

***Toyi-Toyi-ing to Freedom: The Endgame in the ANC's Armed Struggle,  
1989–1990***

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*This article focuses on the twelve-month period between August 1989 and August 1990 which proved to be the final year of the African National Congress's (ANC) armed struggle against the South African government. This period is interesting because it dramatised the central paradox that existed throughout the ANC's armed struggle, namely its material weakness which was belied by its immense symbolic strength. In August 1989, the ANC's proposals for negotiations were accepted by African leaders, while in South Africa, F.W. de Klerk acceded to the South African state presidency. These events considerably improved the prospects of a negotiated settlement. However, by August 1990, the ANC and the South African government had still not begun formal negotiations, and the bone of contention between them was the ANC's continued commitment to violence. This highlights the second key theme: namely, the immense symbolic significance carried by the question of violence in the conflict. At stake was the credibility of the ANC's claims to be South Africa's national liberation movement. The ANC needed to perpetuate the notion of MK as an effective fighting force in order to sustain its claim that negotiations had been achieved through its actions, and that it was entering into talks on its own terms. Meanwhile for the government, these considerations*

*operated in reverse: it was anxious to counter the notion that the ANC had fought its way to the negotiating table. This article will discuss how the two sides jostled over this question in the period leading to the ANC's unilateral suspension of its armed struggle in August 1990.*

A considerable literature exists on the political transition in South Africa, yet within this body of work, certain aspects of vital importance to our understanding of the period remain under explored. This article focuses in detail on the twilight of the ANC's armed struggle in the years leading to August 1990, and the effect that the organisation's waning military campaign had on two developments, namely, the process of moving the ANC towards negotiations, and secondly, the subsequent stalemate that occurred between the ANC and the National Party (NP) government over the issue of 'talks about talks'. The full dimensions of the crisis facing the ANC and its military wing Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK) on the eve of negotiations, and the centrality of the issue of the armed struggle to the stalemate in negotiations are two issues which have not been given due emphasis in any existing account of the transition. This article will explore both issues and explain the paradox that in spite of the material weakness of MK's challenge to the state, the issue of armed struggle became the focus of a trial of strength between the ANC and the National Party, waged in a war of words, and fought through the domestic and international media, as the two sides jockeyed for position on the road to formal negotiations.

For MK, 1989 was a difficult year. In December 1988 peace accords signed in New York between the governments of Angola, Cuba and South Africa provided for Namibian independence and the withdrawal of foreign troops from Angola. The agreements stipulated that the parties to the accord would prohibit any state, organisation or individual from employing their territory to perpetrate acts of violence against any other country in the region. This committed the Angolan government to cease its military support for the ANC and, in early January 1989, Oliver Tambo, then ANC president, announced that MK military camps in Angola were being vacated in order to facilitate the accords. MK cadres were to be relocated to new base camps in Uganda, Tanzania and Ethiopia.

In practice, however, a large number of MK cadres were moved across the Angolan border to Zambia where the ANC did not have permanent camps, but rather an agreement with the Zambian government that it could use 'transit' residences for its military personnel headed towards South Africa. At the time of the 1989 influx, morale amongst MK members in Zambia was very low. Bill Anderson, an ANC Military Intelligence officer who arrived in Lusaka in 1987, recounted that a number of cadres had infiltrated Zambia from Angola in the years before 1989, expecting to stay for a few weeks before proceeding to South Africa. However, they ended up staying much longer, in some cases as long as two or three years. During the 1980s, the ANC in Lusaka was divided into two categories. On one side were 'regular' residents who were provided with houses that had

**Comment [J1]:** Won't most readers know Tambo was president of ANC?

electricity, fridges, stoves, and in many cases, televisions. On the other were MK temporary residents who stayed in accommodation without electricity, and often no mattresses. In Lusaka MK members lived in Chunga, Kaunda Square and Mtendere, the poorest townships in the city, while regular ANC members lived in Helen Kaunda, a modestly affluent part of the city, amongst the Zambian middle class. While regular ANC residents received money which allowed them to buy their own goods, MK members did not. Instead they received 'underground supplies' of meat and vegetables provided by the regional military command. If they wanted to buy anything, they had to sell their supplies, which was illegal. They voiced their frustrations to their commanders repeatedly, but nothing effective was done to remedy their situation. Marooned in Lusaka with little prospect of being sent home, an atmosphere of antagonism towards their superiors developed. By 1989, according to Anderson, there were certain residences into which representatives of the military command could not enter for fear of being shouted down, or even physically assaulted.<sup>1</sup>

As bad as things were, the situation of MK cadres in Zambia compared favourably to that of their colleagues dispatched from Lusaka towards South Africa. By 1989, MK was in a state of 'absolute chaos' Anderson recalled, with MK cadres being deployed 'without briefings, without proper preparations of documents, without proper clothing'.

Anderson's boss, Keith Mokoape, the MK Head of Intelligence, told him that because the number of MK operations was perceived to be declining, there was 'one objective and one alone' for the intelligence department in helping to plan operations: this was 'to make the graph of actions go up, irrespective of what actions [were undertaken], irrespective of

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<sup>1</sup> Historical Papers, University of the Witwatersrand. Karis-Gerhart Collection, Folder 1, Part I (hereafter referred to as Karis -Gerhart Collection): Howard Barrell interview with Bill Anderson, April 8, 1991, pp. 26-7.

basing cadres and so on'. Meanwhile, a member of the department headed by MK Chief of Staff Chris Hani, which was responsible for keeping figures of those infiltrated into South Africa, informed Anderson that of about 240 MK cadres deployed from Zambia in 1989, a third had defected, a third were captured or killed by the enemy, while a third 'were somehow in place, whether active or drifting'. In most cases no proper communications were established, so nobody was too sure of the status of the latter.<sup>2</sup>

By 1989, the main route of infiltration of MK personnel was from Zambia, through Zimbabwe, across Botswana and then into South Africa. Garth Strachan, who was based in ANC operational structures in Zimbabwe at the time, gave an indication of the probable fate of the third category, whose whereabouts remained uncertain. Strachan estimated that from around late 1986 onwards, MK suffered an almost '100 per cent casualty rate' among those it sent into South Africa from Zimbabwe, with the 'casualty rate' defined in terms of people 'killed or arrested within 24 hours' of entering South Africa. Within Zimbabwe itself, faced with the prospect of 'certain death' in these 'ill-prepared, ill-planned missions', a large number of MK cadres either deserted or defected to the enemy in order to save their lives.<sup>3</sup> The problem of defections, along with the South African security forces' success in penetrating ANC structures with spies, meant that MK structures in the countries directly neighbouring South Africa were heavily infiltrated by double agents, thereby making it hazardous for MK to operate in those territories.

Under these circumstances, there was widespread criticism of Joe Modise, MK's Commander. In 1989 there was a meeting of the Politico-Military Council, the organ

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<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 21–2, 29.

<sup>3</sup> Karis-Gerhart Collection, Folder 36, Part I. Howard Barrell interview with Garth Strachan, 28 December 1990, pp.1,199–200, 1,204.

responsible for prosecuting the ANC's revolutionary struggle, where MK's record came under withering criticism. Apparently this led Modise to offer his resignation, but this was promptly refused and further discussion of the matter was terminated abruptly.<sup>4</sup>

MK's crisis had diplomatic repercussions for the ANC's relations with the Zambian government, and these came to a head in mid-1989. On 7 May 1989, an ANC member shot dead his Zambian girlfriend and then himself in Mtendere in the second incident within a month in which ANC members had killed Zambian nationals. Understandably, the issue aroused the concern of the local authorities and on 9 May, Alex Shapi, the Zambian Secretary of State for Defence and Security, issued a stern warning that his government would 'not allow anyone to play around with guns even if he is a freedom-fighter'. Shapi vowed to prosecute law-breaking ANC guerrillas, but added that Zambia would not act unilaterally to disarm MK. In its response the ANC announced that it was looking into the matter of the misuse of firearms by some of its members and promised to take appropriate action where necessary. On 19 May 1989, Shapi announced at a news conference that the ANC had begun disarming some of its members in Zambia. Then on 25 May, Tom Sebina, the ANC's spokesman confirmed this, stating that whilst the movement was not being left 'naked and defenceless', it had decided to ensure that discipline was preserved by its personnel. The process of disarming MK guerrillas in Lusaka was carried out by ANC security in co-operation with the Zambian security forces.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Karis-Gerhart Collection, Folder 1, Part I. Howard Barrell interview with Bill Anderson, 8 April 8 1991, p. 31.

<sup>5</sup> 'Guerrilla Kills Girlfriend, Turns Gun on Himself', *The Associated Press*, 8 May 1989; 'Zambia Warns Law-Breaking ANC Guerrillas', *The Associated Press*, 9 May 1989; 'Zambian and Swazi Action Against the ANC Over Firearms', *BBC Summary of World Broadcasts*, 12 May 1989; 'ANC Disarming Some Members in Zambia', *BBC Summary of World Broadcasts*, 20 May 1989,

However the violence involving the ANC in Zambia continued. On 30 July an explosive device detonated at a house belonging to the ANC in Kamanga township in Lusaka. It was the latest in a series of bomb attacks on ANC houses, all within the space of a few months, in which one man had been killed and at least three ANC members seriously wounded. At the time it was assumed that the attacks were the work of agents of the South African government. However on 11 August, the *Zambian Daily Mail* reported that the ANC had arrested four of its former cadres for the attacks. The arrests created another confrontation with the local authorities, for it transpired that the men had applied for refugee status with the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) in Zambia, and were awaiting resettlement by the commission at the time of their apprehension. Furthermore, one of the men had in fact been arrested by ANC security outside the UNHCR office in Lusaka. Both the Zambian government and the UNHCR were furious. They charged that the four had been abducted and demanded that the ANC release them. This marked the first time that Zambia had spoken publicly on the subject of ANC dissidents. Amidst the furore, a relative of one of the detainees announced that 32 South African exiles in Zambia had been arrested and beaten by ANC security men, and claimed that the dissidents' aim was to highlight the lack of democracy and poor conditions that existed within the ANC-in-exile. In Sweden, at the same time, twelve defectors from the ANC were fighting deportation. They made similar charges of

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based on Johannesburg home service in English reports, 19 May 1989; 'ANC Denounces Pretoria Propaganda', *Xinhua General Overseas News Service*, 26 May 1989; 'ANC Reportedly Disarming Some Members in Zambia', *BBC Summary of World Broadcasts*, 29 May 1989.

abuse and injustice within the movement, and voiced their fears of retaliation if forced to leave.<sup>6</sup>

ANC Secretary General Alfred Nzo announced on 16 August that about 5,000 ANC cadres from Zambia, South Africa and other countries would gradually be moved to Tanzania where they would settle on a piece of land to acquire new skills. Whilst making the announcement, he denied reports circulating in the South African media that the men were being ejected due to pressure from the Zambians.<sup>7</sup> However, in an article published in *The Independent* of London on 19 August, the well connected British journalist Richard Dowden reported that senior officials in both the Zambian government and the ANC, speaking from Lusaka and London, had confirmed to him that Kaunda had delivered the ANC an ultimatum to leave Zambia and had informed the movement that only a diplomatic mission would be allowed to remain.<sup>8</sup>

However, neither the ANC nor the Zambian government could afford to fall out in such an open manner at that particular time and both strenuously denied the reports. African leaders were scheduled to meet in Harare, Zimbabwe, on 21–22 August to discuss a peace plan that the ANC had formulated setting forth its preconditions for engaging in negotiations with the South African regime. It was in the interests of neither the ANC nor the Zambian government for the impression to gather that the former was exploring the possibilities of a peaceful settlement as a consequence of having its military

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<sup>6</sup> 'Former ANC Members Arrested for Bombings', *Xinhua General News Service*, 11 August 1989; 'Tambo's Illness Deepens ANC Leadership Dilemma', *The Independent* (London), 14 August 1989; 'Tambo and ANC Appear to be Ailing', *The Washington Times*, 14 August 1989; 'Deportation from Sweden Recommended for Former ANC Members', *BBC Summary of World Broadcasts*, 5 August 1989, based on Radio Sweden broadcast, 3 August 1989.

<sup>7</sup> 'ANC Cadres Move to Tanzania', *Xinhua General News Service*, 16 August 1989.

<sup>8</sup> 'Kaunda Orders the ANC Out of Zambia', *The Independent* (London), 19 August 1989; 'Angola Peace Hopes Fade as Unita Calls Off Ceasefire', *The Independent* (London), 25 August 1989.



options paralysed by the latter. A number of reports in the media at the time were making this claim. On the basis of their common interest, the two parties acted to defuse the crisis.

On 18 August, the four men detained by the ANC in connection with the bombings were handed to Zambian authorities.<sup>9</sup> In the following days the ANC and the Zambian government undertook to discredit the reports of an ANC expulsion, dismissing them as ‘utter rubbish’, and, in the words of a special assistant to President Kuanda, a ‘deliberate and malicious ploy to try and drive a wedge between the ANC and the Zambian government’. In the meanwhile, Alex Shapi declared that the ANC was in Zambia to stay ‘until apartheid is dismantled’ and an ANC statement dismissed the stories as ‘absolute nonsense’.<sup>10</sup>

Despite these avowals, the story had not died down by the time the OAU meeting in Harare commenced, and both Zambia and the ANC were once again compelled to deny the reports. ANC delegates stated that the movement had in fact begun moving its guerrillas out of Zambia two years previously, while Kaunda said at a news conference at the end of the meeting on 22 August that: ‘The truth is Kaunda has made no expulsion of the ANC. The HQ [headquarters] are still in Lusaka and the executive are still there...I would not be so cheap [as] to do such a thing’.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> ‘Zambia ANC Hands Over Four Prisoners To Lusaka Authorities’, *BBC Summary of World Broadcasts*, 26 August 1989, based on Malawi Broadcasting Corporation report, Blantyre, 23 August 1989.

<sup>10</sup> ‘Reported ANC Withdrawal From Zambia Denied’, *BBC Summary of World Broadcasts*, 21 August 1989; ‘Zambia Denies Reports about Zambia Ordering ANC to Leave Zambia’, *Xinhua General News Service*, 21 August 1989.

<sup>11</sup> ‘ANC Seeks African Backing for Talks Plan’, *The Guardian*, 21 August 1989; ‘Kaunda’s Reply’, *The Independent* (London), 23 August 1989; ‘Kaunda Says ANC Still in Zambia’, *BBC Summary of World Broadcasts*, 24 August 1989.

The story soon disappeared as the ANC and Zambia succeeded in getting their line that the withdrawal was being undertaken by mutual consent established in place of the damaging reports of an irate Zambia kicking MK out of the country. Nevertheless, the fact remained that an exodus of MK guerrillas from Zambia was taking place. This was an event of huge significance in the history of the armed struggle, because whilst on article little had changed and Zambia could still be used by MK as a 'transit' route to South Africa, in reality, the infiltration of large numbers of guerrillas was no longer a feasible option. If the ANC continued to employ that route, it faced two options, neither of which was palatable. If it sent the guerrillas beyond Zambia, the ANC knew that given the conditions that existed within MK structures in countries like Zimbabwe and Botswana, there was a high likelihood that the missions would be abortive. Meanwhile, the alternative of keeping guerrillas bottled up in Zambia risked a repetition of the crisis with President Kaunda's government from which the movement had just extricated itself. Coming in the aftermath of the expulsions from Angola, and the Nkomati Accord of 1984 in which the Mozambican government signed an agreement with South Africa pledging to deny the ANC the use of its territory as a transit route, MK military camps in Tanzania and Uganda faced a swathe of territory stretching from the Atlantic to the Indian Oceans that prevented the deployment of significant numbers of MK troops towards South Africa. Whilst further options for infiltration remained, such as moving MK cadres clandestinely through these territories, or flying the troops to frontline states by air, these alternatives necessarily involved the movement of small numbers. It was impossible under these circumstances for the ANC to *intensify* its armed struggle within South Africa.

At the same time, prospects for a negotiated settlement were appreciating rapidly. At the Harare summit, the OAU promptly endorsed the ANC's peace proposal as its policy for South Africa. The plan, known thereafter as the 'Harare Declaration', envisaged that the ANC would halt its use of armed force if the government created the right conditions for talks by ending the state of emergency, releasing political prisoners, lifting a ban on political organisations and withdrawing troops from black townships. After the satisfaction of these preconditions, negotiations would commence amidst a 'mutually binding ceasefire', but hostilities would only be deemed to have terminated when agreement on a new constitution was reached. The ANC further insisted that negotiations would focus exclusively on the modalities of transforming South Africa into 'a united, democratic and non-racial state' organised on 'the basis of universal suffrage, exercised through one person one vote on a common voters roll'.

Meanwhile in South Africa, National Party (NP) leader FW de Klerk acceded to the state presidency on 15 August, two days after the resignation of PW Botha. After consolidating his power with a victory in a whites-only general election on 6 September, de Klerk undertook significant initiatives towards normalising the political situation. Above all, on 15 October 1989, Walter Sisulu, Oscar Mpetha, Andrew Mlangeni, Raymond Mhlaba, Elias Motsoaledi, Wilton Mkwayi and Ahmed Kathrada of the ANC, along with Jafta Masemula of the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC), were unconditionally released from prison.

Although the conflict had thus moved decisively in the direction of a peaceful settlement, the issue of violence remained the roadblock to negotiations. Whilst the terms of the Harare Declaration set the ANC's preconditions for talks, for the NP, the demands

of the declaration could not be conceded until the ANC abandoned its commitment to violence. As the NP's Constitutional Development Minister Gerrit Viljoen stated on 17 October in an interview on a state-run black radio station, the government's sole condition was that: 'People should commit themselves to a peaceful negotiating process. If they comply with that requirement, I'm sure virtually all restrictions that exist at present would have to be reconsidered and have to be revoked.'<sup>12</sup>

For its part, the ANC felt that it could not commit itself to unilaterally renounce the use of force, because whilst the idea of MK as an effective military force may have been a myth, it was an incredibly potent one amongst the black masses within South Africa. This was displayed at the first mass rally addressed by the newly released political prisoners, which took place on 28 October in front of an estimated 70,000 people at the recently opened Soccer City stadium on the outskirts of Soweto. There the crowd did the *toyi-toyi* – a muscular march mimicking the movements of MK guerrillas in training. Meanwhile, when Walter Sisulu and other ANC stalwartsemerged from beneath the grandstands; they were escorted by an honour guard of twenty young militants clad in khaki uniforms, marching in military style. The rally spokesman informed observers that these escorts were 'symbolic' of MK. In his keynote speech, Sisulu reaffirmed the ANC's policy that it would not abandon the armed struggle unless the government met its terms.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> 'Official: ANC Can Be Legal If It Renounces Violence', *United Press International*, 18 October 1989.

<sup>13</sup> '70,000 Greet Freed Anti-Apartheid Leaders At Record Rally', *The Associated Press*, 29 October 1989; "'Armed Struggle' Will Continue, Activists Pledge', *The Toronto Star*, 30 October 1989; '70,000 Hail Rebels in South Africa', *The New York Times*, 30 October 1989; 'South Africa: "Today It Is Freedom"', *IPS – Inter Press Service*, 30 October 1989.

Clearly, in the minds of a large number of black South Africans, if the government had released senior ANC leaders and was considering entering into talks, this had to be attributable to pressure imposed on it by the movement, above all through its armed struggle. However the rhetoric and militancy on display at the rally on 28 October belied the fact that at the time there had been no reported violent incidents linked to MK within South Africa for nearly two months. Furthermore, the 180 attacks attributed by the police to the ANC in the first 11 months of 1989 represented a dramatic fall from the 280 recorded in 1988.<sup>14</sup> While questions may be raised about the reliability of the South African security forces' figures about MK attacks, especially given the state's history of exaggerating or minimising the 'terrorist' threat depending on its political objectives at any given time, the overall pattern pointed to an armed struggle of limited and declining military effectiveness.

MK's silence within South Africa ended in December 1989 when two of its cadres, Prakash Napier and Yusuf Akhalwaya, accidentally killed themselves in a bomb blast at a Johannesburg station. Another bomb exploded in Cape Town. Meanwhile, in January 1990, Chris Hani claimed MK responsibility for the bombing of a police vehicle in Port Elizabeth during the 1989 Christmas period which killed three policemen and a police informer.<sup>15</sup>

These sporadic attacks were hardly sufficient to sustain the morale of the discerning about the future of the armed struggle, and the ANC therefore spent the 1989/90 festive season in a sombre mood. The anniversaries of the founding of MK and the ANC, which

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<sup>14</sup> 'First ANC Rally for 29 Years Permitted', *The Financial Times* (London), 23 October 1989; 'ANC Clings to the Myth of the Armed Struggle', *The Independent* (London), 9 January 1990; 'World Insider', *The San Francisco Chronicle*, 22 January 1990.

<sup>15</sup> 'South Africa: Mixed Reaction to Mandela – De Klerk Talks', *IPS – Inter Press Service*, 14 December 1989; 'Mandela's Release a Mixed Blessing', *The Toronto Star*, 19 January 1990.

fell on 16 December and 8 January respectively, were devoted to making resolutions to do better in the coming year. In a public statement on 15 December, timed to coincide with the MK anniversary the following day, the ANC acknowledged the fall in its military attacks compared with the previous year, and vowed to correct the 'imbalance' between the armed struggle and other forms of activism in 1990.<sup>16</sup> Meanwhile on 8 January, in statements to the international media, Chris Hani again vowed to step up attacks within South Africa. He attributed the decline in attacks in 1989 to logistical problems related to the move from Angola and the further infiltration of the movement in previous years by former cadres who had been recruited by the police. Now the 'process of re-establishment and re-organisation' was complete and the necessary lessons had been learned, he said. On negotiations, he commented that it was possible that a ceasefire might occur, but that such an act 'must not be unilateral. It will have to be binding on both the ANC and the South African government'.<sup>17</sup>

The seven ANC prisoners released in October 1989 arrived in Lusaka on 15 January 1990 along with Harry Gwala, another ANC activist, for three days of talks during which they sought the external movement's views on the question of negotiations. Their trip revealed that although the fire of revolt amongst MK members in Lusaka may have been extinguished with the expulsions in 1989, beneath the surface the embers still smouldered. Bill Anderson recalled that a mass meeting was called to mark the arrival of the eight. The ANC's external leadership tried to prevent underground MK cadres in Lusaka from attending, declaring that something separate would be arranged for them. However, this failed and the meeting ended up being controlled by the MK underground

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<sup>16</sup> 'South Africa: ANC Vows to Step Up Armed Struggle', *IPS – Inter Press Service*, 15 December 1989.

<sup>17</sup> 'South African Rebels Vow New Attacks', *The Toronto Star*, 9 January 1990.

who used the opportunity to air their grievances. Their criticisms were ‘universally acclaimed by the audience as a whole’, Anderson in particular recalled the occasion when former MK Commander Raymond Mhlaba got on stage and ‘everyone cheered and referred to him as commander’, before someone stood up in the audience and asked Mhlaba to resume the post he had occupied briefly in 1963, because, the cadre said, MK had no leader. Others rose and asked the existing leadership to account for MK’s high casualty rate. Eventually one cadre stood up, pointed to the platform where the ANC’s external leadership was assembled, and told them that if they truly wanted to represent the rank-and-file the only course of action available to them was to resign. At that point the hall erupted in cheers of approval.<sup>18</sup>

The other notable event of the trip occurred at the beginning of a three-day policy meeting of the ANC National Executive on 18 January. In the preceding days the rhetoric of ANC leaders on the question of violence soared to new heights. Most vocal was Chris Hani. As the eight former prisoners arrived in Lusaka, he waited to receive them on the airport tarmac. There he told assembled reporters, ‘de Klerk has not done anything; this is our victory...And all forms of struggle now have got to be escalated...There is a need for a lot more military pressure...We cannot afford to enter negotiations from a position of weakness.’ He warned that not even the release of Nelson Mandela would spare the government MK’s wrath: ‘It will be a tremendous victory, it will reinforce the ANC leadership – but it will not bring about fundamental change. It will be just another victory

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<sup>18</sup> Karis-Gerhart Collection, Folder 1, Part I: Howard Barrell interview of Bill Anderson, 8 April 1991, pp. 27–8.

that needs to be consolidated for us to move forward.' The military struggle had 'to be escalated because the reason for armed struggle is still there.'<sup>19</sup>

However, a very different note was inadvertently sounded when the National Executive meeting commenced on 18 January. There the ANC secretary-general Alfred Nzo, who had been serving as acting president since a stroke had incapacitated Oliver Tambo in August 1989, made an extraordinary gaffe. At the opening ceremony which was open to the public, he mistakenly delivered a speech that was intended for a closed session of the meeting. In front of an audience that included the international press corps and President Kaunda, he wondered aloud whether the ANC should call it a day as far as the the armed struggle was concerned, in the event of the organisation being unbanned and 'operate solely as a legal movement', or whether it should 'continue to maintain some underground units' in South Africa. He advocated the latter course, saying that the 'armed struggle must continue', but then went on to inform the gathered audience that 'looking at our situation realistically we must admit that we do not have the capacity within our country to intensify the armed struggle in any meaningful way'. He went on to say that , 'it may therefore be that the main military task that we should pay attention to is precisely the building up of that capacity within the country both to be able to fight effectively should the need arise and to have sizeable forces at the moment when a new South African army is formed'.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> 'Exiled ANC Leaders Dream of Return Home', *The Globe and Mail* (Canada), 19 January 1990; 'S. Africans Vow Intensified Struggle', *Christian Science Monitor*, 19 January 1990; 'Mandela's Release a Mixed Blessing', *The Toronto Star*, 19 January 1990; G. Bell, 'De Klerk Ushering in Era of Compromise', *The Times* (London), 22 January 1990; 'Waiting for Mandela', *Newsweek*, 29 January 1990.

<sup>20</sup> 'ANC Admits Inability to Intensify Armed Struggle', *United Press International*, 18 January 1990; 'ANC Prepares to Take the Initiative on Negotiations', *The Guardian* (London), 19 January 1990; 'ANC Admits Limits of Armed Struggle in South Africa', *The Times* (London), 19



Nzo's error highlighted the discrepancy between the ANC's public and private stances on the question of violence. Through its security forces the South African government was aware of the ANC's inability to deliver on its threats regarding the armed struggle, and therefore could not be bluffed by such comments. Nevertheless de Klerk was enraged by the public statements that had been made by ANC spokesmen in Zambia during the visit. He was looking for a clear indication that the movement was committed to achieving peaceful solutions. Instead, a torrent of belligerence spewed forth. Amidst reports in the media that quoted official sources saying that an unhappy de Klerk was having second thoughts about unbanning the ANC, Nelson Mandela released a statement through family friend Dullah Omar saying that if he was released but the ANC remained illegal, he would 'have no alternative but to continue the struggle where he left off' in 1962. Omar confirmed that this implied a return to 'activities related to the armed struggle'.<sup>21</sup>

The NP yielded, and on 2 February 1990 de Klerk legalised the ANC in his opening speech to parliament. At the same time he also made a firm commitment to release Mandela. However, de Klerk chose to maintain most other political restrictions. Significantly, the changes he announced were strongly qualified by the prohibitions that remained. In a press briefing to South African journalists a few hours before his speech, de Klerk made clear that the government was making a distinction between 'political' activists and 'terrorists'. Thus, people who were known to have undertaken violent acts would be charged if they returned to South Africa. Likewise, only 'political prisoners'

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January 1990; P. Waldmeir, *Anatomy of a Miracle: The End of Apartheid and the Birth of the New South Africa* (London, Penguin, 1997), p. 137.

<sup>21</sup> 'Mandela's Path to Freedom Delayed By Call to End Ban', *The Times* (London), 30 January 1990.

would be released from incarceration.<sup>22</sup> Over the next few days, statements by government spokesmen made clear the partial nature of the changes. Some, but not all prisoners were being released; the ban on many political parties was being lifted, but security legislation would remain, enabling the police to arrest activists for political activities; and the townships would remain under military occupation under a continuing state of emergency. How this all affected the armed struggle was clarified in a statement by police spokesman Leon Mellet on 10 February, when he called on MK cadres within South Africa to surrender their arms, but added that even if they did they would not be immune from prosecution on charges of terrorism.<sup>23</sup>

The ANC's response was to reiterate that the terms set forth in the Harare Declaration represented its bottom line for suspending violence and entering into talks. On 3 February, the day after de Klerk's speech, a statement by the ANC's National Executive commented that the movement was 'gravely concerned' that the government had decided that 'some political prisoners will not be released', that the state of emergency would remain, and that detention without trial would continue. The statement emphasised that any halt to hostilities would 'have to be negotiated' and would 'have to arise from a mutually binding cease-fire'.<sup>24</sup>

The ANC National Executive Committee met in Lusaka from 14–16 February 1990 to consider the situation arising from de Klerk's initiatives. In a statement released at the end of the meeting, the National Executive again emphasised that the government had not

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<sup>22</sup> 'Apartheid's Exiles Await the Call Home', *The Independent* (London), 4 February 1990.

<sup>23</sup> 'SA ANC Radio Says De Klerk Wants to Preserve White Minority Rule, Orders Armed Struggle to Continue', *BBC Summary of World Broadcasts*, 14 February 1990, based on commentary 'Our People Will Not be Terrorised to Surrender', Radio Freedom broadcast, Addis Ababa, 11 February 1990.

<sup>24</sup> 'ANC Vows to Continue Armed Struggle', *United Press International*, 3 February 1990.

met the demands of the Harare Declaration in full and that only after it had done so would the ANC 'seek to negotiate with the Pretoria regime a suspension of hostilities by both sides'. The statement added that the need for MK to continue operating was highlighted by what it described as a 'continuing campaign of repression carried out by the South African Bantustan police and armies'. This issue was of pressing importance at the time. On 11 February, de Klerk released Nelson Mandela as promised, but on the weekend of his release approximately 50 people were killed and thousands made refugees in fighting between supporters of the ANC and Inkatha, the governing party in the KwaZulu homeland. Under these circumstances, the ANC National Executive's statement added, MK had a responsibility to defend the people until the government took 'all the necessary measures to end this violence and thus create the situation when the present obligation on our part to act in defence of the people, arms in hand, will fall away'.<sup>25</sup>

However MK was in no position to deliver on its threats. The dramatic upsurge in the armed struggle that the ANC promised in January had not materialised. According to statistics released by Pretoria University's Institute for Strategic Studies, the number of attacks by MK in the first three months of 1990 increased modestly to 82 from 77 during the same period in 1989.<sup>26</sup> Meanwhile, MK's weakness on the ground in South Africa was highlighted by events in March. The first direct talks between the ANC and NP about overcoming the obstacles to formal negotiations were scheduled to commence on 11

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<sup>25</sup> 'ANC National Executive Committee Issues Statement Calling for Meeting with President De Klerk', *BBC Summary of World Broadcasts*, 19 February 1990, based on SAPA dispatch 17 February 1990.

<sup>26</sup> 'ANC Radio Says "Ultra-Leftists" Hindering Attempts to Forge Black Unity', *BBC Summary of World Broadcasts*, 1 June 1990, based on Radio Freedom commentary, Dar es Salaam, 29 May 29, 1990.

April, but after the 'Sebokeng Massacre' of 26 March when police shot dead 11 protesters, the ANC announced on 31 March that it was pulling out of talks 'indefinitely'. However, after an emergency meeting between de Klerk and Mandela in early April, the talks were rescheduled for 2–4 May in Cape Town. Significantly, MK had been invisible in this whole process. It had proved itself unable to either protect the ANC's supporters or avenge their deaths.

A stalemate had been reached in the conflict. The ANC's policy was one of neither peace, nor war. It emphasised that it was not continuing with violence in order to overthrow the state – for –it was not rejecting the possibility of a peaceful settlement or acting in bad faith to undermine talks – but rather that the armed struggle was being maintained in order to pressure the government into submitting to the terms of the Harare Declaration. MK, however, was incapable of intensifying its military pressure. Meanwhile, the NP continued to insist on a commitment to purely peaceful methods of struggle by its adversaries as the essential precondition for any further relaxation of security measures.

Therefore, when the two sides met for 'talks about talks' (i.e. a discussion of the terms under which they would agree to begin formal constitutional negotiations) at Groote Schuur mansion in Cape Town on 2 May, behind the *bonhomie* of the delegates, the impasse remained. In a joint statement after the first four hour meeting on 2 May, seven obstacles to substantive talks were listed: security laws, the return of black exiles, the presence of troops in black townships, the release of political prisoners, the state of emergency, the ANC's commitment to armed struggle, and continued violence in black communities. The armed struggle was the only obstacle raised by the government, the

others were ANC demands. A consideration of MK's actual weakness highlights just how little leverage the ANC actually possessed during these talks.<sup>27</sup>

At the end of the meeting on 4 May, the government and the ANC released a joint statement, the 'Groote Schuur minute', which announced the creation of a joint working committee which was to report back on 21 May with proposals regarding defining and releasing political prisoners and granting immunity to people involved in 'political' offences. However, continued disagreement over what constituted political offences meant that MK cadres remained in an uncertain legal position. Furthermore, the minute only made provisions for persons who had committed offences *before* 4 May. Therefore any ANC members who continued their involvement with activities related to the armed struggle after that date would be acting in violation of the agreement and would not be entitled to protection under its terms. On the basis of the Groote Schuur minute, the security forces possessed the legitimate right to crush any ANC military structures that remained operating after 4 May – with the signed consent of the ANC leadership. The ANC's leaders may not have intended to outlaw its cadres who were continuing with activities related to the armed struggle, but that was the substance of the communiqué they signed in Cape Town.

The matter created a furious dispute on the evening of 4 May when Joe Slovo, who was part of the talks at Groote Schuur, submitted the minute to Mac Maharaj who was in South Africa illegally as part of a project dubbed 'Operation Vula', which aimed at establishing an underground ANC leadership presence within South Africa capable of co-ordinating all aspects of resistance – including armed struggle – against the state. Maharaj complained that the document took into account those in prison and exile, but took 'no

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<sup>27</sup> 'De Klerk, Mandela Try to Clear Air', *The Washington Times*, 3 May 1990.

account of the illegals and the people ... in the underground', it was 'totally silent' on them. Slovo countered that their safety was implied as a 'natural consequence' of the agreement, but Maharaj berated him for breaching faith with those in the underground.<sup>28</sup>

Meanwhile, Chris Hani had returned to South Africa on 18 June under an agreement reached between the ANC and the government granting him and other exiles temporary immunity from prosecution. Although he was effectively in the country through the grace of the government, Hani used the opportunity to embark on a nationwide tour in which he repeatedly issued threats to overthrow the state. Hani arrived in Transkei on 27 June to discuss negotiations and the Groote Schuur Minute with the Transkei Military Council. Transkei was ruled at the time by Bantu Holimisa, a military dictator who had seized power in a coup in December 1988, and who became the first homeland leader to gain the ANC's support due to his insistence that the then banned organisation was a key player in any political settlement in South Africa. Upon arriving in the Transkei, Hani declared that the training of MK cadres would continue because there was no way of guaranteeing the South African government would not return to its 'evil ways'.<sup>29</sup>

It was after a speech, delivered to 3,000 students at the University of Transkei on 18 July 1990, where Hani declared that the ANC was continuing to infiltrate guerrillas into South Africa because the correct conditions for negotiations were yet to be created, whilst adding that MK might have to 'seize power' if the government appeared unwilling to

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<sup>28</sup> Karis-Gerhart Collection, Folder 18, Part I: Howard Barrell interview with Mac Maharaj, 20 November 1990, p. 388; P. O'Malley, *Shades of Difference: Mac Maharaj and the Struggle for South Africa* (New York, Viking Penguin, 2007), pp. 356–57.

<sup>29</sup> 'ANC Military Wing to Continue Training Cadres', *BBC Summary of World Broadcasts*, 4 July 1990, based on Capital Radio (Umtata) report; 'Pretoria Gets A Goading From a Maverick Chief', *The New York Times*, 28 December 1989.

share sovereignty, that the South African state chose to escalate the stalemate over negotiations into a crisis.<sup>30</sup>

De Klerk and Mandela raised the issue of Hani's speech in a one-hour long discussion on Friday 20 July after the latter's return two days previously from a six-week long world tour. De Klerk announced that Hani's utterances 'militated against the words and spirit of the Groote Schuur minute' while Law and Order Minister Adriaan Vlok accused Hani of trying to provoke right-wing violence, and warned that the police would 'not stand idly by' in the face of his provocations. In response, Mandela repeated the ANC's policy that it would not abandon the armed struggle until a constitution recognising the right of all to vote was negotiated.<sup>31</sup>

The government's rage at the speech seemed disproportionate at the time. After all, Hani's comments merely echoed the ANC's official policy – as well as statements that Hani himself had made on many occasions during the previous six months. Hani certainly appeared nonplussed by the whole affair when he spent the weekend of 20–22 July appearing before mass rallies in the Transkei dressed in MK's camouflage uniform and brandishing an AK-47 rifle, accompanied by bodyguards waving AK-47s, in front of a crowd of ANC supporters toting imitation AK-47s.<sup>32</sup> At a rally on the Friday, Hani commented on the *contretemps*. He said he had no regrets regarding his comments that had ostensibly offended de Klerk, and that he hoped that they would not be used as a 'red herring' by the government to derail the next round of talks. He reiterated that MK was

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<sup>30</sup> 'ANC's Military Leader Says Struggle Still Goes On', *BBC Summary of World Broadcasts*, 20 July 1990, based on SAPA dispatch, 18 July 1990.

<sup>31</sup> 'Mandela Sees de Klerk After ANC Threat', *The Independent* (London), 21 July 1990

<sup>32</sup> 'ANC Arrests Raise Pressure on Mandela', *The Independent* (London), 23 July 1990; 'ANC Officer Flees to U.S. Consulate', *The Washington Post*, 24 July 1990; 'South African Clash Leaves 24 Dead', *The Guardian* (London), 24 July 1990.

being strengthened and that this was no a secret. Negotiations had to lead to the transfer of power to the people and the government would have to surrender power to a democratic majority, he added. Hanı said his rhetoric on armed struggle was not bravado but a serious declaration of MK's intention to fight. He did not see the incident affecting the next round of talks between the ANC and the government, and added that he would only stop commenting on violence when the ANC declared the time had come for a cease-fire.<sup>33</sup>

What Hanı perhaps did not know was that at the time he was speaking Operation Vula was being smashed. The government's agenda in making such an inordinate fuss of his comments became clearer on 22 July, when the lead story in South Africa's Sunday newspapers was of the exposure of a 'conspiracy' that the security forces had managed to foil. The police's tactic was to selectively leak details of the investigation to the media during the following days. The state was keen to link the speech made by Hanı, a senior South African Communist Party (SACP) member, to the uncovering of the plot, as part of their claim that Vula was a conspiracy involving an elite unit of the SACP acting within the ANC, but outside its command structure. Police alleged that the investigation that led to the arrests was launched following Hanı's comments, whilst a government spokesman intoned ominously that if a link was proved between Hanı's threats and the uncovered plot, then the issue would 'very much be a stumbling block to negotiations'.<sup>34</sup>

The ANC National Executive Committee met on Monday 23 July for a two-day

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<sup>33</sup> 'ANC Military Leader on De Klerk's Reaction to "Seize Power" Comments', *BBC Summary of World Broadcasts*, 23 July 1990, based on SAPA report, July 20, 1990; 'South Africa ANC Military Leader Comments on Power-Sharing, Armed Struggle', *BBC Summary of World Broadcasts*, 24 July 1990, based on Radio South Africa report, 22 July 1990.

<sup>34</sup> 'South Africa ANC "Insurgency" Alleged; Slovo Denies "Sinister Red Plot" by SACP', *BBC Summary of World Broadcasts*, 24 July 1990; 'ANC Arrests Raise Pressure on Mandela', *The Independent* (London), 23 July 1990.



meeting to decide its policy in preparation for the next round of ‘talks about talks’ scheduled for 6 August. The National Executive charged that the government had timed its announcement of the arrests in order to put pressure on Mandela to renounce the armed struggle.<sup>35</sup> On the same day, Joe Slovo also accused the government of bad faith and said that the announcement of the arrests was all an attempt to derail a mass rally that the SACP had scheduled for 29 July, where it planned to officially launch itself as a legal organisation inside South Africa. ‘It is our mass popularity, not some fabricated “red plot” that really worries de Klerk’, he charged.<sup>36</sup>

On July 25, the day after the ANC National Executive concluded its strategy meeting, Mac Maharaj was arrested under Section 29 of the Internal Security Act, thereby becoming the first member of the ANC National Executive Committee to be apprehended for involvement with Operation Vula. At a news conference on the same day, Nelson Mandela tried to suggest that the violations were due to difficulties the ANC had experienced in communicating with its underground members in South Africa, some of whom had been infiltrated before 2 May and were ‘still operating according to the old instructions’. Mandela said that the movement had been diligently ‘trying to reach all of them to convey decisions taken at Groote Schuur’.<sup>37</sup> When Mandela was asked to explain the obvious contradiction between the ANC’s existing, stated policy of refusing to suspend the armed struggle, and the comments he was making that the movement had

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<sup>35</sup> ‘ANC Arrests Raise Pressure on Mandela’, *The Independent* (London), 23 July 1990; ‘South Africa: Massive Swoop on ANC Guerrillas’, *IPS – Inter-Press Service*, 23 July 1990; ‘ANC “Military” Man Asks US Consulate for Asylum’, *The Independent* (London), 24 July 1990.

<sup>36</sup> ‘SACP General Secretary Reacts to “Red Plot” Smear’, *Xinhua General News Service*, 23 July 1990; ‘ANC “Insurgency” Alleged; Slovo Denies “Sinister Red Plot” by SACP’, *BBC Summary of World Broadcasts*, 24 July 1990.

<sup>37</sup> P. van Niekerk, ‘Leading ANC Official Arrested in South Africa: Latest Detention May Threaten Peace Process’, *The Globe and Mail* (Canada), 26 July 1990.

instructed its soldiers to lay down their arms, he responded irritably that the questioner was 'very confused' and called for the next question.<sup>38</sup>

Mandela had known about the arrests before they were splashed over the news. Mac Maharaj, who had become aware that Operation Vula was in trouble on 13 July when he heard of the arrest of Sipiwe Nyanda, recalled that he briefed Mandela about the matter on the morning of 19 July. Mandela then called Jacob Zuma, another senior ANC member, about arranging a meeting with the government to discuss the arrests. However it appears that the matter was not discussed at the meeting between Mandela and de Klerk on 20 July 1990.<sup>39</sup>

After the affair was publicised in the media, it was de Klerk who called for a meeting with Mandela. This took place on 26 July. There de Klerk read from documents confiscated in the raids which referred to a secret underground meeting of the SACP Central Committee in Tongaat, near Durban on 19–20 May 1990. In the minutes of the meeting, 'Comrade Joe' was quoted as saying the SACP would not be bound by the ceasefire agreement that those in attendance expected to be reached at the next round of talks in August. It appears that Mandela had not been briefed about this aspect of Vula because he recalled later in his autobiography that he was 'taken aback' by the information, and 'knew nothing about it'.<sup>40</sup>

The government's strategy was two-fold. First, as mentioned, it sought to exploit the affair to drive a wedge between the ANC and SACP. Second, on the basis of the material

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<sup>38</sup> 'South Africa: ANC Executive Member Detained', *IPS-Inter Press Service*, 26 July 1990; 'Senior ANC Leader Arrested But Talks "Go On"', *The Financial Times* (London), 26 July 1990; 'Mandela Insists S. Africa Talks Must Stay on Track', *Christian Science Monitor* (Boston), 27 July 1990.

<sup>39</sup> O'Malley, *Shades of Difference*, pp. 368–69.

<sup>40</sup> N. Mandela, *Long Walk to Freedom: The Autobiography of Nelson Mandela* (London, Abacus, 1995, c1994), p. 701.

that had been seized, it was aware that the ANC was intending to announce the suspension of its armed struggle at the next talks about talks, and that the movement hoped to present its act as a magnanimous, voluntary gesture to facilitate formal negotiations. The government's goal was to ratchet up the pressure to make the unilateral suspension appear a capitulation.

The government's first aim soon unravelled. It assumed that the 'Comrade Joe' referred to in the minutes of the meeting in Tongaat was Joe Slovo. However, Slovo was able to produce his passport, which proved that at the time of the meeting he was actually in Lusaka. In fact, the 'Comrade Joe' referred to in the minutes was Siphwiwe Nyanda. On 28 July, Mandela told a group of ambassadors to South Africa that Slovo would be present at the 6 August talks in Pretoria whether de Klerk liked it or not. Meanwhile Mandela set about clarifying the basis of the ANC's alliance with the SACP. On the one hand, he reaffirmed the links between the two organisations and defended the SACP against government smears, but he simultaneously made clear, as he stated in his speech at the rally marking the re-launch of the Communist Party on 29 July, that 'the ANC is not a communist party...and as a national liberation movement it has no mandate to espouse Marxist ideology'.<sup>41</sup>

Following the 'Wrong Joe' fiasco, the government and police were subject to widespread derision and their campaign to have Slovo removed from the ANC delegation disintegrated. However Mandela conceded that he understood de Klerk's concern about recent events, reiterated the total commitment of the ANC, MK and the SACP to the

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<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 701; 'South Africa's Red Flag Holds Promise for the Curious; The Communist Party re-emerges unscuppered by events in Europe', *The Independent* (London), 29 July 1990; 'ANC Tightens Links with Communists', *The Guardian* (London), 30 July 1990; 'Mandela Distances Himself from his Communist Allies', *The Financial Times* (London), 30 July 1990; 'South Africa; The Wrong Joe', *The Economist*, 4 August 1990.

agreements reached in May, and said that the problems de Klerk raised in the 26 July meeting would be discussed at the forthcoming talks.<sup>42</sup>

After 16 hours of negotiations beginning on 6 August, the government and the ANC released a joint communiqué in the early hours of the following day which became known as the 'Pretoria Minute'. The agreement contained an unconditional and unilateral ANC suspension of armed activities. In return the government made a series of non-committal pledges of good intent. It would 'consider' lifting the state of emergency in Natal as soon as possible (it had lifted the emergency in South Africa's three other provinces in June), but offered no timetable for achieving this; meanwhile it would give 'immediate consideration' to ANC requests for it to 'review' certain provisions of the Internal Security Act. The government would also release more 'ANC-related prisoners' beginning in September 1990, and from October would give indemnity to 'categories' of individuals involved with politically related offences.<sup>43</sup>

The ANC immediately went on a propaganda offensive to sell the ceasefire to the masses in order to minimise the political fallout. It was a hard sell. In fact, as Joe Slovo later confessed, in his estimation '90 percent of ANC supporters thought the decision was a sellout'.<sup>44</sup> Slovo began the campaign on the day of the release of the Pretoria Minute, threatening that the ANC would resume arms the moment it became clear that the

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<sup>42</sup> 'De Klerk and Mandela Agree on Talks', *The New York Times*, 2 August 1990; 'South Africa: Stage Set for "Groote Schuur II" August 6', *IPS – Inter Press Service*, 2 August 1990.

<sup>43</sup> 'ANC Suspends Armed Struggle in Peace Deal', *The Guardian* (London), 7 August 1990; 'Mandela's Guerrillas Lay Down Their Arms', *The Toronto Star*, 7 August 1990; 'ANC Agrees to Suspend Armed Struggle', *The Financial Times* (London), 7 August 1990; 'S. Africa Accord Signals Move to Joint Rule', *Christian Science Monitor* (Boston), 8 August 1990.

<sup>44</sup> Waldmeir, *Anatomy of a Miracle*, p. 166.

government was not honouring the agreement.<sup>45</sup> The ANC's line was that the ceasefire was conditional, that the security forces were effectively on probation, and that a return to the armed struggle remained an option. The organisation placed an advertisement in the press the day after the agreement to this effect which declared: 'The armed struggle has not been abandoned...The people's army, Umkhonto we Sizwe, has not been dissolved; we have not forfeited our right to self-defence...continued suspension is conditional on the behaviour of the South African police and defence force.'<sup>46</sup> On 12 August 1990 Chris Hani spoke to students in Umtata in the Transkei of the need for the soldiers of the liberation struggle to remain 'in the trenches' waiting for orders from the ANC whilst on the same day Harry Gwala, another hardliner, spoke of seizing power and of 'teeth for teeth'.<sup>47</sup>

In reality, and contrary to the rhetoric, the ANC leadership had no intention of going back. Once again, it is important to distinguish between the ANC's public and private stances on the question of violence. As noted, the ANC's public relations campaign following 7 August emphasised that the right of 'self-defence' was being maintained, and that the suspension was conditional on the security forces' behaviour. However, as National Executive Committee member James Stuart later recalled, in the days immediately following the ceasefire 'a wave of violence was unleashed against the ANC' by 'elements of state security' and their surrogates. However, he added, in the face of this onslaught, the leadership 'resisted the temptation to resort once again to the armed

<sup>45</sup> 'Constitutional Development Minister on remarks by Winnie Mandela, Sisulu, Slovo', *BBC Summary of World Broadcasts*, 13 August 1990, based on SAPA report.

<sup>46</sup> 'Still Willing to Fight, ANC Warns', *The Globe and Mail* (Canada), 9 August 1990.

<sup>47</sup> 'ANC's Chris Hani on the Suspension of the Armed Struggle', *BBC Summary of World Broadcasts*, 15 August 1990, based on Radio South Africa report, 12 August 1990; 'ANC Reluctant to Drop the Language of War; South Africa's Whites are Alarmed that a Peace Deal has not Ended African National Congress Rhetoric', *The Independent* (London), 14 August 1990.

**Comment [J2]:** Need to expand - eye for an eye tooth for a tooth? Not ear from text?

struggle because we knew that that would be the end of the ANC as an organisation of such high prestige and such high authority, both in the country and internationally. I think that would have destroyed us completely'.<sup>48</sup>

### **Conclusion**

This article has illustrated certain aspects of the crisis that faced the ANC on the eve of its legalisation in February 1990 and how these led to a situation whereby the ANC was rendered incapable of intensifying its armed struggle within South Africa beyond the low-level it had fallen to in the late 1980s. The article also discussed the ostensibly paradoxical fact that after the unbanning of the ANC, the sole obstacle that impeded the commencement of formal talks between the movement and the government was MK's armed struggle, in spite of both sides acknowledging its negligible military significance. The real issue at stake was the terms under which the ANC would enter into negotiations and specifically, whether it would do so as a triumphant liberation movement or not. When the government stated that its sole condition for talks was that the ANC should unilaterally renounce violence, its aim was to strip the credibility of the movement's claims that it had secured South Africa's liberation through its own efforts. Victorious armies do not disarm unilaterally at the behest of vanquished foes. Naturally the ANC resisted this and a stalemate resulted.

In August 1990 the stalemate was broken. By this time the ANC felt that it had held out against the government's demands long enough for its decision to suspend its armed struggle to be seen as a voluntary, magnanimous act rather than a capitulation. However,

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<sup>48</sup> Robben Island, Mayibuye Archives, Bellville, University of the Western Cape, Wolfie Kodesh interview of James Stuart (H.G. Loots), 25 March 1993. Audiotape MCA 6-375.

the affair of the 'sinister red plot' that emerged in late July upset this plan. The impression that the concession had been forced from the movement contributed to the ANC emphasising after the Pretoria minute that MK returning to armed struggle was an option that it might exercise. In reality such a move was not seriously entertained, but the determination with which the movement pursued its propaganda campaign to make it seem that there may be a return to arms highlighted just how fragile the ANC considered its position.

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