



## CHAPTER NINE

### THE FAILURE OF UMKHONTO'S ARMED MISSION

Perhaps the most publicised and debated issue in South African politics since the signing of the New York Peace Accord in December 1988, has been whether the ANC-SACP alliance and Umkhonto had the ability to continue their armed struggle or whether the swing in both White and Black political thinking was strong enough to force the ANC and the SACP to the negotiating table. Up to the time of the signing of the New York Accord, Black political thinking, and to a great extent also White political perspectives in South Africa, had centred around a military solution to the country's political problems. Since the signing of the New York Accord however and the negative effect that it had on the ability of the ANC and Umkhonto to escalate the armed struggle in South Africa, increasing attention has been given to the possibility of a negotiated settlement in the country, despite persistent refusals from the ANC to disband Umkhonto and to stop recruiting people for the organization.

But how realistic were these claims, and what ability did the ANC-SACP alliance really have of escalating the armed struggle into a full-scale people's war - as it predicted it would do in 1987? Did the ANC, in its alliance with the SACP, have sufficient military forces in Umkhonto to force the South African government to hand over power to the ANC, or should their sabre rattling be seen for what it really was, namely armed propaganda to attract support for the aims and objectives of the Freedom Charter inside as well as outside South Africa? Similarly - why, after almost thirty years of revolutionary armed struggle, did the ANC-SACP alliance remain the only major liberatory force in Africa that had not achieved or even approached



their declared objective, namely to destroy White minority rule in South Africa and replace it with a more democratic system of government? In the course of this final chapter answers to these and other questions pertaining to the state of the armed struggle in South Africa and the position of Umkhonto in it since 1961 will be provided.

1. SOME VIEWS AND OBSERVATIONS ON THE ANC-SACP'S ARMED STRUGGLE IN SOUTH AFRICA AND THE FACTORS INHIBITING ITS DEVELOPMENT

Since the ANC and the SACP began their armed struggle against the South African government in 1961, a number of publications have appeared in which attempts were made to analyse the struggle and the factors that may have had an inhibiting effect on its development and the attainment of its aims and objectives.<sup>(1)</sup> The earliest of these publications that deals with the armed struggle in South Africa

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1. The following is a list of the studies that are examined in this chapter to determine some of the factors that inhibited the development of the armed struggle in South Africa: E. Feit, Urban Revolt in South Africa (1971); J.B. Bell, The Myth of the Guerrilla. Revolutionary Theory and Malpractice (1971); J.B. Bell, The Future of Guerrilla Revolution in Southern Africa, (Africa Today 19, Winter 1972); L.H. Gann, No Hope for Violent Liberation, (Africa Report 17, February 1972); S. Johns, Obstacles to Guerrilla Warfare. A South African Case Study, (Journal of Modern African Studies 11 (2), 1973); T. Lodge, The African National Congress in South Africa, 1976 - 1983: Guerrilla War and Armed Propaganda, (Journal of Contemporary African Studies 3 (1/2), 1983 - 1984); B. Turok, Strategic Problems in South Africa's Liberation Struggle: A Critical Analysis, 1974; Colin and Margaret Legum, Africa Contemporary Record, Annual Survey and Documents 1974 - 1975; P. Rich, Insurgency, Terrorism and the Apartheid System in South Africa, (Political Studies, xxx (11), 1984); T. Lodge, Mayilome! Let us go to War! From Nkomati to Kabwe, the ANC, January 1984 - June 1985, (The South African Review Three, 1985); S.M. Davis, Apartheid's Rebels. Inside South Africa's Hidden War, 1987; M. Radu, The African National Congress: Cadres and Credo, (Problems of Communism, July - August 1987); J. Herbst, Prospects for Revolution in South Africa, (Political Science Quarterly, 103 (4), 1988); W.P. Esterhuyse, The International Political Status of the ANC, (Africa Insight, 19 (1), 1989).

and the reasons for its relative failure is that of Edward Feit,<sup>(2)</sup> to whom reference has been made on numerous occasions in this study.

According to Feit, revolutionary situations were not common phenomena because of two basic factors that inhibit their development. The first was the "routenization" of power, while the second was the extent to which the threat of potential revolt was perceived by the privileged minority against whom the struggle was directed. In his examination of the above two factors, Feit drew extensively upon the research and findings of two experts in the field, namely Heinrich Popitz<sup>(3)</sup> and Joseph Lopreato.<sup>(4)</sup> Popitz, according to Feit, argued that the majority, like the minority, was a distinctive phenomenon in which numbers appear to carry very little weight. If the relative strength of the minority and the majority was compared, two things stand out clearly; first of all - the superior ability of the privileged (minority) group to organise quickly, efficiently and effectively; and secondly, their ability to legitimize their privileges before the underprivileged (majority) group can develop an effective counter-ideology. According to Popitz, the privileged group can organise more effectively because they have a clear common interest to defend. There were no ambiguities about it. Moreover this interest was maintained by exchanges among privileged individuals. Individual and common interests, according to Popitz, were therefore congruent.<sup>(5)</sup>

The case of the underprivileged masses, however, was more complicated. While it was certainly in their interest to challenge the privileged, argued Popitz, that challenge does not involve the next step or development, namely, what will happen or what must be the next step once they have attained their freedom or have overthrown the status quo. The individual who was called upon to take risks, has no guarantee or even a certainty that he will personally benefit from

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2. Feit, Urban Revolt in South Africa, pp. 301 - 324.
  3. Heinrich Popitz, Prozesse der Machtbildung as quoted in Feit, Urban Revolt in South Africa, p. 302.
  4. Joseph Lopreato, Authority Relations and Class Conflict as quoted in Feit, Urban Revolt in South Africa, p. 303.
  5. Feit, Urban Revolt in South Africa, pp. 302 - 304.



the proposed or propagated change. The problem of distribution, in other words, who will get what, where, when and how, remained unresolved, according to Popitz. Agreement on what was wrong was thus no guarantee that agreement will be reached on what was right, or what was best, or that what was eventually instituted was acceptable to all.<sup>(6)</sup>

The privileged, on the other hand, have solved the problem of distribution even if the solution was not acceptable to all. To them a new order was not necessarily a better order or an answer to the existing problem, simply because it was not in power. Thus, argued Popitz, while the problem of distribution forces the underprivileged and the leaders of the organisation representing them to deal with the next step of the revolution only, which was the step immediately following a successful revolt, the privileged can concentrate on the step immediately facing it. They could offer select members of the underprivileged group advantages of immediate effect - such as premiums for loyalty and service or opportunities for personal advancement, which in the case of the latter was a highly sought after commodity.

Popitz further argued that while these advantages can be countered by the underprivileged, the impulse to do so and to organise such action had to be much stronger than that of the privileged if they were to attain equality of force. Resolutions alone were not enough. Great willingness on the part of the individual to submit himself to the common purpose, and a plan for distributive justice that was generally acceptable, was needed to bring the underprivileged to the "niveau" of the minority.<sup>(7)</sup>

The minority, Popitz went on to state, ruled not only because of vertical legitimisation of the kind suggested by Max Weber, the great German sociologist, but also because of a horizontal legitimisation among the elite. The elite, in other words, legitimise themselves.

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6. Feit, Urban Revolt in South Africa, p. 304.  
7. Feit, Urban Revolt in South Africa, p. 304.



They were in power because they have solved the problems of distribution and because they have agreed on the order which makes distribution and organisation possible. It thus goes without saying that this legitimisation of the elite rests on the belief that the existing order - as opposed to the one suggested by the underprivileged - was just. Feit argued that there was "a basic legitimacy of the established order. Once a certain ordering of things exists, even the unprivileged has something at stake: It was only rarely true that they have nothing to lose but their chains".<sup>(8)</sup> But if there was order and not mere arbitrariness even in exploitation, and if order was enforced by effective threats of violence, the unprivileged, wrote Feit, may come to believe that what they are receiving from the political system (the status quo) was better than nothing - and nothing at all might be the result of revolt.<sup>(9)</sup>

But how does all this apply to the South African situation? According to Feit the relevancy between Popitz's model and South Africa lies in the fact that according to Popitz:

The main problem for the rulers is at the beginning to avoid carefully anything which could affront the apathetic, individualistic majority, and at the same time to reduce this potentially dangerous group by appointing some of its members to the service class and stigmatising others as the outcasts.<sup>(10)</sup>

Thus, what Popitz was saying and which Feit agreed with, was that in the South African situation the creation of an African elite class - by co-opting them through the system of "separate development" which offered them relatively well-paid jobs and stability - the ruling order or the privileged minority effectively reduced the mechanisms of revolution. The point made by Popitz and Feit was born out by the fact that in 1968 the South African police force consisted of 53

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8. Feit, Urban Revolt in South Africa, p. 304.
  9. Feit, Urban Revolt in South Africa, p. 304.
  10. Heinrich Popitz, Prozesse der Machtbildung, as quoted in Feit, Urban Revolt in South Africa, p. 304.



percent Whites and 47 percent Blacks (16 755 Whites, 13 044 Africans, 1 371 Coloureds and 600 Indians). The latter were all part of the unprivileged majority as opposed to the privileged Whites in the force.<sup>(11)</sup> By 1987, the ratio between Whites and Blacks in the South African police force had almost reached the fifty percent mark.<sup>(12)</sup> Clearly, such cooperation between the privileged and the unprivileged for whatever reason(s) was highly counter-productive to revolutionary development. This was even more true when a section or sections of the unprivileged were incorporated into the political structure of the privileged group, even if this was done in a limited way as was the case with the inclusion of Indians and Coloureds in the constitutional development of South Africa in 1983/84. Although the latter development led to the formation of a series of new political alliances such as the UDF, and was partially responsible for the unrest that broke out in 1984, the mere inclusion of these two minority groups of the unprivileged class substantially weakened the position of the left and thus their revolutionary potential.

These views tie in well with the research and findings of Joseph Lopreato who set out to test the proposition that conflict between two aggregates in any association, rests on whether they were in superordinate or subordinate positions.<sup>(13)</sup> According to Feit, Lopreato's findings seem to indicate that more intense status conflict takes place within the authoritative group than between that group and those excluded from authority. "Such conflicts, extrapolating Lopreato's findings, if protracted," wrote Feit, "can spark the kind of 'incapacitating crisis' of which Lenin wrote." Lenin saw revolution as an elemental movement involving millions, occurring at a time of particular upsurge when masses of aggrieved humanity were driven by unusually harsh adversity into an insurrectionary mood that

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11. Horrell, A Survey of Race Relations in South Africa, 1968, p. 109.
  12. Cooper, A Survey of Race Relations, 1978/1988, p. 555.
  13. Feit, Urban Revolt in South Africa, p. 305.



could find outlet in action owing to a particular incapacitating crisis at the top of society and government.<sup>(14)</sup>

However, argued Feit:

Whether or not such a crisis takes place depends, it would seem, on whether the fissiparous pressure among the privileged can be contained in the face of a common interest or a common threat. This depends in turn on the perceptions of the interest or the threat among the privileged. If they see the threat to their interests as real and imminent, the tendency to unite may be stronger than the tendency to faction.<sup>(15)</sup>

As to the question whether the ruled can revolt successfully, Feit pointed out that Popitz was sceptical as far as overturning an established power was concerned. He argued that the possibility of change rests on overcoming what he terms "the organisation gap" between the integrated minority - provided that it remained integrated - and the disintegrated or even mutually hostile majority group, which in South Africa would be the African majority.<sup>(16)</sup>

By the "organisational gap" between the privileged and unprivileged, one understood the form of organisation that would enable the latter to successfully revolt against the position of the privileged; while at the same time "routinize" authority to the greatest possible extent. The latter, as Lopreato has pointed out, was not so easy to achieve since conflict was part of the process whereby those in authority will always seek to maintain the status quo, while those without it would constantly try to change it. Thus, according to Lopreato the "crisis of authority" exists not only among the elite of the privileged but also among the elite of the unprivileged. According to Feit one only needs to look at the internecine striving in the ANC both before and after 1960 to find living proof of

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14. R.C. Tucker, The Marxian Revolutionary Idea, as quoted in Feit, Urban Revolt in South Africa, p. 302.  
15. Feit, Urban Revolt in South Africa, p. 305.  
16. Feit, Urban Revolt in South Africa, p. 306.



Lopreato's theory. What is more, the tension created within the leadership ranks of the ANC and Umkhonto, particularly in Natal where the leadership of the two organisations was at loggerheads for the most part of the early 1960's, was increased from outside by the actions of the government who was in a position to "de-authorize" any leader(s) by exposing the emptiness of his (their) threats or promises.<sup>(17)</sup>

However in doing so the government could at the same time promote challenges to its authority. In other words, by refusing to adhere to the demands of moderate Black leaders, the government actually encourages radicals to belittle the efforts of these moderate leaders in favour of a more radical course of action which was exactly what transpired in the early 1960's and which led to the formation of Umkhonto.

According to Feit,<sup>(18)</sup> the response of the older leadership intent on maintaining power, was to routinize authority to the greatest possible extent, thus ensuring that the revolutionary movement will be organized along bureaucratic lines. Indeed, the difficulty of control was enhanced, he points out, by the elevated status the leadership of the African majority enjoyed among its own people compared with the low status it has among Whites, who, on the whole, discriminate not among Africans of different classes, but against them as a group.

Feit further argued that the problem of control was intensified by the need for a revolutionary organisation to produce results - ie, to realise its aims and objectives. In order to gain a following, a revolutionary organisation/movement has to make many promises and these promises must be realized if it does not want its status to be challenged. Campaigns launched with fanfare, argued Feit, must - at least partially - achieve their objectives. On the other hand, where a government meets challenges directed at it with success or

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17. Feit, Urban Revolt in South Africa, p. 306.

18. Feit, Urban Revolt in South Africa, p. 306.





even partial success (success can never be total) the revolutionary leadership and organisation it represents was either discredited or reduced in status of importance. Even if the radical leadership and the cadres managed to survive the government's action against them, their position and importance will deteriorate with every subsequent successful action against them. The result was that the support group will find it increasingly difficult to mobilize with each succeeding action against it.

Failure and factionalism Feit wrote, feeds on each other in a revolutionary situation. The more often the movement fails, the less likely it is to succeed in the future unless it is extra-ordinarily fortunate. The insurgent leaders under pressure will seek to retain control by imposing a bureaucratic pattern on the revolutionary organisation, the protection of their own status being rationalized as protection of the revolution itself. (19)

According to Feit, Lenin in his revolutionary writings conceived just such a pattern of party organisation, and met objections that such a party might easily be decapitated, with the answer that it was easier for a dozen intelligent people to escape than a hundred imbeciles. But the decapitation of Umkhonto at Rivonia in 1963 and the destruction of much of the combined ANC-SACP underground leadership shortly thereafter, has proved Lenin's philosophy wrong. (20) Although urban underground cells can survive for a time through their own ingenuity or with the backing of support groups, their situation was in the long run precarious if not short-lived. Part of the reason for this was that the police and other security organs have a much better network of agents in the urban areas than in the countryside and although it might take a while to do so they will finally gain access to the underground and its leadership, as was the case at Rivonia in 1963. In addition, because the administrative and military system was more closely co-ordinated and concentrated in the urban than rural areas, even simultaneous attacks at different places

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19. Feit, Urban Revolt in South Africa, p. 307.  
20. Feit, Urban Revolt in South Africa, p. 307.



can be dealt with fast and efficiently. The period between 1960 and 1964 contained numerous examples of the South African government's ability to deal with virtually every measure that the underground could bring against it in terms of its armed struggle.

But there were also other factors that contributed to the downfall of Umkhonto's internal organisation in 1963 and the collapse of the ANC and the SACP's underground structures by 1965. Since a revolution or a revolutionary situation was a form of war, revolutionary organisations such as Umkhonto were normally organised along military lines. In other words, it follows some form of bureaucratic structure forced upon it partially by its leadership and partially by the conditions under which it had to operate. Yet, the very attributes that were basic to any revolutionary underground situation and which were essential to any successful insurgency, namely quick decision-making, clandestine operations, secrecy, rapid execution of orders, and the need for cadres to operate independently at times without prior approval or direct contact, were basically all anti-bureaucratic in nature. The revolutionaries were therefore faced with the problem of how to advance the armed struggle successfully along non-bureaucratic lines, without losing direction and control over it.<sup>(21)</sup> According to Feit, Martin Oppenheimer in his 1969 work "The Urban Guerrilla",<sup>(22)</sup> argued that the constant need for security and anonymity, and the fear of informers, particularly among their own ranks, poisons the atmosphere among the revolutionaries, who can never really fully trust one another. Since the police must be prevented from discovering the whole organisation, a fractionalized form of organisation was all that the revolutionaries can permit themselves. This meant that those who felt comfortable in an atmosphere of this kind are hardly the kind to further a just and humane society. It was to the credit of the members of the African underground that they did not fit into this kind of atmosphere.

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21. Feit, Urban Revolt in South Africa, p. 308.

22. M. Oppenheimer, The Urban Guerrilla, 1969, p. 69 referred to in Feit, Urban Revolt in South Africa, p. 308.



argued Feit, but at the same time it facilitated the ease with which the police managed to penetrate the underground and finally destroy the internal structures of Umkhonto and the ANC. (23)

Thus, although bureaucratization was important to the underground leadership it was counter-productive to an underground revolutionary situation. The result was that cadres, where possible, seek to escape bureaucratic controls and conduct operations on their own. Bureaucratic control, while important to the leaders of the underground, can thus be crippling to a revolutionary organisation if it was too strictly or dogmatically applied. Yet at the same time if it was too loosely applied and cadres were allowed too much freedom of movement and decision-making, it could lead to a direct decline in security and control which, in turn, would eventually lead to the destruction of the underground as actually took place with Umkhonto in the mid-1960's. After all, to penetrate even the most bureaucratic of underground organisations such as the SACP was always possible as Gerhard Ludi had shown in the 1960's and others since then. The reason for this was that bureaucratic structures such as the SACP, ANC and Umkhonto were normally founded on predictable actions which, like any bureaucracy, were counter-productive to a successful insurgency. According to Feit, the effectiveness of a revolutionary organisation and thus an insurgency, depends not so much on its complexity, which often exists on paper only, but on its ability to strike unanticipated blows at the enemy. These blows or acts must either cause great damage or if the damage was small, have great symbolic value. What is more, the action must be of such a nature that it will gain additional support for the revolutionary organisation and its ideals. (24)

Feit also stresses the fact that besides a natural desire of the underground leadership to retain authority by making it routine, the bureaucratic tendency can also be ascribed to a particular view that

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23. Feit, Urban Revolt in South Africa, p. 308.

24. Feit, Urban Revolt in South Africa, pp. 309 - 310.



a leadership has of the future. A leadership whose views of the future were based largely on abstract principles would be more likely to adopt bureaucratic forms. In Natal, for instance, where the ANC was clearly committed to the old bureaucratic forms from the pre-1960 period and the idea of a multi-racial society obtained through non-violent means, the local leadership was reluctant to take steps towards a policy of open violence that might endanger their future dream of a non-apartheid multi-racial society. According to Feit:

The ANC had to think of the next step but one; the government of the next step only.<sup>(25)</sup> This had, perhaps, influenced the ANC and its emphasis on non-violent campaigns, its reluctance to turn violence, and its insistence that violence, when employed, was not to endanger life. The hotheads who were to realize the insurrectionary acts were not necessarily imbued with the same goals. Hence bureaucratic command and structures tended to break apart.<sup>(26)</sup>

But even more important, argued Feit, was that revolutionary action was normally undertaken by a small minority that had limited resources and was in fact, waging a poor man's war. Although substantial sums of money were allegedly channelled into the ANC and Umkhonto by the SACP after 1961, these funds were not unlimited nor could they even remotely match the financial muscle of the State. Moreover, despite the financial resources available to the underground and despite the exploits of its cadres and however great their courage and ingenuity, the odds were overwhelmingly against them of being wiped out in the long run; unless political, economic and diplomatic circumstances enable them to attract world opinion and support for their cause. Over the years since the beginning of the armed struggle the ANC and Umkhonto has used every opportunity to inform the world at large that the armed struggle in South Africa was forced on them by the South African government's inflexible attitude and that as such their struggle was a legitimate war against oppression and racial discrimination. Armed struggle was adopted because it was

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25. Feit, Urban Revolt in South Africa, pp. 310 - 311.

26. Feit, Urban Revolt in South Africa, p. 311.



the only alternative left open to them. Yet it was, as Feit pointed out, an attempt to reauthorize the ANC and with it the SACP. By 1960, the authority of the ANC had been severely deflated as one non-violent campaign after another failed to produce any meaningful change to the likes of those on whose behalf the ANC professed to wage its campaigns. In fact, exactly the opposite took place. Instead of elevating oppressive laws, the campaign waged by the ANC with the help of the SACP led to their intensification, and the closing of whatever political avenues were still open to Africans. "By turning to violence," wrote Feit, "the leaders of the ANC may have hoped to re-establish the ANC as the leading African political organisation in response to the challenge of the Pan Africanist Congress [PAC] and its military wing Poqo. This did not happen. The ANC failed in its campaign of militancy."<sup>(27)</sup>

But there were other more obvious factors, according to Feit, that undoubtedly had an influence on the failure of the insurrectionary movement in the early 1960's. The first and most important of these was the apparent reluctance that existed among the revolutionaries, even after the decision was taken to adopt armed struggle and Umkhonto was formed, to engage in civil war. Mandela, according to Feit, made it quite clear at the Rivonia trial in 1963 that the ANC and Umkhonto's leadership viewed the situation developing in South Africa with alarm, and that they were fully aware of the fact that civil war could mean the destruction of what the ANC stood for. Moreover, with civil war it would be more difficult than ever to bring about racial peace and harmony in South Africa.<sup>(28)</sup> In addition, the ANC, according to Feit, did not really do very much to deauthorize the White group, to challenge their authority and to tear it down. The ANC was apparently against such a policy and the type of action that went with it; and given the organisation's partnership with the SACP, this was fully understandable. Less understandable, however, was the revolutionary movement's continuous appeal to

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27. Feit, Urban Revolt in South Africa, pp. 311 - 312.  
28. Feit, Urban Revolt in South Africa, p. 312.



the South African government as the source of authority to grant them their wishes. It was the government to whom they looked for concessions and cessions of rights such as the calling of a national convention. Undoubtedly by recognising the South African government, the same authority against whom they were about to wage an armed struggle, was to reduce the stature and importance of their demands and with it the significance of the armed struggle.<sup>(29)</sup>

But fear of violence may also have had other roots, argued Feit.<sup>(30)</sup> Considering the nature of the armed struggle and the attacks conducted between 1961 and 1964; as well as the fact that the revolutionaries were in no position, financially or militarily, to wage a guerrilla war against the South African government, one is left with the question as to what the real aim of the armed struggle was. Was it meant to frighten the government into changing its policies in favour of the revolutionaries, or was it intended to overthrow the status quo? The ANC-SACP alliance probably aimed to do both, namely to frighten the White electorate into putting pressure on the government to change its policies, and hopefully through such action to bring about the collapse of the status quo in the country. Unfortunately for the alliance, exactly the opposite took place. The White electorate closed ranks behind the National Party who promised to root out the "enemy" through whatever means available to it. The outcome of this was that the government, in other words the status quo, tightened up its security legislation and put into motion a campaign of counter-insurgency and anti-communist action that all but destroyed the underground by the middle of the 1960's.

Another explanation advanced by Feit for the ANC and Umkhonto having failed to achieve their goals in 1964 was the fact that the SACP, which played a vital role in the revolutionary movement and which was closely involved with Umkhonto and the armed struggle, was run mainly by Whites, who, he alleges, despite their superior organisational and financial, if not social positions, made one error after another -

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29. Feit, Urban Revolt in South Africa, p. 312.

30. Feit, Urban Revolt in South Africa, p. 313. See also Barrell, MK, pp. 6 - 7, and Dawn, Souvenir Issue, p. 24.

many quite foolish and obvious.<sup>(31)</sup> He added that while on the one hand, these White communists were dedicated revolutionaries committed to the SACP and its ideals of an egalitarian society, they were also White, and doubtless felt a strong and unconscious identification with their own people. "The clash of loyalties and beliefs could be reconciled by acting out the roles of fighters for African liberation, while seeing to it that this struggle always came to naught." Although such a view, as Feit pointed out, was largely theoretical it was certainly not without some merit.<sup>(32)</sup>

Returning to the ruling group and the manner in which they perceived the threat against them, Feit argued that the effect of the 1960's insurgency as represented by the ANC-SACP alliance and Umkhonto was to cement the otherwise divided elements of White society. A view of how Whites perceived the threat against them, was revealed during a survey conducted by the Natal Mercury in 1969.<sup>(33)</sup> Of the sample group questioned about 60 percent said that they saw terrorism as a "real threat" while some 30 percent saw terrorism as "some threat"; only 6 percent felt that terrorism presented no threat at all.

The question that remains to be answered is why Umkhonto and the ANC (and the SACP) had so little success in mobilizing support for their activities among the African masses, at a time when the ANC felt it necessary to meet apartheid and racial discrimination with a campaign of revolutionary violence. In answer to this, Feit argued that although there was a growing number of permanent African town dwellers in South Africa, much of the African population in the urban areas was migrant labour. As such many Africans were only partially men of the cities and towns; this was true even in cases where no permanent return to the countryside was foreseen. This attitude has of course been encouraged by the government, through its policy of segregation and by the traditional African authority whose interest

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31. Feit, Urban Revolt in South Africa, p. 313. See also Dawn, Souvenir Issue, pp. 24 - 25.
  32. Feit, Urban Revolt in South Africa, pp. 314 - 315.
  33. The Natal Mercury (Durban), 1969.01.27. Feit, Urban Revolt in South Africa, p. 317.



it served. (34)

Peasants formed the bulk of the African population in South Africa and were fundamentally conservative and even reactionary. They tended to see their society as being of one fabric of which no part can be changed without affecting or changing it all. They were naturally distrustful of reformers and suspicious of those who promised them amelioration. As a result, revolutions, it has been argued, were quite difficult to forment in South Africa (or elsewhere in Africa) despite the manifest and real grievances of most Africans. According to Feit "the stability of South African society and the slow change for the better in economic terms, even for Africans, have reinforced this conservatism, as has the power of the police." (35)

To the conservative nature of the peasant masses must be added the difficulty of the sabotage group to cause major damage to the state with the limited number of saboteurs and arms available to it. While it is so that the tactics and skills of the saboteurs or attack group developed and their attacks became more sophisticated and damaging as the struggle progressed, the ability of the state to meet the onslaught against it did not remain stagnant but effectively kept pace and sometimes even outsmarted the actions of the "enemy". In an industrialized society such as existed in South Africa in the 1960's, minor and sometimes even not so minor damage caused by sabotage could be easily absorbed, as long as the government could limit the frequency with which it took place. Thus, as the South African government through the various means and methods available to it, managed to increase its surveillance and to counter the activities of the revolutionaries, so the latter had to step up its activities and operational capability not only to keep pace with developments, but more so to maintain its status. This meant that a reasonably normal and stable order will have to be significantly disrupted before the masses, particularly the oppressed masses, will feel deprived and threatened enough to engage in collective mass behaviour such as that

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34. Feit, Urban Revolt in South Africa, p. 318.

35. Feit, Urban Revolt in South Africa, p. 318.





hoped for by the ANC in its alliance with the SACP after 1961. Such a development, according to Feit, was not evident in South Africa in the 1960's. (36)

If one adds to this the ability of the South African government to maintain relative order and security, despite its unpopularity with the Black masses of South Africa, and the extensive system of informers and agents that served the needs of the security establishment, as well as the fact that it had been gathering information on people and organisations since the 1922 mine workers strike in which the SACP played a prominent role, it is not so difficult to understand why the ANC-SACP alliance failed to achieve their aims and objectives in 1963, and why virtually the entire revolutionary underground movement inside South Africa was destroyed by the state by the middle of the 1960's.

One further and final aspect which also played a significant role in the eventual destruction of the underground in the 1960's and which has been highlighted by Feit in his analyses, was the fact that the ANC, the SACP and Umkhonto were so closely interwoven by 1963 that when the police infiltrated the one they automatically gained access to the other. This factor played an important role in the destruction of the internal ANC, the SACP and Umkhonto by 1965. (37)

Most of the theories and factors advanced by Feit in 1971 as having contributed or appeared to have contributed to the collapse of the insurrectionary movement in the mid-1960's were as appropriate to the armed struggle during the 1980's as it was then. In fact, the same problems that faced the ANC-SACP alliance and Umkhonto in the 1960's were still part of the ANC's problems two decades later. If the South African government was considered powerful and difficult to subject in the 1960's, it had become even more so by the end of the 1980's, despite the unrest of the mid-1970's and that which followed in the mid-1980's. Throughout the years since the Sharpeville riots

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36. Feit, Urban Revolt in South Africa, p. 318.

37. Feit, Urban Revolt in South Africa, pp. 322 - 324.



the South African government had shown itself quite capable of maintaining the status quo and to meet whatever new challenge the ANC-SACP alliance could bring against it. Even the sanctions campaign that the ANC so effectively launched against South Africa in the 1980's was weathered relatively successfully by the State despite the many problems and hardships that resulted from it.

A second view as to the possible factors and conditions that inhibited the armed struggle in South Africa during the 1960's and which has many points in common with the views of Edward Feit, is that of J.B. Bell,<sup>(38)</sup> who produced a number of works in the early 1970's on revolutionary development and guerrilla warfare around the world. Two of these works that are of particular importance here are The Myth of the Guerrilla: Revolutionary Theory and Malpractice, published in 1971, and a nine page article on the same subject published in Africa Today in 1972 entitled, "The Future of Guerrilla Revolution in Southern Africa". In his review of the armed struggle in Southern Africa, including that waged by the ANC and Umkhonto, Bell argued that while most guerrilla or revolutionary leaders were not fools or knaves, their

persistance in a course evidently doomed to failure or at least a too long, perhaps indefinite, protracted action cannot be fully analysed in orthodox political or military terms. The whole complex of illusions, assumptions, and misinterpretation, wrapped in the seamless garment of theory, have become articles of faith. In recent years many men, in many places, outwardly sane, sensible, sound, hard-minded, and dedicated to victory have accepted this particular course, inexplicable in logic but highly satisfactory for the troubled and desperate. For them, the new myth [that of guerrilla revolution] ... must fulfill a need beyond the orthodox tactics and strategy of revolution. That to the blind or

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38. J.B. Bell is the author of the following publications: The Secret Army: The IRA, 1916 - 1970, (1971); The Myth of the Guerrilla: Revolutionary Theory and Malpractice, (1971); The Long War: Israel and the Arabs since 1946, (1969); The Future of Guerrilla Revolution in Southern Africa, (Africa Today 19, Winter 1972).



the uninitiated, the coldly pragmatic and the purely rational such a faith is based at worst on tenuous illusions and at best on optimism is immaterial to the believer. For him the myth has a comforting reality, fulfills a need in a world which denies his dearest hopes. What to others are illusions are varieties without which life to him would be a continual humiliation and despair. Within the context of the faith, the Myth cannot be seriously questioned, the need it fills is too great to accept alien analysis.<sup>(39)</sup>

This myth, argued Bell, was based upon the belief or understanding that justice will ultimately triumph if the cause was right, and just. Thus, in terms of this belief, time was inevitably on the side of the just, and what was not achieved today will be achieved tomorrow. In other words, the armed struggle was a protracted one which in the long run will pay off dividends in favour of the revolutionaries. Closely associated with this part of the guerrilla myth was the fact that the enemy or the status quo was seen as a paper tiger, outwardly awesome, but inwardly weak and rent with dissention and contradiction. Thus, in time, victory will be the reward of the just. The exploiter must collapse, since guerrilla revolutions are inevitably successful. So goes the myth of the guerrilla and the revolutionary. Yet in South Africa the opposite took place between 1961 and 1988 with the capacity of the guerrilla to secure victory remaining visibly limited.<sup>(40)</sup>

This brings into focus the strategic position and role of the masses, for the success of a revolutionary course was not the result of its own efforts but the degree of support it receives from the people, - the masses. The masses and their numbers were thus vital to any revolutionary development. "We are many and they are few," accurately summed up the position of the guerrilla/revolutionary in the armed struggle. Yet, according to Bell this was an illusion: masses were much of the time merely mouths to feed. As such they were not an asset but a responsibility. Until such time that they can be manipu-

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39. Bell, The Myth of the Guerrilla, p. 245.

40. Bell, The Myth of the Guerrilla, pp. 246 - 249.



lated into reaching the sort of flashpoint that can start a revolution, the masses are probably the least revolutionary of the whole social strata in a particular society. Much of the time, they were mere collections of people busy with the minutiae of their overpowering important daily lives - which was mainly one of economic survival. People, argued Bell, have a reluctance to sacrifice their lives for a distant grail, a distaste for a duty seldom properly understood, and they rarely live a life so intolerable that death was preferable.<sup>(41)</sup> To provide the masses with an adequate reason for revolutionary action, that is to persuade them to take up arms and to overthrow the existing order - something they have been fearful of up to that point - and to transform fear into an instrument of revolutionary action, has proven an awesome task throughout the course of human history, not only in Africa but also outside the continent. It can thus be argued that the odds against the revolutionary were daunting and inhibiting at virtually every step of the struggle. However, this does not mean that the masses cannot be sufficiently primed to acquire a revolutionary character. On the contrary, revolutions around the world have proven that it can be done - but that it was not an easy task, even under the most despotic and repressive of regimes. Most of the wretched of the earth, argued Bell, - the humiliated and the desperate - do not in fact seek recourse by revolutionary means. Most remain engrossed in their daily struggle for existence, in the frugal comforts of their home and family and in their own narrow but supremely important lives. They may well draw some small comfort, a measure of pride from the actions of the men in the hills, wrote Bell, but many still do not choose to abandon their own well-trodden path. On the other hand, there were those who simply cannot sit back and accept a quiet life. The will to fight humiliation, poverty, oppression and misery in general was too strong. Love of glory, hope of power and excess of pride, unexploited talents, ambition, a deep psychological drive, fate or a religious zeal all may be part of the driving force that made the revolutionary what he is. Yet such driving forces were not a general phenomenon, but were part and parcel of a highly individua-

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41. Bell, The Myth of the Guerrilla, p. 249.



listic type of character. Revolutionaries, argued Bell, often perceive the world through a peculiar form of tunnel vision, blocking out all but two alternatives - liberty or death.<sup>(42)</sup>

In elaborating on his theory of the myth of the guerrilla revolution, and its specific role in Southern Africa, Bell further argued that nowhere has the myth been more attractive than in Southern Africa, for here it embodies the aspirations of Black nationalism, and raised the hope that the poor and humiliated, by taking up arms against the established power, may free themselves from their racist oppressors and the scars of colonialism.<sup>(43)</sup>

The power of the myth, Bell argued, has been such that it has inspired at times a most attenuated form of revolutionary strategy where all that needs to be done, was to ignore the disheartening odds and begin the struggle. But, said Bell, there were really no defeats for the strategy of guerrilla revolution in terms of the myth; there were only delays. The reality of the situation was however somewhat different from that of the myth. To begin with, the revolutionaries must have a cause sufficiently attractive to persuade men to risk their lives, but more important, that cause must truly have some possibility of success. As Feit has pointed out, many Blacks were prepared to be members of the ANC while the organisation was legal and the punishment of belonging to the organisation was not too severe. But the minute the ANC was forced underground and Umkhonto was set up in 1961, many - if not the majority - of the ANC members who joined the organisation in the pre-1960 period, chose to terminate or abandon their membership due to the dangers involved. Like Feit, Bell argued that by 1962 very few in the ANC were indeed prepared to make blood sacrifices solely in the name of justice.

It would thus appear, according to Bell, that while it may be easy to start a revolutionary insurrection and pursue it in an unjust society

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42. Bell, The Myth of the Guerrilla, p. 251.

43. J.B. Bell, The Future of Guerrilla Revolution in Southern Africa, (Africa Today 19, 1972, p. 7).

filled with highly frustrated men, and while such action might be highly satisfying to the revolutionaries and their leaders, such strategies very seldom lead to victory, nor was it everywhere relevant.<sup>(44)</sup>

There were two basic reasons for this. First, as a strategy, it has little appeal to those in a society sufficiently pliable to accommodate change through democratic means. Secondly, insurrection was not a viable option or alternative in a modern authoritarian state, which was able to make use of whatever weapons of oppression it may need to meet the challenge facing it.<sup>(45)</sup> In this, Bell's thinking was very similar to that of Feit who argued that in its attempt to maintain White unity and White minority rule in South Africa, the government effectively suppressed the insurgency and whatever revolutionary development that was in the offing; thereby systematically turning South Africa into a modern police state.<sup>(46)</sup> Moving away from Feit, Bell argued that two of the main reasons why revolutionary guerrilla warfare has largely failed in Africa, but particularly in South Africa, was that the revolutionary leadership had grossly misread their opponents, while at the same time overestimating their own importance and abilities.<sup>(47)</sup> According to Bell the first had proven to be a crucial factor in Africa's revolutionary development. The winds of change that were blowing throughout the African continent by the beginning of the 1960's and which were heralded in by Ghana's independence in 1957, were highly encouraging to the nationalist leaders of the ANC and the SACP in South Africa.

Similarly, in 1962, after years of bloody guerrilla warfare, the

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44. Bell, The Future of Guerrilla Revolution, (Africa Today 19, 1972, p. 8).
  45. Bell, The Future of Guerrilla Revolution, (Africa Today 19, 1972, p. 8).
  46. Feit, Urban Revolt in South Africa, p. 324; Bell, The Future of Guerrilla Revolution, (Africa Today 19, 1972, pp. 8, 10).
  47. Bell, The Future of Guerrilla Revolution, (Africa Today 19, 1972, pp. 8, 10).



Algerian nationalists had gained their country's independence from France, while in the Congo, the Belgians cracked at the first serious pressure. This created the unavoidable impression that the colonial powers in Africa were little more than paper tigers who lacked both stamina and conviction. In view of this it was reasonable for the revolutionary leadership in South Africa to anticipate that in time the colonial power of the Portuguese in Angola and Mozambique, and White minority rule in Rhodesia and South Africa, would also come tumbling down. They were right in their predictions about developments in the Portuguese colonies of Angola and Mozambique, but were altogether wrong about South Africa; which unlike the former, was not a colonial power - even of the special kind as defined by the SACP in 1962. In terms of international law South Africa, in spite of its political philosophy, has been an independent sovereign state since 1910 and the country and its government has been recognised by the international community as such, despite the fact that many did not agree with the country's racial policies. South Africa has therefore never been a paper tiger that would collapse under or feel threatened by an insurrection of the type launched by the ANC-SACP alliance in the 1960's. Bell wrote:<sup>(48)</sup>

In South Africa the ANC ... up to 1960 acted as if the Boers were Britons. The Afrikaner was, however, ruthless in the pursuit of his own dream [and] absolutely certain of his destiny. In addition the regime had to hand all the repressive machinery of a vast, wealthy, modern state to achieve that destiny.

Provoked finally to adopt absolute repression, the government in 1960 and 1961 smashed the ANC and PAC beyond salvage. In reaction to this development the ANC in 1961 adopted a policy of violence.

Yet even at this point given the repressive measures used by the government, argued Bell, the sabotage campaign decided upon by the ANC was little more than

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48. Bell, *The Future of Guerrilla Revolution*, (*Africa Today* 19, 1972, p. 10).



an extension of the original error in a different form; for the Afrikaner was not going to disavow his mission when confronted by a few bombs; and the African organisations, small, on the run, harried by the security forces, were incapable of directing a real insurrection. ... the sabotage strategy could neither force change nor convert the regime to the wisdom of concession. (49)

As a result, he pointed out, after 1965 the only option left to the ANC and the SACP was to restructure Umkhonto we Sizwe outside the country and to wage revolutionary guerrilla warfare from exile. Thus, according to Bell, one of the major contributing factors to the failure of the ANC-SACP-led insurrection in the early 1960's has been the fact that the two organisations had grossly misjudged the South African government,

but particularly the Afrikaner's reaction to defiance; a disaster for the organisation, who failed to see that one of the vital preconditions for a guerrilla revolution did not exist in any case. The missing component was a general conviction on the part of the African masses that a victory was possible. The Marxists-Leninists in the movement may have had faith in the nature of history and the dedicated leaders of the defiance campaign faith in their people, but such faith was not returned. The Africans, sullen and humiliated, knew the Boer and his capacity. A resort to boycotts or strikes, massed defiance and monster meetings was possible, if permitted. When it was no longer permitted there was no rush to the streets but rather to sabotage, quiet arson in the night. ... To rise against the Afrikaner was the dream of the few. Those few had to keep silent or go into exile. By the end of the decade, the only action within the republic was a few leaflet bombs - and regular treason trials. Adamant, arrogant without compromise, the Afrikaner has constructed a closed society and an efficient state, invulnerable to guerrilla revolution. (50)

But if the revolutionary leaders in South Africa had underestimated

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49. Bell, The Future of Guerrilla Revolution, (Africa Today 19, 1972, pp. 9 - 10).
50. Bell, The Future of Guerrilla Revolution, (Africa Today 19, 1972, pp. 10 - 12).





the South African government, they had also grossly overestimated their own ability to force the government to mend its ways and to accept a democratic multi-racial South Africa. With several exceptions, most of the new African regimes limited their assistance to rhetoric and promises. A good example of this was the sums of money that was promised to the ANC and Umkhonto by a number of African states in 1962. In his opening address at the trial of Nelson Mandela and other members of the NHC of Umkhonto in 1963, Dr. Percy Yutar stated that

large sums of money, varying from R4 000 to R240 000 were promised, accepted and received from such sympathisers and supporters, not only from within South Africa, but also from sympathisers and supporters in several African states such as Algeria, Ethiopia, Liberia, Nigeria and Tunisia, and also from sympathisers and supporters in other countries.<sup>(51)</sup>

Exactly how much of these promised amounts ever reached the ANC and Umkhonto in the 1960's was never revealed. Indications are that only a very small amount was ever received by the ANC in exile and an even smaller amount by its internal structure and organisation inside South Africa. Most of Africa's newly-independent states were simply too poor to make any major contributions to the ANC and Umkhonto in the early 1960's. As a result much of the money pledged to the latter organisations remained paper pledges.

Bell further argued that while the OAU and the African states' spasmodic contributions of goodwill were sufficient to keep the gears from grinding, allies outside Africa who also contributed to the armed struggle in South Africa, often created more confusion than comfort in their support. More often than not, Bell alleged, the purpose of Soviet support for the armed struggle can be seen as a tactical political manoeuvre to frustrate Chinese ambitions in Africa, while the offers of arms were often made to create a faction

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51. Supreme Court, Transvaal Division, Case 65/64, The State against N. Mandela and others, Opening Address Dr. P. Yutar, p. 17.



and embarrass still another African ally.<sup>(52)</sup> It was common knowledge, he continued, that the PAC was largely a recipient of Chinese arms and financial support whereas the ANC received most of its arms and moral support from the Soviet Union and its allies. On occasion Umkhonto cadres were sent to China for military and political training, yet these were more the exception than the rule. Bell went on to point out that, added to the inherent schismatic inclinations of revolutionary movements, not to mention already divided organisations, the competition, not limited to the Socialist Bloc, caused serious trouble.

In the long run, the aid from outside South Africa probably did more harm than good. At least the support of international opinion, the resolutions at the United Nations, the enthusiasm of the Tri-continental delegates, the structural harm although they may have postponed the realization that the real campaign would be won in the bush  
... (53)

Add to this the tactical errors such as that made by the ANC and Umkhonto cadres in Rhodesia in 1967, the splits and betrayals, not to mention corruption and the other ills that normally accompany an underground struggle, then one has a reasonably accurate picture as to why the armed struggle failed in South Africa. According to Bell:

to enter the struggle over-confident is not a crucial miscalculation, [but] to begin by misreading the opponent and thus the prospect of applying guerrilla revolutionary strategy can be, - particularly as was largely the case, if the guerrilla movement had limitations that no one could see. (54)

A third opinion as to the reasons for the failure of the 1960's insurgency in South Africa was offered by Lewis H. Gann,<sup>(55)</sup> a

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52. Bell, The Future of Guerrilla Revolution, (Africa Today 19, 1972, p.11).
  53. Bell, The Future of Guerrilla Revolution, (Africa Today 19, 1972, pp. 11 - 12).
  54. Bell, The Future of Guerrilla Revolution, (Africa Today 19, 1972, p. 12).
  55. L.H. Gann, No hope for violent liberation, (Africa Report 17, February 1972, pp. 15 - 19).



prominent American scholar of African history. According to Gann, the development of the armed struggle in South Africa in the 1960's shared many of the problems that faced nationalist liberation movements in other parts of Africa. The ANC in South Africa, like the liberation movements in Southern Rhodesia, for instance, was being constantly frustrated by the activities of people who were willing to inform on it, thereby aiding the counter-insurgency operations of the police. It was through the help of such an informer that the police managed to gain access to the combined underground headquarters of the ANC and the SACP in Rivonia in 1963. Without the valuable help of this particular informer it is doubtful whether they would have managed to destroy the underground by the mid-1960's. But more important, argued Gann, was the fact that the armed struggle in the 1960's centred mainly on sabotage which "is subject to extraordinary weaknesses by its very nature." He went on to point out that "The civilian population at large is likely to be alienated by the disruption of essential services. Moreover, hungry and homeless people become more, not less, dependent on government relief."<sup>(56)</sup>

But even more significant, continued Gann, was the fact that while a modern industrial economy can easily be hampered by sabotage, it cannot be put out of action or destroyed by such activity alone.

Another factor, according to Gann, that helped to inhibit guerrilla activity in South Africa in the 1960's and 1970's, was the pass laws. The strict application of these laws prevented underground fighters of the ANC and Umkhonto from moving around the country undetected. Security inside South Africa had always been a major problem for the ANC; partly because of poor discipline and the willingness of some people to inform on the organisation, and partly because of the organisation's preoccupation with publicising its activities.

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56. Gann, No hope for violent liberation, (Africa Report 17, February 1972, p. 15).



Gann stated that:

The liberation groups in southern Africa face a cohesive and self-confident ruling class; the very structure of the southern African ethnic hierarchy stands in the way of successful attempts at infiltrating the army, the administration and the security services. The government is better informed than its opponents, many of whom are now exiles with all the exiles' customary misconceptions about their former homes. Since the South African government is neither inefficient nor corrupt, partisans [here] lack the advantages of guerrillas in so many other parts of the world, where resistance fighters can bribe key officials, place their own men in sensitive positions and extract intelligence from likely or unlikely sources. (57)

But what was more, argued Gann, armed saboteurs were faced with the additional problem of acquiring weapons, which could not easily be purchased in southern Africa. All assault weapons had to be supplied from abroad or by friendly African governments, which, once it became known as a source of supply, ran the risk of retaliatory action from the South African government. Weapons could be brought into the country by two methods - by submarine or by couriers across the border; but both these methods proved problematic over the years due to the vigilance of the South African security establishment. Even if these problems were overcome, there remained the problem of terrain, which in South Africa was not at all suitable for guerrilla warfare. While there are several areas in South Africa which can be considered rough and inhospitable, they did not form contiguous and inaccessible bases, nor were there dense jungles, as was the case in Guinea-Bissau, to provide guerrilla armies with natural cover. Both the rural and urban areas of South Africa were of such a developed nature and the country's communications network so developed, that it was almost impossible for any revolutionary force to assemble a guerrilla army in secret or to train guerrilla cadres for any length of time without eventually attracting attention. There was simply no

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57. Gann, No hope for violent liberation, (Africa Report 17, February 1972, p. 16).



part of South Africa over which the government and the security forces did not have effective control.<sup>(58)</sup> While it is true that sprawling urban complexes such as Soweto near Johannesburg can provide guerrillas with a relative degree of cover for some time, the very nature of these areas, such as their orderly layout and the fact that they can be effectively sealed off in a very short time by the security forces for operational work, make it highly dangerous for any guerrilla or saboteur to remain in them for too long. There was thus none of the hostile terrain or the "urban jungles" that formed such an important part of the liberation forces' cover and strategy in for instance the Algerian liberation struggle in the 1950's.<sup>(59)</sup>

To these unfavourable conditions could also be added the difficulty of moving guerrillas and recruits in and out of the country. With only one or two major access routes, such as that through Swaziland and the other through Botswana, available to the insurgents, and with these routes constantly being watched by the South African security forces, the ANC had great difficulty in bringing trained guerrillas into the country without running into the security forces at some or other stage of the operation. Even with the major influx of recruits after 1976 the ANC was still unable to return large consignments of guerrillas to the country, because the police maintained a tight watch on every possible access route in and out of the country.

In view of these inhibiting factors it had been argued that there was little hope of a revolutionary situation or a full-scale revolutionary guerrilla war developing inside South Africa, despite the optimism of the underground leadership that they could bring this about. As long as the South African government remained in power, argued Gann, had the support of the majority of the White voters in the country and could maintain its security apparatus, the ANC-SACP alliance, with the meagre resources available to them, had little

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58. Gann, No hope for violent liberation, (Africa Report 17, February 1972, p. 16).

59. Gann, No hope for violent liberation, (Africa Report 17, February 1972, pp. 16 - 17).

chance of escalating the armed struggle into a full-scale guerrilla war.

For the ANC and Umkhonto to expand the armed struggle inside South Africa they would have had to rebuild their limited underground structures to the point where they could effectively challenge the existing order. Even more important, they would have had to set up structures that would have been able to effectively parallel the South African government's intelligence network, something Gann believed was beyond the grasp of the ANC-SACP alliance in the 1970's.<sup>(60)</sup>

Gann further argued that the chances for a revolution were always best in a society or environment where the ruling class was divided, dispirited and corrupt. Preferably, it should have become incapable of further developing the country's resources; and the political institutions that sustain the government should have deteriorated to the point where it serves as a brake on economic expansion. Similarly, the coercive machinery of the state, the army, and the police should be easily penetrable by the underground. Better still, argued Gann, the military forces should have suffered crushing defeats in a foreign war, while the opposition should be united and guided by a determined and cohesive party. Unfortunately for the ANC-SACP alliance, none of these conditions were present in South Africa in the 1960's and 1970's. The most radical European dissidents were mainly to be found in the English universities and Churches around the country. "... their professional aspirations and styles of life in themselves prevent them from penetrating the army, the administration and the police," claimed Gann.<sup>(61)</sup>

On the role of riot and strike action as an instrument in the development of a revolutionary situation, Gann argued that the

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60. Gann, No hope for violent liberation, (Africa Report 17, February 1972, p. 17).

61. Gann, No hope for violent liberation, (Africa Report 17, February 1972, p. 17).



success of these tools depends largely on the nature and strength of the socio-political structure against which it takes place as well as the strength of the conscience-vote. If the latter is weak and ill-defined it can inhibit the use of riots as an effective political weapon. In South Africa, argued Gann, the police were not merely permitted, but expected, to use firearms when needed to suppress illegal rioting. In addition, the separation of the White and Black population groups from one another and the fact that Whites were heavily armed - as opposed to Blacks who were mostly unarmed - made it unlikely that even under the most severe conditions a riot or unrest situation could spill into a White urban area. In fact, the outbreak of violence may, as has been the case in the past, strengthen the hands of the government by cementing White unity across class lines while at the same time generating support for its counter-insurgency methods and actions, whatever they may be. According to Gann, commotions confined to African townships were liable to destroy public facilities set aside for the use of Africans; hence violence may have the unanticipated result of opening new rifts within Black society. But perhaps even more important was the fact that despite the roles played by the ANC, the PAC, and the SACP, Blacks in South Africa in general lacked a united leadership. Political fragmentation made it difficult for any revolutionary development to reach maturity. Thus, while there was a good deal of unrest and discontent among South Africa's Black masses in the 1960's and early 1970's, due to factors such as rising inflation, unemployment, rising cost of living and increased crime, particularly in the Black townships, those developments were insufficient to generate the sort of atmosphere that would be conducive to a revolution. Moreover, even if a revolutionary situation could be achieved, the masses had to be armed and organised; something neither the ANC nor the SACP could do in these years. "Militants," wrote Gann,<sup>(62)</sup> "cannot easily get arms, and the masses are unwilling to rise at the sound of the clarion for the price of

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62. Gann, No hope for violent liberation, (Africa Report 17, February 1972, p. 17).



failure is too high and the chance for success too small."<sup>(63)</sup>

While it is true that the rapid industrialization of South Africa in the late 1960's and early 1970's had brought about a greater militancy among Black workers, its effects were not only negative. It also brought some real benefits to Africans in that it provided new labour opportunities as well as new and improved housing to thousands more, even if this was on an inadequate scale. Gann argued:

Moreover, the uneven impact of capitalist development has created vast regional differences, as well as new economic lines. There are cleavages between migrant and established African workers, between employed and unemployed, between those with vested interest in separate development and those without such a stake. The hope of establishing a successful non-European unity movement therefore, seems poor ...<sup>(64)</sup>

Having said this, Gann went on to say that, while these conditions were prevalent in the 1960's and early 1970's, it was not inconceivable that strikes and industrial actions could play an increasingly important role in future South African politics, and that strike action could become more common as the African worker took an increasingly important part in industry and advanced into more skilled positions. But, argued Gann, industrial action cannot easily be turned into an insurrectionary weapon. By the beginning of the 1970's, for instance, South Africa's Black labour force was still politically too isolated, too heterogenous in character and too poorly organised, if not occupationally unstable to stage the type of major strike action that could threaten the status quo in South Africa. An important factor that should be kept in mind when examining industrial action as a political weapon, was the

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63. Gann, No hope for violent liberation, (Africa Report 17, February 1972, p. 18).

64. Gann, No hope for violent liberation, (Africa Report 17, February 1972, p. 18).





availability of a potentially massive labour reservoir just across the country's borders in neighbouring Swaziland, Lesotho, Mozambique and Botswana. Until this potential labour reserve had been "neutralised", the strike organiser's task in South Africa remained a daunting one. Gann argued:

The militant White South African opposition does not know how to appeal to skilled White workers, technicians and foremen, whose cooperation would be essential for successful industrial warfare. Traditionally, the South African [National] Congress and its allies have come mainly from the ranks of professional men and white collar workers, people not particularly well qualified either to run or wreck an industrial power.<sup>(65)</sup>

On the point of possible outside military intervention in South Africa in support of the ANC-SACP-led armed struggle, Gann argued that there was little hope of that ever coming about. In theory, the member countries of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) could muster in terms of sheer numbers a massive military force against South Africa. In practice however, they were too poorly trained, too poorly equipped and too disunited to be of any real threat to South Africa. Although the idea and desire for a Pan-African military force had been repeatedly raised at OAU meetings, most of the organisation's member countries were simply too poor to make any real material and financial contribution to such an African army. What is more, the members of the OAU lacked a common high command, not to mention a common tactical doctrine and a common staff organisation to bring about such an invasion of South Africa. In contrast to this South Africa has a highly mobile, well trained and sophisticated army that could strike with devastating power.<sup>(66)</sup>

A fourth assessment of the armed struggle and the factors inhibiting its development in South Africa that was made in the early 1970's, was that by Sheridan Johns in his "Obstacles to Guerrilla Warfare -

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65. Gann, No hope for violent liberation, (Africa Report 17, February 1972, pp. 18 - 19).

66. Gann, No hope for violent liberation, (Africa Report 17, February 1972, p. 19).



A South African Case Study".<sup>(67)</sup> In reviewing the history of the armed struggle in South Africa and the problems that faced it over the first ten years, Johns, who is an American political scientist, argued that one of the biggest mistakes made by the ANC-SACP leadership, and which has been acknowledged by them, was that they under-estimated the "ruthless determination" of the South African government to crush the underground. Johns argued that it was generally conceded by most, including the ANC, that the cadres of the ANC and Umkhonto were ill-prepared for the situation of illegality it had to face in the 1960's.<sup>(68)</sup> In support of his statement, Johns quoted as follows from a 1972 edition of Sechaba:

Still suffering from the habit of semi-legal days prior to the banning of the movement we have not yet devised a tight conspiratorial method of work which made it extremely difficult for people to know more than they were entitled to. The looseness in the machinery of the organisation made betrayal by the weak and the provocateurs easy. Those who broke down were able to betray many individuals. Notorious traitors emerged who enthusiastically betrayed their former comrades. The most serious blow was the discovery of the headquarters of the High Command of M.K. [Umkhonto] in Rivonia. The enemy was thus able to smash the very heart of the organisation ...<sup>(69)</sup>

Forced to seek a position in exile for the liberation struggle in South Africa, the ANC-SACP alliance and Umkhonto were faced with three major problems, namely environmental, existential and technical.<sup>(70)</sup> With their organisational base destroyed inside South Africa, the ANC's external mission faced distinctive problems in establishing effective bases outside the country. The ability of the organisation to maintain its effectiveness and momentum inside

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67. Johns, Obstacles to Guerrilla Warfare, (The Journal of Modern African Studies 11 (2), 1973, pp. 267 - 303).
  68. Johns, Obstacles to Guerrilla Warfare, (The Journal of Modern African Studies 11 (2), 1973, p. 275).
  69. Sechaba, December 1971 - January 1972, p. 14 as quoted in Johns, Obstacles to Guerrilla Warfare, (The Journal of Modern African Studies 11 (2), 1973, p. 275).
  70. Johns, Obstacles to Guerrilla Warfare, (The Journal of Modern African Studies 11 (2), 1973, p. 275).



South Africa became increasingly difficult with time as its links with South Africa became attenuated, and its leaders and cadres became increasingly preoccupied with the problems of maintaining themselves and their organisation in exile and the changing requirements forced upon them, namely to initiate and direct the armed struggle inside South Africa.<sup>(71)</sup> According to Johns, these conditions were to a large degree responsible for the decline in ANC and Umkhonto activity inside South Africa after 1965. Although the ANC and the armed struggle in South Africa were generally received in a favourable manner by most African nations and leaders there were those who did not appreciate the ANC's close co-operation with the SACP which, they felt, compromised the nationalist credentials of the ANC and its struggle in South Africa. As a result, some African governments, notably among them Ghana, refused to accept non-African military trainees which, of course, affected the composition and position of Umkhonto whose members were predominantly communist. In Ghana, for instance, which served as a magnet for African revolutionaries in the early 1960's, the ANC encountered scepticism and hostility from Nkrumah's government who did not accept the ANC's multi-racial and largely non-Pan African stand. Although the formation of the OAU and its Liberation Committee introduced a new era in African unity and the struggle against racial discrimination in Africa, the ANC was not the only organisation competing for the new organisation's support. As only one of many liberation organisations operating in Southern Africa at the time, the ANC was forced to compete with its rivals for both material and moral support. This had the result, inter alia, that within the larger councils of the OAU, the ANC had to lobby regularly not only to get general resolutions of opposition to apartheid translated into more concrete commitments of support, but also had to ensure that the composition and mandate of the Liberation Committee were congenial to ANC interests.<sup>(72)</sup> But, continued Johns, "perhaps even greater

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71. Johns, *Obstacles to Guerrilla Warfare*, (The Journal of Modern African Studies 11 (2), 1973, p. 275).
72. Johns, *Obstacles to Guerrilla Warfare*, (The Journal of Modern African Studies 11 (2), 1973, p. 277).



efforts have been consumed in direct negotiations with the Liberation Committee regarding the terms of its support and the allocation of funds". Yet despite these efforts the returns have been uneven and mostly disappointing.<sup>(73)</sup>

Johns is thus in general agreement with Bell and Gann that the OAU in terms of financial and material aid, was of little help to the ANC-SACP alliance and Umkhonto in the 1960's and 1970's. The organisation was too bankrupt to give any real financial aid, let alone military support, to the ANC and the SACP in their armed struggle in South Africa. Whatever real support the organisation received from the OAU was mostly of a moral and verbal nature. As a result, the ANC like many other national liberation movements in the 1960's, directly approached a number of African states such as the United Arab Republic, Zambia, Algeria and Tanzania for financial and material (military) aid. Undoubtedly, argued Johns, the establishment and maintenance of close relations with these African states and the setting up of bases in these countries was a time-consuming exercise. It involved lengthy negotiations with the governments in question in order to determine and define the terms under which the ANC and Umkhonto could import arms, train its cadres, conduct military exercises and organise its resources for the resumption of the armed struggle in South Africa. Thus, Johns continued, the necessities of infra-African diplomacy placed great demands upon ANC personnel and resources.<sup>(74)</sup>

Another factor, according to Johns, that inhibited the ANC from resuming the armed struggle in South Africa in the late 1960's, was the organisation's close relationship with the underground SACP and the communist world in general. Although the ANC's close relationship with the SACP, on the one hand, enabled it to gain access to communist arms and other forms of military aid for Umkhonto that would otherwise not have been as readily available to it, its association with the SACP and communism has also embroiled it in the

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73. Johns, *Obstacles to Guerrilla Warfare*, (The Journal of Modern African Studies 11 (2), 1973, pp. 278 - 279).
74. Johns, *Obstacles to Guerrilla Warfare*, (The Journal of Modern African Studies 11 (2), 1973, pp. 278 - 279).



dispute between the Soviet Union and China since the 1960's. Johns alleged that while the expanding links with the Soviet Union and its Eastern European supporters sustained a flow of vital material support from the most affluent section of the communist Bloc, it had also provoked some serious contention within the ranks of the ANC itself. It provided an easy target for those within the ANC and Umkhonto who disagreed with the role of the communists in the liberation movement. (75)

A further factor that helped to retard the armed struggle in the early 1960's was the fact that while the ANC and Umkhonto found increasing support for the armed struggle among groups and individuals both inside and outside South Africa, the rising chorus of world-wide condemnation of South Africa's apartheid policies did not always translate itself into appreciable pressure upon the country's major economic partners, nor did it move the western powers, who "continued to maintain correct relations with a regime whose racial policies they professed to abhor. Although the ANC could demonstrate that it had supporters and sympathisers throughout the world, it could find little evidence that their moral stance against apartheid had moved South Africa's rulers," argued Johns. (76)

Johns further claimed that:

While the difficulties of coping with an unfamiliar external environment, and generating effective pressure upon Pretoria, brought uneven success, the problems of maintaining cohesion in exile and organising for a return to salient activity within South Africa proved far more intractable. The ANC (and its rivals) face a determined foe which commands the most powerful state apparatus and the strongest and most sophisticated economy on the African continent. Its determination is immeasurably stiffened by

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75. Johns, Obstacles to Guerrilla Warfare, (The Journal of Modern African Studies 11 (2), 1973, p. 279).
76. Johns, Obstacles to Guerrilla Warfare, (The Journal of Modern African Studies 11 (2), 1973, p. 279).

the fact that for the majority of White South Africans there is no "mother country" to which they could flee; the southern tip of Africa is their only home.<sup>(77)</sup>

Moreover, these disadvantages which have always confronted African opposition in South Africa, have been compounded by the distinctive features of the ANC's exile existence. According to Johns, perhaps one of the most inhibiting factors influencing the armed struggle in South Africa in the early 1970's was the fact that, unlike all other southern African liberation movements at the time, the ANC had no convenient potential sanctuary in a friendly independent state contiguous to South Africa. An equally serious blow to the ANC's ability to resume the armed struggle in South Africa was the rapid disintegration by 1969 of its ZAPU ally. Consequently, argued Johns, with the final collapse of ZAPU in early 1970, the ANC quietly dropped its insistence on the correctness and necessity of the ANC-ZAPU alliance, and shifted its attention to other means for the return of Umkhonto's cadres to South Africa. In addition, the combined ANC-ZAPU incursions into Rhodesia between 1967 and 1968 had also revealed that without internal organisation, mass mobilisation and mass support, armed activity becomes strangulated.<sup>(78)</sup>

Thus, according to Johns, the problems that confronted the ANC-SACP alliance in the 1970's were not the mobilisation of support from outside South Africa, but the establishment of an effective base inside the country. Johns wrote:

Although the accelerated implementation of apartheid has brought new misery to thousands of non-Whites, ... among the urban African population there is little evidence that any ANC underground organisation has been able to capitalise upon these events to organise protests against government actions.

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77. Johns, Obstacles to Guerrilla Warfare, (The Journal of Modern African Studies 11 (2), 1973, p. 279).
78. Johns, Obstacles to Guerrilla Warfare, (The Journal of Modern African Studies 11 (2), 1973, pp. 290 - 291). See also The African Communist 47, Fourth Quarter, 1971, p. 30.



This inability of the ANC to take full advantage of the changed circumstances within South Africa, he pointed out, was implicitly recognised by the organisation's exile leaders in Lusaka, who were becoming increasingly concerned that despite the growing discontent and protest inside South Africa, the organisation was being isolated from these developments.<sup>(79)</sup> The ANC leadership was particularly concerned at being isolated from the new voices of protest in the country such as that of the student-led Black Consciousness Movement (BCM). Johns argued:

In response to events within South Africa, the ANC has sought to link itself with the signs of new Black assertiveness lest the direction of protest slip further away from its hands. In a spate of recent analyses on the difficulties and prospects of guerrilla warfare, he pointed out, there is virtually unanimous agreement that earlier efforts to mount an armed struggle in South Africa were doomed to failure, and that future efforts have little chance of success in the short, if not in the long, run.<sup>(80)</sup>

The reasons for this state of affairs were numerous. According to Felt, whose observations were the first to be examined in this chapter, factors ranging from the ideological to organisational, to poor security and leadership contributed to the failure of the 1960's insurgency in South Africa. Among these Felt however singled out the organisational weakness of the ANC-SACP alliance, and the organisational strength of the South African government, to be the main factors inhibiting the success of the 1961 insurgency. He also pointed out that the ANC's organisational weakness was compounded by the degree of overlapping that had come to exist between the ANC, the SACP and Umkhonto. As a result of the close relationship between the three organisations the police only had to infiltrate one to get to the leaders of the other, which was exactly what happened between 1961 and 1965 and which led to the demise of the underground movement

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79. Johns, Obstacles to Guerrilla Warfare, (The Journal of Modern African Studies 11 (2), 1973, pp. 293 - 294).
80. Johns, Obstacles to Guerrilla Warfare, (The Journal of Modern African Studies 11 (2), 1973, pp. 294 - 295).



inside South Africa. In such a set-up the protection offered by a cell-based organisational structure was simply not enough, something the ANC-SACP alliance found out to their disadvantage in 1963.

Bell and Gann on the other hand, found the most salient shortcomings or problems facing the revolutionary struggle in South Africa, to be the absence of the very special conditions in which armed revolution had succeeded elsewhere, and the myth and miscalculations that often accompany revolutionary theory and struggle. According to Bell, the ANC-SACP alliance had misled themselves by over-estimating their own strength and under-estimating the power and determination of the South African government. Both Bell and Gann thus agreed that until such time that conditions changed in favour of the revolutionary leaders, there was little hope of successful armed struggle in South Africa.

Johns on the contrary, argued that perhaps the biggest obstacle to revolutionary armed struggle in South Africa, had been the destruction of the internal underground in 1963 and the fact that the ANC-SACP alliance had to conduct their operation from exile. The latter point in particular and the many problems that the organisation experienced in establishing itself in exile, not to mention the fact that it had to compete with other liberation organisations for financial and material support, made it difficult for the ANC and Umkhonto to resume the armed struggle in South Africa between 1965 and 1976.

Thus, although the four analyses examined so far differed in their assessment of the factors that most inhibited the armed struggle in South Africa, they did agree that the overwhelming political, economic and military might of the South African government, its extensive legal and security machinery, and the support it received for its actions and policies from the White voters had been crucial factors in the State's ability to deal with the insurgency action against it. They were also in broad agreement on the material weakness of the ANC-SACP alliance; its lack of effective organisation; its underestimation of the determination and ability





of the South African government and the White population in general, to resist its policies, as well as the imperfect cohesion in the ranks of the liberation movement itself as factors inhibiting the armed struggle in South Africa. They also agreed that the configuration of power in the international arena was in favour of the South African government despite its apartheid policies and that this position was unlikely to shift.<sup>(81)</sup>

Although the views and opinions expressed so far are significant in that they help to explain why the armed struggle failed in the 1960's and why the ANC-SACP alliance was unable to resume the initiative inside South Africa in the early 1970's, they were however largely the views of people outside the liberation movement. This leaves the views of people who were actively involved in the armed struggle to be examined.

Benjamin Turok, who was National Secretary of the Congress of Democrats (COD) in the 1950's and an active member of the underground and Umkhonto until he was arrested and sentenced in 1962, produced a booklet in 1974, entitled, Strategic Problems in South Africa's Liberation Struggle<sup>(82)</sup> in which he examined the non-violent mass action of the 1950's; the transfer to violence which led to the formation of Umkhonto and the beginning of the armed struggle in 1961, and some of the major factors that in his opinion, inhibited the development of the armed struggle from a campaign of sabotage to a full-scale revolutionary struggle. Turok came to the conclusion that while there could be little doubt that the non-violent campaigns of the 1950's politicised large numbers of oppressed people, particularly those in the urban areas, and increased support for the ANC and the Congress Alliance, the end of the decade saw a definite decline in mass support for the ANC's non-violent campaigns. This was particularly noticeable after the organisation's banning in 1960. The effect of this, he argued, was that the ANC in its drift towards a

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81. Johns, Obstacles to Guerrilla Warfare, (The Journal of Modern African Studies 11 (2), 1973, p. 295).

82. B. Turok, Strategic Problems in South Africa's Liberation Struggle: A Critical Analysis, pp. 1 - 58.



policy of armed struggle and an underground existence, became isolated from the mainstream of Black political thinking. As a result, the sabotage campaign, while welcomed by many Blacks, failed to mobilize or politicise the masses, who were in the main caught by surprise. Turok wrote:

The Black population welcomed the actions but showed little willingness to undertake similar acts spontaneously when called on to do so. This is hard to explain but it may be that the techniques used were too strange and difficult. But it is also likely that they had not been shown how isolated acts of sabotage were relevant to bringing about the downfall of the government. Sabotage remained the weapon of an elite corps in the liberation movement. As a consequence, sabotage had the effect of isolating the organized movement from the mass who felt unable to join in this new phase or even to defend the actionists when they were seized.<sup>(83)</sup>

Turok further pointed out that the liberation movement was completely unprepared to undertake a campaign of armed struggle in 1961. He wrote:

Having talked of fascism for a decade and more, the movement was nevertheless surprised when the police behaved like fascists. ...Looked at as a single phase of the struggle it must be said that the sabotage campaign was abortive. While most members of the liberation movement would agree that the turn to violence was necessary and historically correct, the actual form of the campaign led down the road to disaster.... It has been claimed that sabotage lifted the psychological shackles of legalism and of respect for White authority and that if the movement had not taken these steps it would not have survived politically [yet] in later years explanations for the setbacks suffered included 'mistakes or insufficient vigilance and inadequate organisation' and 'security lapses'.<sup>(84)</sup>

Finally, Turok pointed out, what is important is that the sabotage campaign failed on the main count, in that it did not raise the level

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83. Turok, Strategic Problems, pp. 36, 45.

84. Turok, Strategic Problems, p. 45.

of action of the masses themselves. Thus, although it seemed that the masses supported and welcomed the resort to violence, they could find no way of joining in and of expressing their support. They were, Turok pointed out, "left on the threshold, frustrated bystanders of a battle being waged on their behalf".<sup>(85)</sup>

Like Bell and Gann in their analyses, Turok also argued that the ANC and the SACP totally underestimated the ability and will of the South African government to resist an insurrectionary development and to mount the necessary measures to defeat it. The important lesson here, argued Turok, was that there can be no move towards armed struggle until such time that a proper line of defence and retreat had been prepared. The line of defence, Turok pointed out, laid in organisational arrangements which ensure that a leak to the police does not lead to the destruction of the organisation. The line of retreat on the other hand refers to the establishment of an adequate underground network of hiding places and routes for flight over nearby borders. "It has become all too clear that without sound organisation at home no developments abroad can really expect to lead to success, not least because of the absence of a friendly border."<sup>(86)</sup>

To this can be added the absence of suitable terrain inside South Africa for guerrilla warfare as well as the non-availability of friendly neighbouring countries from which insurgents could operate without much interruption. Unfortunately for the ANC and the SACP, Turok argued, South Africa was geographically and politically isolated from friendly, pro-ANC African countries to the north by the buffer territories of Swaziland, Lesotho, Botswana, Angola, Mozambique, South West Africa and Rhodesia. Although most of these latter countries, with perhaps the exception of South West Africa, would have liked to provide the ANC and Umkhonto with base facilities and have on occasion done so before 1975, they were generally too

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85. Turok, Strategic Problems, pp. 45 - 46.

86. Turok, Strategic Problems, p. 49.



dependent on South Africa for their economic survival to make this official policy.<sup>(87)</sup>

South Africa had sufficient military power to launch cross-border strikes at ANC and Umkhonto bases whenever it wanted and this served as a strong deterrent, particularly to the governments of Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland to officially deny the ANC bases in these countries. Turok made it clear that to start armed conflict without the availability of nearby and friendly borders and safe supply routes, not to mention the ability to receive an uninterrupted supply of new recruits all the time, was to court almost certain disaster. One had only to consider the importance of the North for South Vietnam, of China and the USSR for North Korea in the Korean War, of Tanzania and Zambia for Frelimo and the MPLA, of Guinea for PAIGC, of Tunisia for Algeria, he pointed out, to realise that this was a crucial factor in the conduct of any protracted armed struggle.<sup>(88)</sup> The essential requirements for a protracted guerrilla action were and would always be sufficient local support, space for mobility, across the border sanctuaries and relatively safe supply lines for both men and materials. It has often been said, Turok pointed out, that Southern Africa was a single theater of struggle, with the successes of the armed struggle in the countries to the north, but more specifically in the neighbouring states of Angola, Mozambique and Rhodesia, serving as an important psychological incentive, yet ... "no movement can predicate the stepping up of its struggle at home on successes elsewhere, particularly when these struggles are themselves likely to develop slowly and distances to the south are great."<sup>(89)</sup>

Turok also had some criticisms to level at the ANC leadership in exile. He pointed out that although a great deal of propaganda work was done by the Mission in Exile during the 1960's, the feeling was that this was done at the cost of the armed struggle back home. There was always the danger, he argued, that in the hustle of

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87. Turok, Strategic Problems, pp. 49 - 50.  
88. Turok, Strategic Problems, p. 50.  
89. Turok, Strategic Problems, p. 51.

international activity and lobbying, leaders far removed from home might become isolated from events back home. In the final analysis Turok wrote, "the only justification for an external organisation of South African freedom fighters lies in the work they do for the struggle at home and in preparing for their own return."<sup>(90)</sup>

Turok added that there had also been those who blamed the ANC's poor performance on an ageing leadership that had been out of the country too long. Others pointed to the vast bureaucratic structures that developed in exile and with which many of the exile leaders grew comfortable over the years. In his opinion no one argued against or questioned the importance of political and solidarity work but it could easily become a bottomless pit for financial resources and manpower. Year upon year, he pointed out, more people were needed for administrative work which meant that the ANC's civilian structure outgrew its military structure to the point where the latter could not perform its functions properly. As such the movement in exile was tied down with work which was only partially beneficial to the struggle at home. Turok drew a comparison between this development in the ANC and what transpired elsewhere in Africa and pointed out that in the case of both the MPLA movement in Angola and Frelimo in Mozambique, the civilian structures of these organisations were eventually disbanded in favour of a military arrangement with guerrilla training being made compulsory for everyone involved in the organisations.<sup>(91)</sup> Compulsory military training for ANC-SACP members was only introduced in 1985.

In its attempts to resume the armed struggle inside South Africa, Turok alleged, the ANC, but particularly the Revolutionary Council which was set up in 1969 to guide Umkhonto, had great difficulty in re-establishing a sound foothold inside the country. One of the main reasons for this, according to Turok, was the difficulty of concealing activists inside the country whether it was in the urban or the

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90. Turok, Strategic Problems, p. 52.

91. Turok, Strategic Problems, p. 52.



rural areas. Both these areas - and this was in stark contrast to conditions elsewhere in Africa - were relatively unsuitable for guerrilla warfare and revolutionary activities. In the cities the density of the population and anonymity provided by it was a distinct advantage to the revolutionary, but the concentrated presence of the police and their infrastructure of informers as well as the regular pass raids conducted by them, made it very difficult for an activist to remain hidden for too long. In the countryside on the other hand, the sparse population and the more relaxed attitude of the local police forces made it highly suitable for guerrillas to hide out. This advantage was, however, offset by the presence there too of agents and informers but even more so by the presence of local government agencies and in the case of the independent homelands by the counter-insurgency activities of their administrations.<sup>(92)</sup>

Another factor according to Turok that also appeared to have inhibited the resumption of the armed struggle inside South Africa during the first half of the 1970's was the emergence of the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM). The formation of the BCM at the end of the 1960's and its strong emphasis on Black power and African unity presented, according to Turok, the first real challenge to the ANC and its multi-racial policies inside South Africa since the collapse of the internal phase of the armed struggle in the mid-1960's.<sup>(93)</sup> However, in 1978 the ANC President, Oliver Tambo, pointed out in an interview with the American newsheet The Black Scholar that Black Consciousness was not a movement like the ANC but merely a phase in the armed struggle. "It is not outside the struggle for human rights - on the contrary - it grows into the mainstream which has been set by the African National Congress."<sup>(94)</sup> This statement of confidence it is important to note, was made in 1978, at a time when the

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92. Turok, Strategic Problems, p. 53.

93. Turok, Strategic Problems, p. 54. See also E. Harsch, ANC Challenges Apartheid Regime, (Intercontinental Press, 1983.07.25, p. 418).

94. The Black Scholar Interviews Oliver Tambo, (The Black Scholar 9, January/February 1978, pp. 32 - 33).

ranks of the ANC and Umkhonto had been filled with new recruits and a year after the government had banned the Black Consciousness Movement. This effectively left the way wide open thus for the ANC-SACP alliance to re-establish their presence and influence inside South Africa. The sudden influx of new recruits after 1976 also enabled the ANC to strengthen Umkhonto and to allow the organisation to accelerate its armed incursions into the country. Consequently, between 1976 and the end of the 1970's the ANC and Umkhonto gradually stepped up their activities inside South Africa in preparation for the wave of attacks that were to follow in the early 1980's.

Conditions both inside and outside South Africa after 1975 were thus generally in favour of the ANC-SACP alliance, not only for resuming the armed struggle but for actually escalating it into a full-scale revolutionary guerrilla war. The wave of attacks that hit the country in the early 1980's and the sophisticated nature of these attacks led many observers to believe that the ANC-SACP alliance had finally attained the ability and necessary skills to escalate the armed struggle into a major guerrilla war. Yet a mere three years later those same observers had to admit that despite the favourable conditions which faced the ANC-SACP alliance since the mid-1970's the ANC and Umkhonto were having difficulty in advancing the armed struggle inside South Africa. Having stated in 1981 that since June 1976, ('95') ... "Umkhonto we Sizwe was able to capitalise on the political exhilaration which was generated by the disturbances themselves in mounting an at times spectacular campaign of sabotage and guerilla warfare ... [and that] all the indications are that it will develop into a full-scale revolutionary war", Tom Lodge, who has always been highly sympathetic to the aims and objectives of the ANC-SACP alliance, had to admit a mere two years later in 1984 that "Since the end of 1982, while the ANC has succeeded in maintaining the level of military operations, the possibility of it being able to advance to a more ambitious stage of guerrilla-warfare has begun to

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95. Lodge, The ANC Resurgence 1976 - 1981, (Reality 14 (2), March 1982, p. 1).



seem increasingly remote." (96)

What brought about this swing in opinion? According to Lodge two factors were responsible for this; the first being the South African government's increasingly aggressive regional policies, and the second the fact that the indifference or hostility of certain Western governments was only partially compensated for by the degree of sympathy shown towards the ANC-SACP alliance in Communist China and Australia. (97)

But even more important, according to Lodge, (98) was the fact that Mozambique which became a major operational base for Umkhonto after 1976, proved to be less suitable than what the liberation alliance had hoped for. With its territory in full striking distance of the South African Defence Force the latter launched a number of lightning raids against ANC and Umkhonto bases and operational facilities in and around Maputo between 1981 and 1983. As a result of these attacks and the implications of the Nkomati Accord of 1984, the ANC and the SACP were forced to abandon Mozambique as an operational base. The ANC soon afterwards seemed incapable of exploiting neither the growing international support for sanctions nor the escalating unrest situation in South Africa of the mid-1980's to launch a fully-fledged guerrilla war.

In his assessment of the armed struggle in 1987, Lodge wrote that although the ANC had gone out of its way to capitalise on the spontaneous unrest situation and called for a military offensive that would put the enemy into a strategic retreat, such a message in

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96. Lodge, *The ANC in South Africa, 1976 - 1983: Guerrilla War and Armed Propaganda*, (The Journal of Contemporary African Studies 3 (1/2), October 1983 - April 1984, p. 177).
  97. Lodge, *The ANC in South Africa, 1976 - 1983*, (The Journal of Contemporary African Studies 3 (1/2), October 1983 - April 1984, p. 177).
  98. Lodge, *The ANC in South Africa, 1976 - 1983*, (The Journal of Contemporary African Studies 3 (1/2), October 1983 - April 1984, p. 177).





retrospect seemed premature. The State, he pointed out, was yet to be confronted with a military threat that could seriously stretch its resources. "The repression unleashed with the second state of emergency appears at least for the time being, to have checked the tide of insurrection. Though Umkhonto attacks increased significantly," he continued, "the ANC's most conspicuous gains have been diplomatic rather than military."<sup>(99)</sup> A year later the ANC-SACP alliance suffered a diplomatic as well as military setback when the signing of the tri-partite New York Accord forced the organisation to remove its bases and facilities from Angola.

While it is true that the ANC had managed to raise its international stature over the last two decades through its contact with leading international statesmen, and through numerous visits to both Western and Eastern Bloc countries by its president, Oliver Tambo, and other senior leaders, not to mention through its contact and talks with White interest groups from South Africa since the mid-1980's, the ANC was nevertheless experiencing great difficulty in rousing the sort of support it needed among Blacks (and Whites) in South Africa to bring about a people's war. In practice this meant that the ANC-SACP alliance proved virtually unable to rebuild Umkhonto's shattered organisational structure inside South Africa. Ronnie Kasrils, a senior member of the ANC-SACP alliance and Umkhonto's NHC admitted this much in an article published in Sechaba in September 1988.<sup>(100)</sup> In this he made it clear that in spite of the favourable conditions that have existed in South Africa for revolution since the mid-1970's and Umkhonto's efforts to promote such a development, the ANC-SACP alliance as a whole had not been able to take full advantage of these favourable conditions. The reason for this impasse, according to Kasrils were both theoretical and practical. ... "we have long formulated theoretical positions such

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99. Lodge, The African National Congress after the Kabwe Conference, (The South African Review 3, 1987, pp. 6 - 7).
100. Kasrils, Politics and the Armed Struggle, (Sechaba, September 1988, pp. 1 - 2).



as 'the armed struggle must complement the mass struggle' and 'the guerrilla must be rooted among the people' etc," [but, ... continued Kasrils] "it is one thing to state the theory and quite another to put in into practice."<sup>(101)</sup>

Kasrils also reserved some criticism for the Mass Democratic Movement (MDM) and its leadership inside South Africa, whom he felt was out of touch with developments and the true role of Umkhonto in the armed struggle. "It is clear," Kasrils wrote, "that the most people at home, including within the Mass Democratic Movement regarded MK as some kind of external force that must come and defend them from the vigilantes and destroy the Boers. They do not see themselves as having to be an integral part of the armed struggle."<sup>(102)</sup> The MDM had its origins sometime between 1987 and 1988 as an alliance of organisations which have rejected apartheid and committed themselves to the establishment of a democratic alternative to the existing political structure. The main components of the MDM consisted of the UDF, the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) and the National Education Crisis Committee (NECC). It was also claimed that both the ANC-SACP alliance and Umkhonto were served by the MDM, which according to one of its leaders, Titus Mafolo, was part of the National Liberation Movement (Alliance). Like COSATU, the MDM was primarily a working class orientated movement committed to "a working class leadership in the struggle for (National) liberation and the acceptance of the African majority as the main force in the struggle."<sup>(103)</sup>

Other factors singled out by Kasrils as having inhibited the development of the armed struggle inside South Africa were: organisational

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101. Kasrils, Politics and the Armed Struggle, (Sechaba, September 1988, pp. 1 - 2).
  102. Kasrils, Politics and the Armed Struggle, (Sechaba, September 1988, p. 4).
  103. The Daily News (Durban), 1989.07.28 (M. Suliman, Mass Democratic Movement Explained). See also The MDM: Uneasy About Friends and Enemies, (South African Update 1 (1), July 1989, p. 5); and Cooper, Race Relations Survey, 1988/1989, pp. 681 - 682.



weaknesses both inside and outside South Africa; the absence of a proper revolutionary organisation to organise and lead the masses in all forms of struggle - including armed struggle; the need for a policy that would ensure co-operation both on the theoretical and practical levels of operations; greater clarity on what type of organisational structure to create both inside and outside the country and increased co-operation between externally trained cadres and those activists who have never left home. "In fact," Kasrils wrote, "there are extremely few policy positions of either the ANC or SACP on how power is to be seized....What is demanded is a vision of how power is to be seized and a plan for the building of the forces and means to carry out this task."<sup>(104)</sup>

Kasrils went on to state that central to the creation of a proper organisational infrastructure inside as well as outside the country was the need for a revolutionary army, an army in which Umkhonto would form the core. However, there were two major obstacles that stood in the way of the creation of such an army, namely the South African police and the South African Defence Force of whom the bulk of their members were loyal to the State. According to Kasrils, without the undermining and subversion of the latter forces a revolutionary situation and thus the creation of a revolutionary army was not possible inside South Africa, which explains why the ANC-SACP alliance had been unsuccessful in their attempts to establish and strengthen their position inside the country. As a result the ANC-SACP alliance had been forced to maintain and train the bulk of Umkhonto's cadres outside the country. This made it extremely difficult if not virtually impossible for the organisation to successfully infiltrate large numbers of recruits into the country and to strengthen its position among the people of South Africa. This meant that until such time that this could be accomplished, the armed struggle conducted by Umkhonto remained largely a hit-and-run affair conducted from outside rather than inside the country.

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104. Kasrils, *Politics and the Armed Struggle*, (Sechaba, September 1989, pp. 4 - 6).



According to Kasrils, a similar situation existed in Rhodesia in the 1960's and the 1970's, until the guerrilla armies of ZAPU and ZANU were established among the people. (105)

A further factor singled out by Kasrils as having inhibited the development of the armed struggle in South Africa, was the absence of what he considers to be a clear cut strategy on the transfer of power in South Africa. On this issue which, according to Kasrils, ranks amongst the most important the ANC had to settle, the organisation appeared to be totally at a loss for words. It had no programme to bring this about, nor had it ever drawn up a plan to indicate in a systematic manner how this should come about. As a result, Kasrils argued, one was left with the impression that it would come about through a combination of mass struggle, strikes and armed clashes which would somehow place so much pressure on the South African government that it would finally collapse, thereby enabling the ANC-SACP alliance to take control of the country and institute the aims and objectives of the Freedom Charter. (106)

Unfortunately for the ANC, time had proved that such a wait-and-see attitude did not work in South Africa. It did not only allow the South African government to modify its policies and to adjust its strategies to the tactics and actions of the ANC-SACP alliance, both inside as well as outside the country, but a wait-and-see approach also ignored South Africa's economic strength and ability to survive both politically and economically. South Africa was highly industrialised with a sound economic infrastructure that enabled it to survive tough economic times. At the same time, it provided attractive economic and financial incentives for those members of the unprivileged class or group who wished to collaborate with the government. As a result of the latter development in particular, a small Black middle class had developed in South Africa despite the government's apartheid policies. The members of that class, although they may

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105. Kasrils, Politics and the Armed Struggle, (Sechaba, September 1988, pp. 6 - 7).

106. Kasrils, Politics and the Armed Struggle, (Sechaba, September 1988, pp. 10 - 11, 17 - 18).



give their verbal support to the armed struggle to protect themselves and prevent their alienation from their own society, are as a group or social strata non-revolutionary in nature since they have economically and socially much to lose.<sup>(107)</sup>

Even though the growth of an affluent Black middle class may turn out to be no hindrance to the influence and actions of the ANC-SACP alliance inside South Africa, Umkhonto still had to deal with the fact that it was completely outstripped in both size and firepower by the South African security forces. The South African Defence Force (SADF) alone had a budget of some R6,6 billion in 1987 while the South African police (SAP) had a budget of R1,530 billion for the same period.<sup>(108)</sup> In sharp contrast to this the ANC and Umkhonto operated on a shoestring budget of some \$100 million (or R250 million) of which approximately only half was earmarked for Umkhonto. The rest was channelled to the ANC and the SACP. In terms of manpower, the ANC and Umkhonto, even by the late 1980's, were estimated to have had no more than 10 000 men under arms. Of these between only 300 and 400 were estimated to be operative inside the country at any given time. Similarly, the fact that most of the arms used by Umkhonto came from the Soviet Union and its Eastern Bloc associates, made the ANC and Umkhonto totally dependent on the whims and moods of these countries. The South African government, on the other hand had a highly developed and independent arms industry that by 1988 was exporting arms to more than 39 countries.<sup>(109)</sup>

Although Umkhonto had managed to increase its armed attacks between 1985 and the end of 1988,<sup>(110)</sup> those attacks never reached the point where it could be considered a real threat to the authority and stability of the State. On the contrary, the escalation in armed attacks since the early 1980's and the repeated calls by the leaders

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107. See Cooper, Race Relations Survey, 1988/1989, p. xxxiv.  
108. Cooper, Race Relations Survey, 1988/1989, pp. 334 - 335.  
109. Cooper, Race Relations Survey, 1988/1989, p. xxxix. See also J. Herbst, Prospects for Revolution in South Africa, (Political Science Quarterly 103 (4), 1988, pp. 680 - 681).  
110. See Chapter 4 Diagram G, pp. 227 - 231.



of Umkhonto to accelerate the armed struggle and to extend it to the White areas, had exactly the opposite reaction to what was intended. Instead of frightening the White electorate into rejecting the government's apartheid parties, it had the effect of galvanising increased support for the government. In addition, Umkhonto and the ANC also had to pay heavily in manpower and equipment over the years.<sup>(111)</sup>

In a research paper published in 1988 on the prospects for revolution in South Africa, Jeffrey Herbst,<sup>(112)</sup> an American expert on politics and international affairs found that everything considered the evidence suggested that the ANC and Umkhonto had been unable to mount a significant military threat to the South African government. Over 60 percent of all attacks conducted by Umkhonto in South Africa were against various forms of infrastructure such as powerlines, government buildings and railway lines, or were done for symbolic purposes. They were, Herbst pointed out, the same type of attacks that the ANC was conducting twenty-five years earlier when Mandela was first arrested. There was thus very little evidence of the ANC moving from "sabotage acts to attack the enemy face to face", as Oliver Tambo had claimed. "While attacks against infrastructure can occasionally be quite damaging and armed propaganda sometimes results in many injuries, in the main they are of little more than nuisance value."<sup>(113)</sup>

The South African government managed relatively successfully to counter virtually every new phase that the ANC and the leaders of Umkhonto introduced into the armed struggle. As a result attacks on businesses that could have been economically harmful to the country and cause despondency among Whites were few in number.<sup>(114)</sup>

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111. Herbst, Prospects for Revolution in South Africa, (Political Science Quarterly 103 (4), 1988, pp. 681 - 682).
  112. Herbst, Prospects for Revolution in South Africa, (Political Science Quarterly 103 (4), 1988, pp. 665 - 685).
  113. Herbst, Prospects for Revolution in South Africa, (Political Science Quarterly 103 (4), 1988, pp. 682 - 683).
  114. Herbst, Prospects for Revolution in South Africa, (Political Science Quarterly 103 (4), 1988, p. 683).



Similarly, attacks against the State itself, especially against its security apparatus were also almost non-existent. According to Herbst:

While the ANC has developed into a more sophisticated military organisation in the last few years, its attacks against South Africa do not provide any evidence that it is now capable of inflicting truly significant damage on its opponents. ...The ANC, therefore, needs both quantitative and qualitative changes in its attacks against South Africa if it is to pressure the South African regime.<sup>(115)</sup>

Given the various facts and arguments that have been advanced so far, especially the change that has been effected to the status of Umkhonto and the armed struggle by the 1988 New York Peace Accord, as well as the major changes that have been taking place in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, it is clear that despite the favourable conditions that existed from the mid-1970's to the end of 1988, the ANC-SACP alliance was not only unsuccessful in its attempts to advance the armed struggle into a people's war, but its chances of doing so seemed to have passed by the end of 1988. Militarily, the ANC-SACP alliance had since the beginning of the armed struggle in 1961 never been in a position where it could pose a serious threat to the status quo in South Africa. This meant that if the ANC wished to bring about political change and a transfer of power in South Africa, it had to do so through non-military means such as a political or negotiated settlement. As early as 1975 John Barrett, then Director of the South African Institute of International Affairs, pointed out that South Africa's racial problems were basically a political problem in search of a political solution, and that neither great military power nor economic sanctions would solve it.<sup>(116)</sup> His words proved prophetic. In the early 1990's the ANC-SACP alliance abandoned the armed struggle, and Umkhonto, although reluctantly, was compelled to subject itself to this new development and the search

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115. Herbst, Prospects for Revolution in South Africa, (Political Science Quarterly 103 (4), 1988, p. 683).

116. Legum, Africa Contemporary Record, 1974 - 1975, p. 417.



for a more peaceful solution to South Africa's racial and political problems. Clearly, the ANC-SACP alliance and their military wing Umkhonto we Sizwe had failed in its mission to promote revolution in South Africa through violence and to seize power.

This development is particularly significant if one views it against the background of revolutionary developments elsewhere in Africa. In most of the revolutionary wars in Africa where a transfer of power had taken place since the end of the Second World War, it was politics and the process of negotiations and diplomacy that finally hooked through the knot in the end. This has been recognised by researchers and political observers such as Tom Lodge, who said:

Guerrilla warfare will remain just one theme in the struggle. While it will be a major aspect, its importance will remain chiefly psychological. It will provide a medium through which the ANC can exercise authority, and can enhance its status internationally. But for a long time it is unlikely to accomplish more. ...even in the long term, the probabilities are against a military-based seizure of power. Like most anti-colonial struggles this one is almost certain to end through talks.<sup>(117)</sup>

### CONCLUSION

Since the beginning of the armed struggle in December 1961 numerous views and explanations have been advanced by scholars and other observers both inside and outside the ANC-SACP alliance on the development of the armed struggle and the possible factors that could have caused it to falter. Although some of these explanations were divergent in nature, there is also a substantial body of broad agreement on some of the key factors that appeared to have frustrated the aims of the ANC-SACP alliance and Umkhonto, namely to bring about a revolutionary situation in South Africa and to seize power. Most of the scholarly and other views advanced in this chapter including those of people inside the liberation movement such as Ben Turok and

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117. Lodge, State Power and the Politics of Resistance, (Work in Progress 50/51, October - November 1987, pp. 3 - 6).





Joe Slovo were in broad agreement that the ANC-SACP alliance had grossly underestimated the ability and determination of the South African government to resist the insurrectionary activities against it and to use force where necessary to achieve its aims. This latter point was particularly highlighted by Slovo in his assessment of the armed struggle some years later. "We," he stated, "were still working on the approach that the enemy's security apparatus was what we knew it in the fifties. We did not sufficiently realise that the beginnings of armed struggle would lead to the very steps which the enemy took. ... Not only did they create a new force but they also began to legislate for new techniques." Slovo went on to state that they also made many mistakes with regards to security and underground work in the 1960's. This was particularly the case with their underground headquarters in Rivonia where many of the members of the NHC of Umkhonto stayed. As a result of this members of the underground were constantly moving in and out of the Lilliesleaf Farm property without being caught. This according to Slovo led to a false sense of security which in the end resulted in the South African police penetrating the underground and destroying it by the mid-1960's. (118)

There also appears to be general agreement among observers that in their under-judgement of the ability and determination of the South African government, the ANC-SACP alliance over-judged their own ability to take on the security and economic might of the South African government. While it is true that in the early years of the armed struggle the aim and objective of the ANC-SACP alliance was not to destroy South Africa's economic ability as such, although many of Umkhonto's early attacks were directed against economic installations or targets whose destruction could be economically disruptive to the country, this was no longer the case by the end of the 1970's when armed propaganda and attacks on economically sensitive installations such as SASOL and the Koeberg power station went hand in hand.

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118. Dawn, Souvenir Issue, 1986, pp. 24 - 25.



As Slovo has pointed out, the ANC-SACP alliance made a grave mistake in their judgement of the ability of the South African police and the government's security apparatus in general. By 1963 the Security Police had successfully infiltrated the underground in South Africa. Although attempts were made by the liberation movement to step up their vigilance and to minimise the threat of infiltration, people who were prepared to inform on the liberation movement and the ability of the Security Police to place their agents at the heart of the movement had a crippling effect on the armed struggle over the years. Even in exile the ANC-SACP alliance and Umkhonto could not escape the attention of the security police, who repeatedly managed to infiltrate the ranks of the ANC-SACP alliance since the mid-1960's. A good example of the latter was the discovery allegedly of a major South African controlled spy-ring in Umkhonto's training camps in Angola in the early 1980's. With the aid of this spy network which apparently involved some senior members of Umkhonto in Angola, the South African Security Police was able to trace the movement of recruits and guerrillas to and from South Africa. The Security Police also gained valuable information on the underground structures of the ANC and Umkhonto in Angola. Although draconian steps were taken by the ANC and Umkhonto to destroy the spy-network, ANC-Umkhonto members turning agents for the South African police remained a serious problem for the ANC-SACP alliance.

Other factors agreed upon by observers as having had an inhibiting influence on the armed struggle were organisational difficulties, particularly in exile, limited funds, unsuitable terrain for guerrilla warfare and large scale insurrectionary activities, the apparently dominating role of the SACP in the ANC-SACP alliance, the apparent unwillingness of the South African peasant masses to become militarily involved in the armed struggle, the obvious ability of the South African government to anticipate and counter every new phase of the armed struggle as well as the fact that South Africa, unlike elsewhere in Africa where wars of liberation were fought, was not a colony in the true sense of the word but a fully independent state, legally constituted and internationally recognised as such. The ANC-SACP-led armed struggle in South Africa was thus not directed



against a colonial power or classic colonial conditions - as much as the SACP wanted the world to believe this, but against the political and racial policies of an independent state. The aims of the armed struggle was thus not for independence but political rights for Blacks and the right to rule. In terms of communist theory this right should be exercised through revolutionary violence and the seizure of power.

Although South Africa's apartheid policies were unacceptable to many if not most World powers both in the East and the West, and Britain was one of the first to officially object to the country's racial policies in 1960, it was not until the end of the 1970's that the international community was beginning to take a more concerted stand against developments in South Africa and the country's racial policies. While these latter developments were highly encouraging to the armed struggle and undoubtedly contributed to the escalation in armed activities from 1981 onwards, other facts were already at work to counter these developments. Militarily, the South African Defence Force launched a series of lightning attacks on ANC-Umkhonto facilities in neighbouring states between 1981 and 1986. These latter attacks not only left large numbers of ANC-SACP and Umkhonto members dead but it eventually forced the liberation movement to move its remaining facilities and personnel out of the reach of the SADF. Inside the country, the Security Police in close co-operation with the Department of Military Intelligence and the National Intelligence Service were able to restrict the ANC and Umkhonto's ability to set up an underground infrastructure and to establish sufficient arms caches to initiate a people's war. The inability of the ANC and Umkhonto to re-establish a sound underground presence inside South Africa was one of the reasons singled out by Kasrils in 1988 as having inhibited the development of the armed struggle in South Africa. The fact that the ANC was unable to establish a substantial presence inside South Africa during the 1980's also had political implications for the movement in that it was unable to effectively extend its political work among the Black masses of the country, particularly in the rural areas where it always had a weak presence.



Diplomatically the ANC-SACP alliance and Umkhonto also suffered a number of important setbacks during the 1980's. The first was the signing of the Swazi Accord between South Africa and the Swazi government in 1982. In terms of this agreement which was kept a secret until 1984, the South African and Swazi governments mutually agreed not to allow their respective countries to be used for attacks on one another. This effectively put paid to the ANC and Umkhonto's activities in Swaziland after 1982. The second setback to the ANC and Umkhonto came in 1984 when the South African government signed a similar agreement with the FRELIMO government of Mozambique - known as the Nkomati Accord. In 1986 the South African government through the use of its economic muscle helped to engineer a coup in Lesotho that brought a pro-South African government under Major-General Lekhanya to power. With the support of this latter government and aided by the terms of the Swazi and Nkomati agreements, the South African government was able to isolate the ANC-SACP alliance in South and Southern Africa while at the same time reduce its ability to escalate the armed struggle. The final setback to the armed struggle came in December 1988 with the signing of the New York Accord. Although this latter agreement in itself made a significant contribution to the declining position if not importance of the armed struggle after 1988, it was the background of political change in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe that witnessed the collapse of orthodox communism and which helped to end the Cold War that permanently altered the role and position of the armed struggle and thus Umkhonto by the end of the 1980's.

Although the above developments had a major influence on the position of the armed struggle by the end of the 1980's and in a way were also responsible for the changes that took place in the South African government's position by the beginning of the 1990's, other factors also had a bearing on the outcome of the armed struggle. Some of those that were singled out by Feit, Bell, Gann, Lodge and others for attention were the organisational weakness of the ANC-SACP alliance and Umkhonto, a continued shortage of funds, the role of the OAU which was often more confusing than encouraging, the relative predictability of the ANC-SACP leadership, the apathetic and largely



non-revolutionary nature of the peasant masses in South Africa and the fact that Soviet support for the armed struggle was often seen as little more than tactical support to frustrate Chinese ambitions in Africa. In short, the ANC-SACP alliance and Umkhonto were thus faced with some formidable if not insurmountable obstacles in their struggle to seize power in South Africa. Although some of these problems were clearly the making of the liberation movement itself, others, among them some major factors, were beyond the control of the ANC-SACP alliance or Umkhonto we Sizwe.