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Frontline state security: rebel movements and cover states in Southern Africa, 1970–1990

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ABSTRACT
Exile is a key dimension of armed groups, which often depend on the safety of third-party countries to establish headquarters, train soldiers, and forge connections with the outside world. A fitting illustration are the Frontline States in Africa, which offered refuge to multiple national liberation movements in the second half the twentieth century. While it is generally acknowledged that exile offers ample opportunities for armed groups to develop their organizations, the ability of host nations to influence the internal politics of exiled armed groups remains understudied. This paper offers a comparative analysis of the interventions of the Frontline States in the mutinies of three African national liberation movements. We argue that intervention in the internal affairs of anticolonial organizations was a double-edged sword: on the one hand, it contributed to the successful conclusion of the struggle for liberation, but on the other hand, it stimulated the development of authoritarian political culture.

Introduction

Exile is a key dimension in the history of armed groups, which often depend on the safety of third-party countries to establish headquarters, train soldiers, and forge connections with the outside world. The 26 July Movement of Fidel Castro was reorganized in Mexico before it embarked on the Cuban Revolution.[1] The Polisario Front, the organization that seeks to liberate the Western Sahara, is primarily based in the Sahrawi refugee camps in Algeria.[2] *The Front de liberation Nationale* (FLN), the organization that challenged French colonial rule in Algeria, was partly based in training camps in Morocco, Tunisia, and Egypt.[3] In the 1970s, the Montoneros fought the dictatorship that was established during the

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Argentine Revolution from the relative safety of Mexico.[4] Following military defeat in 2001, the Taliban regrouped in Pakistan while they also established offices in Iran.[5] The Palestine Liberation Organization operated from exiled bases in neighboring countries such as Jordan, Syria and Lebanon, while the leadership of Hamas is currently located in Qatar.[6] In each case, third-party governments provided vital places of sanctuary for insurgent actors.

The Frontline States in Africa are a recent example of how third-party governments can support armed non-state actors. Between the 1960s and the 1990s, the Frontline States consisted of a group of independent countries that opposed white minority rule in Southern Africa. Tanzania, Zambia, and Botswana, among other countries, provided cover to African nationalists from neighboring territories that were fighting for decolonization. The success of victorious liberation movements such as the *Zimbabwe African National Union* (ZANU, which has governed Zimbabwe since independence in 1980), the *South West Africa People's Organization* (SWAPO, which has governed Namibia since independence in 1990) and the *African National Congress* (ANC, which has governed South Africa since majority rule in 1994) would be improbable without the support from the Frontline States.[7]

Building upon the example of the Frontline States, this paper probes the relationship between host nation and armed group. Across history, states have provided cover to armed groups that fight in conflicts in distant territories. Several scholars have highlighted the ways in which cover states are able to facilitate armed groups, but has largely overlooked the ways in which cover states are able to curb them. Indeed, scholars have extensively reviewed the opportunities that came with exile, such as the establishment of headquarters, military camps, and diplomatic services.[8] It is well established that these initiatives were decisive for the conduct of the armed struggle.[9] However, as Eric Burton noted, the Frontline States in Africa also managed to 'control, steer, monitor, influence, and constrain the activities' of the national liberation movements that they hosted.[10] The fact that the Frontline States regularly intervened in the internal politics of the armed groups that were under their protection, especially in the cases of upheaval, remains understudied.

This paper offers a comparative analysis of the interventions of the Frontline States in three mutinies of national liberation movements, in particular the Nhari Mutiny in ZANU in 1975, the Shipanga Rebellion in SWAPO in 1976, and the Mkatashinga in the ANC in 1984. At some point in time, virtually every African national liberation movement in exile struggled with dissent.[11] Dissatisfaction with strategy, uncertainty about the future, and bottom-up calls for more democracy by the rank and file were often interpreted by the party leadership as signs of obstruction. This was usually followed by a paranoid atmosphere of 'spy fever' and concomitant disunity within the

African national liberation movements.[12] In turn, the leadership was often rescued by the Frontline States, which directly intervened against mutinies by arresting and jailing dissidents.

This paper argues that the intervention of the Frontline States in the internal affairs of national liberation movements was a double-edged sword. On the one hand, it contributed to the successful conclusion of the struggle for liberation, by preserving the unity of the movement. National liberation movements were characterized by factional infighting and internal competition, which slowed down the fight for freedom.[13] On the other hand, the suppression of party democracy stimulated the development of an authoritarian political culture. This remains important today, as ZANU, SWAPO, and the ANC currently are in power as governments in Zimbabwe, Namibia, and South Africa.[14] The interventions by Frontline States have occasionally been mentioned in histories of African decolonization, but have not been examined in detail. Moreover, the scholarship on the liberation struggle has usually been conducted via national case studies and the subject of mutinies never studied comparatively.[15]

Comparing the role of the Frontline States in three distinct mutinies reveals new insights in the patterns of control and influence that host nations exercise on armed groups seeking cover in their territories. For practical reasons, this paper is principally based on an extensive review of secondary literature.[16] The archives of victorious African national liberation movements, which rule much of Southern Africa today, are generally inaccessible to the public and this makes it difficult to retrieve primary source material about the various mutinies. While there are exceptions, such as the ANC collections in the Mayibuye Archives and the University of Fort Hare, these materials are usually carefully declassified and do not contain sensitive material about internal problems.[17] While we wait for these archives to open up, future research may benefit from research opportunities at the National Archives of the cover states and possibly the memoirs of African activists that were part of the armed groups under review.

This paper commences with a literature review of the relationship between cover states and armed groups. We argue that by sheltering insurgents, this relationship is distinctly different from traditional agent-principal theory. This sets the stage for a discussion of the various ways in which the Frontline States in Southern Africa supported exiled national liberation movements during the second half of the twentieth century. This is followed by a comparative analysis of three mutinies in ZANU, SWAPO, and the ANC in exile. The next section offers an analysis of the role of the Frontline States and questions what this means for our understanding of the influence of cover states on insurgent actors more

generally. The conclusion argues that the case study of the Frontline States offers important insights into modern-day conflicts that involve exiled armed groups.

Rebels and sponsors in exile

In the literature on the relationship between armed groups and their foreign sponsors, the role of cover states receives relatively little attention. We define cover states as countries that offer exile to armed groups that are engaged in violent insurgencies elsewhere. Usually, cover states are located next or near the aforementioned conflicts and have vested interests in their advancement. For the purpose of this article, our focus is exclusively on military actors and therefore excludes isolated groups of political exiles, such as the Russian exiles in the early twentieth century, Afghan leaders based in Western Europe and the United States in the 1980s, or the opposition against the Pinochet dictatorship in Chile.[18] Although political exiles can equally be used as instruments of statecraft,[19] we are mainly interested in armed groups, rebel formations, or liberation movements that seek to overthrow another government via insurgency and are seeking shelter in a neighboring cover state.

The foreign sponsorship of armed actors is a common phenomenon across time and space.[20] Sponsoring militant violence is traditionally seen as a form of coercive diplomacy which grants states the ability to advance their interests.[21] Much of the recent literature sees state sponsorship as a root cause of terrorism, which has been a particularly productive topic of research during the Global War on Terrorism.[22] State sponsorship of militant groups is closely related to proxy warfare. Proxy warfare is an established and well-known form of warfare, especially in the case of intra-state wars, which has spurred the theorization of the relationship between principal and agent.[23] As several scholars have argued, the ability of patrons to enforce control over their proxies, and the ability of proxies to influence their sponsors, is of paramount importance.[24] This has led to 'hard bargains', as the agendas of principals and agents are not always the same.[25]

In the case of cover states, the relationship between principal and agent is substantially different to mainstream proxy warfare or other forms of state sponsorship, because the agents are located within the territory of the principals.[26] This leads to a number of important considerations. First, it allows an exceptional level of support as cover states can protect armed groups from their enemies by offering physical safety. For instance, when the *Frente de Libertação de Moçambique* (FRELIMO) took up arms against the Portuguese colonial regime in Mozambique, it established its head-quarters in neighboring Tanzania to evade persecution by the colonial authorities.[27] In some cases, insurgent actors are also granted the privilege to establish training camps, schools, hospitals, diplomatic services, and

even governments in exile. The *Frente Nacional de Libertação de Angola* (FNLA) was represented in the Democratic Republic of the Congo through the Angolan Revolutionary Government in Exile, while the FLN was represented in Egypt through the Provisional Government of the Algerian Republic.[28] Such institutions in exile can subsequently be used to bolster recruitment and launch military incursions, as was the case with *Les Forces de Libération Africaine de Mauritanie* (FLAM) in Senegal.[29] In this sense, exile offers revolutionary movements much-desired opportunities to grow their organizations, to connect with the outside world, and to develop military capabilities.

Second, physically sheltering forces on one's own territory provides cover states with exceptional control over the agent as they are largely dependent on their hosts. If the principal decides to sanction the agent, they have many more options at their disposal compared to a regular state-proxy relationship. Besides threatening to cut off funding or restricting mobility of exiled members, the principal can use its armed forces or intelligence services to curb the behavior of the agents. When the Taliban regrouped in Pakistan following their defeat at the hands of the United States and Northern Alliance in the early 2000s, they had little chance of returning home without being hunted down by the government of Kabul. This situation 'remarkably reinforced' Pakistan's leverage over the Taliban.[30] Indeed, Taliban testimony confirms that they actually 'lived in fear' in Pakistan, as the government controlled their families and could arrest them when the need arose.[31]

Third, sponsors are at risk of military retaliation by the opponents of the agent, either through punishment for sheltering foreign insurgents or through collateral damage in altercations between the agents and their enemies. An obvious case is the decision of the United States to invade Afghanistan in 2001 following the Talban's refusal to hand over Osama Bin Laden. A more recent example is the Indian strike on Pakistan in May 2025 following an attack on Indian tourists in Kashmir. This direct threat to the principal's country is different from regular proxy warfare as the latter has the explicit aim to 'further their own strategic goals yet at the same time avoid engaging in direct, costly and bloody warfare'.[32] By sheltering armed groups, cover states take on a much more explicit role in distant conflicts than is otherwise the case.

Fourth, there is the ever-present risk that the agent might, if it grows too strong, pose a risk to the cover state itself. There is a sliding scale of the possible consequences. The Tunisian president Habib Bourguiba was, for example, able to keep the FLN within his country in check without recourse to large scale violence despite the fact that, 'there were some 150,000 Algerians in Tunisia, many of them heavily armed and outnumbering the infant Tunisian army itself'.[33] In the early 1970's the government of Jordan did not have that luxury when the strong position of the PLO in Jordan led to

tense relations between principal and agent. This ultimately resulted in an event that is known as Black September, when the king of Jordan instructed his army to purge PLO fighters in a 'military showdown'.[34] As such, the risk that cover states take on does not only include external retaliation, but also involves the behavior of the agents.

The experience of violent struggle has a profound impact on the culture of armed groups. Steven Levitsky and Lucan Way argue that the 'identities, norms, and organizational structure' that were forged in exile 'are a critical source of cohesion – and durability – in party-based authoritarian regimes'.[35] Pointing to, for instance, FRELIMO, they argue that the history of struggle benefitted the creation of partisan identities and boundaries, military-style internal discipline, leaders with unquestioned authority, and the 'capacity to repress'. This has also been observed by other scholars.[36] While we agree with the argument, we argue that this analysis overlooks the role of cover states. In several cases, insurgent actors could only survive their tumultuous time in exile with support from the governments that physically sheltered them. Cover states can influence the agents that they host through military training, political education, enabling or denying access to external resources, and by enforcing internal discipline. The latter can be illustrated through the example of the Frontline States.

The Frontline States of Southern Africa

During the twentieth century, the world witnessed an incredible shift in the global balance of power through the demise of colonial empires.[37] Especially in Africa, dozens of new states were established in a relatively short amount of time. However, in Southern Africa, the ongoing wave of decolonization was thwarted by a secret tripartite alliance between South Africa, Rhodesia (modern Zimbabwe), and Portugal.[38] Since 1920, South Africa was the League of Nations mandate holder of South West Africa (modern Namibia) and had subsequently continued to control the country against the wishes of the UN.[39] In 1965, the regime of Ian Smith in Rhodesia had unilaterally declared independence from the United Kingdom.[40] The Portuguese Empire reigned over Angola and Mozambique, among other colonies in Africa.[41] Together, this 'security umbrella' against black majority rule withstood internal and external pressures to make way for democratization.[42]

The minority regimes of Southern Africa were primarily challenged by African national liberation movements, many of which embraced an armed struggle to secure independence.[43] The ANC was established in 1912 to address the rights of the oppressed black population of South Africa and formed its armed wing, *uMkhonto we Sizwe* (MK), in 1961.[44] SWAPO was established in 1960 to advocate for Namibian independence and founded the *People's Liberation Army of Namibia* (PLAN) in 1962 to

combat the armed forces of South Africa.[45] ZANU was established in 1963 to promote majority rule in Zimbabwe and founded the *Zimbabwe African National Liberation Army* (ZANLA) in 1965 to oppose Rhodesian security forces.[46]

This meant that from the 1960s onward much of the Southern African region was embroiled in armed insurgencies. Especially after the collapse of the Portuguese Empire in 1974, which granted independence to Angola and Mozambique, the region became increasingly militarized. South Africa's military and economic might, in particular, casted 'a giant shadow over the entire subcontinent', as Pretoria sought to destabilize the independent African countries across its borders in order to contest the advancement of democratic rule.[47] By adopting a so-called 'Total Strategy', South Africa mobilized all facets of society to support the war effort.[48] Rhodesia also chose a military solution to the insurgency. In the 1979–1980 budget of Rhodesia, right before Zimbabwean independence, 37% of its expenditure was related to defense and security.[49]

Exile became a defining feature of the wars for liberation in Southern Africa. In 1960, the ANC was banned by the apartheid government.[50] In 1964, ZANU was banned by the Rhodesian government.[51] While SWAPO was never formally banned, it was forced to primarily operate through its external wing abroad.[52] These bans were enforced by effective internal security police and intelligence operations. In all three cases, in order to avoid being dismantled, the national liberation movements moved into the independent neighboring countries that became known as the Frontline States. This alliance began in the mid-1960s through 'informal monthly consultations' between Julius Nyerere, the president of Tanzania, and Kenneth Kaunda, the president Zambia, who wanted to expedite the process of African decolonization. They invited representatives of national liberation movements to join their consultative meetings and to establish guerrilla camps in the relative safety of their countries.[53] In some cases this cooperation went significantly further. As George Robert explains, the several key members of exiled liberation movements were directly employed by the Tanzanian state. A leader of ZANU worked in the office of public prosecutions, an ANC leader worked as a planner for the Ministry of Home Affairs, while another ANC member worked for a nationalized newspaper.[54] This illustrates that exiled freedom fighters were largely dependent on their hosts for their survival.

In 1974, the Portuguese Empire suddenly collapsed through the Carnation Revolution. The resulting independence of Angola and Mozambique strengthened the alliance, and later on Botswana, Lesotho, and Zimbabwe joined as well. Operating as a regional security bloc against the aforementioned 'security umbrella' of reactionary minority regimes, the Frontline States mainly operated through summit diplomacy. The group became formally recognized in 1975 by the Organization of African Unity (OAU, the

predecessor of the African Union) as an ad-hoc committee, which bolstered its legitimacy.[55]

Although it may seem that the Frontline States were a unitary bloc, there were important national differences among the countries that participated. Botswana, for instance, was exempted from providing military aid to liberation movements, while Zambia secretly negotiated with Rhodesia, much to the dismay of Tanzania and other neighboring states.[56] Mozambique similarly negotiated unilaterally with South Africa.[57] This was partly caused by the fact that supporting African decolonization came with significant costs for the Frontline States. Zambia and Mozambique were, for example, 'subjected to cross-border raids from Rhodesia' which could be substantial. Both South Africa and Rhodesia also attempted political destabilization operations against Frontline States.[58] Furthermore, there were certain limits to what the Frontline States could do together. While they coordinated diplomatic efforts and shared information, there was, for instance, 'no serious coordination of the defense policies'.[59]

The operations of African freedom fighters in the Frontline States have been subject to a burgeoning field of scholarship. The ANC, SWAPO, and ZANU established headquarters in 'hubs of decolonization', such as Dar es Salaam in Tanzania and Lusaka in Zambia.[60] Importantly, this led to the establishment of a wide array of exile camps, which could include non-military facilities such as hospital services, farming operations, and educational institutes (most notably the Solomon Mahlangu Freedom College in Tanzania and the United Nations Institute for Namibia in Zambia) as well as military facilities.[61] The Frontline States backed the national liberation movements that opposed minority rule in Southern Africa by channeling arms and material and facilitating the training of armed forces.[62] Thousands of African guerilla fighters passed through the Frontline States, which were occasionally used as launching pads for military incursions.

Despite the advantages it offered, exile was a pressure cooker that involved serious challenges. Camp life was extremely difficult, as Christian Williams described in an analysis of Kongwa, a town in Tanzania that hosted several camps by five different national liberation movements. People were often stuck in these camps for prolonged periods of time and struggled because of a lack of basic commodities. Their behavior was also 'monitored and restricted' by camp officials who were sometimes accused of corruption and sexual misconduct.[63] This atmosphere of animosity and uncertainty became exacerbated by enemy destabilization tactics. Secret services and counterinsurgency units such as Koevoet (from South Africa), the Selous Scouts (from Rhodesia), and the Flechas (from Portugal) used an array of new and creative strategies to bring the fight to the exiled national liberation movement. These included infiltrations known as 'pseudo operations', targeted assassinations, and the efficient use of propaganda.[64]

The challenges of camp life, combined with the external pressure from colonial and settler regimes, resulted in volatile relations within African national liberation movements. As feelings of discontent among the rank and file led to moments of rebellion, a certain degree of 'spy fever' got a hold over the leadership of the ANC, SWAPO, and ZANU, who feared that their organizations were being infiltrated by the enemy.[65] This paper contends that rebellion was not only dangerous for the armed groups that battled with internal discontent, but also for the cover states that hosted them. While existing literature has stressed the desire of the Frontline States to maintain unity during the struggle for liberation,[66] virtually no research has been conducted on their influence over the internal politics of national liberation movements. By comparatively examining the intervention of the Frontline States in mutinies of several armed groups, we can see new patterns of control that sheds a different light on the relationships between principals and agents.

Unity and mutiny in national liberation movements

The exiled national liberation movements of Southern Africa 'were notoriously prone to division, rumor, obsessive fear of informers and intolerance of dissent'.[67] Williams argued that this meant that 'conflicts occurred repeatedly within every major liberation movement during its year abroad'.[68] Although mutiny was ubiquitous during the armed struggle for liberation, it remains understudied, for practical reasons. Mutinies are clandestine affairs and therefore tedious to reconstruct. Testimonies are difficult to retrieve, the archives of national liberation movements are often closed to the public, and moments of rebellion become overshadowed by patriotic histories that glorify the struggle.[69] In addition, the existing scholarship on exile 'is organized around distinct national historiographies', focusing on specific individual organizations.[70] To date, not a single comparative analysis of mutinies in Southern African liberation movements has been produced. To this end, this article reviews moments of rebellion in the Frontline States among three nationalist insurgencies.

The Frontline States played a pivotal role in the Zimbabwean insurgency against the settler regime of Rhodesia. Although efforts by the Frontline States to merge ZANU and the *Zimbabwe African People's Union* (ZAPU) failed because of rivalry between the two entities (for instance through the creation of a short-lived Joint Military Command), they at least succeeded in preventing further splits. Between 1974–1975, ZANU was shaken up by the so-called Nhari Mutiny. ZANLA soldiers were experiencing major shortages of food, clothing, and proper military equipment on the Rhodesian war front and had to make 'extreme sacrifices' to survive, while the leadership of the High Command lived in relatively safety and comfort in exile.[71] Led by field

commander Thomas Nhari, ZANLA soldiers marched back to Zambia 'to assert control over the ZANLA headquarters and camps'. They benefited from the fact that several ZANLA leaders were abroad on diplomatic engagements.[72] Although this episode is surrounded by rumors of Rhodesian intelligence involvement,[73] Nhari's revolt was based on 'genuine grievances' that smoldered within the rank and file of ZANU.[74] The problems on the war front were real, and the ZANU High Command was accused by the soldiers of being 'unaccountable and undisciplined'.[75] While some ZANU leaders believed that they should listen to this critique, the revolt was put down by force and the party leadership exacted a 'brutal revenge' by executing Nhari and dozens of alleged conspirators.[76]

Although this may seem as an internal affair, the resolution of the crisis in favor of the ZANU leadership occurred within the context of the Frontline States. As Stuart Doran has argued, the Nhari Mutiny was 'squashed by the Zambian police' and the help of 250–300 ZANLA soldiers from a base in Tanzania, who apparently had permission from Nyerere's government to cross the border to Zambia.[77] Machel's ruling party organized a 'bogus meeting' with Nhari in Mozambique, where he was trapped and apprehended.[78] Moreover, the ZANU leadership handed several rebels to Mozambique for 'further punishment'.[79] As such, the Nhari Mutiny could not have been resolved in this way without the involvement of the host governments. This illustrates that national liberation movements that resided in exile were dependent on their cover states for their protection. Already in 1971, the Frontline States had intervened in a ZAPU rebellion, when the Zambian government arrested and imprisoned the rebels to save the leadership. Together with the Tanzanian government, Zambia secured a media blackout, ban on communication, and a blockade on arms shipment within the ZAPU forces.[80] Through these acts, the Frontline States ensured the survival of ZAPU and ZANU, up until Zimbabwean independence in 1980. The first democratic elections resulted in a 'landslide victory' by ZANU, which effectively absorbed ZAPU in 1987.[81]

The Frontline States were equally important to the Namibian insurgency against South Africa. While the armed struggle by SWAPO was 'far less advanced' when compared to Zimbabwe, the Frontline leaders recognized that the war was an important 'source of pressure on Pretoria'. SWAPO mainly operated from bases in Angola and Zambia, while its original headquarters was located in Tanzania. The Frontline States approved the transfer of arms and military instructors, and facilitated international diplomatic access.[82] In 1976, SWAPO experienced a major crisis that became known as the Shipanga Rebellion. By then, there were already early signs of the 'crystallization of an authoritarian political ethos' within the organization, as the leadership had requested the Tanzanian government to detain critics in the late 1960s. In the years that followed, tensions continued to build, as there were shortages of

materials for the war front, confusion about military strategy and ideology, and demands for more internal democracy. In 1976, a bottom-up group of 'anti-corruption fighters' travelled to Lusaka to demand change. The SWAPO leadership refused to meet them, but they were received by the Zambian government. Among the delegates was Andreas Shipanga, a prominent SWAPO member, although he was certainly not the only one. As Colin Leys and John Saul rightfully point out, the term 'Shipanga Rebellion' is therefore misleading.[83]

Just as was the case with the Zimbabwean insurgents, the SWAPO leadership utilized the support from the Frontline States in its favor. Not long after the anti-corruption fighters had filed their complaints, the main SWAPO camp that harbored disgruntled fighters was 'surrounded by three of four battalions of the Zambian army'. Up to 2000 dissidents were subsequently detained. Some were 'rehabilitated' in SWAPO camps while several others, such as Shipanga, were illegally held in prisons in Tanzania for up to two years, and an unknown number were killed.[84] Again, SWAPO leader Sam Nujoma was able 'to consolidate his power' through 'rapid action on the part of the Zambian government' and help from the Tanzanian government.[85] This pattern of repression continued in the years to come. In the 1980s, SWAPO detained nearly 1000 people during a 'spy drama' in Angola.[86] While the Angolan government was not directly involved, it hosted several SWAPO dungeons where hundreds of people were tortured, imprisoned, and killed.[87] When Namibia finally became independent in 1990, SWAPO won the first democratic elections with an overwhelming majority.[88]

Finally, the Frontline States were a crucial bedrock of the efforts by the ANC to topple the South African apartheid government. After its banning in 1960, thousands of South Africans joined the 'external mission' in Tanzania, Zambia, and Angola, among other places.[89] Between 1983–1984, the ANC experienced the Mkatashinga mutiny, which has been described as 'one of the most serious threats' in the history of the movement. The source of the conflict was a combination of complaints. Some MK soldiers were drafted to fight alongside the Angolan government in the Angolan Civil War, while they wanted to fight in South Africa against the apartheid state. There were also calls for more internal democracy and complaints about the brutal behavior of the ANC's security organ, which was named Mbokodo. Mkatashinga led to 'the nearly total collapse of the political military and moral authority' of the ANC in Angola.[90] During its course, hundreds of soldiers gathered in a camp near the Angolan capital to protest, where they organized a 10-person committee to begin talks with the ANC leadership.[91]

Again, similar to the Zimbabwean and Namibian case studies, the ANC responded with force. A combined force of MK soldiers and an Angolan elite presidential brigade surrounded the camp that contained the mutineers and announced that 'the combatants had been arrested by the Angolan

government and were going to prison in Luanda'. Some mutineers were publicly executed, while others received different forms of punishment such as incarceration.[92] The decision to purge the dissidents could not have been made without the help of Angolan government, who instructed its interior minister to liaise with the ANC, actively used government forces to control the mutineers, and transported them via military escorts to (maximum-security) prisons.[93] Moreover, the Frontline States hosted several ANC detention centers, which became notorious for human rights abuses. Especially Quatro, otherwise known as Site 32, served as an infamous place for 'arbitrary detention, torture, and murder'. The Frontline States allowed the ANC to take extreme measures, under the guise of weeding out alleged spies and maintaining unity.[94]

Steering the struggle

A comparative perspective on the mutinies in ZANU, SWAPO, and the ANC reveals a common pattern of rebellion and control. Each mutiny occurred in the territory of a cover state, at a moment when the armed group was vulnerable. Each challenge to the leadership was based on real grievances, and cannot be solely attributed to the stresses caused by counter-insurgency operations. However, the intent of the dissenters was not necessarily meant to split the movement or jeopardize the goals of the insurgency. Nhari and his comrades used the principles of 'democratic socialism' of ZANU to call attention to problems on the war front, while the anti-corruption fighters of SWAPO openly approached their superiors to communicate the demands for internal democracy; similarly, disgruntled ANC members established the Committee of Ten to engage in talks with their leadership. In each case the rebels were asking for a more democratic dispensation within the movement. Nevertheless, in each case the leadership responded with force – tough measures that were only possible through the interventions by the Frontline States.

The decision to respond with force, rather than to accept internal criticism, was motivated by an overarching desire to maintain unity on part of the leadership and their cover states. National liberation movements competed with rival organizations for international legitimacy. ZANU competed with ZAPU, SWAPO's international recognition was contested by the *South West Africa National Union* (SWANU), and the ANC was challenged by the *Pan-Africanist Congress* (PAC).[95] Like rebel movements everywhere, Southern African freedom fighters were characterized by a notorious 'history of infighting', which was generally seen as weakening the nationalist cause. Unity was therefore seen as a 'prerequisite' for the success of insurgent campaigns against Rhodesia and South Africa.[96] The struggle for liberation was thus a struggle to maintain unity within the nationalist movement; a process that

became characterized by bloody mutinies, the purging of internal factions, and numerous splits.

It is widely established in the literature on African decolonization that the experience of armed resistance had a profound impact on the political culture of victorious national liberation movements. Roger Southall described how ZANU, SWAPO, and the ANC transitioned from rebel movements to post-colonial regimes that continue to be guided by the experience of exile.[97] Henning Melber has convincingly shown that this legacy informs contemporary anti-democratic behavior and militant rhetoric of post-revolutionary regimes in Zimbabwe, Namibia, and South Africa.[98] As Sara Rich Dorman has pointed out, this pattern is not only visible in Southern Africa but can also be witnessed in other regions on the African continent, particularly in Eastern Africa.[99]

However, the formative effects of Frontline State intervention in mutinies, and its unintended consequences for political culture, have received scant attention. The Frontline States facilitated the brutal repression of internal upheaval that, to an important degree, stimulated the development of authoritarian tendencies among the leadership of non-state actors. While much of the existing scholarship on African insurgencies focuses on either the leadership of African rebel movements or the influence of external geopolitical actors, most prominently the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China, the role of African cover states is usually overlooked. Our case studies of mutinies illustrate that many developments within the struggle for liberation were not necessarily motivated by great power rivalry, but had their own logic that was shaped by local circumstances.

Our comparison of mutinies within the Frontline States illustrates how cover states can affect the internal politics of the insurgent actors that they host. Cover states are not 'neutral territory', but heavily politicized places that influence the conduct of exiled movements. The importance of this relationship cannot be underestimated, as the legacy of war carries over into post-revolutionary rule. Other examples of this authoritarian legacy exist. For example, there is evidence to suggest that Uganda and Ethiopia had significant influence during crucial periods in the formation of the Rwandan Patriotic Front and the Sudan People's Liberation Front respectively.[100]

Interestingly, not much has been written, even beyond the African context, on the relationship between cover states and agents. The means and methods of the cover states to achieve their objectives have been particularly poorly served, and more research is needed to understand their influence over exiled armed groups. One area of consideration for future research could be a critical examination of the motivation of cover states to shelter armed groups. Cover states take significantly more risk that traditional state sponsors of proxy warfare. In the case of the Frontline States this was particularly glaring. Neither Zambia or Tanzania was directly strategically threatened by

apartheid South Africa or Rhodesia. It cost both nations significant resources to act as a cover state, though in both cases the ideological conviction that settler colonialism was an abhorrent stain on independent Africa proved to be decisive.

A closely connected issue is unity within the cover state. Some elements within the cover state might have significantly more or less sympathy for the exiled movement which they are harbouring than others. Several members of Nyerere's government believed that his support for the national liberation movements acting on Tanzanian soil went too far 'unduly exposing itself to dangers ... expending financial and other resources it could ill afford'.[101] These elements can be found in other cover states as well. It is, for example, clear that Pakistan's support for the Taliban went beyond the simple geostrategic calculation of keeping India out of Afghanistan. Many Pakistani intelligence officers had religious-ideological sympathies with the Taliban that went beyond the interests of the state they served.[102] While these dynamics are not wholly unique to cover states their impact is more direct than in a regular sponsor-proxy relationship.

Another question of interest is how the relationship between cover states and armed groups develop once the latter become successful in gaining power. After the consolidation of independence, ZANU, SWAPO, and the ANC continued to engage with their former hosts, albeit in a significantly different capacity. The Frontline States were now dealing with political parties whose behaviour they had shaped to a significant degree. As both sides remained devoted to the legacy of the struggle, their leaders seldom openly challenged each other. Even in the case of autocratic behaviour or democratic backsliding, which was most clearly pronounced in the case of Zimbabwe, former cover states such as Zambia and Tanzania continued to engage with ZANU.[103] This also calls into question the ideological orientation of the cover states and how this affects their relationship with former clients.

Conclusion

Nelson Mandela, perhaps the most influential African revolutionary of the twentieth century, believed that unity was the most important factor for the success of armed struggle. 'A revolution cannot move with two heads', wrote the leader of the ANC, 'one bad head is better than two good ones'.[104] Mandela internalized this lesson while he was in exile, as he underwent military training in Algeria, the country that had defied French colonial rule through a successful insurgency led by the FLN.[105] The ANC emerged victorious in 1994 in part because it managed to maintain a significant degree of unity while rival movements succumbed to internal divisions. The same applies to ZANU and SWAPO in Zimbabwe and Namibia. Maintaining unity

did not occur in a vacuum, but was a process heavily influenced by the perils and possibilities of exile.

This paper argued that Frontline States were critical for maintaining unity within the exiled national liberation movements of Zimbabwe, Namibia, and South Africa. Looking back, the intervention of Frontline States in African mutinies proved to be a double-edged sword: it may have expedited the conclusion of the struggle for decolonization, but simultaneously nurtured militant mindsets among the leadership of armed groups. This form of interference stimulated the centralization of power within rebel formations, which in turn facilitated the development of an authoritarian political culture. From the perspective of the cover state, a united movement had more chance of success than a fractured movement. However, the unintended consequence of this logic was that the leadership of armed groups were encouraged in their autocratic tendencies, which carried over into post-colonial politics.

The history of the Frontline States offers new insights into the relationship between cover states and armed groups. The lessons from exile were that tough measures against dissent were favorable over the stimulation of democracy. The case studies of Zimbabwe, Namibia, and South Africa illustrate that this has important ramifications for contemporary rule, as post-revolutionary governments tend to incorporate the experiences of exile into the practice of governance. This insight is relevant for contemporary affairs, as the phenomenon of cover states is omnipresent in present-day conflicts across the world. Armed insurgents continue to rely on external nations for safety. The Frontline States show that by providing physical protection to insurgents, cover states are willing to take significant risks. At the same time, this leverage allows them to exercise a significant degree of influence over the internal politics of armed groups.

Notes

1. Yaremko, "The 26th of July Movement," 49.
2. Wilson, *Sovereignty in Exile*.
3. Horne, *A Savage War of Peace*, 128–31.
4. Yankelevich, "The COSPA," 68–80.
5. Norlen and Kaura, "When Proxies Win," 201–22; and Giustozzi, *The Taliban at War*.
6. Sayigh, "The Politics of Palestinian Exile"; and Barak Mendelsohn, "Understanding Qatar's Relationship with Hamas."
7. Khadiagala, *Allies in Adversity*.
8. Ellis, "The ANC in Exile"; Mazarire, "ZANU's External Networks 1963–1979"; Williams, "Education in Exile"; and Roberts, *Revolutionary State-Making in Dar Es Salaam*.
9. Sapire, "Liberation Movements, Exile, and International Solidarity."
10. Burton, "Hubs of Decolonization," 25–56.

11. ZANU faced the "Nhari Mutiny" in 1974, SWAPO the "Shipanga Rebellion" in 1976, and ANC struggled with a mutiny in 1984. Blessing-Miles Tendi, "Transnationalism, Contingency and Loyalty"; Leys and Saul, "Liberation Without Democracy?"; and Trewhela, *Inside Quatro*.
12. Douek, *Insurgency and Counterinsurgency in South Africa*.
13. Saunders, "SWAPO."
14. Melber, "From Liberation Movements to Governments."
15. Alexander, McGregor, and Blessing-Miles Tendi, "The Transnational Histories of Southern African Liberation Movements."
16. Garaba, "An Investigation into the Management of the Records and Archives."
17. Maaba, "The History and Politics of Liberation Archives at Fort Hare"; and Webb, "Research Note: Mayibuye Archives and the Cold War in Southern Africa."
18. Wright and Zúñiga, "Chilean Political Exile,"; Johnston, *New Mecca, New Babylon*; Hyman, "The Afghan Politics of Exile."
19. Auten, "Political Diasporas and Exiles as Instruments of Statecraft."
20. Mumford, *Proxy Warfare*.
21. Bapat, "Understanding State Sponsorship of Militant Groups,"; Karlén, "Turning off the Taps"; Patten, "Taking Advantage of Insurgencies"; and Dombrowski and Reich, "The Strategy of Sponsorship."
22. Byman, "Understanding, and Misunderstanding, State Sponsorship of Terrorism"; Kirchner, *Why States Rebel*; Chase, "Legal Mechanisms of the International Community"; Richardson, "State Sponsorship"; and Berkowitz, "Delegating Terror."
23. Fox, "Conflict and the Need for a Theory of Proxy Warfare"; and Farasoo, "Rethinking Proxy War Theory in IR: A Critical Analysis of Principal – Agent Theory."
24. Bapat, "State Bargaining with Transnational Terrorist Groups"; Salehyan, "The Delegation of War to Rebel Organizations"; and Bryjka, "Operational Control over Non-State Proxies."
25. Banks, "Foreword," x.
26. This section builds on Salehyan, "The Delegation of War to Rebel Organizations."
27. Thompson, "Visualising FRELIMO's Liberated Zones in Mozambique," 1962–1974.
28. Marcum, "Government-in-Exile Versus Government-in-Insurgency"; and Misra, "Recognition of the 'Provisional Government' of the Algerian Republic'."
29. Kinne, "The Benefits of Exile: The Case of FLAM."
30. Norlen and Kaura, "When Proxies Win: The Impact of the Taliban's Changing Fortune on Pakistan's Leverage."
31. Giustozzi, *The Taliban at War*, 210–15.
32. Mumford, "Proxy Warfare and the Future of Conflict," 40.
33. Horne, *A Savage War of Peace*, 224.
34. Barari, "Four Decades after Black September: A Jordanian Perspective"; and Shlaim, *Lion of Jordan*, Chapter 14
35. Levitsky and Way, "Beyond Patronage."
36. See for instance: Dorman, "Post-Liberation Politics in Africa."
37. Thomas, "Decolonization and the End of Empires," 11–26.
38. Ribeiro de Meneses and McNamara, "The Origins of Exercise ALCORA, 1960–71"; and Kleynhans, "The Foundations of Exercise ALCORA."

39. Dale, *The Namibian War of Independence*.
40. White, *Unpopular Sovereignty*.
41. Correia and Verhoef, "Portugal and South Africa."
42. Khadiagala, *Allies in Adversity*, 20.
43. Bereketeab, "Introduction: Understanding National Liberation Movements," 3–16.
44. McKinley, "Umkhonto We Sizwe."
45. Dobell, *Swapo's Struggle for Namibia, 1960–1991*.
46. Dzimbanhete, *Zimbabwe's Fight for Independence*; and Ranger, *Soldiers in Zimbabwe's Liberation War*.
47. Plaut, *The Struggle for Southern Africa*, 9.
48. Metz, "Pretoria's 'Total Strategy'."
49. Khadiagala, *Allies in Adversity*, 85.
50. Ellis, "The Genesis of the ANC's Armed Struggle in South Africa 1948–1961."
51. Hull, "The Conflict in Rhodesia."
52. Vigne, "SWAPO of Namibia: A Movement in Exile."
53. Khadiagala, *Allies in Adversity*, 24.
54. Roberts, *Revolutionary State-Making in Dar Es Salaam*, 140.
55. Breytenbach, *Conflict in Southern Africa*, 1.
56. Khadiagala, *Allies in Adversity*, 54, 70; and Chung, *Re-Living the Second Chimurenga*, 95.
57. Isaacman, "After the Nkomati Accord," 10–13.
58. Hall, "The Mozambican National Resistance Movement (RENAMO)."
59. Khadiagala, *Allies in Adversity*, 66.
60. Burton, "Hubs of Decolonization."
61. Macmillan, *The Lusaka Years*; Williams, *National Liberation in Postcolonial Southern Africa*; and Armstrong, *An Ambulance on Safari*.
62. Salim, *The Frontline States*, 2.
63. Williams, "Living in Exile: Daily Life and International Relations at SWAPO's Kongwa Camp"; For another description of Kongwa, see Chapter 7 of: Bopela and Luthuli, *Umkhonto We Sizwe: Fighting for a Divided People*; and Ngculu and Mbeki, *The Honour to Serve*.
64. Cann, *The Flechas*; Bolliger, "Apartheid's Transnational Soldiers"; Bester, "From Cooperation to Amalgamation"; Stiff, *The Silent War*; and Cilliers, *Counter-Insurgency in Rhodesia*.
65. Douek, *Insurgency and Counterinsurgency in South Africa*.
66. Khadiagala, *Allies in Adversity*, 28.
67. Alexander and Kynoch, "Introduction: Histories and Legacies of Punishment in Southern Africa," 405.
68. Williams, *National Liberation in Postcolonial Southern Africa*, 10.
69. Ranger, "Nationalist Historiography, Patriotic History and the History of the Nation."
70. See note 68 above.
71. Bhebe, *The ZAPU and ZANU Guerrilla Warfare*, 56–57.
72. Tendi, "Transnationalism, Contingency and Loyalty in African Liberation Armies," 145–46.
73. White, *The Assassination of Herbert Chitepo*, 22, 35.
74. Bhebe, *The ZAPU and ZANU Guerrilla Warfare*, 56–57.
75. Mazarire, "Discipline and Punishment in ZANLA: 1964–1979," 572.
76. Doran, *Kingdom, Power, Glory*, 26.

77. Ibid.
78. Tendi, "Transnationalism, Contingency and Loyalty in African Liberation Armies," 145.
79. Chung, *Re-Living the Second Chimurenga*, 93.
80. Bhebe, *The ZAPU and ZANU Guerrilla Warfare*, 25.
81. Khadiagala, *Allies in Adversity*, 89.
82. Quoted from a Zambian official: Ibid., 98–102.
83. Leys and Saul, "Liberation Without Democracy? The Swapo Crisis of 1976."
84. Ibid.
85. Khadiagala, *Allies in Adversity*, 98.
86. Trewhela, *Inside Quatro*.
87. Williams, *National Liberation in Postcolonial Southern Africa*, 134–42.
88. Melber, "Namibia, Land of the Brave," 305–27.
89. Macmillan, *The Lusaka Years*, 6–7.
90. Zantsi, "Mkatashinga," 90.
91. Ellis, *External Mission*, 188–89.
92. Zantsi, "Mkatashinga," 97–98.
93. Ellis, *External Mission*, 190–91.
94. Ellis, "Mbokodo: Security in ANC Camps, 1961–90," 283; and Trewhela, *Inside Quatro*.
95. Hoog, *Comrades Beyond the Cold War*, 29–30.
96. Khadiagala, *Allies in Adversity*, 28.
97. Southall, *Liberation Movements in Power*.
98. Melber, "From Liberation Movements to Governments."
99. Dorman, "Post-Liberation Politics in Africa."
100. Prunier, *The Rwanda Crisis*, 94–96; and Johnson, "The Sudan People's Liberation Army and the Problem of Factionalism", 57–58.
101. Roberts, *Revolutionary State-Making in Dar Es Salaam*, 144.
102. Coll, *Ghost Wars*, 72–76; and Coll, *Directorate S*, 45–47.
103. Doran, *Kingdom, Power, Glory, 1960–1987*.
104. Drew, "Visions of Liberation," 28.
105. Peterson, *Revolutionary Warfare*.

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