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**DEMOBILIZATION AND INTEGRATION
OF THE ARMED FORCES:
THE NAMIBIAN EXPERIENCE.**

**VICTOR L. TONCHI
DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC
ADMINISTRATION
UNIVERSITY OF NAMIBIA**

INTRODUCTION

This Conference like many others with related themes taking place in the region is an important one. It is important in the sense that experiences and ideas generated from this conference may provide us with solution for conflicts prevalent in the region. By sharing these experiences, our brothers and sisters in Mozambique and South Africa may be able to avoid the unfortunate situation that is taking place in Angola today.

As a case study, this paper is basically an empirical one. It is based on my own experiences and observations and during its preparation I had the opportunity to discuss with these issues senior officials in the Ministries' of Defence, Ministry of Lands, Resettlement and Rehabilitation and the Ministry of Trade and Industry whose Minister was previously responsible for the creation and establishment of the Development Brigade comprising of ex-combatants.

It is now three years since Namibia attained its independence. It was independence gained after a long and bitter struggle of which armed conflict with the occupation South African Army lasted for over 22 years. Over that period, not only were South Africa Defence forces fighting SWAPO's People's Liberation Army of Namibia, but also some local army units created by the South African government. At the height of the conflict in the late 1970's and early 1980's counterinsurgency units making up the South West African Territory Force (SWATF) were formed. Among these were the notorious Koevoet.

It is behind this background that we can perceive and understand the problems of demobilization and integration of such forces into a national army after independence.

THE DEMOBILIZATION PROCESS

BACKGROUND TO THE NEGOTIATION PROCESS

As we are all aware, Namibia remained a United Nations responsibility till independence. For almost three decades, several U.N. resolutions have been passed calling for South Africa's withdrawal from the territory. Among these resolutions was the United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 435 of 29th September 1978 which had as its objectives to hold free and fair elections in the territory under the auspices of the United Nations. In the UNSCR 435 (1978) proposal, the United Nations Secretary General was to appoint a Special Representative who would be assisted by a United Nations Transition Assistance Group (UNTAG) so that a free and fair elections can be held as well as an impartial electoral process. It took almost ten years before this resolution was implemented. Many factors could be attributed to the implementation of UNSCR 435 (1978). Among these are the Cuito Quenavale battles and the fact that both parties involved in the armed conflict felt that a negotiated settlement rather than a military solution was a possible alternative.

In 1988, several agreements were reached between the three governments involved in the conflict i.e. Angola, South Africa and Cuba. The July 13th, 1988 meeting in New York had the three parties agreeing and committing themselves to a peaceful settlement in South Western Africa. The Geneva agreement of August 5th 1988 and the Geneva Protocol of November 15th 1988 were among the important agreements reached between the three countries.

The Geneva Protocol of 5th August 1988 spelt out the dates and measures of restraint to the parties concerned in order to start the ball rolling for a peace settlement in the region.

It recommended to the Secretary General of the United Nations that 1st November 1988 be set as a date of the implementation of UNSCR 435 (1978). Other dates were set for Angola and Cuba to reach an agreement on the redeployment of Cuban troops to the north and finally a total withdrawal of Cuban troops from Angola. In the same agreement, South Africa was to complete withdrawing its forces from Angola by 1st September 1988. SWAPO was expected to adhere to these agreements by taking necessary measures of restraint to recognise the de facto ceasefire then in place. SWAPO forces were to be deployed north of the 16th parallel and confined to bases in Angola.

The target dates set in The Geneva Protocol were not met and therefore new dates acceptable to all parties concerned were proposed at a series of meetings in Brazzaville, New York and Geneva respectively. During these later meetings, bilateral agreements were also reached between the Angolans and the Cubans for the withdrawal of Cuban troops from Angola. The schedule for the withdrawal of Cuban troops from Angola entailed that the phasing out starts on the 1st April 1989 and should reach 100% by 1st July 1990 when all Cuban troops should have withdrawn.

Important dates during this negotiation period are the 13th December 1988 and 22nd December 1988. On 13th December 1988, the Protocol of Brazzaville was signed by Angola, South Africa and Cuba. The three parties agreed that 1st April 1989 should be the commencement of the implementation of UNSCR-435 and to meet on 22nd December in New York for final tripartite signature. The Protocol of Brazzaville also recommended a United Nations Verification arrangement as well as the Joint Commission (later known as the Joint Military Monitoring Commission).

Finally a trilateral agreement was signed in New York between South Africa, Cuba and Angola. Simultaneously, a bilateral agreement was signed between Angola and Cuba.

Once this has been achieved the scheduled activities were to be followed according to the agreement. The schedule of the peace process entailed that by 1st April when the implementation of UNSCR-435/1978 starts, 3,000 Cuban troops will begin withdrawing from Angola and the remaining 47,000 of the estimated 50,000 troops will be reduced accordingly till their final withdrawal on 1st July 1991. On the same date of 1st April, SWAPO combatants were to be confined to their bases in Angola and Zambia. South African troops were to be confined to bases in Namibia and commencement of their reduction to 1,500 by 1 July 1989. The remaining South African troops were to be withdrawn completely a week after the election results.

DEMOBILIZATION

The fact that both South African forces and SWAPO combatants were restricted to bases and required to observe the ceasefire signified demobilization. In this process, South African troops were confined to their bases inside Namibia and were monitored by the military section of UNTAG. This same procedure applied to SWAPO combatants in Angola north of the 16th parallel. PLAN combatants were separated from both FAPLA and Cuban forces to insure that they were restricted to their bases.

Once the SWAPO combatants had regrouped and concentrated at particular bases, they were addressed by both the SWAPO President and UN officials on the implementation of the peace process. They were reassured of similar demobilization activities taking place inside Namibia. SWAPO combatants were disarmed and weapons were stocked at some places inside Angola. On the Namibian side, armed units such as the SWAFF were disarmed and disbanded. However, the counterinsurgency unit Koevoet remained active till the election time.

REPATRIATION OF EXILES

As the peace process progressed, many Namibians in exile were repatriated. PLAN combatants were repatriated as civilians and therefore it was not easy to distinguish members of PLAN from the rest of returning exiles. This problem was also compounded with the fact that most SWAPO members in exile had undergone military training of some kind.

It was difficult for PLAN combatants to enter an environment that they had regarded as hostile unarmed. But through the political good will of the SWAPO leadership and the ex-combatants themselves as SWAPO cadres, had an understanding of the Namibian political situation which persuaded them to take risk by entering the country so as to participate in the peace process. Before returning home, each ex-PLAN combatant was given a task to at least mobilize about ten supporters for the November 1989 elections. It is therefore important to note that upon their arrival in Namibia, many PLAN combatants became pre-occupied and got involved in the campaign process.

THE INTEGRATION PROCESS.

After the 1989 November elections, and after SWAPO had been declared winner, a Shadow cabinet was formed. The Shadow Minister for Defence like the rest of the designated ministers, was responsible for establishing his ministry. A core staff was put together by the Permanent Secretary for Defence. The minister instructed the Permanent Secretary to draw the core staff from both ex-PLAN combatants and former SWATF soldiers. It was at this stage that integration of forces was initiated and in the process the military contingent of UNTAG acted as mediators.

RECRUITMENT PROCEDURES

At independence, it was realized that once the UNTAG military section leaves, there will be a vacuum and after considering the security problems in our northern borders with Angola, it was felt that an army be formed as soon as possible.

Initially a unit comprising ex-fighters from both sides was formed to serve as a guard of honor for the independence celebrations. The same unit still functions today as the Presidential Guard of Honor. The core staff that was created to establish the Ministry comprised of former SWATF and ex-PLAN combatants and was able to identify individuals in the regions so as to start recruitment drive for the regular National Army. Once recruitment offices were established, announcements were made in local radios and by word of mouth about the recruitment into the army.

This was achieved within a short period of time due to the existing infrastructure of radio-communication system that serves most of the local languages in the country.

Many ex-fighters from both sides were then recruited into the new army. A unit called the Border guard was created to maintain security on the Northern borders with Angola. This unit lasted for a few months and was withdrawn from the border due to indiscipline and lack of order among the soldiers.

The rest of the soldiers underwent a standardization training at Osire military base near Okahandja. With assistance from The British Military Assistance Training Team (BMATT) this standardization training started a month after independence and ended in 1991.

The objective of this training was to find the middle of the road training that was conducive to both sides. Most of the soldiers had gone through different training. The ex-SWATF had South African training while ex-PLAN had soviet training.

Something neutral was therefore necessary to avoid alienation among the soldiers.

In order to ensure proper integration strict rules had to be adhered to. For instance, trainees were to refrain from party slogans, revolutionary songs, party T-Shirts or any other paraphernalia indicating political allegiance.

The training itself was geared towards reducing suspicion among soldiers and for that reason simulations of battles were conducted during training with instances where ex-SWATF and ex-PLAN combatant in the same Unit would be able to save each other's lives.

SIGNIFICANT PROBLEMS ON INTEGRATION

For a country just emerging from war, one could not expect this process to go smoothly. To start with, there were complaints during the recruitment period about the procedures. This was especially among the ex-SWATF and ex-Koevoet who complained that only ex-PLAN combatants were being recruited. This being so because in many cases recruitment officers were ex-PLAN combatants. It took sometime for most ex-SWATF fighters to realize the integrity and genuineness of the whole recruitment process.

During training, complaints came from both sides in terms of treatment received from commanders who happen to be a former enemy. It is significant though, that no major fights erupted between the two groups throughout this process.

The Namibian Army had also problems in terms of recruiting black senior officers from the ex-SWATF's. A number of senior officers from the former SWATF were mostly whites who had stayed behind. Blacks were not promoted to higher ranks in the SWATF due to the existing policy at the time.

This was then a difficult problem for integration as you were to find that senior officers in the new army were mostly ex-PLAN fighters who were black and white ex-SWATF officers.

REHABILITATION OF EX-FIGHTERS

Not all former fighters from both sides could have been recruited in the army. The Namibian Army currently stands at about 7,000 while the number of ex-fighters range between 20-30,000.

Confronted with the problem of unemployment especially among ex-combatants, the government initiated the Development Brigade. The aims and objectives of the Development Brigade were to alleviate unemployment and at the same time contribute to development of the country. The Brigade was to engage in several development sectors, such as agriculture, construction and water development. Almost over 16,000 unemployed former combatants were registered for the Development Brigade Program located in the Ministry of Lands, Resettlement and Rehabilitation. These were to be relocated in 12 former military bases. However, the majority were to be concentrated in the Northern part of the country taking into account the agricultural potential in those regions (e.g. Ovambo, Kavango and Caprivi).

Registered individuals were to undergo job-oriented training in the three sectors identified. Instruction in areas of numerical skills, literacy, english and management were also envisaged. Such crash courses were important if we bare in mind that illiteracy has been a major problem for Namibia and many ex-combatants never had the opportunity to study while in exile.

Several foreign experts participated in this immense project. These included 22 Cubans, 6 Indians, 2 Dutch and 3 British. At the local level a significant number of Namibian technicians, artisans, agriculturalists and teachers were anticipated for the project.

Once the project was off the ground, assistance came from the European community, South Korea and Japan. They provided machinery for water drilling and tractors. Initially there were problems with this project due to the fact that so many people were registered and allocated to designated military bases without material to work with. This finally led to reduction in the number of people employed in the Brigade.

Today the Developing Brigade is a corporation called the Development Brigade Corporation employing between 2-3,000 people. One of the moral responsibilities taken by the government was the payout to former fighters especially ex-PLAN combatants. This was encouraged by the South African governments' proposal to pay R30 million to former SWATF members. After some debate, a compromise was reached and the money was divided between the two groups of ex-fighters. The government chipped in to increase the amount paid to ex-combatants to R24 million. There were however problems associated with this issue in terms of who really qualified as an ex-PLAN fighter among the returning exiles.

Other rehabilitation programs exist through The Ministry of Lands, Resettlement and Rehabilitation. Initially these programs were to cater for disabled ex-PLAN fighters but now accommodates other disabled and non-disabled individuals. Training has been provided for in areas of agriculture and woodwork. For this purpose, the government has provided pieces of land in the Northern parts of the country.

CONCLUSION

The process of demobilization and integration is not without major set-backs. The events of 1st April 1989 are but one of those confusions that may impede the process if there are no proper clarifications on certain points. SWAPO for instance was not really involved in the negotiation process and therefore the question of whether or not SWAPO had bases inside Namibia was not dealt with.

On the Namibian side, most members of Koevoet joined SWAPOL (South West Africa Police) once they were disbanded. These were later to be responsible for maintaining law and order during the transitional period. Most ex-Koevoet members also retained their pistols which were in many cases publicly displayed. Such acts of intimidation during the campaign period led to tensions and suspicions among the ex-fighters. It should also be borne in mind that PLAN fighters had weapons stacked throughout the country and ready for use. Under such circumstances there was potential for disrupting the peace process.

The envisaged integration process entailed a balanced number of ex-fighters from both sides. Whether this has been achieved could not be verified. But whatever the case may be, it has never been a major issue to the present.

During the recruitment process, it was also difficult to determine who was a Namibian and who was not. Many Non-Namibians had even voted in the November 1989 elections and it was therefore inevitable that many Non-Namibians joined the Army particularly ex-SWATF and Koevoet members. About 36 of these were expelled from the army earlier this year, three years after independence. It is also important to note that old habits and loyalties die hard, and this made the integration process quite difficult from both sides many troops still held political allegiances.

Taking into account the problems and difficulties identified above, one can attribute the success of this integrated armed force to the political goodwill and honesty of the SWAPO leadership. The policy of National reconciliation has played quite a significant role and had in this case reduced tension among former enemies. But of course not without many compromises.