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IRR

MAIMANE

MALEMA

MARIKANA

NKANDLA

NUMSA

SACP

ZILLE

ZUMA

OPINION

How the armed struggle succeeded

Ronnie Kasrils | 16 February 2017

Ronnie Kasrils reviews MK's 30-year armed struggle and its contribution to forcing the apartheid regime to the negotiating table

The people's patience is not endless. The time comes in the life of any nation when there remain only two choices: submit or fight. That time has now come to South Africa. We shall not submit and we have no choice but to hit back by all means within our power in defence of our people, our future and our freedom.

Thus ran the clarion call of the Manifesto of Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK) clandestinely posted in public places in South Africa as the first bomb blasts heralding its existence exploded at apartheid offices and installations on 16 December 1961.

The birth of MK was a cumulated response to the systemic repression and brutality of the apartheid system manifested in the 1960 Sharpeville massacre; the outlawing of the African National Congress (ANC) and Pan Africanist Congress (PAC); the Communist Party of South Africa (CPSA) having been banned in 1950; the closing down of all means of non-violent struggle; and the fact that change was seen as impossible unless revolutionary force was utilised. The ANC – and, with it, the South African Communist Party (SACP) which played a significant role in the establishment of MK (see for example Cde Isu Chiba's interview in *Men of Dynamite* cited below) – faced the same question as the other racially and colonially enslaved countries of the region. The resort to armed resistance was not exceptional to South Africa.

The 1960s saw the similar turn to armed struggle in Angola, Mozambique, Namibia and Zimbabwe, and further afield in Guinea-Bissau and earlier in Kenya and Algeria and beyond. The latter two struggles were rooted in the post-World War II decade of the 1950s which saw most notably the triumph of the Vietnamese over the French and the victory of the Cuban Revolution, both of which were to feature in contributing to the advance of our struggle.

The terrain in Vietnam and Cuba, as in Mozambique and Angola, with vast forests and mountains was highly suited to guerrilla warfare. Zimbabwe's conditions were favourable once the shared borders with Zambia and then Mozambique opened up to its freedom fighters. Namibia's inhospitable desert topography did not deter that country's insurgents. And neither did South Africa's lack of forested areas or of friendly borders deter MK – not in almost 30 years of protracted endeavour. There are other factors to be considered, including the role of the peasantry which had hardly survived as a productive class in South Africa, but as Amilcar Cabral noted: "Our people are our mountains." In fact that is the decisive factor in successful guerrilla warfare whether rural or urban. Making the same point Mao Zedong utilised a different metaphor: "the people are the sea in which the guerrillas swim." The Irish and Cypriots used the urban environment to advantage, as did MK. The epoch and context of the times, and particularly the international conjuncture, is yet another fundamental factor as to whether guerrilla struggles might be valid or not. The collapse of the colonial system post World War II certainly was a key factor in the armed resistance in those countries where the colonial power was reluctant to concede peaceful change.

The resort to arms showed that the liberation movements had a great deal in common, including a common enemy and common goals, and consequently cooperated and assisted one another to a great degree in the spirit of fraternal solidarity and exemplary internationalism. They were all able to overcome tremendous odds and achieve the mutual objective of freedom and independence. Much has been written and debated about MK's contribution to the liberation of South Africa. And much more will still be written and debated, not as an academic game but rather to clarify the lessons and preserve the heritage for today's and future generations of our people. That is why developing a people's history is so important – a people's history being consistent with an authentic decolonised history of a national liberation struggle for freedom and independence from the totality of a foreign yoke.

These were protracted struggles, linked to the imposition of colonialism. Liberation historiography consequently embraces different eras and contexts and the changing circumstances with which the revolutionary movements have to contend. This is demonstrated in the changing perspectives from the period of the launching of armed struggle to the time of negotiations and liberation.

#### About historiography

Briefly put, the study of historical writing, which we are attempting in this review, is termed historiography. Historiography stands on three legs grounded in specific contexts and eras:

- The listing and categorising of the available literature and sources in their specific context and times (categorisation implying more than a bibliographic list);
- Assessing and critiquing the literature; and
- Illuminating the key themes and debates.

The above three facets of the historiography will assist in clarifying what I believe should be the essential objectives of scientific historiography: deepening understanding of the subject under review

through analysis, contextualisation, debate and where necessary revision; highlighting the gaps and limitations of the existing literature; pointing to new areas of research and analysis; and above all being armed with the necessary ideological orientation (derived for example from historical materialism). A people's historiography, rooted in political economy, class engagement, labour and the masses, should be in search of the truth to establish and convey better understanding. To do so we must make it patently clear which accounts genuinely serve the cause of the freedom that has been fought for, and expose those which defend injustice. That is where we need to part ways with scholastic purists or the nay-sayers who believe truth can only be arrived at by "dispassionate objectivity" which is blind to the "just war" rationale and the context of the time.

In historical terms MK historiography is relatively recent; more so when considering the evolving literature and debate around let us say the French Revolution, World War I or the Russian Revolution. We need to bear in mind as well that much information about the liberation struggle from primary, organisational and participatory sources is still secret; documents and reports are unavailable or lost; many participants are yet to tell their stories; not to mention the fallibility of personal attestation and bias, limitations of memory and ideological factors. What is exciting is the steadily growing genre of autobiography of MK experiences which enriches the historiography and necessitates ongoing updating from time to time. Of particular note is Cde Fanele Mbalu's *In Transit* featuring the s; Cde James Ngculu's *The Honour to Serve* in the post-1976 era; Cde Stanley Munong's *If We Must Die* and Cde Wonga Bottoman's *The Making of an MK Cadre* from the perspective of 1980s recruits. Concerning time and context, and how these help us to understand the varying perspective of revolutionary participants, one needs to trace both the formal statements of the movements concerned and the writings and speeches of the leading theoreticians.

In MK's case the statements of Cde Oliver Tambo and writings of Cde Joe Slovo are exceptional. Cde Slovo's *No Middle Road* written in the early 1970s and *Has Socialism Failed?* in 1990, demonstrate the changing circumstances and challenges that had to be grasped. At this point let me pay tribute to both men who worked so closely together: Cde Tambo for his inspirational and unifying leadership of MK and the ANC; Cde Slovo for his contribution to both the theory and practise of Marxism and the armed struggle, including his drive and creativity in commanding MK's special operations.

As much as we encourage serious scholarly work, it is the account of those who actually participated in fighting for freedom, the primary sources, that are invaluable and with the passing of time should not be lost. There is a view among some academics that memoirs should not be treated as primary sources, as they are deficient from a scholarly point of view and lack objectivity. Yet many autobiographies of South Africa's struggle history in my view pass muster as scholarly works with the advantage that they are embedded in first-hand experience and in fact the best of them provide acute critical insights. As much as there is a growing literature, the history of MK is under-recorded and, more particularly, along with the history of Apla (Azanian People's Liberation Army), is barely featured in the annals of the country's conventional national military historiography and museums, still dominated by the racist narratives of the SADF and its colonial predecessors.

Against these are Liliesleaf (Rivonia), the Apartheid Museum (Crown Mines), the Mandela Capture Site at Howick, and Freedom Park in Pretoria which are counters to such domination and need to be assisted by ongoing transformation and liberation historiography.

For these reasons there is a need to work on establishing and listing as full as possible a historiography of the growing struggle sources available: oral and written, interviews, articles, memoirs, biographies, policy statements, speeches, documents, polemics, debates, poems and songs, museum displays, films and archival sources etc. This is a necessary step towards the task of categorising the available records, distinguishing between those who fought the just war and those who fought to preserve the racist-colonial system. I am also of the view, given the fundamental importance of context and era, that we need to establish a more thorough periodisation of MK's history which I will attempt to offer as a guide. These phases, with the relevant policy statements, and hard lessons learnt in the preceding phase, are key to grasping the evolution of the objectives, strategy and tactics of the armed struggle. I stress this point for, at the recent Witwatersrand Conference on the "Politics of Armed Struggle in Southern Africa" labour commentator, Terry Bell, crassly declared at the opening event that the ANC-MK, failed to learn from its mistakes – although after being lambasted he stated "at least up to 1980" (25 November 2016).

In the limited space available I will at least want to deal with the question of whether MK achieved its goals and what might have been left undone. By way of illustration I will briefly list the number of its operations as but one indicator of its activity – albeit a prime reason for its existence. A full investigation would look at the economic cost to the country; the casualties on both sides; the amounts of weapons captured; which police records such as those of apartheid General HD Stadler in his studies refers to. But such statistics including classification as "terrorist operations" can be and are deceptive and mechanical and attest to the costs of struggle rather than outcome.

Whatever the setbacks or characterisation by the repressive regime, it is the final battle, the outcome of the war, that determines who won. Just consider the debate about the Battle of Cuito Cuanavale, which was a defensive victory by Cuban-Angolan forces over the SADF, creating the springboard for the brilliant advance on Namibia's borders and the sea change in the region. A people's victory was evident – yet to this day reactionary apartheid order and quasi-liberal claims persist about who won the war.

In a similar way reactionary, denialist views exist about MK's role seeking to belittle its incalculable contribution. Historiography must be a battle to establish the truth.

I will examine how far MK had progressed by 1990 and whether its objectives had been achieved.

Periodisation (phases of MK armed struggle and policy foundations)

A thorough periodisation of the phases of armed struggle, attendant policy and the changing historical context, role and rivalry between international powers, is absolutely necessary in guiding assessment and research, and understanding the shifts in strategy and tactics. This also relates to the reaction of the regime at different times, its resort to increased repressive legislation and declarations of states of emergency, its increased militarisation, the "total war" strategy, the recourse to the use of "hit squads", the aggression towards and invasion of Angola and the Front Line States, the promotion of

counterrevolutionary bandit groups such as Unita in Angola and Renamo in Mozambique and its support from imperialist forces. It is worth noting Marx's observation that revolutionary struggle brings on fiercer repression from counter-revolution which compels the revolutionaries to develop greater organisational capacity and tactics.

The ANC Submission to the TRC sums up the phases as follows: Historical context and Resistance to 1960; and Repression and Total State Strategy 1960s to 1990.

Within this submission a note on armed operations refers to the stages as: Sabotage campaign; Wankie campaign; 1976 Soweto uprising to 1985 and thereafter; and in essence breaks down as follows:

- 1961-69: Establishment of MK December 1961 to the Zimbabwe Campaign – Wankie and Sipolilo;
- 1969-1979: From the Morogoro Conference to 1976 Youth Uprising and aftermath;
- Towards People's War and People's Power: The Green Book; political-military co-ordination; increased MK operations; [this would be 1980 onwards – RK];
- ANC and Internal Mass Revolt – Role of Mass Democratic Movement (MDM) in 1980s;
- Role of SDUs (Self-Defence Units) post-1990.

I submit the following categorisation as perhaps a more refined and extensive guide to historical research, the changing balance of forces and context which changes with time, and perhaps a more pointed way of indicating gaps in the literature which need to be filled:

- 1945-1960: Establishing the context in the post-World War II context of victory over fascism and collapse of the colonial system and influence of the cold war – national, regional and international including the role of the United Nations Organisation; the move from non-violence to violent confrontation; guerrilla wars became prevalent in Africa, Asia and Latin America. Note: the relevance of the wars of resistance to colonial conquest over the preceding centuries need to be considered, lasting in South Africa until the Bambata Rebellion of 1906.
- 1961-1963: Establishment of MK; Sabotage Campaign to Rivonia arrests; including the draft Operation Mayibuye document (as flawed as it might be), foreseeing the unfolding of guerrilla warfare and the objective of insurrection.
- 1964-1967: Attempts at Recovery: Wilton Mkwayi and Bram Fischer's endeavours; internal structures destroyed; rear bases (Tanzania and Zambia) and problems of getting home; initial training in China, Algeria, Ethiopia, Egypt, Cyprus, Czechoslovakia, Cuba and the Soviet Union. Training in China, Ethiopia; – Egypt fell away as a rear base as those in Cuba and the Soviet Union and later GDR (East Germany) grew; (Yugoslavia provided military training in the late 1980s); emergence of the Anti-Apartheid Movement (AAM) and the first of many UN resolutions calling for sanctions against South Africa.
- 1967-1968: Zimbabwe campaign involving a fighting alliance between Zipra (the Zimbabwe People's Revolutionary Army of Zapu) and MK.

- 1969-1975: Morogoro Conference – assessment of problems, failures, challenges and way ahead; particularly the absence of political work inside the country as prerequisite for armed struggle; elaboration of strategy and tactics; creation of Revolutionary Council (RC) in Lusaka to direct internal struggle; stepped up propaganda and infiltration; Black Consciousness and student activity; workers' strikes in Namibia and South Africa; the collapse of Portuguese colonialism; liberation of Angola and Mozambique; SADF invasion of Angola – with Cuba providing vital assistance and MPLA triumphs March 1976.

- 1976-1979: The Soweto rebellion the turning point; increased MK recruitment; Mozambique and, particularly, Angola provide bases; revival of MK operations; Swaziland, Lesotho and Botswana springboards; GDR, Cuban, Soviet training; delegation to Vietnam on people's war; "Green Book" results – setting out strategy for advancing struggle and concept of people's war. Note: Soviet, GDR and Cuban training geared to guerrilla and underground struggle as does MK's own training programme (Soviet term "MCW" – Military Combat Work) denotes new focus of training in linking armed struggle with mass struggle, creating underground networks, infiltration of enemy forces and the goal of insurrection; note too the increase in Zanla (Zimbabwe National Liberation Army) guerrilla activity across the Mozambique border and its emphasis on "political mobilisation" of the peasantry.

- 1980-1984: New front opens as Zimbabwe becomes independent; establishment by ANC of "Senior Organ" structures to integrate political and military work under RC; developing concept of Four Pillars of Struggle stressing primacy of political leadership and mass struggle, reinforced by armed actions, underground work and international solidarity; dramatic rise in MK operations from 20 in 1980 to 61 in 1984; Politico-Military Command (PMC) replaces RC (1983) for better co-ordination of political and military tasks; development of underground structures; emergence of UDF, Cosatu (Congress of South African Trade Unions), MDM (Mass Democratic Movement)

; protests grip the country and Young Lions flock to MK's banner; MK-Fapla (People's Liberation Armed Forces of Angola) joint operations against Unita (National Union for the Total Independence of Angola) in Angola; spies, informers, infiltration and mutiny; 1984 Nkomati Accord non-aggression pact between Mozambique and apartheid South Africa.

- Pretoria's "total onslaught"; states of emergency; regime death squads and raids on Matola, Gaborone, Maseru, Swaziland, Harare and into Angola denote the rising fears of the regime and its attempts to destroy MK; overcoming mutiny and Nkomati reversal;

- 1985-1990: MK operations increase from 104 in 1985 to 249 in 1988; Kabwe Conference 1985 – stepping up armed struggle; Tambo (1985): "Make South Africa ungovernable and apartheid unworkable"; international isolation increases; beginnings of dialogue with business and academics; secret regime talks with Mandela and Thabo Mbeki's parallel external channel; Operation Zikomo which steps up infiltration of MK cadres post-Kabwe to carry out politico-military work; significance of Operation Vula 1988-90; Battle of Cuito Cuanavale 1987-88, the historic turning point for the region; independence for Namibia; Fidel Castro's statement: "Africa's history will be written as before and after Cuito Cuanavale"; MK camps relocate to Uganda; mass upsurge "unbans" ANC; the regime increasingly

losing control within the country; international and domestic capital seek political reform to stave off revolutionary change.

- 1990-1994: De Klerk's February 1990 speech; ANC-SACP reorganise; MK's cessation of armed struggle; third force and regime violence; SDUs (Self Defence Units) and MK's role; Transitional Executive Council; 1993 MK disbands and integrates with other forces into new SANDF (South African National Defence Force); April 1994 ANC gains power in first democratic elections.

Assessing MK's role

"In building up our own popular army we aim ... not only at the overthrow of the fascist regime, we aim also at building up a politically conscious and revolutionary army, conscious of its popular origin, unwavering in its democratic functions and guided by our revolutionary orientation"

– OR Tambo

In moving towards enumerating MK's operations I am by no means stating that MK actions are the sole criteria for measuring whether MK was a success story. However, the fact that under extremely adverse conditions MK was able to recover from setbacks and keep up a protracted offensive against the apartheid regime, and maintain and grow its organisational capacity, for well-nigh 30 years, is a testament to its durability and success.

The ANC, SACP and MK never abandoned their mission, kept coming back from what the regime repeatedly announced was the "end of the struggle". This resilience kept the spirit of hope alive among the people. Guerrilla struggle is the weapon of the weak over the strong and its ultimate efficacy can only be judged by the final outcome: has fundamental change been achieved? Was that change achieved by the contribution of MK's activities?

South Africa's topography, lack of a friendly border, lack of a peasantry, large white population rooted in the country, huge security apparatus, its strong centralised state, powerful resources backed up by Western supply and support, speedy communication and super highway network and level of development, by no means suited classical guerrilla war. In fact there was concern among some on the left, particularly university based, that the role of workers' struggle and trade union organisation should not be watered down. The severity of repression, however, often led to reliance on the force of arms.

In any event the liberation movement always stressed the relevance of mass struggle, where its capacity would emerge strongest, and as that evolved so the development of the strategy and tactics came to recognise MK's role as secondary to and reinforcing the political struggle – although it remained decisive in reinforcing and strengthening the political struggle. While military operations only began to progress beyond armed propaganda in the 1980s, the demonstration that the white regime was not invincible, was losing control in the townships and bantustans such as the Transkei, coalesced to play a paramount role in inspiring the masses and tilting the balance of forces in favour of insurgency. The formation of MK was instrumental, as was the role of the victorious guerrilla struggles in the southern African region which, with Soviet and the decisive Cuban support on the ground, ultimately brought the SADF to a halt.

The nature of MK operations and dramatic growth in the 1980s was a key factor in moving from armed propaganda to a point approaching people's war and the threat of insurrection by the time FW de Klerk threw in the towel in February 1990. By that stage MK's Operation Secret Safari alone had smuggled 40 tons of weapons into the country and the number of MK had grown to 10 000 of which perhaps half were fully trained and many more were auxiliaries within the country. (See MK's Comprehensive Personnel Register – CPR – below which enumerates numbers in excess of this).

The revolutionary army was growing; there was some arming of the masses; sections of white youth, mobilised through the End Conscription Campaign (ECC), were refusing to serve in the SADF; MK intelligence department (MKIZA) was obtaining information from within the enemy forces (through operatives such as Rocklyn Williams and Roland Hunter); elements within the bantustan armies, particularly the Transkei, were being won over. These were key factors in the growth of a revolutionary army. The legendary Vo Nguyen Giap's Five Fighting Factors (an MK term) as the key to Vietnam's victory over the French (1954) and then the Americans (1975) became the subject of intensive study in MK ranks. We synthesised these as:

- A just cause providing moral superiority over the enemy;
- Correct theory and leadership;
- A united and determined people;
- The invincible art of guerrilla warfare; and
- International solidarity.

These and the theory of a revolutionary army were elements of what MK referred to as military combat work (MCW) which combined political and military work. Its development, based on Soviet partisan warfare in World War II, was an inestimable threat to the regime.

The MK numbers meant that when the time came in 1994 to form a new integrated national defence force (the SANDF) there were significant MK cadres to enlist, with 12 becoming generals (some were over age such as General Lambert Moloi and not incorporated) and by 1998 General Sipiwe Nyanda became the SANDF commander. A Certified Personnel Register (CPR) compiled for the inclusion of all previous forces – statutory and non-statutory – into the new SANDF listed 28 888 MK members of which 11 738 elected to join (16% of SANDF's strength); 7 238 demobilised, and the rest had taken jobs elsewhere, could not be traced or failed to report at all. (See Rocklyn Williams' Brief Historical Overview of MK 1961-1994).

It is possible that 8 000 received comprehensive training during the 30 years of MK's existence: approximately 2 000 in the Soviet Union, many returning for advanced courses; 800 in the GDR (80 a year for a decade at Tetrow but also small groups in Berlin); 300 in Cuba; 50 in Yugoslavia; the rest in Angola, and various African states such as Algeria, Egypt, Tanzania, Mozambique, Uganda, Zimbabwe and a few score in China, Cyprus and Czechoslovakia in the early 1960s. This is a rough estimation and needs accurate research. I know of one recruit of Muslim background who Joe Modise arranged to be

trained with the Palestinians in Lebanon just prior to their expulsion in 1982. There may have been more.

MK started off from inside South Africa with a small contingent of cadres as its pathfinders. Approximately 100 operatives at its inception carried out almost 200 sabotage actions (December 1961-July 1963). At the end of that period some 300 cadres had been involved in operations and possibly up to 1 000 recruits had left the country for military training. However, by 1965 the underground in South Africa was effectively smashed. It was that underground network that was meant to receive the returning cadre and situate them safely in the country. They were from then, however, save for few, effectively locked out of the country for many years.

Thus the struggle leadership came to operate from exile. MK never gave up despite tremendous odds; going through ups and downs, from low to high points, until it was able to consolidate and grow from exile bases following the 1974-75 liberation of Angola and Mozambique. One of the stiffest obstacles to surmount was the enormous distance from home and dangers of moving through Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland and into a country infested with apartheid agents and informers, where the underground had been destroyed and no safe havens existed. This remained a key problem right through to the late 1980s and took considerable courage, risk and ingenuity to overcome. The two mutinies in Angola, at the Viana and Pango camps, in 1983-4 (only two in 30 years!) and some sporadic acts of defiance that occurred over the years emanated from this problem, as did the idea that applied for a time that guerrilla actions could create the political platform for survival rather than the reverse. (Note: this went along with the incorrect theory of Regis Debray in his account of the Cuban revolution, despite being severely criticised by Joe Slovo: "Latin America and the Ideas of Regis Debray" in *The African Communist* No.33 1968).

With the strategy and tactics of armed struggle undergoing major shifts, the 1976 Soweto uprising proved the turning point. Recruits flocked into MK – drawn by the impact it had made and the capacity it had. By 1980 a new approach of people's war, based in time around the four pillars of struggle and the revolutionary army, saw a dramatic upturn in MK operations. Some success in building underground networks, and the mass upsurge in political struggle, partly inspired by armed actions, aided this progression. Our concept of a revolutionary army consisted of (i) the advanced highly trained core; (ii) armed auxiliaries among the populous; (iii) elements of the enemy forces won over to the side of the revolution (such as from the bantustans); and (iv) intelligence sources within the enemy working for the revolution. We did not envisage the capacity of winning over sections of the enemy forces as in the Russian Revolution, Cuba and Portugal.

Any assessment of the success of MK needs to take into account the overall impact of its military operations; its growing capacity to strike at the enemy; its ability to inspire the people; better prospects of survival amongst the people; the linking of its actions to the mass upsurge; neutralising enemy agents and informers; and the rendering of apartheid unworkable and the country ungovernable.

To this we need to factor in the psychological effect on both the government and the white population of armed actions; and the alarm of Western powers at the growing threat of armed revolution. The

consequent pressure, aligned with other factors, on the apartheid regime and business interests, was part of the equation.

To appreciate the growing confidence within MK it is necessary to bear in mind as well its battle record in Zimbabwe and presence in Zipra forces up to 1980 and close links with Zimbabwe's armed forces to 1990; and its intensive counterinsurgency actions against Savimbi's Unita bandits during the 1980s in Angola. Some MK combatants such as Cde Joe Jele were involved with Frelimo inside Mozambique before liberation. Such actions played a significant role in building MK's combat record and experience.

The courage and contempt for death shown by MK cadres from Cde Vuyisile Mini (hanged in 1964); the likes of Cdes Basil February and James Masimini who fought to the death in Zimbabwe, Cde Ahmed Timol's underground role; young lions such as Cde Solomon Mahlangu; the daring commander Cde Barney Molokoane who led the Sasol and other operations, Cde Phila Ndwandwe (Portia) and Cde Ashley Kriel defiant unto death, are unforgettable martyrs reflective of MK's mettle throughout its 30 years existence.

#### MK operations

Below are military operations carried out by MK combatants .

- 1961-1963: 170 operations were listed in the Rivonia indictment alone. The initial charge sheet listed more than 200. In March 1966, the police chief, Lieutenant-General JM Keevy, stated that there had been 409 acts of sabotage in South Africa since 16 December 1961 but these include Poqo, some dozen of the African Resistance Movement (ARM), and MK, which would have been responsible for the bulk.

- 1967-8: Zimbabwe campaign – at least four major battles and other skirmishes in the bush.

- 1969-76: this period was a low point of operations but lively propaganda distribution carried the message that the liberation movement was alive; some underground units were established; infiltration of small numbers took place; an aborted sea landing in 1972 reflected the drive to get cadres back home. Numerous trials, including that of Winnie Mandela and others, avidly transmitted the message of no surrender. There was also the ANC's Radio Freedom broadcasts, established in Lusaka as early as 1972, Luanda from 1976-7, Madagascar, Addis Ababa and elsewhere.

- 1977-1979: the favourable conditions arising from the Soweto up-

rising of 1976 saw the resumption of MK actions to almost 20 a year, including sophisticated operations such as rocket attacks on police stations at Booyens, Moroko ((by G5 Nyanda-Shoke unit), Soekmeaar; and physical clashes with the police in the rural areas such as at Derdepoort. The interception of Solomon Mahlangu's unit in downtown Johannesburg was a setback but enthused the masses.

- 1980-85: The 1 000-plus operations in the 1980s pointed to a dramatic rise in MK's capacity. The year 1980 opened with the Silverton siege in Pretoria – again with a failure as the three guerrillas were killed – however the black population was greatly inspired by their audacity; soon thereafter the country was rocked by the Sasol oil refinery attack of June 1980, led by the redoubtable Barney Molokoane (the

billowing black smoke visible from Soweto and Johannesburg forty kilometres away); the August 1981 rocket attack on the Voortrekkerhoogte military base outside Pretoria; the May 1983 car bombing of the South African Air Force headquarters in Pretoria; the bombing of Eskom power plants in the Transvaal; the attack on the Koeberg nuclear plant near Cape Town were operations of growing sophistication which shook the regime.

- 1986-89: following the Kabwe Conference of the ANC in June 1985 MK attacks were stepped up and by 1988 peaked at 249; Operation Zikomo saw an unprecedented infiltration into the country; car bombing of police outside the Johannesburg and Roodepoort magistrates courts; the audacious launching of a driverless automatic car laden with explosives at the Johannesburg Drill Hall in July 1987; repeated bombings in Durban and environs and Robert McBride's dramatic rescue from hospital in Pietermaritzburg of his wounded commander, Gordon Webster, under police guard; the laying of landmines within the border areas; the establishment of guerrilla bases in Ingwavuma, Zululand; a mortar attack on the SADF radar post at Klippan in the Western Transvaal in 1989; attacks on the police and military in the Eastern Cape; bomb attacks and sieges in Cape Town; the establishment of a political-military leadership in the country (Operation Vula) and so on. (Reference: South African Military History Journal Vol 11 No 5 – June 2000: A brief historical overview of Umkhonto We Sizwe (MK), 1961-1994 by Rocklyn Williams). It is quite probable that far more than the 1 000 recorded MK operations were carried out in the 1980s. For example the Ahmed Timol Unit carried out over 30 bomb attacks, several on police stations, during 1988 alone (Ref. Jamal Chand's TRC indemnity application). MK historian Janet Cherry, who worked for the TRC, informally suggested to me that there might have been be as many as 2 000 operations.

Statistics 1980-89 from University of Maryland Global Terrorism Database. This coincides with MK Intelligence calculations for the same period which refers to bona fide MK operations and does not include the incalculable spontaneous acts of violence emerging from mass defiance. Howard Barrell cites 281 acts in 1988 and more than 200 in 1989).

Insurrection or negotiation?

Had the cessation of MK actions in August 1990 not come about as a result of negotiations it is evident that such operations would have increased even more. In the new, favourable conditions of mass upsurge on a scale never before seen in South Africa the strategic objective of basing MK forces within the country, with the massive amounts of weaponry that had been smuggled in, and linking with the increasingly militant populous, rising working-class organisation and consciousness, would have seen significant advance towards the insurrectionary possibilities foreseen in such documents as the ANC's Strategy & Tactics, The Green Book, the SACP's Path to Power, and Operation Vula (see Maharaj & O'Malley's Shades of Difference).

In his paper (cited below) MK combatant Cde Patrick Mangashe argues that the ANC's armed struggle was halted in mid-stride (by the negotiation process), and can thus not be regarded as having run its full course. He further states that the advent of the UDF brought with it new impetus to the armed struggle

by creating conditions that had not existed since 1961. Note that neither he nor I say that the liberation movement could have defeated the apartheid military machine on the battlefield. There was the general acceptance that neither the regime nor the liberation movement could crush the other, but my point is that the build-up of MK capacity and mass insurrectionary energy could have tipped the balance even more substantially in our favour.

Neither would we denounce a peaceful solution with which Cde Mandela is credited. I do not wish to say that revolutionaries should be indifferent to the high cost of prolonging the struggle. And it may be callous to say that there can be no risk-free strategy. The period 1990-1994 saw more casualties than the preceding decade in the country but then one has to consider the burden, suffering and danger of unrequited objectives migrating into the future. History does not often present the opportunity of a revolutionary break with former power relationships. What of the high cost of compromise that fails to address the root cause of the people's problems? Are we not struggling with such frustrations in South Africa today?

### The path to power

At its 7th Congress held in Cuba in April 1989, the SACP, discussing the mass ferment in the country aligned with the increase in armed actions, and contradictions facing the regime, considered the question:

"In what way can we talk of insurrection as a possible path to power?" The thesis is worthy of study. The Party's Path to Power programme observed: "The crisis facing our ruling class will be aggravated still further by a combination of mass upsurge, in which working class action at the point of production will play a key role, mass defiance, escalating revolutionary combat activity, intensified international pressure, a situation of ungovernability, a deteriorating economy and growing demoralisation, division, vacillation and confusion within the power bloc. "When all these elements converge in a sufficient measure, the immediate possibility of an insurrectionary breakthrough will present itself. Such a situation will, of course, not simply ripen on its own; its fruition depends, in the first place, on the work of the revolutionary movement. But we must also be prepared for a relatively sudden transformation of the situation. In the conditions of deepening crisis, events triggered off by the tiniest conflicts, seemingly remote from the real breeding-ground of revolution, can, overnight, grow into a revolutionary turning point (Lenin). The regime's grip on its reins of power could be swiftly weakened and the stage set for a sustained national uprising leading to an insurrectionary seizure of power."

And it stressed: "The subjective forces – both political and military – must be built up so that when these seeds of revolution begin to germinate, the vanguard will be able to seize the historic moment. In this sense, all-round mass action, merging with organised and armed activity, led by a well-organised underground, and international pressure, are the keys to the build-up for the seizure of power. Seizure of power will be a product of escalating and progressive merging mass political and military struggle with the likelihood of culminating in an insurrection."

What the Party's top leadership were unaware of, despite the presence of three comrades involved in the secret talks (to which they were sworn to secrecy) was that the possibility of negotiations was

maturing. Of course the ANC's 1989 Harare Declaration on its minimum terms for a political settlement was an open document and signs of pending talks were in the air and needed to be addressed. Turning to such a prospect the statement went on: "There is no conflict between this insurrectionary perspective and the possibility of a negotiated transfer of power. Armed struggle cannot be counterposed with dialogue, negotiation and justifiable compromise, as if they were mutually exclusive categories. But whether there is an armed seizure of power or negotiated settlement, what is indisputable to both is the development of the political and military forces of the revolution".

The line of reasoning continued with a warning: "We should be on our guard against the clear objective of our ruling class and their imperialist allies who see negotiation as a way of pre-empting a revolutionary transformation."

The thesis continued with a most far sighted judgement (my italics added): "The imperialists seek their own kind of transformation which goes beyond the reform limits of the present regime but which will, at the same time frustrate the basic objectives of the struggling masses. And they hope to achieve this by pushing the liberation movement into negotiation before it is strong enough to back its basic demands with sufficient power on the ground."

"Whatever prospects may arise in the future for a negotiated transition, they must not be allowed to infect the purpose and content of our present strategic approaches. We are not engaged in a struggle whose objective is merely to generate sufficient pressure to bring the other side to the negotiating table. If, as a result of a generalised crisis and a heightened revolutionary upsurge, the point should ever be reached when the enemy is prepared to talk, the liberation forces will, at that point, have to exercise their judgment, guided by the demands of revolutionary advance. But until then its sights must be clearly set on the perspectives of a seizure of power." (The Path to Power)

The revolution disarmed?

One is left to speculate on the extent to which the balance of forces was shifting in favour of mass insurrection. What might the outcome have been, given the growth of MK's capacity and the rising insurrectionist mood of the masses, had negotiations not halted the process in its tracks? This certainly merits further examination, more particularly in the light of the 7th Congress warning that the ruling class and imperialist allies would seek negotiations to pre-empt a revolutionary transformation. What was apparently not envisaged was the manner in which a Faustian Pact (a devil's bargain) of compromise between elites "bartering" political power for the economic status quo, (albeit providing considerable opportunities for the development of a black business class). Is this not what the SACPs Path to Power had warned against?

Undoubtedly those involved could not imagine the unintended outcome of pork barrel politics, systemic crises and the degeneration of today's South Africa most particularly under the leadership of Jacob Zuma (See the Introduction to 4th edition *Armed & Dangerous*, Jacana Media 2013 by Ronnie Kasrils). I am not saying that we should not have gone in for a negotiated settlement when the opportunity arose and which prevented civil war. Neither am I implying that there was anything approaching a

conspiratorial “sell-out”. I am of the view that the Mandela-Mbeki leadership, of which I was a part, approached the negotiations in a strategic but arguably too secretive a manner.

Rather I raise for consideration, along the lines envisaged in the Path to Power, that arguably we could have won far more demands at the negotiating table; reining in the riches-at-all-costs mentality of corporate capital and obstructing through the hegemony of people’s power the emergent rent-seeking crony capitalists of the Zuma era. How could such opportunists come to the fore? Were we not too optimistic in believing that gaining the reins of political power would lead to conquering economic control?

Those who might assert that the revolution was disarmed do not think solely of the cessation of the armed struggle. But did we not allow a gap to develop between the political elite and the masses; between the ANC and the former UDF and organised labour, the UDF ingloriously dissolved without a murmur from its top leadership (so many of whom rushed first into government and then into big business) while Cosatu was at the apex of its strength? One is left to imagine the leverage those forces, with a vigilant MK on guard, even in a truce situation, with the masses on the rise could have given to our delegation at the negotiating table! True, our adversaries had much powder in their guns but did we not have the strategic initiative? Were the masses not ready for sacrifice and revolt? Would the release of that energy not have provided a working class hegemony and assertion of discipline and control over unrestrained corruption and would-be crony capitalism?

Or perhaps it was us in the leadership, some contending to this day that the balance of power was not in our favour, who had lost the will and the belief in the masses? Those who might contend that the Western powers would have subjected us to impossible pressure and threat of sanctions need also to consider the support we enjoyed from international solidarity and with regard to the USA the backing of the African-American community. I am not contending that we should have gone for insurrection or bust. The negotiated opportunity was a prospect we could not have ignored.

The question posed, as in the 7th Congress programme, is about how much more we might have gained had we not reined in the MDM, the trade unions and MK. Within a couple of years the SACP and Cosatu were up in arms against the non-negotiable introduction of Gear (Growth, Employment and Redistribution) at the expense of the RDP (Reconstruction and Development Plan), tactically decided on the removal of Cde Mbeki for Cde Zuma only to lose to a Zuma administration that could not be managed by the left. Zuma consistently played victim resorting to the conspiracy card, without ever providing a shred of evidence.

Hark the words in the Path to Power: “The imperialists seek their own kind of transformation which goes beyond the reform limits of the present regime but which will, at the same time frustrate the basic objectives of the struggling masses”. Yes indeed great powers have been concerned about the outcome of our struggle and indeed they and their minions will conspire. One is left to muse about where we have come from and speculate again on how much more leverage we might have mustered behind the negotiation table. For that I refer one more time to the SACP’s 7th Congress Programme which boldly declares that in all things “the masses are the key.”

Dealing with the growing insurrectionary potential of the masses at that time the Path to Power states:

“While the exact moment of the seizure of power depends upon objective as well as subjective factors, there can be no doubt that what the masses do, led by the liberation alliance, influences the objective factors and hastens the arrival of that moment. It is precisely this subjective factor which, in the last five years, has dramatically transformed the objective situation. The unique series of partial uprisings, the dramatic growth of the mass democratic movement, the emergence of giant trade union organisation, escalating armed actions and international mobilisation against the regime, are all interdependent processes which have changed the whole objective framework of struggle.

“There is no aspect of the crisis facing the regime – whether it be the rapidly deteriorating economic situation or the divisions and vacillations within the power bloc – which has not got its primary roots in the soil of people’s struggles. It is the all-round escalation of these struggles, combined with, and dependent upon, the consolidation and growth of mass and underground organisation, which will lead to the revolutionary breakthrough.”

The opportunity of revolutionary breakthrough does not arise very often. We can speculate about lost opportunity not out of romantic nostalgia but to try and rethink what has gone wrong and learn the lessons for the current challenges.

MK and the outcome

But back to MK’s growing capacity at that time where even a critic such as Howard Barrell had evaluated MK’s role as follows: “MK’s main achievement over the three decades to 1990... helped to stimulate a combative political spirit among the ANC’s support base and to further militant popular campaigning. MK cadres dared to struggle, and set an example to millions. In this respect, MK played a vital role in bringing South Africa to the verge of a negotiated end to white minority political domination.” (MK: ANC’s armed struggle, page 71).

What of the outcome we have been discussing? One indication of what has been lost relates to the fate of MK veterans. The ANC and its MK Military Veterans’ Association (MKMVA), in most dubious hands, actually led by a deserter from MK ranks, has to date failed to project to the South African people the outstanding achievements of MK and its operatives because they are too busy defending their self interests. Now and then on anniversary dates such as the execution of Cde Solomon Mahlangu some martyrs are glorified and medals haphazardly awarded to veterans without adequate certification. A recent convening of an MK Veterans Council by General Sipiwe Nyanda and others as part of an attempt to rectify problems faced by the ANC is an important event in MK history (Nasrec, Johannesburg, 17 December, 2016).

We are suffering from a strange case of the victors failing to write history. Unlike the Chinese, Vietnamese, Cubans and Mozambicans for example, MK does not feature in school history curricula, no official films have been produced, and no military record is established. There is little contestation from government or ruling party concerning the many attempts to undermine MK’s notable achievements.

Today's youth – the born-frees – know little about MK's role and the sacrifice of its cadres. This must be rectified or MK's legacy will be lost.

One other point among many about the integrity and profile of the MKMVA that must be sorted out is the age of its members, many whom appear to be extremely young. If an MK member was 18 years old in 1993 at the time it wound up then she/he would be 41 years old in 2016. It is high time that research is conducted into the MKMVA; its leadership; its structures and membership; its role which has come in for serious questioning as a private army of a particular political persuasion. What is quite bizarre is how its leadership stems from the intake of 1992 and how the mgwenya (1960s veterans), the 1976 intake, and 1980 young lions, have been left out in the cold.

## Conclusion

As a militarily powerful state, recognised by both sides in the Cold War as globally strategic, overseeing a highly successful and relatively advanced (and thus complex) economy, radical change in apartheid South Africa was always going to require a combination of revolutionary forms of pressure to bring about the overthrow of the system.

Thus it required not only the development of a militant trade union movement; a revolutionary political movement; global public opposition to apartheid; but also activities that could trigger, within the capitalist global powers, sufficient uncertainty about the sustainability of white rule to force South Africa's domestic and international business partners to insist on change. MK's activities clearly contributed to the latter, and to the growth of at least the beginnings of an insurrectionary phase in South Africa that further contributed to Western alarm. That concern existed even though the prospect of a "red revolution" receded with the fall of the USSR.

While it might be argued that international pressure was an important factor in ending apartheid, that pressure did not come about because the West disapproved of apartheid, it came about because it was alarmed. And it was alarmed because the prospect of insurrection and an armed seizure of power (backed by a general strike and national insurrection) had, by the late 1980s, become objectively alarming.

The fact that MK's armed struggle did not climax in an armed insurrection does not negate its success. A leaflet issued at that historic time when MK emerged on 16 December, 1961 declared:

"We hope – even at this late hour – that our first actions will awaken everyone to a realisation of the disastrous situation to which the Nationalist [party] policy is leading. We hope that we will bring the Government and its supporters to their senses before it is too late, so that both the Government and its policies can be changed before matters reach the desperate stage of civil war. We believe our actions to be a blow against the Nationalist [government] preparations for civil war and military rule."

Armed struggle was always one of several pillars forming part of the ANC struggle to end apartheid; the combination achieved the replacement of apartheid with democracy. MK's founding manifesto set out

its objectives as: “the overthrow of the Nationalist government, the abolition of white supremacy and the winning of liberty, democracy and full national rights and equality for all the people of this country”.

MK succeeded in achieving those objectives, whatever the outcome of the current juncture of the National Democratic Revolution.

Cde Kasrils was part of MK from its earliest years, and is a former SACP Central Committee and Politburo member, ANC NEC member and Cabinet Minister.

\* This article, which first appeared in the African Communist February 2017, is an expanded version of an address delivered at the University of Witwatersrand on November 25, 2016 on the topic of The Historiography of Umkhonto We Sizwe: The politics of armed struggle in Southern Africa.

#### Literature and sources

As stated, there is a growing list of literature of all kinds and what I provide hereunder is a selected bibliography of just some of the titles by way of demonstrating the range. If I had time it would have been incumbent on me to align and date the writings with the periods they deal with, for as I have mentioned above the era and context in which observations are made are most relevant. This must be regarded as a work in progress. As historian Luli Callinicos has pointed out to me: “Historiography adds further opportunity to explore more detailed complexity and nuance of each of the periods that you have identified.”

#### MK participants/activists

##### Political memoirs and autobiographies

Partly about MK: in the lives of Mandela, Sisulu, Govan Mbeki (including *The Peasants’ Revolt*), Kathrada, Goldberg, Joe Slovo, Raymond Mhlaba, Rusty Bernstein; Joel Joffe’s *The State vs Nelson Mandela*, Ben Turok, Michael Dingake, Rica Hodgson, Mac Maharaj with Pdraig O’Malley *Shades of Difference* provides exceptional insights and robust critique; Indris Naidoo’s *Island in Chains*; Barry Gilder’s *Song’s and Secrets*, *London Recruits* edited by Ken Keable (clandestine internationalist support, smuggling of literature and weapons); Aziz Pahad’s *Insurgent Diplomat* (with insight into the secret talks on negotiations), Jay Naidoo *Fighting for Justice* etc. Most of this literature was produced post-1990, and as memoirs generally cover the political life and times of the writers, commencing with those born in the second decade of the 20th century such as Mandela and Tambo.

##### MK memoirs and biographies

Books: James Ngculu’s *The Honour to Serve* (one of the best insider accounts of MK life, camps, training and a balanced view of the mutinies in Angola); Nathoo Babenia’s *Saboteur* (1961-3 sabotage campaign), Stanley Munong *If We Must Die*, Wonga Bottoman’s *The Making of an MK Cadre*; Fanele Mbalis, *In Transit*; Connie Bram’s *Vula* (although for a full understanding Mac Maharaj’s O’Malley interviews are imperative); Raymond Suttner’s *The ANC Underground*; Imtiaz Cajee’s *Timol: A Quest for Justice*; the Kathrada Foundation’s *Dynamite Men* which uniquely provides insight into SACP sabotage

units prior to the establishment of MK; Tim Jenkin's Escape from Pretoria; Ronnie Kasril's Armed and Dangerous and The Unlikely Secret Agent; Luli Callinicos' Oliver Tambo: Beyond the Engeli Mountains; Anthony Sampson's Mandela; Hugh Lewin's Bandiet and Stones against the Mirror (on the African Resistance Movement). These accounts focus on the MK years – 1961-1990 – and apart from Babenia and Lewin's Bandiet are all produced post-1990 and increasingly more recently.

Journals: African Communist and Umsebenzi – SACP journals (the latter's relaunch in the late 1980s coincided with the major escalation of mass struggle into a genuine semi-insurrectionary phase and its coverage of SDUs in the early 1990s); the ANC's Sechaba journal; policy statements, analysis; commemorative anniversaries; Dawn MK's Angola monthly camp journal and notably its Special 25th Anniversary 1986 edition with personal accounts covering the Sabotage Campaign, Zimbabwe episodes, the Aventura project – attempted landing by sea and Operation Ingwavuma (1980s guerrilla base in northern Zululand); Thinker, November and December 2013 personal accounts of sabotage campaign, Tambo and the camps, Special Operations, weapons transport and infiltration; Journal of South African Studies, for example articles by Arianna Lissoni, Luli Callinicos, Ben Magubane, Janet Cherry et al. South African Historical Journal – Special Issue: The ANC at 100. See especially Callinicos' Oliver Tambo and the Dilemma of the Camp Mutinies in Angola in the Eighties, with a pertinent assessment of that controversial topic.

#### MK policy statements/analysis

MK Manifesto December 1961; Operation Mayibuye (1962 draft); Rivonia Trial 1964; SACP/ANC literature and statements; Morogoro Strategy & Tactics 1969; Green Book 1979; Make SA Ungovernable – Make apartheid unworkable Tambo's 1985 Speech; Joe Slovo's No Middle Road, 1974; the 1989 Harare Declaration; the SACP 1989 programme Path to Power; For the Sake of our Lives 1991 guidelines on forming self-defence units (SDUs); ANC Submission to TRC August 1996 and 12 May 1997 with notes on MK operations. The above are crucial documents which follow the genesis of the theory of the armed struggle, correction of strategic errors, emphasis on creating a political and underground base for armed actions, and the progression from sabotage and armed propaganda through to the concepts of People's War and insurrection. The Harare Declaration points to the culmination of a possible peaceful negotiation of the conflict. In this respect the message of the MK Manifesto to the white community in 1961, hoping that civil war can be avoided, needs to be noted regarding the outcome arrived at by the final negotiations which adheres to that logic.

#### Oral interviews

SADET Oral History Project; Wolfie Kodesh recorded interviews in the 1990s; and struggle archives (Mayibuye Centre); SA History Online etc.

#### Academic accounts

Thula Simpson's Umkhonto We Sizwe (this recent and massive tome identifies extraordinary number of incidents involving MK); Howard Barrell's MK: The ANC's Armed Struggle (Penguin), which is pro-MK in contrast to his subsequent very critical doctoral thesis, Conscripts of their Age – ANC operational

strategy, 1976-1989; Julie Frederikse *The Unbreakable Thread*; Janet Cherry's *Umkhonto We Sizwe*, a Jacana pocket history; Hugh Macmillan's *Chris Hani* and Jack Simons two separate biographies in the same pocket series; and his excellent *ANC The Lusaka Years*; Janet Smith and B. Tromp *Hani – A Life Too Short*; Ben Turok *The ANC and the Turn to Armed Struggle*; Joe Slovo: *Latin America and the Ideas of Regis Debray*, *African Communist* No. 33 1968); Vladimir Shubin *ANC: A view from Moscow and The Hot Cold War*; Piero Gleijeses *Conflicting Missions and Visions of Freedom* (latter two authors' brilliant works on the international and regional situations, Soviet and Cuban roles); Filatova and Davidson *The Hidden Thread – Russia and South Africa in the Soviet Era*; Soviet soldiers accounts in *The Road to Cuito Cuanavale*; Victoria Brittain *Hidden Lives Hidden Deaths – South Africa's Crippling of a Continent*; the late MK combatant and scholar, Rocklyn Williams' *Brief Historical Overview of MK 1961-1994* is an invaluable source (Ref: *South African Military History Journal* Vol 11 No 5 – June 2000); William Minter's *Apartheid's Contras – an inquiry into the roots of counter-revolutionary war in Angola and Mozambique*; *The Thirty Years War for Southern African Liberation: A History* soon to be published by John S. Saul; Patrick Mangashe's paper to the Wits Conference: *The armed struggle, the underground and mass mobilisation in South Africa's Border region, 1986-1990, through the experience of MK Cadre emanates from Operation Zikomo* (referred to above) and attests to the development of politico-military insurrection and what was possible by the late 1980s through the eyes of a combatant; Gavin Cawthraw's *Brutal Force*

– *The Apartheid War Machine*; Sasha Polakow-Suransky's *The Unspoken Alliance – Israel's Secret Relationship with Apartheid South Africa*; Eddie Maloka's *The South African Communist Party*; Jacob Dlamini's *Askari* is an objective insight into those who turn traitor; and Jacques Pauw's *Heart of the Whore* is an account of the regime's hit squads; De Wet Potgieter's *Total Onslaught – apartheid's dirty tricks exposed*; Burger & Gould's *Secrets and Lies*, which deals with Wouter Basson and the CBW programme; and James Saunders' *Apartheid's Friends* is an impressive account of the history of the Security Services.

Virtually all of this growing literature has been published in the post-1994 period with most post-2000 and even much more recently post-2010.

#### Historical record

*From Protest to Challenge*, indispensable six volumes 1882-1990 Karis, Carter, Gerhart, Glaser et al; SADET's *The Road to Democracy* based on extensive struggle interviews ; TRC complete record post-1994; Archives: Mayibuye Centre UWC; Wits; Fort Hare; O'Malley interviews post-1994–  
<http://www.nelsonmandela.org/omalley/index.php>”[www.nelsonmandela.org/omalley/index.php](http://www.nelsonmandela.org/omalley/index.php)); Committee on South African War Resistance (Cosawr) and End Conscription Campaign archival material based on 1980s campaigning.

#### Film/documentary

*Secret Safari: MK weapons smuggling* – Director David Brown; *Vula Communications: role of Tim Jenkins*; eNCA TV; *Action Kommandant: the life of slain MK cadre, Ashley Kriel*; *Indians Can't Fly: the capture and killing of Ahmed Timol* – Director: Enver Samuels; *Speech of Flame* – about Barney

Molokoane unit and Sasol operation – Director Sam Mofokeng; To Catch a Fire – feature film written by Shawn Slovo about the Barney Molokoane unit, Joe Slovo, MK Special Ops; Cuba-South Africa: After the Battle – Director Estella Bravo; Dieci giorni con i guerriglieri del Mozambico libero (Ten Days with the Guerrillas in Mozambique’s Liberated Areas) – Director Franco Cigarini; The Routes to Freedom – Director Patrick Ricketts; Kalushi, feature film, about the life of freedom fighter Solomon Mahlangu – Director Mandla Dube; Mandela – Long Walk to Freedom – Director Justin Chadwick (2013); Mandela’s Gun – Director John Irvine (2016) Generally post-2010 productions

Hostile/critical

Memoirs

Bruno Mtolo’s Road to the Left (a traitor’s account of 1961-3 sabotage campaign); Terry Bell and Ahmeen Kajee’s Fordsburg Fighter – a deserter’s account 1961-67. But note Dlamini’s Askari which is not hostile and provides a more balanced account of defectors than the previous two books which decontextualise and de-historicise the experience of the camps. A problem of some of those dealing with defectors, traitors and mutiny is that they virtually exclusively extrapolate from the individual to the general and thus in their unbalanced generalisations throw out the baby with the bathwater. Revolution and armed struggle is a rough terrain and the protagonists are no saints but for every defector there is the story of countless heroes rising above the privations and at times abusive treatment in continuing with their sacred mission.

Academic

Stephen Ellis’ Comrades Against Apartheid and External Mission, Paul Trewelha’s Inside Quatro and other writings suffer from the former’s intense anti-communism and the latter’s emotional antagonism to the liberation movement, in both cases approaching conspiracy theory; Ellis’ well-researched Genesis of the ANC’s Armed Struggle 1946-1961, Journal of South African Studies, June 2011 is considerably better; Anthea Jeffries’ People’s War is an outright defence of the Inkatha Freedom Party and an effort at attributing the blame for violence on the ANC’s “terror” war; Allister Sparks whose books typify liberal viewpoints such as Jeffries’ that MK and the ANC in exile are responsible for all the ills from which the country is presently suffering. It is worth noting the man’s background as probably the most antagonistic of editors towards the ANC in the South African media 1960-1989 (other than Tertius Myburgh), and his abrupt about-turn when it became politically expedient to get into Mandela’s good books in 1990. Most of his journalistic work retains an aftertaste of his initial antagonism when he referred to MK combatants as “terrorists”.

SADF and police literature

Magnus Malan and Jannie Geldenhuys’ memoirs; Helmoed Heitman’s War in Angola; Leopold Scholtz’s SADF Border War 1966-89; Jan Breytenbach’s 32 Battalion and Eden’s Exiles among others writing on Angola; Reid-Daly’s Selous Scouts on Zimbabwe; Peter Stiff Warfare by Other Means; William Minter’s Apartheid’s Contras; WS Van Der Waal’s Portugal’s War in Angola 1961-1974 – these last two are highly recommended. Apart from Breytenbach who admits the SADF failed to achieve its objective at Cuito

Cuanavale and lost in Angola, this literature, including his writing, sees the communists behind the “terrorism” in the region and is faithful to the surrogate forces he commanded. Foremost of South African Police (SAP) literature about the “revolutionary onslaught” is that by General HD Stadler *The Other Side of the Story*, General JV van der Merwe and others *Die Glorie Jare van die SA Polisiemag*, Hennie Heyman’s book on General Mike Geldenhuys, A Jansen’s *Eugene de Kok*, J Pittaway’s *Koevoet – The Men Speak*; and the very interesting electronic magazine *Nongqai* edited by Hennie Heymans chronicling SAP history; Gordon Winter’s *Inside Boss*; Neil Barnard’s *Secret Revolution*; Marius Spaarwater’s *Spook’s Progress*; Eugene de Kock’s *A long Night’s Damage*. Barnard claims the “armed onslaught was in many respects an abject failure. Where did the ANC set up a military base on South African territory, or even just a camp, as prescribed by the theory of revolutionary warfare? In fact, they were not even safe in neighbouring states.” Well, we by no means claim to have adhered to the classical prescriptions of revolutionary warfare without developing our own concepts in theory and practice as has been demonstrated. The ultimate point is not how safe were we in the neighbouring states (for all their criminal efforts apartheid forces certainly failed to root us out) but how safe was the apartheid system?

The earlier literature has been published before the 1994 transition with more recent works such as Spaarwater’s and Barnard’s appearing in recent times, all with a propagandist and defensive slant.

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