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MK Special Operations Unit Project

Interviews

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To start, maybe a general question: where does Special Ops fit into MK and the armed struggle as a whole, as you see it? Of course, the armed struggle was waged as part of the overall national liberation struggle...

You must consider the *Green Book*. In the history of the movement this is one of the most critical documents. It emerged from one of the most systematic commissions, and its report was adopted by the NEC. It was put in a safe. It is now in the public domain, but only since 1990. Nowadays some people read it not from the point of view of trying to understand what the movement was trying to do but from the point of view of how does it justify their own positions around strategy and tactics and more specifically issues such as People's War, insurrections, arming the people, guerrilla war etc. Anyway, so it was adopted and then embargoed. But it was now our policy position. Now the problem arose: how do you translate it into action because you can't refer to the *Green Book*?? You can't say there is a decision of this or that nature.

Also the NEC in Tanzania, meeting around the *Green Book*, rejected the component of it relating to the structures needed. Members of the NEC adopted the strategy and tactics part but opposed that structure – yet it's a fundamental principle that structure follows strategy. You don't create a structure and then create strategy. You develop a strategy and then you ensure that the mechanism to implement it is adequately structured to deliver. Now, the NEC abandoned the structure – it was advocating a Central Organ of seven people, which members of the NEC now saw as a threat to their position, because it was entrusting the entire home front to this Central Organ, which was supposed to attend to the home front full-time. The Central Organ would combine military, political and propaganda work. It would answer to the NEC, but, now other members of the NEC who were not earmarked to the Central

Organ felt it would marginalise them and diminish the powers of the NEC. Consequently Part II of the *Green Book* was excised.

I don't know how many comrades were actually in their minds implementing the *Green Book* in the work they were doing. Even Special Ops. That was what you were supposed to do. There was also a warning in the *Green Book* to conduct work inside South Africa in such a way as not to jeopardise the legality and the space occupied by the mass organisations. So you needed to intervene in a different way – and that is where a whole lot of problems arise for the movement, even for the UDF (United Democratic Front) and COSATU comrades.

When the armed struggle was launched, leaders like Mandela were very clear that sabotage was not going to be sufficient. They opted for it for a variety of reasons. Many of these were explained publicly, but some were not. It was in the 50's that the Congress movement began to adjust to the need for armed struggle. It's a historical incorrect to suggest that non-violence was the approach of the movement from 1912 or that non-violence was a principle for the Natal Indian Congress (NIC) and the Transvaal Indian Congress (TIC). Nowhere in their Constitutions does it say this – but today, reading that into the strategy and tactics of those organisation creates misperceptions.

In the 1950's mass struggles became a conscious strategy as a defensive position of the movement because it was operating at the extra-parliamentary level. To protect itself the movement conducted its mobilisation under the banner of non-violent action. And the Defiance Campaign had already pointed to the dangers of violence which had broken out in Kimberley and Port Elizabeth where people were killed. So, this put the movement in a defensive position, so more and more emphasis began to be put on non-violence, without saying that this is a principle.

However there were some comrades who began to say it's a principle – and that led to its own problems. In the 50's with the decision to adopt mass-based tactics, we were being focussed at the extra-parliamentary level. It's interesting that the Liberals coined the term 'extra-constitutional' action and they attacked us for this. We avoided this debate by saying our struggle is non-violent. We didn't want to argue about whether it's extra-parliamentary or extra-constitutional. Obviously, you can't stand up and say you don't respect the Constitution, then you're immediately guilty of a crime. But the truth of the matter is, it was not our Constitution, we couldn't give a damn about it.

Yes, I think ultimately it's not easy, given the circumstances in the 50's and early 60's, to make mechanical distinctions between violent and non-violent forms of struggle, to periodise in a crude way. There

were formal decisions taken about armed struggle in 1960 and '61, but the turn to it was obviously beginning in the 50s...

Well, you'll see this for yourself when you do the research.

In the public space Julius Lewin initiated, towards the end of 1958, a debate in the journal *Africa South*. Drawing on *The Anatomy of Revolution* by Crane Brinton, Lewin concluded that there was no revolution around the corner. His article elicited responses from people like Michael Harmel, Jack Simons and Eddie Roux. None directly challenged Lewin's conclusion. Neither Harmel and Simons who were deeply engrained in Marxism-Leninism, used the opportunity to advance the proposition that there were objective factors maturing in the South Africa that suggested the country was heading for revolution. And yet hardly three years later, Harmel was among those favouring a move away from non-violent forms of struggle.

Ben Turok states that Harmel wrote an article advocating the armed struggle shift, and he says that was decided by the Party in December 1961. And that is when the Party units were set up. As a Marxist, wouldn't you begin to ask whether he missed seeing what were the fundamentals that were at play? Either Harmel missed this in '59 or he was misreading it in '60 because these are not issues that depend on a day-to-day shift. You can't say Sharpeville shooting, therefore armed struggle. It was maybe the tip of the iceberg but Marxists want to look at the base of the iceberg to see which way it's moving, they don't determine it by the tip.

At that time there was hardly anybody studying what guerrilla warfare involves. If there was one man who was studying it, it was Madiba, and that I came to know by accident, it is because I was in London, and one of my tasks was to deal with a request from home for reading materials. I had to comb through the libraries and then I had a request from home saying: thank you very much for these books, but can you guys now also make it a point of getting books written by generals who were in charge of successful counter-insurgency operations? And this stuck in my mind because the writer said, for example, there is a British general who headed the counter-insurgency in Malaysia who has written a book. I think it was Westmoreland, but I'm not sure. So, I get the book and more material and send it home.

When we land in jail (Robben Island) and I'm at the quarry, I'm discussing with comrades and I find the man whose referring to the material is Madiba. So, one day I say to him Madiba, Man, you were the one requesting the books! He said so you were the one that was sending them. But it turned out that in all my interaction I did not come across anyone else who had read them. The attitude – and I'm being blunt – was that if you took to armed struggle you

were certain to succeed. But issues relating to guerrilla war, especially in the context of *Operation Mayibuye* led to a massive debate. Few people talk about the fallout on the Island between Govan (Mbeki), Raymond (Mhlaba), (Joe) Gqabi and (Andrew) Masondo on one side and Madiba and Sisulu on the other.

In a debate that started there, one of the questions that Mandela raised persistently in discussions in which I was involved related to the feasibility of guerilla warfare in our situation. Where could we locate our rear bases? He would point out that initially we placed our expectations on the forthcoming independence of our neighbouring states, particularly the then Bechuanaland. When it became independent in 1966 the reality turned out otherwise because it found itself under unrelenting pressure from South Africa which rendered it unable to even provide us with safe passage from Zambia to South Africa.

Rhodesia was under the grip of White minority rule and Mozambique remained under Portuguese rule under 1975. Even states beyond the immediate neighbouring states were under considerable economic and political pressure from apartheid South Africa. The FLN (National Liberation Front) in Algeria had Morocco in the west and Tunisia in the east upon whom it could rely on to allow it to locate its safe bases.

Given these circumstances Madiba would push us to face uncomfortable questions such as what should the aim of our guerilla war; is it realistic to aim to defeat the regime militarily; if not, what were our options? These were the type of questions that found us floundering during the discussions with Madiba and in some instances his doggedness caused considerable ill feelings and even downright acrimony.

Mandela had engaged in intensive discussions with leaders of the FLN. He had visited their headquarters in Morocco where he was briefed by Dr Mustafa. Like us, the Algerians faced a larger settle minority that ruled the country. He pointed out at first the FLN, influenced by the defeat of the French militariy in Indo-China, believed they too could defeat the French militarity. When they realized that this was not possible, they resorted to guerilla warfare with the aim to unleash political and economic forces that would force a settlement by negotiations. Dr Mustafa rounded off his advice by urging Mandela not to neglect the political side of war and maintained that international public opinion was sometimes worth more "than a fleet of jet fighters".

Operation Mayibuye was premised on airlifting trained cadres and parachuting and bringing them by sea. It planned on bringing 100 trained combatants and dispersed them in the country where they'll be able to set up bases in the country because there'll be 7000 or so activists on the ground ready to join the action.

It gave little attention as to where bases would be located and in particular where our rear bases would be. The Algerians drew Madiba's attention to these issues and to the fact that South Africa had developed roads and an air capacity that could rapidly move its troops to virtually any part of the country to counter the guerillas.

Our reaction when the Rivonia arrests and trial took place with *Operation Mayibuye* as the centrepiece of the prosecution case was to defend our leaders and unquestioningly defend *Operation Mayibuye*. It was the right thing to do. But now here we were in prison, talking among ourselves and being forced to scrutinise our plans and actions in order to learn from our mistakes! Some of us simply wanted to wallow in the justness of our cause and the certainty of victory and not have to face such uncomfortable questions.

By the way, what's cropped up through a paper by an academic recently is that British intelligence files that have opened up reveal that there was an agent there reporting on Madiba's trip. And that the aircraft company that flew the charter that Madiba took, started as a charter company in 1960 - and the first person it flew out was Patrick Duncan. But it was a project set up by British Intelligence. And the pilot was a South West African who had trained in the 1930's in Nazi Germany and served in Hitler's Luftwaffe and he was flying (UN General Secretary, Dag) Hammarskjöld and all of us. And he ended up working with both British Intelligence and South African Security. And there were complaints by South African Intelligence to the British Intelligence about why they were not told in advance. (See Garth Bennyworth: *Bechuanaland's Aerial Pipeline – Intelligence and Counter-Intelligence Operations against the SA Liberation Movements 1960-1965*, published in South African Historical Journal 2017).

To come back to the armed struggle, if you leave *Mayibuye* aside, you still see comrades looking at the struggle with those uni-dimensional lens – and look at what happens in exile, we then mount the Wankie and Sipolilo campaigns. What was the strategic plan behind that? This is pre-Morogoro. It was that we send in forces with ZAPU (Zimbabwean African People's Union). Some would remain with ZAPU while in Rhodesia, and when fighting takes place they're under the command of the ZAPU Commander. There will be another contingent who will push into South Africa and split up to the different provinces.

But if they got through, what were they were going to do? Your expectation was that if you sent in 10 guerrillas into the Northern Transvaal they'd be able to set up a base and that they will start training on the ground. They hoped to do that un-detected, and having started training they would launch an attack simultaneously as guided from outside in six different parts of the country.

There'd be an uprising. But I ask whether this is possible in terms of our resources on the ground?

In 1969 in the Morogoro *Strategy & Tactics* document we said we can't expect the struggle to move forward unless guerrilla warfare is going to be linked to organising the masses. What was meant by organising the masses was not spelt out – but in practice the architects of that saw it as comrades going inside the country to people with requests – help us with this and that. We'll do the fighting, you shut up. That was not mass activation.

Later on we described what we were doing as armed propaganda. It was not decided when we started it as propaganda, but that's Morogoro. What about the masses, the people behind the armed struggle? Does it mean an acquiescent mass base? No, but in this approach to the mass base, it was: contact this one, tell that one we're bringing six people in, they must give safe accommodation. They will need transport, money, food. So, immediately your mass organisation is intended only to mobilise to provide that. It's not for the masses to stand up on their own, organise themselves and act on their own. We're battling with that. We're learning from experience.

What I'm trying to say here is that Morogoro has been assessed as really articulating a strategy of guerilla warfare. In doing that it does refer to the role of the masses, but if you look at what leads up to it, correctly we have to acknowledge Wankie and Sipolilo as significant developments. Here was a concept that we are sending in guerillas, they're going to create a Ho Chi Min route (based on the Vietnamese experience) to the country, they're going to meet a ready-made mobilised population, which wasn't there. Now if you interrogate your concept of guerilla warfare, you will see that you can't take that for granted. If you used your model of guerilla warfare as the Chinese at that time, because the Vietnamese struggle was not yet over, you see that the Chinese, even when they retreated to the Yen'an caves they had to keep building a political base amongst the people in order to move with the struggle.

I have done a paper for the Luthuli Memorial Lecture in which I tried to locate why we should say Wankie and Sipolile were a great achievement because while, on the military side, it was a failure, politically it was a significant victory.

In what sense?

If you look at the date, '67. What was the situation in the country? There's nobody, no evidence of any effort to restart, to rekindle; and any effort to do so is snuffed out, just like that. It is a period in which a person is sentenced to prison for drinking from a mug with a picture of Madiba. We have been making

efforts to come home. It doesn't catch the headlines. The public is unaware. Apartheid has got a blanket on news. When Wankie and Sipolilo take place, go and read the newspapers. The South African papers are full of it, and the ANC is being portrayed as people to be feared.

So, amongst the masses of the oppressed there is a sense that the struggle is going on. That the people that we thought had gone away, they're not just sitting in Tanzania. And what is more, they're really fighting and they're putting the Rhodesian soldiers against the wall. That was its achievement.

It's a direct precursor to the Winne Mandela trial, to the revival of the ANC, to the basis on which the space begins to open up and you then come to 1971, the NIC being revived, starting off with Mewa (Ramgobin). He started in a bit of a dodgy way – with the amnesty campaign for prisoners. And that was being influenced partly by the Americans, who were saying let's get amnesty. But some of us who heard about it in the single cells (on Robben Island), we didn't talk loudly, but we said this is wrong, we don't want amnesty. They want to create a problem for us. But from there it became 'Release Mandela'... So Mewa is important. People's views are growing, changing, evolving.

The next high water mark in the armed struggle is Aventura, the ship, in 1971. Have you ever sat back and asked yourself where would it land 20 to 25 comrades on the Transkei coast? Their point man in the country is (Alex) Moumbaris (Greek internationalist, sentenced to Pretoria Prison, from which he escaped with Tim Jenkins and Stephen Lee). He's a foreigner. He's not related to anybody on the ground in Transkei. So, they're going to land, he's going to give them car keys, he's going to transport them. After he's dropped them off, what are they going to do? They are going to find the links with the people on their own. There's nobody here guiding them.

What accounts for that way of thinking? And it's a huge resource. We took 20 to 30 comrades to Baku, we trained them. This was beyond the training they had done at Odessa, they did naval training. It was a special group and one of them is still alive – Fanele Mbali. He's in Cape Town. He was the Commander of that group. Now you look at that and you say what was the thinking behind that? How did they conceptualise guerrilla warfare? You realise that this is the same thinking in *Mayibuye*. We have committed to guerrilla warfare but we are simply not grappling with the reality of how do you get it moving in the country. You're simply believing that if you inject a few comrades, that people will be ready to receive them – and these are people who are already driven by fear. Every time you contact a lone person, within days the enemy has found the cadre.

And in the *Strategy & Tactics* of Morogoro the place of armed propaganda in classical guerilla war was not dealt with...

So, Aventura comes and goes. What was the approach of the movement beyond just saying the word 'guerrilla warfare'? How are you going to implement that? And then you will find this huge gap arising that while Morogoro put the concept of guerrilla warfare and mass mobilisation as going together, it still left open that mass mobilisation was simply to service the armed struggle. But the facts were beginning to show that until you could get the mass work going, you could not create the conditions to even root people in the country. But you had to root them in such a way to avoid the experience that every time you went there and touched the top people it was over, people got arrested.

Now it's in that context that we are battling our way, trying to find the answer. You can use loose words to find our way home, to hack our way home, but we're trying to get rooted at home – and that is when the Politico-Military Strategy Commission sits. It's against this real problem of bashing our heads that in 1978 the NEC and the Revolutionary Council (RC) in an extended meeting decides to set up the Politico-Military Strategy Commission based on a visit that OR (Tambo) and others had made to Vietnam. And the Vietnamese described how they were doing things that raised the profile of armed propaganda.

By the early 1980s, the ANC recognised the urgent need for greater coordination between military and political work in the home front. By December 1982, the Central Headquarters under which military work was carried out was restructured and replaced by MHQ (Military Headquarters) which was organised along formal military lines and coordination between MHQ and the Internal Political and Reconstruction Department (IPRD) was enhanced by setting up Senior Organs in the forward areas with a drive to establish Area Political Committees (APC's) inside South Africa. This emphasis on the need for synergy between the work of MHQ and the IPRD was also emphasised when the RC was replaced by the Politico-Military Council (PMC) in 1983 and the Senior Organs in the forward areas were subsequently replaced by Regional Politico-Military Committees.

The idea of the PMC was that it would be a combined political-military structure with APC's within South Africa – this was to emphasise the political nature of the struggle and the strategy. The idea of a combined politico-military structure was deeper than a question of improving coordination of political and military work – the two had to be integrated into a single whole. It is the political structure in an area that will guide you to hit this kind of target here because it

fits in with this kind of mass struggle that's going on and it would stimulate the struggle.

In the case of the G5 (MK unit commanded by Siphwe Nyanda) because they had located themselves in the country, we made an exception and allowed them to continue to operate inside the country without putting them under an internally based APC. Slovo argued that they were already settled and operating successfully in the Transvaal urban area and that it would be premature and possibly endanger their security if we placed them under a newly created APC. But that too was over-optimistic because our assessment was based on the fact that the G5 had begun to survive in the disused mines.

The APC's were meant to be inside the country area by area. And that to do this, we needed to send in senior comrades right up to members of the RC into the country. Not just to go in and out, but to begin to create the conditions to settle down in the country. That exercise which was decided upon by the RC as far back as 1981 was based upon an assessment made at that time with a view that we would review progress made in a year's time. In a year's time, we found that there was no progress and no senior member had been sent in.

The main issue about the armed struggle is that we didn't have the senior ANC leadership inside the country. Have you heard of any country where an exiled leadership was leading the armed struggle – but where the leadership never entered the country for thirty years? And yet commanded from the outside? How was it to keep in touch with changes that were happening in the country? That effort to send in senior cadres to serve at that political-military level sort of got paralysed. That does not mean we gave up on that. We certainly, some of us in the RC, understood that need. At a strategic level we had a leadership now so long outside the country, living in very difficult and changing circumstances that differed in different countries – for example, Tanzania was very different from Swaziland, Maputo from Gaborone, Harare from Luanda.

So, you are preoccupied with those changing situations in countries where there are structures that you are directly in command of, but what about the changing conditions within South Africa?

On the *Green Book*, Luli Callinicos (*Oliver Tambo: Beyond the Engeli Mountains*, David Philip, 2004) has brought to light the notes made by Oliver Tambo while the commission was meeting - and OR is brutal. He is looking at us, and he says we are just doing things the wrong way. We have been giving the bulk of our attention to the military side and making some progress there, but we have allowed the political side to lag behind. This debate is taking place in the commission.

And you will see in the *Vula* communications, OR and Slovo say that *Vula* is the one glimmer of light because you are getting it right. But we could not say publically what OR is writing during the course of the debate at the Politico-Military Strategy Commission. How could we say to an MK commander and combatant, that, look, slow down? He will say what the hell!

Now the same thing, Slovo gets caught in a trap, because what we have done so far in terms of actions by MK is more like armed propaganda, but he does not persist on saying our MK actions are striking successes. But look at his targets. Had we pursued that shift to armed propaganda, of attacking strategic economic targets...when you combine that with the sanctions and the mismanagement of the economy by the Apartheid system, you then see a different way forward for armed struggle in South Africa.

This is what the Vietnamese did with their armed propaganda. When they entered the South, they would leave a team of propaganda people to continue to mobilise the people. They would carry out actions that would make the people feel confident.

We had put all our resources into the armed struggle component, the military component, and yet the political component is needed in two forms - one, a political structure in the underground because it is illegal and, two, mass work and mobilisation; not just having contact with the masses but in mobilisation of the masses. We're talking '78. As I said, OR says so we've just got it completely lopsided. If I quote his words you'll be shocked. And he says how are we going to do this? It means we are going to slow down on the military side, but we can't tell the people - this is not in his notes - and the South African public that the ANC and the Alliance cadres, we've got it all wrong. No, we got to do the shift in a very subtle and careful way. It is in this context that Special Ops comes to birth.

The result is that when we come back to assess the impact and the developments of Special Ops you will see it changing, because it shifts from armed propaganda to actually beginning to behave as if it's a replacement for MK. Slovo is no longer there. He has moved away because he is elected SACP Chair and he is now asking to be given some space. The result is the new incumbents are not aware what's happening. But why? Go back and read the *Green Book* carefully. Bear in mind also that when Special Ops was set up it did not fall under the RC. Instead, it reported directly to the President OR Tambo. But by 1984 Special Ops is moved to and falls under MHQ.

From what I can tell, Rashid's very clear about the role of Special Ops...

If Special Ops is born out of the *Green Book*, how does he justify the Dolphin unit? It was simply an ordinary sabotage unit. What it shows is that in practice the mindset did not buy into the *Green Book* because in practice suddenly you find something else. Gebuza (Siphiwe Nyanda, G5 MK Commander and later SANDF Head) gave an interview claiming that in the Natal machinery they created a Special Ops unit. So, what then was the Special Ops set up by Slovo and OR about? It was supposed to be shifting the alignment, keeping the focus on carrying out actions that would be propaganda, with the aim to incite the conditions for the mass struggles and the creation of the political underground.

Then why create other Special Ops units like Dolphin because you are now replacing ordinary MK units? So what are you saying? That all the other MK machinery must close down?

They were experimenting with Slovo in Command. They were experimenting because Siphiwe Nyanda and them are putting G5 on the ground and beginning to survive on the ground, and then they are expanding into G6 and G7, trying to root themselves at home, but rooting themselves militarily. And whenever we debated the creation of an APC there were problems. Slovo said at the Planning Meeting of the RC, no, you can't link up with G5, I don't want you to expose and endanger G5 by placing it under an APC as it's settled in the country.

So, he was assuming that because G5 were living in dugouts, in the mines, successfully, it will always be successful there, that those dug-outs would become long term safe bases. He was still not seeing the need for the Political Section to be the guiding force. So, if then ordinary machineries of MK were to develop a Special Ops unit, then what's the difference between the Special Ops Unit of Slovo and any other sabotage unit? Special Ops was supposed to go for the big targets that would make the propaganda headlines impacting not only on the perception of the people but hurting the regime.

Comrades suddenly, for some reason, in exile saw their contacts as their personal property. No, no this is my unit. Rashid speaks like that. He left Special Ops but he decided he'll manage Dolphin. His brother was there and he's going to manage Iqbal Shaikh and his brother. Nobody's asking the question, if you look at the struggle, Marxist and other guerrilla struggles, what does it mean when your family is in your unit? It's very nice to recruit them, but now you are in the same unit or in command of your family member's unit. When a crunch moment arrives, were a critical decision has to be taken which puts your family member's unit at high risk, are you able to take that decision or do you back off?

So the practical organisational issue arises when you have your family members and you take responsibility and you don't instead go to another MK leader to say you think your brother is right for recruitment, go work on him.

But from that point you don't get involved. Yes, I'm interested to know whether he's there, but I'm no longer involved in the operational side. Is he at high risk or low risk? It's important to separate that, and not put Commanders in the difficult situation where when they think that their family members are at risk, their instinct would be to say I'd rather put myself at risk to save my brother or sister or child. Completely wrong issues are rising on the battle front. We don't look at that. We treat it that each one that is recruited is my personal possession. Are you recruiting for the organisation or are you recruiting for yourself? Look at the problems that we are facing today. Are they born partly from that thinking? That's not only an outside problem, it's an inside problem

So, there are many problems with our practice. And it's not enough for me or Rashid to say *Green Book* – because I'm vicious about that, I've said it to Joe personally that you have elaborated the theory from time to time and you've been the biggest deviator in the implementation, and he didn't like it.

So, implementation is where the problems arise. How to then get to People's War? There's a paper presented on People's War before Kabwe that says in six months of trying to create internal leadership, an internally based APC, there has been an abject failure. True, it has been an abject failure - because you've refused to send in leading people. How can you send a comrade who has been a student activist for three months in the country to now go and tell Smangalisu Mkhathshwa (UDF leader) what to do? How is it going to work? What experience has the comrade got to read the problems and on what basis is he going to engage? How does he or she interact with Archie Gumede with the sensitivities to the problems about which he needs assistance? Not on problems that you want assistance with. By the way, this kind of problem arose when the Naledi-Sexwale team entered South Africa and began to interact with comrades like John Nkadimeng and Joe Gqabi yet no lessons seem to have been derived from this experience.

Because you want to influence that mass organisation to grow, you've got to understand what that leader inside the country is facing and what sort of help he or she wants. But you are sending in a cadre whose thinking is, as I said, still: give me a safe house, give me a place to hide arms, give me somebody to provide me with transport. So, you are already unconsciously hollowing out that developing mass organisation and you're not striving consciously to grow and strengthen it except through the inspirational impact of an action such as the spectacular strike against the Sasol refinery. We hit Sasol in 1980 and it became inspirational; it's drawing people into the struggle. But that is all. Yet

unless you interacted with the Gumedes you are not feeding the outside with information that makes them understand the internal situation.

So, you need senior people to come and acquaint themselves and the APC is all about that, and we didn't send people because every time it came to a senior person, it doesn't happen. The person is selected, but it doesn't happen, so the People's War document says that's a failure.

With Special Ops, armed propaganda is doing well, we hit Sasol, Koeberg, Voortrekkerhoogte and others. What Rashid does not face is that they've now hit a major problem. Special Ops has run into a head-on problem in Swaziland.

I'm in Swaziland living clandestinely at that time when they pumped in 12 to 20 comrades. One night they cross the border from Maputo into Swaziland heading for home. Don't know if Rashid will mention it, but they were planning to hit several power stations at the same time - but the Swazi police and army intercepted them. That setback was the start of the end of the big operations of Special Ops. The secret pact between Pretoria and Swaziland in 1982 and the Nkomati Accord of 1984 effectively denied us the however rudimentary rear base of Mozambique and the transit route of Swaziland

The other one was a chap called 'Hotstuff' – Chamusso from Special Ops. Rashid must have told you about that?

Ya. I also saw that movie on him, *Catch a Fire*...

Even that was somewhat inaccurate. Rashid will tell you. Hotstuff had been located, he had access to explosives. The police were on to him. The outside lost contact with him and he, with the enemy on his track, decided to fight and *moer* them on his own, and he just went on a trail bombing and the cops caught him in the end. And we called him 'Hotstuff' because he was totally out of control. He was a one-man show. His nickname was 'Hotstuff' because of that. Slovo is telling me, Man, we have no contact with him. He's just using everything he's got!...

So Slovo and them could tell it was him?

They could see from his trail....

His is a great story!...

A great story, yes, a great story!...

But to come back, the issue that arises is the enemy hit at Matola, there was the killing of Obadi, then Barney (Molokoane, Special Ops Operational Commander). The truth of the matter is that these were charismatic young chaps. They were great; they were dare-devils. I don't know whether Rashid tells you - I think it's in the repeat of Sasol - the Barney group go in, they got these two lines of fences, high ones, at these refineries. They get there and they say, hell, how we're going to do this? Previously they cut the wire. You know what the guys did? One of them went and bought a trampoline and they practiced with the trampoline and with a mattress to get right over that fence... This is on the ground things, you wouldn't have thought about, but what it tells you, is that the cadres were determined to perform that mission.

Now that is the type of individual you wanted in Special Ops. With Koeberg, same thing. When Slovo reported to OR he called it 'Operation Mac'. It was around that time that I learned that in the files it was called Operation Mac. In a sense I was a bit chuffed, but I was also a bit angry because how could he code-name an operation with a person's real name? OR comes into the RC and, while they're joking about me, says with pride, 'Mac, you did a good job', so I looked at him mischievously and say, 'Chief, you're getting me wrong. I want to tell you, I found this guy in a commune, a hippy-type colony with free love, and he was a dagga smoker'.... OR doesn't know what to say!...That's not his view of the model MK soldier. But, let me say, Rodney and his partner were very good!...



Mac Maharaj in Lusaka in the 1980s, Villon Films

In the implementation of Special Ops, you will then find these gaps - and then you will find how military headquarters is reorganised, and now Rashid is made Head of Ordnance. What does he do? He wants Special Ops people to be in Ordnance. What happens to Special Ops? No, no, he says, I'll manage this whole thing, the next Commander is taking over from me. But Rashid's taking away the best cadres....

Did he tell you about the two operatives - it turned out very interesting - I don't know what happened to them - but they were two brothers Johannes Mnisi and his brother Christopher, we use to call him Ace? But the story behind that is - I don't know whether they were already in Special Ops - when they came home and

Johannes got arrested and they tortured him, he became an *Askari* (former ANC and other liberation members who became agents of the apartheid state), then his brother got arrested and he too got tortured and he too became an *Askari*. So, the two of them became *Askaris*. Johannes, now as an *Askari*, was brought with the Boers and set up a meeting (with other Special Ops cadres, to entrap them).

I was in Swaziland at that time, 1982, Rashid was coming in but he got held up, but that night a comrade called George (Ndlovu) from Special Ops and another (Chris Nungu, Special Ops Commander) had gone to Oshoek to meet an operative from home. In fact, later on, it turns out that the meeting was set up by Johannes from home. He asked George to come and meet him at home and George said, no, I can't come home. And so the agreement was that they would meet on the Swazi side, but as George and his partner drove to the Oshoek border that night, the Boers were waiting, and they opened fire and the car caught alight and George and the other chap were burnt to death.

But it turns out that these two brothers were now trying to bide their time waiting to escape. They had agreed to work as *Askaris* under torture. But they decided to come back to the ANC – and used their own finances to do so. It is Christopher who now made it possible for them to escape from the *Askari* unit, and the chap who did the Church Street bombing later, who died in the car, Shongwe, drove the two brothers when they escaped from being held as *Askaris*. They returned to Swaziland and I think they met Gebuza.

I think Ace went off into a regular MK machinery but Johannes was accepted into Special Ops and he came back into the country to co-ordinate the Church Street bombing. It's interesting that he refused to go into the army post-94. He refused to accept a commission. He had a criminal background. And there you have a problematic arising, that this type of information is taken by people like (academic) Patrick Bond and turned around in articles to say corruption was imported from outside and brought into South Africa by the ANC and in particular he says *Vula* brought it here.

They are using this type of background as well as the fact that, yes, we smuggled cars, but you couldn't go into an operation with a legitimate car! If we took our cars it would be easier for the security to identify us. So, it had to be stolen cars, and if we put a car bomb, you think we going buy a car and blow it up? There's a peculiar morality there. However, it's also true that the movement had treated successful operations as sufficient evidence of the conversion of a comrade from a criminal to a law-abiding citizen and they promoted such people very, very fast. That is why Johannes sticks in my mind, that here's a chap who said I'm not going into the Defence Force and he died fairly poor. He tried to run some small businesses. Johannes was key inside the country. He would do things inside the country because he had connections with the underworld...

The apartheid security would sometimes say that the ANC was using criminals. But the security police often used criminals to penetrate the ANC to serve as informers instead of prison sentences. And you know more than me, that some of those who were detected were

turned around and also carried out MK operations. But others, it seems were just ordinary criminals who came into the ANC. Surely, this role of criminals, without exaggerating it, is understandable, given the nature of apartheid? And it's hardly peculiar to our struggle? It's happened in many of the South American struggles and elsewhere too?...

Yes. You know, one day Sipiwe Nyanda and I are meeting in Rosebank in a car park. I arrive early, I get into the shopping complex but I can still see into the car park, and I see a car with a couple of African people. They sit in the car. I see another person standing in the shopping mall in one corner, I look around and I see another, all in plain clothes, I say, hell, what is this?

You must have were in disguise...

Yes. Next thing Sipiwe arrives. I can't do anything because I'm seeing people positioned in different places as Sipiwe was driving in and parking. There are people in the car and I say to myself what's happening here, is this the enemy? Anyway, Sipiwe gets out of the car, and the next thing I see, the chaps from the car greet him. He walks over to them and then he walks away. He recognised them and they recognised them

When Sipiwe and I meet, I say what the hell was happening there? He says those guys were planning to hit that bank. 'What? They recognised you?' 'Yes, they recognised me from Swaziland.' I tell Sipiwe, you are being careless in your disguise, here were chaps who had some connection with Swaziland, they're doing their own thing here, they're not MK cadres, these are rogues...

Anyway, suddenly OR says to me got to meet you face to face. Be in Moscow on like 5 July '89. I'm swearing here, I'm saying what the hell! I walked across the border! How do I get to Moscow? And he says get there and return without being detected!

How does he connect with you?

We were in advance of the internet...

When *Operation Vula* came up I said to OR and Slovo we need a Strategy Paper. I drafted it and we had a discussion around it. Now based on our discussion OR says I want you, Mac, to go home. So, I said no problem, but two issues. One, can I go and discuss it with my wife? In my days, you were not allowed to discuss these things even with your spouse. All the top comrades who wrote the rules that we are not to tell our wives were telling

their wives. The rules didn't apply to them! I formally asked for permission. So, he says okay.

Second, I need time, I need resources to develop communications. Now this is something nobody appreciated, even to the end. I remember Ronnie was now Military Intelligence and they were claiming that they had a unit in the country that was in radio communications with Angola – this is the Broederstroom unit.

So, I don't tell them I'm in *Vula* now. I call Ronnie, they have radio communication equipment through their Soviet contacts. I say what kind of aerial – they say, no, you need wide enough space. Your normal concept of an aerial is something sticking up. But what they had devised needed an open space, and you laid your aerial on the ground and you could collapse it, fold it up, just as a mounted aerial upwards could be collapsed.

So, I say what about coding and decoding - he says they use the book code. I say book code means coding alphabet by alphabet by hand and then entering it key by key before transmission by morse code? Deciphering note by note, squaring it up with the book? No thank you very much, Comrade. I'm clear what I want. He doesn't know, but I'm looking at it from the perspective of the operative inside the country. Where has that operative got the time to do a one-paragraph message by opening for each alphabet, a book and putting down the page number, the line number, counting the position? How long is it going to take to code a paragraph? And when a message comes to me, how long am I going to take to decode it? My conditions are, I am clandestine here. So, in this investigation of the options, I get to London, and get the results....

Anyway, on the *Green Book*, I was there as a consultant. There's a chapter drafted by me. The sharpest debates are taking place around this question of the armed struggle. I get abroad in '77 after prison. Read the ANC literature of that time – it was that only the armed struggle is the way forward, and I say, no chaps, you've got it wrong, your emphasis that only the armed struggle is wrong.

Over time the word 'only' slowly goes out of use.

Some clarity about the approval for Special Ops' formation. Tambo gets the go-ahead from the NEC for Special Ops and for not having to report on its operations to the NEC until after they've been carried out and in limited detail. Does this imply that proposed operations were actually discussed, at least broadly, in NEC meetings before then?

No, no, OR asked the NEC for a mandate for Special Ops to carry out operations in a tightly-knit, highly armed propaganda technique, to strike at publicly discernible targets. That to carry out these operations he would not disclose to not just the ANC, but also the RC anything. That it is only subsequently, after an operation, that he will bring reports. And even in those reports, what he says will be at his discretion. It is the way in which *Vula* was authorised. It's a normal way to protect the President to say he has the discretion on what he reports on certain operations.

Before that, there were some operations that had to be reported at the RC level, but there were a whole lot of operations that did not have to be reported. You had to exercise your judgement. When we wanted, over the Anti-Republic campaign, is to hit the stadium where the cabinet was going to be present, that was the type of action that needed to be reported, and when it was reported to the RC, we vetoed it. Because it was going to change the rules of the game. We didn't want to attack civilians with a view to create fear.

We were opposed to this generally, but we knew that at times there may be a resort to a particular terrorist act. Now we regarded attacking the government and the President and the Prime Minister in a stadium in that situation as action that was hitting civilians and therefore a change of the rules. And we said, no. We also had problems with other targets, particularly what we called the Wimpy Bar attacks.

The debate about the legitimacy of targets, human targets, took a particular sharpness when the Silverton siege took place. These comrades came into the country on a MK operation and were intercepted, and they took refuge in a bank. They took hostages. The question that arose was: do we support hostage-taking because these are random civilians, including Black people? There were different arguments and it was pointed out that in other countries there had been occasions when a bus-load of school children was taken as hostages.

So, we realised that you could not create a general rule that covered everything. There was an on-going debate and it became sharper and sharper at different moments, particularly when the regime carried out something heinous like executing somebody or if it carried out a raid or massacred the people, like in Uitenhage. These debates would flare up at these times again.

So, it was never a settled debate. In the debate on conscripts, some of us argued, that they were a legitimate target. The fact that they had not yet been trained was not enough to say no to this, because it raised the question at which point do you decide they're in the army? And the argument was

accepted that a person drafted as a conscript is on his way to being trained and is a legitimate target.

To turn to Special Ops as a whole. What would you see as its overall strengths and weaknesses?

Special Ops was extremely successful in attacking targets of high visibility which in the public mind would have been regarded as impenetrable. So it was responsible for destroying the myth that SA was impenetrable. It virtually established in the minds of the people and the enemy that there was no target that we could not reach. Now that created panic in the enemy. It planted the seed of doubt among some in the White community as to whether clinging to apartheid was the right way to go. It succeeded also in inflicting damage in certain instances that were very, very considerable in terms of the economics. It delayed Koeberg by six months. That's a massive delay. It was hit on the eve of its commissioning. We had to hit it before this. It was hit on that date for two reasons - the commissioning day was arriving and also Rodney Wilkinson was to be retrenched. So, he decided that he was going to hit it then.

Special Ops also showed that besides operations requiring meticulous planning, there were high visibility operations that could be carried out highly opportunistically, example Koeberg, and invariably the opportunistic action was the one the enemy found most difficult to trace and therefore they could not take revenge. But the ones that were involved in high planning and a team - the enemy usually finds out who was responsible and goes for them successfully.

But Special Ops also showed that even the armed propaganda component was something that was unsustainable if it was going to be continuously located outside of the larger framework of People's War, which required an internally based leadership. And a leadership that was covering both military and political, not a leadership which sat as military and sat as political and only met to co-ordinate.

When the Vietnamese decided to attack and take Saigon the Politburo met. It decided that it's time to take Saigon. Its second decision was to take a member of the Politburo and say you take command and sent him to the frontline.

And it picked a chap for a very, very particular reason. He had already shown in his past record that he had a tendency to outsmart the enemy by making them think that he's attacking them from the outside but in the meantime he would infiltrate a good part of his forces inside Saigon. And so, when the attacks were coming from the outside and the South Vietnamese were defending that, suddenly from the inside, the reinforcements struck. It was

called the lotus flower attack. Now I'm saying the decision was a political decision based on their military capability and military and political intelligence, and the mapping out of and handing over of the command.

As the Vietnamese moved from north to the south, when they came into a particular village, they would carry out an operation. For instance, such as executing the head of the administrative machinery in public with the grievances made out, but after that, they would leave behind a few people to remain in the community to carry on with propaganda and organising the people. This one operation was simply to open the space to show whose side the people are on. What is interesting is that the Vietnamese very consciously went to destroy the administrative machinery. Chomsky wrote an essay on this.

In a brilliant piece on Vietnam that I had smuggled into prison there is an explanation of how they destroyed the administration of the South and then created a People's machinery. In our debate in the RC, we came to the idea that what was being done in Soweto was that the people were creating rudimentary organs of People's Power. But the idea was never fleshed out and never communicated backwards and forwards. We did issue one leaflet on rudimentary organs of People's Power, but never developed the concept. But if you look at the elimination of the informers, attacking councillors and the administration people, that was actually destroying the administration of the regime.

Special Ops had shown many positives but once we lost the capacity to organise from Mozambique through Swaziland it faced formidable problems. The conditions in Botswana were more difficult than Mozambique. Special Ops began to drift towards carrying out operations that were more like those carried out by regular MK units. They still acted as if it was irrelevant to have a political section. They said we are the political people.

This problem has a deeper root in the ANC. It persists even today with the role of intelligence. I have fought even the East Germans and I fought even inside, even post-1990. I've said Intelligence - your job is not to lead the political decisions. Let the organisation take its decisions. Then let us have the intelligence. Don't come here and tell us what to do; rather show options and the implications of each. And if you look up to now, Intelligence decides and Intelligence plants members everywhere - and Intelligence did that to me. They would take my junior and make him an Intelligence Officer to report on the work I was doing.

So, Special Ops found itself in that situation, which is not a problem of its own making; it's a larger problem. We had to go home and we had to settle inside in a relationship with the mass organisations.

Special Ops weaknesses stem from the fact that from the point of view of the overall armed struggle, by the 80s, mass mobilisation, partly stimulated by actions of Special Ops, had moved into top gear. But we were still unable to integrate a leadership from outside with a leadership from inside. We were still bouncing between the inside saying we're the leadership and the outside saying we're the leadership, and paying homage to each other, but each side thinking they are the real leadership. Neither of them saying we have got something to learn if we come together. But how we bring us together was the key problem because the Military wanted the mass movement to become its operatives and the *Green Book* was saying, learning from our experience, guard and protect the mass organisation, because it is only in that ferment that masses become our ocean.

Without that ferment there is an assumption that the objective oppression and exploitation of the people means automatically their consciousness is aligned to those objective conditions. It's not true. Politicisation is about taking the conditions created by the objective oppression and exploitation and making people aware of the nature of the oppression and exploitation - and that awareness is not in the classroom. The best place of learning is in action, whether it's a strike or some other form, but always it is in action where the people come together, stand together and act together, where they define a task, set out an objective and act to achieve that objective, and whether they fail or succeed is part of the learning curve of developing their consciousness.

Now if you come from that perspective, it was absolutely necessary that the way forward was to take people with the experience of exile and keeping the movement alive and the political knowledge and the discipline of an organised movement and integrating them with a leadership that's home grown. But each of those leaderships had their defects. Do not run away thinking that in the mass organisation there were no defects. I keep on saying – against Jeremy Seekings (*The UDF: A History of the United Democratic Front, 1983-1991*, David Philip, 2000) – that I was in the country from '88, I have yet to know of NEC meetings of the UDF properly deciding on a campaign. Often, two to three comrades got together and took a decision.

Don't come with this thing that you were consulting 400 organisations. Repression made it necessary to by-pass democratic decision-making processes. At times, a handful of comrades, sometimes just three comrades would decide. Outside, we had a Morogoro conference, we had a Kabwe conference, and a *Strategy And Tactics* document; you didn't have that. You didn't have the UDF

put a Strategy & Tactics document on the table. This is our strategy, these are our objectives, these are our means.

I meet Frank Chikane, Smangaliso (Mkhatshwa), Sydney (Mufamadi), Kgalema (Motlanthe), Cyril Ramaphosa, Billy Nair, Jay Naidoo, Cheryl Carolus, Chris Dlamini, Valli Moosa, Murphy Morobe, Pravin Gordhan, Mike Roussos, Ismail Momoniat - all the key people in the mass movement. In fact, when I said to Muna (Nair), you set up a meeting with (COSATU General Secretary) Jay Naidoo one-to-one, he says, 'What the hell, you don't want to meet that guy!' I said you set the meeting. He said 'do you know who he is?' I said I know who he is, I know what you think about him, I know how you've been interacting with him. I want to meet him.

Now whatever Jay Naidoo says in his book (*Fighting for Justice*, Picador Africa, 2010), he and I, in the country, had at least four meetings, but the meetings were not about what you're doing, but about strategy. What's your strategy? I need to understand it, and if I felt it was dragging us away from our strategy then I would begin to reason with him to tailor the action so that it fits into the larger strategy, and if he had a problem I would explain the larger strategy.

That was our discussion. I respected him as the (COSATU) General Secretary.

Now Muna and them were not in that mood. They were in the mood that we are at war with this guy and either he does what we say or we don't deal with him. But to integrate - this was the problem. It's not that I wanted Jay Naidoo to sit in a committee, but I wanted it to be said that we are taking fully on board their thinking.

Okay. Shall we continue on Special Ops?...

With Special Ops, I think you can't carry on armed propaganda outside of the development of mass organisation and action. So, the People's War document is right about that point, we can't carry on the same way with our propaganda. But its answer on what we must do in practical terms became problematic, and you will see that problem in terms of Special Ops. It now was robbed of Mozambique as a rear. Swaziland, we now know, had already signed a pre-Nkomati agreement so we were being hunted there. Lesotho was still a marooned place. Botswana was continually going this way, that way. Nowhere could you mobilise a force that would consistently act.

So, with the other arms not moving forward, Special Ops were sitting in the air. So, that's where we were sitting, and that's where Special Ops got trapped, and so what happens? We've lost all our main Commanders. I would say that

Rashid's strengths were most evident in his technical ability, his commitment and his readiness to be in the frontline of any action. But not making him privy to the strategy underpinning armed propaganda emanating from the *Green Book* left him in a space that did not allow these abilities to continue to grow. I think with every one of us what should first be highlighted are our strengths, then our weaknesses. But the real weakness is that he was left with one arm tied behind his back because he was unaware of the historic context and the strategy in which armed propaganda and Special Operations emanated.

Now in the military sphere he just operated on the personal order - and if I hold the rank and I tell you what to do, you do. Inside the country you can't do that. (Padraig) O'Malley (*Shades of Difference: Mac Maharaj and the Struggle for South Africa*, Penguin Random House, 2007) came and asked me at one stage, 'Mac I'm not hearing that you gave orders'. I said I never gave an order.

In the situation in the country when you're in command of forces, orders are of no consequence, and he came back to me, years later, and he one day said to me 'I found out about you'. So, I said what did you find out? He says 'I've been following this question and I've come to the conclusion that the unanimous answer when I ask somebody why did you carry out this, they said but Mac had said so. But Mac never gave you an order?' And the answer he got was 'if Mac had suggested something needs to be done at the conclusion of a discussion, if you didn't do it, you knew he was going to do it. So to save the bloody guy from doing it ...'

To something else: in O'Malley's interviews with Rashid it's said that you believed that Rashid supported the Wimpy Bar attacks which you were very opposed to. Rashid says that he didn't support them either. Were there really differences in approach between you and him on this?

The Kabwe Conference took the decision that civilians now were not completely out of bounds. They could get caught in a cross-fire, and you are not to call off an operation if this might happen. You still have to exercise your judgment. But take the struggle to the White areas. I know that Modise and Slovo heading the Military at one stage did encourage Wimpy Bar attacks. Chris Hani supported it. The RC looked at this problem and decided that this had to come to a stop and sent Cassius Maahe and me to the forward areas to convey the instructions to all units not to carry out such attacks against civilians.

When we saw in the Political Section that was happening at home, me being me, I say Joe, Modise you're doing the wrong thing. Joe and Modise deny to me that their teams are doing it. OR comes into town, wants to know what's

happening. I tell OR it's the Military. It's being done with the authority of the leadership at the Military.

Chief being Chief, he has got to go around this problem. Decision is taken: stop it. In the meantime Rashid, in the exuberance of their actions, one day boasts to me – and I said to him, hey, are you prepared to stand up because now I want to confront Slovo because you're being ordered by Slovo? At this stage Rashid backs down – but the decision is taken. And in the aftermath, OR then very, very shrewdly decides who he sends to the forward areas – Botswana, Lesotho, Swaziland and Maputo – to order the cadres to stop attacking the Wimpy Bars. He sends the late Cassius Maahe and me. He doesn't send Modise, he doesn't send Joe, and I've long agonized why he didn't.

At the beginning I was very angry because he's sending me to go and tell comrades who have been brought up to think that the only Command they accept is from the the Military structure. No matter how much you say you have been sent by the PMC and RC, no matter how much you say you're Secretary to the Internal, anybody, a junior, will say but you're not in the Military...So I'm angry, but years later I look at it and I say, no, I understand OR now. If he had sent Modise, what he was asking Modise to do is go to comrades he told it was okay to attack Wimpy Bars to now tell them don't, you're doing wrong, stop it – and the comrades are going to ask why stop it? Is it wrong? And he will be forced to say it's not wrong, but just don't do it – meaning carry on, so he's not going to convey that order unambiguously.

So, OR decides that the Assistant Secretary of the RC and me should go to the frontline states, but he also knows that these are two people, that if you told them to be in Lesotho, they will never raise with you how am I going to go there? You will just hear they are there and they are back. So, that was the score.

After having gone to Botswana I entered the country in '88. Sydney Mufamadi comes to me, and by that time he is in the the District of the Party, and he's Deputy Secretary of COSATU, and says he has got a problem - 'there are cadres here of MK, they are stuck for money, they need R 6000'. So, I say who are they and he says, 'no, I can't ask them who they are'. So, I say, what are they doing? He says 'they're been here for a long period'. I say, no, you don't give the money, you tell them that a person from Head office is saying they need to retreat to Botswana. We give them enough money to go and get fresh instructions.

Sydney says 'how can I do that?' I say that's its because these guys are now continuing with the Wimpy Bar attacks. I'm staying a block down the road in Hyde Park in a hotel. I just moved in there and that day they bombed a bin in

the Hyde Park shopping complex. They're hitting civilians and we say no, that decision had to be now countermanded officially. Stop it, it's not our policy. Rashid, in my view, up to the end of the time with me face-to-face defended it as authorised, but there was never any authority to do so. Rashid was now heading Ordnance and they were hitting the Wimpy Bars. They were supplying the equipment.

But he denies it in O'Malley. He thinks you misunderstand...

Look, even the necklacing, even Chris Hani went on the radio and supported necklacing. And a year ago I had an argument with a couple of comrades at a social evening and they are condemning the necklacing and certain actions we carried out. Some of this I had been involved in so I'm not going to let these guys get away. I say, comrades, when the necklacing took place, weren't you dancing in the streets? First they denied it, then after one or two more drinks, they admitted this.

The necklacing was never a decision taken by the movement. Take the question of taking the struggle to the White areas. It was partly translated by MK into those Wimpy Bar actions and bins. And when the leadership confronted the Military leaders, they denied that they had instructed this. When I found evidence that they had, I fought it out; I said it's time to bring them under control.

I had the same problem from the day I was appointed Secretary of the Internal – I once confronted JS (Slovo) and Keith Mokoape and a chap called Negro who were based in Botswana. They'd been given instructions by the Military not to co-operate with the Political in Botswana. I confront JM and JS saying you've got to back off chaps, you can't keep saying you want to work together and the Political must develop and you're just acting the other way.

'No, no, no we didn't give the instructions', they said. And one day I walk into the Lusaka office, there's Keith, Negro, JS and Joe sitting in one room. I say Keith, did you not tell me about this? I know JS and JM are here, it's difficult for you to say you told me. The two Joes – are you satisfied now that you actually gave this man instructions not to co-operate with the Political? Now cancel that order.

What came of your visit to the frontline states to tell comrades that the Wimpy Bar attacks must stop?...

Got it to stop. The last remnants of it was in '88 that I had to confront on the ground. That delay was because the message was being conveyed in a half-hearted way, the leaders who gave the order and praised those actions now

were told to tell them to stop and they told them in half-hearted way. Essentially, they couldn't say to them your action is counter-productive in terms of our political strategy. While we are trying to split the White community you are uniting them.



Mac Maharaj in the 1980s,
Nelson Mandela Foundation

What do you make about what (MK Military Intelligence operative) Rocky Williams said about Special Ops? Let me quote him: 'The effects of this strategy were twofold. On the one hand, it resulted in a situation where the Special Operations Division, due to its profile, responsibilities and capabilities, began to assume a much greater responsibility for the conduct of internal military operations than it should have done.

On the other, the preferential location of the Special Operations Division under the command of Tambo created a degree of resentment and mistrust amongst MK rank-and-file and strained relations between the division and the army commander, Joe Modise - a phenomenon not unusual within those armed forces, be they irregular or regular, that maintain specialist special operations capabilities.'

Criticisms of these operations from the 'left', however, maintained that spectacular military operations of the Voortrekkerhoogte type were no substitute for the task of rooting the military underground in the local population. There were definite reasons for a shift to the special operations-type activities, however, and this was reflected in the fact that Special Operations, initially under the command of the late Joe Slovo, was placed under the direct command of the President of the ANC, Oliver Reginald Tambo, with the Commander of MK, Commander Joe Modise, retaining only nominal oversight over this division.'

I don't agree with Rocky. I think he's putting it too simplistically. He is putting it in a text book, academic sort of way. The reality is that in every war the Command has had to mount operations behind the backs of the entire Command as long as they are consistent with the objectives. You have to carry out certain operations behind the back of even the Commander on the field such as with the Special Ops in the Second World War. So, that automatically causes a tension. But it was never being said to the extent that the Rashids conducted themselves and said to the other comrades in MK 'Sorry, we're under Tambo, we don't answer to others'.

The problem was not caused by OR and creating a Special Ops Unit outside of the normal reporting line; it was the cadres in that unit conducting themselves in such a way. Also, the resentment to *Vula* grew when I got caught. Until then, there was no problem. They didn't know that the reports that were being given by Tambo at the NEC but always disguised were from *Vula*, and in that way it was fine. But it's when I get arrested, Joe Modise is in Angola, and the comrades become agitated and say what's happened to Mac? And Joe has to say I don't know, the guy is in a maverick operation, it's got nothing to do with MK.

My son at the age of eight went from a demonstration at Trafalgar Square to Vella (Pillay's) house and disappeared in the backyard where Patsy found him ripping an ANC flag into pieces with a knife because in front of my kids Mendi (Msimang) had said to Zarina (Maharaj, married to Mac) 'Mac had no business to do this, Mac's operation had nothing to do with the ANC.' To say it in public and in front of the children – what does it do to the kids? But what I'm saying here is that Rocky is saying the creation of a unit separately is in itself the start of a problem. I'm saying, no, that's a necessity of struggle. The creation of Special Ops was a brilliant move and by its actions raised the level of the struggle, especially the other three pillars of struggle, significantly.

The animosity that has arisen is when the cadres begin to see those in Special Ops begin to behave differently and begin to boast about what they can do. Now you hit Sasol, and because you're in Maputo you walk around displaying that you did it. You're not supposed to do that. You are supposed to pretend that you're just carrying on with your work and take no credit. But that's when the animosity grew because it made the others feel that you're looking down on them. So, that's the problem and the truth of the matter is that from day one, when Special Ops began they began to behave like that.

Maputo was a very funny environment; we were free and not free; we were there with friends in the government and we were there with the enemy present; and the enemy was even in the government; and we were behaving as if to say we're in open territory, so we were caught in a trap. How do you live in a mind-set of total illegality in an environment where you feel free? You are going to drop your guard.

You know, when I came into the country, my first report was a laughable one. I said I had to beg Joe Slovo to get reference books and ID books for us and false documentation. We came into South Africa, thinking when you stay in a hotel you need your ID. Gebuza and I split up in Joburg and we take a cab separately to the Protea hotel. Gebuza goes first to register and I come behind. He's assuming that they are going to ask him for his ID. I get there and he's

still not finished and they're not asking for an ID. I rehearsed the number and everything. All the tension around the forged ID – and they don't ask for it!

And the truth is throughout my stay here I was never asked for an ID, and I say to JS and them, and I ask myself, did we ever debrief your cadres that we sent home? That when they come back they explain what happened, how it happened, how did you pass a road-block, how did you register, did you use your ID, your reference book?

You never asked those questions so you were creating an imagined situation and you are spending enormous resources forging, and here am I in *Operation Vula*, I haven't got those resources, I have to beg if I need a passport, I need this, I need that, and each one is holding on to their own resources but it's supposed to be for the service of whole movement. They don't tell me that April, Tokyo's brother, is heading the documentation centre in Luanda, but every cadre, Rashid as well, know him. If they want documents they go to him. What are you supposed to do? And here I am in the country having the biggest fun about this attitude.

I'm told Hammersdale is sealed off. I say, no, chaps that is the time we're supposed to be there! They say, 'how do we go there? They are searching the buses and all the transport, it's lockdown there.' I say what about documents? ID? No, I'm told it doesn't help. So I'm furious. I say, no, we are here in the country to be where the trouble is. What I'm seeing is that we're running away.

So, we got to reverse this. We got to crack this problem. I don't know if it was PG (Pravin Gordhan) or who. They come with a cyclostyled form with a rubber stamp, a notice from the Camperdown Magistrate's Court summoning you in a hand-written name, address and case number to come to give evidence as a witness at the court at 9am on a date rubber-stamped on the form.

On the bus the comrade just shows this, no photograph, nothing. Look at this thing, you can forge it inside the country! And I write to OR and JS to say, comrades, I don't need your documents and I try to tell them you're not imagining the situation at home because you not debriefing the cadres when they come back outside. As a Commander you have to ask what was the situation that the cadre found himself in so as to equip other cadres better to deal with the home situation when they come in. And the biggest flaw which I hope you will tackle – with Rashid in a oblique way, and Ronnie and Gebuza too – because I fought this out with JS: they were not doing the preparation of an operation the right way. And in those days it was still the hit-and-run, hit and come back – and I say you spend all your time on how to hit the target, you do not even spend 10% of the time on how to retreat, and yet all my training has been that you spend 90% on how to retreat safely, 10 % on how

to hit a target. We could never agree. I know that even in the country, even my comrades like Gebuza could not measure up to that. They could not internalise that; they thought the retreat is a matter of ingenuity; and I'd been saying, yes, there is innovation, but you can't just rely on that.

I learnt that innovation from my detention in '64 where the Benoni post office robbers were with us; and they were planning to escape with us. They were mainly Africans and there was one White chap, a Hungarian; he was a foot soldier. The commanders were two Africans. They approached us to escape. They approached Wilton (Mkwayi). Wilton comes and tells me. So, we meet them and I ask the chaps, I hear you guys, but why do you want us because if you go with us you are in bigger trouble? The one chap tells me how we are pursuing the same objective, that we are wanting economic sanctions and they are robbing, so we have common interests in tackling the economy!...

Very original (laughter), very innovative! ...

Ja. But then finally one of them says that, 'to be honest, we've got the money'. They'd stolen £41 000 and the police only found about £5 000 and he said 'everybody, even the Commander here at the Fort, wants to be our friend because they want to get the money'. So they said they have got the resources but we political prisoners are the most feared in prison, we are under total lockdown, but they've got some freedom and they can get out. He says we can escape with them, and head for Botswana. 'We know all the routes', they say, but once they are in Botswana they are nothing, and we are influential there, we can tell the Botswana government to let them stay there. 'So, we need you in Botswana and you need us here', they say! I say, yessus, you are telling me something! Then I start discussing their plans... It was actually the Hungarian that was the weak link because he took his share and he buried it in tins in his garage and freshly concreted it. When the cops saw the fresh concrete they dug it.

The chap explains to me that for the robbery they had their getaway well planned but at a certain point they changed the stolen car. They got onto the highway and abandoned that car, and at that point there was no pre-arrangement. They simply stopped a kilometre or so down the road and stopped a passing motorist randomly. They grabbed him, got into the car, held a gun to him and went on. That was the way they broke the link because they used that car to find their way to their next car and the police tracing their movements could find all the links but not this random act.

So, he says 'in between your chain you must have a random act which is unpredictable.' He insisted that your getaway must be planned to the tee, but

'in that planning, plant an action that is random so that the police lose track of you.'

Please respond to Rocky's view that Special Ops' spectacular military operations were no substitute for rooting the military underground in the people...

Well, it needed to change the political climate inside the country, among the people. Mass mobilization included that. Rocky is limited in the way he sees the military part of our struggle. The simple fact is that our conception of the revolution is a political thing. It's not a military thing. The military is merely an extension of the political and therefore you needed a political organisation that is spearheading it. The Umkhonto Manifesto said that the armed struggle must be under the overall political leadership of the national liberation movement.

I argue that the reason why Walter Sisulu was made Commissar was because he was heading the ANC Secretariat and in the Party Secretariat - so that a departure at a strategic level or a decision that is strategic needed political endorsement, and that is where *Operation Mayibuye* falls.

Slovo, (Arthur) Goldreich and Govan (Mbeki) acted on the basis that we are the Party Central Committee, we are in the Politburo, we are the military, we decide and that's it. Not true – and Slovo in his autobiography actually argues that Luthuli didn't know about the armed struggle. The reason is that Slovo does not pay account to the democratic processes of the ANC. He thinks that if the Party has agreed and the ANC Working Committee agreed that's sufficient, whereas for Walter and Madiba it has got to go to the NEC – and to Slovo it doesn't exist.

He's not even aware that such a meeting took place and he then says the Chief did not know and the Chief correctly did no wrong. He was conducting himself disregarding the necessity for recognising a political venture in the ANC and a need for the ANC to have a political decision. And Brian Bunting perpetrates that in *Moses Kotane* (Inkululeko Publications, 1975) by saying Kotane told him that Luthuli didn't know, yet there is overwhelming evidence that the Chief presided over the meeting. Never mind who said what. The truth remains that the decision was summarised by Luthuli in the chair and that decision was that we are authorising you to go ahead with the armed struggle but you must set up a separate structure from the ANC. The ANC will continue with its orthodox mobilisation even though it is illegal. But we are not going to hold it against you. We authorise you to recruit within us. That's agreed.

So, you don't turn round and say because he had earlier spoken against violence therefore he wasn't part of that decision. Now they were trapped, they

were living in the Rivonia Trial period where you had to try and conduct yourself in a way that did not add to the problems of the comrades on trial - but they did add to it, because they met at Lobatsi and, yes, they didn't publish this, but they took a decision that MK is the military wing of the ANC - and here's the Rivonia trial going on... And if it established that it's the ANC's military wing, finish – being an ANC member you're wrong.

So, Rocky is wrong to say that the military needed to root itself amongst the masses. He is ignoring the political; the role of the masses; and that mass consciousness does not exist outside of action. He is assuming that oppression and exploitation necessarily means they are sympathetic and will give you automatic support.

Now Rocky should also have recognised that where a particular outfit registers significant successes, there'll be an inclination for other outfits to look at them with a bit of envy. Other comrades will feel that they've got this success, because they've been given this money by the leaders, they've got this, they've got that.

I'm also saying, from the political side, that's true. JS and Modise were running the camps and the training in the socialist countries, therefore they knew the cadres – and they're taking the best. So, all that is there. That need not be a destructive thing... That is the normal rivalry that arises provided you take care to build a core of good activists not just in your own little outfit, but others too, in the movement as a whole. But there were comrades who tended to go the other way and overboard. They began to personalise. But that's also because in the earlier generation, many of them personalised things. Now that element is there.

But what's funny – and I laugh about it now – is that JS and them never gave me one top person. When they gave me a person, I learned one thing, that person had probably already become a troublemaker in the military ranks, they don't know what to do with him. I don't mean that those in the Political Section were not good. They were mostly perceived as troublemakers by the military, but in the Political Section they turned out to be very good.

So, Rocky is not taking into account that Maputo was a very specific place, it was a problematic area – because of the amount of support we got on the one side from Frelimo and from the other side we were given a lot of attention by the South African regime. Zarina has told the joke of how she lost her motorcycle keys and she was thumbing a lift, and how she was picked up by a White chap in a Jeep – and she was in swim wear and it was getting dusk. And this White chap turned out to be a naval officer from South Africa. So these

guys were operating there at the same time freely. Inside the Mozambican government itself, there were elements. So, information was flowing.

As I said, we were living with the aura of the free space, yet we were supposed to be operating underground. And we thought we were setting up semi-camps - because Matola was that. It was the place where Special Ops comrades are staying. Where they are planning. Where Special Operations has its head office. All the comrades living or operating from Mozambique knew that it was the home of Special Ops. Now you started talking like that. Politically too, we began to talk like that, the comrades began to say that the house next to the Mozambican Presidency is an internal house. So, the entire body of comrades from South Africa living in Mozambique would know where the internal house is. You want Indres Naidoo maybe, there's his house. You want Slovo's house, there. Obadi? There...

Do you see how we are living? Because there's nothing forcing you to constantly say I'm underground and the enemy must not know. The same sort of perceptions Rocky refers to about Special Ops applies even with *Vula*. And then they would say it had more money, it had more this, it had more that. The answer would be yes and no. You see, as long as you've got focused attention on a problem, you're successful. But once, I'm saying, JS has become Chairman of the Party, is in the RC, Chief of Staff of the army, Head of Special Operations, how is he going to do all this?

So, the first thing he does is, no I can't be Chief of Staff. What do you do? You know that Chris Hani is earmarked for home to join me, but you take him and make him Chief of Staff. Well, you put paid to his going home. JS knows that Zuma is earmarked to go home, but what do you do? You support a decision that he becomes Head of Counter-Intelligence and so he can't go home too. Do you see the allocation problem?

But in Gebuza you had a good person, by all accounts. Young too...And others?...

Gebuza was my first choice to enter South Africa with me. He is a fantastic guy, brave and innovative. Gebuza's weakness, I've written about it, is when OR didn't send me reinforcements and he wanted to meet me in Moscow, I said I've got to hand over Command. And I wrote him a note, which Gebuza may not like, but I'm very proud of it. I said, Chief, I'm now handing command to Gebuza. No option. I've now worked for a year with him in the country. He's very good. He's brave. But he has one major weakness and this is critical to the qualities needed in a Commander operating in our circumstances - he has no self-doubt.

He's over-confident, you mean?

No, no, no. To me self-doubt arises, for example, when he and I come to the conclusion that we are going to train people in the country in order to find who's just the saboteur and who's the type of person who's got an officer potential, and we'll do training on the ground. We will only send out officer material for training. We plan an operation which a trainee has got to carry out. He reports to me. I say how far are we with this person that we're training. 'No, no, we doing an on-site sabotage operation.' And he gives a rough description of it.

That night I say to myself, has he planned if something goes wrong? If something goes wrong, what's the damage? Are there going to be civilians who are going to die and are they going to be Black civilians? And I come to the conclusion, hey, this is a serious problem, I better check, I don't know the site.

So, the next day at the hideout he comes in and I said to him, hey Joe, this operation, have you looked at it from the point of view that if it went wrong, are there civilians who are going to be in danger. Have you looked at retreat? His reaction to me is 'what's your problem? Are you trying to change the decision? We agreed on this operation, right?' So, I say no I'm not trying to change the decision, I'm just trying to make sure that we've planned for success, have we planned for things going wrong? Not because I want things to go wrong, but when you are on site and an emergency crops up, have you looked at all the permutations, the detours that you are going to take? You don't have to at that time put in ten unknown factors into your equation.

You've already isolated the factors. So, if it's easier to take the detour, you do. So Gebuza said 'no, no, no, we're not changing'. I said this is not the discussion, broer.

And I say to OR, you know you've put me in a very difficult situation. I am here almost alone and there is no committee that I can go to, to test whether the ideas that we are pursuing don't have problems. You're leaving it to me. Now that needs a very strong capacity for self-doubt, and then overcoming that doubt and pursuing that goal with full vigour and confidence. Gebuza doesn't have that. And if you look around, up to now he doesn't have it. But otherwise, he was one of the best of that crop.

Yes, I know Ronnie's made the criticism of me about why I gave Gebuza the tapes, the discs and the code to decode them – but it was to say I'm leaving, I don't know when I'm coming back. But you need to maintain the individuals from these organisations that I'm interacting with on a one-to-one basis. You

read those reports and you will see what you need to do because now you've got to focus more on the political side. So, that's where the problem arises.

Anyway, so I'm sitting here in the country and OR is telling me, Mac, we've got to pre-empt Maggie Thatcher, she wants to take control of the negotiations process. We have got to out-manoeuvre her. We now have to face the reality that negotiations will come but you need to push on *Vula* but also focus your mind on this negotiations process coming. So, he's saying one of the objectives is to undercut any manoeuvre from Maggie Thatcher. Yet at a pre-negotiations meeting in Mells Park in the UK, Michael Young (a British businessman with links to South Africa) raised the matter that he has been briefing Thatcher's office. Don't you think it's time we approached Thatcher to intervene, he asks? Thabo supports this. A member of the National Working Committee is saying, yes, get Maggie in, and there's a decision by OR exclude her at all costs! And there are documents to support this. Did you read the notes of Tony Trew and Michael Young?

Okay. To move to something else. The MK Special Ops unit is set up and then the Revolutionary Council also sets up a Special Ops unit under your command. Wasn't that duplication? Why was it necessary for the RC to set up a Special Ops unit? How was it meant to be different?

The reality is we are talking '81. The debate has now taken a particular twist. Modise, in fact, is advocating in the RC that when we sent in MK cadres across the border we are having too many casualties and we had to do something. You could see the enemy had now organised the farmers into commandos along the Botswana border. Farmers are in radio communication, the police are giving Blacks mealie meal to get information and we are finding the cadres, as soon as they cross two kilometres in, they're caught. Modise is saying that when we cross over we are supposed to strike only when we are deep in, because we had to protect Botswana, we could not provide evidence that Botswana is a launching pad for us. But, in fact, Modise and them were allowing the cadres to act right close to the border.

So, Modise comes up with the idea that – he put it very crudely – when our cadres come across a White farmer they should knock him off. We say, no, you can't do that, that's wrong. There was one meeting in Maputo where Tambo was chairing when this type of debate is taking place. Tambo had to really come down heavily on one of the Wankie comrades.

JM (Modise) sees JS (Slovo) put his hand up. Now JS is opposing attacking civilians. Modise puts his hand up and he'd anticipated what Joe is going to say because they'd been discussing this. He says, you know, all those comrades

that say that my approach is wrong do not know what it is to be a Black man and suffer. They don't know what it is to carry a pass, they don't know what it is to be arrested and go to jail. To JS' credit, JS says 'You dare talk to me like that! Your wife has not been killed through a parcel bomb. My wife has'.

JM is just watching between JS and I who's going to put their hand up next... but OR is watching this debate. It's getting heated and a comrade who was in the Wankie group puts his hand up and supports JM. As he is talking, OR stops him dead in his tracks and he says, comrade, you were in the reconnaissance team that went across the river into Zimbabwe, you came back with the report that for 12 kilometres there were no Rhodesians soldiers. On the basis of your report we crossed and within 2 or so kilometres there was the enemy – so don't come with information that's going to get us slaughtered.

Anyway, the issue you have raised is about *Operation Green Vegetables*. In this debate the question became it's time to strike at the enemy – and before an RC meeting we used to meet for two weeks to survey the political and military situation to come up with draft plans. A small group in the Planning Committee raised the question of hitting enemy targets but the bases of the army were well protected and we did not have the capability of hurting them.

I then argued that we may not have the capability but we could hit the conscripts, and with a small unit of even five people we could provide a devastating blow. The debate then became whether the conscript was a legitimate target and it was agreed that it's legitimate but under dissention. OR was brought in. Now OR says, well, he's interested, but the arguments takes us nowhere. They are tomorrow's soldiers, that's true and so authorisation is given to hit them, but OR says if I'm hearing Mac right, you chaps are going to cause turmoil here. You can't carry out this operation within the structures, it needs to be done separately so that the enemy doesn't have evidence – because the enemy is going to come in any case for us – but we can't do this in such a way that the enemy finds out.

So it was agreed – 'Mac, you are relieved from your Secretary post, we are freeing you to carry out this operation, just this one.' But nobody is to know. Now Slovo, the RC, the Planning Committee and OR knows, and my reporting line is to OR. I go to JS and I say I need assistance from your team. JS says, sure. I didn't realise how much there was this issue of: why didn't Special Ops get it?

So I say to JS I want technical knowledge – and the best technician in his team was Rashid. I said I want Rashid, I don't want him in my team, no, I want you to authorise him to share information with me on technical aspects. And I go to Rashid and I put the option in a different way, I ask him why have we not

succeeded in bringing down a bridge, and Rashid goes through the whole engineering of bridges. And I say, Rashid, I've heard of a bomb – I think it was called a conical bomb or something like that – that was shaped like a cone, and Rashid says 'we've got those bombs in the armoury.'

I say have you ever used it? He says no. I say what's its properties, Rashid? He says 'if we strapped it against a wall, one metre concrete thick, it would concentrate the explosion in such a way that it will blow a hole into the wall and everything inside that room is kaput because of the turbulence it would create inside the room.' I say, well, the bridge's column is gone, its pillar is gone because if I can hit a metre thick reinforced concrete, that's it! So, I ask Rashid about it because I can't go to the camps, I can't go to the armoury – if I go to the armoury it'll be noted that the Political Secretary is coming to the camp – for nobody has said that I've resigned from my job. I'm still Secretary but I disappeared from Head Office, I'm living in Swaziland.

So Rashid is doing all that - and I remember the debate taking place, even about the generator of the hand-held dynamo for the power. I say, Rashid, if the automatic timer doesn't work, I know that in the dynamiting that I've done, there's an ordinary dynamo that was a crank, the safest thing. He says 'we've got them'. Come on, Rashid, bring it. He brings it to Swaziland. I said I want to see it used. Let's go into the bush. He can't help, they have not been using it. The instructions are in Russian. I must see this, please put ordinary detonators but let's go in the bush and show me, I want to see it and do it.

We know its properties. Rashid knows it, he's got the technological knowledge, but if you're sitting there in the army, imagine if we had put it in the Drill Hall, that whole hall would be gone. But I'm not telling Rashid what I'm attacking, now Rashid is thinking I'm hitting bridges, and now I can see in his mind he's thinking, what the hell is this? A bridge should be a Special Ops target and they did try to hit a bridge, by the way. That's a fascinating story, the Upington Bridge.

So, in Rashid's mind, he is delving into the equipment that will bring down a bridge because I'm not giving him examples of what I want to do – I'm trying to elicit the type of armoury I need without disclosing what I want to hit. So why the Special Ops of the RC? This was meant to be a single action. In fact OR sends a message to me a week before we're going to do it – 'stop, don't do it!' I'm in full swing when OR writes to me to stop.

I write back and say, Chief, this is not a political operation, this is a military operation. If I stop now it has to be in a way that nothing leaks out to the enemy so that we can come back to it tomorrow. Secondly, I stop now, I don't know whether I can go back to it again in the same way because I don't know

whether it will leak out. So I'm saying to him in effect that I'm going to proceed. He said we are not ready for the reprisal that will come. He has been quietly consulting Heads of State without disclosing the operation by saying there's a big operation coming, how are we going to withstand it? And they're saying what do you mean? And he's saying the enemy is going to go wild, they are going to come attacking us air and ground, and they are going to attack you also. And the message he's getting is that they are just not geared for that counter-attack, they're not ready for that repercussion.

And I think he's also taking into account the ambivalence amongst some comrades. Those who know, are saying Mac is doing a crazy thing. He's going to put us in big trouble. OR is saying – and some of the others too - that politically the repercussion would also be that the operation would unite the Whites, not divide them.

So that's the context of it – but it was meant to be a once-off operation, not an ongoing Special Ops unit.

So, did you have cadres ready, were they inside the country?

Yes, I had five of them...

So, how did you get the message to them?

I had couriers. One cadre I picked as a reconnaissance man and I delivered him to Nelspruit railway station and gave him instructions that he was to walk every metre of the railway line from Nelspruit to Witbank and back, and bring a reconnaissance report.

What sticks in my head is that I personally crossed him at the Swazi border and took him into South Africa, and at the border he turned round and said to me, 'Comrade, you are the first Commander that I have met that I really respect'. I say what are you saying? He says 'I've gone into the country before but my Commanders have never been here at the border with me, you have not only been at the border', he says, 'you crossed with me.' He says Modise, 'the nearest he comes is Maputo, you are the only one that has come in', and why I remember him is that I was there to receive him when he returned to Swaziland – and he returned with the soles of his boots completely worn out, completely, but he finished the mission.

Eventually, he was captured by the Boers for a different operation and he was killed in detention at Piet Retief. It would have been round about '84/'85. He was known as Castro. Matthew Posa would know his real name. Phosa came from that area and was at that time a lawyer inside the country.

By the way, even the five comrades didn't know what they were supposed to hit. They knew they were hitting a train. My problem was don't hit the train which is taking the Mozambican migrant workers back.

In a published interview with O'Malley, Rashid suggests that the success of Special Ops led to other structures like the RC setting up its own Special Ops unit. He also describes Special Ops as akin to a Special Forces unit made up of specially hand-selected cadres that carried out operations against very specific targets and he didn't seem to know what the rationale for the RC Special Ops Unit was..

The issue is very clear. Nobody knew there was an operation called *Green Vegetables*...

But Rashid knew...

That's later. I never went around saying *Operation Vula*, not even in the country...

Rashid says he suspected you were in the country but you never said to him that you were going in...

And they never said Koeberg is *Operation Mac*. They never talked about it. Slovo called it *Operation Mac* but the point is at that time, while the operation is being activated, nobody knows that we're attacking Koeberg; even the cadres carrying it out know they are hitting Koeberg but they don't know it's called *Operation Mac*. They don't call it that because if the enemy heard there's an *Operation Mac* it would alert them something is happening. So, nobody knows there's an operation called *Green Vegetables*.

Nobody knows outside of the discussion that happened in the RC Planning Committee about the question of how do we hit the enemy target and the legitimacy of attacking conscripts. Nobody knows what I'm being assigned. Secondly, I'm not reporting to the RC on a daily basis, my report is only periodically to OR, and at the conclusion, when I have wound down the operation I go and report to the RC that I'm back for duty.

Rashid doesn't know it's a once-off operation. He is thinking of all this retrospectively and locating it in terms of Special Ops. It's the only way you can make sense of it. It's in terms of what you know, you can see the illogicality, that this is rival body. But Slovo is in the RC and he says to Rashid co-operate with Mac, and the agreement is that, Rashid, you can't go there, but you can help Mac.

And if we were setting up a long term structure and it disappears, comrades would ask what happened? Why did it just disappear? Is there something wrong with Mac? But that's because they didn't know they were hitting a train, they didn't know we were going for conscripts, and to me the success of the operation with just a five-man unit is dependent on the enemy not knowing, but once you've done it you can't repeat that. It's afterwards that these comrades are talking about it – and they're sitting and thinking how was this guy going to hit 2000 troops?

But the idea was, we were going to derail that train in the Machadodorp area. You must go there. If the train is coming round a bend, down a steep incline, the moment it's on the bend, its force is taking it there, if you then open this rail, this force is going to make it move straight down that cliff. Now there's 20 coaches going down.

The key thing was that you had to have the number of the train and you had to identify it as it passed through different stations. You had to be absolutely sure that along those lengths you're getting verification, and the problem that arose was the last verification didn't come through. On the site there, you didn't need many people, we place the bomb; its only a question of detonating it with eye view...

Had the bombs been already placed?

We were on site, we hadn't placed it on the rail, but the issue that had arisen was that we didn't have at every station somebody. We had an identification at Park Station. As the train passed through, what is its number, how do you identify it? Then the bloody problem arose when the train is stationery you can identify its number, but when they are moving it's not easy. Those trains used to be like a camouflage green with the number in sort of yellowish writing.

Now, the number is done so badly and you're reading it on a moving train. So, you got to be good with binoculars to read it in movement. And once you missed at a critical point the identification of the train, you had to stop because now you might hit the wrong train and you'll hit Mozambican migrant workers – and the repercussions will be very different.

So, I called off the operation. I actually crossed over into Maputo that same night after calling it off and winding it down. I get there and now I call a meeting of the Political Committee in my capacity as Secretary of the Political Section at Indres Naidoo's house. Zarina is in London about to give birth. She's in Guy's Hospital and I tell Indres to book a call to Sue Rabkin's father who's a paediatrician at the hospital to find out how Zarina is. In the middle of the

meeting the phone rings, Indres goes to answer it and comes to say Milou has been born – a boy, and I say, no, the meeting is over. I leave for London.

Anyway, so none of them know about *Operation Green Vegetables* and the only person to whom I had to report to was OR. And OR, when I walk in, just gives a sigh of relief! 'It didn't happen, thank God', he says. 'Get back to your other work', he says.

So, the others, they really have no knowledge. They are guessing in the dark. O'Malley has worked it out. O'Malley gets it write in his book.



**Mac Maharaj with Nelson Mandela,
the Ulwazi Programme**

Back to Special Ops...

As I said, Special Ops as an armed propaganda unit had enormous strengths because it was given attention to by JS sitting at the top on the basis that its key targets were, before they were hit, approved by OR. So, JS and OR worked that way. I'm talking about the key targets be it Sasol, Koeberg, Voortrekkerhoogte.

I'm not talking about the other operations, like the Dolphin Unit. Because those were never reported, as far as I'm concerned, to OR, that we're going to do this, we're going to do that - because they didn't feature at that level of action except the attack on an army headquarters.

So, as an armed propaganda grouping it had this enormous potential, but once it began to expand into trying to hit targets simultaneously or closely after each other it had to maintain an outfit, a series of outfits, in different places inside the country to act in unison or serially or sequentially. And once that question objectively arises, you have to be located as a Command inside the country. Then you bump again into the same problem that MK in general was facing.

That in the absence of an adequate political underground, in the absence not just of mass mobilisation, but mass mobilisation in which the ANC is a part, you are in trouble locating yourself, and you then walk into a situation where you endanger that mass organisation because you are looking for a quick fix for your immediate needs.

You're not looking at the long-term problem that arose post Rivonia. I think that's where Special Ops weaknesses go back to a general MK weakness - and that's why I am not surprised that in its development by the time Rashid

leaves, Special Ops has already begun to move into what would be regarded as run-of-the mill MK activities.

Was Rashid moved to head MK's Ordnance Division because it was recognised that Special Ops was more or less petering out? Or is it that once he was moved, Special Ops began to fizzle out because of leadership issues? Or is it both?

I understand you. I'm not so sure about the answer. Not every project could be run with OR in direct management of it. He was the Head of the ANC and Umkhonto, but he could not then be involved in the operational side of issues, with a front that is dispersed so widely. JS himself, once he became elected SACP Chairperson, his own interests and, objectively, his workload, were such that he had to get some focus in his work. And when military headquarters is established as military headquarters, the core staff positions that go with the military headquarters, Chief of Staff, Chief of Logistics, Chief of Intelligence, Chief of Operations - once you began to populate that box you are overstretched...And I'm still of the view, looking back now at that history, that the conversion of military headquarters into a proper military headquarters - with designated posts that go with military headquarters - was a premature step.

Really?

Yes, yes.

Why do you say that? Because others say it was overdue?

You set that up when you've got your army going in battle. You're going for battle. What battle did we go for? You've now created all these boxes...

Except they argue, as you know, that it allowed, for the first time, for coordination.

Why didn't they coordinate earlier when you had Military Headquarters? The same people were there. What was the problem? Is it that I put on a hat that says I'm now Military Intelligence? There was an Officer of Intelligence in the Revolutionary Council (RC). There was the assistant Secretary of the RC in charge of operations. He was sitting there at Central Headquarters. Slovo was there. Modise was there. So, what do you do? You create these posts in anticipation that now you're going into war, but the anticipation was premature. We set up military headquarters I think round about 1984 or so.

In fact, it is the Maseru raid that tilted the argument. The RC was busy debating it in a suburb in Lusaka - and the debate was quite furious. Some of us would say, no man, you don't need this yet. And there was an argument about why we needed it. And I think that the news of the Maseru raid came through and it created an emotional climate that influenced the debate.

It was not just premature at a structural level, it was premature because strategically we had not got on top of the situation that the *Green Book* had identified. External events were driving us. And I come from the principle that it is strategy that determines structure. So, as I said earlier, while the *Green Book* correctly identified the problem, the commitment that was necessary was of a different order.

You're not properly discussing in the organisation concrete problems of mobilisation. You're not discussing how to get the underground created. You're discussing MCW (Military Combat Work) - how, when you walk in the street and you are possibly being surveilled, you bend down and tie your shoe lace and look in the window of a shop so that you can see whether you're being followed. But there was a different kind of instruction you were meant to be giving. You are supposed to be teaching how is our country governed? What is the world in which we live in? What is the political economy of the system? What are the different arms of the struggle? What is the role of a trade union? What is the place of a mass organisation? How do you preserve the legality of that mass organisation? What is the task that an underground must carry out? And how must it be sensitive that what it is gearing for is part of a People's War?

So, I'm saying we isolated the defect in our approach to the relationship between the Political and Military. We were too separated. Also, for money for the Political you have to go to the Treasury. I don't know what Treasury has given Military. And then Tom Nkobi (ANC Treasurer General) comes to me because he's going to Holland to raise money for the ANC, he says 'Mac come, you can motivate'. Why? Because Holland is not going to give money for military work. So, the Military don't even know the problems of raising the money. They only know about raising money when Slovo is in a delegation to the Soviet Union. With the Soviet Union you ask for so much, so much they give you, then that much is for the Military. They don't say this much is for the Political. But we say we'll use the money from Holland for Political.

So, built into that situation, in my view, is one of the critical elements in '86 when the NEC is discussing this matter. Meeting after meeting, we're talking about home. There's a report from the Military. There's a report from the Political. And there's lack of progress. Military is saying there's no political structure. Political is saying we don't have the resources, we don't have this

and that, and you have got the cadres. We carry on like that and we come to the same analysis: we've got to get this thing moving, getting home.

So, it's in the '86 meeting, listening to this debate again and bored to death during the tea break – we've disposed of the subject, we've moaned again - I said there's a different problem here. The comrades are not bad comrades, they're good comrades, but there's a great fear in the movement, starting from the setback of Rivonia. We cannot afford another setback like Rivonia. So, we can't have a Slovo go home in case he gets caught – it would be a disaster. We can't have a Modise go home – it would be a disaster. We don't want that setback. And then I said to myself, why? It's because with the sensitivity of an operation like that, the concern is that the enemy has been penetrating us, it is monitoring us.

I go to Chris (Hani). Chris, you know what the blockage is here? You're afraid to send in leading people because we're afraid the enemy will pick it up. Let us propose that OR be entrusted with the mission and that he does not have the duty to report back on who he's sending. Chris says he thinks it's a good idea.

We go to JS. We put it to JS. JS says maybe, maybe. We go to Zuma. Zuma says he agrees. We go to OR and say to OR, Chief, here's a proposal. I know the item is over, but this is what we are saying. I explained the thing to him.

He says, well, after tea break, I'll reopen the matter. Chris gets up and proposes a simple resolution that we entrust the task of sending senior people home to OR and because of the sensitive nature of the project, he will only report back as and when he deems fit. Chris says more, assisted by Slovo.

OR turns around and he says, as the meeting is discussing this and saying, okay, we agree, he then says 'no, no, no don't agree so easily. Do you know what powers you're giving me?' He says 'do you realise each of you in this room, you are saying you are giving me powers to come to you on a one-to-one basis and say you and you, you are going home. And you can't say no to me.'

So, I then say no, Chief, because I'm getting afraid we're going to lose this resolution, no Comrade President, let's make it for volunteers. OR says 'no way. No, no volunteers. This must be very clear, this resolution. You're giving me the power. You've said senior people and it means that anybody in this room, I can decide you go home - and you go home. Full stop. No volunteers.'

We then pass this broad resolution entrusting a special project to the President with the powers to report as and when he deems fit. Full stop. He's to be

assisted by Slovo. And people forget this resolution because they're not into it. They're just not into it. They don't believe it'll happen.

So, the result is that when *Vula* is caught, all of them, from Modise down, repudiate that there's such an operation.

I remember it was presented as being outside the structures, as a sort of maverick operation....

Yes. Not only maverick. They said no, it's got nothing to do with the ANC.

And that is why even Ronnie doesn't remember the resolution authorising it. He was not there. What the purpose of it was, he doesn't understand. He sees it as straight – what we were seeing in the Military – we're now going to achieve People's War. So, we're going home, we're going to start fighting.

And the first thing he does when he comes in here and I locate him in Durban, he says 'release twelve AK's, there's going to be a demonstration in Inanda against our comrades and we've got to break that demonstration'.

I said, no, you're not here for that. He doesn't understand. And he then says 'we need an insurance policy in case negotiations don't succeed'. But that was not the purpose; because again that concept shows total unawareness of the *Green Book*. Now I don't claim that my view is an all-embracing comprehensive analysis of the factors that are in that situation. But I'm saying that this aspect of it didn't get resolved. It began to make progress when *Operation Vula* was implemented. But the fatal flaw in *Operation Vula*, for which I must take responsibility, is that I didn't brief the comrades at the top level of the centrality and critical role of the communication system that we had developed – because I was very clear that I was looking for virtual real time connection with Head Office. There was no experimentation going on, on this issue.

Also, comrades outside were not taking enough precautions. I told them stop asking how I'm travelling from Joburg to Durban and which car I'm using. That's not your business. Don't micromanage me. I'm looking for strategic advice, that's what you've got to give me because I'm now on the ground. You've authorised me to act in the name of the NEC, you've authorised me to act in the name of the Central Committee, give me strategic guidance.

When Sydney met them outside, they said, hey, he's working too hard. And Sydney says, ja, he's meeting too many people.

Did they want you to cool off?

Yes.

You will find O'Malley said that when I exited the country and was away for a few months the communications from Vula suddenly thinned out on political issues. And he says at the beginning I'm reporting. I'm doing my best. Every day that I have a meeting with a person from a mass organisation I'm giving OR a detailed ball-by-ball report. Trying to get them to understand the problem. And when I'm not asking for their intervention, I'm saying this is what you need to do. Now, that would go from political problems of organisations, organisational problems and sometimes very small operational problems. But when I'm not around, the communications are not political; they are purely on technical issues. About this guy coming into the country this day. A courier is going to go meet you here, put so many weapons there. Politics is gone.

And after we are unbanned, the issue we were facing now is what happens to the underground in all its formations? Political, Military, the lot. And the Committee led by Madiba authorised me to consult. I then presented at a meeting that what we needed as stage one was to find a way to keep the organisational structure and cohesion of the underground, including MK, and I said the UDF had developed a marshal structure, let's bury the underground into that structure. So, that if we are caught out, we have an explanation that we are protecting ourselves.

We would begin to provide the officer core for that marshal structure. And that would then give us a way of keeping the structure together and functional as we look at the developing situation.

You had quite a sophisticated communication system in *Vula*?...

That development of ours, the money we put into it, and the speed with which we could decipher and encipher was such, that not even the Soviets could do it. (Vladimir) Shubin (Soviet official supporting the ANC) asked me when I had come out of the country to the Soviet Union to share the system as he realised that, hey, OR and JS are armed with information virtually week by week of what's happening in the country. And I say to Shubin very straight, gently, I say, Comrade Shubin, we have a relationship that goes far back, deep, but if I came to you for communications you would only give me those that had already captured. You wouldn't give me your latest one. You'd reserve your latest for yourself. Now you're coming to me, you want me to give you ours. I can't. I can't share that because I will lose control of how it's being used, and I would lose control of who would disclose it. We were before the Internet and when Saponet came out, we were already riding on it, we were now making calls...

What's Saponet?

It was a predecessor to the Internet, it was like a post box to the Internet

When was this?

That would be 1989.

You left a message in the pigeonhole. It is like in a post box, you know, you have pigeon holes, so Saponet, literally in a virtual space. So, you to take it out of that post box using a code.

I read somewhere that Zarina had worked for some company that played a part in initially developing the fax machine and she had some technical knowledge of communication? And that this helped *Vula*?

Yes. Zarina worked at Xerox in London. In Lusaka she was working for the the Preferential Trade Area, computerising their system. And she was very much part of the *Vula* communications team right until she met that accident.

When we were in Lusaka in 1988, we were told you were in Moscow for health reasons. I think at the time, Zarina was involved in a car accident and recuperating in hospital?

And the panic was that Zarina was semi-conscious. Nobody knew that she had seventeen fractures. They just thought that there was something minor. She's in that state and Momo (Ismail Momoniat) and Jerry (Coovadia) and them asked to see her. So, JS takes this group of comrades, but they are afraid that in that state Zarina might say 'Where's Mac?' because she was handling the communications.

Anyway, from inside I would say in my report there's a delegation coming. In that delegation will be so and so. Now, that person don't reveal him, for example, Momo, is in the District Committee of the Party in Johannesburg. Joe, don't discuss the issues of the Party with other people from Joburg. Momo is there from the District Committee. OR, JS, on ANC matters, these are the issues that you need to discuss. So, they would manoeuvre. So, that's the nature of the reports that you were sending. You didn't say to them cold bloodedly just they're coming, discuss what you want. Then you're not helping them to get into the situation.

It's not as if comrades were bad or good. It's a question that exile had created its own problems. The variety of conditions and problems that we were battling with outside locked your mindset to concentrate on the problems of outside

and prevented you from applying adequate attention to home. And then you didn't have eyes and ears on the ground so you were not based on knowledge of the situation at home. To be fair, one of the people who always tried to keep his ear to the ground was Thabo Mbeki - more than other members of the RC. Even in his work as Head of international Relations, he kept meeting people from home. He read and he kept in touch. And he understood the *Green Book* very well. I would say he internalised the *Green Book* as did OR. I certainly claim that I internalised it. I don't think that the other comrades internalised it to that extent.

Anyway, we were in communication with Lusaka at the cost of a local call. So, I'm saying that I hadn't properly briefed the *Vula* comrades on the importance of communicating with Head Office, not just about sending us six AK's. Where's the pick-up point, who's delivering where? You had to send political reports. You had to say I have met Jay Naidoo, the General Secretary of COSATU, this is the discussion I've had with him. We have come to a common understanding of the strategic way forward and there is no conflict of interest between the two organisations. They are doing different things, but what they're doing fits in with our overall strategy. And if they don't fit in and they are undermining your overall strategy, then you have to engage them to persuade them to reformulate the way they are looking at it.

Previously, I had intercepted Jay in Harare, had a chat with him and then brought JS into the meeting. Now I'm the Internal Political Secretary. There was no arrangement that we would meet. I go to Harare saying to JS, from the Party's (SACP's) side now, COSATU is going to be there, we've got to engage with them. Go there.

I first chat with Jay and I say I'm going to bring JS in. He's happy. Bring JS. We meet. Now Jay comes home. I'm not aware of the detailed problems inside COSATU. I'm aware of many comrades who are linked to the ANC and the Party having reservations about Jay Naidoo.

Yes, though Billy was reaching out to Jay....

I said to Billy, whatever reservations you've got, you've got to work with him. This is the General Secretary of COSATU. Jay Naidoo reports to COSATU. Billy's covering his back - and proposes that COSATU goes to Lusaka. That delegation that went to Lusaka, (Makhulu) Ledwaba was there. He phoned me recently when the bust-up started in COSATU over Vavi, who had just been kicked out.

He wants me to intervene. I said no. He says, 'no man, Comrade Mac, at the Lusaka meeting of the ANC and the Party, it was jointly agreed to send Jay Naidoo and you out of the room to draft the communiqué. And it is that

communiqué that spoke of the nature of the relationship. It accepted the leadership of the ANC but the independence of COSATU.'

He said that formulation came from you guys. 'You had dealt with all the reservations that Jay raised.' Now if you go back to that resolution, you will see it asserted the independence of COSATU within the context of who leads overall. But as I see it what you're getting right now is a battle for each one to assert their independence to the point where they are saying we are co-determinants. We are now equals. And that for me has its own problems...

But this issue also applies to the Party. You can't be co-equal to the ANC. You're not putting your own candidates for election yet. You're not taking responsibility for the failures of the ANC, but you take the benefits of the successes. Well, that creates a problem in the Alliance. However, if you go back to the *Green Book*, to what it says about mass organisations and trade unions, you will see the Green Book articulated it very clearly. Now I keep referring to the *Green Book* because JS was party to it. He was in the Strategy Commission.

Who went to Vietnam? Was JS part of the delegation?

JS did go. It was Tambo, Modise, JS, Cassius Make, and Thabo Mbeki. But the Commission is what's important. The Commission was OR, JS, Thabo, Joe Gqabi, and there was a fifth member.

I'm emphasising that they had been in the debate. I had gone there, from time to time I was called in, particularly when it came to the Bantustan organisations.

We keep coming back to this theme of the relationship between the Military and Political, of the relationship between the armed and mass struggles...

Yes, because it's so important. One of the issues we had to grapple with was how do you create an underground if it does not hide itself inside the mass organisation? But how do you hide it in a mass organisation without making it the controlling voice of the mass organisation? Its leadership has got to be exercised with a sensitivity that recognises the mass organisation's core autonomous existence. If you don't do that, you'll have subjugated it totally to be your instrument and therefore you've depleted its capacity to broaden and bring in new people. You're narrowing your appeal but you want that autonomous energy. In the UDF not everyone of their affiliates agreed on all decisions. And you didn't consult them all for every decision, but everybody

would be feeding off and saying that name inspires us and you began to claim that they were yours.

So what looked like four hundred disparate organisations suddenly looked like a mighty river. So that's its strengths. But there are also weaknesses in that situation – have you got a cohesive underground force buried inside it that is taking stock not of the operational, but of strategic, issues? Is the fit going right? Are they doing things that undermine the overall strategy? Or are they complementing that overall strategy? Those are the issues that arose. So, to the extent that comrades are not seeing it, they're not seeing it because of the tasks that they have and the distance they have from the reality on the ground. And when they come in, they have a particular mindset: give me a hiding place, give me resources, give me somebody as a driver. They're not interacting.

Okay, we need to move more to the specific operations of Special Ops. You were not directly involved in Special Ops, but you initially met Rodney Wilkinson and Heather Gray who carried out the Koeberg operation. What exactly was your role? What's your assessment of the Koeberg operation as a whole?

Let me put the bare facts. Firstly, we need to acknowledge the work of two comrades from ZAPU, Jeremy and Joan Brickhill. Now Jeremy was in ZAPU intelligence. He's Zimbabwean. Joan is South African. They married in London and then settled in Zimbabwe as part of ZAPU.

Dumiso Dabengwa (Zimbabwe People's Revolutionary Army Head of Intelligence and later ZAPU President) just before his death spoke publically about the cooperation. He said he was the Head of Zapu Intelligence when they came across this information and they decided to tell me. Now that was very interesting because Dabengwa's great friend was Joe Modise. Why didn't he tell Joe Modise? Because he knew that Joe is more a talker, not a worker. So, when Jeremy came to me, it was as part of ZAPU Intelligence.

Jeremy says he's come across this chap who claims he has these drawings. Would I be interested in meeting him? When he explains everything that he knew I say, okay, let me meet him. I meet Rodney and when I look at the diagrams and question him, I reach the initial conclusion that it looks like these are genuine drawings.

But how could you tell? You're not an expert in this area?

No, you can read the diagram of a thing, that this is what the nuclear reactor is, this is the transistor, and the layout of the buildings is all there. But Koeberg

has not yet been commissioned. And I say to myself, man, this, if it this is true, it's an interesting target! Because there's no radiation fallout problem. So, I interact with him. I then say to myself this is not my job, so I said to him the best unit for this is Special Operations. So, I go to Joe. Previously I'd given Joe other target information, I'd given him the diagram and layout of the mobile refinery in Wentworth.

So, JS takes it and I said I'm not so sure this is genuine, but it looks genuine to me, in terms of my cursory knowledge. And he said, 'well, how should we proceed?' I said, look, as far as I'm concerned, you've got Rashid with a BSc, he's got science. But secondly, I would take this for proper checking. JS, as it turned out, took it to a number of scientists. I don't know who he took it to, but I have reason to believe that amongst the scientists he consulted was a nuclear scientist in Britain. Don't confuse this with Renfrew Christie (underground ANC activist imprisoned for passing information to the ANC on South Africa's nuclear programme).

JS had to go to nuclear scientists who were practitioners in the field. And their judgment was this is genuine. And that is what set Koeberg on the road. What happened thereafter was not something that I got involved in. Who Rashid went to see, etc. I introduced the couple, I'd given the background and said now it's your issue. In Rodney's background there was no political root nor in Heather's, but there was a root that attracted me – and that is, he was one loose cannon.

He was in the SADF (South African Defence Force). And he got drunk and he stole a tank. And he went with the tank from the camp. And the tank rolled over. So, you know, these things attracted me...And he's a dagga smoker and I'm talking to the guy, and I'm seeing that there's not much politics in this guy, but there is something of an adventurer in him. And I say you know what, this is the guy! This guy will do things that others will hesitate to do. But I came to the conclusion that Rodney's weaknesses were compensated by Heather, particularly Rodney's proneness to get nervous. And I said the person to calm him was Heather, his wife. Heather was a physiotherapist. And I think I said to JS whatever you do, keep this couple together.

My next involvement is when Koeberg has taken place. Heather has exited and gone to Harare. Rodney, after the explosion, goes to Swaziland. I told you that I believe that in planning these operations, you should give more time to the retreat than to the advance. And I believe that was one of the weaknesses in our work. Because here they are, they have retreated and they are separate.

She's in Harare. He's in Maputo. Who's going to give them support? They are nervous wrecks. They're thinking the enemy may know about them and come for them.

This is when an appeal comes to me to intervene. From Special Ops – from Rashid or JS. They have a problem. 'Go to Harare, meet her'. Nothing significant. All they want in that situation is that the senior comrade that they have faith in is there. People are having a psychological, traumatic experience; you're not expected to be a psychologist and psychiatrist; what is expected, is your mere presence and your mere willingness to sit down with a person and help him or her slowly over an hour, two hours, to begin to relax a little bit so that when you leave, the person feels a little bit relieved. And guide them not to say a word about their knowledge of and involvement in the Koeberg attack.

That helps. So that, I do – and then the next thing is they have sent them to London to go to a little village in the UK to hide and not say anything to anybody. They have linked them in London with Mannie Brown.

Now Mannie I know from inside the country in the 60's. I get to London. Mannie Brown comes to see me. 'Mac, we have a problem'. So, clearly Joe had told Mannie about my connection with Heather and Rodney. And he says, 'look, Rodney is a loose force, we can't manage him – he's just bored, sitting, doing nothing. He can't do nothing.' So, I then meet him and Heather and I say to Mannie, this man has got many skills. You've got to find a way to use him. You can't just hide him for the rest of his life. He has done this thing, it's a magnificent act, but he has got to be given tasks that make him feel part of a collective...Because his growth left to his own won't happen. I believe that that led to his greater involvement with (MK's) Ordnance (division) because by that time Cassius Make had become Head of Ordnance. I believe *Operation Safari* began at the time of Cassius and was taken over by Rashid after Cassius was killed in Swaziland.

At that stage Rodney had developed plans. As far as I remember, when I met Rodney he was explaining to me that he's got ideas, he's designed a boat and a yacht that have concealed compartments – we can do the same with that. Can we get a yacht, say, in Mauritius? That's when I said to Mannie don't dismiss these ideas. There's a talent sitting here.

So, that's my next involvement. After that, I come into the country on *Operation Vula* and I only get involved with them after they had broken up as partners inside the country. So, that's my involvement.

What do you think about the operation overall?

I think under the circumstances Rodney took a wonderful decision to strike prematurely because he was being retrenched. And he realised that if he didn't hit it then, he wouldn't be able to hit it again. He hit it not in the best way that he could've done if he had his own time. But he did enough damage. Firstly, it established in the minds of everybody that there was virtually no target that was impregnable to us. Secondly, it established in the minds of the international community through the voices of nuclear scientists that we had very consciously hit it before it became commissioned in order to ensure that there was no radiation fallout problem. Now that in the scientific community got fed into the broader understanding that we were a very responsible organisation. We were just not reckless with people's lives. It was a great encouragement for the mass organisations, MK, the underground and for the international anti-apartheid campaign. So, Koeberg did that.

The quantity of the damage, R66 million, the delay of the commissioning by many months – good, but I don't regard these as the big issues. I regard the big thing as the inspiration to the people that nothing is out of bounds for us, especially when you then link it with Voortrekkerhoogte and the two Sasol strikes before that; and then the fact that the regime never found who did it! That Rodney had done it, only came out after 1990.

That was the *Mail and Guardian* piece by David Beresford?...

Yes, but I don't know who decided he'd come out. I don't think Rodney acted on his own. I think he did it with the agreement of Rashid and also JS.

Subsequently there have been other interviews too. Many of them bring out a fairly consistent picture of Rodney as a somewhat nervous person, as an unlikely saboteur, as almost not having the personality for it, not that apartheid didn't drive others similar to him to the guerrilla struggle...

Look, my instructor in East Germany on dynamite had been awarded the Order of Lenin. He had learnt dynamiting as a 15-year-old in the Second World War. He had become a master at demolition work. And the practical dynamiting we did was to take a four-storey building of flats. It looked like one set of buildings; but if you looked at it structurally, carefully, there were separate blocks of flats attached to each other. There is a double layer of bricks, but it's not an inter-linked layer of bricks, and this guy took me to a site where he wanted to blow it up but retrieve the bricks intact...

He said 'no wastage'. He determined the exact amount of space it would take when a wall fell. He lays charges right through the wall of bricks – small, small charges, in layers, in series. And he blows it up in that series order, so you

actually see one wall parting from the other intact even though they'd been attached before.

But before we went on any dynamiting, he has a glass full of Vodka. Until then his hands are very shaky, before the operation. Then the full glass of Vodka, then his nerves are steady on the job. And when he finished, back to the Vodka. So, people who look like they can't manage, they have their ways...

Was the Koeberg operation influenced by any opposition to nuclear energy? Did the ANC at that time have an anti-nuclear policy?

That was not in our calculations. If I had met Rodney in that commune and he had said to me I stole these maps because I'm an environmentalist and I'm opposed to nuclear, I would've said fine. That's your interest. But just give me the maps, man. And having interviewed him, I said to JS this is the man to carry it out. He's left no trail. They are not aware that he had taken it. And he has got no political background so you can send him back. And Rashid and them sent him back to his job at Koeberg. And he goes and applies for a job. And he gets it.

He said that he was floored when you comrades asked him to do it. It seems he wasn't expecting that...

Yes.

What became of Rodney after 1994?

He went to the army, I think. When I last spoke to him over the phone, he was interested in a farm somewhere. He's full of physical activity. He won't be a farmer that's hands off. He's out in the bush that he loves...And maybe he's still smoking his ganga.

So apart from Koeberg, you were not involved at all in anything to do with Special Ops?

No. As I say, I gave them the diagrams. And introduced them. In fact, the other Merebank refinery matter, (veteran ANC activist) Frene (Ginwala) introduced me to her nephew. He was working for Mobil Refinery. And when he left them, he took a file of the pipeline and the refinery and he gave it to Frene. When I passed through London, Frene gave me the diagrams, she didn't tell me who she got it from. Again, I looked at the diagrams and I said to her it looks genuine but can you assure me that it is? And I pushed her until she said it's her nephew.

So, then I said, fine. I handed the file to JS. Said here is a target for you, you do what you want to do. Here's the man, if you want to question him about the file. That operation was the one that led to the death of Clifford Brown and somebody else in Umbilo Road (in Durban). They'd come to hit the refinery.

But the reason they didn't hit the refinery was the on-site reconnaissance showed that it would affect the civilian population, which was a Coloured housing estate.

If you consider Special Ops as a whole, which one or two operations do you think were the most effective and why?

I don't think you can look at any of the operations outside of the criteria that arise from the fact that they were supposed to be conducting armed propaganda. That's the starting point. So, to estimate their significance, if you want to distinguish between one operation and the other, you need to estimate it in terms of the impact it made. And the impact, you divide into at least four categories.

One, on the masses in South Africa, because the first purpose of armed propaganda is to inspire the people who are oppressed to stand up. The second is the impact it had on the cadres of the movement, be they in exile, the underground or in prison; it is supposed to inspire those cadres who are part of the front line of the struggle to become more confident of themselves and their organisation.

The third aspect is the impact on the enemy – which has to be measured partly by the extent of the damage, partly by the amount of publicity it got and the reaction of the masses and the international community, but also partly by the extent to which the enemy got on top of that situation and found out who did it and took revenge.

And the fourth component would be the international community. Last, but don't underestimate it, because the survival of the ANC depended substantially on the material, besides the moral, support it would get from the African countries and the international community, including the non-socialist camp, the social democratic countries. But even in the United States, with its imperialist position, it is the recognition that the ANC was a formidable force that led us to win on passing that Sanctions Act. It is because they said if we don't do that, we are going to be isolated from the ANC.

So, these are the criteria to consider how effective Special Ops was. How else can you look at it? And on that basis, you can then look at each operation and see to what extent it meets these criteria.

What you would see then is that Sasol, because it came first in line and because the one Sasol where they hit the storage tanks while they were full of oil - the other one was empty – burnt for a week. That was a wonder. It was not a thing that happened and was just over. For over a week people around the area were seeing the smoke and smelling the air and seeing the ashes.

And I believe people quite far away could smell the burning...

Far away. So, Sasol had an enormous impact. And it was known to be a protected national key point.

I was told that the National Key Points Act was passed after the SASOL operation. Correct?

Maybe. The National Key Points Act and maybe the Physical Planning Act. Because the Physical Planning Act also gave the regime powers to do certain things.

But with Sasol, the regime takes revenge. It was able to isolate who were the people in Special Ops, who were its Commanders, who were its operators. And it was able to hit some of the field Commanders and eliminate them.

So, when Special Ops begins to lose focus, to become defused, it is at a time when it has been losing its key personnel. Not just at Matola. When Barney Molokoane and them went back to hit Sasol again, in the retreat they get caught up before they cross the border, there's a shoot- out, they get killed. The regime is isolating them. And the reasons are simple. Part of it is too loose talk in Maputo among the comrades.

With Koeberg, in that sense, the regime was not able to work out who did it and could not go for reprisals.

With Voortrekkerhoogte, the impact of striking the head office of the military headquarters was very important. But the fact that it did not inflict real damage was its weakness. The fact that people got away was its strength. So, that's how I see it.

The comrades who assembled to hit the three Sasol targets at the same time on 31 May-1 June were all housed in the same place in Matola. Yet they were from three different units doing separate operations. They get briefed, all together, by JS, Obadi and other leaders. But wasn't that a problem? Each unit is not supposed to

know what the target of the other units is, and if comrades from one of the units got caught the other units could become vulnerable?

One casualty will knock the rest out. It tells you that the environment of Angola and Maputo was not conducive to occupying a total mindset of illegality. You were not looking at the situation from the point of view of inside the country. If you were inside the country, you would say how dare you tell everybody I'm here? But there in Maputo you put all of them in one room and you're briefing them, each one knowing where the other is going so that if one gets caught the others are in trouble...

Well, I was told that comrades in each unit were told not to discuss with comrades from other units their respective targets or the nature of their operations. But even if members of one unit didn't know the real names of members of their own or other units, was putting them together appropriate? Maybe there wasn't the capacity or resources...

This is a far more complex question. Yes, the resources is one thing. Remember SIDA (Swedish International Development Agency) was giving us money on the basis it's not for armed struggle. The Soviets were giving us armaments, equipment and material supplies, tinned fish, clothes and things like that. They're not giving money. Mozambique had its own rules of the game, which we accepted also without it being necessarily spelt out. Do not incriminate us and do not cross directly into South Africa from Mozambican territory. Now in this situation Mozambique was like a liberated zone and people behaved as if they were in a liberated zone. So, we also were dropping our guard. So, it's this complex interplay.

How do you think the regime found out which comrades were involved in Sasol?

As I said, Maputo was a terrible place to operate from because you had a sense of total freedom. And so, you had very, very loose talk. Who's doing what – and the natural tendency, suddenly you think that underground means – keep it a secret from your comrades and let the enemy know. You'll reveal things that should be secret and you'll conceal things that were open.

But what about the possible efficiency of the regime's security agencies or the work of informers?

There was also the inefficiency of the security services of the South African state. They had agents, but they had also problems of the quality of the reports. If you speak to Moe (Shaik, ANC political underground activist), he will tell you of two key officers in the Durban Security Branch who were at war with

each other, in a power struggle. And each one created a false agent and pumped under the agent's name all sorts of information as a report coming from the agent. There were cooked up reports and they were collecting money. What is happening now in the security services, including giving jobs to their relatives, is the old story about the apartheid security intelligence too.

So, let's make this point for you to understand it. Craig Williamson is boasted of as a highly efficient agent. He's not. The bulk of what he supplied was openly obtainable from the United Nations and the Anti-Apartheid movements. He was in the Kremlin. You could go on a visa as a tourist. No problem. If you say, did he have a single report or minutes of the RC, of Special Operations, of the Internal Political Committee? Nothing.

What do you make of the Robert McBride-Gordon Webster units' operations?

I am not clear whether the McBride operations were given sufficient guidance from outside. I don't know whether the intelligence report was accurate. When I look at all the information that came out around it at the TRC, nothing suggests that the Magoo's Bar was a legitimate target. It falls into the category of a soft target, but we've had to defend it and fight for the release of McBride. And you find suddenly comrades who are in regular ANC MK work implicated in this action as well as comrades who are in Special Ops.

You don't know who's linked with whom. So, it's not clear, but it does raise whether Special Ops focus is getting defused. You wanted to hit enemy personnel, that would've been beautiful. I was in the country underground. I remember so many sights. At Bedfordview near the mall, there is an artillery base, right there in the open. Where, with the Grad-P that we used in Voortrekkerhoogte, you could cause tremendous damage. Because it was not a big base, it was literally a base surrounded by four streets. And you had all the tanks in there. The damage you could've inflicted would've been significant. It was not like you would hit a staff cottage or a workshop or something like that.

There were vulnerable targets, but again let's be gentle with ourselves. Not being in the country, asking you to find targets when you have not got military training, what does it ask you to do? And what does it mean when they say to a cadre find a target where the soldiers frequent? They go, they come across a pub, it's in the White beachfront area, your reconnaissance is done by a person of colour, you can't go into the pub, fraternise. You needed to send a White comrade inside that place, frequenting it for days, different hours, drinking with people, getting to know them. And then say on certain nights of the week this is when the majority of patrons are soldiers and their girlfriends. The action and the results don't show that.

**What's your view of the Church Street, Pretoria Air Force bombing?
Why has it become controversial?**

Poor communications by the movement, subconsciously making the narrative in your mind the one that was in the media. The target was clearly selected as the Air Force Headquarters. The timing was when the bulk of them were going to be now coming out of duty. There was no way to avoid some civilian casualties, but Kabwe had resolved that if the target is legitimate some cross-fire death might take place. But the knowledge that this was the Air Force Headquarters, that it was intended for the Air Force Personnel was not the narrative that we put out straight away and we should have done that immediately. Once the first story went out in the media, the propaganda perception war was won and that was now the dominant story. That made it the controversy.

And in the defence of it, we did not have information about exactly who was injured and who killed. So, we had no way of correcting that perception, but subsequent evidence before the TRC shows that about eleven of them were from the Air Force staff. But that didn't come out at that time. And we had no way of correcting that part.

There's the human element, that when an operation goes off successfully everybody is ready to claim it. When an operation gets botched, everybody is running for cover, and the ones who could make the explanation are not present. The person who had the sense of what to say and what not to say was OR because he was so sensitive to all the arenas, all the four pillars; he was aware and conscious of them. So, he was meticulous.

This thing about OR looking at a statement over and over and rewriting it, I've experienced personally, but it was the sensitivity that he's balancing. SIDA must continue to fund us. We must have an explanation for SIDA. We must know how to talk to Machel, to Kaunda who was keen on the Lusaka Manifesto, to Botswana. So that consciousness in the communication was specifically a property that sat with OR because all of us were sitting in particular silos and looking at it from those silos – and that's where the defects arose, that's where the space arose.

At the TRC, Thabo led the delegation, but having made his presentation, he disappeared. Modise and some others were there but it was left to me to face the grilling, and I said unreservedly I apologise for all the deaths of civilians that occurred. They were not intended, it happened.

Why were car bombs used rarely in the armed struggle in South Africa?

The use of a car bomb came up very late in our struggle. It was just beginning to be developed in new ways and it could have some technical problems. It had to be detonated by remote control. Technology for remote control was just coming into play. This is before cell phones. At the moment I can switch that TV on from here, but if I walked out into the corridor and tried to switch it on, it won't come on. It has a distance limitation. We worked on this and I think Rashid and them will know more about the details. I think that even the IRA comrades were involved in helping us, but the first car bombs had a simple, I think, one button trigger. And I'm saying think because my knowledge is based on the discussion with JS telling me the problems they faced and saying how they will solve it.

So, it was press one button and it goes off. But even if you said that that one button triggers three numbers, one, three, five before it goes off, the same number could also be triggered elsewhere, without the knowledge that this would trigger a bomb. Then came the idea that you need two buttons. Press one, then the other. But the chances of that happening randomly were still high. Then came the idea that you must press two buttons separately so that you are forced to use two hands. But that too had problems

How come car bombs were used in other struggles – that of the IRA, the Palestinians, South American struggles...

They were less discriminative about what happens to civilians. The Palestinians and Algerians. Same in Latin America. You must understand why in our situation were we so much against civilian deaths, what we call classical terrorism - we were trying to avoid a race war. Mandela in his autobiography says we were prepared to even consider terrorism, but in the 1961 debates we were very clear we were not going to follow the Algerian model of bombing buses; they could do it because they had a settler population, we couldn't.

Maybe partly too because, in our case, we had a stronger mass movement, including the trade unions, compared to these other struggles?

Yes. But as the ANC we could have done far more to assist the mass movement and build the political underground. You also have to ask why members of the Politburo – apart from me – who were leaders already in the movement don't shift from the Military to undertake Political tasks? Why didn't they give me in the Political Section another senior comrade with a reputation and a background of politics? And I would assume that you are elected Chair of

the Party or Secretary or to the Politburo because you are par excellence a political worker. You are the cream of the political forces. Yet nobody's in the Political. They're all in the Military. Whose responsibility is that? Can you evade asking the question of who was the General Secretary of the Party at that time? Who was the Chairperson? What positions did they take?

The only person that you could isolate is Moses Mabhida. But Mabhida was already a key element of the RC's military work. Yes, he was involved in the political side but never as part of the Internal Political Reconstruction structure. And he never interacted with us. He interacted with the Military. My interactions with Moses were in the Party, not in any ANC structure except for the time when he administered the MK oath. By the way, I took the MK oath three times (laughter).

Why (laughter)?...

Each time they said I had not been a member of MK.

Why would they say that?

Each leader was trying to do something of their own.

You asked that question and it provoked me to answer. But I just have a set of questions. Like I say, where have you had a guerrilla struggle where the leadership is not on the ground? And then if you really seriously make that observation you ask, why should you wait for an instruction? You are part of the leadership, you should actually be moving into the country. In fact, Madiba, when he advocates the armed struggle, he puts himself forward to be the Commander-in-Chief.

Okay. As you must know, there's also criticism from some comrades for what they see as your bravado, your adventurism. That you were too open when you were in the country and you let people know you were here who didn't need to know and so on. Some see it as, well, a sort of martyr streak?...

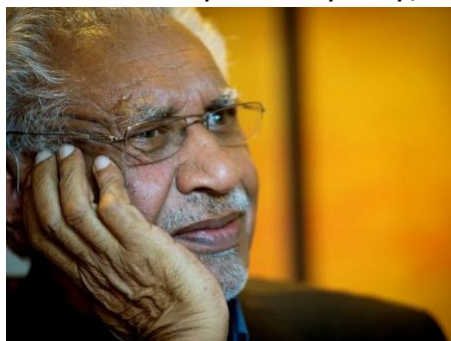
These are perceptions among some comrades. They're not the enemy's perception – which is different. The enemy actually did a study of me. Three volumes that are sitting in the Mayibuye Centre. Karl Edwards (Security Policeman) headed that study.

But to come back to the problem. I'm right now writing about Madiba for a speech. And I'm saying there isn't an action where he didn't put his hand up once he said we do this. And he'd say I'm there. I come from that school.

Here's an action, look around, who's going to do it? I go forward....But the carelessness thing is meeting too many people. That's in the Vula communications. As I said, Sydney Mufamadi goes to Lusaka, meets JS and OR at my arrangement. Comes back and reports to me that 'OR and JS say they feel I'm being a bit reckless, overstretching' – but it's Sydney telling them this, that I shouldn't do this. Sydney tells me, 'you know, OR and JS are saying that you must slow down a bit'. I say where does this arise? And I write to OR. I say, Chief, I have a problem. Nobody knows who I meet. I'm meeting the mass organisation and trade union leaders one-to-one as individuals. You want me not to meet them, it's okay I'll not meet them. We will not resolve the political problems. But I object to your raising it with Sydney. He is under my Command. And you're raising it with him.

And OR writes back, sorry, will not do that. The only person who would know who I met would be Gebuza, my deputy. But there too, the only reason he knew was because I had to give him the discs to say there you will find a record of who I've seen so that you need to maintain that contact while I'm out of the country.

But I didn't even allow Billy to know. Billy would wake up suddenly and find out, as it happened, I'd met Jay, and Sydney would wake up and say, 'oh, it seems he's contacted Cyril'. Now they are still operating with a factionalist mind. Cyril is not part of their clique so he's not reliable so you shouldn't meet him. But when they confront me, I say - but wait, we gave him 10 000 mine workers' 40th anniversary pamphlets, he distributed it to the workers. You received 2000 – I've come here into the country and they are sitting in your storeroom. Who must I work with? You work with the guy who talks good or the guy who takes action? But all this, because they say they are in control of the unions. What they say to Lusaka must be what stands. Not for me. I'm representing the Party, I'm representing the NEC of the ANC. My job is to verify your information at the mass level. You can't do that by remote, because if I trusted the report of Sydney, I would say Cyril is a bad guy.



Mac Maharaj at his 90th birthday in 2025

So, why exactly did you leave the SACP after 1990?

I'm not going to give you a full answer on the record. So, very briefly. The ANC had to launch an Interim Leadership Group in January 1990 and it really cocked-up – (Alfred) Nzo, who as at the time both the SG (ANC Secretary-General) and the acting

President of the ANC, has a press conference and I read in the *Sowetan* about an Interim Leadership Group, it names four people and it says a fifth is unnamed. Now I'm in the country – Jesus, I say,

you fingered me. I say what the hell have you guys done? And they come back and say that was a mistake by Nzo. I say is that how you guys get away with things? You say it's just a mistake by Nzo, finished, klaar. So, what's the example for juniors? So, this is the background.

And I then I say can we have a consultative process to determine how the Party must surface? Let's learn from things. JS says the Central Committee is meeting to decide this question. I say, well, can we organise an underground meeting of Party members from around the country, we'll have about ten to twenty of them? So, we have the Tongaat meeting.

And this is where my next hurdle comes. I say to JS we need a statement from the General Secretary because this is a very important consultative meeting and I even say, if you want, we can smuggle you in and out. He says no, we'll send a message. They send a message to me that Jeremy Cronin is coming with the message. I say where will he find us? No answer. I say send us the text in case he doesn't arrive. They don't. So, I have to draft a message that night. Jeremy is waiting for indemnity before he comes, but they are refusing to give us the message from the General Secretary. It's only going to be delivered by Jeremy himself.

But in the meeting in Tongaat the usual problem arises when it came to who goes into that Interim Group of the party. And I can't say to the twenty people in the room I object to this one or that one. And they put the names. Raymond Mhlaba attended that meeting.

We then meet as an extended Politburo. Chris and Ronnie are there. We come to the Interim Leadership Group, I say to them, comrades, you've got my extensive report on Harry Gwala, you can't put him there, we're in a different ball game. The ANC is going to be in negotiations, this is going to be a difficult terrain, and I can tell you the ANC will really appreciate the Party if we in principle supported it and tried to uphold the moral quality of our struggle. So, you can't put Harry in, he has been involved deeply involved in some unacceptable things in the violence in the Natal Midlands. But it was decided to include Gwala. So, I retreated.

JS then says but aren't you going to help to launch the Party? So, I said, well, let's make a deal, I will help, I will do everything for the launch I'm required to – only one thing, when you announce the Interim Leadership Group, exclude me.

But then I get arrested. Now the same thing crops up. I'm getting reports of what people are saying – and I can name the people. ANC comrades saying let Mac and them rot in prison. Let's negotiate, they'll get freed later. They're not

worried about whether we're being tortured. I send messages starting from prison to JS – I can escape now with no trace, but I'm asking politically is it the correct thing to do? No response. But who arrives at Westville prison when I'm awaiting trial? Slovo and Nzo.

I say what are you doing here? When we appeared in court on the first day, there was not one single NEC member. I come out of detention. I hear that at the launch of the Party they announced my name. I wrote a letter saying chaps I retire from the Party, I'm not disclosing why, I don't want to harm the Party, but I reserve my right, if you try to rubbish my name I will be forced to explain publically. That letter was written to Slovo in his capacity as Secretary of the Party.

Of the Special Ops comrades who stands out for you?

Obadi (Montso Mokgabudi). And Barney (Molokoane) too. Also, Rashid. And you have to deal with JS in his role as Special Ops, with his immense drive and his strengths and weaknesses.

You must look at people independently.

Rashid leaves in '76 shortly after the Soweto uprising, '78 he spends time in East Germany, then he's in Angola as an Instructor, '79 he becomes a Commissar and later that year or in 1980 he joins Special Ops, '83 he becomes Special Ops Commander and then '87 Head of Ordnance. Isn't this a very swift rise in the ranks? Why does it happen?

Age has got nothing to do with it. Nor is the length of period in the movement the key determinant - except that there should be sufficient time in the movement. What is sufficient is difficult to assess.

There's a flaw that is deeply embedded in our movement – it stems from the idea that you rule by committees - and that ignores the centrality of who is the Chair or the Commander or the Head of that committee, and that the Head is the Head. You cannot carry out operational or political or military work, without somebody who is mandated, be it the Secretary or the Chair, to attend to operational matters between meetings. He or she takes the decision that I'm crossing the unit tonight and I'm going to cross them at this particular point. All those decisions can't go to committees.

Now the movement does not think that way. It does not understand that you can have the best structure, but a bad head and it'll do nothing. You can have the worst structure, but a good head and you'll get great results.

We are wedded to a false knowledge of what it means to be collective.

There were others that rose too like Rashid. They had to rise. We needed cadres. When I got outside, the '62 generation had been out of the country for 14 years, and the generation that I come from, when we left the country, we were not even allowed to tell our wives we're going. We were told you're going. You'll be back in six months and you don't tell your wives, you don't tell anybody, and no communication. With the '76 generation, because of the mass flood and because they were kids, we had to allow them to connect with their families.

I tell you a real story. There was a comrade called Dulla. He was a mechanic, he lived in an out-house in a place where I used to stay together with OR's driver, Khumalo. We're sitting and talking. I'd come out of the country in '77, chatting and gossiping and every time we talk about home, he says how much does that cost? And I tell him R12, and he says please, man, put it in pounds and so I had to do that.

Now the '76 generation is contacting their own families. And I'm Secretary of the Internal, and one day Dulla says 'I don't have contact with my family'. So I say to Dulla where you come from, Dulla? He says Cape Town. So, I say we've got structures going in Cape Town. We'll trace your wife and arrange for her to come to Botswana.

So we arrange that. It happened. I'm gone. I come back. We converge. And I say, hey, DB, how was your wife? He says 'it was very painful – no, man, Comrade Mac, it just went off the rails'. I say what happened? He says 'I went there, I was so happy to see her, she was so happy she came from Cape Town. But he says 'in half an hour it just went the wrong way! I say what you mean wrong way? He says 'I asked her about my pigeons. But she said "I gave them away"! Now he's sitting in Lusaka and she's stuck with his pigeons in Cape Town – and that's years ago! And he's very hurt she gave them away... There's nothing wrong with a person of Rashid's generation rising to that position. He did well – but Rashid takes every criticism of Special Ops personally. A Commander has got to take a lot of nonsense.

I also think Rashid was short-changed after 1994. I would agree that they shouldn't have put him in the strategy planning in the Defence Force, but they certainly could've put him as the Ordnance Head - and he would've been a very good.

Why do you think Rashid became Ordnance Chief?

I don't know. In '87 I'm de-escalating from politics outside the country. And when I started building the legend that I'm ill it was because I knew I'm going home. Although I'm Secretary of the Political Section, I'm using my illness to de-escalate from the Political section. Not to run away from the Political. To prepare for home. So, that when I go into the country, I have the least possible amount of information of the structures outside to give away if I'm caught.