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Ellis, S.

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MBOKODO: SECURITY IN ANC CAMPS, 1961–1990

STEPHEN ELLIS

NO LESS THAN four official reports have been published since 1992 by the African National Congress (ANC) into human rights abuses perpetrated by the organisation during its years in exile. At least three other organisations have also published reports on the same subject. These documents, plus an abundance of first-hand testimony by former prisoners and officials of the ANC, permit us to reconstruct with some confidence the record of the detention, torture and executions carried out by the ANC in exile, as well as the context in which these events occurred. This constitutes a chapter in the history of the ANC sufficiently important, albeit unpleasant, as to be worthy of further study. In present circumstances, it also has far-reaching implications.

The present article does not attempt to investigate either the legality of the ANC's security policy during its period in exile, nor to compare it with that of other organisations, including notably that of the South African government, whose own human rights record is well known. The article summarises what has been established concerning the ANC's security apparatus in the 1980s, and in particular its response to indiscipline, espionage and widespread criticism by rank and file members of its armed wing, *Umkhonto we Sizwe*, in the period 1981–4. It compares this with an earlier, and less well-documented, wave of unrest in 1967–9. In doing so, it concludes that the nature of the ANC in exile changed markedly in the period due to the organisation's militarization under the guidance of the South African Communist Party (SACP), which after 1969 became the dominant force within the ANC's exile leadership, or the External Mission of the ANC as it was formally styled.

Sources

For many years the conditions inside ANC training and guerrilla camps were not widely known outside the ranks of ANC members in exile. Howard Barrell, a journalist and ANC member who had good access to information on the inner workings of the ANC in exile, has stated that it was common knowledge among ANC cadres that there were security men who inflicted routine beatings on their victims and for that reason were

Stephen Ellis is director of the Afrika Studiecentrum, Leiden, the Netherlands. He is grateful to Richard Carver and Oyama Mabandla for their comments on this paper and to Eric van den Berg for supplying press clippings.

commonly known as 'panel-beaters'.¹ Nevertheless it remains unclear to what extent ANC cadres in exile were aware of the treatment meted out to their own kind in some detention centres, especially in the ANC's Angolan punishment camp known as Quatro (sometimes wrongly rendered as 'Quadro'). Perhaps surprisingly, the South African government, whose intelligence services were clearly well informed about conditions in the ANC camps, did little to make their information public, not even releasing details of the mutiny which took place in ANC camps in Angola in 1984, and which shook the ANC to its foundations. The first lengthy account of the 1984 mutiny was published only in 1990, written by five former ANC detainees.² The ANC itself established a commission of inquiry into the 1984 mutiny and its origins as early as February 1984, known as the Stuart Commission after its chairman James Stuart,³ a veteran member of the ANC who was elected to the ANC's National Executive Committee in 1985. The report of the Stuart Commission, however, was not released by the ANC until 1993.⁴

The first official inquiry on the abuses in ANC camps to be made public was that chaired by Thembile Louis Skweyiya S.C., a senior member of the South African bar, in 1992.⁵ His cousin and fellow lawyer, Zola Skweyiya, was himself an ANC official who in exile was given responsibility for investigating human rights abuses within the organization in the wake of the 1984 mutiny, although by all accounts he was able to make little headway in this work.⁶ The Skweyiya Commission was constituted as a result of public and private pressure on the organization to give an account of its conduct during the years of exile.⁷ Its terms of reference were

1. Howard Barrell, review of Stephen Ellis and Tsepo Sechaba, *Comrades Against Apartheid: the ANC and the South African Communist Party in Exile* (James Currey, London and Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1992) in *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 18 (1992), p. 857, n. 7.

2. Bandile Ketelo *et al.*, 'A Miscarriage of Democracy: the ANC Security Department in the 1984 Mutiny in *Umkhonto we Sizwe*', *Searchlight South Africa*, 5 (July 1990), pp. 35-65. The first known account of the mutiny had earlier appeared in *Africa Confidential*, Vol. 29, No. 24 (2 December 1988), then edited by the present author.

3. Real name Hermanus Gabriel Loots. Like most ANC members, Loots used a pseudonym or 'travelling name' while in exile. In the present text ANC members are referred to by the names by which they are best known, whether or not it is their original or real name.

4. 'Report: Commission of Inquiry into Recent Developments in the People's Republic of Angola' (Lusaka, 14 March 1984). Henceforth known as the Stuart Commission. Obtainable from ANC headquarters, Johannesburg. I am grateful to Carl Niehaus for supplying copies of this and other ANC reports.

5. 'Report of the Commission of Enquiry into Complaints by Former African National Congress Prisoners and Detainees' (August 1992). Henceforth known as the Skweyiya Commission.

6. 'Report of the Commission of Enquiry into Certain Allegations of Cruelty and Human Rights Abuse against ANC Prisoners and Detainees by ANC Members' (Johannesburg, 20 August 1993), pp. 53-4. Henceforth known as the Motsuenyane Commission.

7. See, for example, the interview with Chris Hani, member of the ANC's National Executive Committee and Secretary-General of the SACP, in *Work In Progress*, 82 (June 1992), pp. 18-20, in response to some of the allegations made by Ellis and Sechaba, *Comrades Against Apartheid*. On the debate inside the ANC over the constitution of the Skweyiya Commission, Paul Trewhela, 'The ANC Prison Camps: an Audit of Three Years, 1990-1993', *Searchlight South Africa*, 10 (April 1993), pp. 12-14.

restricted to the cases of former detainees who had themselves complained to the ANC. It was empowered to investigate complaints relating to 'the conditions of their detention' and to inquire into 'the allegations of their mistreatment'.⁸ Its mandate did not include an investigation of cases of murder or execution. Nor was it empowered to investigate other cases of detention reported to it but in which the victim had not personally complained to the ANC. The Skweyiya Commission did not address, other than in passing, the question of where responsibility lay for these abuses, although it did name several senior ANC officials whom it considered to bear some responsibility for the abuses which had occurred.

Partly because of the limits to its terms of reference, the Skweyiya Commission did not bring an end to pressure on the ANC to launch a more thorough investigation. In consequence, the organization appointed another commission, chaired by Dr Samuel Motsuenyane, a well-known South African businessman, which reported in August 1993.⁹ Although the Motsuenyane Commission mentioned the names of two senior ANC officials whom it found to have committed errors of conduct, it again avoided determining the question of which senior ANC leaders might by reason of their office, be held responsible for the abuses which had taken place in exile. Yet another ANC commission of inquiry was that chaired by Z. N. Jobodwana which inquired into the death of Thami Zulu, a prominent officer of *Umkhonto we Sizwe* who died in 1989 shortly after being released from a period of 14 months during which he was detained by the ANC on suspicion of espionage. The Jobodwana report, which appears to have been drafted by senior ANC and SACP lawyer Albie Sachs, dates from March 1990 but was released only in 1993.¹⁰

In the meantime, there were at least three other reports on the question, one published in December 1992 by Amnesty International,¹¹ and another written by Bob Douglas S.C., a South African advocate who had been commissioned by a right-wing lobby, the International Freedom Foundation.¹² A third was published by the International Society for Human Rights, an organization which seemed broadly to share the political standpoint of the International Freedom Foundation.¹³ By late 1993

8. Skweyiya Commission, p. 6.

9. See note 6 above.

10. 'Report on a Commission of Inquiry set up in November 1989 by the National Working Committee of the African National Congress to Investigate the Circumstances leading to the Death of Mzwakhe Ngwenya (also known as Thami Zulu or TZ)' (16 March 1990). Obtainable from ANC headquarters, Johannesburg.

11. Amnesty International, 'South Africa: Torture, Ill-Treatment and Executions in African National Congress Camps' (AFR 53/27/92, London, 2 December 1992). Obtainable from Amnesty International, London.

12. 'The Report of the Douglas Commission 1993' (January 1993). Obtainable from International Freedom Foundation, Johannesburg.

13. International Society for Human Rights, 'Human Rights and the African National Congress' (Frankfurt, 1993). Marc Gordon, an official of the International Freedom Foundation, was the ISHR's observer at the Motsuenyane Commission.

there were also dozens of depositions in circulation in photocopy form by people claiming to have suffered at the hands of the ANC's security apparatus or to have intimate knowledge of such abuses. These and other information were the basis of many newspaper articles either by alleged victims or by senior ANC officials reacting to the various allegations made against the organization or against them personally.

There is evidence that some alleged witnesses or victims of abuses in ANC camps, having returned to South Africa in the early 1990s destitute and, in some cases, embittered received funding and material support from political enemies of the ANC, including possibly from South Africa's Directorate of Military Intelligence. Evidence from sources which may have been affected by considerations of political bias or enmity should, like all other historical evidence, be evaluated in the context not only of what is stated, but of the circumstances and motives for which it was compiled. The fact that a given testimony may have been produced at the request of, or with support from, an organization opposed to the ANC does not make it invalid: it is merely a factor which needs to be assessed in its proper context.

Of all this abundant evidence, the most authoritative documents are probably the three widest-ranging reports produced by the ANC, namely the Stuart, Skweyiya and Motsuenyane Commissions, in 1984, 1992 and 1993 respectively. Since these inquiries were commissioned by the ANC itself, they had better access to internal ANC documents and more power to summon ANC witnesses than any other investigation. Moreover, although there are grounds for criticizing all three inquiries, the Skweyiya Commission in particular was generally regarded by observers at the time of its publication as a courageous and fair report, albeit with rather restricted terms of reference, which was path-breaking in its significance. The Stuart Commission has the merit of having been compiled at the height of the armed struggle, within a few days of the 1984 mutiny, and of having been written for internal consumption rather than with an eye to publication. The Motsuenyane Commission, unlike the Skweyiya and Stuart Commissions, was independent in the sense that it was composed of people who were not members of the ANC, but who had access to ANC documents and witnesses.

Of the other reports, that by Amnesty International has the merit of having been compiled by an organization with acknowledged expertise in its subject and which cannot seriously be suspected of ulterior political motives. The Douglas report, in contrast, was commissioned by an organization which has explicit political aims opposed to those of the ANC.¹⁴ The report contains so many unsubstantiated and often wild

14. On the International Freedom Foundation, David Ivon, 'Touting for South Africa: International Freedom Foundation,' *Covert Action Information Bulletin*, 31 (1989), pp. 62-4.

allegations, combined with a highly polemical tone, as to make it the least satisfactory of all the various inquiries, notwithstanding its author's qualifications as a Senior Counsel.

These various documents, in spite of their strengths, weaknesses and omissions, agree on a good many points which may therefore be regarded as established beyond any reasonable doubt. In brief, the central finding of all of them, supplemented by other evidence, is that the camps run by the ANC in southern Africa to house its guerrilla army, and particularly those located in Angola, were the scene of numerous hardships and administrative abuses from the late 1970s onwards. The Angolan camps were closed in 1989, but others in Tanzania, Uganda and elsewhere remained open until 1992 at least. The conditions in the camps provoked expressions of dissatisfaction which the ANC met with harsh and often arbitrary punishments, particularly at the punishment camp known as Quatro, properly known as Site 32 or, later, the Morris Seabelo Rehabilitation Centre. Corruption, authoritarian administration and other abuses including arbitrary detention, torture and murder, combined to cause great resentment which resulted in the 1984 mutiny known as *Mkatashingo* (or, according to Ronnie Kasrils, *Mkatashini*)¹⁵. Participants in the mutiny were themselves severely punished, including by public execution. Similar abuses, however, continued until 1990, when the ANC was unbanned in South Africa and its members allowed to return from exile. Even as late as 1993, when most *Umkhonto we Sizwe* fighters had been back in South Africa for two years or more, the ANC's soldiers were so angry with the way they were treated by their leaders that it was necessary to hold a special conference where they could voice their complaints. A particular target was Army Commander Joe Modise, the subject of bitter complaint for 25 years or more. The *Umkhonto we Sizwe* conference held in Kangwane in September 1993 may thus be viewed in a long tradition of tension between the *Umkhonto we Sizwe* leadership and the rank and file.¹⁶

None of the reports gives any credence to the allegation that the 1984 mutiny was directly inspired or organized by South African government agents as Oliver Tambo asserted to the ANC national conference in Durban in July 1992.¹⁷ The ANC's own Stuart Commission stated in 1984 that 'we have not uncovered any evidence that enemy agents organized the disturbances [i.e. the 1984 mutiny] from the beginning'.¹⁸ Tambo's allegation at such a late date must therefore be regarded as a cynical lie.

15. Ronnie Kasrils, *Armed and Dangerous: My undercover struggle against apartheid* (Heinemann Educational, Oxford, 1993), p. 250.

16. Brian Sokutu, 'MK's toughest fight—keeping the troops happy', *Sunday Times* (Johannesburg), 12 September 1993.

17. Reported in Trewhela, 'The ANC Prison Camps: an Audit of Three Years,' p. 17.

18. Stuart Commission, p. 24.

It is unedifying but, perhaps, unsurprising, to learn that ANC soldiers in Angola lived in poor conditions, and that these gave rise to frustration and indiscipline which, in the circumstances of a military struggle, were repressed with a heavy hand. For present purposes, what is of concern is to establish why the ANC was not able to deal with these problems more effectively, and to assess the significance of these events for what they indicate about the ANC as an organization.

The ANC security apparatus

The most authoritative published information on the evolution of the security apparatus set up by the ANC in exile is contained in the latest of the ANC's official commissions, that chaired by Dr Samuel Motsuenyane which issued its report on 20 August 1993. Motsuenyane did not receive any evidence on the existence of an ANC security department prior to 1981, but noted that 'it is clear, however, that security and intelligence duties were carried out as part of the operations of the MK [*Umkhonto we Sizwe*]' before that date.¹⁹ The Motsuenyane report stated that the person appointed by Oliver Tambo to head the Department of Security and Intelligence in 1981 was Mzwandile ('Mzwai') Piliso, who selected his own personnel from the ranks of *Umkhonto we Sizwe*. Originally from the Transkei, and related to some leading members of the organization, Piliso was a veteran ANC member. He had joined it in the late 1940s but left South Africa shortly afterwards and became politically inactive. Persuaded by Oliver Tambo to re-enter politics, Piliso threw himself into ANC work and was appointed to the National Executive Committee in the early 1970s. In short, Piliso was a senior member of the ANC leadership, with close personal ties to Tambo and other key leaders, especially those of his own generation who were also from the Transkei. By the late 1970s Piliso was the head of ANC personnel, based in Angola, where he was responsible for setting up training camps to accommodate the large influx of new recruits to *Umkhonto we Sizwe* in the wake of the 1976 Soweto uprising. According to Kasrils, Piliso already headed a security apparatus at this stage, but this appears to be incorrect.²⁰

Only in 1981 did an urgent need arise for a new head of the ANC's Department of Intelligence and Security, based in Lusaka. Piliso was considered to have made such a good job of assimilating the influx of new recruits in Angola that he was offered the job. He was reluctant to accept, but allowed himself to be persuaded. As head of Intelligence and Security, Piliso was chief of a directorate whose other members were the heads of external intelligence, security, and administration. The Security

19. Motsuenyane Commission, p. 25.

20. Kasrils, *Armed and Dangerous*, pp. 170-1.

organ, one of the three separate structures which fell under Piliso's overall authority, was responsible for running the ANC's places of detention and became known as *Mbokodo*, a Xhosa word designating a stone used for grinding maize, generally regarded as 'a euphemism for the harshness with which the Department treated its victims'.²¹ As the head of this whole structure, Piliso reported directly to ANC President Oliver Tambo. At the time Piliso took up his post in 1981, the other members of his directorate are said to have been Peter Boroko (an SACP member, head of Intelligence and number two in the Department of Intelligence and Security directorate), Reddy Mazimba (head of Security) and Sizakele Sigxashe (head of administration). Sizakele, trained in the Soviet Union, was elected to the Central Committee of the SACP in 1984 and the Political Bureau in 1985, the same year in which he was elected also to the ANC's National Executive Committee.²²

Motsuenyane is correct in pointing out that the large influx of recruits to *Umkhonto we Sizwe* after the Soweto rising of 1976 greatly stretched the ANC's resources, and that the failure to respond adequately to the demands which this imposed on the organization, in spite of Piliso's best efforts as head of personnel, was one of the factors which led to unrest among the rank and file. However, neither Motsuenyane nor any of the other reports mentions that *Umkhonto we Sizwe* had experienced similar problems of disaffected personnel and an unpopular leadership as early as 1967-9, and it is useful to consider briefly the history of the ANC's security structures in order to put the later disturbances in context.

The ANC was, as is well known, a non-violent movement for over four decades after its foundation in 1912 and it had no institutional means for enforcing discipline or security within its own ranks. It was only in the 1950s that the organization adopted a strategy of mass mobilization and of defiance of the law, and only in 1961 that it adopted a policy of armed struggle. To be more precise, the ANC did not formally adopt the armed struggle in 1961: rather, many individual members of the ANC, with the tacit (but not yet explicit) blessing of the leadership of their organization, joined their Communist Party allies in establishing an underground army, *Umkhonto we Sizwe*. At this early stage *Umkhonto we Sizwe* did not, technically speaking, 'belong' to either the ANC or the SACP, but was an autonomous unit composed of members of both organizations. None of the three—the ANC, the SACP or *Umkhonto we Sizwe*—had a specific apparatus for ensuring its own security. That was to evolve only in the course of the armed struggle.

21. Motsuenyane Commission, p. 26.

22. A biography of Sigxashe released by the SACP in December 1991 states that he joined the ANC in 1959 and the SACP in 1984. This last date appears to be a typographical error, as Sigxashe was certainly a Party member long before then.

In the years immediately after 1963, police repression caused many members of *Umkhonto we Sizwe* to leave South Africa and to find shelter in camps established by the ANC in Tanzania. Some South African Police intelligence, we may note, even at this early date came from spies whom it had succeeded in placing or in recruiting at the heart even of the ultra-cautious SACP.²³ The ANC's four Tanzanian camps became the bases of the *Umkhonto we Sizwe* guerrilla soldiers, a small number of whom had undergone training courses in China, the USSR, or elsewhere. It appears that any problems of either discipline or security within the Tanzanian camps at this stage were dealt with by the *Umkhonto we Sizwe* command under Joe Modise, appointed Army Commander in 1965.

In 1967, *Umkhonto we Sizwe* launched its first foreign-based offensive, in the Wankie district of north-west Rhodesia, together with soldiers from the ANC's ally, the Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU). The ZAPU/*Umkhonto we Sizwe* forces, using inappropriate tactics and with poor logistic support, were attacked by more mobile Rhodesian forces and badly mauled. Some of the survivors, eventually making their way back to ANC camps in Tanzania, were highly critical of the leaders who had sent them into Wankie badly prepared and supported, and they spread dissatisfaction to the point of mutiny. Some survivors of the Wankie campaign were detained by the ANC in Tanzania on account of their criticism of the army leadership.²⁴ Chris Hani, one of the most articulate of the young Wankie veterans, was held several months by the authorities in Botswana after escaping from the Wankie defeat. Returning to Tanzania, incensed by the poor leadership of the Army, he submitted an angry memorandum on behalf of the *Umkhonto we Sizwe* combatants, 'charging the then MK leadership with incompetence and complacency'.²⁵ Modise appears to have been a particular target of Hani's memorandum, which is said to have been penned in early 1969.²⁶ According to one report, Hani was summarily sentenced to death by the *Umkhonto we Sizwe* high command for this act of insubordination, but later reprieved.²⁷ In fact there had been a groundswell of dissatisfaction in the ANC camps even before the Wankie campaign, and indeed one of the motives for launching the campaign in the first place was probably to prevent the spread of demoralisation through inactivity.²⁸

23. Gerard Ludi and Blaar Grobelaar, *The Amazing Mr Fischer* (Nasionale Boekhandel, Johannesburg, 1966). Ludi was a police spy who infiltrated the SACP in the early 1960s.

24. 'Inside Quadro', *Searchlight South Africa*, 5 (July 1990), p. 31.

25. Jeremy Cronin, 'What Happened in Exile?', *Work in Progress*, 81 (March 1992), p. 35.

26. Kasrils, *Armed and Dangerous*, p. 253.

27. Ellis and Sechaba, *Comrades Against Apartheid*, p. 47, who mistakenly attribute the incident to the period before the Wankie campaign, rather than after.

28. Tom Lodge, *Black Politics in South Africa since 1945* (Longman, London, 1983), p. 300; Howard Barrell, *MK: the ANC's Armed Struggle* (Penguin, London, 1990), p. 20.

It was largely as a result of pressure from its disaffected soldiers that the ANC held a consultative conference at Morogoro, Tanzania, in 1969. The conference resulted in sweeping changes in the ANC leadership, with the appointment of a new body to oversee the armed struggle, and with a clearer statement of strategy than had previously existed.²⁹ There were also major changes in the composition of the ANC's National Executive Committee. In general, the Morogoro conference was the point at which the SACP could be said to have gained decisive influence over the whole of the ANC in exile, asserting its superiority over other factions or tendencies within the ANC leadership.³⁰ It was in the context of this overhaul of the ANC's apparatus, along lines recommended by SACP thinkers, that the ANC appears to have first established an autonomous Department of Intelligence and Security, at some time in the mid-1970s. One of its first directors is said to have been Simon Makana (later, ANC representative in Moscow and a member of the SACP Central Committee). However, I know of no published source confirming the date of origin of this department.

It was in these circumstances that *Umkhonto we Sizwe* received the influx of new recruits who left South Africa in 1976-7. Barrell estimates that there were some 800 *Umkhonto we Sizwe* guerrillas in 1965.³¹ Stephen Davis puts the number of ANC exiles at 1,000 in 1975 and 9,000 five years later, after the influx of fighters from the Soweto generation. A substantial number of these would have been guerrilla soldiers.³² By 1993 *Umkhonto we Sizwe* was said by its Chief of Staff to have trained altogether some 16,000 people, of whom 5,000 returned to South Africa after the unbanning of the ANC in 1990, while a further 6,000 still remained in camps outside the country.³³ These figures suggest that the total number of soldiers enlisted in *Umkhonto we Sizwe* at any one time never exceeded 11,000, at most. From 1976 until 1989 the bulk of them lived in camps in Angola, the ANC's main military region, with others scattered in other countries in southern Africa or attending training courses in eastern Europe.

Following the reorganization of the *Umkhonto we Sizwe* command structure in the 1970s in the wake of the Morogoro conference, and after the incorporation of the wave of new recruits in 1976-7, there were the first

29. See Joe Slovo, 'J.B. Marks, Communist, Man of the People, Fighter for Freedom,' *The African Communist* 95 (1983), pp. 88-9. This text, published in late 1983, seems to have had some influence on the attitude of ANC mutineers the following year.

30. Ellis and Sechaba, *Comrades Against Apartheid*, pp. 52-66.

31. Barrell, *MK: the ANC's Armed Struggle*, p. 19.

32. Stephen Davis, *Apartheid's Rebels* (Yale University Press, New Haven, 1987), p. 57.

33. Chief of Staff Siphiwe 'Gebuza' Nyande, quoted in Kaizer Nyatumba, 'MK Registration Deadline', *The Star*, 15 September 1993; Jaclyn Cock, 'The Social Integration of the Demobilised Soldiers in Contemporary South Africa', *South African Defence Review*, 12 (1993), pp. 1-17.

reported cases since 1968 of the detention of suspected dissidents. As early as 1976 there were cases of *Umkhonto we Sizwe* soldiers being classified as suspected enemy agents by the newly-installed Department of Intelligence and Security and relegated to a permanent administrative limbo as 'suspects', apparently as a result of their attempts to resign from the ANC, or because they had complained about conditions in the camps, or were otherwise regarded as trouble-makers.³⁴ There was a small number of similar cases throughout the late 1970s. However, virtually all sources agree that the first major purge by ANC security took place only in 1981, the year in which Piliso took control of the Department of Intelligence and Security, and that this was to be one of the root causes of the 1984 mutiny. Again, there is general agreement that the causes of the mutiny were dissatisfaction with the leadership of *Umkhonto we Sizwe* on the part of the rank and file; dissatisfaction with being deployed in battle against the *União Nacional para a Independência Total de Angola* (UNITA) in Angola rather than against the South African state; harsh punishments by ANC camp commanders, including arbitrary detention and torture, sometimes resulting in death; and poor camp conditions.

Spies and suspects

There can be no doubt whatever that *Umkhonto we Sizwe* actually was infiltrated by South African Police agents in the late 1970s. One such spy, Joseph Tshepo Mamasela, subsequently testified to a South African government commission of inquiry, explaining in detail how he had been recruited by the police to spy on the ANC. A professional car thief, born in 1955, Mamasela agreed to work as a police agent in exchange for an exemption from prosecution after he had been arrested for a criminal offence. He joined the ANC in Botswana, where he was detained by ANC Security in 1981. He managed to escape, returning to South Africa where he was formally enrolled in the South African Police in February 1982.³⁵ It appears clear that a motive for the 1981 purge—probably the leading one—was the discovery by the ANC's security organ of the existence of Mamasela and other spies, many probably with similar backgrounds. These included a number who had penetrated the organization at a relatively high level. It was this realization which caused the ANC leadership to appoint Piliso to head the Department of Intelligence and Security with a brief to root out the spies.³⁶ There seems to have

34. Stuart Commission, p. 24.

35. Affidavit of Joseph Tshepo Mamasela presented to the Harms Commission, 18 April 1990. Copy in the archives of the Independent Board of Inquiry, Johannesburg. Some background information on Mamasela, and corroboration of his testimony, is also contained in notes of interviews with former police captain Dirk Coetzee, contained in the same archive.

36. Ellis and Sechaba, *Comrades Against Apartheid*, pp. 116–8.

been something close to panic in the ANC leadership. The security offensive against suspected spies was accompanied by a general campaign by the ANC leadership to restore discipline. This took the form of fierce repression of any perceived infraction. Minor disciplinary offences, such as drunkenness, and perceived infringements of the military code, such as criticism of the ANC leadership, were equated with espionage. Marijuana-smoking was viewed by ANC security officials as a particularly serious crime.³⁷ All the commissions of inquiry agree that the 1981 purge resulted in the detention of many *Umkhonto we Sizwe* soldiers who were not seriously suspected of espionage but who were detained in the general atmosphere of suspicion which spread throughout the ANC camps in 1981, during which offences of every kind were turned into an amalgam.

Some sources, however, allege a more specific political motivation for the mistreatment of *Umkhonto we Sizwe* cadres and in particular for the purge of 1981 which lay at the origins of the mutiny. The most explicit such allegation is made in an article by five former Quatro detainees, who suggest that the first stirrings of protest against the leadership of *Umkhonto we Sizwe* and the ANC may be traced to 1979, when inmates of an ANC camp near Quibaxe in northern Angola known as Villa Rosa or Fazenda, where conditions were harsh, began to criticize their leaders. They allege that the ANC's response was to strengthen the security apparatus, 'which till then had just been composed of a few old cadres of the 1960s', using security personnel recently trained in East Germany and the Soviet Union, and to proceed with construction of the prison camp at Quatro.³⁸ They go on to suggest that the discovery of South African spies in 1981 was a classic Stalinist purge, using the deliberate manufacture of what they term an 'internal-enemy-danger-psychosis' which was used to condemn any ANC member who called for a conference to debate the movement's problems, as the Morogoro conference had debated the aftermath of the Wankie campaign.³⁹ According to the same account, security men who refused to implement the purge were themselves punished. Paul Trewhela, one of the editors of the journal which published this account, himself a former member of the SACP and of *Umkhonto we Sizwe* who was sentenced to a prison term in South Africa in 1965,⁴⁰ has gone still further in suggesting that the training of the ANC security apparatus by officials of the Soviet KGB and the East German *Stasi* lay at the origin of the purges. The ANC security men, Trewhela implies, were trained by their German and Soviet

37. Ketelo *et al.*, 'Miscarriage of Democracy', pp. 38-42.

38. Ketelo *et al.*, 'Miscarriage of Democracy', p. 38.

39. Ketelo *et al.*, 'Miscarriage of Democracy', pp. 39-40.

40. Henry Pike, *A History of Communism in South Africa* (Christian Mission International of South Africa, 2nd edn., Germiston, 1988), p. 427.

instructors to apply the methods of East European Stalinism within the ANC's camps.⁴¹

Certainly, most of the key security personnel in Angola by the time of the 1981 purge were SACP members. The first commander of Quatro, from 1979 to 1982, was Gabriel Mthembu (also known as Sizwe Mkhonto), who had been trained in security intelligence in East Germany. In 1982 he left Angola to attend the Lenin School in Moscow. He returned in 1984 to take up the post of deputy head of Intelligence and Security for Angola.⁴² The first deputy commander of Quatro, Morris Seabelo, also a SACP member, had risen to become regional chief of security in Angola by the time of the 1984 mutiny. Seabelo was a member of the tribunal which sentenced a number of mutineers to death by public execution. The man who coordinated the security crackdown from Luanda was 'Captain' Lentsoe Moeketsi, also a SACP member.⁴³ Throughout the early 1980s the ANC's National Commissar, Andrew Masondo, filled an important position at the apex of the network of political commissars which the ANC had established on the Soviet model. He was also a member of the Central Committee of the SACP. According to one former ANC intelligence officer, Masondo 'provided the critical nexus between the commissars and *Mbokodo*. The two were to work in harness as the Praetorian Guard of orthodoxy and "ideological correctness" in the movement. Their task was clearly to defend the movement from both "ideological subversion" and espionage penetration. That was the climate abroad in the camps.'⁴⁴

Senior officials of the ANC confirmed in testimony to the Skweyiya Commission that they knew of torture in the camps in Angola in the early 1980s.⁴⁵ Whatever lack of awareness there may have been in the ANC and SACP leadership about the excesses of the security apparatus was dispelled by the 1984 Stuart Commission, which described the conditions in the ANC's Angolan camps accurately and made a number of recommendations for improvement. Although at least one senior official—Andrew Masondo—was explicitly blamed for the abuses, and was demoted, others of the Stuart Commission's recommendations were not adopted or were implemented in theory but not in practice. The arbitrary detention and torture of prisoners continued throughout the

41. Paul Trehwela, 'A Literature of Wolves', *Searchlight South Africa* 8 (January 1992), pp. 62–67.

42. Motsuanyane Commission, pp. 140–1.

43. Oyama Mabandla, 'Comrades Against Apartheid: a Response by co-author Oyama Mabandla (Tsepo Sechaba) to a Review by Jeremy Cronin in *Work in Progress*, 811'. Unpublished ms., October 1992. The journal *Work in Progress* declined to publish this rejoinder to Cronin in an acceptable form. Photocopies of this text are available on application to the author of the present article.

44. Mabandla, 'Comrades Against Apartheid: a Response by co-author Oyama Mabandla'. Cf. Kasrils, *Armed and Dangerous*, pp. 184–5.

45. Skweyiya Commission, pp. 24–5.

1980s, even after Tambo had personally visited Quatro in 1987.⁴⁶ The findings of the Stuart Commission appear never to have been formally tabled before the full National Executive Committee of the ANC or presented to the ANC consultative conference at Kabwe in 1985, and the Stuart report was effectively buried until 1993. People detained during the mutiny remained in detention in harsh conditions until as late as 1990, and the security organ continued to be responsible for numerous abuses of the same sort as those that had touched off the 1984 mutiny, in spite of minor reforms. In 1986-7, the directorate of the Department of Intelligence and Security was suspended as a result of personal conflicts between Piliso and Boroko, and the department was run temporarily by a committee consisting of Alfred Nzo, Joe Nhlanhla (the new head of Security) and Jacob Zuma (the new head of Intelligence).⁴⁷ Both Piliso and Boroko were later redeployed, and Nhlanhla became the new head of the Department, introducing a number of reforms.⁴⁸ Nevertheless, the catalogue of abuses continued.⁴⁹

Security and politics

All armies confront problems of discipline from time to time. An exiled guerrilla army is certainly no exception, and the fact that similar troubles were recorded in *Umkhonto we Sizwe* in the 1960s could be said to indicate no more than that soldiers living in harsh conditions, frustrated by lack of contact with the enemy whom they have enlisted to fight, are prone to indiscipline which then causes the military command to exact punishment. The first known wave of detentions, in 1967-9, was conducted not by a special security service but by the army command. Thereafter there was a satisfactory political solution to the problem, with the calling of the Morogoro consultative conference at which the rank and file of *Umkhonto we Sizwe* were allowed to air their views and to discuss the shortcomings of the Army high command, as a result of which far-reaching changes were implemented. As far as is known, no ANC members were executed or murdered as a result of their expressions of complaint in 1967-9 (although Hani appears to have come perilously close to it) and none was detained for any considerable period.

The situation in *Umkhonto we Sizwe* changed markedly with the influx of new recruits to the organization in 1976-7. The organization's leaders were concerned to impose some form of discipline on the newcomers

46. Skweyiya Commission, p. 36.

47. Ellis & Sechaba, *Comrades Against Apartheid*, p. 178.

48. Motsuenyane Commission, pp. 26-7.

49. Amnesty International, 'South Africa: Torture, Ill-Treatment and Executions in ANC Camps,' pp. 11-14.

whose sheer numbers posed a problem of assimilation, and at the same time ANC leaders were concerned—rightly, as it transpired—that the new recruits might contain a number of enemy agents. Since *Umkhonto we Sizwe* was a military structure, it was reasonable that the leaders of the ANC/SACP should wish to establish a security service which would both enforce discipline and act as a counter-espionage service. Many security personnel were rather young, and the fact that many would have had some experience of detention by the South African Police before their flight into exile would no doubt have made them prone to take a robust view of the duties of a security officer. Some had certainly undergone training by East European operatives, some of whose methods and views of what constituted dissent they would have assimilated. Certainly there are cases of people being detained in the late 1970s because of their criticism of the ANC's leadership and for calling for a consultative conference. While this may be regarded as circumstantial evidence, it does not fully support the thesis advanced in the journal *Searchlight South Africa* that the purge of 1981 was a classic Stalinist manoeuvre in the sense of being planned with the primary aim of enforcing a degree of ideological correctness. A definitive judgement will have to await study of the ANC and SACP archives, which are at present closed. But the available evidence suggests that, until 1981 at least, such abuses as did occur were the result of a rather unsophisticated approach to the enforcement of discipline and of material shortages rather than of any political decision to purge people judged to be ideologically suspect. The torture methods used by ANC security officials bore little resemblance to the highly bureaucratised repression and surveillance typical of the KGB and the *Stasi*. Only once the security apparatus has been unleashed on suspected spies or dissidents, or other perceived troublemakers of all descriptions, did the ideological and political aspects of the purge become apparent.

In considering this point, it is useful to compare the ANC's response to the troubles of 1967–9 and those of 1981–4. The SACP appears to have thrown its full weight behind the calling of the Morogoro conference in 1969. The importance of this is that it put the SACP on the side of the reformers within the ANC and gave the Party a populist position within *Umkhonto we Sizwe*. In the event, the delegates at the Morogoro conference endorsed a range of views advocated by leading lights of the SACP and in so doing inaugurated a major change in the relationship between the SACP and other elements within the broad coalition which was accommodated within the ANC, although not every leading SACP member supported this change. This was to lead to the exclusion from the ANC of any organised faction other than the SACP, and notably in the withdrawal of the so-called Gang of Eight, a group which included both Communist and non-Communist ANC members who were critical of the leading

position taken by the SACP within the ANC alliance.⁵⁰ The ANC leadership, however, remained sufficiently broad as to accommodate such an iconoclast as Pallo Jordan, who had spent many years in America and had a background in the Trotskyist-inclined Non-European Unity Movement. It is telling that Jordan was not a member of the ANC/SACP military wing, where a military standard of discipline was required, but a holder of a civilian office, and that he was not regarded as leading any sort of faction within the ANC, which allowed him to be tolerated.

The Morogoro conference committed the ANC to a manifesto which Joe Slovo characterized as one of 'revolutionary nationalism', bearing a marked resemblance to the manifesto of the SACP itself, both in its analysis of the South African condition and in its commitment to a particular strategy of guerrilla war.⁵¹ Moreover, for the first time the ANC agreed to allow members of all ethnic groups to sit on a senior committee, namely the Revolutionary Council, which had oversight of the political and military struggle and which immediately became an SACP fief. These changes helped to sharpen the ANC's strategic focus and to render its military bureaucracy more efficient. At the same time, they provide a clue as to why the SACP was able to support grassroots criticism and dissent following the protests of 1967-9, but did not adopt a similarly sympathetic attitude after the mutiny of 1984, by which time it was in control of the ANC and was determined to fight off any challenge to its position from below.

The 1981 purge was not associated with a factional struggle within the leadership along the lines of the great Stalinist purges of the 1930s. On the contrary, the ANC leadership seems to have been united in its failure to give political attention to the abuses it knew to be taking place in the camps and in its failure to halt them, and even when it felt obliged to find a high-level scapegoat in the person of Andrew Masondo, he was not utterly disgraced in the classic Stalinist fashion, but was found alternative employment as the head of the Solomon Mahlangu Freedom College and remained an acknowledged member of the ANC leadership. This means of sidelining a senior official rather than holding him up to public ridicule or exemplary punishment, is far more reminiscent of, say, Zambia under President Kaunda than it is of East European Stalinism.

Only in one or two cases could it be said that detention may have been used as a weapon in the in-fighting between ANC leaders. For example, the Jobodwana Commission failed convincingly to dispel suspicions that Thami Zulu, a senior *Umkhonto we Sizwe* commander, was detained as a

50. "The Enemy Hidden Under the Same Colour", statement by the Central Committee of the SACP on the activities of the "Gang of 8", in *South African Communists Speak: Documents from the history of the South African Communist Party 1915-1980* (Inkululeko, London, 1981), pp. 400-17; Ellis & Sechaba, *Comrades Against Apartheid*, pp. 52-78.

51. Slovo, 'J.B. Marks', pp. 88-9.

result of in-fighting between rival factions of the ANC/SACP.⁵² But perhaps the most celebrated example of an arrest motivated by in-fighting was that of Pallo Jordan, which also demonstrates how precarious was the ANC's tolerance of such a free-thinking intellectual. According to a source who was at that time a member of the ANC intelligence apparatus, this took place in June 1983, as follows:

Pallo was detained on the orders of Party member and *Mbokodo* chieftain, Peter Boroko. Another member of the Party, Francis Malaya, an official with Department of Information and Publicity (DIP) and a secret informant of *Mbokodo*, complained about Pallo's behaviour. Pallo was accused of exposing the *Mbokodo* informant network within DIP by mockingly referring to Malaya and another man named Ace . . . as *Amapolisa*—warning other DIP staffers to be careful of them. On that basis, Pallo was detained and was to spend six weeks in detention. I participated in an informal meeting at Green House (*Mbokodo* HQ) which discussed Pallo's arrest. . . . During the discussion one *Mbokodo* officer made a chilling remark which seemed to capture the essence of the entire saga. The comment went thus '*eli intellectual lase Merika lijwayela kabi*': 'this American trained intellectual is uppity'—and thus in need of straightening out. Clearly, the arrest had ideological overtones. Pallo's education in the West made him suspect to a group of youngsters brought up to revile and suspect everything the West represented. This was a centrepiece of the Party's anti-Western propaganda which had been imbibed uncritically by these enforcers. The person who made that comment was Samora Gcina (alias Vusi) . . . I'm almost certain Vusi was not a member of the Party but like many young men joining the ranks with only a rudimentary high school education, he was susceptible to influence by the virulent anti-West rhetoric of the commissars. This is where the tragedy lay.⁵³

Had there existed significant factions within the ANC other than the SACP after the exclusion of the Gang of Eight in 1975, no doubt the security question might have become an important topic of debate within the ANC leadership. In fact there was relatively little difference of opinion on the issue. The non-controversial nature of the security question is indicative of the comprehensiveness with which the SACP, building on its base in *Umkhonto we Sizwe*, had imposed its will on the whole organisation. One of the overwhelming calls of rank and file agitators was for progress in the armed struggle—a consistent theme both in the 1967–9 and in the 1981–4 disturbances. *Umkhonto we Sizwe* soldiers wanted to know why they were kept in boring, demoralising camps, or deployed to fight in Angola rather than in South Africa. On both occasions they reserved their special contempt for Joe Modise, the Army Commander, who had a reputation for holding the rank and file in contempt and for incompetence. These charges, if seriously debated, would have called into question the conduct of the armed struggle in the form championed by the SACP and as it was accepted by the ANC at its

52. Jobodwana Commission, esp. pp. 8–9.

53. Mabandla, '*Comrades Against Apartheid: a Response by co-author Oyama Mabandla*'.

1969 Morogoro conference. In this sense the abuses perpetrated by the ANC security organ certainly were political: one of the classic motives for purges in the tradition of Soviet Marxist-Leninism was to provide an explanation for the failure of the leadership to make the progress which it claimed would follow from the application of scientific socialism. If the armed struggle made less progress than was desired, and than the rank and file called for, then an explanation had to be found. And it was found in the agitation of spies. Where spies did not exist, they must be invented. Thus, even marijuana-smoking was regarded as the work of enemy agents.

Jeremy Cronin, a senior member of the SACP who went into exile only in 1987, while acknowledging the excesses of the ANC security organ, has suggested that it would not have made any difference whether the ANC's security personnel had been trained by the KGB, the *Stasi*, or some other security force such as the US Central Intelligence Agency.⁵⁴ We may assume that all militarized formations have a need of some form of security apparatus which will use detention as its chief weapon. Bluntly put, the question is: were the excesses of *Mbokodo* a regrettable by-product of the armed struggle, as Cronin and other ANC/SACP apologists suggest? Or were they, as Trewhela suggests, a symptom of the ascendancy of the SACP and of its alliance with the governments of the Soviet bloc? Or should they be understood in some other way?

The crude interrogation methods of *Mbokodo* cannot be specifically related to Soviet or East German training. However, where they may be said to owe something to the Soviet connection, as Trewhela has charged, is in the role of the security service within the politics of the ANC. It was the specific contribution of the SACP during the years of its ascendancy after the Morogoro conference to introduce into the ANC the notion of a single correct ideological and strategic line, a direct input from the scientific Marxist-Leninist method. A Stalinist notion of the correct political and ideological education of soldiers spread to other parts of the ANC, and tended to penalize critical thought even among non-soldiers. In the hands of political commissars and zealous young security officers, persons suspected of failing to conform to this line were equated with security suspects.

All political systems which adopt authoritarian or totalitarian features tend in this direction. In the case of the ANC, the growth of a Stalinist style of political-military discipline was associated with the rise of Communist influence in the ANC, particularly after 1969. This gave to the practices of the security organ a coherent ideological justification.

54. Author's interview with Jeremy Cronin, Johannesburg, March 1992.

Conclusion: the militarization of the ANC

Whereas there exists a considerable literature on the militarization of African states and on the effect of military regimes, including in regard to the South African state,⁵⁵ previous authors have paid little attention to the effect on the ANC of its own militarization after its adoption of the armed struggle in 1961.⁵⁶ A banned organization, led from exile, necessarily encounters particular problems which are not faced by a state. The ANC after 1961 aspired not only to be an alternative government of South Africa, but also, like other liberation movements controlling camps or territory, it acted as a state of sorts in regard to its own personnel.⁵⁷ Whether in a legally-recognised state or a quasi-state, the effects of militarization are similar. Most notably, the field of political activity is reduced, typically to the pursuit of single goals or slogans. In the case of African military regimes this is typically the 'elimination of corruption', economic development, or national unity. In the case of a liberation movement, it is victory in the struggle to overthrow the target government. Other political issues are subordinated to this single, overwhelming goal. Since the political regime is militarized, military discipline is required and harsh punishments await dissenters. Dissent is characterized as mutiny. These remarks could equally apply to a right-wing or to a left-wing system of militarization, but a system such as that introduced to the ANC in exile, particularly after 1969, identified liberation with a specifically Marxist vision of strategy and ideology introduced to the ANC by its SACP ally. Dissenters, or simply people who clashed with those who governed the movement, were easily equated with saboteurs or spies. The restrictions on critical thought, or on inappropriate behaviour, were all the stronger in the case of members of *Umkhonto we Sizwe*. The longer the ANC's armed struggle lasted, and the more it became apparent that its success was far from certain, the more pressing became the need to find scapegoats, real or imagined.

Just as a period of military government may permanently alter the historical development of a state, so did the militarization of the ANC permanently alter its character during the period of exile. Since its unbanning in 1990 the ANC has been the scene of diverse political and ideological debates and disputes, and the public airing of the abuses of the

55. See, for example, Kenneth Grundy, *The Militarization of South African Politics* (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1988).

56. Among histories of the ANC, Francis Meli, *South Africa Belongs to Us* (James Currey, London, 1989) and Heidi Holland, *The Struggle: A History of the African National Congress* (George Braziller, New York, 1990), are highly partisan; P. Walshe, *The Rise of African Nationalism in South Africa: the African National Congress 1912-1952* (University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1971) is outdated.

57. Cf. William Cyrus Reed, 'International Politics and National Liberation: ZANU and the Politics of Contested Sovereignty in Zimbabwe', *African Studies Review*, 36, 2 (1993), pp. 31-59.

past via the Skweyiya and Motsuenyane commissions was itself a symptom of such differences. It is apparent that within the National Executive Committee of the ANC and, no doubt, within the Central Committee of the SACP, there have been sharp disagreements between those whose inclination is to air the mistakes of the past in public and those who would prefer to conceal them or to place the responsibility elsewhere. It appears that the first group includes particularly leaders like Nelson Mandela who were on Robben Island during the troubles of exile, backed up by former leaders of the United Democratic Front who had never been in exile. In the second group are ANC security officials and many veterans of the exile leadership.⁵⁸

An evident sign of the factional struggles behind the scenes is the question of personal responsibility. The Skweyiya Commission fairly clearly attached a degree of personal responsibility to Mswai Piliso, who was the Head of the ANC's Department of Intelligence and Security from 1981 to 1986 and who 'candidly admitted his personal participation in the beating of suspects in 1981'.⁵⁹ However the Motsuenyane commission, which identified some individuals responsible for specific abuses, made no special mention of Piliso in this regard but instead named in passing Army Commander Joe Modise and former Intelligence chief Jacob Zuma.⁶⁰ The ANC postponed investigation of where the full responsibility for these abuses lay, suggesting the constitution of a 'Truth Commission' which would treat the whole range of crimes and abuses committed during the armed struggle by both the ANC and the South African government.⁶¹

By the time the Motsuenyane Commission reported, in August 1993, the ANC seemed well on the way to becoming at least the main element in the government of South Africa. ANC headquarters in Johannesburg continued to employ many of the officials of the Security Department who were found to have participated in abuses in Angola and who presumably would be well-placed to hold political or other high office in a future government. ANC security officials had had a number of meetings with their opposite numbers in the South African Police and the South African Defence Force with a view to discussing future mergers of their services and personnel.⁶²

One of the more disturbing possibilities of a future South African government is that it will employ in its security departments veterans both of the old South African Police Security Branch and of *Mbokodo*, both of them having a shabby tradition of brutality and of contempt for legality.

58. Trehwela, 'The ANC Prison Camps: an Audit of Three Years', pp. 12-14.

59. Skweyiya Commission, pp. 61-2.

60. Motsuenyane Commission, pp. 71 and 85.

61. African National Congress, 'African National Congress National Executive Committee's Response to the Motsuenyane Commission's Report', 29 August 1993.

62. Jacques Pauw and Shaun Johnson, 'MI Chief's Secret Parley', *The Star*, 27 August 1992.

If so, it will not be the first time in southern Africa that a shared ethos, irrespective of its precise ideological origin, will have overridden old enmities and brought former enemies together after the overthrow of a racist or colonial government.⁶³ At the time of writing, the ANC had not yet become a party of government in South Africa. Only when it does so will it be possible to see its rich and complex history in a new perspective. In particular, only time will tell the extent to which its armed struggle against a ruthless opponent, which had itself been profoundly militarized, has affected its political nature.

63. Cf. Richard Carver, 'Zimbabwe: Drawing a Line Through the Past', *Journal of African Law*, 37, 1 (1993), pp. 69–81.