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POLITICS AND THE ARMED STRUGGLE: THE REVOLUTIONARY ARMY

- Ronnie Kasrils

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Since the creation of Umkhonto We Sizwe our Movement's basic positions on armed struggle have amounted to:

- commitment to a strategy of revolutionary armed struggle to achieve our goal - the seizure of political power and the creation of a liberated South Africa based on the Freedom Charter;

- MK is the instrument of the ANC and our liberation movement and takes its leadership, direction and command from the ANC;

- political policy and strategy determines our military strategy;

armed struggle must complement mass struggle and we seek to combine all forms

_ of struggle - violent and non-violent, legal and illegal;

- u the development of the armed struggle is dependent on its being rooted among the people - our MK combatants and organisers must therefore base themselves

There are numerous consequences and tasks that flow from the above. For example it has always been clear to us that our trained cadres - our combatants and organisers - must be imbued with political theories and ideas, must understand that politics guides the gun and gives the motivation and courage for successful struggle. The question of the political preparation of these cadres - their discipline, devotion, determination, morale and political consciousness is the subject of another paper; Their preparation for their organisational and Operational tasks - whether political, military, intelligence or security functions is another question that requires special attention.

I have stated that there are numerous consequences and tasks flowing from the basic positions on armed struggle already expressed. Our struggle is a most complex one. Problems have mounted and have often been shelved owing to the exile years; the fact that we are based largely abroad; that we lack an underground political base at home. How many of the consequences and tasks flowing from our positions on the armed struggle have not been addressed, tackled or maybe not even perceived?

This is not simply a problem for the High Command of Umkhonto Ne Sizwe, but for our entire movement. Anything that relates to our fundamental strategy - the seizure of power through the force of arms - is a fundamental question for us all, and that includes the leadership and activists of our mass democratic movement at home as well as the various sectors of our movement abroad, whether military or political.

The fact that we proclaimed our armed struggle on December 16, 1961 and that it is still at an extremely low stage of development must force us to frankly and critically examine the problem areas.

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

It is therefore clear that although we have long formulated theoretical positions

such as "the armed struggle must complement the mass strnggle" and "the guerrilla must be rooted among the peOple" etc, etc, it is one thing to state the theory and quite another to put it into practice.

The fact that nearly three years since the Kabwe Conference of the ANC we still await a fresh strategy and tactics document does not help our military strategy and tactics. It is also clear that most people at home, including within the mass democratic movement, still regard MK as some kind of external force that must come and defend them from the vigilantes and destroy the Boers. They do not see themselves as having to be an integral part of the armed struggle.

Highlighting these defects one asks: is it nossible that we are incorrect in believing that the armed-struggle is the way forward? When Govan Mbeki was released from prison Die Beeld gloated that he had 23 years to ponder on the incorrectness of his belief that armed revolution was possible.

If anything, however, the events of the past three years have unmistakably demonstrated just how possible and necessary it is to advance our struggle through a combination of armed and mass uprisings. The people have demonstrated just how ready they are to take up arms. In fact one might say that "insurrection has been knocking on the door".

2. THE SUBJECTIVE FACTOR

This period of township uprisings, which also spilled over into some rural areas and bantustans, has revealed strengths and weaknesses. On the one hand it showed the existence of certain objective elements of a revolutionary situation in our country: the ruling class being unable to rule in the old way; the oppressed messes not being prepared to live under the old conditions; the heightened mass struggle and general crisis in'the country. On the other hand the situation revealed our

organisational weaknesses, both inside and outside the country - what is referred to as the subjective conditions.

History teaches us that a revolutionary situation will persist for as long as a ruling class is unable to resolve its contradictions. But its persistence is conditional on the mood of the masses, their confidence in the revolutionary movement and its organisational ability to lead them out of the current impasse to the seizure of power. In the absence of the subjective conditions the revolutionary situation will pass. Success is dependent on the subjective factors. When we are speaking of the subjective conditions we are referring to the presence of revolutionary organisations, and of their ability to organise and lead the masses in all forms of struggle - armed struggle included. The subjective factor is Organisation. It is the existence of a revolutionary party or movement which is capable of providing the correct strategic and tactical guidance, having created the forces and means to carry out the tasks of the struggle. This includes also the political and military readiness of the advanced masses who become part of the revolutionary army. When the masses fight with stones it shows the absence of revolutionary organs!

The past three years have shown us how relatively underdeveloped the subjective factor is. To overcome this weakness is the key task of our movement. We have had endless discussions and meetings about how this should be done. We have experimented with different structural forms. Differences of approach exist between military and political organs of the movement. They appear to agree in meetings but differ in practice. Confusion exists among rank-and-file comrades going home as to what structures to create, and between externally trained cadres and those activists who have never left home. In fact there are extremely few policy positions of either the ANC or SACP on how power is to be seized. And this is central to the problem. For unless we have a clear vision on how power is to be seized we cannot

effectively address the question of what type of organsiare required for such a task. We cannot effectively address the subjective tasks.

What is demanded issa vision of how power is to be seized and a plan for the building of the forces and means to carry out this task. This vision and this plan must be clearly understood by all activists, at home and abroad, within the terms of their tesks and responsibilities so that all have a clear and common understanding df their own role within the machinery of struggle.

Central to the creation of the subjective factor is Umkhonto We Sizwe. For to achieve our goal - the siezure of political power through our strategy of revdlutionary armed struggle - it is necessary to create a Revolutionary Army. The main obstacles on the way to power are the SA Defence Force and SA Police. These obstacles can only be defeated or removed through a Revolutionary Army. At present MK is only the nucleus of such an army. It has to be extended and developed to embrace all potential revolutionary forces;

3. THE REVOLUTIONARY ARMY

A Revolutionary Army must be composed and structured in such a way that it can be situated among the masses. The problem facing us is that the bulk of our army is recruited, trained and remains outside the country. As referred to already we face considerable problems in the infiltration and rooting of our combatants inside the country. The enemy understands this and his security forces work overtime to prevent this occurring. For once we succeed in basing our forces within the country the armed struggle will merge with the mass struggle and this will really spell the end of white supremacy.

An ex-Rhodesian farmer who has settled in the northern Transvaal border area said that our land mines, whilst creating a nuisance, would not really change the situation because we simply run in and out of the country. What caused the problem in Zimbabwe was that the "terrorists" were living among the people. And one might add that until Zimbabwean guerrillas learnt how to live among the people their struggle remained in the doldrums as they engaged in hit-and-run raids into and out of their country.

My contention is that a clear conception of what the Revolutionary Army could and should be will help solve this problem.

Clearly the Revolutionary Army is the armed forces of the revolution. But we should not see it as a single uniform organ. It must consist of three component parts.

Firstly there are the Organised Advanced Detachments - the nucleus of the Revolutionary Army;

Secondly, the Revolutionary Armed People - who are the most active elements within the mass struggle who in time swell the ranks of the Revolutionary Army;

Thirdly, there are the elements of the enemy Army and Police which are won over to the side of the Revolution.

It is essential to identify each of these components and have an organisational plan as to how to recruit them, prepare and train them, and bring them into the Revolutionary Army. Each of these components represent different levels of political and combat readiness and they require different forms of organisational work.

(i) The Organised Advanced Detachments

This is the nucleus of the Revolutionary Army. It is the base or core around which the Revolutionary Army must be built. The trained, full-time combatants of MK are

central to this core. But these combatants must themselves have different specialisations..They must be grouped into combat units of various types and specialities such as:

a) Guerrilla units of the countryside - whose size and mode of operation will depend on the terrain. They aim to link up with the villagers and farm labourers.
b) Underground combat groups of the urban areas - They base themselves in the factories, townships, residential areas and other work places. They may be combat groups, sabotage units, elimination squads; those who are not full-time MK combatants who "work by day and operate by night" (and this is preferable).

c) Self-defence units - based in the factories, townships and rural areas. These have already begun to emerge out of necessity as the popular democratic organisations have been forced to defend themselves, their leaders, their homes, offices and meetings from the enemy forces. Self-defence units can be organised by legal or semi-legal organisations, as well as the underground, and form the basis of a people's self-defence militia. Trained MK cadres must merge into these self-defence units and lead them;

Creating the Advanced Detachments is the first necessary step to building the Revolutionary Army. For over 25 years we have concentrated on building one element of this core - MK. This has been done under extremely difficult and problematic conditions and has been a tremendous achievement which should not be belittled. Conditions have now developed which gives us the possibilities of extending MK into the Advanced Detachments spelt out above. The example of the emergence of the self-defence units illustrates this point.

By creating underground combat groups in the urban areas, and especially the factories; by developing the self-defence units in towns and villages; and by basing small units amongst the rural people we will begin to recruit combatants inside the country, amongst the workers, the women, the rural people and the youth, and overcome the most problematic consequences of having been based externally for

so many years. We will lose our dependence of having to recruit only those who are prepared to leave the country for training. By being locally based we will also considerably restrict the enemy's possibilities of infiltrating our ranks.

The development of the Organised Advanced Detachments, from their MK base, will enable us to root the armed Struggle amongst our people within our country. This will enable us to arm our people and realistically prepare and plan for the armed seizure of power.

(ii) The Revolutionary Armed People

These are the most conscious, active elements from amongst the masses who have shown their readiness to confront the enemy with whatever means are at hand, from stones to petrol bombs and knives, to the building of barricades. They must be drawn into the Revolutionary Army. It is the task of the nucleus - the full-time combatants and guerrillas - to recruit, prepare and train them. These are the street fighters who in their tens of thousands have already engaged the enemy in numerous pitched battles. They are not only willing to take up arms but have been calling for arms. They must be given military skills and weapons and organised into disciplined fighting units under the organised command and leadership of the advanced detachments, to take part in the armed struggle for political power.

As the armed struggle develops so more and more activists from among the mass political struggle will be reached and drawn into the ranks of the Revolutionary Army. In this way the nucleus - or the vanguard - bridges the gap between itself and the masses, finds ways of the arming the people and creating the Revolutionary Army.

(iii) Units of the Enemy Armed Forces

These are elements from within the enemy Army and Police who are won over at decisive moments to side with the Revolution. It is a vital task to work within

the enemy forces, to agitate and politicise soldiers, police, vigilantes and other auxiliary forces of the enemy, in order to show them who the true enemy is, thus rendering them ineffective to the state. Some sections will be neutralised, while others will be won over. Those who are won over to the side of the revolution bring their arms with them and become part of the Revolutionary Army.

Recent developments at home show the potential for such work particularly among black soldiers, officers and police. Some examples are the Transkei coup; the abortive coup in Bophuthatswana; mutinies among municipal police in Sebokeng and Lekoa; mutinies among Namibian troops on the Angolan border. Clearly there is considerable scope to win over these elements making the enemy pay the price for utilising black troops as cannon fodder.

The disaffection of many white conscripts with the SADF creates possibilities of at least neutralising significant sections of the white soldiers and possibly winning over to our side, at the decisive moment, some elements. Given the enemy's acute white manpower shortage the mere neutralisation of even, let us say, one-tenth of the white conscript army at a decisive moment could make all the difference to the balance of forces.

We have to move away simply from encouraging whites to refuse to serve in the SADF, to getting them actively involved in the SADF for purposes of clandestinely organising and agitating from within, no matter how difficult such a task may appear to be. In a lecture on the 1905 Revolution, Lenin remarked that "it is foolish peacefully to refuse to perform military service". It is necessary to struggle to win over or neutralise the enemy forces, for revolutionary movements seldom achieve their objectives unless they can convert or weaken the spirit of the soldiers whose duty it is to uphold the existing regime.

4. THE UNDERGROUND AND THE REVOLUTIONARY ARMY

Prior to the Rivonia setback, when we had a strong underground network at home, the idea was that trained MK cadres, returning to the country, would be received by and fall under that structure. The logical development of a Revolutionary Army based on that underground would have resulted. The underground would have carried out the all-essential political tasks of organising the masses, building mass democratic, trade union and underground structures, developing illegal means of propaganda, engaging in all-round vanguard activity. The underground would have been the backbone of our Revolutionary forces and Army, recruited for it and given it leadership. Such an underground would have been clear about the use of revolutionary violence in which MK is the main striking force. After all it was the underground that created MK!

The intervening years have seen many problems building up. The lack of such an underground at home and the presence of a large guerrilla force outside the country, waiting to come to the defence of the people and punish the enemy, has, I feel, clouded our vision. In the most pragmatic sense the need to deploy MK cadres at home for combat work could not wait on the reconstruction of our internal underground. In the process this has helped to create a serious imbalance between our political and military structures. It has not been possible to suspend combat actions and concentrate on the building of the underground network, although it could be argued that greater talent, energy and resources should have been put into redressing this balance. For it is an incontrovertible point that a strong underground presence at home would help solve all the problems we face.

The reality, however, is that such an underground scarcely exists. We are not talking about a few score units and operatives able to partially influence the mass democratic movement. We are talking about an underground that can bring the masses into action, that can work for a nationwide general strike, that can help

build and lead the revolutionary armed forces.

Where an underground structure does not exist, or only partly exists, we must build both the underground structures and the Revolutionary Army. Such a structure must be capable of organising our people for political work and combat work. For this purpose we must use the best MK cadres as organisers. There is no need to have an artificial division between political work and combat work as long as we follow the principle that the ANC gives leadership to MK and that the Movement's structures control the Revolutionary Army.

At present we have incomplete structures, anyway. We have politico-military structures at our national headquarters and at regional command levels. These have to be developed at city, district and rural area levels at home. In order to overcome the lack of an underground base we ought to concentrate on creating local committees at these levels. We must concentrate our effort at those localities where the mass struggles have been the fiercest. The political underground and combat forces will grow side by side, with the combat forces of course falling under the leadership of the local Politico-Military Committee. Attention will be paid to all forms of struggle with the activists and combatants ready to show the masses how to raise the struggle to the higher forms of armed struggle. The Politico-Military committees must ensure against both 'leftist' and 'opportunist' tendencies, i.e. against employing purely military or purely peaceful/legal forms of struggle.

The creation of these local underground bases will not only assist in the building of the Revolutionary Army, but will help to overcome the problems bogging us down at HQ. A network of local FHCS, with the responsibility to deal with tactical questions and other details, will bring to an end the myriad of links to Lusaka, the weak communication lines open to enemy penetration, the mass of paperwork and unnecessary reports, the complicated structures, the parallelism

and separatism of departments, the squandering of resources. It will end the problem of leaders overloaded with too much detailed work and free them to strategise, plan, direct, check and to organise support, reinforcement and resources.

Such local structures must be built from the bottom up using our most talented and experienced cadres - from local to city to regional to provincial committees. Communication must be organised from the top (i.e. Lusaka) down. In time we would require only four lines of communication - from Lusaka to the provincial PMCs.

True, the idea of PMCs has been tossed about for some time. But what is needed is a big shake-up in our approach from the top. We need to be frank, open and courageous. 'Perestroika' is fashionable nowadays. It is all about changing structures that do not work! He must avoid becoming like a factory with workers and managers who seem busy but do not produce the goods - only paper!

5. THE REVOLUTIONARY ARMY AND INSURRECTION

During the process of developing the Revolutionary Army, we build our combat units, mercilessly attack the enemy forces, concentrate on eliminating his personnel which he cannot replenish and which is his Achilles' heel, demoralise his forces and all the time gather our own strength. Let develop from a nucleus to a fully-fledged People's Army waging a People's War.

As to which of the components of the Revolutionary Army will give us the best results, the likely force, given South Africa's industrial base, will in all probability be the underground combat units based in the factories and townships - the very forces that have reminded us these past years of our people's industrial and urban insurrectionary strength.

Although the fierce repression unleashed by the enemy appears at the moment to have turned the tide of resistance of the past few years, we must bear in mind that mass resistance comes in waves. The struggle ebbs and flows. The people have learnt a great deal about their potential strength in this period. We must prepare our forces and means so that when the next waves of mass struggle rise to again batter the Apartheid system we must ensure that the armed struggle coincides with and reinforces the high tide of resistance. And the nature of the revolutionary situation that still persists in our country is such that the next waves of struggle will surely reach higher peaks than ever hitherto witnessed. As indicated earlier on, building the Revolutionary Army is the key to creating the subjective conditions of a revolutionary situation. As the forces and means of our revolution become more powerful, so the possibilities of seizing power will materialise.

How will power be seized? We cannot say exactly, but we must have a developed strategy. Yet in our policy documents and official statements surprisingly little guidance is given. One is left with the impression that a combination of mass struggle, strikes and armed blows will somehow create so much pressure on the regime that it will collapse and our Movement will take power. The impression is also created that such a situation might come about through some form of negotiation.

While there have been some lively debates and articles written about the role of insurrection, sometimes counterpoised to protracted guerrilla struggle or seen as a culmination of guerrilla struggle, no conclusions have yet been drawn in our strategy documents.

I stated at the outset that we need a clear vision of how power may be seized if we are to sort out our organisational problems and structures, as well as

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motivate our cadres. Because structures must be geared to the strategy of seizing power, and that means not only leadership organs but structures at the grass roots.

An Armed Uprising or Insurrection has always been considered by revolutionaries as the main way to seize power. The onset of guerrilla struggles in colonially dominated countries from the 1950's on, usually resulting in negotiations and national independence, has perhaps created the impression that Insurrection is nowadays something far-removed from the realm of possibility. Tom Lodge, in assessing the ANC's military potential in Work In Progress 50/51, writes that guerrilla insurgency's "importance will remain chiefly psychological", that "the probabilities are against a military based seizure of power". He is wrong of course, but can be excused because we have given him no cause to assume otherwise.

Of course we do not dogmatically claim that the seizure of power from one group by another must entail violence. History shows that a peaceful way is possible. But what is necessary to both - whether violent or peaceful - is the presence of the Revolutionary Army. The ruling class or group will never give up power voluntarily. If the ruling power in South Africa ever reaches a stage where they are hopelessly divided and are forced to negotiate, it will only be in the circumstance of a major crisis from which there is no other escape, and because of the presence of a Revolutionary Army.

On the other hand the possibility of a national armed uprising of all our people can only be open to us if we have the necessary forces and means to carry out the Insurrection. Every revolution which must depend for its ultimate success upon popular support demands an active revolutionary situation before insurrection can be safely launched. It also needs a movement which has the forces and means powerful enough to overthrow the existing order.

Insurrection is an open armed action taken by certain classes or social forces against the existing political power. It is the highest stage in the revolutionary process - the culmination of the objective and subjective factors into a decisive moment which, if the revolutionary forces are properly guided, leads to the seizure of power.

A successful insurrection requires necessary planning and preparation. Among these preparations are: the presence of a political underground; the presence of the Revolutionary Army; and work within the enemy forces to weaken their effective capacity.

The events of the last three years in our country, more particularly the fighting mood and spirit of our people and the strength of the working class and urban masses, together with the rising spirit in the countryside, has reminded us of the insurrectionary energy of our people. The gathering of our forces so that the subjective elements of our revolution are strengthened may be protracted or more rapid than we imagine; If we take advantage of the favourable conditions and are clear as to what organs we need to create, then it may take a much shorter time than we imagine. Building the Revolutionary Army, and with it the underground, with the insurrectionary seizure of power in mind, is an objective which can be achieved by planned, purposeful organisational work in a relatively short period of time (such as five years) where the conditions are favourable and where the Revolutionary Army is waging the war. One final point. The Revolutionary Army is not only the organ for building up the revolutionary forces and for seizing power, but it becomes the organ for defending and guaranteeing the revolution. If power came prematurely, through some negotiated formula imposed by circumstances beyond our control, and we had no Revolutionary Army at our disposal, we would find our people cheated of real

power. So whatever way we look at it, our most crucial task is the creation of a Revolutionary Army.

NOTE: The plan and method of creating the Revolutionary Army and preparing it for the seizure of power is called Military and Combat Work, or simply MCW. Military Work is the task of undermining the Enemy Forces from within. Combat Wbrk is the building of the combat forces of the revolution. MCW should not be confused with Secrecy - the techniques of underground work - which is an essential tool for the implementation of MCW.

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