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## The Impact of "*Umkhonto We Sizwe*" on the Creation of the South African National Defence Force (SANDF)

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### **Abstract**

This article has three aims: first is to assess the impact of Umkhonto We Sizwe, its doctrines, culture and history, on the creation of the South African National Defence Force in 1994; second it attempts to examine the nature of this guerrilla army, its efficacy, its traditions and the relationship of its military objectives to their political objectives; and third it strives to suggest how MK and APLA histories can be more fully recorded.

## Introduction

Fewer histories of guerrilla wars exist than do written accounts of conventional battles or modern wars. There are eminently practical reasons for this relative deficit of writing. The first is the inescapable reality that a substantial amount of guerrilla history is unrecorded (in written form at least) during the conduct of a guerrilla war.

Government forces fighting guerrilla forces tend to keep general records of their counter-insurgency campaigns, their military objectives, the nature and conduct of their operations and the personnel deployed in such operations - although much of this is subsequently "doctored" for political reasons (either to justify the operation in question or to escape culpability for excesses committed during the campaigns).

Guerrilla forces, for their part, record their political objectives in some detail (a pre-requisite for the successful conduct of a revolutionary war) and tend to keep records of their campaigns and their personnel whilst in training, but they rarely keep detailed records of the conduct of the operations and the personnel deployed therein. Unlike government armies they lack, once deployed, the benefit of reliable resources, a fixed infrastructure, a capable administrative system and an institutionalised military-historical tradition.

An area of scholarly enterprise that is even less recorded is the impact of guerrilla armies on the creation of new, post-conflict national armies. The reconstruction of many post-conflict societies has seen the armies of the victorious revolutionary movements playing a major role in the command and organisation of the new defence force - the Bolsheviks in Russia in 1917, the Viet Cong in Vietnam, the Zimbabwe National Liberation Army and the Zimbabwe Peoples Revolutionary Army in Zimbabwe in 1980, and the People's Liberation Army of Namibia in Namibia in 1989 constitute a few examples of this trend.

Even in those countries where peace was secured via political compromise and settlement, guerrilla personnel have continued their military careers as senior command and staff personnel within the structure of the new defence force - the creation of the Union Defence Forces in 1912 and the creation of the South African National Defence Force in 1994 in South Africa and the integration of RENAMO and FRELIMO military personnel in into the new Mozambican Defence Force in 1992 for example.

It is important for a number of reasons to record these guerrilla struggles in more detail and to assess the impact, or lack thereof, which guerrilla armies have had upon the creation of new national defence institutions. The first reason is simply of an historical nature. Most accounts of guerrilla warfare from the perspective of the guerrillas themselves are kept alive through an oral tradition. Illiteracy, lack of resources and time pressures (particularly when such persons are engaged in the task of creating a post-conflict society) mitigate against the recording of these experiences in more detail. It is important, as any guerrilla-fighter can

confirm that such accounts are captured before the memory of these campaigns quite literally dies.

The second reason is strategic and doctrinal in nature. Guerrilla armies possess military traditions that can be of considerable benefit to the creation of a new army. The innovation, flexibility and creativity that characterise most guerrilla struggles are essential doctrinal ingredients for those armies that are trying to adapt to the challenges of mobile warfare for instance. The strategic dimensions of guerrilla warfare with its emphasis on mobilisation of the people and dispersion of own and enemy forces can constitute an important component of a country's national defensive strategy.

In light of the above, the aim of this article is as follows. It strives, firstly, to assess the impact of *Umkhonto We Sizwe*, its doctrines, culture and history, on the creation of the South African National Defence Force in 1994. It also strives, secondly, to examine the nature of this guerrilla army, its efficacy, its traditions and the relationship of its military objectives to their political objectives. It strives, thirdly, to examine how MK and APLA histories can be more fully recorded.

## The Political Context and the Transition to War

### From The Defiance Campaign to the early armed struggle

Although the end of the Boer war was to be characterised by considerable bitterness and resentment from the Boer side, it was, ten years later, to provide the basis for a rapprochement between Boer and Britons. In an exercise of supreme pragmatism both Boer and British leaders established the Union of South Africa whereby both ethnic groups agreed to govern South Africa to their mutual interest and advantage. Most Africans, Coloureds and Indians were excluded from this political arrangement (apart from a small number eligible for the qualified franchise in the Cape Province) and it was against this backdrop that the first rumblings of mass-based urban resistance to racial segregation and political exclusion occurred.

Although a number of political groupings claiming to represent disenfranchised South Africans were to emerge during the early twentieth century it was the ANC, the Communist Party of South Africa (CPSA - later to be known as the South African Communist Party) and the independent trade union movement that were to be the most influential and effective amongst black South Africans<sup>1</sup>. The first five decades of political resistance against Smut's initial policy of segregation and, after 1948, the National Party's policy of apartheid, however, was to be characterised by its non-violent nature (although many of the political campaigns during the 1940s and the 1950s were to become manifestly militant in nature).

The early ANC, founded in 1912, represented an amalgam of different social and political interests (its founding members were largely drawn from religious quarters, professional classes and from traditional leaders), non-violent strategies (passive resistance, strikes and deputations to the South African government and the colonial authorities) and a moderate political ethos (mainly a combination of liberal-democratic ideals, Christian values, the principles of *ubuntu* and the influence of *Satyagraha* on both its moral values and political strategies).

The growing institutionalisation of both segregation and apartheid (the passing of the 1913 and 1936 Land Acts, the removal of African and Coloured votes from the voters roll, the banning of the Communist Party, and the approval of a battery of repressive legislation by the incoming National Party in the post-1948 period) witnessed the emergence of a more militant tradition within South African resistance politics in general and the ANC in particular. Greatly influenced by the experiences of hundreds of thousands of South Africans in the Second World War (where soldiers had been exposed to the ideals of both democracy and socialism), the emergence of a militant Youth League within the ANC from the late 1940s onwards, the successful organisation of the 1944 bus strike and the 1946 mineworker strike, and the growing grass-roots collaboration between the ANC, the Communist Party and supportive democratic organisations such as the South African Indian Congress, the strategies of the ANC were to shift in terms of scope and content during the 1950s.

Although the ANC continued to eschew violence in the conduct of its mass action campaigns the initiation of the Defiance Campaign in 1952 was significant in two respects. Firstly, the scope of the protests on a national level outrivalled anything which the ANC had proved capable of organising since its inception in 1912. Planned in conjunction with the South African Indian Congress (the SAIC, by this stage, a seasoned practitioner of *satyagraha*) the Defiance Campaign sought to mobilise as wide a spectrum of national opinion as possible against the National Party's incremental institution of unjust apartheid laws. Protests occurred across the breadth of the country covering all major urban areas and extending deep into the rural heartlands of the Northern Cape, the Orange Free State, the Eastern Transvaal and Natal. What was significant about the campaign was the extent to which it proved capable of interacting with and organising support from other non-Congress quarters - the Torch Commando and elements within the white parliamentary opposition for example.

Secondly, the Defiance campaign was also significant in that it provided a compelling example of how the principles of non-racialism could be applied in practice. White, Coloured and Indian South Africans were not only arrested for defying the plethora of discriminatory national laws and municipal bye-laws, they also played a central role in the organisation of the campaign itself. It was this emerging tradition of non-racialism that was to find its organisational expression in the creation of new resistance organisations such as the Congress of Democrats and the Coloured People's Organisation in 1952 - 1953. These organisations were to organise themselves into the "Congress Alliance" in 1954 and, in 1955,

were to convene a Congress of the People at which occasion the *Freedom Charter*, the lodestar of the ANC, was adopted.

The politics of the 1950s were to provide a critical crucible within which the later political-military strategy of the ANC was to be forged. This was reflected in the lodestar of the ANC - the Freedom Charter:

*"The people shall govern. Every man and women shall have the right to vote and to stand for election to all bodies which make laws. All national groups shall have equal rights. The people shall share in the country's wealth. The land shall be shared among those who work it. All shall have equal rights before the law. All shall enjoy equal human rights. There shall be work and security. The doors of learning and culture shall be opened. There shall be houses, security and comfort. There shall be peace and friendship."*<sup>2</sup>

The final decision to embark on an armed struggle by the ANC was not a decision reached easily by the Congress Alliance nor was it a strategy that necessarily enjoyed the support of all sectors of the Alliance itself. It was both the perceived limitations of previous peaceful protest, the Sharpeville massacre of 1960, the intransigence displayed by the regime in declaring the White Republic in 1961 and the banning of the African National Congress and the Pan African Congress in the same year that lead to the formation of MK.

Opinions were divided on the moral and practical viability of initiating an armed struggle against the South African state and, for these reasons, the birth of MK was initially not specifically linked to the ANC (in its founding speeches it proclaimed itself as a People's Army at the disposal of the South African masses). On the evening of the 16 December 1961, a series of explosions rocked all major centres in South Africa. Although little structural damage was caused, the explosives were of a rudimentary nature, and no one was injured or killed, these explosions marked the birth of Umkhonto We Sizwe. The motivation for creating MK was boldly stated in the various MK manifestos distributed at the time:

*The time comes in the life of any nation when there remain only two choices: submit or fight. That time has 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..."*<sup>3</sup>

Although this was not a formal declaration of war, and notwithstanding the restrained nature of the initial operations characterising the initiation of the armed struggle, the launch of MK marked the initiation of a de facto war between the ANC alliance, MK and the South African government.

## The Military Strategy of "Umkhonto We Sizwe": Waging A People's War

### From Passive Resistance to Insurrection: The Development of MK strategy and doctrine from 1961-1994.

As stated above, opinions within the Congress Alliance were divided on the moral and practical viability of initiating an armed struggle against the South African state. The inherent religiosity of the Congress Alliance and its fundamentally humanist nature saw a great reluctance by many ANC members to embrace a strategy that was starkly different from previous Alliance strategies and that raised as many moral dilemmas as those which armed struggle did.

For these reasons, the birth of MK was initially not specifically linked to the ANC - in its founding speeches it proclaimed itself as a People's Army at the disposal of the South African masses.<sup>4</sup> These reservations notwithstanding, however, it was clear that the mood of many black South Africans was inclining in the direction of violent struggle - particularly as the severity of state repression increased.

Militarily, these operations were characterised by their simplicity. Homemade explosives were used, and much of the expertise was provided by former Second World War veterans who now found themselves within the ranks of MK (people like the late Jack Hodgson playing a prominent role in this regard). Anticipating coercive measures from the state, MK despatched a number of senior commanders abroad to facilitate the establishment of an external infrastructure and secure advanced training for MK combatants. Mandela himself was to feature prominently in these efforts and was, himself, to receive military training abroad in Algeria and Ethiopia between 1961 and 1962.

The initial phase of armed struggle was characterised by an emphasis on sabotage. The High Command of MK, under the leadership of Nelson Mandela, did not believe that sabotage in itself would bring the government to "its senses" and maintained that even "at this late hour" the prospects of peaceful settlement should not be ruled out. The political rationale for this approach was exemplified by the last serving MK Chief of Staff, the late Chris Hani, when he stated:

*At its inception the High Command decided on selective sabotage as the form armed resistance would take. All efforts were made to avoid the loss of human life. We clearly stated that the aim of the campaign was to bring the government to its senses before it was too late and save our country from going down the path of war which would leave scars very difficult to heal and further polarise South African society.<sup>5</sup>*

The state was initially caught off-guard by the initiation of the Sabotage Campaign and hastily responded to the emerging guerrilla struggle at a number of levels. Legislatively, it passed a number of laws aimed at containing and crushing the resistance. The General Law Amendment Act (also known as the Sabotage Act) provided for indefinite detention without trial. The Unlawful Organisations Act provided for banning of specified organisations if the Minister of Justice deemed fit.<sup>6</sup> The ANC had anticipated these developments and in 1961 despatched Oliver Reginald Tambo (later to become the President of the ANC after Mandela's arrest and imprisonment) to establish a mission in exile with the twofold purpose of mobilising international support for the struggle and securing military training facilities for MK abroad.

Several key cultural, political and institutional features characterised the birth of the new guerrilla army - many of which were to exert a profound influence on the re-professionalisation of the armed forces and the stabilisation of civil-military relations during the post-1994 period. These features were all, in essence, a reflection of the political culture and normative predisposition of the Congress Alliance itself. The *first* was the fact that the activities of MK were situated solidly within the tradition of subservience to the political and civil authority of the ANC. This was reflected at a number of political and practical levels. MK remained the instrument of the liberation movement and was driven by its political programmes (this was to assume a more concrete expression with the formal linking of MK to the ANC at the Lobatse conference in 1963). Political policy and strategy would determine MK's military strategy and the armed struggle was not an end in-itself but would strive to complement the mass political struggle.

The *second* was the fact that a strong element of moral restraint characterised MK's initial campaigns. This restraint was the product of the influence of two factors - the strong ethical ethos present within the Congress Alliance and the realisation that the population had to be politically and psychologically prepared to support an armed struggle. The *third* distinguishing feature of MK was its non-racial ideology as reflected in the multi-racial and multi-ethnic nature of its echelons hierarchy and its rank-and-file membership. Unlike any other armed formation in South African history, MK was representative of South Africa's diverse population in both its institutional make-up and its culture and traditions.

Somewhat predictably the Sabotage Campaign did not "bring government to its senses" and waves of arrests saw many prominent ANC members being arrested, prosecuted and jailed. Rather than seek dialogue, the state began to professionalise both its intelligence operations and its counter-insurgency strategies in the light of these developments. A Directorate of Military Intelligence was established in 1960 and its officers were sent for advanced training in France, Germany, the UK and the USA.<sup>7</sup> Some were to receive "on-the-job" training in the conduct and pursuit of counter-insurgency campaigns (General Magnus Malan being attached the French Army in Algeria for this purpose).<sup>8</sup> Republican Intelligence (civilian intelligence) was formed in 1961 with its primary mission being the

containment and crushing of the activities of both MK and the ANC. Specialised training in interrogation and counter-intelligence techniques were also provided to Republican Intelligence via the offices of the countries referred to above.

Recognising the necessity of moving to more sophisticated levels of guerrilla struggle, and acknowledging the need to devise a more complex guerrilla strategy, the ANC instructed a number of its senior members to study revolutionary warfare and theories of guerrilla struggle in more detail. Indeed, the intellectual environment within which the refinement of MK strategy occurred was infinitely more favourable than that which had faced the Boer armies at the time of their decision to launch the guerrilla phase of the Boer War.

Revolutionary struggles which had integrated both mass political mobilisation and guerrilla strategies had been successfully waged in the Soviet Union (1917), the People's of China (1949), and a number of socialist countries in Eastern Europe. The partisan resistance throughout Europe during the Second World War had left a rich legacy of underground work and intense guerrilla struggles were, during the 1960s, being waged across the globe (Vietnam, Cuba and various Latin American countries).

In developing their strategy of guerrilla warfare, the founders of MK had access to many texts from which they could gain insight. The writings of Lenin, Trotsky, Giap, Mao, Che Guevara, and the Boer War Generals, amongst others, were amongst the first texts used in this regard. MK commanders travelled abroad to the USSR, the GDR and China to acquire the necessary strategic, doctrinal and technical expertise with which to wage guerrilla warfare. The result of this process of strategic introspection was twofold.

Firstly, it was to lead to the development of a sophisticated political-military strategy that sought to situate the military context of the struggle within the overall political objectives of national liberation. Unlike the Anglo-Saxon approach to doctrinal development - which sees a relatively clear cut division between strategy and doctrine (and equates the latter with the operational and technical aspects of war-fighting) - this strategic approach was more consistent with the Soviet strategic and doctrinal tradition. This tradition did not stress the bifurcation between strategy and doctrine but sought to emphasise the organic link between the two aspects namely:

*.....political (sometimes socio-political or military-political) and military-technical. An understanding of the two aspects and their mutual relationship is fundamental to and understanding of the overall concept. These aspects convey an appreciation.....on various key issues, including the nature of the political and military threat, the nature and essence of future war, and - flowing from these -*



*changing priorities involving the composition, structure and training of the armed forces.*<sup>9</sup>

The political dimension of this strategy was to be articulated in such documents as the South African Communist Party's manifesto "The South African Road to Freedom" adopted by the party in 1962 in which the initial principles of the strategy of internal colonialism was to receive initial expression. The military components of the strategy were to be reflected more fully in the Manifesto of Umkhonto We Sizwe which accompanied its launch on 16 December 1961.

Secondly, it was to lead to the development of Operation Mayibuye - a comprehensive plan designed to create and internalise the structures required for the successful prosecution of the armed struggle within South Africa. Operation Mayibuye had a threefold series of objectives. The first was to prepare an underground structure capable of ensuring the revolutionary overthrow of the state. The second was to provide for the military training of MK personnel whether at home or abroad so that MK would possess the capacity to confront the state militarily. The third was to ensure, via the ANC's external structures that the necessary levels of international support accrued to the liberation struggle.

Very few of these goals were to be fully realised. Barely a year and a half after its formation, MK's High Command within the country was exposed at a farm outside Johannesburg, and virtually its entire command structure was arrested and detained. In a massive trial known as the "Rivonia Trial" most of those arrested were sentenced to lengthy periods of imprisonment, whilst a few managed to escape. The rapidity with which the state responded to the emergence of MK reflected two pertinent weaknesses within its organisation - both of which had contributed to the arrest of the High Command and the effective neutralisation of MK activities within the country for the next decade.

The first was the lack of familiarity which the leadership possessed in relation to the basic tenets of underground work (most members were drawn from the tradition of the high profile resistance campaigns of the 1950. The second, related to the first, was the extent to which MK relied on the experience and leadership of publicly Recognised activists thereby facilitating the identification and monitoring of these senior commanders by the intelligence services of the South African government.

The post-Rivonia period saw the ANC concentrating on developing its external infrastructure and securing military facilities for the training of existing and prospective combatants. Initially training for the nascent guerrilla army was provided by countries such as Algeria (where Mandela himself had received training during his underground period prior to his arrest), Tanzania and the former Soviet Union. These training opportunities were to expand considerably in later years with training being provided in virtually all the former socialist countries as well as in a range of African countries.

The military culture that began emerging in MK in the 1960s and the early 1970s reflected a compound of influences and traditions. MK's politico-strategic parameters were informed by the ANC's strategy and political campaigns within the country and the traditions of people's war developing in the Third World. Its military-specific culture reflected an amalgam of Soviet-influenced military practices (drill, instructor and officer training, weapons techniques etc) and classic guerrilla army traditions (a minimal rank structure and an emphasis on self-sufficiency, innovation and mission-oriented command once deployed).

A conference called the Kabwe conference was held in Zambia in 1985 and isolated three sets of problems confronting MK. The first problem was the urban focus of most of the military operations MK had conducted to date. The neglect of the countryside, it was argued, had allowed the state to counter-organise the population in these areas through the manipulation of tribal elders, the institution of homeland administrations, and the creation of SADF tribal battalions in these areas. The second problem that was identified was the belief that MK actions should move increasingly from those of armed propaganda to a position of people's war. This perspective was increasingly reflected in the strategic positions adopted within MK (the development of theoretical positions around the concept of the "Revolutionary Army" for instance) and MK training (the emphasis on Military Combat Work being a case in point).

The third was to redefine the definition of what constituted a legitimate military target. Particular emphasis was placed on the direct military engagement of SADF and SAP personnel and the "taking of the war" into the white areas. This did not necessarily entail the targeting of the white population as a military target but rather sought to ensure that strategic installations within the white areas were increasingly targeted and that those white communities who were involved in the SADF's area defence system (such as the rural farming community) were engaged at a military level. Typically this translated itself into a series of sub-strategies whereby landmines were placed on roads in the border areas of the country, farmers who were known to be active within the SADF Commando system were targeted by MK combatants and military and police personnel and facilities within white suburbs were attacked by MK units.

Despite the declaration of a nation-wide State of Emergency in 1985, and the detention of tens of thousands of activists between 1985-1987, MK managed to maintain a steady increase in both its rural and urban operations. The strategy of taking the war into the white areas was partially realised as economic and strategic installations in white suburbs are attacked. Special Operations activities during this period included the detonation of a car bomb outside the Johannesburg Magistrate's Court (killing four policemen) in May 1987 and attacks on a number of military facilities within the mainly white areas.

Notwithstanding the difficulties encountered by MK in organising and prosecuting the armed struggle within South Africa, it was to accumulate considerable combat experience within the Frontline states. Apart from

MK's experience of having engaged the Rhodesian Army and the South African Police between 1967-1968, it was also to participate in some of the major military campaigns in neighbouring countries. MK personnel participated with FRELIMO forces in the liberation of Tete Province in the early 1970s and hundreds fought with ZIPRA forces in Zimbabwe throughout the 1970s (and were even on the verge of being integrated into the new Zimbabwe Defence Force in 1980 before South African Military Intelligence got wind of their intentions and prevented their inclusion).

Although the subordination of MK to the political authority and direction of the ANC during this period was never seriously questioned, it is perhaps not unsurprising that MK developed a quasi-military identity that sometimes resulted in differences of opinion between the MK leadership and that of the NEC.<sup>10</sup> This was the twin product of the initial failure of the ANC to effectively integrate MK activities within South Africa into a corresponding political hierarchy and the physical separation of the bulk of MK combatants in the camps in Angola from the non-military rank-and-file in their different locations.

The period prior to the lifting of the ban on the ANC in 1990 found MK undergoing a profound re-examination of its roles, missions and capabilities. This reassessment had been a long time in the making and had been reflected, in varying degrees, in the Morogoro Conference, the Kabwe Conference and the restructuring of the ANC in 1983. The following observation by Ronnie Kasrils in the late 1980s reflects this strategic thrust behind this re-evaluation:

*It is certainly true that the blows MK has delivered to the enemy, and the heroic sacrifices of our combatants, have played a vital role in inspiring our people and popularising the ANC. Yet despite the tremendous upsurge of mass resistance over the past three years we were not able to take full advantage of the favourable conditions that materialized. We were unable to deploy sufficient forces at home; our cadres still found big problems in basing themselves amongst our people; our underground failed to grow sufficiently....the incredible mass resistance and strikes were consequently not sufficiently reinforced by armed struggle".<sup>11</sup>*

Acknowledging that MK's major weakness remained the fact that it was primarily an army-in-exile, Kasrils outlined the necessity of building the "Revolutionary Army" (a concept that reflected the influence of Leninist teachings on underground work, Soviet experiences of establishing clandestine units and classic guerrilla theories). The building of the Revolutionary Army involved three components. The first component consisted of the Organised Advanced Detachments which constituted the core of the Revolutionary Army. These detachments consisted of guerrilla units in the countryside; underground combat units in the urban areas, and self-defence units based amongst the people. The latter were to become a

reality, and a problem, within South Africa particularly as political violence engulfed South Africa during the post-1990 period.

The second component was the Revolutionary Armed People - those advanced sectors of the population who, trained and armed, would fall under the command and control of the Organised Advanced Detachments. The third component consisted of those units or individuals within the enemy's armed forces - whether soldiers or police - who had consciously sided with the Revolutionary Army. The entire process of creating the Revolutionary Army was known as "Military Combat Work" - the "military" aspect referring to work within the enemy's armed forces, and the "combat" aspect referring to the creation of the guerrilla units in their entirety.

The creation of the Revolutionary Army was only partially realised. The politics of transition pre-empted the emergence of those conditions that would have allowed its fuller realisation. There were, however, areas where aspects of this strategy were realised and these deserve individual mention. The first was undoubtedly Operation Vula - an operation that was a product of the attempts by the ANC leadership to remedy the organisational weaknesses that had been identified at successive ANC National Conferences and strategy sessions. The ANC had undergone a wide-ranging organisational restructuring process since 1983 which had profound implications for both the organisation and activities of MK.

Most significantly this took the form of a reorganisation of the ANC and MK's external and internal structures. Prior to 1983 ANC political structures and MK military structures operated separately and co-ordination of political and military activities, to the extent that it occurred, took place at a strategic level (the level of the Revolutionary Council) and not at an operational or tactical level (in the rear areas such as Angola, the forward areas such as Botswana, Zimbabwe, Swaziland, Lesotho and Mozambique and the underground structures within South Africa). Although MK structures strove to harmonise their activities with those of the emerging mass resistance within South Africa that was often not achieved and MK units frequently engaged in military actions separate from and uncoordinated with that of the broader political struggle.<sup>12</sup>

Attempts were made to rectify this situation with the most notable being the convening of a meeting of all regional front commander and commissars in Maputo in 1983 and by 1986 the ANC political-military hierarchy had been substantially altered in organisational format and strategic direction. Most significant had been the replacement of the Revolutionary Council by the Political Military Council (PMC) which controlled and integrated the activities of the Internal Political Committee (responsible for the co-ordination of ANC political activities within South Africa), Military Headquarters (responsible for the co-ordination of operations, ordinance, intelligence and communications) and NAT (responsible for the co-ordination of civilian intelligence, counter-intelligence and security).

Political-military structures were replicated downwards at the level of external Regional PMCs (Swaziland, Mozambique, Lesotho, Zimbabwe, Botswana and London), internal Regional PMCs (Western Cape, Border region, and Northern Transvaal for example), Area PMCs in such cities as Durban and Pretoria for instance, and even local PMCs in some towns and villages. Some of these PMC structures worked exceedingly effectively although others were to suffer from a degree of infiltration from the South African government's intelligence agencies (Swaziland and Botswana for example) and from often strained relations between the political and military components (the Zimbabwe PMC during the late 1980s for example).

The lifting of the ban on the ANC and MK in February 1990 led to a de facto ceasefire emerging between MK and the security forces. This was formally ratified in August 1990 when MK announced that armed actions were to be suspended for the first time in 29 years. The suspension of the armed struggle took most MK members by surprise as little preparation had been done amongst MK cadres for this reality. Intensive political work amongst MK structures, however, ameliorated the effects of this initial confusion. As a result of the decision to suspend the armed struggle MK activities were to assume a qualitatively different hue as peace-time preparations were made for MK's eventual integration into a future Defence Force.

Recognising the inevitability of integration, Military Headquarters (now located at Shell House in Johannesburg) despatched thousands of MK personnel abroad for conventional command and staff training. This training was provided at a number of different locations. The first was the training of new recruits in the new MK camps in Uganda and Tanzania (relocated from Angola since the independence of Namibia). The second was the attendance by MK personnel at both junior and senior staff courses in such countries as Zimbabwe, Uganda, Ghana, India, Nigeria and even the United Kingdom.

The third was the training of MK personnel within the country - either in aspects of conventional and counter-insurgency warfare by the TDF or, at a more rudimentary level, the training of Self Defence Units by MK personnel active within the country. The advantage of most of this training was its institutional and cultural compatibility with what appeared, at the time, to be the likely "model" of a future Defence Force - a British-styled Defence Force akin to those existing in other Commonwealth countries (a belief that has been confirmed by the past six years of the integration process). But from 1993 onwards MK was to enter into possibly the most crucial stage of its history - its integration into the new South African National Defence Force.

## **The Influence of Guerrilla Armies on the Creation of Modern National Defence Forces: The Experiences of Umkhonto We Sizwe on the SANDF.**

### **The role of MK in creation of the South African National Defence Force**

Despite the fact that South Africa's negotiated settlement had been under discussion since early 1990, it was not until November 1993 that the armed forces of the two major political actors, the South African Government and the African National Congress (ANC), became involved in direct and structured negotiations. The reasons for the "lag" between the pace of the political and the military talks were, for both the ANC and the South African Government, largely identical. *Firstly*, both parties saw the retention of their armed forces as a form of a "security fallback" - a psychological and symbolic asset necessary to appease their often sceptical constituents. *Secondly*, the retention of their respective armed capabilities was seen, in very pragmatic terms, as a physical guarantee which could be utilised should the negotiation process falter.

The establishment of the Transitional Executive Council in late 1993 with its seven sub-councils - three of which had a broad security mandate in the form of the sub-councils on Defence, Intelligence and Law and Order - made the question of whether an integration process would take place inevitable. The role of the Sub Council on Defence was essentially political-strategic by nature. It was primarily responsible for maintaining oversight over the armed forces during the pre-election phase and for initiating the planning required to create a new, integrated, National Defence Force.

The planning and staff responsibility for the management of the pre-integration planning process was delegated to a body known as the Joint Military Co-ordinating Council (JMCC) which fell under the authority of the Sub Council on Defence. Although the JMCC did not possess the attributes of a formal command structure, it was to become responsible for the management of a strategic planning process whereby detailed plans for the creation of the new defence force were laid. The JMCC had two chair persons who took the chair in rotation (the Chief of the SADF, General George Meiring, and the MK Chief of Staff, Siphiwe Nyanda).

To facilitate the planning process the JMCC established a range of working groups depending on either the functional area being addressed (personnel, intelligence, operations, logistics, finances and non-cardinal issues) or the Arm of Service under consideration (Army, Air Force, Navy and Medical Service). Representatives on these committees were drawn from both the statutory forces (the SADF and the TBVC armies) and from the non-statutory forces (MK and, at a later date during 1994, APLA) but, in reality, it was both the SADF and MK who either co-chaired these committees and/or dominated their proceedings.<sup>13</sup>

The SADF's mandate regarding their participation in the JMCC was to try to keep the structures, doctrines, training culture and organisational culture as intact as possible throughout the integration process. This was achieved for a number of inter-related reasons. Firstly, the SADF's influence over the process was most manifest in its virtual monopoly of the formal staff skills and strategic management concepts, its keen sense of bureaucratic politics, and its familiarity with the practical, conceptual, strategic and doctrinal issues underpinning both the planning and the force design process.

Secondly, the SADF possessed the organisational, planning and budgetary capabilities which allowed them to prepare, in considerable detail, their various position papers well before their discussion with the formal structures of the JMCC. Invariably SADF positions came to dominate most of the proceedings of the JMCC.

Although MK's influence over the process was significantly enhanced by the political leverage possessed by the ANC on the national political stage - a leverage that allowed it to exact key political compromises on the ranking and placement of NSF officers, the management and oversight of the integration process during the post election period and the participation of the British armed forces as neutral arbitrators overseeing the entire process - its ability to impact more decisively upon the process was made difficult by a range of organisational and historical problems.

MK's command and control structures within South Africa were, at the time of the JMCC, weak with its cadres dispersed throughout the country and with many being active in non-military fields (the latter being particularly pronounced with the immanence of the country's first democratic elections). The mandate received by MK officers participating in the JMCC was often vague and MK officers frequently had to use their own political and military acumen to thwart SADF positions that would have otherwise disadvantaged non-SADF personnel in the integration process. Their ability to participate in the JMCC proceedings in a more robust manner was further limited by a range of very practical and personal problems not least of which was the fact that most did not enjoy the benefits of a fixed income, very few possessed their own transport, material resources to support them in the preparation of position papers were virtually non-existent, and they lacked, quite simply, the advantages of an organisational infrastructure to empower them in what was an immensely detailed, complex and, for some, alienating force planning process.

The influence of MK in the process was thus uneven and depended strongly on the area of restructuring being addressed. Within the Air Force and the Navy Workgroups the influence of MK was minimal - these being areas where MK, a primarily landward guerrilla army, had failed to build any strategic expertise. Its influence was more pronounced in the Army Workgroup (partially due to the quality of MK officers on this workgroup and partially due to the fact that the SADF co-chair of this group, a charismatic conventional force officer, was well-disposed towards and enthusiastic about the impending integration process) and within the

Medical Services Workgroup (where MK officers and doctors proved adept at preparing detailed position papers on the integration process within their particular Arm of Service).

It is not surprising, for the reasons outlined above, that the force design of the new SANDF was largely based on that of the former SADF and that the strategies, doctrines and procedures remained unaltered (prompting one senior SADF officer at the time to comment that "the SADF got more than 80% of what it wanted out of the JMCC process"). The imminent integration process was to be based, therefore, on SADF structures and SADF rules and regulations - a phenomenon that was to greatly undermine the capacity of non-SADF forces to influence this process in the initial stages.<sup>14</sup>

With the initiation of the integration process on the 27th April 1994, the integration process relied on SADF structures and practices - thereby creating the conditions for what was effectively to become the "absorption" of most NSF and TBVC personnel into the structures of the "new" SANDF (although this absorption process was uneven within and between the various levels of the organisation). Partially this was a product of historical necessity and partially a product of vastly disparate force levels - SADF bought some 90 000 personnel to the integration process, MK envisaged a contribution of some 22 000 personnel, the TBVC armies 11 000 members and APLA some 6 000 soldiers.

Between April 1994 and June 1994 nine non-SADF generals (three lieutenant generals and six major generals) were appointed to a number of General Staff positions with the SANDF. None of these, with the exception of the Chief of SANDF Staff, were appointments to critical portfolios and the de facto power within the SANDF continued to reside in former SADF officers.

Thereafter, hundreds of senior MK officers were ranked by the organisation in preparation for their appearance before Placement Boards. The ranks of former guerrilla commanders were determined by MK and ALA on the basis of six inter-related criteria - command experience, operational experience, seniority, educational qualifications, military training and military qualifications, and length of service within the organisation.

Yet most of these officers were to be despatched on various courses for the next three to five years and had little impact on the restructuring of the new National Defence Force (a process that continued to be driven, largely, by former SADF officers).

The fact that none of the non-SADF forces had an institutional power base within the SADF created innumerable obstacles to their free and fair integration into the structures of the new SANDF. At a psychological level many SADF members regarded the activities of the new SANDF as simply being "business as usual" and treated integrating non-SADF members as though they were new members of a long-established organisation. Not infrequently arrogance and racism were used by white



officers to obstruct the activities of non-SADF officers within the SANDF. The continued use of Afrikaans as a medium of instruction and command and control also had the effect of distemping non-SADF officers and preventing them from contributing to or understanding the restructuring processes within which they were involved. NSF officers in particular were disadvantaged by the fact that it took, in some cases, years for them to be integrated into the SANDF - a period during which they remained on nominal salaries without the service benefits normally accruing to regular military personnel

The capacity of the non-SADF forces to influence the restructuring process was further limited by the positions within which they were placed, the de facto authority which these posts carried and by the training requirements which they were required to fulfil prior to being confirmed in their ranks. Most of the influential senior command and staff positions with the new SANDF continued to be occupied by former SADF officers. These positions included the Chiefs of the Arms of Service, the Chiefs of the Staff Divisions (Personnel, Intelligence, Operations, Finance and Logistics, the Officers Commanding the Territorial Commands, the Officers Commanding the Conventional Forces and virtually all key strategic Directorates with the Defence Headquarter establishment.

Institutional and cultural absorption was less pronounced in the Ministry of Defence and the Defence Secretariat. The Ministry of Defence, under the political control of Minister Joe Modise (the former Command of MK) and Deputy Minister Ronnie Kasrils, strongly resisted attempts by the Chief of the National Defence Force to determine the political and strategic agenda according to which the restructuring of the defence function should proceed. This led to heated exchanges within the Council of Defence where the Ministers, Secretary for Defence and the Chief made their key decisions, and a fair degree of political tension ensued between the office of the Minister and the office of the Chief of the National Defence Force.

The capacity of the Ministry to implement its proposed policies depended, critically, on its ability to secure trusted personnel to oversee and execute this process. This was found in the newly established Defence Secretariat where a small group of former MK and liberal SADF officers had been appointed to key positions, in particular, within the Policy and Planning and Finance Divisions. The process of de facto absorption referred to above began being reversed by two processes in particular. The *first* was the successful manner in which the Ministry of Defence, via the Defence Secretariat, succeeded in managing the Defence White Paper process and, more significantly, the exceedingly comprehensive Defence Review process.

The process of absorption also began to be reversed by a further series of developments that "old guard" elements within the SANDF had not anticipated in 1993 and 1994. This was the simple but inescapable fact that non-SADF officers in general, and MK officers in particular, were completing their compulsory training courses and were now ready for real deployment with the SANDF. The strategy of excluding NSF and non-

SADF officers from posts and processes on the basis of their training commitments was now coming to an end and it was in this environment that the "Meiring Report surfaced".

By late 1998, however, MK could claim a more reasonable representation within the new National Defence Force than had pertained in 1994 - especially in light of the fact that only 12 000 of the originally anticipated 28 000 members remained within the organisation. The uniformed component of the SANDF consisted of 39 077 former SADF personnel (53%), 11 727 former MK personnel (16%), 9 580 new SANDF personnel (13%), 6 453 TBVC personnel (9 %) and 4 901 ALA personnel (7 %). The civilian component of the SANDF, for its part, consisted of 17 976 former SADF (91%), 11 MK personnel (0.06%), 790 TBVC personnel (4%) and 1 ALA (0.01%).

Of the total of 41 Generals within the SANDF (1 April 1998) 7 were former MK and ALA generals, of the 4493 senior officers (Major to Brigadier General) 548 were former MK and ALA officers, of the 6046 junior officers (Second Lieutenant to Captain) 998 were former MK and ALA officers, and of the 62 625 non-commissioned officers and other ranks some 15 076 were MK and ALA personnel.<sup>15</sup>

## **Writing a forgotten history: Reclaiming the tradition of MK.**

Even though MK (as with the other integrating forces) ceased to exist on the 27 April 1994 (the date in which the SANDF came into formal existence) the traditions upon which MK was based continue to exist - most notably in the veterans' organisations and in the political traditions of the ANC. A key challenge for the continuation of MK traditions in future will be twofold. The first will be the extent to which these traditions and history are recorded in the form of written biographies, campaign histories and historical surveys. Further academic studies can be initiated, particularly those that will focus on the political relationship between the ANC and MK and the extent to which that relationship changed during the post-1994 period.

The second will be the extent to which MK history and traditions are internalised within the institutional culture of the SANDF given the fact that the present traditions of the SANDF are overwhelmingly based on the traditions and cultures of the former SADF. It is important, furthermore, to ensure that all the marginalised discourses within South Africa's military historical tradition are also brought to the fore in future. This includes the history of ALA and those under-recorded indigenous African military traditions. Unless this development occurs a truly indigenous South African military tradition will be severely hampered in future.<sup>16</sup>

## The Impact of MK on the creation of the new National Defence Forces

Little detailed history exists on the history of MK (although this is beginning to emerge). Histories that do exist are often "official" versions and, as such, reflect the ideological bias of the ruling party. More frequently those credible historical accounts that do exist either assume the form of personal accounts written by former combatants or selected academic articles that focus on a specific aspect of the guerrilla struggle.<sup>17</sup> Clearly the richness of this history needs to be recorded and should at least merit similar scholastic attention as those studies that have been commissioned on the participation of South Africans in various conventional wars and campaigns (the First World War, the Second World War, the Anglo-Zulu Wars, and the first phase of the Anglo-Boer War constituting examples in this regard).

It is precisely for the above-mentioned reasons that Southern African guerrilla armies, *firstly*, constitute such a fertile arena of potential research. Such research can be conducted at a number of levels be they broad historical overviews, campaign histories, regimental or detachment histories, and personal accounts by former soldiers. Such historical renditions can combine both focussed and "human interest" accounts of the liberation struggle. What, for instance, were the experiences of the different units in both training and combat, what campaigns were fought both within and without the country, what personal struggles and travails characterised its operations, what were the institutional peculiarities of the guerrilla army in question (rank, traditions, medals and decorations etc) and what was the nature of the military leadership that emerged within the organisation during the years of its existence?

*Secondly*, it is evident that historical accounts of MK in particular are woefully under-developed - although abbreviated histories do exist in the political literature of the 1980s and early 1990s.<sup>18</sup> More recently, particularly with the relocation of the ANC's archives to the Mayibuye Centre at the University of the Western Cape, a limited range of more personal accounts of former MK combatants are beginning to emerge.<sup>19</sup> The underdevelopment of historical writing on MK in particular is attributable to a number of historical and practical factors - the lack of a written tradition inherent in any young army, the severe censorship and political restrictions characterising the period during which MK operated as a guerrilla army, and the lack of resources required presently to mount a sustained study of MK since its inception.

*Thirdly*, it is important to ensure that the development of South African defence strategy and doctrine takes account of the diverse South African military traditions. To date very little, if any, of South Africa's guerrilla traditions are codified and reflected in both the national defence strategy of the country - which at present relies overwhelmingly on conventional military deterrence as the primary strategy to be used against external aggression - or the current doctrine of the SANDF (which, regardless of Arm of Service or Type Formation, relies heavily on conventional doctrines of war). Ideally, any national defence strategy should reflect a

robust and creative integration of conventional, semi-conventional and guerrilla strategies that prove capable of complementing one another in the eventuality of war.

A number of practical steps can be initiated to ensure that any future doctrinal revision attempts to integrate the diverse experiences of both the ANC and MK into its discourse for instance. The tradition of civilian-based defence (CBD) - which provided the bedrock of South African mass resistance against apartheid - could be incorporated as an element of South African national defence strategy. Essentially CBD is a non-violent strategy of resistance which seeks to deny an occupying power both the resources (the people and products) and legitimacy (the consent) required to govern. Although such a strategy can lead to high attrition rates amongst a civilian population when confronting a ruthless aggressor, it is a powerful weapon in the hand of an unarmed civilian populace (as the South African experience in the Defiance Campaign of the 1950s and the mass campaigns of the 1980s demonstrated).

MK's doctrines of underground organisation (developed and honed over 33 years of sustained struggle) provide a much more effective and home-grown guerrilla tradition than those counter-insurgency doctrines which the SADF imported into their counter-revolutionary strategies via the American, French and British counter-insurgency traditions (23). MK's guerrilla and doctrinal traditions (self-sufficiency, mobilisation of the people, effective use of both urban and rural terrain, military-combat work, and the interfacing of the political and military components of a war) can be incorporated into the rear area defence doctrines of the landward strategy (particularly the organisation of the Territorial Forces), Special Forces doctrine, and the clandestine training of Military Intelligence personnel.

It is significant to note that both the MK and SADF members of the Army Workgroup actually proposed and received approval for the creation of an Unconventional Brigade during the Joint Military Co-ordinating Council process (1993-1994) that was responsible for the creation of the new SANDF. This proposal was ignored - largely due to the apathy of former senior SADF officers responsible for the implementation of the JMCC proposals during the post-1994 period who preferred to adhere to those doctrinal tenets with which they were more familiar.<sup>20</sup>

*Finally*, the experiences of both MK and the Boer armies provide rich examples of how guerrilla armies can, with the appropriate levels of political endorsement and support, bestow considerable legitimacy upon the creation of new National Defence Forces. The amalgam of the different traditions of the Boer armies and the British colonial regiments provided the UDF with a rich strategic, cultural and doctrinal base upon which it could draw in its subsequent campaigns. This process has yet to happen within the current SANDF which is, at present, largely based on the doctrine and practices of the pre-1994 SADF. The immanent integration process which is about to be initiated within the country's Reserve Forces may well constitute an arena where these traditions can be more fully expressed.

In time South Africa will develop a military historical tradition that is more fully reflective of its diverse military past. That this has not happened to date has as much to do with historical factors and the history of conflict that has characterised this country as it does with the exigencies of the current political transition. It is a challenge that military historians, defence strategists and doctrinal experts must embrace in the future.

## About the Author

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## Glossary

ANC	African National Congress
APLA	Azanian Peoples Liberation Army
CPSA	Communist Party of South Africa
FRELIMO	Front for the Liberation of Mozambique [Frente de Liberta Vão de Mozambique]
JMCC	Joint Military Co-ordinating Council
MK	Umkhonto we Sizwe - Military wing of the ANC
MKIZA	MK Intelligence Division
MPLA	Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola [Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola]
NSF	Non-statutory Forces
RENAMO	Mozambican National Resistance [Resistência Nacional Moçambicana]
SACP	South African Communist Party
SADF	South African Defence Force
SAIC	South African Indian Congress
SANDF	South African National Defence Force
SAP	South Africa Police
TBVC	Transkei, Bophuthatswana, Venda, Ciskei
UNITA	National Union for the Total Independence of Angola [União Nacional para a Independência Total de Angola]
ZIPRA	Zimbabwean Independent People's Revolutionary Army

## Endnotes

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<sup>1</sup> A number of political groupings of different political leanings and social composition emerged during this period including the ANC, the South African Communist Party, the Non-European Unity Movement, the Industrial and Commercial Workers Union. The last of the traditional military uprisings against colonial rule was the Bambata Rebellion in 1906 - an insurrection suppressed by both British and South African police and military personnel at the time. The earliest mass-based resistance of a non-military nature was Ghandi's passive resistance campaign against pass laws in the Transvaal followed, in time, by the anti-pass-pass demonstrations of 1913, and the mine workers strikes of the 1910s and 1920s.

<sup>2</sup> Quoted in Eddie Roux's "Time Longer Than Rope: The Black Man's Struggle for Freedom in South Africa". The University of Wisconsin Press, Madison, USA, 1978, page 399.

<sup>3</sup> "Umkhonto We Sizwe 30th Anniversary Souvenir Magazine". Shell House, Bree Street, Johannesburg, 1991.

<sup>4</sup> The late Joe Slovo, for example, observes that the former President of the ANC, Chief Albert Luthuli, never endorsed the transition to the armed struggle and neither, he speculates, would many of those in ANC leadership as a whole have done so if the decision had been presented to them in 1960 (Slovo, J. "Slovo : The Unfinished Autobiography" Ravan Press, Johannesburg, 1995, page 147).

<sup>5</sup> Hani, C. "ANC and Armed Struggle". Paper delivered at ANC/IDASA seminar "The Future of the Security and Defence in South Africa", Lusaka, 24 - 27 May 1990.

<sup>6</sup> Roux, E. op. cit., page 425.

<sup>7</sup> Le Grange, S.L. (Lt). "Die Geskiedenis Van Die Hoof Van Staf Inligting" [The History of the Chief of Staff Intelligence]. Militaria, 12/2, 1982.

<sup>8</sup> De Villiers, D and De Villiers, J. "PW". Tafelberg, Cape Town, 1983

<sup>9</sup> Menning, B. "Bases of Soviet Military Doctrine". In Willard Frank and Philip Gillette. "Soviet Military Doctrine from Lenin to Gorbachev: 1915-1991". Greenwood Press, London, 1992.

<sup>10</sup> "Militarism" is a contested term which does not admit to easy delineation.

<sup>11</sup> Kasrils, R. "Politics and the Armed Struggle". Unpublished paper, Lusaka, February 1988

<sup>12</sup> For an excellent overview of these problems and the measures introduced to rectify them see Tsepe Motumi, op.cit. pages 91-96

<sup>13</sup> Author's own experience in the JMCC structures, 1994-1995

<sup>14</sup> Williams, R. "South Africa's New Defence Force : Progress and Prospects". CSIS Africa Notes, Number 170, March 1995, Washington, USA

<sup>15</sup> "Defence in a Democracy, South African White Paper and South African Defence Review". 1 Military Printing Regiment, Pretoria, 1998, pages 78-81.

<sup>16</sup> The bulk of the SANDF's traditions continue to be enshrined in the country's Part Time Force units - many of which can trace their origins back to the late 18th and 19th centuries. Most of these traditions, however, are overwhelmingly "white" in origin and reflect the histories of white South Africans in such wars as the Boer War, the First World War and, more recently, the South West African and the Angolan campaigns.

<sup>17</sup> An important contribution on the history of MK has been "The Spear of the Nation - The Recent History of Umkhonto We Sizwe". In Jakkie Cilliers & Markus Reichart (eds.) "About Turn" Institute for Defence Policy, Midrand, 1995.

<sup>18</sup> See - Barrell, H. "MK". Penguin, 1991 for example

<sup>19</sup> Kasrils, R. "Armed and Dangerous". Heinemann, South Africa, 1996

<sup>20</sup> The Joint Military Co-ordinating Council was responsible for devising the plans upon which the creation of the new SANDF would be based after the April 1994 elections. It was co-chaired by MK and the SADF, consisted of representatives from the other armies present in South Africa at the time (the homeland defence forces and ALA) and was divided into a number of functional and Arms of Service workgroups such as the Army Workgroup.