle, the cutting thrust of which was the political stayaways', in the eyes of Garth Strachan, a leading ANC operational official in Zimbabwe.⁴⁸

The SACP was the first component of the ANC-led alliance to study the recent developments and reorganise itself. At its sixth congress in Moscow in December 1984, a month after the Transvaal stayaway,⁴⁹ the SACP also added its voice to those (who included the MK mutineers in Angola) calling on the ANC to hold another consultative conference, a demand the ANC leadership had already decided to concede.⁵⁰ In its own deliberations, the SACP resolved to shift the focus of its activities slightly away from strengthening the ANC (and recruiting within it) towards building its independent underground presence inside South Africa, particularly within the emergent trade union movement.⁵¹ Slovo's election as new SACP chairman to replace Dr Yusuf Dadoo, who had died, improved the sense of direction of the party, which decided to free a handful of its members from their ANC duties to do purely SACP work,⁵² and decided to publish a quarterly internal

⁴⁸IV/Strachan, p.1,158.

⁴⁹Ellis et al, *Comrades*, pp.145-147; SACP, 'SACP holds its sixth congress', in *African Communist*, No.101, Second Quarter, 1985, pp.5-8.

⁵⁰Ellis & Sechaba, *Comrades*, p.148.

⁵¹Ellis & Sechaba, *Comrades*, p.147.

⁵²They were to include Ivan Pillay and Joe Jele. Personal knowledge.

agitational pamphlet, *Umsebenzi*.⁵³

The first edition of *Umsebenzi* published an outline of a new strategic vision. After a side-swipe at surviving members of the 'independent worker' tendency, in which the SACP asserted that the November stayaway had

sent a message to all our working people that political and economic demands cannot be separated [and...] exposed those meddlers who have been trying to stop the trade union movement from playing a part in the national liberation struggle[.]⁵⁴

the party declared the South African conflict was moving towards an insurrectionary outcome. It said:

When the situation is ripe the national withdrawal of labour can combine with other mass actions, including the use of revolutionary violence, to destroy the racist regime.⁵⁵

For SACP members like Strachan, the challenge now was whether or not the ANC could develop the underground capacity to cultivate, and then combine, the forms of struggle suggested by this vision and by MCW, the insurrectionary doctrine.⁵⁶

⁵³As a journalist and strong supporter (though not a member) of the SACP, I was among those consulted on the design and naming of the pamphlet. Its target audience was defined as 'your average shop steward in the unions at home'. Initially, its proposed name was *Inkululeko* [Zulu for 'Freedom'], the name given to a previous series of illegal SACP pamphlets. But, after discussion, it became known as *Umsebenzi*, meaning 'The Worker', in order to connote a closer working class allegiance. I contributed the international column for its first six-odd issues.

⁵⁴The ANC made much the same point in O R Tambo, 'Render South Africa Ungovernable', in *Sechaba*, March 1985, p.5.

⁵⁵*Ibid.*

⁵⁶*IV/Strachan*, p.1,158.

Available statistics of unrest in the four months after September 1984 indicated, however, that the ANC had a long way to go towards cultivating that capacity. The figures confirmed fears within the ANC over the weakness of its underground and its very limited capacity to defend its potential constituency. Police recorded 2,370 unrest-related incidents of violence in this period.⁵⁷ The death toll was 149, almost without exception black people, of whom 16% were said to be blacks killed by blacks. Some 77 per cent had been killed by gunshot wounds, suggesting most were probably victims of security force action. A further 651 people were injured, 80 per cent of them as a result of gunshot wounds.⁵⁸ Security force deaths numbered only three, with 82 injured.⁵⁹ Moreover, the ANC leadership conceded that it had 'not realised' its plans, dating back to 1980, to build up stores of small arms distribution to people in the event of a new round of uprisings.⁶⁰

Nonetheless, pockets of insurrection continued, throwing up new organs and forms of struggle. In many townships, residents did not merely displace state-approved local government; they also replaced it. Scores, and soon hundreds, of councillors resigned in late 1984 under

⁵⁷Stadler, *Harms Commission Statistics*, pp.1,038, 1,040.

⁵⁸Minister of Law and Order Louis le Grange, cited in Cooper et al, *Survey 1985*, p.533.

⁵⁹Stadler, *Harms Commission Statistics*, pp.1,038, 1,040.

⁶⁰*IV/slovo*, p.989.

popular pressure and threat. The prototype replacement of state-approved local government was developed in Lingelihle, the African township serving the small Eastern Cape town of Cradock. There, a civic organisation, Cradora, had by November 1984 not merely forced the resignation of all councillors but established their own local government: a system of elected street and zone committees. The Cradock experience greatly inspired other communities to emulate it.

In Vaal townships, outraged residents refused *en masse* to pay rent and service charges. The result - though not the boycotters' original objective⁶¹ - was to undermine seriously the financial base of the local council, and impose new burdens on the state treasury.

The ANC took public stock of this blizzard of developments in its New Year Address in January 1985. The executive felt that the ANC's progress depended upon considerable improvements in its armed activity and the underground. The underground was the key. It alone could draw together the different strands of struggle.⁶²

The executive said that areas in which 'democratic

⁶¹Matthew Chaskalson, Karen Jochelson and Jeremy Seekings, 'Rent Boycotts and the Urban Political Economy', in Glenn Moss and Ingrid Obery (Eds.), *South African Review* 4 (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1987), pp.53-58.

⁶²Tambo, 'Render South Africa', p.11.

forces' had emerged as 'the alternative power' should be transformed into 'mass revolutionary bases' from which MK could grow as a people's army.⁶³ MK needed to link up with the groups of township residents involved in attacks against the local state, so 'drawing the masses into the prosecution of a people's war'.⁶⁴ The executive also called for improvements to organisation in the rural areas and bantustans⁶⁵ - indicative of a recognition that this was necessary for the ANC to be able to attenuate state forces.

In January and February 1985, serious unrest spread from townships on the Vaal and east Rand, to the eastern Cape, Karoo and parts of the Orange Free State. In February, there were serious clashes between police and residents at the Crossroads squatter camp outside Cape Town. March saw a dramatic escalation of turbulence in the eastern Cape, particularly in the industrial town of Uitenhage. There, on March 21, the 25th anniversary of the Sharpeville shootings, police opened fire on a crowd of marchers, killing at least 20. In April, unrest escalated in townships on the east Rand, eastern and Western Cape and Orange Free State, bringing the unrest death toll since the

⁶³*Ibid.* p.12.

⁶⁴*Ibid.*

⁶⁵*Ibid.* p.8.

beginning of 1985 to 161.⁶⁶ Tensions were high in Natal where the opposition of Chief Mangosuthu Buthelezi's Inkatha movement to the unrest was an important factor in checking upheaval in the province.

In cases where township residents themselves went on the offensive, township councillors and local police were common targets of their rage. In the eight months to the end of April 1985, the homes of 814 policemen were destroyed or badly damaged;⁶⁷ in the seven months to July, 12 policemen or councillors were killed and 100 injured in attacks;⁶⁸ and, in the nine months to May, 257 township councillors resigned in response to demands that they should do so.⁶⁹

UDF strategists were slow to achieve any clarity on what the form of unrest meant for their strategy. Some, like Jeremy Cronin, had been convinced by the onset of the uprisings and the November 1984 stayaway that the African townships should be the focus of UDF energies. But, relates

⁶⁶The worst affected area was the Port Elizabeth-Uitenhage complex in the eastern Cape, where 82 people had died; 19 had died in the Western Cape; 35 in the remainder of the Cape, including the Karoo; seven in the Orange Free State; six on the east Rand; four in Soweto; six elsewhere in the Transvaal; and only two in Natal. Cooper et al, *Survey 1985*, p.535.

⁶⁷*SA Digest*, May 1986, cited in Cooper et al, *Survey 1985*, p.545.

⁶⁸*Ibid.*

⁶⁹Minister of Cooperation and Development Gerrit Viljoen, cited in Cooper et al, *Survey 1985*, p.545.

Cronin, it took longer for the UDF to see that the

...problems that we were posing rather abstractly - the question of state power - was being addressed, not theoretically but practically, through the destruction of the lower echelons of state power and the building of alternative forms.⁷⁰

As in this instance so too in others, formulation of UDF strategy followed, and sought to account for, practice; those responsible for the practice informing UDF strategy were significantly autonomous of the UDF; in this sense, the UDF was *leading from behind*.

The Revolutionary Moment

The ANC and SACP had, since 1969, believed it was necessary to differentiate between two phenomena. The first was what the SACP described as 'a revolutionary situation', 'in which a call to revolution involving an armed uprising would properly be on the agenda'. The second was the process during which organised violence was used, either defensively or as part of a planned build-up, towards an all-round revolutionary insurrection.⁷¹

In mid-1985, the PMC believed that the period of build-up was approaching its climax and that insurrection was now properly on the agenda. History was, at last, about to produce the revolutionary moment. The NEC put this view

⁷⁰IV/Cronin, p.101.

⁷¹IV/Slovo, p.961. For the ANC's formulation of the distinction, see ANC, *Strategy and Tactics*, pp.174-176.

across in a statement on April 25 1985. The statement was drafted by Slovo.⁷² Several thousand copies were distributed in leaflet form inside South Africa, mainly in Natal.⁷³

The leaflet stated the understanding of the 'moment' in South Africa within a Leninist framework. In parts, it is almost a parody of the preconditions Lenin laid down early this century for a revolutionary moment⁷⁴ and for successful insurrection.⁷⁵ Whereas Lenin had stated 'it must be impossible for the ruling class to maintain their rule without any change', the ANC said it was now 'clear that the racists cannot rule in the old way'. Whereas Lenin stated there must be 'a crisis...among the "upper classes"', the ANC said that 'on the side of the ruling class the economic and political crisis has reached new heights'. Whereas Lenin had said that the ruling class's

⁷²IV/Maharaj, p.490. Slovo was not yet formally a member of the NEC. Slovo elaborated on some issues raised in the leaflet in an interview over Radio Freedom in July. See *ANC News Briefing*, vol.9, no.28, 14/7/85.

⁷³See ANC, 'ANC Call to the Nation. The Future is Within Our Grasp', in App/A/31. According to Maharaj, in an unrecorded discussion with me in Harare in 1985, some 10,000 copies of the pamphlet were sent to forward areas for dispatch into South Africa. Yacoob Abba Omar, who was involved in a Durban-based underground propaganda unit, says his unit distributed thousands of copies in African, Indian and so-called coloured townships around Durban. IV/Omar, pp.743-744.

⁷⁴V I Lenin, 'The Collapse of the Second International', in V I Lenin, *Collected Works* vol.21 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1960), p.213.

⁷⁵V I Lenin, 'Marxism and Insurrection', in V I Lenin, *Selected Works* vol.2 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1977), p.330.

crisis must be of a kind that leads 'to a fissure through which the discontent and indignation of the oppressed classes burst forth', the ANC stated that all government 'reforms, designed to defuse the developing revolutionary assault, trigger off even more vigorous mass opposition' and that there is a 'growing ferment from below and the deepening crisis from above'.

The ANC leaflet noted that events were moving with 'astonishing speed' and suggested that there was a real possibility of decisive national insurrection soon. Echoing the SACP in *Umsebenzi* earlier, the ANC pamphlet's vision of insurrection was that

A long-lasting national work stoppage, backed by our oppressed communities and supported by armed activity can break the backbone of the apartheid system and bring the regime to its knees.⁷⁶

The leaflet claimed that ANC strategic foresight had been crucial to bringing about this state of affairs. The leaflet referred to the New Year Address four months earlier in which the ANC had called for the creation of 'mass revolutionary bases' and for the country to be made 'ungovernable', and asserted:

Only three months have passed since that call was made and already the surge of people's resistance and active defiance have reached new heights. The face of our country is changing before our very eyes.⁷⁷

⁷⁶ANC, 'ANC Call to the Nation'.

⁷⁷*Ibid.*

The leaflet issued a series of directives to different sections and strata of the ANC's potential constituency. The doctrinal schema of MCW underlay them. In particular, the leaflet addressed ways of extending the two main elements of an MCW-type offensive: the 'political army' and 'revolutionary army'.⁷⁸

The leaflet appealed for a broadening of what MCW called the 'political army' - those acting consciously to bring about revolution. The leaflet urged the black working class to absorb the lessons of the recent successful stayaways in the Transvaal and eastern Cape and to 'sharpen the weapon of workers' power at the point of production in the struggle for national liberation' with a view to 'combining national stay-away action with countrywide mass popular actions'. Organisations straddling the middle ground - 'social institutions, religious, cultural, civic and sporting', which had a 'belief in the brotherhood of man' - should 'side even more vigorously with the cause of people's liberation'. There should be mass defiance of apartheid laws. Any black person serving in 'the machineries of apartheid' should immediately resign. And the white community in general should 'move away from its support of apartheid' and 'increase the ranks of the growing number of democratic whites who are participating in our liberation struggle'.

⁷⁸See ANC [Ronnie Kasrils, et al], *MCW*, in App/A/21.

The leaflet also called for a broadening of what the MCW schema referred to as the 'revolutionary army'. It called upon MK units, who comprised the 'organised advanced detachment' of the 'revolutionary army', to 'intensify the armed struggle with all means at its disposal and concentrate more and more on actions against the armed forces and police'. It called upon the youth and other militants - part of the 'revolutionary armed people', another element of the 'revolutionary army' - to 'find ways of organising themselves into small mobile units' which would 'act in an organised way in both white and black areas against the enemy and his agents', turn every black area into a '"no go area" for any isolated individuals or pockets of the enemy's police or armed personnel', 'obtain arms by whatever means from the enemy and from any other source', and link up with MK units.

The leaflet also addressed itself to the third element of the revolutionary army - to army and police units which might transfer allegiance to the ANC. It urged blacks serving in state armed forces to 'stop shooting their brothers and sisters in defence of white rule' and, instead, to 'organise secretly to turn their guns against their masters'. White conscripts in the SA Defence Force should refuse to serve.

Maharaj, representing political operational machineries, was in full agreement with the drift of the

leaflet Slovo had drafted.⁷⁹ This was rare agreement indeed between the ANC's leading military and political strategists. But it had arrived too late to create the crucial missing element on which the successful working out of the insurrectionary schema depended: an underground leadership inside South Africa able to lead and combine a range of forms of struggle. The ANC, while it proclaimed its moment had arrived, was unable even to move senior officials into the forward areas to provide an improved level of tactical command from there.⁸⁰

At this point, The formal political underground still numbered only about 350 to 500 individuals.⁸¹ On the other hand, the informal underground was growing rapidly. But the ANC had no programme to draw this latter body of people into a closer relationship. Most of the ANC leadership evidently still viewed the uprisings as mainly a military problem, which is where most resources were directed.⁸²

Problems in the Forward Areas

The ANC presence in Zimbabwe⁸³ had yet to make any

⁷⁹IV/Maharaj, p.490.

⁸⁰IV/Maharaj, p.490-491.

⁸¹IV/Maharaj, p.496.

⁸²IV/Maharaj, p.496.

⁸³The ANC and Zimbabwe had now reached an agreement on clandestine ANC activity. Whereas the movement of ANC political personnel through Zimbabwe was subject to few restrictions,

significant progress in its attempts to start a classical guerilla war in the northern Transvaal.⁸⁴ Over and above organisational problems and disputes in local ANC structures,⁸⁵ ANC military activity from Zimbabwe was undermined by an array of security measures that had been put in place in the northern Transvaal. These included early warning systems for local white farmers, sophisticated electronic surveillance systems, and border patrols.⁸⁶

Botswana and Lesotho, from the latter of which several score ANC exiles had been withdrawn, remained under pressure to sign Nkomati-style accords with South Africa. In the early hours of June 14, the South African Defence Force mounted a raid against 10 alleged ANC houses and

military movement was covered by a secret understanding between Zimbabwe and the ANC, to which only a few top officials on either side were party. Its basic terms were: that Zimbabwe would turn a blind eye to a limited flow of ANC weapons and military personnel through Zimbabwe but it should be kept informed in outline of what was being planned and done; the ANC should appoint a 'military attache' in Zimbabwe to facilitate this communication (It did - a man who used the *nom de guerre* 'Manchecker', a close associate of Joe Modise); border crossings and the like had to be undertaken without official collaboration, hence illegally; a handful of top Zimbabwean cabinet and security officials would be available to intervene on behalf of ANC military personnel if arrests occurred (as they did). In Botswana, there was no cooperation between the ANC and the government on military movements; cadres had to operate completely illegally. *IV/Strachan*, pp.1,192-1,195.

⁸⁴*IV/Strachan*, pp.1,195-1,199.

⁸⁵*IV/Strachan*, pp.1,195-1,199.

⁸⁶*IV/Strachan*, pp.1,195-1,197.

offices in and around Gaborone, Botswana's capital. Twelve people died, eight of them South Africans.⁸⁷ Most of the dead South Africans were members of, or had links with, the ANC, though none of those killed held command-level positions.⁸⁸

A key element of South Africa's counter-insurgency strategy had always been to keep ANC command and control structures stationed abroad and continually to interrupt its lines into South Africa.⁸⁹ The strategy's success was apparent. According to Maharaj:

the enemy devised a strategy where...they forced us off track...they forced us into a mode of retreat and discontinuity of structures.

Inside the country, meanwhile, there existed no substitute for external command. In the fast-moving circumstances of the mid-1985, to the extent that the ANC could be said to be providing any tactical leadership at all, it, too, was leading from behind.

ANC Conference

When about 200 external mission delegates⁹⁰ gathered for

⁸⁷Daily News, 17/6/85.

⁸⁸Unrecorded conversations with surviving Botswana-based ANC members in subsequent weeks..

⁸⁹IV/Stadler, p.1,046. Stadler expanded on this in an unrecorded portion of his interview.

⁹⁰There were no delegates from inside South Africa. IV/Pillay, p.801. On a visit to Lusaka shortly after the conference, I was told by ANC officials that there had, indeed,

the ANC's second national consultative conference in Kabwe, Zambia, in June 1985, operational officials based in forward areas were determined that their central argument be heard and heeded. It was that the ANC's main weakness was its underground and that weakness resulted from political-military parallelism and dislocation in operational structures. They faced several difficulties in getting a proper hearing, the most important of which resulted from the fact that this was the first ANC conference since 1969 which meant scores of administrative issues would also need to be dealt with. These issues, operational officials feared, might compete with strategic questions for attention. And so they did. Long political and administrative reports by Tambo, by secretary general Alfred Nzo and by treasurer-general Thomas Nkobi occupied delegates for several days.⁹¹

The conference did, however, appoint three commissions to deal with operational matters - an Internal Commission, a Commission on Strategy and Tactics, and a Commission on National Structures, Constitutional Guidelines and Codes of Conduct. Each listed its recommendations,⁹² which then

been delegates from the underground. I had, however, been misinformed.

⁹¹Unrecorded conversations with delegates who attended the conference.

⁹²ANC, 'Internal Commission Report' (n.d. [circa 1985]), in App/B/3; ANC, 'Commission on Strategy and Tactics' (n.d. [circa 1985]), in App/B/3; ANC, 'Report of Commission on National Structures, Constitutional Guidelines and Codes of Conduct' (n.d. [circa 1985]), in App/B/4.

went before the conference and were recodified into conference recommendations.⁹³ All three commissions called for drastic improvements in political-military cooperation. But, whereas, the Internal Commission and the Commission on Strategy and Tactics advocated political-military *integration*, the Commission on National Structures favoured separate political and military lines of command which would be *coordinated*.

The Internal Commission called for a revival of the Area Political Committee (APC) concept of 1981, - that is, of regional political underground leaderships overseeing all specialities in their area - and for the deployment of senior ANC leaders into the country to staff them.⁹⁴ It also recommended changes to the PMC, the ANC's top operational organ⁹⁵ - notably a reduction in its size of the kind envisaged in the 1978-1979 strategic review but never implemented because some ANC leaders feared a more dynamic Revolutionary Council (as it then was) might develop into a rival of the NEC. The Commission on Strategy and Tactics agreed with the Internal Commission. It called for the application of MCW principles,⁹⁶ which closely accorded with the APC concept.

⁹³These are listed in ANC, 'Report, Main Decisions and Recommendations of the Second National Consultative Conference', in App/B/2.

⁹⁴ANC, 'Internal Commission Report', p.12.

⁹⁵*Ibid.*, p.14.

⁹⁶ANC, 'Commission on Strategy and Tactics', p.18.

But the commission on national structures wanted parallel political and military lines of command which would be coordinated.⁹⁷ When these key operational recommendations came to be summarised, the formulation spoke of 'combined political/military structures' - without specifying more clearly what this meant.⁹⁸ The issue had been fudged; the status of the conference was merely consultative; substantially the same individuals as in the past would staff the PMC. In practice, this combination of factors would mean *coordination* of operational machineries in the forward areas.

The conference also decided to change operational structures yet again (see *Figure 6*, overleaf). In each forward area a regional political-military committee (RPMC) would be established. An RPMC would, in effect bring together the separate political and military committees which had been set up in 1983 and would coordinate their respective activities, plus those of the intelligence department and of Sactu in the region of South Africa for which the forward area was responsible. This approximated the 'senior organ' model of the 1980-83 period. Inside South Africa, the plan was to establish area political-military committees (APMCs) to coordinate different specialisations. This was a bow in the direction of the APC

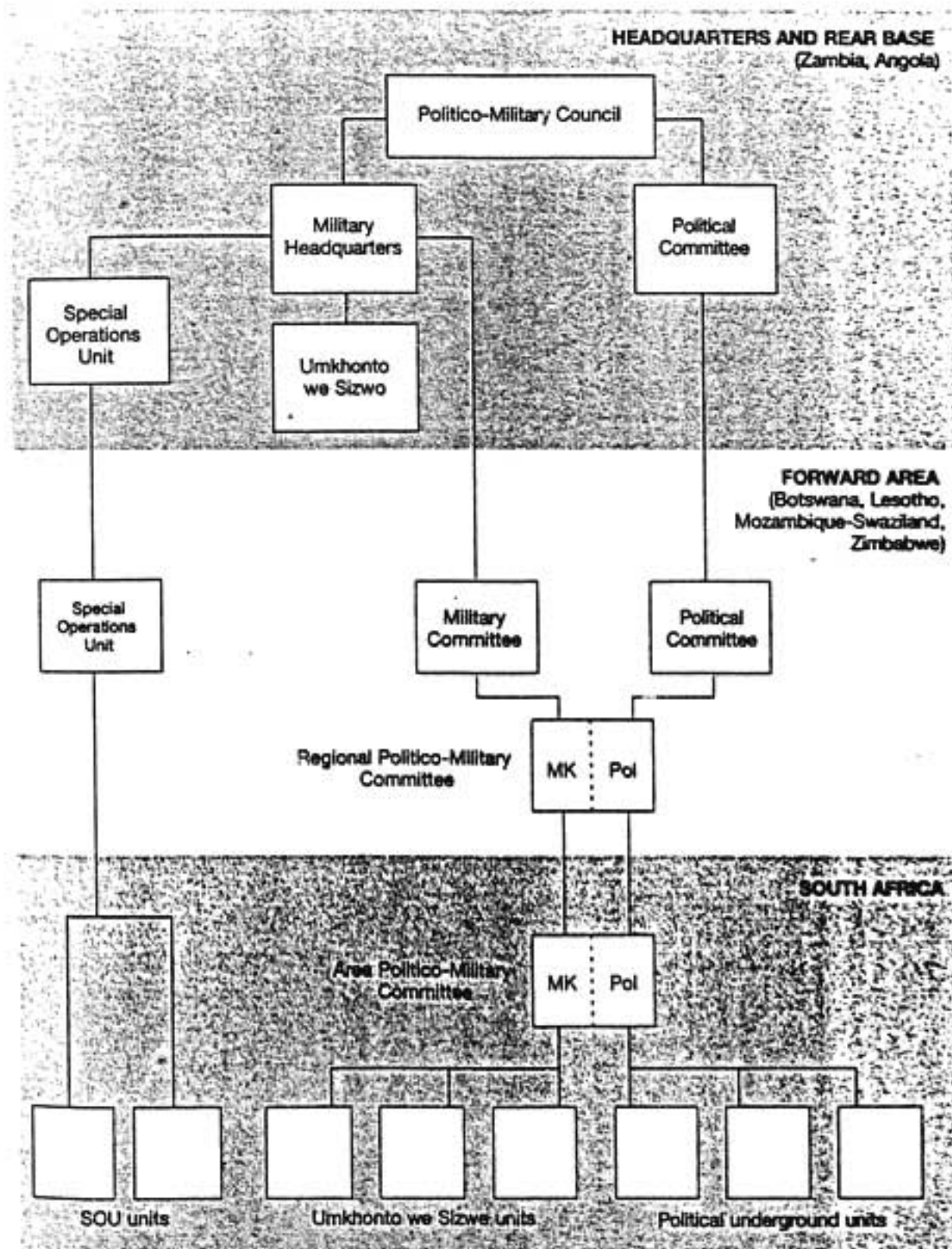
⁹⁷ANC, 'Commission on National Structures', p.2; See also IV/Maharaj, pp.513.

⁹⁸ANC, 'Main Decisions and Recommendations', pp.10, 12.

FIGURE 9

ANC operational structures

Basic lines of command & co-ordination July 1985 – 1986



concept, though it seems the intention was not to give political leaderships on APMCs control of other operational specialisations such as military combat.

The gravest shortcoming of the conference was that it did not give itself the time to arrive at a comprehensive statement of strategy and tactics. The Morogoro version, dating back to 1969, was hopelessly outdated. A draft of a new basic strategy document had been prepared before the conference,⁹⁹ but was very general. In Maharaj's view, it followed Morogoro's formulations and Slovo's 'Planning for People's War' in its base militarism, yet sought to skirt the key points of dispute: the role of armed activity as opposed to political activity in people's war; the relationship between people's war and the insurrectionary potential then evident; and the possibilities for a negotiated settlement in South Africa involving the ANC, which some believed were 'incipient'.¹⁰⁰

The draft for a new strategy and tactics document was bound to be controversial. But, laments the report of the Commission on Strategy and Tactics,

there had been no circulation [of it] to the regions, and even Conference delegates saw it for the first time a few hours before proceedings began... [W]hen [the commission on strategy and tactics] convened, the overwhelming majority of

⁹⁹It was apparently produced by Thabo Mbeki, Joel Netshitenze (alias Peter Mayibuye) and Joe Nhlanhla. *IV/Maharaj*, p.511.

¹⁰⁰*IV/Maharaj*, p.510-511.

its members had not yet managed to read the draft, and we had to adjourn for some hours to enable them to do so.¹⁰¹

The commission was, thus, unable to formulate a new strategy and tactics document. Moreover, it could not expect the full conference to do so since it had set aside less than two-and-a-half hours in plenary for consideration of both the Strategy and Tactics Commission's and the Internal Commission's reports.¹⁰²

To correct this failure, the conference instructed the NEC to set up a special sub-committee to draft a new strategy and tactics document after the conference; the draft would then be 'circulated amongst all units, branches and regions [of the ANC] for thorough discussion and appraisal' before adoption by the NEC.¹⁰³ One of the most junior (and intellectually able) members of the NEC elected at the conference, Pallo Jordan, was appointed convenor of this sub-committee.¹⁰⁴ But Jordan lacked the authority to push the committee to complete its work.¹⁰⁵ In the event, the committee reported only in October 1989 - more than

¹⁰¹ANC, 'Commission on Strategy and Tactics', p.15.

¹⁰²IV/Maharaj, p.509.

¹⁰³IV/Maharaj, p.509.

¹⁰⁴IV/Jordan, p.241. The NEC appointed the committee. Other members included Maharaj, Simon Makana (who was elected to the NEC at the Kabwe conference) and Slovo. IV/Maharaj, p.519.

¹⁰⁵There were also other factors. Joe Slovo, for example, had many other calls on his time: he was MK chief of staff, head of SOU, had recently been elected chairman of the SACP, and the SACP general secretary Moses Mabhida was already ineffective as a result of illness.

four years later!¹⁰⁶ By then, Jordan concedes, its report had 'been overtaken by events'.

At the most crucial moment in its history, in the midst of the most serious uprisings in South Africa in which its name was being widely proclaimed as leader of a revolution, the ANC had held a conference and concluded it with no generally agreed formulation of strategy.

Conclusion

The new round of uprisings, which resulted from provocative local and central government measures instituted by the state, provided the ANC with conditions for which it had long waited. Yet the ANC was unable to give the new upsurge any strategic coherence. It was confined largely to shouting from the sidelines. It was as if the ANC was taken by surprise by exactly the thing it had so long sought to usher into existence.

The ANC could not develop its vision of people's war; nor could it give any shape to the insurrectionary forms of action that developed. Although thousands of ordinary people were now actually engaging state armed forces in the streets, the ANC was unable to provide them with tactical leadership. It could merely release statements, such as its 'Call to the Nation' of April 1985. The street combat was grossly unequal and MK was unable to protect the ANC's potential constituency from state armed forces to any

¹⁰⁶IV/Jordan, p.241.

meaningful extent. And, although the ANC was proclaimed leader of the upsurge, it was mounted by people who were, organisationally, substantially autonomous of it.

It was as if all the warnings about the consequences of political-military parallelism in operational structures given by Maharaj and political structures were vindicated after April 1984. MK had quite clearly been unable to integrate itself into the limited organisational base the ANC had inside the country. ANC operational structures still made cooperation between political and military cadres in the field almost impossible. There was no underground leadership in place able to combine different forms of struggle. The ANC lacked the capacity to ensure that simultaneous uprisings in disparate townships attenuated state armed forces. In sum, although the situation was one of unprecedented political advance for the ANC, operationally it was a disaster.

Within the ANC, strategic confusion was deep. To escape this confusion, the ANC sought guidance from two beacons. The first was a collection of the old Leninist battle cries articulated some 60 years earlier in a situation some 7,000 miles away. The second was language borrowed from a strategic doctrine of revolution, MCW, which the Soviet Union's security services had developed from attempts at insurrection in various other countries. When, at its consultative conference in June 1985, the ANC

was required to develop its own strategic path, it could not do so. Without knowing *what* it wanted to do, the ANC could not determine appropriate structures for the task. In these circumstances, various factions in the leadership could be expected to develop their own initiatives, with or without colleagues' knowledge - as the next, and final, chapter shows.

CHAPTER NINE

TACTICS OF TALKS, TACTICS OF CONFRONTATION -

The Road to Vula, July 1985 - December 1986

Insurrection cannot be led from afar.
- Mac Maharaj¹

Introduction

Further uncertainty was soon heaped onto the confusion over operational strategy bequeathed at Kabwe. Shortly after the conference, the indications were that South Africa might yet move towards a negotiated settlement. The ANC came to face a fundamental strategic choice. Its one option was revolutionary confrontation; the other was to pursue a negotiated settlement.

The ANC theorised that the two options could be mutually re-inforcing: revolutionary pressures could feed the prospects for negotiations; and, if negotiations started, this might create legal space in which its organisers could advance the prospects for revolutionary confrontation. But realising a symbiotic relationship between them would prove difficult.

Not least among the reasons for this difficulty was

¹IV/Maharaj, p.525.

the deepening strategic confusion within the ANC after the Kabwe conference's failure to develop an agreed formulation on strategy and tactics. Moreover, without knowing what it wanted to do, the ANC could not determine *how* to do it or appropriate structures for the task. Various factions would develop conflicting opinions on how best to proceed. And, in one crucial instance, an influential group of ANC leaders would become so frustrated that they would conclude that, if the ANC was to make further progress, they needed secretly to bypass all existing ANC operational structures.

Operation Zikomo

Uncertainty over strategy after the Kabwe conference was evident in a large-scale infiltration of MK combatants, which began in mid-1985, codenamed 'Operation Zikomo'.² Ronnie Kasrils, then head of MK intelligence, says its purpose was to inject 'several hundred' combatants as 'shock forces' in the township uprisings.³ They were to form a kind of officer class for township militants, providing them with leadership and training. Ivan Pillay, of operational political structures in Swaziland, says these combatants had minimal back-up. They had

maybe...R1,000 or R2,000, maybe...12 hand grenades and an AK...many of them just being put across the fence and sent home to integrate

²IV/Kasrils, pp.272-273.

³IV/Kasrils, p.272.

themselves with the defence committees, street committees, etc.⁴

Several arguments preceded Operation Zikomo: over the absence of underground structures able to integrate and deploy those infiltrated; over what political role those infiltrated could play; over the poor quality of the political briefings they received before infiltration; and over whether they were merely 'canon fodder'.⁵ Mac Maharaj, then a key figure in the Political Committee of the Politico-Military Council (PMC), felt that Zikomo was merely another variant of the 'detonator' approach - the expectation that the injection of armed activity would somehow spark general conflagration.⁶

Whatever its declared purpose, Zikomo was a belated attempt by the ANC leadership to compensate for their unpreparedness when the new round of uprisings started nine months earlier. MK structures had failed to ensure that stocks of arms were available inside the country. Arms, notably the hand grenades favoured by Umkhonto we Sizwe chief of staff Joe Slovo, had certainly been smuggled into country, but police statistics suggest a very high

⁴IV/Pillay, p.770.

⁵IV/Maharaj, pp.534-535.

⁶IV/Maharaj, pp.534-535.

proportion had been captured.⁷ A more serious failure was that the ANC still lacked the ability to absorb combatants from abroad. Combatants hurriedly infiltrated after the Nkomati Accord had suffered an appalling casualty rate. This meant that, when the uprisings had broken out six months later, in September, armed activity had dwindled to levels below the previous year.⁸

Operation Zikomo did, however, have important short-term effects. As state security forces lost control over some townships in 1985, and for as long as the state's sources of intelligence in those areas dried up, the newly-infiltrated guerillas survived. Insurgent armed activity leapt to new levels in the period from June 1985. Whereas there had been 30 attacks in the five months to May, there

⁷Hand grenades were the particular form of weapon favoured by Slovo for distribution during uprisings. The number that the ANC smuggled into the country is not known. But, if recorded usage (incidents involving hand grenades) can be taken as an indication of safe smuggling and storage, then it appears that the ANC was unsuccessful in building up secure stores of weaponry. In 1980, police found or captured 96 grenades whilst there were only three instances in which grenades were used (3%); in 1981, 58 grenades were captured as against 6 used (10%); in 1982, 65 were captured and none used; in 1983, when the ANC started its 'grenade squad' campaign, 103 were captured and only two were used (2%); in 1984, the second year of the grenade squad campaign, with the uprisings starting in September, 286 grenades were captured and only two used (0.7%); and, in 1985, with the uprisings for which the grenades were intended now at their height, some 163 grenades were found or captured and 67 were used (47%). Stadler, *Harms Commission Statistics*, pp.1,030-1,031.

⁸*IV/Slovo*, p.1,000. There were only 12 incidents of insurgent violence inside South Africa between September and December 1984, as against 26 for the same period in 1983. See Stadler, 'Statistics: Terrorism in the RSA. Period: 1 January 1976 - 30 September 1990 [Monthly Breakdown], in *App/A/17.2*; Booyse, 'Monthly Breakdown'.

were 31 in June alone and 75 more between July and December - a total of 136 attacks for the year, more than double the number in any previous year. Over the year, the state killed or captured a mere 31 ANC guerillas, which meant a ratio of three guerillas captured or killed for each 13 attacks - MK's best year and most favourable casualty rate ever.

Death of the 'Grenade Squads'

If Zikomo was a success, the fate meted out to the 'grenade squads' highlighted the ANC's domestic operational weakness. State security services chose the period immediately after the Kabwe conference to discredit the idea.

As clashes with security forces continued, thousands of young black militants were desperate for arms. Rumours of the availability of 'pineapples' [grenades] in a township would attract scores of young militants from surrounding areas.⁹ The ANC, which had little command and control over either these young militants or, indeed, the grenade squads, was unable to close off the opportunity which presented itself to security services. A state security agent, a young black man who had earlier received training and a supply of grenades from the ANC in Botswana,

⁹Unrecorded conversations with David Niddrie, a journalist and member of the ANC underground familiar with township developments.

was used for the ruse. Cal Saloojee, the Botswana-based ANC member involved in training grenade squads, says that, after this particular young man had returned to South Africa,

[p]roblems developed. And we had already [by June 1985] put out an alert to say this guy is suspect. Unfortunately, the structures dealing with him could not do [anything] concrete about it. He went back... At that time in Duduza [the township serving Nigel] we didn't have anything. On his own initiative, of course in collaboration with the Boers [police], he went into Duduza and said...he was a movement [ANC] guy, he's been sent in on a mission and, if there are guys interested, they could form a unit...¹⁰

The agent was not short of volunteers among the Cosas students he approached.

Mayhem resulted. Eight young activists died in the process of attempting to prime or throw grenades, and seven others were seriously injured, some of them losing limbs. Security services had booby-trapped the explosives.

Township comrades now had cause to be deeply suspicious of anyone offering them arms. The incident received widespread publicity and meant the end of the grenade squad idea. Moreover, it made matters more difficult for guerillas infiltrated under operation Zikomo to link up with township militants. The mechanism which might have brought externally trained guerillas and local militants together securely, area-based underground commands dealing with all operational specialities, did not

¹⁰IV/Cal Saloojee, pp.931-932.

exist.

Suddenly, within the external mission, reports Saloojee, the grenade squad project - which senior ANC operational officials had once fought to control - became an embarrassment: 'Everybody was taking cover - nobody wanted to accept responsibility for what was happening.'¹¹

The Tactics of Talks

In May 1984, two months after the Nkomati Accord, Tambo had disclosed that the ANC was under pressure to talk to the South African government (something he denied eight months later).¹² Subsequently, a prominent white South African academic¹³ and a senior journalist from the government-supporting press¹⁴ had mounted well-publicised visits to ANC headquarters in Lusaka. Rumours abounded that some form of contact had opened up between the ANC and the state.

In January 1985, Tambo denied categorically that any such contacts had opened up.¹⁵ He attributed the rumours of talks to a realisation among some whites that, whereas

¹¹IV/Cal Saloojee, p.932.

¹²Oliver Tambo, 'We are a force', in *Sechaba*, October 1984, p.14. For his denial, see IV/Tambo, p.1,246.

¹³Professor H W van der Merwe, director of the Centre for Intergroup Studies at the University of Cape Town.

¹⁴Piet Muller of *Beeld*.

¹⁵IV/Tambo, pp.1,244-1,245.

the state was in crisis, the ANC had, notwithstanding the Nkomati Accord, increased its domestic stature.¹⁶ Tambo said the ANC would talk to 'anybody' who wanted to know its views on South Africa. It was prepared even to meet MPs from President Botha's ruling National Party as individuals if it was understood that such talks 'would not be binding on the ANC in any way'.¹⁷ But the ANC had

objections to formal meetings which might create the false impression that somehow there are secret talks going on with the...regime. We don't think they should be secret... So, if we are talking, we would be talking with a clear mandate.¹⁸

Tambo said the ANC was

part of the wish to see apartheid end painlessly, but our experience is that the regime is not prepared for that. Indeed Botha has just said his regime is not prepared to talk to the ANC - so that is that.

As far as the ANC is concerned, we are not opposed to talks in principle. Nobody ever is. But we have not been impressed by South Africa's policy on talks [with Swapo in 1981 and the MPLA and Frelimo in 1984]. [T]hey are shown not to have been serious about wanting peace.

The ANC approaches the question of talks with the South African government with great caution. And our priority in these circumstances is that we escalate the struggle.¹⁹

The first signs of a significant political re-appraisal within the white South African establishment had come shortly before the ANC conference in June 1985.

¹⁶IV/Tambo, pp.1,243.

¹⁷IV/Tambo, p.1,245.

¹⁸IV/Tambo, p.1,244.

¹⁹IV/Tambo, pp.1,243-4.

Intermediaries acting for South African business interests had approached the ANC to arrange a meeting. Tambo asked conference delegates for clearance to meet an unnamed group of 'important people' who wanted to talk to the ANC; the talks, he specified, would not amount to negotiations with the government.²⁰ The conference gave its approval. While preparations for these talks remained secret, the ANC received a second approach shortly after the conference. An MP from the liberal Progressive Federal Party (PFP), Peter Gastrow, approached a journalist in Harare to arrange talks between an ANC and PFP delegation.²¹

Both groups seeking talks had been impressed by popular support for the ANC evident in the unrest. The uprisings, growing disinvestment from South Africa, international pressures for sanctions and the government's refusal to consider options outside an apartheid framework persuaded them to explore whether the ANC could help formulate a new South African social contract.

The behaviour of these businessmen challenged much ANC and, particularly, SACP orthodoxy. This held that a degree of socialism, and probably the destruction of capitalism, was necessary to ensure the destruction of apartheid and the achievement of 'genuine' national liberation of the

²⁰Unrecorded conversations with delegates to the Kabwe conference.

²¹Personal knowledge: I was the journalist approached and was the conduit through which the talks were arranged.

African majority.²² Indeed, many ANC members considered major South African corporations part of the 'enemy forces'.²³

In mid-1985, negotiations were not a prospect to which the SACP or ANC had given much attention. In 1962, the SACP had acknowledged that a 'crisis in the country, and contradictions in the ranks of the ruling class' might open up the possibility 'of a peaceful and negotiated transfer of power'.²⁴ But, in 1970, the party had rejected this as a 'highly questionable' hope.²⁵ The ANC's 1969 *Strategy and Tactics* had justified the resort to armed struggle partly on the grounds of ANC 'disillusionment with the prospect of achieving liberation by traditional peaceful processes because the objective conditions blatantly bar[red] the way to change'. But this implied the converse: that, if alternatives emerged, the ANC might suspend armed struggle. Yet *Strategy and Tactics* did not deal with the possibility of future negotiations.

This meant the ANC had now hastily to evolve a set of

²²The view is implied indirectly in the case of the ANC in *ANC, Strategy and Tactics of the ANC*, p.189.

²³Howard Barrell, 'ANC and Business: The Tactics of Talks', in *Work in Progress*, No 39, 1985. The article was sourced to three ANC leaders - Chris Hani, Ronnie Kasrils and Thabo Mbeki - plus Garth Strachan. Legal problems meant this sourcing could not be divulged and I had to use some Aesopian language.

²⁴SACP, 'Road', p.315.

²⁵*IV/Slovo*, p.959.

tactics for talks with non-government groups and possible negotiations with the government. It did so with some skill.

The ANC drew a basic distinction between talks and negotiations.²⁶ In the case of talks, it identified two categories. The first comprised talks with representatives of non-government white groups, such as businessmen or the PFP. Here, the ANC's intention was to

win over to its basic outlook as many potentially amenable whites as possible: at least to attempt to neutralise some hitherto actively reactionary elements, and thereby as much as possible to isolate politically the diehard defenders of...a racist and exploitative state power.²⁷

The second category comprised talks with organisations which the ANC regarded as allies, such as the emergent trade unions and organisations associated mainly with the UDF. Here, the ANC's aim was to 'build maximum unity between all sections and formations of the oppressed, other democrats and progressives' and to draw them in as elements of an ANC-led assault.²⁸

The ANC realised immediately it had held talks in the first category - the talks with business leaders occurred in Zambia on September 13 - that a new legal climate had been created which might enable it to open up public links

²⁶Barrell, 'Tactics of Talks', p.4.

²⁷Barrell, 'Tactics of Talks', p.5.

²⁸Barrell, 'Tactics of Talks', pp.4-5.

to organisations in the second category, namely to allies in the popular and union movements.²⁹

The ANC conceived of *negotiations* as having a clearly defined framework within which attempts would be made to settle the South African conflict.³⁰ Here, a range of preconditions applied. Negotiations, according to the ANC, should be premised on agreement among participants that the objective was to dismantle apartheid and to achieve a modality for a united, democratic and non-racial polity. Another shared premise would have to be the desirability of a change in the character of the SA Defence Force and police.³¹ Other preconditions for negotiations would include the unconditional release of political prisoners and return of exiles, an atmosphere of political freedom inside South Africa and the agreement of the 'entire democratic leadership of South Africa'.

The ANC condemned a campaign led by Inkatha and the PFP for a national convention. It was an 'attempt to cobble out a settlement of the fate of the country over the heads of the people'.³² The ANC said a national convention could be held in South Africa only if its preconditions for negotiations were met and there was 'a situation of

²⁹Barrell, 'Tactics of Talks', p.5.

³⁰Barrell, 'Tactics of Talks', p.4.

³¹Barrell, 'Tactics of Talks', pp.6-7.

³²Barrell, 'Tactics of Talks', p.8.

democracy, free political activity and equality'.³³

When the first two sets of talks occurred - those with businessmen and journalists, and with the PFP - many ANC supporters were anxious that the contacts presaged an abandonment of revolutionary struggle by the ANC.³⁴ The leadership of the ANC responded that the talks were merely one tactic *alongside*, and not in contradiction to, its main strategic thrust: the gathering of revolutionary forces through political mobilisation and armed struggle. Nonetheless, the leadership declared that it had to exploit any potential for advantage or the reduction of suffering which talks might offer.³⁵ The leadership said one advantage flowing from the talks was to grant it a status of *de facto* legality. This promised more 'space' within which to gather and deploy its forces for confrontation.³⁶

In the event, the ANC's talks with business leaders and editors, and later with the PFP were declared a success by all three groups. They did, indeed, create a new legal atmosphere in which the ANC was able to hold public talks

³³Barrell, 'Tactics of Talks' pp.7-8.

³⁴Personal knowledge. My 'Tactics of Talks' article was written expressly to provide the ANC's explanation of its position.

³⁵Barrell, 'Tactics of Talks, p.5.

³⁶I did not develop this idea in the article as I did not want to divulge that some ANC leaders saw in talks and possible negotiations a paradoxical opportunity for increasing physical confrontation.

with a range of popular organisations, churches and other bodies to which it felt politically more akin or which it considered its natural allies.³⁷ In the process, the ANC improved its image among elements in the white establishment and deftly promoted itself in militant circles as national aggregator of variegated democratic interests.

Unequal Combat

In South Africa's streets, grossly unequal combat continued. In the seven-and-a-half months to July 20, 334 people died in political violence, at least 55% of them as a result of security force action. Of the dead, only seven were members of the security forces killed by township residents; none was killed by guerillas.³⁸ In three months to July, 207 people died in political violence, the largest single number on the east Rand, which remained the centre of revolt.³⁹

In Duduza, which seemed to provide security forces with a sort of testing ground for new tactics, right-wing

³⁷Among them were the Congress of South African Trade Unions (Cosatu), formed in November 1985, the UDF-aligned emerging unions, the South African Catholic Bishops' Conference and the National Union of South African Students (Nusas). A small sample of communiques from these meetings in App/B/11 gives the flavour of these meetings.

³⁸Cooper et al, Survey 1985, p.534.

³⁹Cooper et al, Survey 1985, p.535.

vigilantes had made an appearance in May 1985, attacking activists in UDF-affiliated organisations, such as Cosas and the civic association.⁴⁰ It was among the first instances in which vigilantes were deployed against anti-apartheid activists - a development that soon became widespread and tipped the scale of combat further against the ANC and UDF. If not initially promoted by security forces, vigilante groups were certainly abetted by them in many instances.⁴¹

On July 21, the government declared a partial state of emergency.⁴² The intention was to isolate, contain and re-establish government control in those black townships affected by unrest. The ANC responded with an address over Radio Freedom two days later by Tambo who said that the fact that uprisings were not affecting all areas of the country had

enabled the enemy to concentrate its forces on certain areas of our country... This is a situation which we must correct. It is vital that all areas of our country should join in the

⁴⁰Sowetan, 21/6/85. City Press, 23/6/85.

⁴¹Haysom, N., *Mabangalala. The Rise of Rightwing Vigilantes in South Africa. Occasional Paper 10* (Johannesburg: Centre for Applied Legal Studies, 1986). Cole, J., *Crossroads. The Politics of Reform and Regression 1976-1986* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1987).

⁴²It initially covered 36 magisterial districts: 18 in the Transvaal, 17 in the eastern Cape and one in the Orange Free State. Its coverage was amended on several occasions over the next six months before it was eventually lifted in all areas on March 7 1986.

general offensive...⁴³

Moreover, said Tambo,

We must take the struggle into the white areas of South Africa and there attack the apartheid regime and its forces of repression in these areas which it considers its rear.⁴⁴

The UDF, as a body, was unable to give the unrest any direction in mid-1985. No doubt state repression seriously undermined its ability to do so. More than 10,000 people were detained in the first six months of the emergency,⁴⁵ many of them leaders of the UDF and its affiliate organisations. A number of the front's top officials were still in custody facing security law charges. Moreover, as a popular organisation operating in the legal and semi-legal spheres, the UDF could not really be expected to coordinate a violent challenge to the state.

The ANC, however, could be expected to provide tactical direction to the uprisings. The very *raison d'être* of its clandestinity was to enable it ultimately to do so. Yet there was no improvement in the ANC ability to do so after its conference. ANC operational officials acknowledge that their organisation's role in developing street committees and rent boycotts in the black townships in the 1985-1986 period was minimal. Garth Strachan says the

⁴³O R Tambo, 'Address to the Nation', Radio Freedom, 22 July 1985. In App/B/6.

⁴⁴*Ibid.*

⁴⁵Cooper et al, *Survey 1985*, p.535.

street committees arose as an initiative by isolated internal activists, some with links with the ANC, and ordinary residents. Strachan says the ANC was picking up on initiatives like these and then, *post facto*, developing strategies which made sense of them.⁴⁶ Both Slovo and Kasrils agree.⁴⁷ Strachan adds that the underground's links into these street committees, as well as defence committees set up by township residents in a few cases to resist security forces, remained weak throughout 1985 and 1986.⁴⁸ Pillay believes this weakness, and a resultant inability to integrate Operation Zikomo guerillas into the street committees, helps explain why 'the street committees and defence committees began to crumble pretty quickly' once placed under any pressure.⁴⁹

Despite the infiltration of MK cadres under Operation Zikomo, the unrest-related death toll between July 21 and December 31 totalled 545 people, of whom at least 256 were township residents killed by security forces; and of 20 security forces who died, only one was reported killed by guerillas.⁵⁰

⁴⁶IV/Strachan, p.1,163.

⁴⁷IV/Slovo, p.1,022; IV/Kasrils, p.277.

⁴⁸IV/Strachan, pp.1,166-1,167.

⁴⁹IV/Pillay, p.770.

⁵⁰Cooper et al, Survey 1985, p.534.

International Dimensions and White Discord

The gravest shock to the state and whites during 1985 came not from the ANC or its supporters. Instead, it came as a by-product of the unrest in the form of the international response.

In late July and August, the state suffered a series of bewildering international setbacks. Concerned at instability in South Africa and pressures for disinvestment, Chase Manhattan Bank decided to stop rolling over some US\$500-million in loans to South Africa, choosing instead to recall credits as they became due and to freeze all unused lines of credit. A number of Pretoria's other major commercial lenders, a cluster of whose loans were due for repayment, responded in similar vein.⁵¹ The Commission of the European Economic Community called for economic sanctions against South Africa unless the government rejected apartheid; 10 EEC states withdrew their ambassadors from Pretoria; the French government unilaterally announced a ban on investment in South Africa; and the United States House of Representatives voted overwhelmingly in favour of sanctions against South Africa.

The Johannesburg Stock Exchange's response in the last week of July was described as a 'bloodbath', as market capitalisation dropped 9.5% and the rand's international

⁵¹Anthony Sampson, *Black and Gold: Tycoons, Revolutionaries and Apartheid* (London: Coronet Books, 1987), pp.38-42.

value plunged 12%.⁵² The South African government was in a 'panic', according to Professor Sampie Terblanche, an academic economist and government advisor at the time.⁵³

This sudden deterioration in South Africa's international position elicited a bellicose response from President Botha, which shocked local commerce and industry. Botha threatened to repatriate 1.5-million migrant workers from neighbouring states and to cut back economic ties with them unless the international community abandoned moves towards sanctions.

Government advisers urged a more measured response and were encouraged in the second week of August when pre-publicity on a speech by Botha suggested he would announce the abandonment of apartheid and 'cross the Rubicon' into a new non-racial future. Local and international expectations were high. But, on August 15, Botha delivered a finger-wagging harangue against the international community, the ANC and SACP. Confidence in South Africa on international capital markets plummeted and the rand's value hitting an all-time low, 21 percent down on its end-July setting.⁵⁴ In thoughtful quarters of the government,

⁵²*Sunday Star*, 28/7/85. *Business Day*, 1/8/85.

⁵³Unrecorded conversation with Professor Sampie Terblanche in Stellenbosch in January 1991.

⁵⁴*Business Day*, 1/8/85. *Financial Times*, 17/8/85.

panic became near despair.⁵⁵

To the ANC's basically moral arguments for South Africa's economic isolation had suddenly been added an apparently more compelling imperative: South Africa appeared a poor-risk investment. For Tambo, this dovetailed with ANC attempts to render South Africa ungovernable and apartheid unworkable.⁵⁶

The Formation of Cosatu

The Transvaal stayaway of November 1984 and the SACP's re-orientation towards domestic working class organisation prompted an ANC reappraisal of relations with the emergent unions. The ANC and SACP felt that an anomalous situation had developed. There was growing support for the ANC and SACP in Fosatu,⁵⁷ and the federation was increasing its involvement in popular political campaigns. Moreover, hardline members of Fosatu's independent worker tendency doubted that political developments allowed them to isolate

⁵⁵Unrecorded conversation with Sampele Terblanche.

⁵⁶Sampson, *Black and Gold*, p.210.

⁵⁷For example at top level, Chris Dlamini, president of Fosatu, was in 1985 known for 'his political sympathies for the ANC' and, during an undisclosed date in the 1980s, joined the SACP underground. Baskin, *Striking Back*, pp.61-62. Dlamini, who emerged as a leader of the SACP when the party was unbanned on February 2 1990, may be fairly representative. Two other extremely influential Fosatu leaders in this period, John Gomomo and Moses Mayekiso, also emerged as SACP leaders in 1990.

themselves any longer from the nationalist movement.⁵⁸ Yet the ANC, SACP and Sactu were endorsing only the poorly-organised UDF-affiliated unions. This was needlessly limiting ANC, SACP and Sactu influence as trade union unity talks were on the verge of producing a larger federation from which the UDF-affiliated unions were likely to be excluded.⁵⁹

The SACP moved decisively. Via its trade union arm, Sactu, in late 1984, it endorsed industrial over general workers' unions.⁶⁰ Although this was an endorsement only of the organising strategy of Posatu and its allies, it seemed to promise a more fundamental shift. This came when, in early 1985, the SACP and Sactu bluntly instructed the UDF unions to make whatever compromises were necessary to ensure they were part of the new super-federation when it was formed.⁶¹

⁵⁸Baskin, *Striking Back*, p.46.

⁵⁹After a union unity meeting in March 1984 in Johannesburg, the main UDF-aligned unions - the Black Municipality Workers' Union (later the Municipal and General Workers Union - Mgwusa), Gawu and Saawu - had been effectively excluded from the unity moves after failing to fulfil several organisational criteria. Baskin, *Striking Back*, pp. 42-43, 45.

⁶⁰Baskin, *Striking Back*, p.45. Gemma Cronin, a trade union activist in Cape Town at the time, confirms that the Sactu position until then on industrial versus general workers' unions had been ambivalent. IV/Gemma Cronin, p.149.

⁶¹Then living in Zimbabwe, I heard this from a variety of ANC and SACP officials. Gemma Cronin, who was working as a trade unionist inside the country at the time, confirms this. IV/G.Cronin, p.150. So, too, does John Nkadineng, quoted in Baskin, *Striking Back*, pp.45,48.

But some underground members of the ANC, SACP and Sactu were suspicious of this new political line coming from the external mission. These members, believing that the envisaged super-federation threatened Sactu and the entire ANC-led alliance,⁶² tried to resuscitate Sactu publicly inside South Africa in early 1985.⁶³ One of the key movers was Oscar Mpetha, one of the UDF's three national president's and a former leader of the Food and Canning Workers' Unions. Mpetha and most of the rebels were, however, soon faced down. Those who continued to oppose the new line were sidelined from ANC and SACP organisation on the orders of the external mission leadership - however proud the role that some, like Samson Ndou, had played in the past.⁶⁴ After the defeat of the rebels, progress towards a new federation including the UDF-affiliated unions was quick. Fosatu was, clearly, its foundation.

Most unions in the Council of Unions of South Africa (Cusa) and the small black consciousness-orientated Azanian Confederation of Trade Unions (Azactu) decided not to join the new federation. The exception was the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM), led by Cyril Ramaphosa. The largest

⁶²IV/Gemma Cronin, p.146.

⁶³This was, strictly speaking, legally possible. Sactu, as such, had never been outlawed as an organisation in the way the ANC, SACP or PAC had been. It had, however, since the 1960s, operated mainly clandestinely inside South Africa.

⁶⁴Confidential information.

union in the country, the NUM broke ranks with Cusa in favour of the super-federation, which was eventually formed in November 1985 as the Congress of South African Trade Unions (Cosatu) with 33 founding unions representing more than 460,000 workers.

Cosatu's formation represented a considerable advance for the ANC and SACP. Its leadership was dominated by individuals who either were, or shortly became, supporters of the ANC alliance or members of its underground.⁶⁵ Moreover, it had the potential to deliver organised working class power for revolutionary objectives on a scale unprecedented in South Africa.

Yet Cosatu, in its turn, also had the potential to influence ANC and SACP strategy profoundly - away from the pursuit of violent and revolutionary outcomes. The important role within Cosatu of the former Fosatu unions meant that a basically 'participationist' approach to opposition applied. This was an approach which sought measurable gains, in the first instance through

⁶⁵Elijah Barayi, who became Cosatu's first president, was by 1981 a 'very big supporter of the ANC'. Chris Dlamini, whose political loyalty to the ANC and SACP has already been referred to, became Cosatu vice-president. Its first general secretary, Jay Naidoo, considered himself inspired by Lenin's works. Sydney Mufamadi, who as Cosatu's assistant general secretary was the most senior representative of the UDF unions, had been a member of the ANC's underground since 1978 and joined the SACP at an undisclosed date in the 1980s. Baskin, *Striking Back*, pp.60-66. Cyril Ramaphosa, leader of Cosatu's largest single union, the NUM, was by general reputation a supporter of the ANC in 1985, and joined the ANC underground in 1986. *The Guardian*, 20/4/92.

negotiations, very often conducted within state-approved forums; resort to strikes and boycotts appeared some way down the list of tactical options. Herein lay an important challenge to the non-participationist and 'anti-collaborationist' instincts so dominant among the ANC and its allies.

The Commonwealth Initiative and Negotiations - 1

International responses to the crisis also encouraged the ANC to revise its confrontational instincts. Diplomatic developments obliged the ANC to state formally its criteria and conditions for exploring a negotiated settlement in South Africa.

The Commonwealth summit in Nassau in October established a group of eminent persons to 'encourage a 'process of political dialogue' in South Africa.⁶⁶ It also laid out a list of demands to the South African government whose content complied substantially with those then being developed by the ANC. The summit demanded that Pretoria declare that it would dismantle apartheid and also that it take meaningful action demonstrating this intent; that it end the state of emergency; that it release all political prisoners; that it legalise outlawed parties and 'establish political freedom'; and that it initiate, in the context of

⁶⁶Commonwealth Group of Eminent Persons, *Mission to South Africa. The Commonwealth Report* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1986), p.143.

a suspension of violence by all sides, dialogue to establish a non-racial, representative government.⁶⁷

Increased international interest in South Africa was accompanied by a flurry of rumours in late 1985 that the government would shortly release Nelson Mandela and fly him into exile. In the midst of these rumours, in November 1985, the government and the ANC engaged in their first known exchange of signals since the 1960s. The ANC quickly dispatched Maharaj to Botswana to take charge of, and explore, any communications with Pretoria. The exchange, which originated from the government side, followed talks with Mandela in prison. A South African cabinet minister⁶⁸ told a prominent anti-apartheid activist,⁶⁹ apparently in the expectation that his statement would reach the ANC external mission, that the government knew it could not resolve the burgeoning crisis alone; that it had decided to release Mandela and other political prisoners but was unable to work out a modality for doing so which would enable it to save face; and that current levels of unrest made the release difficult as there was a danger that Mandela's freedom might further inflame political emotions.⁷⁰ The implication was that, if the ANC softened

⁶⁷EPG, *Mission to South Africa*, p.142.

⁶⁸Understood to be the Minister of Justice, Kobie Coetsee.

⁶⁹Understood to be Winnie Mandela.

⁷⁰Unrecorded conversation with Mac Maharaj, Harare, November 24 1985.

its position and reined in unrest, Mandela might be released and government-ANC talks of one or other kind might be possible.⁷¹ The intermediary told the external mission that the attitude of Mandela and his colleagues in prison was that they would not be drawn into any deals outside the framework of the ANC and the broad democratic movement.

The external mission's response, through the intermediary, was to raise the stakes. The ANC signalled that it was waiting for the government to create 'a climate conducive to talks about talks'. To do so, the government should release all political prisoners, lift the state of emergency, withdraw troops from the townships, release all emergency detainees and immediately terminate current security law trials. The ANC added that it would have to be able to consult with its domestic allies before it could engage in any substantive communications with the government. In effect, the ANC was holding out for safe passage into South Africa of a delegation comprising members of its national executive committee (NEC).⁷²

Publication of the exchange of signals⁷³ enraged the government, which charged it was a fabrication by

⁷¹*Ibid.*

⁷²*Ibid.*

⁷³My article on the exchange appeared in *The Star*, 25/11/85.

'propaganda experts from behind the Iron Curtain'.⁷⁴ The matter of the cabinet minister's approach was never satisfactorily explained. The best available subsequent explanation was that a 'small but influential' lobby for Mandela's release surrounded the Justice Minister, Kobie Coetsee; that this lobby's thinking was that Mandela's release could ease foreign pressures on South Africa and demythologise Mandela; that this group had overplayed its hand in the preceding weeks; that publicity on its activities had infuriated President Botha; and that the pro-release lobby had been 'stymied' by a hardline group in the cabinet.⁷⁵

'Operation Butterfly'

Meanwhile, two operational initiatives in late 1985 demonstrated that ANC field strategy remained bogged down. The first was a programme to develop an integrated political-military underground command structure in the greater Durban area; the other was a campaign to destabilise the border regions of South Africa.

The first had its origins among a group of operational commanders based in Mozambique and Swaziland. Operations they had conducted in the past had suffered directly from

⁷⁴The Star, 26/11/85.

⁷⁵See articles by Allister Sparks in the *Weekly Mail*, 6/12/85 and for the *Observer Foreign News Service*, 6/2/87.

the absence of political-military liaison. Lack of cooperation meant political and military cadres often 'tripped over' each other inside South Africa.⁷⁶ They believed the solution lay in the integrated approach of the area political committee (APC) plan drawn up in 1981 and they drew up a plan in early 1985, codenamed 'Operation Butterfly', to build, in effect, an APC in Durban. But the group felt that they had to disguise this because the APC concept had become a disputed issue. Hence, they called the leadership they envisaged for Durban a 'regional committee or district committee'.⁷⁷

Thami Zulu, the Swaziland-based commander of MK's Natal machinery,⁷⁸ and one of his deputies in MK's Natal machinery, known as Ralph, together with Sue Rabkin and Terence Tryon⁷⁹ from political structures, drew up an organisational chart for the operation, which they sent to PMC headquarters in Lusaka for assessment.⁸⁰ When they received no response,⁸¹ they pressed ahead regardless,

⁷⁶IV/Rabkin, p.897.

⁷⁷IV/Rabkin, p.900.

⁷⁸Whose real name was Muzi Ngwenya.

⁷⁹Tryon was a former official in the black consciousness-orientated Saso, who had joined the ANC and now served in political and intelligence operational structures in Swaziland. 'Ralph' also used the aliases 'Cyril' and 'Fear'.

⁸⁰IV/Rabkin, pp.897-8. 'Ralph' was also known by the aliases 'Fear' and 'Cyril'.

⁸¹The explanation might be that a junior PMC official who sympathised with the integrationist leanings of 'Operation Butterfly' ensured the copy of the plan sent to the PMC was

encouraged after June 1985 by some decisions at the Kabwe conference favouring a closer political-military relationship in operational structures.

Some groundwork for the operation was provided by earlier clandestine missions into South Africa by middle-ranking ANC members, including Ebrahim Ismail Ebrahim, a former Robben Island prisoner who would soon head the regional political-military committee in Swaziland, Siphon Khumalo⁸² and Ivan Pillay. Pillay had overseen the development of, among others, a network of leafleters in Durban, which grew to include about 13 members,⁸³ among them two young students, Moe Shaik and Yacoob Abba Omar.⁸⁴ Shaik also maintained contact with Ebrahim who, together with Khumalo, entered the country in about April 1985 to solicit recommendations from the underground for the Kabwe conference.⁸⁵

The ANC underground in Durban still included the highly efficient network around Pravin Gordhan. There were

'lost' in order to prevent it being over-ruled by its likely opponents. Confidential sourcing.

⁸²Khumalo was assassinated under mysterious circumstances inside South Africa in 1990 after the unbanning of the ANC and SACP.

⁸³IV/Omar, p.741.

⁸⁴IV/Omar, pp.723-5. IV/Rabkin, p.887.

⁸⁵IV/Omar, p.727-728, 744. Ebrahim's mission was cut short when he noticed he was under surveillance and fled back to Swaziland.

other formal political units as well, though they were generally less well organised. One of the MK machineries in Durban falling under Swaziland was headed by Vijay Ramlakan.⁸⁶

Operation Butterfly aimed to settle a group of middle-ranking, externally trained political and military cadres of proven discipline⁸⁷ in the Durban area; to re-organise the local underground from the top downwards,⁸⁸ asserting authority over existing (and often isolated) underground units; to reflect the principle of integrated political-military command in structures;⁸⁹ and to prepare the ground for the clandestine entry into the area of more senior leadership.⁹⁰

The operation was to have a single line of command from exile to the district committee in Durban. This district committee would, whatever the individual expertise of its three members, operate as a single unit jointly controlling all specialised operational activities in the

⁸⁶The military machinery in which Ramlakan was involved was about half African, half Indian and covered much of the Greater Durban area. It was 'huge' in comparison to the Omar-Shaik propaganda unit, which numbered 13. *IV/Omar*, p.734.

⁸⁷*IV/Rabkin*, p.899.

⁸⁸*IV/Rabkin*, p.897.

⁸⁹*IV/Rabkin*, p.897. *IV/Omar*, p.742.

⁹⁰*IV/Rabkin*, p.899.

Durban area.⁹¹ The specialist units falling under the district committee would include ones dealing with mass mobilisation, propaganda, logistics, communications, security and intelligence.⁹² Military headquarters in exile was not to be granted its own, parallel line of command to military units involved in Operation Butterfly.⁹³

The operation travelled a rocky road from the outset. There were several delays through August and September in infiltrating personnel. In October, underground units inside South Africa heard that the operation might be called off. But, in late October and early November, it was revived.⁹⁴ In late November, the Sheik-Omar propaganda unit was told that there would, be 'one political person' in the group to be infiltrated from Swaziland for the operation.⁹⁵

From the moment the Butterfly contingent, who totalled about nine,⁹⁶ entered South Africa from Swaziland in early December,⁹⁷ there were, according to Omar, a series of

⁹¹IV/Omar, p.742.

⁹²IV/Rabkin, pp.899-900.

⁹³IV/Rabkin, p.900.

⁹⁴IV/Omar, pp.732-733.

⁹⁵IV/Omar, p.734.

⁹⁶IV/Omar, p.736.

⁹⁷IV/Omar, p.734.

basic security breakdowns. Notwithstanding the fact that Omar had warned Ramlakan on a previous occasion that his security had been compromised by speculation in Durban political circles that he was involved in MK activity,⁹⁸ the Butterfly contingent's first port of call was Ramlakan's own house. Ramlakan also used telephone communications with Omar, instead of the less direct methods used in the past. And the political cadre, who turned out to be Terence Tryon, had initially to be accommodated at a hotel, where Ramlakan maintained telephone contact with him.⁹⁹ Tryon himself, together with some of his military counterparts, indicated deep unhappiness about the security of the entire project,¹⁰⁰ yet they continued to hold meetings at Ramlakan's house.¹⁰¹

The end came barely a month later, in the early hours of Christmas Eve. Evidently employing good intelligence, police raided several homes and university residences in the Durban area.¹⁰² They netted all the exiles infiltrated for Operation Butterfly, bar Tryon,¹⁰³ who had wisely maintained minimal links with his military

⁹⁸IV/Omar, p.735.

⁹⁹IV/Omar, p.735.

¹⁰⁰IV/Omar, p.735-736.

¹⁰¹IV/Omar, p.737.

¹⁰²IV/Omar, pp.737-738.

¹⁰³IV/Rabkin, p.899.

counterparts, preferring to rely on his own contacts in Durban,¹⁰⁴ and who now returned to exile.¹⁰⁵ Police decimated Ramlakan's unit, though a few subsidiary structures survived.¹⁰⁶ And Omar left for exile shortly afterwards.¹⁰⁷

Operation Butterfly was conceived as a subterfuge against both the state and those in the ANC leadership wanting separate military command in underground structures. It failed in both instances. Participants still debate why and how.¹⁰⁸ Some believed they had walked into a trap set by South African intelligence.¹⁰⁹ Ramlakan insisted there must have been a security leak in Swaziland. Years later, one of those who had helped draw up the Butterfly schema, 'Ralph', apparently admitted to being a long-term South African security police penetration agent,¹¹⁰ after which Rabkin and others concluded the

¹⁰⁴IV/Omar, pp.737-738.

¹⁰⁵IV/Omar, 738-739.

¹⁰⁶Omar reports that some individuals from Ramlakan's network were still communicating with Swaziland after the round-up. IV/Omar, p.740.

¹⁰⁷IV/Omar, pp.739-740.

¹⁰⁸If only because it bears on the unanswered question of the extent of South African intelligence penetration of ANC structures in Swaziland.

¹⁰⁹IV/Rabkin, p.899.

¹¹⁰Ellis & Sechaba, *Comrades*, pp.169-170. I say he apparently confessed, in view of persistent doubts, within and without the ANC, about the accuracy of conclusions reached by the ANC security and intelligence department.

entire operation had been 'drawn up by the enemy'.¹¹¹

Omar argues that, with or without early South African intelligence penetration, breakdowns in security inside South Africa were, alone, sufficiently serious to guarantee the operation's failure.¹¹² These breakdowns were a product of other, long-term shortcomings in ANC organisation. The operation needed to have been commanded by individuals of more seniority and maturity who might have kept a tighter rein on discipline and security. Moreover, the operation envisaged rebuilding the ANC underground in Durban from top downwards - a task requiring the wielding of considerable authority and, so, better suited to senior cadres. Furthermore, there needed to be a higher proportion of political to military cadres infiltrated from abroad - which might have made operatives more sensitive, on balance, to difficult operating conditions.¹¹³

Destabilising the Border Areas

The programme to destabilise South Africa's border regions had its origins at the Kabwe conference. The intention was to create conditions allowing guerillas to traverse, and survive in, these areas. After the conference, MK

¹¹¹IV/Rabkin, p.898.

¹¹²IV/Omar, pp.745-746.

¹¹³IV/Omar, p.747.

formulated a plan to use landmines to denude the border areas of white farmers.¹¹⁴ Attacks against white farmers were deemed justifiable because of their role in state border defence networks. It was a role the government also recognised, and valued. From 1980 it had spent more than R200-million in these regions improving radio and telephone networks, tarring roads, enlarging commando forces, improving the security force presence and easing the debt burden on border farmers.¹¹⁵

Joe Modise, head of military headquarters, commanded the operation from Zimbabwe,¹¹⁶ while Chris Hani, MK political commissar, slipped into Botswana on a false passport just after Christmas 1985 to oversee operations from there.¹¹⁷ Between November 27 and the end of the year, seven landmine explosions were reported, mainly in the northern Transvaal, just across the borders of either Botswana or Zimbabwe, while police reported recovering another six landmines.¹¹⁸

The landmine campaign continued through 1986, with the

¹¹⁴Anti-tank landmines, rather than weaker anti-personnel mines were to be used, according to Hani in a personal discussion at the time.

¹¹⁵*The Star*, 27/2/87.

¹¹⁶Confidential sourcing.

¹¹⁷Personal knowledge: I drove Hani from Harare to Gaborone for this purpose.

¹¹⁸*Indicator SA*, vol.3, no.4, Spring 1986. Stadler, *Harms Commission Statistics*, pp.1,032-1,033.

focus of attacks shifting towards the eastern Transvaal (where it was being fed by ANC operational machineries in Swaziland, then working under desperate pressure). But the campaign failed to destabilise border areas significantly. By 1987, it was beginning to fizzle out.¹¹⁹ Most landmine attacks occurred in narrow belts of South African territory just over the borders of Botswana, Swaziland and Zimbabwe. Evidently, the devices had been planted by units who spent no more than a few hours inside South Africa.

Some on the PMC, among them Maharaj, argued this method of operation was bound to be counter-productive. They suggested that the units should set up base and store their armaments deep inside South Africa before commencing operations. Otherwise, the first landmine explosions would prompt a massive increase in South African security activity on the border and anguished objections from those countries whose territory the ANC was using for the campaign; this would not only make the planting of more mines doubly difficult but probably defeat the entire objective of the campaign.¹²⁰ Events vindicated these dissenting voices. Security force deployments rose sharply after the first explosions; neighbouring states were seriously embarrassed; moreover, poor intelligence

¹¹⁹Police report 26 landmine explosions in 1986, and the recovery of another 37 landmines. In 1987, there were 14 landmine explosions, whereas they recovered a further 16 landmines. Stadler, *Harms Commission Statistics*, pp.1,032-1,033.

¹²⁰*IV/Maharaj*, pp.497-498.

available to MK units meant many casualties were not white farmers or security forces but, instead, blacks from the ANC's potential constituency.

The Commonwealth Initiative and Negotiations - 2

By January 1986, the ANC leadership maintained that there were still no 'fundamental developments' in the South African situation that warranted a change in strategy. People's war, interspersed with popular uprisings, remained the organisation's perspective. There could be no negotiated settlement, said the ANC, 'while the Botha regime continues to imprison our leaders and refuses to acknowledge that South Africa must become an undivided, democratic and non-racial country'.¹²¹ Again, the implication was that, if the Botha government did change its mind on those two matters, negotiations might indeed become the ANC's main approach. This implication was, however, hidden among doomsday prophecies about the South African state and warlike rhetoric.

The ANC said it detected a shift in the balance of forces. The state had 'lost the initiative', which was now in the ANC's hands.¹²² The state had 'no policy either to

¹²¹ANC NEC, 'Attack! Advance! Give the Enemy No Quarter! January 8th Message of the National Executive Committee of the African National Congress, delivered by President O R Tambo', in Sechaba, March 1986, pp.7-8.

¹²²*Ibid.*, p.3.

save the apartheid system from sinking deeper into crisis or to extricate this system [of apartheid] from that crisis.'¹²³ The 'white power bloc' had 'never been as divided'.¹²⁴ Any state counter-offensive was bound to result in a worsening of the state's strategic position.¹²⁵ On the other hand, ANC members had 'prepared the conditions further to transform the situation to that position when it will be possible for us to seize power from the enemy'.¹²⁶

In order to seize power, an 'urgent task' was the 'rapid expansion and extensive activation of Umkhonto we Sizwe within the country, drawing in the millions of our people into combat'.¹²⁷ In the previous year, the ANC and its supporters had

made significant strides towards the transformation of our armed confrontation with the apartheid regime into a people's war. Of crucial importance in this regard has been the creation of mass insurrectionary zones in many parts of our country, areas where the masses of the people are not only active, but also ready in their hundreds of thousands to assault the enemy for the seizure of power.¹²⁸

Yet, when ANC leaders met the Commonwealth EPG between

¹²³*Ibid.*

¹²⁴*Ibid.*, p.2.

¹²⁵*Ibid.*, p.3.

¹²⁶*Ibid.*

¹²⁷*Ibid.*, p.6.

¹²⁸*Ibid.*

February and May 1976, their amenability to negotiations was again evident. Whatever their movement's rhetorical flourishes, a number of ANC leaders, it would seem, viewed armed activity mainly as a form of pressure which might induce negotiations rather than as a credible element of revolutionary strategy.¹²⁹

The South African government, too, indicated some amenability on the issue of negotiations in early 1986. Pretoria's lifting of the partial state of emergency on March 7 seemed a conciliatory gesture. While the EPG evidently felt it had no reason to doubt ANC sincerity on negotiations, it was apparently more cautious on the postures adopted by the Pretoria government which, the EPG said, were shrouded 'in a specialized political vocabulary which, while saying one thing, mean[t] another'.¹³⁰

Nonetheless, by mid-May, the EPG had cause to feel optimism that it might, indeed, be able to develop a negotiating concept acceptable to the main parties. Nelson Mandela had responded favourably from prison, and the exiled ANC leadership had asked for 10 days to consider it.¹³¹

¹²⁹My own impression, also evident, I think, in EPG, *Mission to South Africa*, pp.85-89.

¹³⁰EPG, *Mission to South Africa*, p.81.

¹³¹EPG, *Mission to South Africa*, pp.112, 114-117.

But the South African response, when it came, laid waste the EPG mission. South African security forces mounted raids, ostensibly against ANC facilities, into three neighbouring Commonwealth states - Botswana, Zambia and Zimbabwe. No ANC members were killed; all casualties and fatalities were non-South Africans; and only two (publicly known) ANC properties were hit.¹³²

'From Ungovernability to People's Power'

The ANC reverted to talk of revolution. Its response was a yet more explicit call to insurrection. The ANC executive released a leaflet under the slogan, 'From Ungovernability to People's Power',¹³³ which amplified its call for an insurrectionary offensive made a year earlier in its leaflet, 'ANC Call to the Nation. The Future is Within Our Grasp'.

The new leaflet argued that the uprisings had made it impossible for the state to govern in many areas of the country. It was, therefore, now possible for people to replace the displaced outposts of apartheid administration with their own popular organs of self-government and self-defence. Here was an explicit case of ANC strategy following developments inside the country; inside South

¹³²Barrell, 'The SA Liberation Movements', p.71.

¹³³ANC, 'ANC Call to the People. From Ungovernability to People's Power', in App/B/12.

Africa, people had already displaced state organs of government in some localities with rudimentary governing structures. The ANC was endorsing this development and, via the act of endorsement, seeking to appropriate the development as one which fitted best in ANC strategy and properly belonged under its command.

The Insurrectionary Schema, 1986

By 1986 those in the ANC calling loudest for the adoption of an insurrectionary strategy - individuals like Kasrils, Maharaj (though less bluntly) and a group of middle-senior operational officials - predominated in debates over operational strategy. They argued that the notion of 'people's war' as a protracted phenomenon had been undermined by the intensity of the uprisings, by the growing divisions among whites and by the likelihood (as they saw it) that black members of the state's security forces must soon defect to the cause of black liberation and the ANC in significant numbers. To the extent that they still talked of 'people's war', they conceived of it as being solely a gathering of forces for national insurrection, in the course of which the vast majority of people were drawn into rebellion against the state, with armed struggle their main form of engagement.¹³⁴

¹³⁴How the debate was presented to me in unrecorded conversations with Kasrils and Strachan in 1986 and 1987.

The insurrectionary tendency was alone in attempting to incorporate the new forms of struggle being developed on the ground inside South Africa systematically into a strategic schema in which the ANC might play a directive role. Other identifiable strategic tendencies within the ANC were, each for its own reasons, less concerned about the details of developments inside the country. Slovo was the foremost exponent of a different insurrectionary strain, which seemed to hold that insurrections were, for all intents and purposes, spontaneous phenomena; that no revolutionary movement either had led, or could lead, an insurrection or determine a revolutionary 'moment'; therefore Kasrils' and others' stress on preparing a revolutionary vanguard in order to provide leadership at the moment of insurrection was largely misdirected. Another tendency, identified most closely with MK's commander, Joe Modise, believed no change was necessary to ANC strategy and its practice.¹³⁵ And a fourth tendency was barely concerned with the details of armed or popular struggles. Its thinking seemed based on an assumption that it was no longer possible to formulate a credible revolutionary strategy for South Africa; ostensibly revolutionary developments were important only to the extent that they might induce the state to negotiate with the ANC.

The insurrectionary tendency around individuals like

¹³⁵Unrecorded conversations with ANC and SACP members, 1986-1990.

Kasrils ascribed a role in its schema to phenomena like street committees, rent and consumer boycotts and strike action. Kasrils explains:

[T]he people themselves, during the period 1983-1986, were creating their own rudimentary organs of people's power. They were creating street committees. They were creating people's courts. They were beginning to create self-defence units. Of course, on perceiving this, we would...give them a lead in our propaganda, would give instruction, would tell them: this is what to do; this is the way forward.¹³⁶

The ANC gave these autonomous creations the legitimacy of its sanction and - often wrongly - the impression that it had originated them. But there was still no indication that the ANC underground could provide a significant level of tactical guidance to the uprisings.¹³⁷

The insurrectionist tendency identified a central role for the street committees. The tendency believed a street committee had the potential to be 'clandestine and semi-clandestine organ[s] for mass participation in insurrectionary tactics'.¹³⁸ Street committees offered a form of popular structure within which the underground could reproduce itself and through which the ANC might draw millions into its campaigns.¹³⁹ Since street committee members were well known to each other, street committees might also close off opportunities for enemy intelligence

¹³⁶IV/Kasrils, p.277.

¹³⁷IV/Strachan, p.1,165.

¹³⁸IV/Strachan, p.1,166.

¹³⁹IV/Strachan, p.1,166.

penetration.¹⁴⁰ The ANC did not, however, see street committees as ANC organs. It was keen that they should reflect a broad range of political opinion to which its underground would provide leadership.¹⁴¹

The tendency reasoned that a nationwide system of street committees and their rural equivalent, village committees (elected village representatives), could facilitate simultaneous popular insurrection over a vast area, perhaps making security force containment impossible.¹⁴² Moreover, a sound street committee system with underground leadership might indeed constitute a 'mass revolutionary base' or a 'mass insurrectionary zone'. These zones or bases might mitigate the lack of reliable external bases and provide the ANC with

a form of liberated zone where the enemy increasingly finds it difficult to deploy either puppets or agents, where its liberty to move through those areas at least is restricted to daylight hours and moving in force with all the limitations that [this] would place on it... [The townships could be] a form of liberated zone...of great strategic importance...because of their geographic locality...closer to the industrial heartlands [and] the white cities, the army bases, etc. So it is not like the peasantry, which is very removed - let's say in the Zimbabwean situation - from the really important strategic targets of the economy in particular.¹⁴³

In this sense, the insurrectionary tendency conceived of

¹⁴⁰IV/Strachan, p.1,166.

¹⁴¹IV/Strachan, p.1,167.

¹⁴²IV/Strachan, p.1,166.

¹⁴³IV/Strachan, p.1,168.

street and villages committees not merely as 'organs of people's power' at the local level¹⁴⁴, but also as organs for the seizure of state power at the national level.

The tendency also re-examined political strike action. It believed political strike action could extend beyond withdrawal of labour to include seizure of factory premises and plant. Whatever historical precedents the insurrectionists found for this,¹⁴⁵ the seed of their thinking was a strike tactic developed by some trade union members from 1985. Called *siyalala la* (or, 'we sleep here'), the tactic amounted to sleep-in strikes at, or orderly occupation of, factories.¹⁴⁶

For the workers who originated *siyalala la*, the tactic had a number of advantages. It helped avoid mass dismissals and harassment outside factory gates; it was an obstacle to managements' attempts to hire alternative work forces; it allowed workers to exercise more control over their situation than a conventional strike; and it fostered greater solidarity among strikers.¹⁴⁷ When originated,

¹⁴⁴Sometimes also referred to as 'organs of people's self-rule'.

¹⁴⁵In revolutionary Russia after 1905 and in Vietnam in 1975. *IV/Mayibuye*, pp.613-614. *IV/Kasrils*, p.276.

¹⁴⁶The tactic had first been used in 1982, but spread after July 1985, being employed in a Durban bakery strike and, later that year, by metal and paper workers. In 1986, others also used the tactic. Baskin, *Striking Back*, pp.82-85.

¹⁴⁷Baskin, *Striking Back*, pp.83-85.

the tactic was not intended to facilitate seizures of premises or plant. But, for the ANC's insurrectionists, this potential was its true significance. Joel Netshitenze,¹⁴⁸ who was running PMC internal propaganda in 1986, recalls how strategy discussions concluded that the *siyalala la* phenomenon indicated the existence of a new mood among workers - one of

'the workers in and the bosses out'... [I]t had the potential for insurrectionary action at a level...never seen before in the struggle, and signified the development of consciousness among workers with the potential to contribute decisively to insurrection.¹⁴⁹

It seemed, to the insurrectionists, to provide a way in which workers could aggressively project their power beyond security force containment into the industrial zones and 'white areas'.¹⁵⁰

Kasrils, had, since early 1986,¹⁵¹ talked of forming workers' militias. Among other advantages, militias could help overcome one of MK's main weaknesses - the fact that it consisted almost entirely of former students or unemployed youth. Apart from the probable greater maturity of their members, workers' militias might also better project MK activity into the strategically important

¹⁴⁸At the time, he used the *nom de guerre* Peter Mayibuye.

¹⁴⁹IV/Mayibuye, p.613.

¹⁵⁰IV/Mayibuye, p.613. IV/Kasrils, p.276.

¹⁵¹IV/Kasrils, p.277.

industrial zones.¹⁵² Kasrils, head of ANC military intelligence at the time, recalls how his thinking on this was influenced by the Bolsheviks' experience (or by a particular account of it):

Lenin and the Bolsheviks...learned...that what was required for discipline and greater efficacy was to organise factory-based combat forces. Those that emerged from the streets tended...to be led by anarchistic elements... It's out of the factories, then, that the combat forces of the Bolsheviks grew, of course side by side with the major Bolshevik armed forces which were those within the Czarist army. So, for us, a lesson of 1983-1986 [was] clearly to develop our underground and our combat forces within the factories, within the industrial zones, and not simply [to] confine it to the townships...¹⁵³

In the evolving schema, the domestic underground was to be assigned the main role in developing these forces and tactics, and in combining them. But the underground remained pitifully weak, notwithstanding the ANC's huge and growing popular support. Still comprising only a few hundred people, the underground remained divided into separate political and military components. Strachan estimates that in late 1986, the underground was no stronger or better able to provide leadership inside the country than it had been before the onset of the uprisings in September 1984.¹⁵⁴

The Kabwe conference had decided in June 1985 that

¹⁵²IV/Kasrils, pp.276-277.

¹⁵³IV/Kasrils, pp.276-277.

¹⁵⁴IV/Strachan, p.1,177.

area-based underground command structures, area political military committees (APMCs), should be established. But, a year later, few, if any, APMCs existed.¹⁵⁵ This meant that externally based regional political military committees (RPMCs) - in Botswana, Lesotho, Mozambique, Swaziland and Zimbabwe - were still trying, across heavily policed borders, to oversee almost all political and military operations inside the country.¹⁵⁶ Strachan, secretary of the Zimbabwe RPMC, notes that this was 'extremely difficult';¹⁵⁷ lines of communications were long, slow and insecure.

The ideal underground conjured up by the ANC insurrectionist tendency should be able to coordinate all clandestine domestic political, military, ordinance, logistics, communications, security and intelligence work at regional level, as envisaged in the area political committee (APC) document of 1981 (see Figure 4), and eventually at national level as well; and it should also have a presence in, and be able to bring together almost all popular anti-apartheid forces - from political organisations, unions, street and village committees, defence committees, combat units of militants and workers' militias. In sum, the underground was supposed to oversee development of the forces for, and eventually lead, an

¹⁵⁵IV/Strachan, p.1,172.

¹⁵⁶IV/Strachan, p.1,172.

¹⁵⁷IV/Strachan, p.1,173.

insurrectionary assault along the lines dictated by the Military and Combat Work (MCW) doctrine.¹⁵⁸ Kasrils implied this quite clearly in an article in the ANC's official organ, *Sechaba*, in May 1986.¹⁵⁹ The approach was, as the interviewer noted and Kasrils conceded, 'quite a way' from classical notions of guerilla warfare in peasant societies.

By mid-1986, the insurrectionist, MCW-based schema had achieved ascendancy among ANC operational personnel - if only because of the enthusiasm of its advocates and the strategic vacuum bequeathed by the Kabwe conference. Moreover, against the background of the conspicuous operational failure of the past, the MCW approach had the advantage of a clear organisational framework, compared to the chronic *ad hoc* appearance of most MK attacks in the past.

Leading proponents - such as Kasrils, Maharaj, Pillay and Strachan¹⁶⁰ - were apparently serious about wanting to build the kind of underground that might in some sense lead an insurrection. To others in the ANC, insurrection was attractive for the opposite reason: because of the way

¹⁵⁸IV/Strachan, pp.1,167-1,176.

¹⁵⁹Ronnie Kasrils, 'People's War, Revolution & Insurrection', in *Sechaba*, May 1986, p.7.

¹⁶⁰There were often disagreements within the tendency. For example, Maharaj often accused Kasrils of having a mechanical and over-schematic approach to operational matters and insurrection in particular. Unrecorded conversations with Maharaj.

it seemed to free the exiled ANC leadership from most strategic responsibilities and place the burden for developing the forces and tactics for revolution on to people inside the country, many of whom acted in the ANC's name. Between these two tendencies and the realisation of insurrection lay not merely a powerful and highly organised enemy but also organisational and strategic habits and assumptions of 25 years, together with a large section of the ANC leadership.

The National Security Management System

As the uprisings continued, the ANC failed to mount a breakthrough. 'Insurrectionary zones', which developed mainly under the ANC's banner in Alexandra township in northern Johannesburg, the Crossroads squatter camp near Cape Town and in the Kangwane bantustan, could not be sustained. In each case, the state was able to isolate, contain and eventually neutralise the local insurrectionary forces.

The state's decision on June 12 1986, as the 10th anniversary of the Soweto uprising approached, to impose a second state of emergency, this time covering the entire country except the nominally independent bantustans, worsened the ANC's operational problems. During the emergency, security forces detained an estimated 25,000 people under emergency regulations (with an average 5,000

people in detention on any one day),¹⁶¹ more than half of them associated with the UDF and its affiliate organisations.¹⁶² A further 2,840 people were detained in South Africa and the nominally independent bantustans under standing security legislation in the course of 1986.¹⁶³ These detentions narrowed down the pool of people from whom MK combatants could hope to get shelter and other forms of assistance.

The state also continued to expand a counter-insurgency innovation introduced in late 1984 - a clandestine system of politico-military security management conceived in 1979, the year after P W Botha became prime minister.¹⁶⁴ The national security management system, as it was known, came under the command of the state security council (SSC), the most powerful of four cabinet standing committees, which was chaired by President Botha himself. Serving the SSC were 12 interdepartmental committees covering most areas of civilian administration, whose task it was to ensure that state policy in all civilian areas of government serviced national security imperatives.

¹⁶¹Detainees' Parents Support Committee, DPSC Annual Review of 1987, cited in Cooper et al, *Race Relations Survey 1987/88* (Johannesburg: South African Institute of Race Relations, 1988), p.537.

¹⁶²Barrell, 'The Outlawed SA Liberation Movements', ff.64, p.91.

¹⁶³Cooper et al, *Survey 1987/88*, pp.535-536.

¹⁶⁴*Sunday Times* (Johannesburg), 2/11/86.

The implementation structures of the NSMS comprised a network of joint management centres (JMCs), each responsible for a particular region of South Africa. These JMCs coordinated a total of about 60 sub-JMCs, responsible for smaller designated areas. Each sub-JMCs, in its turn, coordinated a number of mini-JMCs, each responsible for a particular township or local authority area. Each JMC, sub-JMC and mini-JMC had three committees: one dealing with intelligence; one assessing political, economic and social developments in its area; and a third overseeing propaganda and publicity work within its particular region or area.¹⁶⁵ Each brought together local military and police officers, administrators, local government representatives and businessmen. It provided for direct lines of communication between junior officials serving in townships and the highest level of government. Large or small security force deployments could be readily decided by officers serving on sub- or mini-JMCs, or by fairly speedy reference to higher authority.

The NSMS resembled France's establishment of *Section Administrative Speciale* (SAS) from 1955 in its war against the National Liberation Front (FLN) in Algeria. The SAS assumed politico-administrative duties, combined with operational responsibilities, to fill the vacuum created by unrest and war.¹⁶⁶ As with the *guerre revolutionnaire*

¹⁶⁵*Weekly Mail*, 3/10/86.

¹⁶⁶Paret, *French Revolutionary Warfare*, pp.46-52.

doctrine,¹⁶⁷ the NSMS tried to integrate political and military command at every level of society to serve the counter-revolutionary objective.

The NSMS was, in a sense, a programme to construct a politico-military counter-underground organised on a national and regional basis. It sought to achieve a level of integration (albeit under military predominance) also long sought, but never realised, by the ANC.

Armed Activity

After the declaration of a state of emergency in June 1986, state security forces gradually re-established intelligence penetration into, and basic security control over, areas affected by unrest. The ANC and MK could not spread insurrectionary pressures beyond scattered localities and, so, could not attenuate security forces to any significant degree. As the state rolled back the unrest, MK's casualty rate rose sharply.

Some MK combatants infiltrated in Operation Zikomo and subsequently had managed to establish links with township and other militants. Security police report an unspecified increase over previous years in the number of people (263) arrested in 1986 on suspicion of being internal MK recruits, members of MK support machineries or of

¹⁶⁷*Ibid.*, pp.17, 22, 29-31, 77, 102, 105, 116.

recruiting others for MK.¹⁶⁸ As the high rate of MK infiltration continued in 1986, the number of guerilla attacks underwent a further increase, to a total of 231.¹⁶⁹ A third of these attacks were against police personnel and stations, SA Defence Force personnel and state witnesses in political trials.¹⁷⁰ But, while the total number of attacks for 1986 represented a 70% increase on the total for 1985, the rate of security force neutralisations of guerillas rose even more steeply - to 186, or a 500% increase on the previous year, as security forces improved their position. MK's success rate thus dropped from only 3 guerilla neutralisations for every 13 attacks in 1985 back to four guerilla neutralisations for every five attacks.¹⁷¹

MK's ability to deliver ordinance securely to township battle fronts was also limited in 1986. Whereas police reported 76 instances in which hand grenades were

¹⁶⁸Stadler, *Harms Commission Statistics*, p.1,025, refers to the numbers of 'Ander Lede: ANC' (i.e. 'Other Members: ANC') who were neutralised by security forces. General Stadler, who oversaw the compilation of these statistics explains that this category refers not to ANC members in general but to domestic MK recruits, recruiters or helpers. Statistics for this category were not kept consistently before 1986, but Stadler maintains there was an increase in 1986. *IV/Stadler*, p.1,041. It has not been possible to ascertain how many of the 263 'other members: ANC' arrested in 1986 were convicted.

¹⁶⁹Stadler, *Harms Commission Statistics*, pp.1,021, 1,024.

¹⁷⁰Cooper et al, *Survey 1986*, p.529. Police figures confirm this proportion (placing it very slightly higher at 37%). Stadler 'Target Selection'.

¹⁷¹Stadler, *Harms Commission Statistics*, pp.1,021, 1,024.

detonated, they captured or recovered nearly seven times that many (530).¹⁷² The rate of capture of other ordinance was also high during 1986.¹⁷³

These casualties and losses indicate that, whereas the ANC and MK had been able to exploit a breakdown in security force control between late 1985 and early 1986, they were unable in that period to develop inside South Africa mechanisms of organisation to protect their own personnel and military capacity. There had been no qualitative improvement in the ANC's capacity to locate an armed presence inside the country.

The emergency measures also appear to have helped reduce the number of incidents of popular political violence, or 'unrest', according to police statistics. Whereas in 1985, there had been 16,396 incidents of 'unrest in which murder or other illegal acts of violence were perpetrated', the figure dropped to 13,663 (down by 17%) in 1986. By 1987, the street insurrection was, effectively, at an end: the total number of incidents of unrest for the year dropped to 4,140 (down by 75% on 1985, or by 70% on 1986).¹⁷⁴

¹⁷²*Ibid.*, pp.1,030-1,031.

¹⁷³*Ibid.*, pp.1,032-1,037.

¹⁷⁴In 1988, the rate of unrest incidents remained at its 1987 level - 4,199 over the year. It began to show a trend increase again in 1989, when there were 6,551 incidents of unrest. *Ibid.*, p.1,040.

Strategic Hiatus and the Genesis of 'Operation Vula'

As 1986 drew towards its close, operationally the ANC was stuck in a profound strategic hiatus, if not crisis. Across the gamut of its operational activities, it showed no sign of a breakthrough, although conditions were more favourable than at any time since the resort to armed struggle in 1961.

Having been unprepared for the uprisings that had broken out in September 1984, two years later the ANC was no closer to being able to give them tactical direction. Its biggest-ever infiltration of military cadres - under Operation Zikomo - had been only a short-term and, ultimately, an illusory success. The 'grenade squad' concept, which might have provided a bridge between MK and township militants, had been destroyed through a mixture of mismanagement and security force penetration. The land mine campaign to destabilise the border areas had achieved little more than increased security force deployments and vigilance in these areas and cause neighbouring states acute embarrassment. The ANC's tactical influence over street committees and other rudimentary forms of alternative government which emerged to replace displaced official local government structures was largely rhetorical. And the state was able to concentrate its forces and isolate, contain and re-establish control over

areas of unrest with the use of only a fraction of its total capability.

Elsewhere, in basically non-operational areas, the ANC's efforts were better rewarded. In the realm of popular politics, the UDF, the stayaway in November 1984 and the formation of Cosatu and the activities of its unions embodied real, not merely symbolic, threats to white minority political and economic domination. Moreover, they revealed the considerable potential for the involvement of millions of people in a challenge to state power. Diplomatically, the ANC skilfully addressed different audiences to its own advantage: it persuaded elements in the white South African establishment that it was a serious and mature contender for power; it cemented alliances with a number of other anti-apartheid organisations, broadening its political base and raising its profile in the process; and it harmonised with the tone of international concern over South Africa set by the Commonwealth Eminent Persons Group.

Since the mid-1980s, the ANC's declared intention had been to combine different areas, or 'pillars', of struggle - underground political activity, armed struggle, popular campaigning and diplomatic pressure against the Pretoria government. In 1986, the two weakest pillars remained those for which the ANC was most directly responsible: the pillars of operational strategy - the political underground

and MK. Indeed, in late 1986, as the most favourable operational conditions the ANC had ever experienced began to recede, neither of these pillars could be said to constitute a credible element of revolutionary strategy. Tacitly, this view was, it seems, quite widespread within the ANC leadership. But a handful set out to challenge this view and confront, or circumvent anybody who held this view.

After the Kabwe conference, the ANC executive had begun to meet more frequently, about once every two months.¹⁷⁵ The usual form at these meetings was that, at some stage in proceedings, the PMC's political and military headquarters would report that they had still not made any significant progress in developing internal underground structures.¹⁷⁶ The occasional claim that they had made progress never survived scrutiny. Maharaj recalls he found it

a boring thing to have that item [progress in building the underground on the agenda], because all that happens is that, after you show that there is no real progress - whatever the reports that are presented - the discussion shows nothing really dramatic, no qualitative change. The discussion becomes: Well, you had better pull up your socks; ...something's got to be done; by the next meeting there must be progress. Finish.

No real suggestion is coming forward on how to move forward. Same debate [all the time].¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁵IV/Maharaj, p.527.

¹⁷⁶IV/Maharaj, p.527.

¹⁷⁷IV/Maharaj, p.527.

The debates over operational failures invariably ended up considering how best the ANC might remedy the weakness of its underground. Since 1981 and the formulation of the area political committee (APC) concept, there had been a serious body of support in the ANC for the infiltration of senior leadership figures on the grounds that only senior individuals could rebuild the underground.¹⁷⁸ This was particularly relevant to servicing an insurrectionary perspective, which required the combination of many different forms of struggle and, it was thought, hence the exercise of considerable authority. Maharaj believed that, if the ANC had senior leadership inside the country

then, whatever the battering the mass organisations took, you had, present there, hidden from the enemy, personnel who were interacting with these forces, who were prepared, even when they were detected, [so that] they could continue to survive and provide leadership. Insurrection cannot be led from afar.¹⁷⁹

At an NEC meeting in mid-1986,¹⁸⁰ these matters came to a head - but in a way that all but those in on the secret would have found difficult to discern. The ANC leadership had, yet again, been obliged to concede that the

¹⁷⁸IV/Maharaj, pp.525-526.

¹⁷⁹IV/Maharaj, p.525.

¹⁸⁰IV/Maharaj, p.528. Others [eg., IV/Kasrils, p.334] suggest this decision might have been taken only in 1987. But I tend to accept Maharaj's dating, given his role in initiating and following through the decisions taken. The precise timing of the decision - whether in 1986 or 1987 - does not, however, in my opinion, detract from the insight it provides into the serious problems facing ANC operational strategy, structures and practice by mid-late 1986.

PMC had made no substantial operational progress. During a tea break, Maharaj approached a few NEC colleagues. He lobbied them with a proposal. The only way out of the hiatus, he argued, was now to move senior leadership into South Africa to take charge of building the underground as well as of all ANC operations there.¹⁸¹

Evidently, Maharaj believed that a senior leadership could be successfully infiltrated into the country and take over the domestic underground only if most members of the NEC were not merely ignorant about what was happening in their name but unaware that anything was being done. Security considerations were, formally, one set of reasons for this: how many ANC leaders would 'need to know'? But it is clear from the way that Maharaj manoeuvred that these security considerations were secondary. They provided a cover behind which Maharaj (and others) could isolate from the envisaged project those in the ANC leadership who they believed were still wedded to old habits: crass militarism, the detonator theory and political-military parallelism.

The challenge before Maharaj, as he lobbied colleagues during the tea break, was to develop an appropriate organisational mechanism to achieve his objectives. This mechanism had to take forward the internal leadership project while isolating most of the ANC leadership from it.

¹⁸¹IV/Maharaj, p.528.

The best way, he concluded, would be the NEC's establishment of a small subcommittee to oversee the project; the subcommittee should have a completely open mandate and full discretion on which of its activities to report to the NEC, if any, and when to do so. Maharaj considered that ANC president Oliver Tambo, whom he regarded as one of the most creative strategic minds in the ANC, and Joe Slovo, who was beginning to decouple himself from military concerns and involve himself more deeply in the SACP, where he would soon become general secretary, would be the most suitable members of the committee.

Maharaj first took his thinking to Slovo, who was 'not very impressed' with the idea.¹⁸² So, according to Maharaj,

I go to Chris [Hani], I go to [Jacob] Zuma. [They say:] 'Ja, ja, you've got a point. I say: 'It needs a formula to handle this problem.' So the three of us discuss it. And, when we see that we are in agreement that we should have a small committee made up of the president and probably [Slovo] to take charge of this,...we say: 'Let's go and see [Oliver Tambo].'... [Tambo] says: 'Well, put the proposal to the meeting; let's see what the meeting says'. So, when we resume, Chris turns up and makes the proposal... Zuma stands up and supports it.

And it is a measure of the NEC that no discussion took place. The meeting just said: 'Right, agreed'...

The decision is that, in order to send in senior people from NEC level into the country, a special committee, comprising the president [Tambo] and [Slovo] is appointed; their task is to take charge of this type of mission, whether on a short-term or long-term basis; it's a free hand; they are empowered to conduct this work without reporting to the NEC; they may choose the moment at which they wish to report progress; and

¹⁸²IV/Maharaj, p.528.

they are given a blank cheque...¹⁸³

Apparently dismayed at the inertia of most NEC members response, Tambo intervened to say:

[Y]ou are taking a very serious decision here...[I]t means everybody in this room must be available [to be infiltrated into South Africa]; it means you are giving us those powers.¹⁸⁴

Maharaj was appalled: Tambo seemed to be insisting upon active NEC participation in the project - precisely what he wanted to avoid. So Maharaj then interjected:

Look, this is a very sensitive task and I think it should be left to volunteers; nobody should feel pressured.¹⁸⁵

But Tambo was very reluctant to let NEC members get away with their silence. In the end, however, according to Maharaj, the issue of NEC members' being willing to return to South Africa

doesn't become integral to the resolution... The decision is that [Tambo] and [Slovo] have a blank cheque. They can command; they can choose to call volunteers. It is up to them.¹⁸⁶

The NEC decision Maharaj describes was the genesis of 'Operation Vul'indlela', more widely known as 'Operation Vula'.

¹⁸³IV/Maharaj, pp.528-529.

¹⁸⁴IV/Maharaj, pp.528-529.

¹⁸⁵IV/Maharaj, pp.528-529.

¹⁸⁶IV/Maharaj, pp.528-529.

CONCLUSION

Operation Vula, with whose destruction I began this dissertation and with whose genesis I have just ended the ninth and final chapter, is the climax of our story.¹ It provides us with a kind of promontory from which we can now, in this conclusion, look back and make summary observations about the ANC's line of march.

Looking back from Operation Vula, we can see how little ANC operational strategy actually changed between 1976 and 1986 - indeed, from the 1960s. Vula would be the final attempt by the ANC - or, more precisely, by a section of its leadership which had been given an open operational mandate - to beget a revolution in South Africa. Vula was supposed to be the answer to chronic shortcomings of earlier ANC strategising. And its originators held to the old fundamental assumptions of ANC operational strategy: Revolution was necessary to achieve ANC policy goals; armed struggle was the central requirement for that outcome; revolution was not merely possible but 'inevitable'.

The last assumption - about the 'inevitability' of

¹Little has been written on what happened between 1986 and 1990. Newspapers have carried a number of interviews with Vula operatives. Forthcoming autobiographical accounts by Ronnie Kasrils and Connie Braam (see App/C/1 for the draft English translation of the latter's manuscript) should add to our limited knowledge.

revolution - set the questions that ANC strategists asked themselves. Associated with this assumption in the ANC's case was a contradiction in terms sometimes evident in Marxist-Leninist thinking. Revolution was said to be 'inevitable', provided the ANC devised and implemented strategies and tactics that were suited to the historical conjuncture. From this it followed that, if the ANC was not succeeding in bringing about revolution, it was because its actions were in some way inconsistent with the drift of history. In this case, there were, broadly, three types of error the ANC could be making to cause this. The first was the simplest: the ANC might be implementing the appropriate strategy and tactics but be doing so carelessly. The second was a little more serious: the strategy and tactics decided upon might be inappropriate. In this instance, the ANC might have divined the conjuncture 'incorrectly' and so decided on the inappropriate operational strategy. Or, it might have identified the conjuncture 'correctly' but wrongly determined the strategy to suit it. The third was grave: the ANC's entire divination procedure - its theory of revolution and the assumptions it contained - might be false.

Between 1976 and 1986, ANC strategists never seriously questioned their theory of revolution. But they often had reason to conclude that a particular strategy was not working. Yet they could seldom say with any certainty whether this was the result merely of careless

implementation or of the inappropriateness of a strategy or set of tactics. One reason for this difficulty was that monitoring mechanisms and operational management in the ANC were abysmal. This was attributable to a number of shortcomings. There was no ANC leadership presence on the ground inside South Africa. Key officials often failed to attend meetings of the top operational organ, the Revolutionary Council (RC), and of its successor, the Politico-Military Council (PMC). Rank-and-file ANC members had almost no ability to reward good operational leadership and punish bad: members of the RC and PMC were appointed by the National Executive Committee (NEC); and ordinary ANC members were given only two opportunities to influence NEC membership - in 1969, the year the RC was set up, and 1985. Parallelism between political and military structures made the timeous exchange of mutually relevant information extremely difficult. Personality and inter-departmental rivalries undermined decisions that were taken from time to time to improve information flows between sections. Furthermore, long and poor lines of communication into and out of South Africa, as well as between ANC machineries in different countries, meant that good information on which changes to methods and strategies might have been based was often out of date by the time it reached ANC decision-makers in Lusaka or Maputo. Assessing strategy and deciding on improvements to it could, hence, be a highly speculative process.

Whatever the reasons were for the ANC's operational difficulties, there is no doubt that ANC operations suffered a high failure rate. This is so whether measured by the criteria and objectives which the ANC established for itself or according to those that I might choose. Often the failure was of the most basic kind: the ANC's failure to implement what it had decided upon, or failure to change what it had resolved to change. Equally important was the failure to achieve stated operational objectives when new strategies or tactics were decided upon.

Failure was particularly apparent in the case of armed struggle, the fulcrum of ANC operational strategic thinking. Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK) did not develop its armed activity beyond the sporadic, symbolic endeavour it was when the ANC first resumed attacks inside South Africa in 1976, despite numerous decisions and attempts to do so. The number of attacks which MK mounted did, indeed, increase considerably between 1976 and 1986, as *Chart One* (on page 454) shows. But, as *Chart Two* (also on page 454) indicates, the number of guerillas killed and captured by state security forces usually rose apace. On average, slightly more than two ANC guerillas were killed or captured by security forces for every three of the 634 guerilla attacks between 1976 and 1986² (almost all of which were carried

²The totals were 466 guerillas killed and captured, compared with 634 attacks.

out by the ANC)³. The ratio of guerillas killed and captured to attacks, or the 'casualty rate' as I call it, was an average of 0.73 for the 11 years. Chart Three (on page 454) shows this casualty rate fluctuated year by year, and that it was lowest (i.e. most favourable to the ANC) in two years marked by sudden upsurges in popular political activity, 1981 and 1985. But there was only the slightest improvement, from the ANC's point of view, in this guerilla casualty rate as the number of attacks increased over the 11-year period.

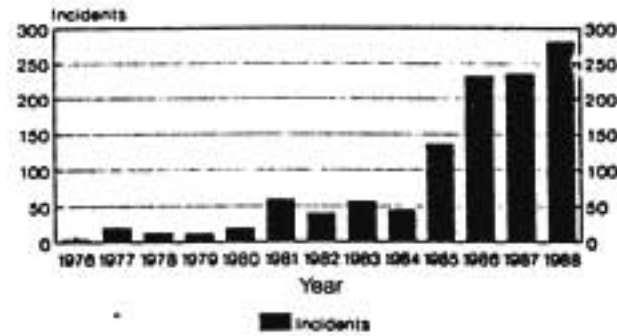
Since many, perhaps most, MK attacks can be classified as modest in their dimensions, this casualty rate indicates a high cost for what were minimal operational rewards. Until 1984, the largest single form of attack was sabotage and the largest single target category consisted of economic installations (of which railway lines, electricity transformers and power stations were among the most common), as Charts Four, Five and Six (on page 455) show.⁴ Sabotage predominated, notwithstanding repeated resolutions by the RC and PMC to move towards popular armed struggle, or 'people's war', in which state forces would become the primary targets. It was only in the 1985-1986 period that there was a marked change in target distribution. As Chart Seven (on page 455) shows, there was then a sharp increase

³General Stadler estimates PAC guerillas were responsible for 'about 10' attacks. *IV/Stadler*, p.1,035.

⁴For a discussion by Stadler of some of the grey areas in his statistical categories, see *IV/Stadler*, pp.1,035-1,044.

CHART 1

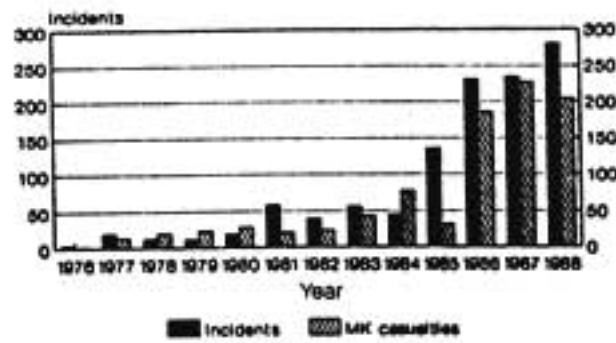
**Insurgent Armed Activity
ANNUAL TOTAL OF INCIDENTS
1976-1988**



Source: South African Police

CHART 2

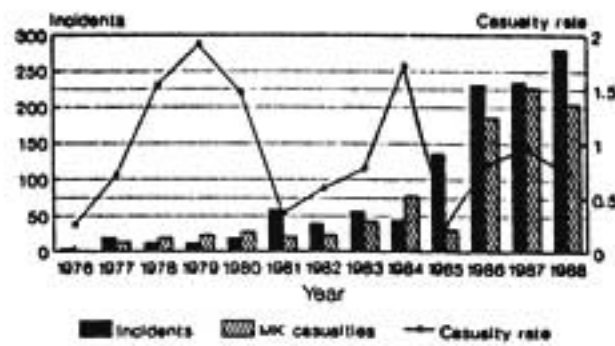
**Insurgent Armed Activity
INCIDENTS/MK CASUALTIES
1976-1988**



Source: South African Police

CHART 3

**Insurgent Armed Activity
INCIDENTS/MK CASUALTY RATE
1976-1988**



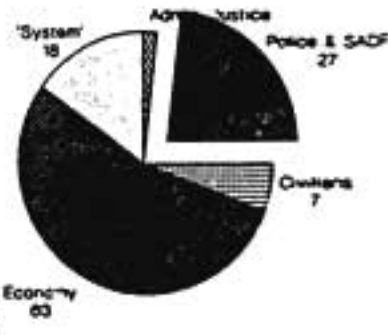
Source: South African Police

CHART 4
Insurgent Attacks
TARGET TYPES, 1976-79



Source: South African Police

CHART 5
Insurgent Attacks
TARGET TYPES, 1980-82



Source: South African Police

CHART 6
Insurgent Attacks
TARGET TYPES, 1983-84



Source: South African Police

CHART 7
Insurgent Attacks
TARGET TYPES, 1985-86



Source: South African Police

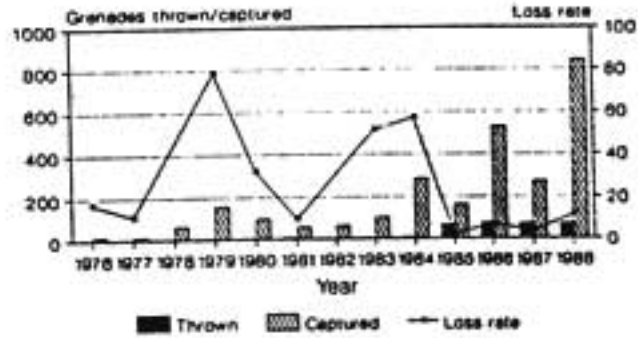
in attacks against security forces and against civilians, while economic sabotage declined. But, after a fall in the MK casualty rate in 1985, it returned to a quite high level in 1986 and remained there for the two subsequent years. ANC guerilla casualties between 1984 and 1986 totalled 294 killed or captured. On the other hand, 58 security force members were killed and 739 injured in popular unrest.⁵

Other statistics illustrate more starkly the weaknesses of the ANC armed activity. These are the rates of capture of the most common armament types used by ANC guerillas.⁶ On average between 1976 and 1986, for each one of the 163 hand grenades thrown by guerillas, more than nine (1,549) were captured by security forces (see *Chart Eight, overleaf*); for each of 150 limpet mines detonated, more than three (518) were captured (*Chart Nine, overleaf*); and for each of 82 incidents in which a firearm was used, eight (670) firearms were captured (*Chart Ten, overleaf*). Interestingly, the exception to this appalling capture rate is provided by land mines. For every two of the 33 land mines laid by guerillas and subsequently detonated about three (49) were neutralised by security forces (*Chart Eleven, overleaf*). It is reasonable to speculate that this relatively low loss rate is explained by the fact that many land mines were laid only a few kilometres inside South African territory and were thus not long, if at all, at the

⁵Stadler, *Harms Commission Statistics*, pp.1,024, 1,038.

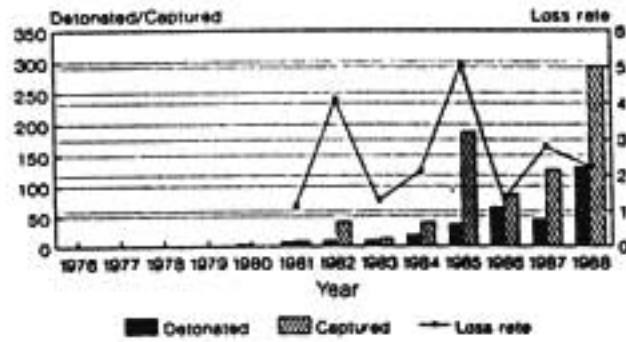
⁶*Ibid.*, pp.1,030-1,037.

CHART 8 Insurgent Hand Grenades THROWN/CAPTURED 1976-1988



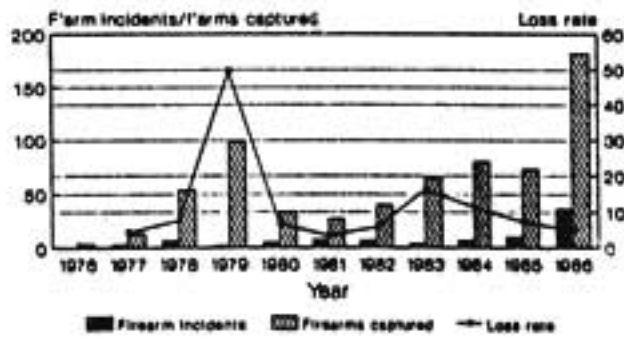
Source: South African Police

CHART 9 Insurgent Limpet Mines DETONATED/CAPTURED, 1976-1988



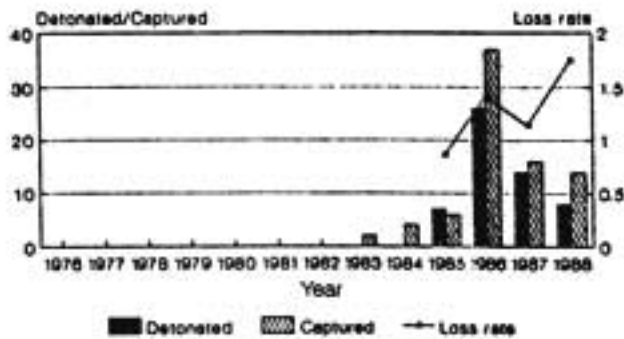
Source: South African Police

CHART 10 Insurgent Firearms INCIDENTS IN WHICH USED/CAPTURED 1976-1988



Source: South African Police

CHART 11 Insurgent Land Mines DETONATED/CAPTURED 1976-1988



Source: South African Police

of the ANC's ordinance department or internal underground. When combined, the statistics indicate that on average between 1976 and 1986, for every three insurgent attacks, which were usually modest sabotage actions, security forces killed or captured two ANC guerillas, recovered seven insurgent hand grenades, captured three firearms and neutralised more than two limpet mines.

These statistics - which must be treated with some caution since they originate from one of the antagonists, the South African Police - are offered mainly for illustrative purposes. Yet they correlate substantially with the frustrations and disappointments described by ANC strategists and members throughout the body of this thesis.

There is no evidence to suggest that ANC armed activity ever achieved any significant degree of self-reliance inside South Africa. Had it done so, ANC armed activity might have had a substantially different, and greater, effect at the military and security levels on outcomes in South Africa.

Self-reliance was an obvious requirement if the ANC was to make any meaningful progress towards developing a popularly-based armed struggle; but self-reliance was also the likely result of involving more ordinary, internally-based people in armed activity. Internal military self-reliance is an obvious desideratum of almost any

revolutionary movement. It was, however, doubly desirable in the South African instance because the ANC had no prospect of secure rear bases in neighbouring states. Yet MK guerillas evidently had little success in developing or linking up with the few support structures inside the country. Short-term cross-border incursions were the norm and guerillas' periods of survival appear, on the whole, to have been extremely short. Guerillas who survived inside the country often remained dependent upon external command, ordinance and intelligence.

The failure of its armed struggle to make real military progress defined almost all strategic questions the ANC asked itself between 1976 and 1986. Likewise, almost all the ANC's decision to change operational strategy and structures between 1976 and 1986 were designed to remedy this failure. And a high proportion of these decisions were never implemented.

Non-implementation was most evident in cases where it was decided that political and military structures should cooperate more closely in the hope of creating the kind of organised domestic political base in which armed combatants might reasonably hope to survive. Personal and departmental rivalries and vanities persistently undermined these decisions. Political-military parallelism persisted in one degree or another, no matter what changes were decided upon for operational structures. The area political military

committee (APC) document of 1981-1982 was never implemented. Attempts to develop an internal underground leadership of seniority and genuine organisational power were repeatedly deferred or frustrated - or, in the case of 'Operation Butterfly' and 'Operation Vula' had to be conducted as a subterfuge against not merely the South African state but a portion of the external mission leadership as well. The result was that ANC underground remained fractured between political and military components, each comprising units that were usually isolated from each other; the only link these units often had with the 'ANC' was with the ANC abroad, which was unable to maintain a dynamic relationship with them or provide them with tactical guidance in what was, certainly from 1984, a fast-moving situation.

A number of other important decisions also remained largely unimplemented. Revolutionary Council (RC) decisions, some pre-dating the 1976 uprising, to develop the concept of the 'MK auxiliary' - an ANC militant who received a crash course in combat work under secure conditions in a neighbouring state and was returned to live legally and fight in South Africa before his absence was noticed by security forces - was barely developed. The concept's latterday variant, the 'grenade squads' of 1983-1985, was never given a proper institutional framework, with the result that various ANC leaders fought to control it while it appeared to be succeeding and denied any link

with it when it failed. In the process, two ideas which could have contributed towards bridging the gap between a largely externally-based MK and internal militants, and between political and military forms of struggle inside South Africa, were squandered. Decisions in 1980 and 1982 to smuggle large quantities of small arms and explosives into South Africa in case there was a new round of uprisings had not been implemented by the time new uprisings did break out in 1984. The lasting impression is of an ANC which is eloquent in its reasoning and its resolutions but hidebound or incompetent in implementation.

As ANC strategic debates sought the success of armed struggle so they treated other forms of struggle as subordinate to the imperatives of armed struggle. Even those ANC strategists who argued so hard for stepping up political organisation inside South Africa - as in the strategic review of 1978-1979, in the Area Political Committee (APC) debate of 1981-1982, in the planning of Operation Butterfly and at the Kabwe consultative conference in 1985 - intended that these political improvements should ultimately facilitate the development of popular armed struggle. When ANC strategists spoke of 'politics', they usually meant 'armed struggle'.

A variety of factors explain why armed struggle became, for the ANC, a kind of Sisyphean task to which all else had to be subject. In the first instance, the brutal

armed violence of the South African state in 1960-1961, and particularly in 1976, not only appeared to call for an armed response, it also stimulated in successive generations a powerful desire to strike back. The ANC's first attempt at striking back, between 1961 and 1963, had, however, been disastrous and brought it to the brink of extinction. This had a profound effect on the ANC's attitude towards armed struggle. It did not, as might have been expected, persuade the ANC to seek a different strategic way forward. Rather it induced in the ANC a determination to succeed with armed struggle. In ANC thinking, the costly thesis of armed struggle, particularly the disaster it had led to in the 1960s, could be justified and rationalised only if the ANC turned the military tables on the South African government: only revenge, no matter how costly, could depict the early disaster as antithesis in a process producing the desired and prophesied synthesis, revolutionary victory in South Africa. Hence, from the early 1960s, ANC self-justification and pride, indeed identity, came to depend to a significant degree upon achieving evident success with armed struggle.

The ANC's strategic discourse also encouraged and justified this stress on military struggle. The Marxist-Leninist theoretical heritage on which it relied conceived of the state as founded upon violence and removeable ultimately only through violence. Strategies of revolutionary warfare derived from this heritage and upon

which the ANC drew - from Lenin to Mao, Giap to Guevara - provided models for revolutionary struggle in which political organisation was ascribed the role merely of helping to redress the military a-symmetry between revolutionary forces and the state.

And finally, the special character of armed struggle created demands which made its domination of strategy highly likely. Unlike non-violent aspects of political mobilisation, armed preparations had to be conducted entirely clandestinely. More so than other forms of struggle, the costs of armed struggle in personnel and material were bound to be high, and demanded disciplines of those involved in it. But these demands could not end with those directly involved: cadres pursuing other forms of struggle had also to ensure that the clandestinity of armed struggle was maintained.

The costs of armed struggle were relatively easily calculated: the number of bombs detonated or attacks mounted could usually be ascertained. But measuring the success or otherwise of political mobilisation or, say, the extent of ANC influence in the emerging trade union movement was considerably more difficult. This arithmetic, or mechanical, quality of armed struggle helped make its successes and failures the main criteria in the ANC for assessing the progress of the entire liberation struggle. Likewise, ensuring the success of armed struggle became

synonymous with ensuring the success of the entire liberation struggle.

Yet, by the mid-1980s, the evidence strongly suggested that not only was armed struggle a failure at a military level but that popular political mobilisation, including the activities of the militant trade unions, provided a more serious challenge to the state than the ANC's military campaign. Much of this political mobilisation and organisation had been initiated or conducted autonomously of the ANC. Its origins most often lay in a growing realisation among sectors of the black population that the legal and political 'space' existed for popular organisation and that, repression notwithstanding, open organisation could deliver improvements to their material situations. Popular organisation was seldom, if ever, stimulated by revolutionary armed activity conducted by the ANC or anybody else.

This was an irony for the ANC. For, through much of the 1976-1986 period, it had behaved as if revolutionary armed activity not only would stimulate political mobilisation and organisation but was a precondition for those two processes. Moreover, to the extent that it had contributed to domestic political mobilisation by non-violent *political* means it had done so in order to enhance the prospects for armed struggle. Yet popular armed struggle was not the result. Rather, non-violent political

struggle remained uncoupled from military struggle and its evident efficacy (compared to the armed campaign's drama but minimal achievement) undermined the prospects for a sustained and serious popular armed struggle.

The rise in importance of political mobilisation occurred in a context in which the state had embarked upon a body of reforms. These reforms, although initially motivated largely by counter-insurgency considerations, had nonetheless created political and legal space from which political and union organisation could, and did, wring further concessions from the government. Why, then, did the ANC persist with its military struggle? There appear to have been several reasons.

Those who made operational strategy in the ANC were not only, or even mainly, looking forward when they did so. They were not solely concerned with formulating their intentions. They were also looking backward. They needed to make sense of, and to justify, the past 20-odd years of commitment to armed struggle, and its failure. To denounce armed struggle as a failure would have meant rupturing a sort of umbilical cord to an important element of the ANC's identity.

A second reason was that the failure of the armed struggle was never so complete as to exhaust the ANC's capacity for rationalisation. Circumstances always allowed

MK a margin for drama, although real military achievement remained highly improbable. The ANC managed to explain a number of key changes to operational strategy, which had been necessitated by failure, as innovations or changes demanded by progress or principle.

When the ANC redefined its armed activity, as armed propaganda, it was as much an acknowledgement and rationalisation of its military limitations, as it was a new strategic departure. The redefinition was also somewhat disingenuous when applied to armed activity in the 1976-1979 period, which had been intended as the opening phase of direct action and a people's war against the state.

Having abandoned the Guevarist detonator approach to armed activity in 1979 because of its failure, the ANC looked to Giap - to a doctrine of protracted people's war interspersed by spontaneous popular uprising - as the framework within which to develop its armed struggle. The new approach offered a perspective within which the ANC's military inadequacies could, quite respectably, be compensated by the actions of ordinary people at large as they confronted the state. But this approach, too, had by 1980 failed to deliver a sustained armed struggle.

The more innovative of the ANC's strategists then began suggesting that ANC strategy henceforth depend, in

effect, entirely upon ordinary people's energies. The ANC should abandon any thoughts of leading a gradual build-up of forces as entailed in the people's war approach. Rather, it should hold out the perspective of decisive popular insurrection against the state, a sort of quick fix of one or another degree of spontaneity. Whereas some in the ANC (like Slovo) maintained the ANC could not hope even to provide significant leadership to such an insurrection, which would be entirely spontaneous, others (like Maharaj and Kasrils) argued it could and must be led in ways suggested by the MCW approach.

Operation Vula was intended at one level to try to assert some ANC leadership over the autonomous forces identified as the engine of insurrection. It was to do so by improving operational management. Building an underground from top down was to achieve this. Vula's authors considered that many among the ANC's most important operational leadership had to be deceived to achieve this. They feared, perhaps justifiably, that, if these officials knew of the operation, they would have to be involved in it and that they might undermine it by inertia if not by active sabotage.

One way of seeing the strategic phases between Guevara and Vula is that each represented an attempt to disguise and to dignify the failure of the preceding strategic framework for the ANC's armed struggle.

The most compelling reason for the ANC's persistence with armed activity regardless of its cost was the prestige, influence and popularity that armed struggle gave it among potential supporters both inside South Africa and abroad. This influence, combined with the ANC's inclusive nationalism and attempts to unite the widest possible spectrum of anti-apartheid forces under its aegis, gave the ANC unrivalled caché. The ANC's rivals - such as the PAC and black consciousness movement - did not have armed struggles and, largely for this reason, could not achieve the same profile. The political dividend the ANC derived from armed struggle made the resources spent on it and lives lost in it worthwhile in the ANC's calculations. Indeed, the heavier the ANC's losses, the higher that return often was: the more MK cadres being buried or marching off to jail, the greater the evidence that the ANC had dared to struggle against a brutal, powerful and internationally infamous enemy. Therein lies the explanation for the paradox of the ANC's trajectory: how it found its success in failure.

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This bibliography includes all books, articles and primary material referred to in the text and footnotes of this thesis, as well as a number of additional works that were significant in informing its content. The bibliography is divided into two sections.

The first section comprises original or primary material. This material is contained in seven volumes held by Rhodes House Library, University of Oxford, and to which access can be gained on application to the Librarian. Four of these volumes, numbered 1 to 4, contain interviews conducted by me. These interviews are listed below. As the *Note on Sources and Footnoting* to this thesis indicates, the prefix *IV/* in a footnote indicates a reference to these interviews. The other three volumes contain additional papers and publications cited in this thesis that are rare or have hitherto been confidential. These volumes are marked A, B and C, and their contents are also listed below. The prefix *App/* in a footnote indicates a reference to one of these additional papers and publications.

The second section of this Bibliography comprises a selection of other publications referred to in the preparation of this dissertation: books and long documents; articles; newspapers and magazines; journals; regular publications by organisations; and theses.

Section OneINTERVIEWS CONDUCTED BY AUTHOR [IV/]Interviews: Volume 1

Interviewee	Page Number
Anderson, Bill	1.
Bunting, Brian	57.
Cronin, Jeremy [First Interview]	99.
Cronin, Jeremy [Second Interview]	122.
Cronin, Gemma	146.
Evans, Gavin	151.
Goldberg, Dennis	183.
Jele, Joe [Notes]	229.
Jordan, Pallo [First Interview]	232.
Jordan, Pallo [Second Interview: Notes]	241.
Kasrils, Ronnie [First Interview]	242.
Kasrils, Ronnie [Second Interview]	279.
Kasrils, Ronnie [Third Interview]	295.
Kasrils, Ronnie [Four Brief Interviews: Notes]	327.

Interviews: Volume 2

Kodesh, Wolfie	335.
Maharaj, Mac [First Interview]	368.
Maharaj, Mac [Second Interview]	385.
Maharaj, Mac [Third Interview]	440.
Maharaj, Mac [Fourth Interview]	509.
Martins, Dikobe	536.

Matshakiza, Sizwe	554.
Mayibuye, Peter [Joel Netshitenze]	584.
Molefe, Popo	620.
Momoniati, Ismail	630.
Narsoo, Monty	657.

Interviews: Volume 3

Nkondo, Curtis	683.
Omar, Yacoob Abba	716.
Pillay, Ivan	748.
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