



**UMKHONTO WE SIZWE.
ITS ROLE IN THE ANC'S ONSLAUGHT
AGAINST WHITE DOMINATION
IN SOUTH AFRICA, 1961 - 1988.**

by

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While every effort has been made to be as complete and as objective as possible, the thesis, like the material it is based upon, has its shortcomings and weaknesses. As such this study should not be seen as a definitive view but rather as an introduction or an opening chapter in the history of Umkhonto we Sizwe and the armed struggle between 1961 and the end of 1988.

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FOREWORD

Although a great deal has been written over the past two decades on the armed struggle in South Africa and the role that the African National Congress (ANC) and the South African Communist Party (SACP) have played in it, virtually nothing of academic value has been written on the main vehicle of the struggle, namely Umkhonto we Sizwe or 'MK' as it is more commonly known. Besides the research undertaken by Edward Felt in the 1960's and the account left to us by Bruno Mtolo on the formation and activities of Umkhonto in Natal prior to the Rivonia events, most of the material that has been written on the subject of Umkhonto makes no meaningful contribution to the history and activities of the organisation. As a result a serious vacuum has been left in the history of the liberation movement but particularly the armed struggle in South Africa. There was therefore an urgent need for a systematic and detailed study of Umkhonto and the specific role it played in the liberation struggle since 1961.

Identifying the need for this study was however the easy part. Writing it on the other hand presented numerous complex problems, part of which was brought about by the lack of suitable source material, and the fact that the organisation was proscribed by law. The problem was further compounded by the fact that although Umkhonto was created to be independent (initially at least) of the ANC and to fulfill a function that the ANC could not do in the 1960's, the two organisations became so closely associated with one another and with the SACP that most of the time it is very difficult if not nearly impossible, to always draw a clear distinction between the three of them. Of course the problem has not been made easier by the Press which, for the sake of simplicity and expediency, have chosen to equate the ANC and Umkhonto with one another. Virtually none of the newspapers which have reported on the armed struggle over the years have taken the trouble to draw any meaningful distinction between the organisation and activities of the ANC on the one hand and Umkhonto on the other. While it is true that the two organisations have very close ties and there is a strong degree of overlapping between both



members and leaders, this research will show that the two organisations are nonetheless different from one another and have organisational structures and functions that support this.

The main difference between the two organisations has always been the fact that while Umkhonto was specifically created as the military component of the ANC-SACP alliance, the ANC on the other hand has remained the main political instrument of the liberation movement. As such, members of the ANC were not supposed to undertake any direct military missions against apartheid targets in South Africa. At best they fulfilled a supportive role such as the distribution of propaganda, the provision of transport, the supply of weapons and the creation of weapons caches etc., to support Umkhonto's cadres in the field. The members of the ANC thus concerned themselves primarily with political and diplomatic work in the armed struggle.

By the middle of the 1980's however, the relationship between the ANC and Umkhonto began to change when the political and military functions of the two organisations were brought together under the control of the newly created Political-Military-Council (PMC) following the collapse of the ANC and Umkhonto's organisational structures in the frontline states of Mozambique and Swaziland, as a result of the South African government's persistent counter-insurgency operations. The new organisational structure that was set up by the beginning of 1983 to replace the defunct Regional Command was sanctioned by the ANC and the SACP and accepted at the former's National Consultative Conference at Kabwe, Zambia, in 1985. This new direction in the armed struggle was further reflected in the decision to introduce compulsory military training for all members of the combined liberation movement. In theory thus, after 1985, all members of the ANC and the SACP were subjected to military training in Umkhonto's training camps in Angola and elsewhere. This move further helped to blur the lines between the ANC, the SACP and Umkhonto. Much of this will become clear in the course of this thesis. Where possible, interpretations will be attached to the facts to highlight certain developments in the armed struggle. Unfortunately, the facts pertaining to Umkhonto is not always



volumous or conclusive enough to make statements that will withstand the test of time.

The aim of this study is to examine the history of Umkhonto from its origins in 1961 to the end of 1988 when as a result of the New York Accord between South Africa, Cuba and Angola the ANC and Umkhonto were forced to remove all their military bases and personnel from Angola with immediate effect. Although this particular move severely crippled the ability of Umkhonto to continue with its armed struggle it was not the only factor influencing its performance and status by the end of 1988. A host of other factors such as poor organisation, weak leadership, dissention, dissatisfaction with the role of the SACP in the liberation movement, and lack of sufficient funds among others also contributed to its weakened position by the end of the 1980's. These and other factors effecting the position and performance of Umkhonto are extensively dealt with in the second half of this study.

Although increased cooperation between the military and political segments of the liberation movement became an important element in the armed struggle after 1985, the leadership of the ANC, the SACP and Umkhonto were not always in agreement on important issues. This became increasingly apparent towards the end of the 1980's when the combined effect of the South African government's counter-insurgency operations and the changes that were taking place in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe were beginning to have a direct affect on the position and future of the liberation alliance led by the ANC and the SACP. Although the ANC, like most political organisations, always had a fair share of dissention in its ranks the formation of Umkhonto in 1961, the destruction of the organisation's underground structures inside South Africa by the mid-1960's and the growing hegemony of the SACP over both the ANC and Umkhonto's leadership since, have produced some serious dissention in the ranks of the liberation movement. The first came in 1975 with the expulsion of the African National Congress African nationalist faction from the ranks of the ANC. The second came with the isolation of the Okhela organisation which was reported to have been a predominantly white anti-communist organisa-



tion inside the ANC. The third attack on the leadership of the liberation movement was averted with the expulsion of the dissident Marxist group known as the "Marxist Tendency within the ANC" in the early 1980's.

Although the ANC and the SACP have always denied that the influence of these attacks on its combined leadership were in anyway serious, this study has shown that these developments in association with other developments had indeed a deep effect on the effectiveness of Umkhonto and the outcome of the armed struggle. The latter is particularly evident in the decision by Chris Hani, who was Chief of Staff of Umkhonto and his protegee, Steve Tshwete, to challenge the ANC's National Executive Committee in 1987 to allow them to execute the decision taken at the Kabwe conference to extend Umkhonto's attacks to include White civilian targets inside South Africa. Although the ANC had accepted such action in principle at its Kabwe conference in 1985, it remained reluctant to fully implement it out of fear that such action could tarnish its image internationally and loose its much needed international support, particularly among the nations and people of Western Europe. Such considerations seemingly did not carry much support with Marxist radicals and militants such as Hani and others who preferred a military to a political or negotiated settlement in South Africa. With the support of the Central Committee of the SACP (or rather, key elements of it) behind them, Hani and Tshwete issued a directive to all Umkhonto commanders in 1987 to extent their attacks to White civilian targets. The fact that the ANC did nothing to stop the directive or to counter Hani's actions is clear indication of the position that the military hardliners had come to occupy in the ANC-SACP alliance and Umkhonto by the latter part of the 1980's.

Unfortunately for Hani and his followers, the signing of the New York Accord at the end of 1988 came as a severe setback to their plans and left them with a cause that was becoming increasingly difficult to execute successfully. This research will show that as a result of these developments and the changes that were taking place in the Soviet Union particularly with regards to Soviet Third World policy,



the military hardliners in the ANC-SACP alliance and Umkhonto were increasingly forced to take a backseat to the views and activities of more moderate leaders such as Thabo Mbeki, who was the ANC's Chief of Foreign Affairs. In view of the above this study will show that the SACP since the early 1970's has taken steadily control of the ANC and the liberation struggle in South Africa and that by the end of the 1980's Umkhonto was more a fief of the SACP and its Central Committee than of the ANC and its National Executive Committee, which had a clear majority of communist members by 1988.

Although some major developments have taken place since the signing of the New York Accord in December 1988, such as the unbanning of the ANC, the SACP and Umkhonto and the release of many political prisoners, these events and developments falls outside the scope of this study and are dealt with in the postscript.

SOURCES

Anyone doing research on Umkhonto and the armed struggle in South Africa will soon find himself confronted by several major problems. The first is a general lack of information or sources pertaining to Umkhonto in particular. Since the armed struggle began in 1961 only a handful of literature have appeared on Umkhonto as such. The first was Bruno Mtolo's book Umkonto we Sizwe. The Road to the Left which was published in 1966. The second was the research done by Edward Felt into the beginning years of the armed struggle. Felt's research which was published in bookform in 1971 and which made extensive use of court records during the 1960's contains a fair amount of information on the early history of Umkhonto as well as the organisations relationship to the ANC and the SACP. Unfortunately the book is difficult to read in that it does not draw a clear distinction between the Umkhonto and its parent organisations, the ANC and the SACP during these early years. One of the main reasons for this confusing situation is the already mentioned extensive overlapping of membership that existed between the three organisations and which Felt has pointed out in his findings.



A further factor that has limited research on Umkhonto has been the absence of a single depository where documents on the three organisations can be consulted. Since the banning of the ANC in 1961 virtually all documents pertaining to the armed struggle and the organisations involved in it have left the country. The few original documents pertaining to the armed struggle that have remained inside the country are mostly those documents that the state have presented to the courts as part of its evidence in the various trials against the members of the underground movement during the 1960's. These latter documents form an integral part of most trial records and as such are open to the public for consultation. One of the weaknesses of Felt's research however is that while he consulted most of the major court cases that took place during the 1960's (these cases include the trials of Nelson Mandela and the National High Command (NHC) of Umkhonto as well as that of the leader of the underground Communist Party in the mid-1960's, Abram Fischer) he did not make use of the documentary evidence that were filed with these records. The reason for this is probably due to the fact that he made use of micro film copies of the various trial records which excludes all documentation.

Beyond these "primary sources" of information on the armed struggle and Umkhonto there are virtually none other that can be consulted on the early period of the struggle. Recently some new information (mostly of a secondary nature) has become available on the early period of the armed struggle and most of this has been made possible only by the political and other changes that has been taking place inside South Africa since 2nd February 1990. Still the period remains poorly documented and any extensive research into this vital phase of the armed struggle will have to await the opening of the ANC's archives one day.

The middle period, that is the period in exile up to the outbreak of the Soweto riots in the mid 1970's, is equally poorly documented if not more so than the period 1961 to the mid 1960's. Very little is known about the activities, organisation and leadership of Umkhonto during this period. Most of the sources that deals with this phase



of the liberation struggle, even those that have been published most recently such as Francis Meli's South Africa Belongs to Us. A History of the ANC (1988), Heidi Holland's The Struggle. A History of the African National Congress (1989), and Howard Barrell's MK. The ANC's armed struggle (1990), shed very little light on this period. Of the three sources mentioned above Barrell's book is perhaps the most complete on the period 1965 to 1976. Barrell, who has specialised in the affairs of the ANC as a journalist between 1981 and 1988 provides some valuable new insights into what transpired in the liberation movement after it was destroyed inside the country by the mid-1960's. But even so the period still remains under-documented.

The period 1976 to the end of 1988 is slightly better documented. Two books that contains a fair amount of information on Umkhonto in this latter period are Stephen Davis's Apartheid's Rebels. Inside South Africa's Hidden War and Howard Barrell's MK mentioned above. Barrell's book which was published in 1990 also contains information on developments since the signing of the New York Accord.

Although the above books are the only sources in that format known to the author on the subject of Umkhonto or which contains information specifically related to the organisation and its activities, there are also other secondary sources that contains information or reference to Umkhonto. These include journal articles, government publications, and reports contained in reputable information sheets such as Africa Confidential. In addition to these materials, there are also the publications of Umkhonto, the ANC and the SACP itself. These latter sources, although until recently not readily available inside South Africa, also contains information on the armed struggle and the role of the ANC and the SACP in it as well as their attitude towards it. A major weakness of most of this material is that it is by nature propagandistic and not as trustworthy as primary sources normally are. In addition, there are also the published findings and views of researchers such as Tom Lodge, Andrew Prior, Michael Radu, Micheal Morris and many others who have made Umkhonto and the armed



struggle the subject of their research over the last decade or more. This latter category of materials are far too numerous to be discussed here. They will be dealt with in the text where necessary.

As far as personal interviews with the leaders of the underground are concerned, none were conducted or included in this study. Although the matter was given some serious consideration, it was finally decided that for this author to have gained access to the underground leadership of Umkhonto, the ANC or the SACP or to have extracted from them the sort of specific and detailed information needed for this research, at the time would have been highly unlikely if not impossible. It is also doubtful whether the information gained would have warranted the expense incurred to obtain it. It is doubtful whether Umkhonto's leadership, most of whom were also members of the SACP and the ANC, would have offered information that could harm the organisation or be of benefit to the South African police via this research. Moreover, since February 1990 transcripts of a great many interviews with the leaders of the combined liberation movement including Umkhonto have been published in the daily press and it is thus unlikely that additional interviews would have revealed the sort of information that could substantially effect the course of this research. As a result it was decided not to seek interviews with members of the ANC-SACP alliance or Umkhonto. Whilst this decision undoubtedly distracts from the status of this research it does not in any way effect the accuracy of its findings. Compared to the latest available information on the subject and contrasted against the information contained in published sources such as Barrell's book on Umkhonto, the history of Umkhonto that follows represents an accurate account of what transpired between 1961 and the end of 1988. While history is a science, and every effort had been made to be accurate and as complete as possible, it is also so that the last word on a subject, especially a contemporary and controversial subject such as Umkhonto and the armed struggle, is never spoken. New information will necessarily bring new approaches to the subject, which will demand new questions and new answers. In their search for these answers, future historians will hopefully find the facts provided



here and the interpretations attached to them a useful guide to a more complete understanding of the history of Umkhonto we Sizwe.

THE DIVISION OF THE WORK

One of the more difficult aspects of this research has been the question of approach and the division of the work. A pure chronological approach without some in depth thematical discussion of the subject matter would have lacked the type of synthesis that was required of a study of this nature. On the other hand, a pure thematical approach without some chronological division of the facts and the major development phases would have been an equally unbalanced synthesis. It was therefore decided to make use of both methods. In terms of this decision the first five chapters of the study deals with the history and development of Umkhonto and the armed struggle in a mainly chronological fashion while the second half of the study i.e. chapters six to nine deals with the subject of Umkhonto in both a chronological and thematical manner. As is almost always the case with the study of an organisation during a particular period, a brief overview of events prior to its formation is necessary for a full understanding of events. Umkhonto is no exception to this rule and in order to explain its formation in 1961 an introductory chapter recording the history of the Black liberation struggle in South Africa since 1912 has been provided. Although this early history of the liberation struggle is well documented and has been extensively written on, it is impossible to examine the origins of Umkhonto and the decisions that led to its formation at the end of 1961 without it.

In terms of sources both chapters make use of primary and secondary materials. Chapter three deals with the formation of Umkhonto in 1961 and here the latest sources on the subject such as Howard Barrell have been consulted. Chapters four and five deals with the internal and external developments of the armed struggle and the position that Umkhonto and the ANC-SACP alliance found themselves in after the collapse of their underground structures inside South Africa by the mid 1960's. Both these latter chapters makes use of a



wide range of sources, most of which are secondary yet specifically related to the subject under discussion.

In the second half of the study (chapters six to nine) chapter six deals with the specific relationship between Umkhonto and its parent organisations, the ANC and the SACP. Chapter seven on the other hand deals with the organisational set-up, leadership, and funding of Umkhonto, while chapter eight deals with the recruitment, training and arming of Umkhonto's cadres between 1961 and 1988. The last chapter in this study (chapter nine) deals primarily with the outcome of the armed struggle and the general position of Umkhonto by December 1988, and the various conditions and factors that have given rise to it.

Chapter nine is followed by a brief conclusion in which South Africa and the ANC-SACP alliance and Umkhonto's position in the late 1980's is specifically touched upon. The study finally concludes with a brief postscript in which some of the major developments that have taken place since the signing of the New York Accord in December 1988 is recorded up to and including the unbanning of the ANC, SACP and Umkhonto in February 1990 and the release of Nelson Mandela shortly afterwards.

THE USE OF TERMINOLOGY

In keeping with accepted academic practice, this study has as far as possible, avoided the use of language and terminology that might be politically or racially offensive, or create the impression of a biased interpretation of the facts. Terms such as African, Coloured, Indian or White have been reserved for reference to these specific racial or population groups. The term Black has been used to refer collectively to the various non-White racial groups in South Africa which in the main are the Africans, the Coloureds and the Indians. When reference is made to the total population of South Africa, that is all the different racial and ethnic groups including the Whites, the term South African will be used. In the past the term has been used to refer mainly to the White peoples of South Africa, but this



is no longer the case. In keeping with the above decision, the study also avoids using terminology that might reflect a biased interpretation of the facts or might give preference to a particular point of view or ideology. So, for instance, it was decided to give preference to the use of more neutral meaning terms such as guerrilla, guerrilla fighter, guerrilla warfare, saboteur, sabotage, cadre, insurgent, insurgency, government and security forces instead of emotionally loaded terms such as terrorist, freedom fighter, comrade, liberation fighter, colonist, settler, murderer, racist or fascist forces, apartheid regime and Pretoria regime. Where terminology such as the latter have been included in the text it was done purposely to convey a particular thought or fact as accurately as possible, and not because of the author's preference for a particular political or ideological point of view.



LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

A comprehensive list of abbreviations has been included below to guide the reader through the text of this study. There are such an array of acronyms in use today that the inclusion of such a list has become an absolute necessity if one wishes to find one's way through any contemporary political literature. As is the common use today, the name or title of an organisation, party or association, is fully accounted for the first time reference is made to it. Thereafter the abbreviation or acronym commonly applied to it is used. For instance, the African National Congress will be referred to as the ANC, while the South African Communist Party will be referred to as the SACP or the Party. Umkhonto we Sizwe too is more commonly known as Umkhonto or MK and will be referred to as such.

AAC	All African Convention
AAPSA	Afro Asian Peoples Solidarity Organisation
AEC	Arusha Air Charters
ANC	African National Congress
APC	Area Political Committees
APMC's	Area Political Military Committees
ARM	African Resistance Movement
AWB	Afrikaner Weerstandsbeweging
AZAPO	Azanian People's Organisation
BAWU	Black Allied Workers Union
BCM	Black Consciousness Movement
BCP	Basutoland Congress Party
BCP	Black Community Programme
BPC	Black People's Convention
CC	Central Committee (Communist Party)
CF	Citizen Force
CDF	Conference for a Democratic Future
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
COD	Congress of Democrats
CONCP	Conference das Organizacoes Nacionalistas das Colonias Portuguesas
COSAS	Congress of South African Students



COSATU	Congress of South African Trade Unions
COSAWR	Committee of South African War Resisters
CONTRALESA	Congress of Traditional Leaders of South Africa (ANC front)
CYL	Congress Youth League
CP	Conservative Party
CPSA	Communist Party of South Africa
CPSU	Communist Party of the Soviet Union
CUSA	Confederation of Unions of South Africa
DBA	Department of Bantu Affairs
DMI	Department of Military Intelligence
DNA	Department of Native Affairs
DONS	Department of National Security
EAA	East African Airways
EC	Emergency Committee (ANC's National Executive Committee after April 1960)
ECC	End Conscription Campaign
FOSATU	Federation of South African Trade Unions
FRAC	Franchise Action Committee
FRELIMO	Front for the Liberation of Mozambique
HC	High Command (Umkhonto we Sizwe)
HQ	Head Quarters
ICU	Industrial and Commercial Workers Union
IDAF	International Defence and Aid Fund
IDAMASA	Inter-denominational African Ministers Association of South Africa
IDAMF	Inter-denominational African Ministers Federation (see IDAMASA)
IUEF	International University Exchange Fund
IRD	International Reconstruction and Development Department
LM	Liberation Movement
MCW	Military Combat Work
MDM	Mass Democratic Movement
MK	Umkhonto we Sizwe (Spear of the Nation)
MPLA	Movimento Popular de Libertacao de Angola
NAC	National Action Council
NAM	Non-Aligned Movement



NCFL	National Committee for Liberation
NEC	National Executive Committee
NECC	National Education Crisis Committee
NHC	National High Command
NIS	National Intelligence Service
NLM	National Liberation Movement
NP	National Party
NRC	Natives Representative Council
NWC	National Working Committee (ANC)
OAU	Organization of African Unity
OU	Operations Unit (Umkhonto we Sizwe)
PAC	Pan Africanist Congress (of South Africa)
PAFMECSA	Pan African Freedom Movement for East, Central, and Southern Africa
PAIGC	African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde
PANA	Pan African New Agency
PMC	Political Military Council
PMSC	Political Military Strategy Commission
RC	Regional Commands (Umkhonto)
RC	Regional Committee (ANC)
RC	Revolutionary Council (also sometimes referred to as Committee)
RPMC's	Regional Political Military Councils (Committees)
SABC	South African Broadcasting Corporation
SACP	South African Communist Party
SACPO	South African Coloured People's Organisation
SACTU	South African Congress of Trade Unions
SADF	South African Defence Force
SAG	South African Government
SAIC	South African Indian Congress
SAN	South African Navy
SANNC	South African Native National Congress
SAP	South African Police
SAPB	South African Political Bureau
SASM	South African Students Movement
SASO	South African Students Organisation



SASOL	South African Coal, Oil and Gas Corporation
SAUF	South African United Front
SOMAFCO	Solomon Mahlangu Freedom College
SSC	State Security Council
SSRC	Soweto Students Representative Council
SWAPO	South West African People's Organisation
UDF	United Democratic Front
UF	United Front
UNITA	Uniao Nacional para a Independencia Total de Angola
UP	United Party
UWUSA	United Workers Union of South Africa
ZANU	Zimbabwe African National Union
ZAPU	Zimbabwe African People's Union



LIST OF DIAGRAMS

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