

'There is no threat from the Eastern Bloc'¹



By Vladimir Shubin with Marina Traikova

Introduction

Relations between the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) or Russia and its allies in Eastern Europe and the liberation movement in South Africa have been the subject of research by many academics, as well as an issue for official statements and speculation in the press. Unfortunately, too often their content has been obscured and distorted. Quite a number of publications in South Africa and in the West claim that the African National Congress (ANC) was playing the role of the Soviet 'proxy' or 'task force' during its liberation struggle.² For example, in their book *Comrades against Apartheid* relying to a large extent on information supplied by spies and traitors, Stephen Ellis and co-author 'Tsepo Sechaba' got themselves (as well as poorly informed readers) into trouble by claiming that 'the Freedom Charter was sent to Moscow Africa Institute for approval'.³ The institute had nothing to do with it: it was established in June 1959, four years after the Freedom Charter had been adopted.

This chapter is primarily an attempt to assess the attitude of the USSR/Russia to the ANC in the three decades that the organisation was banned, especially the period of profound changes in the two countries. As for the other East European countries, Bulgaria has been chosen as a case study, because Bulgaria's relations with the South African liberation movement are undergoing thorough review by Marina Traikova, a Bulgarian citizen who worked in the archives of that country.

1 From an ANC song sung in exile.

2 See, for example, K. Campbell, *The ANC: Soviet Task Force?* (London: Institute of Strategic Studies, 1988).

3 S. Ellis and T. Sechaba, *Comrades against Apartheid. The ANC and South African Communist Party in Exile* (London, Bloomington and Indianapolis: James Currey and Indiana University Press, 1992), 27.

'You know better'

A great deal has been said and written about the negative effects of the links between the Soviet Union and the South African liberation movement. For instance, at a recent conference in London, astonishingly an activist of the Treatment Action Campaign linked the current policy of the South African government on HIV with Joseph Stalin and so-called Stalinism. Such features of Soviet society as the cult of personality, dogmatism, and the lack of broad discussions before taking crucial decisions were not the best to emulate. But even if there was some 'borrowing' of these practices, its influence was insignificant. Undoubtedly, it was outweighed by the positive effect of the ANC's co-operation with the Soviet Union.

Interaction between Russia and southern Africa goes back to the late 19th century: the Anglo-Boer war is significant here. Its importance for Russia can be seen from the order given by the war minister, Lieutenant General Kuropatkin on 30 November 1899:

To the General Staff

Today it was ordered at the most highest level [by Emperor Nicholas the Second]: all reports by Colonel Stakhovich [Russian military agent on the British side] from the Transvaal are to be immediately delivered to [the] Sovereign in [the] original by State messengers, specially appointed for this purpose.⁴

This intense interest of the Russian authorities, shared by the public, in developments 10 000 km from Russia was aroused by human sympathy for the weaker side, typical of the Russian mentality. However, a 'love of Boers' also originated from a strong aversion to Britain; the war in South Africa began when Russian-British rivalry in several areas of the world, especially Central Asia, was high.

The establishment of diplomatic relations between Russia and the South African Republic (ZAR), and the opening of a Russian consulate in Pretoria or Johannesburg was put on the agenda well before the war. This happened in March 1897, after the Tsar gave the instruction to the Foreign Ministry because of the 'ever growing importance of the African continent for the peoples of Europe and important political questions, related to the colonisation, of this part of the world'.⁵ By that time, between 7 000 and 8 000 Russian subjects, mostly of Jewish origin, had settled in the Transvaal. The 'important political role' of the ZAR became evident after the failure of Dr Jameson's raid, and the Russian government 'found it necessary ... to counter the desire of Englishmen to acquire a predominant influence in Southern Africa', and therefore to

4 The Russian State Archives of Military History (hereafter RSAMiH): 488, file 1451/69.

5 Central State Archive of History St Petersburg (hereafter CSAH): 565, inventory 8 (1897), file 2932. Cited in *Rossiya i Afrika. Dokumenty i Materialy XVIII – 1960 g. t.I. Institut vseobshchei istorii RAN*. (Russia and Africa. Documents 18th century – 1960), vol.1 (Moscow: Institute of General History, Russian Academy of Sciences, 1999), 73-74.

accept a proposition by the ZAR envoy in Paris through the French Foreign Ministry.⁶ In September 1898, the Tsar agreed to the appointment of Dr Leyds, a South African of Dutch origin, as ZAR envoy to Russia. In December 1898 he presented his credentials to Nicolas II.⁷ Almost simultaneously, just prior to the arrival of the envoy from St Petersburg, Adolph Von Gernet, a Russian citizen resident in the ZAR, was appointed Russian vice-consul in Johannesburg.⁸

Apart from official military agents ('attachés' in modern terms) and a medical team, about 200 Russian volunteers (many of them officers in reserve or retired) went to South Africa to fight on the side of the Afrikaner republics. The history of their involvement is beyond the framework of this chapter. What is important is that sympathy for the Afrikaners was typical of Russian society and many people became aware of events in distant South Africa for the first time.

The next stage of Russian-South African relations began after the 1917 Bolshevik revolution. For almost two decades afterwards, they were maintained mostly through the Communist International (Comintern), which initially had its headquarters in Petrograd (St Petersburg) and then Moscow. In 1921 the newly established Communist Party of South Africa (CPSA) became a member of this organisation.

The first black secretary of the CPSA, Albert Nzula, was the first African from South Africa who not only visited the Soviet Union, but spent quite a long time there, working in the Profintern (communist-controlled international trade union organisation). Before his death in Moscow in 1934, under the pen name of Tom Jackson, he co-authored a book on African workers in his country with two prominent Soviet scholars of Africa, Ivan Potekhin and Alexander Zusmanovich.

However, contacts between the South African anti-racist forces and Moscow were not limited to Comintern channels. The ANC president Josiah Gumede visited the Soviet Union (Russia and Georgia) in November and December 1927 as the guest of the All-Union Society of Cultural Ties with Foreign Countries (VOKS). After his return to South Africa, he is reported to have said that he had been 'to the new Jerusalem'.⁹

A new stage of Russian (Soviet)-South African relations began during World War II, when the two countries became allies in the struggle against Nazi Germany. In 1942, the Soviet consulate was opened in Pretoria with a branch in Cape Town. Until they were closed at the request of the National Party government in 1956, they naturally maintained contact with the CPSA (until its banning in 1950) and the Congress Movement. But those contacts did not serve as a channel for communication between South African political organisations and the ruling Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU).

6 Ibid.

7 Archive of Foreign Policy of the Russian Empire (hereafter AFPRE): 155, inventory 929, file 3. Cited in, G. Shubin, N. Voropaeva and R. Vyatkina, *Anglo-Burskaya voina, 1899-1902* (Anglo-Boer War, 1899-1902) (Moscow: Vostochnaya Literatura, 2001), 27.

8 AFPRE: 155, inventory 929, file 2. Cited in G. Shubin et al., *Anglo-Burskaya voina 1899-1902*, 26-27.

9 M. Sivogarakov, 'The first visits of the ANC leaders to the USSR', in P. Eidelberg and V. Shubin (eds.), *Southern Africa on the Threshold of the Third Millennium* (Moscow: Institute for African Studies, 2001), 118.

Indeed, the CPSU archives do not contain any record of bilateral relations before 1960 between the Soviet Communist Party and the Communist Party in South Africa, which had been revived in 1953 under illegal conditions and renamed the South African Communist Party (SACP). Nevertheless, some prominent members of the SACP visited Moscow in that period. The first South African communists to visit the USSR after World War II were Brian and Sonia Bunting, who arrived in March 1954 as the guests of the VOKS 'to get acquainted with life in the Soviet Union'.¹⁰ They were followed soon afterwards by Ruth First, who was a guest of the Anti-Fascist Committee of Soviet Women.¹¹ Declassified archive documents do not confirm any inter-party contacts during these visits; they do not even mention the SACP's existence. Discussions with Brian and Sonia Bunting confirm that those trips were not part of a resumption of inter-party relations.¹²

The only exception, to some extent, was Sam Kahn, former communist member of parliament (MP), who was elected to parliament by African voters. He is referred to in the archive documents as 'a progressive figure of the Union of South Africa, who is at present in England'. Kahn mentioned his wish 'to discuss matters concerning the work of the Communist Party' before travelling to the USSR.¹³ However, he could not be regarded as an envoy of the SACP, because he had not participated in efforts to rebuild the Party underground and no official meeting with CPSU representatives took place.

As far as direct contacts with the ANC are concerned, Gumede's visit was an exception. The next visit by ANC leaders to the USSR happened almost three decades after this trip. Walter Sisulu, then the ANC secretary-general, and Duma Nokwe, president of the ANC Youth League, spent a few days in the USSR after participating in the World Youth and Student Festival in Bucharest in 1953 (though Sisulu was over 40 years old). They spent several weeks in the USSR before proceeding to Beijing and then to South Africa. They crossed through Central Russia, the Urals and Siberia by train and then visited Azerbaijan.¹⁴

The circumstances of this trip are indicative of the contradictory attitude to the Soviet Union in the ranks of the ANC. Moses Kotane did not openly oppose the trip, but was not in its favour, because he felt that Sisulu, as the secretary-general of the ANC, 'would open himself to all kinds of criticism by visiting a Communist country'.¹⁵ When Nelson Mandela (in Sisulu's absence) reported on the plans of the trip at a National Working Committee meeting, the ANC president Albert Luthuli did not object to it, but later claimed that he had not been informed.¹⁶ Sisulu was in London, on his way back to South Africa, when Colin Legum, a journalist and

10 Russian State Archive of Modern History (hereafter RSAMH): Minutes of the Secretariat of the CPSU Central Committee, no. 54/341g, 27 March 1954.

11 RSAMH: Minutes of the Secretariat, no. 59/333gs, 4 June 1954.

12 Discussion with B. and S. Bunting, Cape Town, 20 May 1993.

13 RSAMH: Minutes of the Secretariat, no. 54/1433g, 27 March 1954.

14 Discussion with W. Sisulu, Moscow, 1 December 1990; Sivograkov, 'First visits of the ANC leaders to the Soviet Union', 119-121; Elinor Sisulu, *Walter and Albertina Sisulu: In Our Life Time* (Claremont: David Philip, 2002), 108-113.

15 Sisulu, *Walter and Albertina Sisulu*, 108.

16 *Ibid.*

former member of the South African Labour Party who had just returned from South Africa, informed him that there was 'great hostility to his trip' and that Sisulu would hardly be expected to retain his position in the ANC¹⁷ (just as Gumede had lost his). Indeed, dissatisfaction towards the trip to the USSR was expressed at the next annual conference of the ANC. However, a motion of no confidence in Sisulu was defeated.¹⁸ Moreover, Sisulu and Nokwe's trip to socialist countries no doubt influenced their later decision to join the SACP.

In 1955 two prominent black South African women – Lilian Ngoyi (president of the ANC Women's League) and Dora Tamana (national secretary of the Federation of South African Women and a Communist Party member) – were invited to the USSR on the initiative of Helen Joseph. In Geneva, at the session of the International Federation of Democratic Women, Joseph passed to Soviet delegates a letter to the Anti-Fascist Committee of Soviet Women, recommending the invitation to her African friends.¹⁹ However, this visit did not develop into a regular bilateral relationship either.

These examples show that the widespread perception that the friendly relations between the USSR and the liberation forces were conditioned by the ANC's alliance (informal as it was at that time) with the SACP is largely incorrect. It has certain validity, but only in the short period from 1960, after the restoration of the ties between the Soviet and South African communist parties that had been severed after the beginning of World War II and the subsequent dissolution of the Comintern.

The second half of the 1950s witnessed a change in Soviet policy to the south. Initially, wide-ranging relations were developed with a number of Asian countries. This process was symbolised by a lengthy tour by Nikita Khrushchev and Prime Minister Nikolay Bulganin to Afghanistan, India and Burma. Active contacts with African countries began with the expansion of political, economic and military ties with Egypt, followed by the establishment of friendly relations with newly independent Ghana and Guinea. 'Khrushchev's Russia' was ready to back every movement against imperialist domination in the Afro-Asian world.

This policy, no doubt, enjoyed support from the Soviet public, educated for decades in the spirit of internationalism and peoples' friendship. Eva Nzaro, former Tanzanian ambassador to Moscow, who studied at Leningrad State University in the 1960s, recalled: 'Then, they [the Soviets] carried us, Africans, literally on their shoulders. They would give free seats in public transport for us, make us jump queues, shared all kinds of goods if they were in shortage.'²⁰

For many years, Paul Robeson, a famous African-American singer and actor, was a symbol of a black man, strong and gentle, in the USSR. South Africa became familiar to millions of Soviets (perhaps accidentally) because the book *Path of Thunder* by Peter Abrahams, apparently regarded as 'politically correct', became a prescribed

17 Ibid., 113.

18 Ibid., 114.

19 RSAMH: Minutes of the Secretariat, no. 79/160g, 7 June 1955.

20 Eva Nzaro, cited in Balezin, A. *Po Afrike v poiskah Rossii. Putevye zametki istorika*. (In Africa in search of Russia: notes of a travelling historian) (Moscow: Institut vseobshchei istorii, 2004), 114.

text (sometimes in an adapted form) for everyone who studied English in the Soviet Union.

However, at that stage the remote country was not a priority for Moscow's foreign policy makers. In addition, their knowledge of South African realities was limited, especially after the closure of the Soviet diplomatic mission there. The only comprehensive book on the country, *Union of South Africa after World War II*,²¹ was published in 1952, followed by the more ethnographic *Formation of National Identity of South African Bantu*.²²

This lack of knowledge of South Africa was also evident on the eve of the ANC's 1959 conference (the last to be held before it was banned), when the Afro-Asian Solidarity Secretariat (later Afro-Asian Solidarity Organisation (AAPSO)) in Cairo sent a circular letter to all of its committees requesting that a message of greetings be conveyed to the ANC. The Soviet member organisation – the Afro-Asian Solidarity Committee – had to ask the African Department of the Institute of Oriental Studies for information on the ANC. A young researcher by the name of Appolon Davidson²³ drafted a short but complimentary paper on the ANC.²⁴ The African Department had been created in 1956, and became a nucleus for the Africa Institute three years later.

The events of 1960 – the Sharpeville massacre on 21 March, the banning of the ANC and the Pan-Africanist Congress on 8 April and the repressions that followed – drew the attention of the whole world to South Africa. The resumption of contacts between the USSR and anti-apartheid forces was facilitated by the departure of several of their leaders, including ANC deputy president Oliver Tambo and SACP chairman Yusuf Dadoo, who was also a prominent leader of the South African Indian Congress (SAIC) and the Congress Alliance.

The first step in building regular relations between the USSR and the SACP and Congress Alliance occurred when Yusuf Dadoo and Vella Pillay, the Party's representative in Western Europe, visited Moscow in July 1960 and had meetings at the CPSU headquarters. Because there had been no significant prior relations between the SACP and CPSU, the request to receive the two leaders in Moscow was forwarded through John Gollan, the general secretary of the CP of Great Britain (CPGB), who also provided the South Africans with a letter of recommendation that was sent to the Central Committee (CC) of the CPSU. For many years, the British Party was a conduit between communist and other anti-colonial organisations in the former British Empire and socialist countries. It is significant that the 'Sub-Department of the British Empire', and thereafter the 'Section of Great Britain', in

21 I. Yastrebova, *YuAS posle vtoroi mirovoi voiny* (Union of South Africa after the Second World War) (Moscow: Izdatelstvo Akademii Nauk SSSR, 1952).

22 I. Potekhin, *Formirovanie natsionalnoi obshchnosti yuzhnoafrikanskikh Bantu* (Formation of the national identity of the South African Bantu) (Moscow: Izdatelstvo Akademii Nauk SSSR, 1955). Potekhin was later the director of the Africa Institute.

23 Now considered a patriarch of South Africa studies in Russia. He headed the Centre for Russian Studies at the University of Cape Town from 1994 to 1998.

24 Archive of the Soviet Afro-Asian Solidarity Committee, South African Collection (hereafter Archive of the SAASC, SAC). Unfortunately this collection, as distinct from other SAASC documents, in the State Archive of the Russian Federation, has not been categorised.

the Soviet Communist Party headquarters was responsible for South African affairs. It was only in late 1960 that a special Section of African Countries was formed in the International Department of the CPSUCC.

Dadoo and Pillay presented their Soviet counterparts with two memorandums on the 'Political Situation in the Union of South Africa'²⁵ and on 'The Situation in the South African Communist Party'.²⁶ These documents described the 'deep crisis' after Sharpeville and gave an analysis of the actions of the opposition forces. In particular, they emphasised that, in spite of arrests, the Party had continued its activity.²⁷

Another subject of discussion at the meeting in the International Department of the Central Committee was 'forms of fraternal assistance from the CPSU and workers' parties of the Socialist Countries'.²⁸ The SACP representatives underlined the economic constraints caused by declining donations after the introduction of the state of emergency, additional expenditure on assistance to the ANC Emergency Committee and expenses related to maintaining the families of detainees.²⁹ This situation was apparently well understood by the Soviets: by the end of 1960 the SACP was allocated US\$30 000 from the so-called International Trade Union Fund for Assistance to Left Workers Organisations, then attached to the Romanian Council of Trade Unions.³⁰ As a matter of mutual trust, the SACP and other friendly parties have never been asked to account for these donations. Yusuf Dadoo later stated: 'We have open honest discussions as between Communists, and the Soviet comrades have never insisted on this or that line.'³¹

Yusuf Dadoo visited Moscow once again at the end of 1960, this time accompanied by Michael Harmel, a leading SACP theoretician, Joe Matthews, a prominent member of the SACP and ANC, and Vella Pillay. (Harmel and Matthews arrived in Moscow directly from South Africa.) They were members of the delegation that took part in the International Meeting of the Communist and Workers' Parties. Joe Matthews, the only African in the group, was the first to speak at the meeting on behalf of the SACP, followed by Michael Harmel.

This meeting took place when Soviet-Chinese relations were on the decline. However, the SACP delegation were happy with the outcome of the meeting: the joint documents were approved by the Chinese and the Soviets. In the first report by the delegation, published in the *SACP Bulletin*, its leaders were satisfied with 'the

25 Y. Dadoo and V. Pillay, 'The Political Situation in the Union of South Africa', unpublished document.

26 *Ibid.*

27 *Ibid.*, 4.

28 *Ibid.*, 6.

29 *Ibid.*, 4.

30 RSAMH: 89, inventory 38, file 3, p.6. Head of the CPSU CC International Department (B.N. Ponomarev's) report on application of the International Trade Union Fund for Assistance to Left Workers' Organisations attached to the Romanian Council of Trade Unions, 2 November 1960. Moscow's contributions to the fund constituted about half of the total sum. A CPSU Politbureau decision on the distribution of financial assistance for 1963 specifically entrusted 'Com. Semichastny [KGB Chairman] to ensure that while transferring the [financial] means it should be advised that assistance is rendered from the International Trade Union Fund' (RSAMH: Decision of CPSU CC Politbureau P 76/XXXVI, 7 January 1963).

31 Mayibuye Centre, Historical Papers, Yusuf Dadoo Collection: (hereafter MCHP, YDC), E. Pahad, 'Dadoo. A political biography', 211.

development of world Communist Unity'. Having acknowledged that the leaders of the Chinese Party 'apparently differ in view from the majority of the Communist Parties', it nevertheless believed that 'the very controversial nature of the Chinese contribution to [the debate] has also served a valuable purpose'.³²

For several years, while Soviet-Chinese relations deteriorated and when the split became public, the position of the SACP (and the ANC) was to avoid criticising Beijing in order 'not to inflame the differences'.³³ Oliver Tambo later said:

I recall he [Moses Kotane] addressed our cadres in Kongwa [in Tanzania] at one time. It was over the Sino-Soviet dispute that was being debated there and developed into conflicts ... and he was saying, very correctly, that we as comrades should not get involved in this; that this camp was the ANC camp and everybody belonged together there.³⁴

On another occasion he characterised the relations with Beijing in such a way:

I think that in the 1960s and early 1970s this [the Sino-Soviet conflict] was a factor but in 1975 we resolved that question. The Chinese accepted the fact that we have nothing against the Soviet Union, that the Soviets were close friends of ours, and that friendship with anyone else was not condition(al) upon our weakening of relations with the Soviet Union.³⁵

The ANC leadership preferred not to take sides, even when China stopped helping the organisation and began actively supporting the PAC.

The SACP delegation twice had discussions with Nuretdin Mukhitdinov, who was now the secretary of the CC and member of the Presidium (the highest Party body, later called the Politbureau). The South Africans described the situation in their country, outlined plans to convene a SACP conference underground (it took place in December 1960), and discussed ways of sending political literature.

The boycott of South African goods received special attention. The SACP delegation was concerned about the inaction in the World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU), headed by communists, particularly when compared with the active stand of the 'pro-Western' International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU). Yusuf Dadoo had raised this issue in July. He (too optimistically) expected speedy results from the campaign in Western countries to isolate South Africa and was concerned that the Soviet Union and its allies in Eastern Europe would replace them as South Africa's major trade partners. For Moscow, the problem was not so much possible economic losses (bilateral trade was very limited), but that the boycott could undermine Moscow's policy of 'trade with all countries', advocated in response to the embargo placed on the USSR by the US and other major Western states after the beginning of the Cold War.

32 *Bulletin*, no. 2, 2.

33 MCHP, YDC: Pahad and Dadoo, 'A political biography', 218.

34 MCHP: Brian Bunting Collection, Interview with O. Tambo (typed) October 1973.

35 O. Tambo, *Preparing for Power: Oliver Tambo Speaks* (London: Heinemann, 1987), 180.

The South Africans were worried by reports of the sale of South African wool to the USSR, used by Pretoria in its propaganda to subvert the boycott movement. Their Soviet counterpart explained that the wool, bought in London, was claimed to be of Australian origin. He assured Dadoo and his colleagues that Soviet organisations had stopped signing contracts with South African companies in November 1960 and no longer responded to their proposals. Thus, the Soviet Union had curtailed economic ties with South Africa before the passing of the United Nations (UN) resolution, adopted in 1962, and this made it possible for the SACP to state that the USSR 'imposed a full trade embargo at the request of the South African liberation movement'.³⁶

A special case involved co-operation with De Beers. Soviet organisations were instructed to stop dealing with De Beers and to find alternative ways of selling their diamonds. Indeed, De Beers' chair, Harry Oppenheimer, noted in the company's 1963 annual report that 'on account of Russian support for the boycotting of trade with South Africa, our contract to buy Russian diamonds has not been renewed'.³⁷ The CPSU International Department received a note informing it that an alternative buyer had been found in London. However, it later became clear that the Central Selling Organisation, which was registered as British, was controlled by De Beers. Moreover, participants in the deal had apparently known about this from the beginning, and the note, and this was a 'cover-up' arranged by them. Nevertheless, strictly speaking, selling Soviet diamonds through this organisation did not constitute trade relations with South Africa.

The discussions in Moscow in 1960 also led to an arrangement to beam radio programmes from Moscow to South Africa, initially in English and some years later in Zulu. Many years later Blade Nzimande, the SACP general secretary, related how, when he was still a student, he was trying to tune in to the ANC's Radio Freedom and suddenly came across another station broadcasting a Zimbabwean liberation song. It was the African Service of Radio Moscow broadcasting in Zulu.

Yusuf Dadoo's next visit to Moscow, this time with Moses Kotane, began in October 1961. Kotane was not a newcomer to Moscow; he had studied there in 1931–1932 and had taken part in the discussion on the situation in the CPSA in the Comintern in 1936.³⁸ However, most of the people who dealt with him in 1961 belonged to another generation. In CPSU papers his name was initially spelled in Russian as 'Kotein', according to the rules of English. However, some Comintern records of his past survived for a quarter of a century.

Kotane and Dadoo visited Moscow as guests of the 22nd CPSU Congress, but on 21 October 1961, before it began, they had a discussion in the CPSU headquarters with Vitaly Korionov, deputy head of the International Department. At that meeting, for the first time the South Africans touched on the possibility of using violence in

36 *The African Communist*, no. 16, 1964, 46.

37 Quoted in K. Campbell, *Soviet Policy Towards South Africa* (Basingstoke: Macmillan 1986), 102.

38 *Ibid.*, 73–74; V. Gorodnov and A. Davidson (eds), *Komintern i Afrika: Dokumenty* (Comintern and Africa: Documents) (St. Petersburg: Aleteya, 2003), 268–269.

their struggle against the Pretoria regime. By that time, the SACP had created a special sub-committee whose task was to elaborate practical steps on training cadres for sabotage. Kotane and Dadoo also informed Korionov that the first group of six activists were already on their way to China for military training.³⁹ Although the Sino-Soviet conflict was merely simmering, this news was not well received in Moscow. However, Korionov explained to the South Africans that Khrushchev's doctrine on a peaceful transition to socialism did not preclude the use of the armed struggle when other ways were blocked.

The discussion continued after the congress and, according to a CPSU CC decision,⁴⁰ Kotane and Dadoo met on 18 November with Boris Ponomarev, the newly elected international secretary. Ponomarev took the lead in relations with the SACP and ANC for the next 25 years. Among the issues discussed at this meeting, two were most important: the degree of openness of the Party, and the use of violence. The SACP delegation handed a document titled 'Notes on Some Aspects of the Political Situation in the Republic of South Africa', signed by Moses Kotane, to the officials of the International Department. In this document and in his oral presentation Kotane spoke cautiously about the need to use 'some elements of violence' during future mass struggle, 'such as picketing and breaking of communications'⁴¹ and asked the CPSU Central Committee to express its opinion on the correctness of such a course.

Ponomarev was cautious in his response. He promised Kotane and Dadoo that 'the [official] opinion of the Central Committee would be conveyed to them later on the question of their tactics on a new stage of struggle', and meanwhile clarified 'the Marxist Leninist doctrine on the combination of all forms of struggle'. He also said that the USSR 'would be able to render the SACP possible assistance using for this in particular the facilities in some friendly African countries, for example in Guinea and Ghana'.⁴²

Ponomarev reported this issue to the CPSU's top leadership. Four days later the secretariat endorsed a reply to the SACP, drafted by the officials of the International Department under Ponomarev:

Taking into account the situation [in South Africa] we agree with the opinion expressed by comrades Kotane and Dadoo. At the same time, the intention of the SACP to take a course of armed forms of struggle places on the Party great responsibility. It is necessary not to counterpoise one form of struggle with the others but to combine skilfully all these forms. The armed struggle is a struggle of the broad peoples' masses. It means that in the conditions of the preparation for the armed struggle the political work to win the masses acquires decisive importance. Without consistent political

39 Kotane did not mention that MK would begin operations on 16 December 1961, two months later.

40 RSAMH: Minutes of the Secretariat, no. 1/3g, 2 November 1961.

41 M. Kotane, 'Notes on some aspects of the political situation in the Republic of South Africa', 9 November 1961 (Moscow), 12. Typescript in author's possession.

42 RSAMH: Decisions taken on the instruction of the Secretaries of the CPSU Central Committee without recording in the minutes, no. 478, 28 November 1961.

and organisational work among the masses, victory is impossible. The winning of the masses to your side and preparation for the armed struggle are two sides of the same question. Both these tasks should be accomplished in close interconnection.⁴³

'Certain assistance' was also promised in the training of instructors.⁴⁴ This official reply was conveyed to the SACP general secretary, who stayed in the USSR for some time after 16 December, when Umkhonto we Sizwe carried out its first operations. A hand-written confirmation of this was made in the document by Petr Manchkha, who headed the CPSU African Section for over 20 years.⁴⁵

Ponomarev expressed the opinion that a mass Party would be needed when the 'social battles' began, but for the time being supported a cautious approach to the recruitment of new SACP members. He thought that communists should inform people of the SACP's existence, even if they concentrated on working in mass organisations. Thus, the declassified documents of the CPSU archives confirm that far from instigating the armed struggle in South Africa, Moscow respected the decision taken by the South Africans, but warned them against placing too much emphasis on armed forms of struggle at the expense of political ones. However, one detail demonstrates the limited interaction between Moscow and the ANC at the time, and perhaps even the lack of understanding of the ANC's role: Kotane wrote about the SACP's co-operation with the ANC in his paper, but the ANC was not mentioned in Ponomarev's *zapiska*.

The year 1961 witnessed the beginning of bilateral co-operation in the field of education. Vella Pillay made an urgent request for Moscow to receive ten South African students for academic training and to cover their travel expenses from Johannesburg to Moscow. They had been 'expelled [from universities] for their political activities, especially for organisation of the [general] strike in May', and were under threat of being detained and banished.⁴⁶ This request was met on 16 September 1961 by the CPSU CC's Commission on Questions of Ideology, Culture and International Party Ties,⁴⁷ and nine South Africans travelled to Moscow to study. Unfortunately, they arrived in the Soviet Union in February 1962, while the academic year had begun in September. However, they managed to complete the preparatory (mostly Russian language) course in Kiev and then were sent for full university training at master's level in various Soviet cities. Thus, Anthony Mongalo, future ANC National Executive member and now current South African high commissioner to Australia, studied as an oil engineer in Baku, with Eduardo dos Santos, future president of Angola.⁴⁸

The broadening of Moscow's ties with foreign communist parties and liberation movements and the increase in requests for assistance led to the decision on 19

43 Ibid.

44 Ibid.

45 Ibid.

46 RSAMH: Minutes of the Commission on Questions of Ideology, Culture and International Party Ties, no. 59/69g, 16 September 1991.

47 Ibid.

48 Discussion with A. Mongalo, Cape Town, 3 June 1993.

December 1961 to re-establish the International Lenin School,⁴⁹ which had been closed in the late 1930s. The SACP was among 60 parties that were invited to send students there for political training in 1962,⁵⁰ and three people were sent initially: Ruth Mompati, Flag Boshielo and Alfred Kgotong.⁵¹ Ruth Mompati remained very active in the liberation movement, enjoying high prestige as a member of the ANC National Executive Committee, later as an MP, and then as ambassador to Switzerland. Now she is the mayor of Vryburg. Flag Boshielo, then known as William Marule or Magomane, disappeared while trying to return to South Africa. In April 2005 he was posthumously awarded the South African Order of Luthuli. A booklet published on this occasion stated: ‘His comrades were killed instantly in a shootout and it is believed that Boshielo was captured and incarcerated by Ian Smith’s forces in then Rhodesia. Boshielo has not been seen since.’⁵² Alfred Kgotong (his real name was Temba Mqota) was also in the highest echelons of the ANC and the Party. Unfortunately he joined the so-called Gang of Eight in the 1970s and was expelled from the ANC.

In December 1962, Moscow reacted positively to the SACP’s request to receive its representatives Arthur Goldreich and Vella Pillay for discussions.⁵³ Goldreich and Pillay met with Petr Manchkha. Arthur Goldreich recalled 30 years later that their discussions ‘were in a very practical sense influenced by the draft Operation Mayibuye plan’, though this does not mean that the implementation of the plan depended on their mission to Moscow. ‘The scope and scale of specific needs discussed in Moscow were of a very limited nature, though [they] covered issues of wider significance and touched upon possibilities for continued assistance.’⁵⁴

Like Dadoo and Kotane, Goldreich and Pillay had forwarded a memorandum to the Soviet delegation prior to the discussion. The memorandum was devoted mostly to plans for training MK personnel:

Negotiations are at present under way for the establishment of an all-South African training camp in friendly territory, where opportunities will exist for expanding the training programme both in scope and in effectiveness, by enabling recruits to be trained and supervised by designated representatives of UWS [Umkhonto we Sizwe] itself, rather than – as at present – by military personnel of other countries whose political orientation is not always identical with ours.⁵⁵

The camp was established in Tanzania a year later, though the initial number of trainees was very small. The difficulty of organising the training of large groups of fighters in independent African countries was confirmed during Mandela’s mission

49 RSAMH: Minutes of the Secretariat, no. 6/38g, 19 December 1961.

50 RSAMH: Minutes of the Secretariat, no. 16/13, 27 February 1962.

51 Discussion with R. Mompati, Johannesburg, 21 February 1993.

52 *Awards Ceremony for National Orders*. (Pretoria, 2005), 17. The booklet indicates that he was captured in 1972, but this is incorrect. He was captured far earlier.

53 RSAMH: Minutes of the Secretariat, no. 50/46g, 11 December 1962.

54 Arthur Goldreich to the author, 24 August 1993.

55 *Memorandum*, 3.

there in 1962, and a request to provide military training in the USSR (initially for a small group of 20) was forwarded to the CPSU.

In addition, so-called technical consultations with Soviet specialists were organised for Goldreich. This was probably the first Soviet assistance to Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK). Extracts from Goldreich's diary indicate that the Soviets were cautious in political and practical matters. When the South Africans suggested acquiring a ship to transport goods for Umkhonto (MK), the Soviets replied:

Transfer of armaments on high seas – difficult to speak of neutral waters. We realise with techniques used to-day, reloading, on high seas are located very quickly. And here when discovered – serious entanglement, particularly for us and comrades involved.⁵⁶

Moscow preferred to seek the support of independent African countries on this matter:

We [the Soviet Union] don't have any relations with Verwoerd Govt. in any way. So don't care what he say(s). Safest and surest way, transfer of arms through country where they have normal relations – Govt. agreement. Willingness of this government to us [the liberation movement]. Govt. gives us their armaments and Soviet compensates.⁵⁷

Goldreich and Pillay were received by Ponomarev, although they were not in the top echelons of the movement. However, this probably indicates not only Ponomarev's interest in South Africa, but also his concern about the actions of China in the growing conflict with Moscow. In Goldreich's words, their discussions 'developed into theoretical issues of the national liberation struggle' and 'the ideological dispute with China'. The subject was 'particularly expanded' on the delegation's way back from Beijing, where it had been received by Deng Xiaoping.⁵⁸

Thus, in the early 1960s, Moscow's support to the liberation struggle in South Africa was rendered mostly through the SACP. However, Moscow was undoubtedly interested in establishing regular contacts with the ANC. The first person to come to Moscow as an ANC representative after its banning, in May 1961, was probably Tennyson Makiwane. He left South Africa before Sharpeville and was resident in Accra and London. Like many Africans, he visited Moscow on his way to and from Beijing. During one discussion with the Soviet Afro-Asian Solidarity Committee, Makiwane described the situation in South Africa and activities of the ANC, having mentioned in confidence that he was a member of the SACP as well.⁵⁹

A year earlier, the USSR embassy in Athens had sent a summary of discussions with 'T. Makivein' (the Russian transcription of Makiwane) to the Solidarity Committee, describing him as a representative of a nationalist organisation from South West Africa.

56 Quoted in L. Strydom, *Rivonia Unmasked!* (Johannesburg: Voortrekker Pers, 1965), 113.

57 Ibid.

58 Arthur Goldreich to the author.

59 State Archive of the Russian Federation (hereafter SARF): collection 9540gs, inventory 2s, file 40, 68-76.

This was indicative of the lack of knowledge of the ANC among Soviet officials. That the embassy sent the copy of its report to the Soviet Afro-Asian Solidarity Committee was not accidental. The committee gave political and material support to various liberation movements on the two continents and in the early 1960s it became the most opportune channel for contacts with the ANC. Its premises in an old Moscow mansion (10 Kropotkina Street) became the major site for African freedom fighters for the next three decades.

This body, founded in 1956 as the Asian Solidarity Committee, was reorganised and expanded in 1958 after the first conference of AAPSO, in Cairo. It had a permanent representative at AAPSO in the Egyptian capital, where the ANC operated as well, initially under the South African United Front office and then under its own name. The ANC's representative was Mzwandile Piliso, a well-educated South African who had graduated in Edinburgh as a pharmacist and was working in Britain to earn enough money to open his own pharmacy in his native Eastern Cape. However, he met Oliver Tambo in 1960 and was persuaded to join the external mission of the ANC. Piliso was in daily contact with the Soviet Solidarity Committee in Cairo, especially with Latyp Maksudov.⁶⁰

In February 1962, Piliso sent a request to Moscow through the Soviet representative on the Solidarity Committee for rather modest financial assistance 'to the ANC delegation who were present at the conference of writers of Asian and African countries' in Cairo. Dmitry Dolidze, then the Solidarity Committee secretary-general, named the delegates as Oliver Tambo, Nelson Mandella (sic) and Robert Resh (sic) in his letter to the CPSUCC. He added that, 'taking into account that these persons are known progressive people and due to their positive attitude to us deserve necessary support', asked for permission to provide them with 100 roubles in foreign currency (equivalent to US\$111 in those days) 'from the limited fund of the Committee'.⁶¹ Permission was granted in the form of the CC Secretariat's decision 'on rendering assistance to the representatives of the African National Congress'.⁶² Judging from the sources, this was the first time that the Soviet Union had provided financial aid, limited as it was, directly to the ANC. However, the Soviet Union had provided indirect financial assistance to the ANC much earlier. Yusuf Dadoo had indicated to Soviet officials on one of his visits to Moscow in 1960 that the SACP was providing assistance to the ANC Emergency Committee during the state of emergency. No doubt, a substantial part of the allocation to the Party in 1960 and rapidly increasing allocations in the years to follow (US\$50 000 in 1961⁶³ and US\$112 445 in 1962⁶⁴) were spent on the needs of the ANC and MK.

60 A Pretoria agent, Gerard Ludi, who 'penetrated' Moscow in 1962, through the structures of the peace movement, boasted in his book about meeting Piliso, but referred to him as 'Paliso'.

61 SARF: collection 9540gs, inventory 2s, file 47, 20.

62 RSAMH: Decisions of the Secretariat, no. 17/37g, 10 March 1962.

63 RSAMH: 89, inventory 38, file 4/3-5, Head of the CPSU CC International Department B.N. Ponomarev's report on application of the International Trade Union Fund for Assistance to Left Workers' Organisations, 1 November 1961.

64 RSAMH: 89, inventory 38, file 5/5-6, Head of the CPSU CC International Department B.N. Ponomarev's report on application of the International Trade Union Fund for Assistance to Left Workers' Organisations, 3 January 1963.

In late 1961, the SACP made a request to the CPSU that Albert Luthuli and his wife be invited to Moscow when they travelled to receive the Nobel Peace Prize in Oslo in December 1961. This visit did not take place, probably because of short notice. By late 1962, direct contacts with the ANC were, in practice, facilitated by the opening of the Soviet Embassy in Dar es Salaam, capital of newly independent Tanganyika. It was through this embassy that an invitation was extended to Oliver Tambo, deputy president general and head of the Congress external mission, 'to come to the USSR at any time convenient for him'. The SACP was informed of the invitation through the British Communist Party.⁶⁵

The decision by the CC Secretariat on 22 December 1962 was very cautious: Tambo was to be formally invited by the Soviet Afro-Asian Solidarity Committee for a period of rest, though all practical arrangements were undertaken by the CPSU machinery. Tambo visited Moscow three months later, accompanied by Moses Kotane, who once again left South Africa illegally, this time for good, though he was initially supposed to return home. He was accompanied by Kotane, which indicates that Tambo's programme in Moscow was not merely for a 'rest'. However, Tambo was cautious. He was not in hurry to visit Moscow and went to the Soviet Union only after spending almost three years travelling to African and Western countries. When he arrived in Moscow, he tried to play down this delay, emphasising that the ANC had always regarded the Soviet Union as a close friend and supporter, and was confident that large-scale Soviet assistance would be forthcoming when urgently required.

Indeed, what made his visit to the USSR urgent was the lack of support to the liberation struggle from the West and independent African countries, though for different reasons. This lack of support was made clear in Nelson Mandela's notes during his travels abroad in 1962 and found later by the security police. During his extensive tour of African countries, just about £25 000 had been pledged. 'Money collecting is a job which requires a lot of time. You must be prepared to wait. Visit to socialist countries has become imperative,'⁶⁶ Mandela wrote in the conclusion under the title 'Funds' in his report.

Following the pattern set by earlier visits of SACP leaders, Tambo presented a memorandum explaining the situation in South Africa and the ANC needs to his Soviet counterparts. On 5 April 1963, he and Kotane had discussions in the CPSU headquarters with Boris Ponomarev, which signified the beginning of direct and regular contacts between the ANC and Moscow. Tambo used much more radical language than Kotane had done one and half years previously in his discussion with Ponomarev. The overthrow of the government by armed struggle was stated as a goal and immediate preparation for guerrilla warfare begun. During discussions in Moscow, he underlined the need for the urgent transfer overseas of ANC members for military training, because controls at the borders were intensifying, and emphasised that only a limited number of fighters could be trained 'at home'.

65 RSAMH: Minutes of the Secretariat, no. 52/10g, 22 December 1962.

66 Quoted in Strydom *Rivonia Unmasked!*, 108.

Joe Modise recalls: 'I think we sent one group to China; from then onwards we acquired most of our training from the Soviet Union.'⁶⁷ Apparently there were several reasons that the ANC and the SACP leadership made the request for this kind of assistance from the Soviet Union. Facilities in African countries were limited and the political situation was not always helpful. In Algeria for example the situation was unstable because of severe differences within the ruling Algerian Front for National Liberation (FLN). The Moroccan authorities demanded political references for trainees (perhaps worried about their 'communist connections'), and the Ethiopians even suggested using American servicemen stationed there to train the South Africans.

The ANC leadership (too optimistically) hoped that the vast territory of South Africa would enable its guerrillas to manoeuvre freely in the countryside, encircling cities, thus following the guerrilla strategies recommended by the Chinese to revolutionaries in other countries. Another view, expressed often at that stage, that also had to be corrected later was the exaggeration of the role of the liberation army in the struggle. The army was supposed to be subordinated to the ANC political leadership, but nonetheless it was expected to be 'the fighting force as well as a working force and an organiser of the ANC'.⁶⁸ However, Tambo strongly advocated political work among the masses and actions to boycott South Africa, consistent with the Soviet position expressed earlier to Kotane and Dadoo.

The ANC leadership also requested supplies of small arms and explosives, to be followed by heavy machine-guns, anti-tank and recoilless guns, anti-aircraft guns and other sophisticated weapons. Tambo informed the Soviets that £250 000 (a huge sum in 1963) was needed immediately by the ANC for internal work and its external mission, and that the ANC hoped to collect it from sources in Africa, Asia and Europe. He jokingly added that he would not mind if the whole amount were provided by Moscow. This did not happen, but the allocation in 1963 was very substantial: US\$300 000, covering over 40 per cent of the ANC's needs. From that year, regular financial assistance began to the ANC, separate from that given by the Soviets to the SACP. The Party no longer served as a conduit for funds, and the Soviet allocation to it in 1963 was reduced to US\$56 000.⁶⁹

This is not to say that the alliance with the SACP, informal as it was at that stage, was unimportant. Its general secretary, Moses Kotane, served as ANC treasurer-general for most of the 1960s, which no doubt influenced decision makers in Moscow. However, this alliance had never been a condition of Soviet assistance. Liberation struggles were supported in countries where no Communist parties existed, for example in Zimbabwe and Namibia.

The ANC leadership's requests were met favourably by the Soviets, although Ponomarev and other CPSU representatives again underlined the importance of

67 *Dawn*, December 1986 Souvenir Issue, 12.

68 *Our Immediate Task*. Internal ANC document, undated.

69 RSAMH: 89, inventory 38, file 6, 11-12. Head of the CPSU CC International Department B.N. Ponomarev's report on application of the International Trade Union Fund for Assistance to Left Workers' Organisations, 28 December 1963. These sums were allocated in cash, apart from Soviet assistance in kind.

the political aspects of struggle. They enquired about the state of the mass struggle, whether the people were ready to respond to the call for armed conflict, the attitude of the African states to the ANC, and the degree of support for the ANC from democratic forces in other countries, particularly the United States (US). It is clear, as in earlier discussions with SACP leaders, that the Soviet Union did not favour a 'militaristic' approach.

After the conclusion of the discussions in Moscow, Tambo spent several weeks on the Black Sea coast, in Yalta in the Crimea, accompanied by Vladimir Shemyatenkov.⁷⁰

Tambo's request for military training in the USSR was given great consideration. It was not difficult to make the arrangements in a short space of time, and in summer 1963, two groups of about 20 people each arrived for studies in Moscow and its environs in the establishment usually referred to by the ANC as the Northern Training Centre.⁷¹ Terry Bell claims that 'there were also reportedly agreements in place between the US and USSR. These restricted any military aid provided to the ANC to conventional training involving artillery and tanks – not much use in the conditions of the time.'⁷² He shares the opinion of 'the veterans of the 1964 mutiny [?] within the ANC' who alleged that the 'Russians were pursuing their own interests' while the 'SACP and ANC were being held in reserve as surrogates in the global game of superpowers'. 'The assessment of the MK mutineers was based on the fact that the Russians provided orthodox military training to MK fighters.'⁷³

The reality was much more complicated and contradicts these claims. Instead of 'orthodox military training', the courses for MK fighters and commanders included studies in guerrilla warfare from the outset. In his memoirs, a member of one of the groups, Archibald Sibeko, says:

We were taught military strategy and tactics, topography, drilling, use of firearms and in guerrilla warfare. We also covered politics, with heavy emphasis on skills needed [for] construction and use of explosives, vehicle maintenance, feeding a mobile army and first aid in the field: everything necessary for survival under guerrilla conditions.⁷⁴

Sibeko's description of life in the USSR during that period is also revealing:

70 Discussion with V. Shemyatenkov, Moscow, 6 January 1997. Tambo's visit to Moscow in April 1963 was practically 'neglected' by numerous 'experts' on Soviet policy. Most followed the allegations of the notorious traitor, Bartholomew Hlapane, who claimed that after the decision to establish MK had been taken Joe Slovo and John ('Uncle J.B.') Marks were sent by the Central Committee of the SACP to Moscow to organise arms and ammunition and raise funds. The allegations by Hlapane are made in a US government publication, *The Role of the Soviet Union, Cuba and East Germany in Fomenting Terrorism in Southern Africa*, vol. 1 (Washington: US Government Press, 1982), 553.

71 The first two groups included several persons who later became prominent in various structures of the liberation movement, such as Mark Shope, future general secretary of the South African Congress of Trade Unions (SACTU) and Lambert Moloi, later a three-star General in the South African Defence Force (SADF).

72 T. Bell with D.B. Ntsebeza, *Unfinished Business. South Africa, Apartheid and Truth* (London and New York: Verso, 2003), 119.

73 *Ibid.*, 274.

74 Archie Sibeko (Zola Zembe) with Joyce Leeson, 'Freedom in our Lifetime': <http://www.anc.org.za/ancdocs/history/congress/sactu/zz1.htm>.

It has become fashionable to pretend that everything about the Soviet Union was rotten. No doubt we were taken to some show places, and there was much we did not see. But we were not fools. We saw many things which were good, particularly for working people, and were very impressed by public facilities. We also came to respect the Soviet army, and the internationalism, which made the authorities take the side of black people from the other end of the world, and offer care, training and so much material help. Perhaps they were weak on some aspects of democracy, but they certainly did more for our struggle for a democratic South Africa than any of their 'democratic' critics.⁷⁵

Similar feelings were expressed by another activist who spent almost a year 'in the environs of Moscow', a young university graduate who was known in Umkhonto as Chris Nkosana: 'How can the working class forget the Soviet Union? I went to Moscow when I was 21 for military training. I was accepted there and treated wonderfully.'⁷⁶ He was none other than Martin Thembesile Hani, future MK chief of staff and SACP general secretary, who later became known as Chris Hani, a combination of his *nom de guerre* and his real name.

However, some problems did arise during training. One of the MK groups was initially headed by Barney Desai, president of the South African Coloured People's Congress (SACPC). But he was soon withdrawn, or rather withdrew himself. Some ANC members believed that the prospect of direct involvement in armed actions was not attractive to him, but his motives could have been more political: shortly afterwards Desai announced the merger of his organisation and the PAC, in spite of opposition from other prominent CPC activists.

As successful as was the Northern Centre, situated in Moscow and its environs, in providing training to MK cadres, it could not cope with training much larger numbers of fighters in various fields. When Oliver Tambo came to Moscow again in October 1963, the CPSU Central Committee had already taken a decision on mass training of MK members. Odessa,⁷⁷ a city in the Ukraine on the shores of the Black Sea, was chosen as the venue, and the facilities of the local military college, headed by General Checherin,⁷⁸ were adapted for the intake of the South Africans.

In November 1963, the first group of MK members began to arrive in Odessa.⁷⁹ They were joined in February by the main group, which included Thabo More (as Joe Modise was known those days) and Moses Mabhida, who had been recalled from the WFTU headquarters in Prague specifically to undergo military training. More was appointed commander of the South African unit, and Mabhida became

75 Ibid.

76 *The Star*, Johannesburg, 11 December 1991.

77 The city is famous for its defence against the Nazis and their Romanian collaborators in autumn 1941 and guerrilla activities during its occupation.

78 Discussion with H. Loots (James Stuart), Johannesburg, 30 April 2005.

79 Discussion with A. Makarov, Pretoria, 21 November 1993.

its commissar.⁸⁰ Soon after the first unit completed training, another huge group arrived. Altogether 328 MK fighters were trained in Odessa in 1963–1965. About 50 members of the second group, including Josiah Jele, were sent to Tashkent in the Soviet Republic of Uzbekistan, where they had higher-level courses at the (rather famous) local military college.

At that stage, co-operation with the ANC in training was regarded as an important matter in Moscow. A special group of officials, headed by Manchkha, arrived in Odessa in June 1964. They were satisfied with the progress of the training and the morale of the MK members, though they drew the attention of their superiors to the need for greater specialisation in guerrilla training. Vladimir Shemyatenkov, an official of the International Department who was a member of the group, noted later that apart from pure military skills, the ANC cadres were undergoing political education, primarily through their life experience in the USSR. In addition, Africans who had not been able to handle weapons for many decades not only came to grips with small arms, but mastered APCs and tanks as well. This helped to raise their morale and confidence.⁸¹

At the time, the armed struggle had already begun in Angola and Guinea-Bissau, while preparations had been intensified in Mozambique, Zimbabwe and Namibia. The need for sophisticated mass-scale guerrilla training became clear, and a special centre was established in Perevalnoye, near the city of Simferopol, in Crimea. The geographic conditions in this mountainous area, famous for guerrilla activities in World War II, made it appropriate for training African freedom fighters. Although the centre itself was a secret establishment, at least the road sign 'Perevalnoye' was easily seen on the road from Simferopol to the Black Sea coast.⁸²

The leadership of the ANC (and SACP) also expressed the wish to undergo military training. The political and military leadership of the liberation movement – Oliver Tambo, Moses Kotane, Duma Nokwe, Joe Modise, Joe Slovo, and Ambrose Makiwane – spent several weeks in Moscow in one of the 'special flats' not far from the Kremlin, studying the basics of organisation of guerrilla warfare.⁸³

The consultations (the term usually applied to this type of training) took place later as well. Thus, when the ANC delegation led by Oliver Tambo went to Moscow in August 1965,⁸⁴ ANC military leader Thabo More⁸⁵ (Joe Modise) was added, and consultations on 'strategic issues' were organised for him. The text of the CC decision read: 'to entrust the USSR Defence Ministry (Comrade Zakharov) – Chief of General

80 A vivid description of the South Africans' experience in Odessa can be found in Ronnie Kasrils, *Armed and Dangerous: From Undercover Struggle to Freedom* (Johannesburg and Cape Town: Jonathan Ball, 2003), 65–72. See also Vladimir Shubin, *ANC: A View from Moscow* (Bellville: Mayibuye, 1999).

81 Discussion with V. Shemyatenkov, Moscow, 6 January 1997.

82 Pretoria never knew its name. Maj. Gen. F. M. A. Steenkamp of the SAP, spoke of 'Prvolnye military camp'. (See F.M.A Steenkamp, 'Press briefing for accredited foreign correspondents on the history, aims, activities and the level of threat posed by the ANC', Cape Town, 8 February 1984, 30). Harry Pitman, a Progressive Federal Party MP, named 'Privali in Ukraine' as a place where 'terrorists' were trained; *Rand Daily Mail*, Johannesburg, 21 May 1982; *Africa Confidential*, London, 10 December 1986 wrote of a Provolye Soviet camp in the Ukraine.

83 Discussion with J. Modise, Dar es Salaam, 12 June 1999.

84 RSAMH: Minutes of the Secretariat, no. 123/217g, 20 July 1965.

85 Ibid. no. 125/83g, 23 August 1965.

Staff of the USSR Armed Forces [Marshal Matvei Zakharov] to discuss with Thabo More the questions of interest to him'.⁸⁶ The discussion at the CPSU headquarters was at a high level as well. The delegation was received by the CPSU CC Presidium member and secretary, Alexander Shelepin, (he was tipped to become successor to Khrushchev, but was soon sidelined by Leonid Brezhnev).

While the ANC had to overcome serious obstacles to get their cadres out of South Africa, they faced even greater difficulties in organising their safe return home. Initial planning involved the return of around 300 trained personnel. Soviet-trained cadres, including Josiah Jele, took part in an abortive attempt to infiltrate South Africa through Mozambique in 1967. But the first large-scale attempt was carried out through Zimbabwean territory in 1967–1968.⁸⁷ These joint ANC-ZAPU operations prompted diverse reactions in Africa and overseas. In the Soviet Union, the attitude was very favourable: the state of affairs in South Africa was regarded as an integral part of the regional situation, and Moscow encouraged the co-ordination of actions between southern African liberation movements. These operations were the first test of the quality of the combat skills acquired by MK cadres in the USSR, and their skills and courage during the Wankie and Sipolilo campaigns were recognised by friend and foe.⁸⁸

Apart from training and military hardware, Moscow provided the ANC fighters with 'excellent radio apparatus, including a Braun 12-band worldwide receiver', which was singled out by a Pretoria 'expert on terrorism' among the captured equipment.⁸⁹ Moses Kotane had specifically requested it on the eve of the operation in Zimbabwe,⁹⁰ and, although it was difficult to include foreign-made equipment, which had to be acquired with hard currency, in the list of supplies, the USSR agreed to his request.

The ANC leadership also involved Moscow in overcoming problems detected in MK during the fighting in Zimbabwe. One was inadequate medical services, and a group of cadres were sent to a nursing school in Kiev, the capital of Ukraine, for special training. I accompanied Mziwandile Piliso to this school in June 1969. Although she praised the students, its principal expressed her concern that their South African identity could not be hidden: the attempt to disguise the ANC members as Zambians was hardly successful as authentic Zambian students could not understand why their supposed compatriots were not able to speak their vernacular languages.

86 Ibid.

87 Refer to Moses Ralinala et al., 'The Wankie and Sipolilo Campaigns', in SADET (eds.), *The Road to Democracy in South Africa*, volume 1, 1960-1970 (Cape Town: Zebra Press, 2004), 487-528.

88 Some PAC representatives claimed that the MK had been waging 'a conventional style war', while claiming 'to be waging guerrilla warfare.' Quoted in Joe Slovo, 'South Africa: No Middle Road', in Basil Davidson, Joe Slovo and Anthony Wilkinson, *Southern Africa: The New Politics of Revolution* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976), 235-236. Moses Mabhida said that staunchness, resolution and decisiveness were the main qualities acquired in the Soviet Union. (Discussion with M. Mabhida, Moscow, 15 November 1982). Some participants in the campaigns, including Chris Hani, and Akim Ndlovu studied in a highly specialised centre that provided training in guerrilla warfare. (Discussion with P. Mphoko, Moscow, 30 January 2006).

89 M. Morris, *Terrorism: The First Full Account in Detail of Terrorism and Insurgency in Southern Africa* (Cape Town: Howard Timmins, 1971), 54.

90 RSAMH: Decisions of the CPSU Central Committee taken by voting of the CC Secretaries without recording in the minutes, 21 April 1967.

'We had to evacuate our army to the Soviet Union'

Visits of the ANC leaders to the USSR followed two patterns. They were guests of the CPSU congresses, usually convened once every five years, or at other official celebrations. The others were regular visits to Moscow to discuss the evolving situation and the needs of the movement. These visits acquired additional importance when they followed dramatic developments such as the Morogoro Conference in 1969. Soon after the conference, the ANC leadership, supported by the SACP, requested a meeting in Moscow.⁹¹ The delegation, which included Oliver Tambo, Duma Nokwe and Joe Matthews, briefed their Soviet counterparts on the results of the conference, especially renewed concentration on internal work, including the return home of the trained military personnel. Another topic was the consequences of the Lusaka Manifesto.⁹² The leaders of these states reiterated that the liberation of southern Africa was their aim. However, they proclaimed their readiness to normalise relations with the colonial and racist regimes in Lisbon, Pretoria and Salisbury, and expressed willingness to urge the liberation movements 'to desist from their armed struggle' if those regimes recognised 'the principle of human equality' and the right to self-determination.⁹³

This document was not received well in Moscow and the Soviet delegation to the United Nations (UN) expressed a number of reservations, emphasising that the eradication of the colonial and racist regimes in southern Africa did not require talks and persuasion, but concrete and effective action.⁹⁴ Indeed, there was good reason for adopting such an attitude. At best, the manifesto was untimely: Pretoria, Salisbury and Lisbon were not ready to make concessions and compromises. On the other hand, President Kamuzu Banda of Malawi and some other African leaders used the moderate tone of the document to enter into a so-called dialogue with apartheid South Africa.

In addition, decisions that directly affected the struggle in South Africa, Namibia, Zimbabwe and the Portuguese colonies were taken without consultations with the liberation movements. The *African Communist*, the SACP's official organ, described the manifesto as 'insufferably patronising and even arrogant'.⁹⁵ This was especially true of South Africa, as the document contained 'perhaps the most sinister phrase' that steps against South Africa had to be taken 'even if international law is held to exclude active assistance to the South African opponents of apartheid',⁹⁶ although UN resolutions specifically prescribed assistance to those fighting against apartheid.

The era of the Lusaka Manifesto did not last long. By the time that the new regional conference convened in Khartoum in January 1970, it had become clear that the goodwill (or naivety) expressed in Lusaka was not going to bear fruit, and it was decided 'to intensify by all adequate means' the national liberation struggle in Africa

91 RSAMH: Minutes of the Secretariat, no. 73/342s, 11 June 1969.

92 Adopted earlier in April 1969 at the conference of the Eastern and Central African states in Lusaka.

93 Quoted in *The African Communist*, no. 40, 1969, 8.

94 A. Urnov, *South Africa Against Africa* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1988), 83.

95 *Ibid.*

96 *Ibid.*, 9.

‘by making available all necessary facilities to liberation movements as would enable them to carry out the struggle’.⁹⁷ This position was confirmed in the resolutions of the OAU Assembly convened in August–September 1970.

However, short as it was, this era was disastrous for the ANC. ‘In July 1969 [just some days after the ANC delegation returned from Moscow] our headquarters received a notice requiring that the ANC vacate its military cadres from the Kongwa Camp [in Tanzania] within a period of 14 days⁹⁸ ... The reason given for this unprecedented notice was that our cadres in Kongwa had stayed so long that they had now become a security risk to the country.’⁹⁹ If the ANC was unable to infiltrate its cadres into South Africa within fourteen days, they were to be sent to a refugee camp. ‘In other words, this meant the liquidation of Umkhonto we Sizwe.’ According to the report, fighters were sent on ‘refresher courses’, and after these were completed, ‘we were able to obtain permission for their return to Kongwa’.¹⁰⁰

At the ANC Conference in Kabwe in 1985, Oliver Tambo was more forthright: ‘In 1969 as a result of complications that our movement faced in this region, we had to evacuate [most of] our army to the Soviet Union at very short notice. Our Soviet comrades then worked with us to prepare the comrades who returned home in 1972.’¹⁰¹

What was behind this decision of the Tanzanian leadership, apart from the spirit of the Lusaka Manifesto? Aside from pressure from South African quarters (Harry Oppenheimer visited Dar es Salaam some weeks before it was taken), a negative role was played by PAC leader Potlako Leballo, who was a state witness at the trial of the supporters of former Tanzanian foreign minister Oscar Kambona (and former chairman of the Liberation Committee). The suspicion that MK cadres might be used in the alleged coup attempt apparently helped to convince President Julius Nyerere to drastically curtail the ANC’s presence in his country.

Unfortunately, not a single African country was ready to replace Tanzania in providing camps for MK cadres, and many dozens of MK members were flown urgently in special flights (Ilyushin-18 planes of the OKABON, the Independent Red Banner Special Purpose Air Brigade), from Dar es Salaam to the USSR, mostly to the centre near Simferopol.

This demonstrates the importance of Soviet assistance to the liberation struggle in South Africa. The decision to accommodate the bulk of MK cadres was not an easy one for the Soviet leadership. Moscow had agreed to provide them with military training six years earlier, but now it had to maintain them almost permanently, without any clear plans for their return to Africa. Indeed, it soon became obvious that their return to Africa would be delayed and the ANC leadership requested that the course of re-training be extended.

97 Quoted in *The African Communist*, no. 41, 1970, 69.

98 Report presented to the ANC National Executive Committee session in 1971.

99 MCHP: ANC Lusaka Collection, The report of the Secretariat covering the last two years (1971), 5.

100 Ibid. The decision was rather unexpected. No alarm was sounded by the ANC representatives.

101 MCHP: ANC Lusaka Collection. African National Congress National Consultative Conference, President’s statement, 19.

It was J. B. Marks, the SACP chair, who appealed to the Soviet political and military officials in 1970 to prolong the stay of the MK cadres in the USSR. The decision 'to allow the Ministry of Defence to prolong to 1 June, 1971 the training of the South African cadets who are in the Soviet Union according to the CC Central Committee decisions of 1 September 1969 ... and of 29 May 1970' was taken on 20 July 1970.¹⁰²

Uncle J. B. had to fly from Moscow to Simferopol to explain the reason for extending their training to the MK cadres. Fortunately, relations between the ANC and Tanzania soon improved and many cadres returned there. Algeria was also helpful. In addition, some of the cadres were enrolled in Soviet universities or vocational schools. Thus, future SANDF generals Themba Masuku and Leonard Pitso (known in Moscow as Haggar Mcberry and Barney Mackey) were enrolled in the medical and agricultural faculties respectively of Patrice Lumumba University in Moscow.

By the beginning of the 1970s, the pattern of co-operation between Moscow and the ANC was well established. Usually requests for concrete assistance, including a list of required supplies, came via a Soviet embassy (initially in Dar es Salaam, and later from Lusaka). As soon as a delegation arrived in Moscow, it was discussed in advance with International Department officials. Then they drafted the decision of the CC, which instructed the relevant state departments to present their opinion on the requests by a certain date and forward concrete proposals to the CC. Such a document, with the consent of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (usually at the level of deputy minister) would come back to the CC for approval, which was usually secured, because its content had been discussed in advance with functionaries of the International Department 'in working order', that is semi-officially. This procedure helped to avoid mistakes (which happened now and again, but only when this semi-official vetting of a document had not been carried out).

Then the political decision would be taken by the party leadership, first by the Secretariat and then, in the most important cases, by the Politburo. This document would contain the draft order of the USSR Council of Ministers when concrete directives to the state departments were needed.

Apart from this, the NGOs provided significant assistance beyond the framework of the state budget.¹⁰³ This channel provided the ANC with support to a lesser extent, but usually more quickly than government departments.

Western and some South African authors often write about the symbiotic relationship between the ANC and SACP. However, this assessment is possibly incorrect, at least as far as the Soviet Union's relationship with the South African liberation movement is concerned. Moscow maintained parallel relations with the two organisations, even if the same people wore 'two hats'. Financial assistance was accorded to both organisations, but larger sums were allocated to the ANC. Most of supplies in kind naturally went to the ANC, and supplies to the SACP were one-off in nature, such as a car, sent with the

102 The Decision of the Politbureau of the CPSU Central Committee P 135/19, 1 September 1969, referred to in RSAMH: Minutes of the Secretariat, no. 103/24g, 20 July 1970.

103 There was the Soviet Afro-Asian Solidarity Committee, the Soviet Women's Committee and the Youth and Trade Union organisations (corresponding to the ANC Women's Section, the Youth and Students' Section and SACTU).

consent of the ANC leadership to an ANC address in an African country. Members of the SACP usually went to the Soviet Union for special (military) training as ANC activists, while political training was organised in separate groups, in the Institute of Social Sciences in Moscow and its branch in Nagornoye, about 50km north-east of Moscow. However, practically all members of Communist groups were members of the ANC.

Some of the graduates of the institute, such as Thabo Mbeki, distinguished themselves as leading ANC figures. Others sacrificed their lives for the liberation of their country. Probably, the first was Flag Boshielo. Another hero was Ahmed Timol, who died on 27 October 1971 in the Security Police Headquarters in Pretoria. Having returned to South Africa from Moscow via London, he had maintained regular contact with the exiled leadership, informing them of the build-up of the underground machinery.¹⁰⁴

A separate issue was convening 'exclusively' communist meetings in Moscow such as sessions (sometimes 'augmented') of the SACP Central Committee. Several SACP meetings took place in Moscow, beginning in July 1964.¹⁰⁵ The most important of these was the first augmented meeting in June 1970. According to Michael Harmel (his pen name was Lerumo): 'The particularly difficult conditions facing the Party, especially the widespread dispersion of cadres, made it impossible to convene meetings sufficiently representative in character.' But this obstacle was overcome, and the gathering in Moscow comprised 'a majority of non-members of the Executive [read CC], including a number of Party members who had already participated in armed struggle.'¹⁰⁶ On this occasion, the SACP leadership requested facilities for twenty people, instead of the usual ten or so.¹⁰⁷ Among the non-CC members were several younger Party members, including Thabo Mbeki and Josiah Jele.

The meeting critically assessed the activity of the SACP after the collapse of its structures inside South Africa. Its documents spoke about '[t]he failure of the Party to re-establish a working Central Committee collective in which the members in leading positions in the national movement [i.e. Moses Kotane and J. B. Marks] were an integrated and functioning part,' and 'the inability of the CC to resolve the issue of the reconstruction of the Party in the most crucial area of operation, namely in Mkhonto and among our members in Africa' ... 'leading members of the Party, however strategically placed in the national movement or Mkhonto or in any other sector of our struggle, do not function as party cadres unless they take part in continuous collective Party life and policy-making'.¹⁰⁸

The meeting took place at a *dacha* (villa) in the Volynskoye area on the outskirts of Moscow where Stalin, regarded by many as a 'dictator', lived and died. The participants paid special attention to the democratic process and accountability in the SACP, as well as to the 'democratisation' of Umkhonto we Sizwe. 'High standards of discipline are vital but they must be instilled by understanding rather than drill, by respect rather than

104 MCHP: ANC London Collection, Messages from A. Timol.

105 RSAMH: Minutes of the Secretariat, no. 103/13g, 17 June 1964.

106 A. Lerumo (M. Harmel), *Fifty Fighting Years: The Communist Party of South Africa, 1921-1971* (London: Inkululeko Publications, 1971), 109.

107 RSAMH: Minutes of the Secretariat, no. 94/89g, 18 March 1970.

108 MCHP: ANC London Collection, SACP Internal Bulletin (no number), 14.

fear, and by conviction rather than by arbitrary punishment.¹⁰⁹ The group photograph of the session participants – old and young, Africans, white people, Indians, and one coloured person – taken against the background of this dacha was impressive.¹¹⁰

Another example of this type of activity was the participation of the SACP delegations in the international communist meetings. In all such cases, as with the ANC delegations, Moscow covered all travel and accommodation expenses.

In a further meeting between the SACP and the CPSU after the 1960 meeting (described above), the SACP delegation was led by J. B. Marks, the Party chairman, because Moses Kotane had suffered a severe stroke and had been brought to Moscow for treatment in early 1969. The members of the delegation were Yusuf Dadoo, Michael Harmel and its secretary, a young activist registered as J. Jabulani.¹¹¹ (The attitude of the SACP leaders to their duties in the ANC can be seen from the fact that Yusuf Dadoo could only stay for a week in Moscow because he was 'wanted by the [ANC] Revolutionary Council'.¹¹²)

The gathering in Moscow only partly succeeded in bringing together representatives of the communist parties, because not only the Chinese, but also those who did not want to quarrel with them, including the Vietnamese, refrained from taking part. However, the SACP delegation had a chance to express its position on various issues to its actual or potential international supporters. Mike Harmel took an active part in the preparation of the meeting; J. B. Marks delivered a speech and chaired one of the sessions.¹¹³ Joe Matthews was also present, as a representative of the Communist Party of Lesotho. He made a strong anti-Beijing speech, comparing the Chinese Communist Party to a 'mad elephant'.¹¹⁴

The meeting gave the SACP an opportunity to strengthen bilateral ties as well. The delegation's report read:

A meeting was held with the [Soviet] Prime Minister, A. Kosygin. He was especially interested in the conditions of the mine-workers in South Africa. A verbal report was given to him on the subject. He informed our delegation that the Soviet people are very interested in South Africa. He also said that they recognise that the South African struggle is probably the most difficult one in the world. He assured us of their total support of our struggle and invited us to ask for any support we may require whenever we need this.¹¹⁵

109 Ibid., 17.

110 This was one of the SACP and ANC documents, that I shredded in August 1991. I believe my actions were justified: in the days of coups and counter-coups these documents could have fallen into the wrong hands. The 'storming by the people' of the GDR Security HQ resulted in highly confidential documents falling into the hands not of even the West German authorities, but the FBI.

111 MCHP: YDC, List of members of delegations of Communist and Workers Parties, 16. The name of the delegation secretary was not revealed; but appears to be Thabo Mbeki's handwriting.

112 MCHP: YDC, Meeting of the delegation, 4 June 1969, 4.

113 MCHP: YDC, Meeting of the delegation, 2.

114 *Mezhdunarodnoye soveshchaniye kommunisticheskikh i rabochikh partii, Moskva, 1969*, (International meeting of Communist and Workers' Parties, Moscow, 1969) (Prague: Mir i Socialism, 1969), 815.

115 MCHP: ANC London Collection, Report of the work of the delegation of the SACP to the International Conference of Communist and Workers' Parties. Moscow/1969, 2.

Arthur Goldreich, in his discussions in Moscow in 1963, had proposed transporting arms for MK by sea. However, this idea was not welcomed by the Soviets. They were equally cautious when the ANC and SACP leadership suggested organising a landing of MK cadres on South African territory. However, following continual requests, the Soviet side agreed to support the plan¹¹⁶ after warning against hasty and risky actions. Initially some 'organisers of struggle' would be trained, as well as personnel to reconnoitre the sites for possible landing. Depending on the results of this reconnaissance mission, the Soviet side would decide whether to assist in acquiring a vessel, supplying the necessary equipment, including wireless apparatus, and training the landing party.

The forced exodus from Tanzania underscored the urgency of returning MK cadres to South Africa. This issue was raised again by J. B. Marks in Moscow in 1970 and his political discussions resulted in the decision, taken on 20 July, by the CPSU CC Secretariat. It specifically instructed the Defence Ministry to discuss the issue with the South Africans and 'to present to the CPSU CC concrete proposals upon the results of the discussion'.¹¹⁷ The words 'concrete proposals' indicated a favourable approach and would direct the Soviet military to look into the matter sympathetically. The proposals were submitted to the CPSU leadership and the decision of the Politbureau was taken on 20 October 1970, followed that same day by the USSR government order.¹¹⁸

The action became known as 'Operation J'. According to Joe Slovo, this code name was suggested by Oliver Tambo (J stood for 'Joe'). Moscow's role in it, apart from initial consultations, included the allocation of £75 000 for the purchase of the ship¹¹⁹ and the training of reconnaissance operatives and members of the landing party. Most of the training took place in Baku at the naval base of the KKF (Red Banner Caspian Flotilla). The importance the top ANC leadership attached to this project was indicated by the fact that Oliver Tambo visited trainees in Baku.¹²⁰

Unfortunately Operation J was a dismal failure.¹²¹ The ANC decided in its aftermath to send a group of cadres, previously selected for Operation J, to South Africa by air and land. (Tambo was referring to this group, when he spoke in Kabwe about 'the comrades who returned home in 1972', having been prepared for the mission by 'our Soviet comrades'.)¹²² Unfortunately, as Ronnie Kasrils put it, 'one of the comrades who was infiltrated was caught and informed the enemy' of the details of the operation.¹²³

116 The decision of the Politbureau of the CPSU Central Committee P 58/52 of 18 October 1967, item 1, referred to in RSAMH: Minutes of the Secretariat, no. 103/24g, 20 July 1970.

117 RSAMH: Minutes of the Secretariat, no. 103/24g, 20 July 1970.

118 Ibid., The decision of the Politbureau of the CPSU Central Committee, P 183/13 of 20 October 1970, and the order of the USSR Council of Ministers, 2217s of 20 October 1970.

119 SACP to CPSU, 6 September 1970. Referred to in E. Maloka, *The South African Communist Party in Exile* (Pretoria: Africa Institute of South Africa, 2002), 29.

120 Discussion with S. Makana, Cape Town, 3 June 1993.

121 Gregory Houston and Bernard Magubane, 'The ANC's armed struggle in the 1970s', in SADET (eds.), *The Road to Democracy in South Africa*, vol. 2, 1970-1980 (Pretoria, UNISA Press, 2006), 457ff.

122 MCHP, ANC Lusaka Collection, African National Congress National Consultative Conference. President's Statement, 19.

123 *Dawn*, December 1986 Souvenir Issue, 43. The details of these two operations and reasons for their failure are explained in Houston and Magubane, 'The ANC's armed struggle', 458ff.

The arrested MK cadres, as well as Alex Moubaris, an internationalist who agreed to assist them, had been trained in the USSR. This news was met in Moscow with disappointment. Indeed, several years of efforts and a huge sum of money brought nothing but fiasco. The Soviet officials, in particular those in the International Department and the defence establishment, were worried and a more sceptical attitude to the ANC and SACP activities emerged.

The Soviets, maintaining strict rules of secrecy on all issues of Moscow's assistance to the liberation movements, were worried about the disclosure of their involvement in the preparations for Operation J. Indeed, Pretoria's propaganda spoke of 'black recruits smuggled out of South Africa to Russia and other Red states for all types of specialised training', and of 'lessons in weaponry, topography, shooting, explosives, military engineering, sabotage, the doctrines of Marxism-Leninism and the ANC, trade unionism and socialist philosophy'.¹²⁴ However, in South Africa this disclosure had a positive effect. As Ronnie Kasrils wrote, 'instead the people everywhere were inspired and amazed. The imaginative episode really caught their minds.'¹²⁵

There is another aspect to the failure of these operations. In February 1992, Boris Yeltsin, exercising his power as president of independent Russia, pardoned a number of people who had been sentenced earlier in the USSR for high treason. Among them was Nikolay Chernov, who had been recruited by the FBI in 1963. At that time, officially working in the USSR Mission to the UN in New York, he served in the GRU, the Soviet Military Intelligence, as a 'special technician'. After being caught red-handed by the FBI embezzling money from the mission, he 'sold out' his country and began to work for the US.

His betrayal was not detected. After his return home, he was seconded in 1969 to a special unit of the CPSU International Department. His responsibilities were limited, but they included very sensitive matters, such as keeping in order the passports and visas of the guests of the Communist Party, including members of illegal parties who visited the USSR for political and special training. When he was on a short trip abroad, carrying a diplomatic passport and thus avoiding customs, he managed to 'export' two containers of films to his US handlers.¹²⁶

Probably the information about ANC members under training in the USSR, including photographs, had been passed on by him to the US. It is hoped that one day the South African archives will enable historians to find out the exact degree of co-operation between the American and South African security services at that time. But indirect evidence is available: soon after Chernov's trip to the West, arrests of underground communist cadres took place in a number of Latin American countries as well.

Chernov's superiors in the International Department were not fond of him, and in 1974 he was sent back to the Defence Ministry and soon discharged.¹²⁷ The rest

124 H. Pike, *History of Communism in South Africa* (Germiston: Christian Mission International of South Africa, 1988), 474.

125 *Dawn*, December 1986 Souvenir Issue, 43.

126 *Izvestiya*, Moscow, 6 March 1992.

127 *Ibid.*

of his life was as miserable as traitors deserve: 'For almost thirty years, expecting retribution for his crimes, Chernov was drinking, trying somehow to stifle the fear of an inevitable exposure.' He twice attempted to commit suicide, and spent some time in a mental institution.¹²⁸

This was probably the only case that important information on the South African liberation movement may have leaked from Moscow to the Western supporters of the Pretoria regime, with the possible exception of the British spy Gordievsky, who claimed years after Yusuf Dadoo's death that he had forwarded financial allocations for the SACP and ANC to Dadoo. Another incident deserves mention. At a conference in Moscow in 1995, a South African academic (former officer in military intelligence) alleged that Pretoria had relied extensively on 'one or two agents' in the Soviet Union. 'One claimed to be close to Boris Ponomarev,' he added. Probably this was a bluff because, unlike some other government institutions, there was not a single case of betrayal among the CPSU International Department's staff.

The only really successful attempt to infiltrate South African territory was made by Chris Hani in 1974. By that time he was not only a military and political leader of the ANC, but at the top of the SACP structures as well, having been elected its assistant general secretary at the CC meeting in Moscow in 1973. The Soviets were not directly involved in preparations for his undercover mission. This had been done in the GDR. However, his second course of training earlier in the USSR was vital. 'We had undergone a course in the Soviet Union on the principles of forming an underground movement, that was our training: the formation of the underground movement, then the building of guerrilla detachments. The Soviets put a lot of emphasis on the building of these underground structures, comprising at the beginning very few people,'¹²⁹ he recalled.

The early 1970s were perhaps the most difficult period in the ANC history after its banning. The misfortune in Zimbabwe, the failure of Operation J, the lack of support from African countries and international solidarity forces, which began to pay more attention to the liberation war in the Portuguese colonies – all these were demoralising factors, and its ranks in exile were shrinking. (According to Thomas Nkobi, who replaced Moses Kotane as the head of the ANC Treasury, in 1974 ANC had to care for about 250 people in Tanzania, 130 in Zambia, and about 100 in three other states, Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland.)¹³⁰

A realistic assessment of the situation was shared with the Soviets by the participants of the SACP CC meeting in Moscow in November 1973. They admitted that the return to South Africa of the 'old' MK cadres was unlikely. Their number had decreased after a decade of exile, and those who remained in MK were almost all over thirty, and had been away from home for too long. Even if they succeeded in returning to South Africa, it would not be easy to adapt to the changing realities at home.

Under these circumstances, continuity of international support to the movement was vital. Oliver Tambo had good reason to say at the time that: 'Looking back I can't

128 *Pravda*, 11 February 1994.

129 *Echo*, 21 February 1990.

130 Discussion with T. Nkobi, Moscow, 1 October 1974.

remember any request which the Soviet Solidarity Committee had not carried out.¹³¹ For example, in 1969 the Soviet Afro-Asian Solidarity Committee sent sportswear and equipment, musical instruments, and film projectors to Dar es Salaam; in 1970 food and clothes; in 1971 spare parts for trucks and cars; in 1972 four jeeps and two cars; in 1973 clothes, food, and another two cars; in 1974 25 tons of food, three cars and radio receivers.¹³² The training of ANC cadres in the Soviet Union continued in civilian establishments as well. In 1971, for instance, 21 South Africans studied in Soviet universities and five in vocational schools.

Though these figures do not look large in comparison with the supplies the ANC received later, they should be seen against assistance to the movement from other sources, which was very limited. (Unfortunately, the figures for assistance from Soviet state sources for this period are not available, but no doubt they are much higher.) Thus, in 1973 the OAU Liberation Committee had provided the ANC with £3 000. When this contribution was increased to £11 000, it was regarded by the ANC leadership as a major achievement. Sweden, which later provided the ANC with substantial humanitarian assistance, began to help the Congress directly in the 1972/73 financial year with a modest sum of 35 000 Swedish krona (about US\$7 000).¹³³

Nevertheless, international solidarity, important as it was, could not change the situation in favour of the liberation forces. In the same period, when the ANC was facing increasing problems in exile, actions of students and workers signalled the beginning of a new upsurge in the struggle inside South Africa.¹³⁴ Naturally, the emergence of a new movement or a trend professing opposition to apartheid attracted attention in Moscow, at least of those who were involved in African affairs. It became a subject of the discussion between the ANC leaders and the Soviets. I recollect how Oliver Tambo, as always in a sober mood, told us in Moscow in February 1974: 'We played and play a role in all this [the developments in South Africa], but it is not a decisive role.'¹³⁵

I had an enlightening discussion on this issue with M.P. Naicker, who assessed the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM) more positively than most of the ANC leaders at the time, though perhaps owing to his impatience to see positive changes in the situation at home. However, we knew that some forces in Africa and especially in Western Europe tried to play off young BCM leaders against the 'exiled and aged' leadership of the ANC and encouraged them to perform an 'independent' role. This assessment was confirmed in my discussions with Lars-Gunnar Eriksson, a Swedish

131 Discussion with O. Tambo, Moscow, 13 December 1974.

132 Archive of the SAASC, SAC. Various unsorted items.

133 T. Sellström, *Sweden and National Liberation in Southern Africa. Volume II: Solidarity and Assistance 1970-1994* (Uppsala: Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, 2002), 899.

134 Refer to Mbulelo Mzamane et.al., 'The Black Consciousness Movement', in SADET (eds), *The Road to Democracy in South Africa*, vol. 2, 99ff, and Jabulani Sithole and Sifiso Ndlovu, 'The revival of the labour movement, 1970-1980', in *ibid.*, 187ff.

135 Discussion with O. Tambo, Moscow, 12 December 1974.

Social-Democrat, director of the IUEF.¹³⁶ ‘Shubin, give me a week and I’ll organise you a meeting with the BCM representatives in Gaborone, or three weeks for Nairobi.’¹³⁷

A real watershed in the struggle against Pretoria’s regime was the Soweto uprising, which began on 16 June 1976. Nevertheless, the first signs of a strategic change in the situation in southern Africa had been detected earlier, almost immediately after the April 1974 revolution in Portugal. It soon became evident that the independence of the Portuguese colonies in Africa was imminent. When the Mozambican transitional government was formed in September 1974, the possibility arose for the ANC, for the first time in many years, to be in close contact with home.

In 1975 the ANC again requested Moscow to receive groups of fighters for sophisticated training and, perhaps for the first time in ten years, these cadres came almost straight from South Africa. One who stayed for a year and half in the Northern Training Centre was Mosima ‘Tokyo’ Sexwale, future Robben Island prisoner and premier of Gauteng. His group consisted of the new arrivals from home, including his brother. Thirty years later Sexwale spoke warmly about the Soviets who taught young South Africans and took care of them.¹³⁸

The changes in Mozambique allowed the ANC to establish a strong presence in Swaziland. This issue was one of the subjects raised by the Mozambican hosts of a delegation of Soviet solidarity organisations that visited Maputo (then Lourenco Marques) in April–May 1975. They told us how Thabo Mbeki and Max Sisulu had participated in a UN-sponsored meeting in Swaziland, and how Mbeki became the ANC’s informal representative there. But King Sobhuza II wanted an older person to speak to him. Soon the grey-haired Moses Mabhida was deployed to Swaziland. The ANC had earlier established an (informal) office in Botswana. The USSR has never had diplomatic relations with Swaziland, and the resident Soviet embassy in Gaborone was established only in 1978. The absence of a Soviet embassy in Lesotho also meant that there were no contacts between Moscow and the ANC in that country. However, several years before this embassy was established, the first delegation of the Soviet Afro-Asian Solidarity Committee, including Andrey Urnov of the International Department, visited Lesotho in 1980 and were happy to meet Chris Hani (by that time the ANC official representative in Maseru.)

The independence of Angola was a dramatic event. It was proclaimed when the South African–UNITA columns were approaching Luanda from the south and Zairean-FNLA forces from the north. The role of Soviet practical assistance to the MPLA and newly created Angolan government is well recorded. Less well known are Moscow’s efforts to involve other forces, regional and international in the support of Angola.

Thus, after the SACP CC meeting in late 1975 in Moscow, Boris Ponomarev¹³⁹ asked its leaders if the ANC and SACP were able to support the MPLA in the field,

136 On the IUEF activities in South Africa see chapter 3 on the IDAF and chapter 6 on Sweden and the Nordic countries, in this volume.

137 Discussion with L-G. Ericsson, Geneva. 30 August 1974.

138 Discussion with M. Sexwale, Moscow, 3 October 2005.

139 RSAMH: Minutes of the Secretariat, no. 183/45g, 23 August; no. 191/15g, 30 October 1975.

and in particular to send an MK contingent to participate in actions against the SADF. In practical terms, such action appeared unrealistic because the remaining MK core could only make a token contribution to the fighting in Angola.

The Soviet Solidarity Committee assisted in convening an emergency conference in solidarity with Angola by AAPSO in early February 1976, including provision of air tickets for its delegates. The route taken by the ANC delegation, led by Johnny Makatini, shows the complexity of the political geography in the region. No direct flights were available between Lusaka and Luanda because at that stage the Zambian government supported UNITA. The delegation travelled from Lusaka via Dar es Salaam to Moscow by Aeroflot, then to Berlin and on to Luanda by Interflug plane, chartered by the GDR Solidarity Committee.

The events in Angola had another dimension. China's support for FNLA and UNITA practically placed that country in the same camp as the US and South Africa. Against the background of Soviet assistance to the new Angolan government, it looked unfortunate for those in Africa who regarded Beijing as their friend. It was apparent in discussions with Makatini, who for several years was perhaps the main conduit between the ANC leadership and China, and in particular had visited Beijing with Oliver Tambo not long before, in 1975.

Because Angola was a victim of South African aggression, this brought the MPLA even closer to the ANC and turned it into a reliable rear base for South African freedom fighters. For the first time in many years, the future looked promising for the movement. Oliver Tambo – who visited Moscow as a guest of the CPSU 25th congress at the end of February 1976 – appreciated the role Moscow had played in a more difficult period: 'Desperation had not broken our people. Even when our struggle was forgotten, the initiatives, in particular by the Soviet Afro-Asian Solidarity Committee, helped to keep some focus on the South African situation.'¹⁴⁰

The change in the liberation movement's situation demanded urgent practical steps as well. Parallel to supplies along normal channels, which usually took time, Alfred Nzo and Thomas Nkobi (who visited Moscow as part of an ANC delegation in January–February 1976) requested the Solidarity Committee to urgently send all that was necessary for 400 newcomers to Angola – from binoculars to socks and shoes.¹⁴¹ According to the archive documents, the purpose of this visit was not only 'to discuss inter-party relations', as was often true of visits, but also to seek military assistance.¹⁴² The ANC asked the Soviet officials to re-route some supplies from the USSR, previously sent on its request to Tanzania and newly independent Mozambique, to Angola.

The next milestone after the independence of Mozambique and Angola was the Soweto uprising, which began on 16 June 1976. Hundreds and then thousands of youngsters left South Africa. Some wanted to continue their education, but the majority preferred to 'get a gun and come back', that is, to acquire military skills and

140 Discussion with O. Tambo and A. Nzo, Moscow, 3 March 1976.

141 Discussion with A. Nzo and T. Nkobi, Moscow, 3 February 1976.

142 RSAMH, Minutes of the Secretariat, No. 200, item 43g, 9 January 1976, No. 203, item 11g, 30 January 1976.

weapons and fight the Pretoria regime with arms in hand. The absolute majority of them joined the ANC, and its structures did their best to place them either in MK camps or in civilian training institutions.

Within weeks, the ANC had to charter planes to bring first 100 and later another 300 recruits to Luanda. By the end of July 1976, the movement was accommodating several hundred newcomers. Unlike the early 1960s, the people leaving South Africa had generally not been connected with the ANC, SACTU or the SACP before their departure, and the exodus was mainly spontaneous. New recruits, or rather volunteers, were not always committed to the ANC, nor were they accustomed to the discipline required of a fighting organisation.

The ANC leadership had to appeal to its international friends, primarily to Socialist and some African countries. Again assistance from the Soviet Union was vital. About 140 MK cadres were trained in the USSR in the period 1976–1978.¹⁴³ However, the urgency resulted in some mistakes, especially in the selection of cadres. For years a story was repeated in the Northern Training Centre (intended for the ‘cream’ of guerrillas) of how one of the graduates had said at a farewell dinner: ‘Thank you, comrades. Now we know how to rob a bank.’ In addition, though the students as a rule had a reasonable knowledge of English, sometimes double translation from Russian into English and then into a vernacular language had to be arranged.¹⁴⁴

Dozens of recruits came to the Soviet Union for university studies as well. However, many of them had to abandon their studies. The main reason was poor educational standards in schools for ‘Bantu’. Apart from this, many students left home without certificates, and in trying to register at the highest possible level and for the course they preferred, some would inflate their educational levels or qualifications. When they failed to pass exams at Soviet institutions, they would find consolation in drinking, and all this led to what were called ‘heavy losses’. Oliver Tambo called the post-June 1976 group of students a ‘non-typical’ generation of ANC cadres and explained that the period they had been in ANC structures before coming to Moscow was too short for them to acquire the necessary discipline.¹⁴⁵ The ANC leaders were worried by the situation, especially since some students abandoned any obligation to the ANC as soon as they registered for studies. Alfred Nzo, in a letter to the secretary of the South African Students’ Union in the Soviet Union, warned of severe measures, including their withdrawal from the universities.¹⁴⁶

The prestige Moscow had acquired at the time in the ranks of the ANC was confirmed under various circumstances. When a so-called Gang of Eight was formed, though its members took an openly anti-communist stance, one of its leaders, Ambrose Makiwane, boasted to his compatriots in Dar es Salaam that he was well known in Moscow and would soon be going there to arrange the division of the Soviet assistance between the ANC and this group.¹⁴⁷

143 ‘A Brief Report of the Revolutionary Council’, April 1979, 6.

144 Discussion with M. Sexwale, Moscow, 3 October 2005.

145 Archive of the SAASC, SAC: Summary of discussion with O. Tambo, Moscow, 6 December 1979.

146 Archive of the SAASC, SAC: Alfred Nzo to the Secretary, South African Students’ Union (SASU), 12 June 1979.

147 Discussion with E. Mtshali, Moscow, 12 May 1976.

The increased role of the Soviet Union in southern Africa was underscored by a visit to the region in March–April 1977 by Nikolay Podgorny, the chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet (this body was often called 'the USSR collective president'). In Lusaka he met Oliver Tambo, together with Sam Nujoma and Joshua Nkomo. However, the possible effects of these contacts were lost when, in May, Podgorny was replaced in this position by Leonid Brezhnev.

The evolving situation in South Africa was a regular subject of discussions with the ANC delegations in Moscow. As a rule, these visits took place once a year. Thus, in June 1977 Oliver Tambo emphasised the resumption of MK actions. He believed that the situation was favourable for the ANC, but fraught with danger as well. Therefore, the movement had to 'give the masses a chance to express their feelings, especially when imperialist countries (and perhaps the regime itself) are trying to create an alternative to the ANC that can take over the initiative'.¹⁴⁸ Tambo, Slovo (who was introduced by the ANC president as a member of the Revolutionary Council and deputy chief of operations) and other members of the delegation did not expect victory to be 'around the corner'. In particular they were worried that some African countries that were best placed to provide the ANC with rear bases had asked it 'to wait a bit' owing to pressure from Pretoria.¹⁴⁹

By the next annual visit of the ANC delegation to Moscow in October 1978, according to Oliver Tambo, certain forces in the West had accepted the inevitability of 'some kind of majority rule' in South Africa. Therefore they needed organisations that would use revolutionary and anti-imperialist rhetoric and could be 'sold' to the international public, but would take part in Pretoria's so-called reforms aimed ultimately at the creation of a puppet regime. At the same time, Washington was doing its best to isolate the ANC from the struggle inside South Africa. Like the Pretoria regime, it was making it difficult for the ANC to operate in neighbouring countries. In addition, the US was trying to cut off sources of assistance to the ANC. Hence there was 'the noise' about the Soviet and Cuban presence in southern Africa.¹⁵⁰

The ANC leaders could at last tell their Soviet friends that armed combat was taking place in South Africa for the first time since the colonial conquest. They spoke about the 'arming of the people', though its scale was still rather limited.¹⁵¹ As usual, the requirements of the ANC were discussed, including increased supplies of military hardware and training facilities in the USSR. A new element was the request for materials from food to stationery for the newly established Solomon Mahlangu Freedom College (SOMAFSCO) in Tanzania.

However, the most striking feature of this visit was Oliver Tambo's request for assistance in the organisation of training of MK cadres in Angola. The idea of involving the Soviet military in training South Africans on African soil was not a new one. When the Soviets were first requested to assist in training military instructors,

148 Discussion with O. Tambo and J. Slovo, Moscow, 8 June 1977.

149 Ibid.

150 Discussion with O. Tambo, Moscow, 5 October 1978.

151 Ibid.

they had hoped to organise this in ‘some friendly African countries’.¹⁵² However, this proved difficult, and none took place before Tambo renewed the request.¹⁵³ More than 17 years after the first discussions in Moscow, the participation of Soviet instructors in the training of MK fighters on African soil at last became possible. The first group arrived in Angola in October 1979, led by ‘Comrade Ivan’: Vyacheslav Shiryaev, a navy captain.¹⁵⁴ He characterised his role as ‘military and political advisor’.¹⁵⁵

Others followed, replacing one another in two or three-year shifts.¹⁵⁶ Their numbers gradually increased from the three that were requested initially to several dozen. Several were re-deployed after the closure of the ZIPRA camp in Angola. Soon the group included specialists in military combat work (MCW) (that is, building the armed underground), hand-to-hand fighting, communications and communications equipment repair, as well as medical doctors, interpreters, etc. Later Comrade Ivan was succeeded by ‘Comrade George’ (the late Colonel German Pimenov), ‘Comrade Michael’ (Colonel Mikhail Konovalenko), and ‘Comrade Victor’ (Colonel Victor Belush). More than two hundred Soviet specialists and interpreters were stationed with MK in Angola in the period 1979–91.¹⁵⁷

The Soviet specialists in Angola carried out what used to be called ‘international duty’ in the remote camps. These camps often had to be moved, were located in areas where the climate was unhealthy, and were under constant threat from the Pretoria-led UNITA rebels. Initially they stayed in Angola on their own for security reasons, and only later were their families allowed to join them.

According to the ANC documents, the initiative to involve the Soviets came originally from Havana. The matter had been raised with ANC leaders by Jorge Risquet,¹⁵⁸ at that stage head of the Cuban contingent. The Cubans had become involved in training ANC cadres as soon as they arrived in Angola, and by the end of 1977 they had trained two detachments of MK fighters. When Risquet proposed the deployment of Soviet instructors, he wanted to lighten the burden on the Cuban mission (the Cubans suffered some casualties in the area when eight people died in

152 RSAMH: Decisions by the instruction of the Secretaries of the CPSU Central Committee without recording in the minutes, N 478, 28 November 1961.

153 Some academics incorrectly claimed that Soviet instructors had been deployed to Africa to train ANC cadres. Thus, Philip Nel wrote in his book on Moscow-Pretoria relations that ‘training personnel’ from the USSR ‘reached the newly established ANC camps in Tanzania and Zambia’ in 1964. See P. Nel, *Soviet Embassy in Pretoria? The Changing Soviet Approach to South Africa* (Cape Town: Tafelberg, 1990), 43.. He referred to the source, which looked credible – a book by Kurt Campbell, then a Harvard University fellow, (Campbell, *Soviet Policy Towards South Africa*, 41). But Campbell’s source was a book of another American academic, Kenneth Grundy. Moreover, Grundy did not mention the ANC; he wrote of Chinese and Cuban involvement in some African countries and added: ‘Russian instructors were also present in the early 1960s’ without indicating the African country, year or country of origin of the cadres being trained. See K. Grundy, *Guerrilla Struggle in Africa* (New York: Grossman, 1971), 51.

154 V.F. Shiryaev, ‘Menya zvali tovarishch Ivan’ (‘They called me Comrade Ivan’) in VVITKU VMF, *Vospominaniya vypusnikov 1961 goda* (Red Banner Higher Naval Engineering and Technical College. Reminiscences of graduates of 1961) (Moscow: 2005), 88–92.

155 *Ibid.*, 90.

156 Kasrils, *Armed and Dangerous*, 202.

157 *Segodnya*, Moscow, no. 5, 1993.

158 ‘Brief Report of the Revolutionary Council’. April 1979, 5–6. Internal ANC document.

an ambush by FNLA rebel troops),¹⁵⁹ or to have Moscow more deeply involved, or both.

The creation of a reliable rear base for the ANC in Angola provided an opportunity to accumulate weapons and ammunition there. By mid 1982 the ANC formations were well equipped and in position to operate as regular and guerrilla units for a protracted period.¹⁶⁰ The ANC leadership involved the Soviets in training MK personnel in regular and guerrilla warfare, though this proportion changed from time to time.

I had one opportunity to see Soviet specialists with MK in January 1984, when Andrey Urnov (who succeeded Manchkha as head of the African Section) and I went to Angola. Our main task was to meet Sam Nujoma and discuss the tension in SWAPO's relations with the Angolan government, caused by its talks with Pretoria. We used this opportunity to meet the ANC representatives there and the Soviet military. We came across two major problems. Comrade George told us that the MK Command wanted the Soviet instructors to train at least five infantry battalions. The first was scheduled to complete its training in the near future. We believed that such a plan was premature. No doubt the ANC needed personnel trained in regular warfare for the possible integration of the armed forces after liberation, but for the time being the emphasis had to be on guerrilla training and military combat.

We expressed our opinion to Comrade George, but of course the type of training had to be determined by the MK Command. In any case, it did change and later, apart from units that were able to rebuff UNITA attacks, the personnel were trained as guerrillas and underground operatives.¹⁶¹ Thus, when George's successor, Comrade Michael, was leading the group in 1985–1988, the MK recruits underwent six months basic training, followed by specialised training. The programme, which was endorsed by Joe Slovo and Chris Hani during their visits to Luanda, envisaged that most of the cadres would be trained for operations at home. The exceptions were the two battalions formed to fight UNITA, and a mortar platoon. (The MK Command and Slovo in particular planned a mortar attack against a military camp in South Africa, but this idea never materialised.)¹⁶²

The unavoidable participation in the counter-offensive against UNITA, which, apart from fighting the Angolan government forces, threatened the lines of supplies and the MK camps themselves, was one of the causes of the second problem discussed with Comrade George. He was visibly worried by a serious 'case of disobedience to the MK Command', which soon after our departure developed into a mutiny. As Chris Hani told us later, the human losses in the fighting against UNITA had led to demoralisation in the camps. The old accusation by Pretoria that the ANC leadership was sending young people to die for foreign interests was used by the 'dissidents', among whom, he believed, were several Pretoria agents.¹⁶³ The position we stated in Luanda was clear: 'This is an internal ANC matter; you should not interfere in any way.'

159 Discussion with V.Ya Shiryayev ('Comrade Ivan'), Moscow, 2 April, 2003.

160 Ibid.

161 Discussion with M. I. Konovalenko ('Comrade Michael'), Moscow, 10 September 2003.

162 Ibid.

163 Discussion with Chris Hani, Moscow, 25 November 1984.

The direct involvement of Soviet officers helped to raise the level of combat readiness of ANC armed units, especially the organisers of the armed underground. The same applied to the training of MK cadres in the USSR. Major-General Ivan Plakhin was responsible for contacts with the liberation movements for many years, and visited liberated areas of Mozambique and Guinea-Bissau during the anti-colonial armed struggles there, as well as Angola in early 1976 when South African troops were still on its territory. His successors were Air Force Major-General (later Lieutenant-General) Valery Sokolin, former Soviet military attaché in Angola, and then Colonel (later Lieutenant-General) Mikhail Zavaliy. 'General Fyodor' (Major-General Fyodor Fedorenko), himself a guerrilla commander in the Crimea during World War II, led the Northern Training Centre. After his retirement, it was commanded by Major-General Nikolay Kurushkin, who had been known to the freedom fighters as 'Colonel Nikolay', head of the Soviet group with SWAPO in Lubango, Southern Angola, in 1979–1983.

The next visit of the ANC delegation, led again by Oliver Tambo, took place in December 1979. Its composition reflected special emphasis on the armed struggle: Joe Modise, Mzwandile Piliso (then head of the Department of Military Training and Personnel), Thomas Nkobi (who replaced Moses Kotane as treasurer-general), and Cassius Make (Job Tlhabane), assistant secretary of the Revolutionary Council. Oliver Tambo was concerned because assistance from African countries and the OAU Liberation Committee was far from sufficient for the growing needs of the ANC. However, the ANC would do its best to find a solution to its problems on the continent and would appeal to the Soviet Union and its allies only when unable to do so.¹⁶⁴

At that time I left my full-time job as Secretary for African Affairs in the Solidarity Committee, and joined a Doctoral Studies Department of the Academy of Social Sciences in September 1979. However, I continued to meet South African friends and had an interesting discussion with Thomas Nkobi, who recalled how, back in the 1960s, the Soviets had suggested that the ANC look to the West for funding for humanitarian purposes, such as legal defences in political trials and assistance to the families of political prisoners. Nkobi was glad that at last the ANC had begun to receive substantial assistance from beyond the African continent and socialist countries.¹⁶⁵ Thus Sweden, which was a forerunner in this matter, allocated 12.11 million krona (about US\$3 million) to the ANC.¹⁶⁶

The final years of the 1980s witnessed a growing number of MK operations. MK Command worked out the plans for these operations and regularly forwarded requests to the USSR for supplies. But the South African authorities continuously tried to put the blame on Moscow. The minister of police, Louis le Grange, once stated: 'The Russian Ambassador in Lusaka, Dr Solodovnikov, played an important role in the planning of ANC and communist strategy and he was assisted by a South African refugee woman Frene Ginwala.'¹⁶⁷ In fact, Solodovnikov and Ginwala had never met.

164 Discussion with O. Tambo, Moscow, 6 December 1979.

165 Discussion with T. Nkobi, Moscow, 6 December 1979.

166 Sellström, *Sweden and National Liberation*, 899.

167 *Rand Daily Mail*, 3 June 1980.

Oliver Tambo responded:

One must pity the South African government for they are going to be misled into suicidal positions. These actions are done by blacks within the country ... No one outside South Africa – not even the Soviet Ambassador – has got a way of reaching into South Africa and telling the people exactly what to do.¹⁶⁸

However, a concrete type of arms, received by the ANC from the USSR, sometimes did influence its tactics. Thus, Soviet-made limpet mines were used successfully in operations against Pretoria's strategic installations, such as the bombing of SASOL on 1 June 1980. This weapon was easy to use, but initially quite new to South Africa. Moreover, as Joe Slovo testified, it was scarcely known among the 'ordinary' Soviet military personnel. When the first batch of limpet mines was received by the ANC in Maputo, even the Soviet military experts could not handle them. They were attached to the armed forces of Mozambique as specialists in conventional warfare, and not sabotage equipment.¹⁶⁹

It would be fair to compare the appearance of such mines with the Soviet-made Strela ('Arrow') anti-aircraft missiles used by the Partido Africano da Independência da Guiné e Cabo Verde (PAIGC) in Guinea-Bissau and then by FRELIMO in Mozambique against Portuguese aircraft. Although these rockets and limpet mines could not in themselves change the course of the guerrilla war in these colonies, their use in successful operations had great psychological effect.

Following the upsurge in the struggle in the mid 1970s, ANC leaders again began to travel to Moscow for training. Mzwandile Piliso had undergone training prior to the upsurge, and these skills helped him in his new duties, especially in Angola. The next prominent South African to go to the Soviet Union was Andrew Masondo, then known by his nom de guerre, Edward Delinga. After his release from Robben Island in the mid 1970s, Masondo was banished. He left South Africa, and after a short rest in the USSR, began his military training in Moscow. Soon he was appointed the ANC's national commissar. With Joe Modise, an Odessa graduate, and Piliso, he played a leading role in reorganising and expanding MK.

The decision was then taken to send all the executive members who had not undergone military training to Moscow. Alfred Nzo and prominent ANC members who had recently left South Africa – Joe Gqabi, John Nkadimeng, and Henry Makgothi – travelled to Moscow to receive military training.¹⁷⁰ In the MK ranks this type of studies was sometimes jokingly called 'kitchen training' (as a rule the trainees stayed in flats and their classroom was next to a kitchen). But the courses at least gave the ANC political leadership basic military knowledge.

In describing Moscow's relations with the ANC, it is important to stress the contribution of the Soviet 'social' organisations, that is, NGOs. The most prominent

¹⁶⁸ *Guardian*, London, 4 June 1980.

¹⁶⁹ Discussion with J. Slovo, Moscow, 10 May 1985.

¹⁷⁰ Discussion with J. Nkadimeng, Cape Town, 25 November 1994.

role was played by the Soviet Afro-Asian Solidarity Committee (SAASC). As well as supplies, the committee took care of South African students, held numerous meetings and seminars in support of the ANC struggle, and provided ANC activists with air tickets to various destinations, in particular to international conferences, especially those organised by AAPSO and the World Peace Council (WPC).

For example, in October 1976, soon after the Soweto uprising and in anticipation of the pseudo-independence of the Transkei, the Emergency International Conference was convened in Addis Ababa. The committee chartered a plane to transport most of its participants from Europe and other parts of the world to Ethiopia. Air tickets were provided to make a connection in Moscow. The committee was a primary organiser of celebrations of ANC anniversaries. Thus, in January 1982, when its 60th anniversary was marked in many countries, the committee hosted the delegation led by Thabo Mbeki. The committee's delegations also took part and, as a rule, rendered practical assistance to every international conference on southern Africa organised by structures such as the UN and OAU.

Similar activities were conducted by the Soviet Women's Committee, the Committee of the USSR Youth Organisations, the USSR Students' Council and the All-Union Council of Trade Unions. All of them provided substantial assistance beyond the framework of the state and CPSU budgets and supported the ANC position in international bodies: the International Federation of Democratic Women, the World Federation of Democratic Youth, the International Union of Students, and the World Federation of Trade Unions.

In August 1977, the committee of the ANC Youth Section organised a student summer school in Moscow. This was the first conference to bring together exiled students from 14 countries under the auspices of the ANC. Nkosazana Dhlamini, future South African minister of foreign affairs, was among its participants. The funding for these activities was provided from the budgets of the Committee of the USSR Youth Organisations and the USSR Students' Council, supplemented by allocations from the Soviet Peace Fund. In the case of the Solidarity Committee, the fund was its sole source of finance. Contributions to the Peace Fund were collected all over the USSR. But the distribution of the funds was extremely centralised. Soviet citizens were encouraged to contribute to the fund and not to specific projects, and the fund management, under the tight control of the International Department, would decide how to spend it.

However, from time to time more targeted campaigns took place. Thus, the Young Communist League organisation in the Sverdlovsk region collected 20 tons of goods for SOMAFCO. In co-operation with the Solidarity Committee, the organisers of this campaign planned to visit Tanzania, and a fitting occasion would be the official launch of the school in August 1985. However, this idea was not supported by the ANC, probably because SOMAFCO was becoming a kind of showpiece for Western journalists and representatives of 'donors' (it was the only ANC establishment they could be invited to), and they did not want to 'tarnish' its image.

A peculiar form of Soviet assistance to the ANC was the invitation extended to South Africans for rest and medical treatment in the USSR. As in other fields, there

were several channels for it. The CPSU detailed annual quotas for friendly foreign organisations. For South Africa, the quota of the SACP was combined with that of the ANC (here the relationships were really symbiotic). Ten people, and later twenty, would visit Moscow, undergo medical check-ups and, depending on the doctors' advice, would be admitted to hospital or travel to resorts, usually to Sochi or Yalta on the shores of the Black Sea. In addition, the Soviet Afro-Asian Solidarity Committee and other NGOs had their own quotas, which from time to time were used by South Africans. In 1969, on the initiative of the Solidarity Committee, a special decision was taken to admit wounded freedom fighters to Soviet military hospitals. Initially it covered the needs of the liberation movements in the Portuguese colonies, but soon was expanded to the ANC. Among the first South African patients was Max Sisulu, wounded in Pretoria's terrorist action against the ANC office in Lusaka.

Sometimes this treatment was rather lengthy. For example, the ANC Executive Committee member and SACP chairman, John (Uncle J. B.) Marks, became seriously ill in August 1971 and, accompanied by a Soviet doctor specially sent to Dar es Salaam, had to be transported to Moscow for 'lengthy treatment'.¹⁷¹ He spent over a year in the Central Clinical Hospital in Moscow.¹⁷² Marks's health deteriorated and he wrote to Dadoo two weeks before his death: 'I am afraid we might have to make the land of the proletariat our sleeping place.'¹⁷³ Indeed, he was buried in the Novodevichye cemetery, traditionally reserved for the most prominent Soviet figures. Two years later, on 16 December 1974, so meaningful a day for the ANC and MK, his tombstone was unveiled. Almost fifteen years later, his grave was visited by his widow, Gladys, and the ANC students in Moscow, clenched fists raised, sang 'Nkosi Sikelel' iAfrika' with her.

An even more special case was that of Moses Kotane. After suffering a stroke, he was taken to Moscow, also accompanied by a Soviet doctor, on New Year's eve of 1969. Initially his comrades in the SACP, ANC and the Soviet Union shared hopes of his recovery. This was expressed in the message sent to him by the CPSU CC on his 65th birthday in 1970. It expressed the hope that 'the severe illness will retreat, [in the face of] the strength of your spirit and your commitment to the struggle for the cause you devoted yourself to'.¹⁷⁴ After some improvement he was transferred from the hospital to the Barvikha sanatorium near Moscow and later to Sochi, in preparation for his return to Africa. But there his condition deteriorated again and he had to return to the Moscow hospital¹⁷⁵ to remain there for many more years until in 1978, another grave, that of Moses Kotane, appeared at the Novodevichye cemetery.

He stayed in a VIP room in the hospital for almost ten years, treated by the best doctors and assisted by interpreters, usually students, recruited by the CPSU

171 RSAMH, Minutes of the Secretariat, no. 13/112g, 23 August 1971.

172 The Soviets were surprised to read in Morris, *Terrorism*, 8, published in 1971, in what Morris (a South African security policeman) claimed was 'the first full account in detail of terrorism and insurgency in South Africa; that Marks had 'taken up residence in Red China'!

173 MCHP: ANC London Collection, J. Marks to Y. Dadoo, 18 July 1972.

174 RSAMH: Minutes of the Secretariat, no. 103/91g, 14 July 1970.

175 RSAMH: Decisions of the CPSU Central Committee Secretariat, taken by voting, 15 July 1970.

International Department. All expenses, as in other cases, were covered by the Soviet side, mostly from the budget of the Ministry of Health and partly from the CPSU budget. It is impossible to calculate the costs and they have never been taken into account in figures of the Soviet support. But they were, no doubt, very high.¹⁷⁶

Medical assistance was provided to other leaders and activists of the liberation movement, though at times they applied for it too late. That was the case with Yusuf Dadoo, who was originally treated in Britain and then in Czechoslovakia. When he finally went to Moscow in July 1983, the Soviet doctors, contrary to their usual code of behaviour, informed him that he had terminal cancer. He returned to London and passed away a month later.¹⁷⁷ His death coincided with the last days of preparation for the SACP Central Committee meeting in Prague and I had the sad duty of informing Moses Mabhida and other comrades as soon as they landed in Sheremetyevo on their way from Africa to Czechoslovakia.

'One hundred per cent support for the ANC – and, if you want it, 120 per cent support'

The 1980s saw an upsurge in the liberation struggle in South Africa. Its beginning was marked by a number of spectacular operations of MK, followed by the explosion in the black townships in 1984. In this period of hope, as in the early period of dismay, Moscow was ready to render support.

Perhaps the most stunning MK operation was a rocket attack against the South African Army base at Voortrekkerhoogte on 16 June 1981, on the fifth anniversary of the Soweto uprising. (The South African press described the weapons used in some previous MK attacks as rockets as well, but in those cases grenades had been fired from (RPG) rocket propelled grenade launchers). According to the official report, four rockets hit the base, but three of them did not cause any damage.¹⁷⁸ The MK Command assessed the results much higher, probably too high (they spoke about 50 enemy casualties.)¹⁷⁹ Nevertheless, the myth of the SADF's invincibility had been shattered once again.

However, the most publicised and controversial MK operation was the explosion at the entrance to the South African Air Force Headquarters and the building opposite, which housed Military Intelligence, in Church Street in Pretoria on 20 May 1983. The Johannesburg *Sunday Times* reacted to this explosion under the heading: "‘Colonel’ Slovo lies low in London."¹⁸⁰ It quoted Louis le Grange, minister of police, who dubbed Slovo the 'country's enemy No 1 ... He prefers London, it seems, to

176 Surprisingly the ANC archival documents show that when Oliver Tambo, who also suffered a stroke, underwent treatment in Sweden, the ANC had to cover the expenses.

177 His death, or how he 'turned this moment of irreversible defeat into a victory', was well described by Joe Slovo in an article in the *African Communist*, no. 96, 1984, 6-7.

178 The weapon used was the Grad P ('Grad' means 'Hail' in Russian and P stands for 'portable') rocket launcher. Six Grad-Ps under the command of Leal Ramos Monteiro 'Ngongo', smashed FNLZA-Zairean troops in a decisive battle near Luanda on 10 November 1975.

179 *Sechaba*, 12 October, 1983.

180 *Sunday Times*, Johannesburg, 29 May 1983.

Moscow ... Slovo is thought to have gone to London immediately after the Pretoria explosion – apparently anticipating the SADF retaliatory raid on Maputo.' 'It seems', the newspaper continued, 'his every move is monitored by South African agents and informers.' However, Pretoria's intelligence failed miserably: those agents who were apparently tracking Slovo were tracking the wrong man. Slovo was neither in Maputo nor in London at the time of the explosion; he was in Moscow taking part in the SACP Politbureau meeting with members of its Industrial Committee.

This 'joint meeting of the PB with selected comrades involved in TU [trade union] work'¹⁸¹ was convened on the suggestion of Ray Simons, 'proposing a document that would clearly formulate the policy of the party on Trade Unions'¹⁸² in the CPSU guest house estate named Volynskoe-2 (a few hundred metres from Volynskoe 1, Stalin's former dacha). It was some days after the meeting that Slovo flew from Moscow to Berlin, and then, with a ticket provided by the GDR comrades, to London via Amsterdam (the GDR airline Interflug did not fly directly to the British capital).

The *Sunday Times* elaborated: 'He is a Moscow communist, KGB colonel, who has a *dacha* on Lake Baikal – and he is a leading ideologue in the ANC-SACP alliance.'¹⁸³ Some years later, when Slovo first came to the Soviet Union, for a short holiday, I suggested to him to go to that lake in Siberia at least to scout his dacha, but he was, as usual, in a hurry to leave for Africa or for the UK. As bizarre as this tale is, even some 'sane' people in South Africa apparently believed it. Soon after Slovo's death, Shaun Johnson published a rather warm 'tribute to the white man black South Africa loved' in the *Weekend Argus*, and Johnson did not forget to mention Slovo's 'impressionability in a Soviet dacha'.¹⁸⁴

As for Slovo's 'KGB rank', Ellis and Sechaba wrote: 'South African government propaganda alleged that Slovo was a colonel of the Soviet KGB, but that seems rather unlikely in view of Slovo's South African nationality.'¹⁸⁵ If this were the only reason, this tandem of British academic and ANC renegade were utterly wrong: for several decades, even when he was engaged in talks on a political settlement, Slovo had been officially regarded as an alien by the South African authorities, who refused him South African citizenship, obviously for political reasons. A trustworthy version was given by Dennis Herbstein in the *Cape Times*. He described how 'the SAP department of dirty tricks' gave Slovo a rank in the early 1980s: 'Make him a captain in the KGB' suggested one. 'Good idea,' said Williamson, 'but why just a captain? The bigger the lie, the more readily people will swallow it.' The KGB colonel was born.¹⁸⁶

MK operations were becoming increasingly sophisticated and requests for new types of weaponry were made to Moscow. Several times the ANC, and Joe Modise in particular, had expressed their need to acquire Malyutka ('Baby' or 'Tiny One'), wire-guided rocket launchers. This weapon was originally anti-tank, but MK Command

181 MCHP, YDC: Minutes of the P.B. Meeting, held on 17th February 1983 in Maputo, 3.

182 MCHP, YDC: Secretariat activities since formation.

183 Ibid.

184 *Weekend Argus*, Cape Town, 7/8 January 1995.

185 Ellis and Sechaba, *Comrades*, 58.

186 *Cape Times*, 9 January 1995.

wanted to use it for sabotage activities. Although Malyutka had been supplied to a number of countries since the 1960s, this weapon was no longer available, according to the Main Engineering Department. The situation was saved by Professor Rostislav Ulyanovsky, who as the deputy head of the International Department had enough influence to convince General Mikhail Sergeichik, who was responsible for arms supplies, in a very friendly conversation over a *vertushka* (a bug-free phone) of the need 'to help South African comrades'. During the next visit of the ANC delegation its members were introduced to the weapon. Joe Modise was visibly happy to get this handy hardware and under his pressure Thomas Nkobi promised to provide the best suitcases to smuggle it into South Africa. For one reason or another, however, this cherished weapon was never used by the ANC at home.

It was not the Soviets' fault. The group of selected ANC cadres were received promptly in Perevalnoe for training in handling Malyutkas. While in transit in Moscow, they were glad to meet Chris Hani, who came to Moscow for the first time for a family holiday in summer 1983. Hani visited the camp (house) in Skhodnya, near Moscow, where another group of MK cadres were in training. This was the same '*ob'ekt*' where Hani had studied before his departure for South Africa, and the staff were happy to see him again.

With the increase of the intake in MK (and the difficulties of sending cadres home) the ANC, apart from the training facilities in Angola, had to send more people for training in the USSR. MK fighters were always trained in the specialities determined by its command, though after consultations with the Soviet military in Angola and/or in Moscow. In the second half of the 1980s, training was organised in two major directions. First, the ANC needed highly skilled cadres to build armed underground structures. Therefore, more people were provided with training in military combat work (MCW), a highly specialised course that was very popular in MK. The possibility of increasing the number of trainees was discussed with Oliver Tambo in the GDR in 1986. The International Department, in close contact with the military, drafted a special decision of the CC on this issue. It authorised an annual intake of 60 ANC members (and the same figure of SWAPO combatants) for training in the Northern Training Centre in MCW and related subjects over a five-year period until 1990. (In fact, with the approaching independence of Namibia, some of SWAPO's quota were used for the ANC). Joe Modise and Ronnie Kasrils, on one of their visits to Moscow, specifically asked to train the cadres in the transition from legal activities to underground.

Training in military combat was becoming increasingly sophisticated. 'Comrade Gebuza' (General Siphwe Nyanda, first African head of the SANDF) went to the USSR in 1985, immediately after the Kabwe conference of the ANC, with a group of MK commanders, which included Charles Nqakula, who is now minister of safety and security and SACP chairperson, and Nosizwe Mapisa Nqakula, minister of home affairs (and president of the ANC Women's League). 'Gebuza' recalls:

In the USSR, we were staying in an apartment on Gorki Street, Moscow, where the lectures were conducted. For the practical exercises, we went to a place outside Moscow ... We studied MCW (military combat work) as part of an abridged brigade commanders' course. The course covered subjects such as communications, underground work and military work. All were useful.¹⁸⁷

Second, training of ANC cadres for future regular military service was essential. Some people, usually 'ultra-leftists' or right wingers,¹⁸⁸ claim that because of the alleged USSR–USA agreement, Moscow's military aid to the ANC was restricted to conventional training. However, Moscow's agreement on conventional training was not with the USA, but with the ANC. The MK Command and Joe Modise insisted that such training should be organised for the future armed forces, including the air force and navy. The problem was that foreign military cadres were usually trained in the USSR with equipment already 'in the pipe line'. (Some exceptions had been made earlier, for example, for ZIPRA.) It was only after the Gorbachev-Tambo meeting (below) that the International Department convinced the top military that the time had come for such training. By that time, the prospect of a political settlement was emerging, and the International Department believed that at least the ANC should have some skilled cadres in time to control the situation in all branches of the military. In 1986, even before that meeting, the first group of ANC members began a full three-year course for motorised infantry officers in Perevalnoe. Then, in 1987, full-course training (up to five years)¹⁸⁹ was organised for MK cadres in several fields, including helicopter and then jet pilots, as well as aircraft engineers in Frunze and naval officers in Baku.

Another issue that cannot be avoided when writing about Moscow's relations with the ANC is the Soviet influence on its security machinery. Not much has been written so far on the history of the ANC's NAT, as this apparatus was known in the movement, and virtually nothing about Moscow's role, apart from attempts to put the blame for blunders of this body on the SACP and at least implicitly on Moscow. However, Ronnie Kasrils writes in his book: 'Whatever might be thought about interrogation methods in communist countries, I found that Soviet and East German training emphasised the need to depend on brain work and not beating to arrive at the truth.'¹⁹⁰ In the 1980s, ANC security cadres were trained mainly in the GDR. But in November 1986, after his meeting with Gorbachev, Oliver Tambo, in the presence of Joe Modise and Chris Hani, requested that NAT personnel be trained in the USSR. He also repeated a request for a Soviet security expert to be sent to the ANC in Angola. But the Soviet authorities declined, although such a specialist could have positively influenced future developments. Disturbing information (or

187 Sipiwe Nyanda to Vladimir Shubin, 10 December 2002.

188 As a Latin American poet wrote, because the earth is round, those who go to the extreme left finally become extreme right-wingers.

189 An officer's training course in the SADF was from six to twelve months long.

190 Kasrils, *Armed and Dangerous*, 193

at least rumours) was reaching Moscow. The SACP Central Committee Secretariat at its meeting in Maputo decided that the matter was serious enough to be referred to the Party Politbureau, which took a decision: Luanda delegation to discuss this question further with selected comrades.¹⁹¹

By November 1986 the situation had again become serious. Tambo discussed the issue with Slovo after discussions with the Soviet military. Tambo was clearly worried that the ANC leaders were losing control over the NAT. Hardly accidentally, soon after Tambo's return from Moscow, in February 1987, the ANC NEC finally decided: 'The present Directorate of NAT will be dissolved, effective as from the date the Presidential Committee formally announces it.'¹⁹²

The expansion of the anti-apartheid struggle, especially MK actions, worried South African ruling circles, and the blame was again put on the 'arm of Moscow'. P. W. Botha, then South African prime minister, referred to the ANC in November 1983 as 'a small clique of blacks and whites, controlled by the Kremlin'.¹⁹³ General Constant Viljoen, then head of the SADF, claimed that Moscow had formed a special Co-ordination Committee on Southern Africa and named the USSR Ambassador in Botswana, Mikhail Petrov, as the coordinator of the revolutionary onslaught against South Africa.¹⁹⁴ The irony was that in Gaborone, in contrast to Dar es Salaam, Lusaka, and later Luanda and Maputo, 'the Kremlin' had not delegated a single person to be responsible for contact with the ANC. For many years Vassily Solodovnikov was portrayed as a mastermind of terrorist attacks, but when he left Lusaka for home, the new ambassador, Vladimir Cherednik, was immediately elevated by the Pretoria propagandists to the same rank of 'general in the KGB'. Police Major General F.M.A. Steenkamp called the ANC 'an extension of the Communist Party', 'a puppet of the SACP', and claimed that 'the SACP in its turn is a creature of the International Department of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union.'

Fred Bridgland, a leading British journalist, invented another (or the same?) 'Mikhail Petrov, first deputy on the Soviet Politbureau in charge of counter-insurgency policy'.¹⁹⁵ There was no such post, and in any case, nobody in the Politbureau would be specifically in charge 'of counter-insurgency policy'. Perhaps Bridgland meant Marshal Vassily Petrov, then commander-in-chief of the Soviet Ground Forces, who was in charge of regular warfare and had nothing to do counter-insurgency policy. This nonsense was repeated much later in a joint submission by the former Chiefs of the SADF, Generals Malan, Viljoen, Geldenhuys and Liebenberg, to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC)¹⁹⁶ as 'a reality that formed and influenced

191 Ibid.

192 MCHP: ANC Lusaka Collection, Final Version. Decision and Recommendations of the N.E.C. Meeting, 11 to 15 February 1987, 8.

193 *Star*, Johannesburg, 3 November 1983.

194 *Washington Post*, 1 January 1984.

195 Fred Bridgland, *The War for Africa. Twelve Months that Transformed a Continent* (Gibraltar: Ashanti Publishing House, 1990), 17.

196 'Assessment of the probable results of activities of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) as perceived by former Chiefs of the SADF', February 1998. www.rhodesia.nl/trurec1.htm

the perceptions of people', that is, 'an orchestrated attempt by the Soviet Union to subjugate Southern Africa', which is 'denied in socialist circles'.¹⁹⁷

Indeed, the nature of Moscow's co-operation with the ANC was grossly distorted by Pretoria officials. In 1980, when the South African Security Police had to withdraw its agent Captain Craig Williamson, who for a number of years held senior positions in the International University Exchange Fund, it tried to camouflage its defeat and to portray it as a propaganda success. *Servamus*, the South African Police magazine, published a series of articles, written (or just signed?) by Williamson. 'S.A.P. penetrates Moscow' was the headline on the cover of one edition of *Servamus* under a picture of Williamson in Red Square.¹⁹⁸ This propaganda was immediately supported by the 'liberal' South African press. Thus, the *Sunday Times* claimed that Williamson 'even had the audacity to spy on the mighty Russian KGB', and visited Moscow 'as an official guest'.¹⁹⁹ However, he received a Soviet visa as an ordinary tourist in possession of a valid travel document (not a South African passport).

Williamson claimed that he 'monitored the Communist Party of the Soviet Union'. 'I also infiltrated several other anti-South African organisations such as the Soviet Afro-Asian Friendship [that is, Solidarity] Committee.'²⁰⁰ He did not remember the proper name of the organisation he 'infiltrated', and wrote nothing concrete about his penetration of Moscow in his articles. Nevertheless, he was later considered an expert on Moscow's policy. However, it became apparent that this so-called specialist was ill informed about the ANC's relationship with the Soviet Union, or was consciously deceiving the readers. As late as 1989 he claimed that Nelson Mandela 'was appointed [to lead Umkhonto we Sizwe] on the recommendation of Moscow, a decision of which Andrey Gromyko remains proud to this day'.²⁰¹ Unfortunately, Mandela's name was hardly known in Moscow in 1961 and was mentioned in the Soviet press for the first time after his arrest in 1962. The National Intelligence Service, supposedly a think-tank of the South African establishment, fared no better. Its senior operative stated: 'To a large extent one can say that the onslaught against the RSA is an operation of the C.P.S.U.'²⁰²

The South African authorities tried to win over the leading Western countries by portraying themselves as victims of the 'Marxist total onslaught'. D.B. Sole, the South African ambassador to Washington, admitted in his memoirs that they were instrumental in holding a hearing on 'the role of the Soviet Union, Cuba and East Germany in fomenting terrorism in Southern Africa' in the sub-committee on terrorism of the US Senate in March 1982. Moreover, in a letter to his wife, he wrote: 'We had engineered the establishment of the [sub] Committee.'²⁰³ Officials of this

197 *Ibid.*, 5.

198 *Servamus*, Pretoria, September 1981.

199 *Sunday Times*, Johannesburg, 27 January 1980.

200 *Ibid.*

201 Venter, (ed.) *Challenge.*, 278.

202 MCHP: Draft. 'ANC/CP methods of spotting and recruiting of agents within the RSA. Compiled by K.Z. Edwards. May 1990; General remarks and conclusions concerning the ANC/CP, (Pretoria), 1.

203 D. Sole, *This Above All. Reminiscences of a South African Diplomat*, (Cape Town: D. S. Sole, 1989), 481.

sub-committee visited South Africa and were briefed by South African intelligence officials.²⁰⁴

The performance of the witnesses selected by the South African and US authorities (that is, special services) was pathetic. In May 1982 one of the 'witnesses' at the hearing, Nokokono Kave, a niece of Ciskei's 'president' Lennox Sebe and a former student in the USSR, had claimed that 'she was ... introduced to a Russian named Shubin who, she was told, led the armed struggle in southern Africa'.²⁰⁵ The evidence of Chester Crocker, the assistant secretary of state for African Affairs, was more serious. On behalf of the US Administration he 'categorically condemned all terrorist and other violent acts' carried out by SWAPO and the ANC 'to bring about change in Namibia and South Africa'.²⁰⁶ He estimated that SWAPO had received '90% of its military support and some 60% of its overall support from communist sources', and the ANC received 'a comparable percentage of its military and other support from communist and other sources'.²⁰⁷ The ANC reacted with a strong statement:

The derogatory reference by Dr Crocker to the just struggle for national liberation as 'terrorist' is but a feeble attempt by the Reagan administration at concealing its role as the mainstay of terrorist regimes throughout the world ... Neither the ANC nor the Soviet Union made any secret of the selfless support that the Soviet Union, the Socialist community and the progressive forces the world over are granting to the people fighting against oppression, exploitation and human degradation.²⁰⁸

The defence of Pretoria's action was typical not only of the Reagan administration, but of the president himself. Soon after coming to power, he stated:

Can we abandon a country [South Africa] that has stood behind us in every war we have fought, a country that strategically is essential to the free world in its production of minerals we all must have and so forth?²⁰⁹

In an interview with *Sechaba* to the American magazine, Tambo spoke about the ANC's relations with Moscow:

We stood together with the Soviet Union and the allied forces in fighting Nazism during the Second World War. True to these positions, the Soviet Union and other socialist countries stand with us to this day fighting the apartheid system itself and its leaders ... of Nazi ideology and practice.²¹⁰

To justify its aggressive actions against frontline states, the newly appointed defence minister General Magnus Malan, in his first speech in parliament, claimed that 'more

204 *Sunday Times*, 21 February 1982.

205 *Sechaba*, May 1982, 7.

206 *Ibid.*, 8.

207 *Ibid.*, 7.

208 Quoted in *The African Communist*, no. 91, 1982, 90.

209 Quoted in Chester Crocker, *High Noon in Southern Africa: Making Peace in a Rough Neighbourhood* (Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball, 1993), 81.

210 *Sechaba*, December 1982, 20.

than five hundred Russian tanks' were stationed near South Africa's borders, ready to launch an attack. *The Times* of London, not too friendly towards the ANC or Moscow, called his speech

... pretty hot stuff even by South African standards ... Nobody [in parliament] challenged General Malan's figures, for instance nobody asked the general about the range of a Russian tank, how it will get from Angola to South Africa through Namibia. Still, generals are not accustomed to having their opinions questioned.²¹¹

In May 1982 Malan, while presenting the White Paper on Defence and Armaments Supply to parliament, underlined the peril of the total onslaught against South Africa. He spoke of Soviet intentions to tie down South African forces in SWA [Namibia] while giving increasing support to the insurgency in South Africa itself.²¹² Such a plan had never existed. Moscow rendered support to the frontline states and liberation movements strictly on a bilateral basis and co-ordination of their efforts was not too high.

The South African authorities even tried to connect Moscow with activities that lay far beyond its co-operation with the ANC. When the prominent Afrikaner poet Breyten Breytenbach was arrested in 1975, having entered South Africa with a false passport, the pro-Pretoria media emphasised that Breytenbach, who at the time was living in Paris in self-exile, had sat next to Professor Solodovnikov at a conference. However, according to Breytenbach, his organisation, called *Okhela* (or 'Atlas'), was intended to help 'Tambo and Makatini to break away from the Communist Party [and Moscow] when the Okhela group was soundly established'.²¹³

On the other hand, the South African authorities tried to create the impression that the USSR did not strictly observe sanctions and other boycotts against Pretoria. For example, they used every instance that visas were granted to South African participants of international conferences convened in Moscow. This usually happened when international scientific organisations insisted on their participation, particularly if they were members of the governing bodies of these organisations. For example, in July 1982 visas were given to a number of South African doctors to take part in an International Congress of Cardiologists in Moscow. Among the wives who accompanied the delegates was Helen Suzman. No politics was involved; no senior Soviet official was informed in advance; and those responsible in the International Department understood that something was wrong only when Yusuf Dadoo asked for an explanation after the South African press had published stories about Suzman's visit to Moscow.

With the escalation of the struggle in its political and military forms, Soviet assistance to the ANC grew. At the same time, following the emergence of legal opposition in South Africa, the CPSU CC took an important decision in 1981, on the initiative of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Africa Institute, supported by

211 *Times*, London, 18 December 1981.

212 Quoted in *ANC Weekly News Briefing*, no. 19, 1982, 5-6.

213 *Rand Daily Mail*, 28 November 1975.

the ruling party's International Department, to establish contacts with legal popular organisations inside South Africa. Although in principle the decision was correct, it was in all probability premature, because the legal South African opposition inside South Africa was still fragile and vulnerable. Any contacts with Moscow could have been detrimental to its lawful status. On the other hand, in anticipation that Pretoria would have to negotiate with the ANC sooner or later, some future contacts between Moscow and Pretoria were envisaged, in particular to allow Soviet officials not to shun protocol contacts with South African government representatives. However, this was also premature because the intensification of South African aggression against Angola and other frontline states made contact with Pretoria virtually impossible.

The only contacts between the Soviet Union and South Africa at the time were made necessary by the capture of Soviet citizens. Ambassador Yury Yukalov, head of the African Department of the USSR Ministry of Foreign Affairs, admitted much later, in 1988, that: 'Closed contacts took place several years ago. But they were aimed at releasing Soviet geologists captured by RENAMO units in Mozambique [and other citizens as well]. Then we had to be cautious and avoid publicity.'²¹⁴ In fact, these contacts began even earlier, for example, after the capture of Warrant Officer Nikolay Pestretsov in Angola in August 1981 during Operation Protea, a large-scale SADF invasion of Angola. Pestretsov's wife, two Soviet officers, and the wife of one the officers were killed while trying to retreat to the rear.²¹⁵ The minister of defence Magnus Malan claimed that the presence of Soviet military personnel in Angola was 'indisputable evidence of Russian involvement with SWAPO'.²¹⁶ Once again, the South African military hierarchy was ready to twist the facts. From the documents that were captured – and later made public by the South African authorities²¹⁷ – they were fully aware that the Soviet officers were attached to an Angolan Infantry Brigade and had nothing to do with SWAPO. Truth was easily disregarded for propaganda purposes.

The Soviet Union did have experts based at the SWAPO military headquarters in Lubango for many years, but none of them were captured or killed. Sam Nujoma wrote in his memoirs: 'The South African government, under both Vorster and P. W. Botha, tried hard to associate SWAPO with communists, regardless of the truth. They tried to capture SWAPO Soviet instructors at our military academy in Angola, without any success.'²¹⁸ A statement by TASS (the Soviet official news agency) referred to Soviet officers with FAPLA, though their activities did not go beyond 'the framework of technical consultations and training of Angolan national cadres ... The Soviet side places full responsibility for the death of the Soviet citizens on the Government of the RSA and demands the immediate return of the captured Soviet citizen and of the bodies of the deceased.'²¹⁹

214 *Izvestiya*, 30 December 1988.

215 The fact that Soviet officers were accompanied by their wives, shows that the Soviet military mission in Angola did not expect a deep incursion of the Pretoria forces.

216 *Cape Times*, 2 September 1981.

217 *The Role of the Soviet Union*, vol. 2, Addendum, 800-801.

218 Sam Nujoma, *Where Others Wavered: The Autobiography of Sam Nujoma* (London: Panaf Books, 2001), 243.

219 *Pravda*, Moscow, 2 September 1981.

Contacts between Moscow and Pretoria on such issues, though fully justified, had two negative results. First, Soviet officials who were involved were influenced, though to varying degrees, by the South Africans' arguments. Second, Pretoria, which was facing increasing international isolation, sought to exploit each contact for its propaganda, distorting its nature or blowing it out of proportion. The exceptions were rare. One was a Soviet message to Pretoria transmitted through the South African Mission in New York in November 1983 that contained a plain warning: if South Africa continued its aggression against Angola, Soviet assistance to that country's government would increase. Pik Botha had to admit that the Soviet message in essence was a warning that the USSR viewed the issue of Namibia in a more serious light than ever before, and that the occupation of Angolan territory by South African troops, coupled with Pretoria's support for UNITA, was 'unacceptable'.²²⁰

Several strongly worded statements by the USSR government were issued in 1985, protesting against repressions that followed the introduction of the state of emergency and attacks against independent African states. Another stern warning to Pretoria was given when the South African Special Forces damaged Soviet vessels and sank a Cuban vessel in an Angolan port on 5 June 1986: 'The RSA is responsible for an act of terrorism in the port of Namibe in Angola. Actions of this kind cannot go unpunished.'²²¹

Probably the only instance when South African officials fully observed confidentiality was a Soviet-South African meeting in August 1984 in Vienna. It took place soon after the Nkomati Accord, signed by President Samora Machel and P. W. Botha. Moscow did not criticise or denounce it, but was unhappy. The Soviets did not believe that the accord would put an end to Pretoria's assistance to RENAMO, and they proved to be right. Besides, Mozambique had conducted talks with South Africa without any consultations with Moscow. However, the Nkomati Accord strengthened the position of those in the Soviet establishment, whether in the diplomatic quarters or 'special services', who were calling for direct political contacts with Pretoria. Sixteen years later, Sergey Sinitsyn, who led a Soviet delegation to the 1984 bilateral meeting, published a very candid article under the title of 'Viennese waltz with Boers'.²²² He describes the developments:

In summer of 1984 through contacts with 'close neighbours' (KGB)²²³ who were dealing with the issue of setting free our people, RSA officials informed Moscow about their wish to organise a confidential meeting at a working level on the problems of the situation in Southern Africa ... After comprehensive interdepartmental discussion and getting consent of the Old

220 *Times*, 6 January 1984. Chester Crocker gives this message in his memoirs. He claims that Moscow was trying to open a channel with the USA on Africa 'without having to ask' or trying 'to bluff Pretoria out of Angola'. Crocker, *High Noon in Southern Africa*, 180.

221 *Izvestiya*, Moscow, 9 June 1986.

222 S. Sinitsyn, *Vensky 'vals' s burami*. (Viennese waltz with the Boers) *Afrika v vospominaniyah veteranov diplomaticheskoi sluzhby* (Africa in reminiscences of the diplomatic service veterans) (M., XXI vek-Soglasie, 2000), 175-201.

223 The term 'close neighbours' originated from the fact that before moving to the Smolenskaya Square in the mid 1950s the Soviet People's Commissariat (later Ministry) of Foreign Affairs occupied a building close to the Security and Intelligence Headquarters, while the Department of Military Intelligence, situated further away, became known as the 'distant neighbours'.

Square²²⁴ (though without participation of its representative at the meeting) the decision was taken to agree to their proposal'.²²⁵

The selection of South Africans to participate in this meeting shows that Pretoria was much more interested in contacts with the USSR than vice versa. While the head of the National Intelligence Service, Neil Barnard (regarded as a whiz-kid in those days), led the South African delegation, the Soviet delegation was led by a deputy head of the MFA Third African Department. In addition, each delegation included two diplomats and two intelligence officers.²²⁶ Barnard claimed that Pretoria, as a 'regional power', sincerely wished for stabilisation in southern Africa and would like Moscow to assist the process of 'peace and dialogue' by influencing countries and forces that were close to it in order to stop their hostile actions towards South Africa. He emphasised that South Africa was conducting an independent foreign policy and did not want to be closely connected with any superpower.²²⁷ Barnard's statement that Pretoria was ready to get rid of the 'Namibian burden' was more significant, but he stressed that it was against the rise to power of 'the radical forces' in Namibia, namely SWAPO, and insisted on the withdrawal of the Cuban troops from Angola. The South African representatives also falsely claimed that Pretoria had stopped supporting RENAMO.²²⁸

Pretoria's delegates highlighted prospects for co-operation between the two countries in several fields, such as control over a number of strategic mineral resources.²²⁹ They also tried to convince the Soviets that the only viable alternative to P. W. Botha's government would be ultra-conservative elements among the white people. Although both sides expressed their satisfaction with this exchange of opinions, later South African NIS representatives were unable to conceal their disappointment with progress during less formal contacts: the Soviet Union refused to abandon its support for the liberation struggle in return for the doubtful possibility that Pretoria would distance itself from Washington.

The aggravating situation in Mozambique was a concern for both the ANC and Moscow for a number of years. When Oliver Tambo visited Moscow to attend Leonid Brezhnev's funeral, he used the opportunity to visit MK cadres not far from Moscow.²³⁰ But the visit had to be shortened because Samora Machel urgently wanted to speak to him. When Tambo left Machel's suite he was visibly worried. The Mozambican president was very upset about the situation in Mozambique, both military and economic, and complained about the inadequacy of Soviet support. He probably wanted Tambo to use the ANC's contacts with the Soviet Union to increase aid to Mozambique and to hint at the possibility of a change in his country's policy towards Pretoria.

224 The CPSU Central Committee machinery was at the Old Square, not far from the Kremlin.

225 Sinitsyn, *Vensky 'vals' s burami*, 184.

226 *Ibid.*, 185.

227 *Ibid.*, 187-188.

228 *Ibid.*, 192-193.

229 *Ibid.*, 197.

230 Over 20 years later I heard from Jabu Moleketi, incumbent South African deputy finance minister, that he was in this group, as was his future wife, Geraldine, who is now minister of public service and administration.

The developments in Mozambique were discussed in Moscow a year later (in late October 1983) with an ANC delegation, led by Alfred Nzo.²³¹ The South Africans were particularly glad to hear from Boris Ponomarev that Mozambican hopes of securing an end to Pretoria's assistance to RENAMO – in exchange for further restriction of ANC activities – were unfounded, and Soviet assistance to their organisation would continue and strengthen.²³² Unfortunately, in violation of the Soviet-Mozambican Treaty of Friendship signed in 1977, the Maputo leadership did not consult with Moscow on its new approach towards Pretoria. Disturbing information on the developments was reaching the Soviet Union from a variety of sources. Eventually the Mozambican authorities confirmed it: when the Soviet Embassy informed them that some goods of a purely civilian nature were to be sent to Maputo for the ANC, they replied that even the supply of such goods could be used by Pretoria against Mozambique. Moreover, they revealed that an agreement had been reached at an earlier meeting in Swaziland in December 1983 on the mutual cessation of military assistance by Mozambique to the ANC, and by South Africa to RENAMO.

An assessment of the Nkomati Accord signed on the Mozambican-South African border on 16 March 1984 is beyond the scope of this chapter. It is enough to say here that the Soviet Union and the ANC had a similar critical attitude towards it that ultimately proved to be right.

One of the forms of Soviet support was assistance to the SACP to hold its meetings in Moscow. Perhaps readers should recall that the SACP's position in most of the African countries (Angola and Mozambique were among rare exceptions) was far from reliable. For example, Moses Mabhida, then its general secretary, told us how sadly surprised a delegate of the United National Independence Party (UNIP) of Zambia was to find out at the congress of the Bulgarian Communist Party that a SACP delegate was there as well. Therefore, SACP meetings had to take part in a friendlier environment, that is, in one of the socialist countries.

An augmented meeting of the CPSU Central Committee was scheduled to be held in Moscow in November 1984, again at Volynskoye-2, and as usual, the Soviets provided the facilities, including air tickets for delegates from Africa and Europe, mainly from London. Some South African students in the International Lenin School also participated in the meeting. Following a suggestion by Ronnie Kasrils, the meeting was transformed into the Sixth Party Congress.²³³ While the SACP delegates were meeting in Volynskoe, the ANC president Oliver Tambo was about twenty kilometres away in the Barvikha Sanatorium (a medical rest home). The close relations between the SACP and ANC leaders were reconfirmed because after the congress Mabhida, who was re-elected as general secretary, and Slovo, who became the SACP chairman, visited Tambo and informed him of the outcome of the congress.

231 This was a rare occasion for the ANC delegates to go outside Moscow, because too often they were in a hurry to leave. They flew to Volgograd to see the sites of the great battle in 1942-1943.

232 Discussion with A. Nzo, Moscow, 28 October 1983.

233 The circumstances of this step are described in Kasrils, *Armed and Dangerous*, 205.

Unfortunately, Moses Mabhida could no longer lead the Party. He was to return to hospital immediately after the SACP congress. However, he was expected in Cuba and Sandinista Nicaragua, and decided to postpone his treatment. On his way to Managua from Cuba he had a stroke. He had to stay there for about six months before the doctors certified that he was 'transportable'. Mabhida was eager to return to the Soviet Union and the Soviets were ready to receive him for treatment, but requested confirmation that he could safely make the journey.

Back in Moscow Mabhida spent several weeks in hospital and then in Yalta, until the commission of doctors pronounced him fit for work. He left for Maputo (by that time the government of Mozambique was again on friendly terms with the ANC and SACP) but half a year later, on 8 March 1986, he suffered a fatal heart attack in Mozambique. His funeral became an occasion for reconciliation between the ANC and Mozambique. At a traditional hand-washing ceremony, the mourners carried Oliver Tambo and Samora Machel on their shoulders. Talking to the Soviet delegates, Machel even called the ANC FRELIMO's 'elder brother and teacher'. Mabhida's funeral gave the ANC and SACP an excellent opportunity to meet 'people from home', including the UDF co-president Archibald Gumede and its national chairman Curnick Ndlovu, a former MK commander, who had recently been released from Robben Island. For the Soviet delegation, it was a unique chance to discuss the situation in South Africa with those who had come directly from South Africa.

Soon after the SACP Congress in December 1984 an ANC delegation visited Moscow. It included Alfred Nzo, Thomas Nkobi, John Nkadimeng and Joe Slovo. Oliver Tambo had gone to the USSR earlier for medical treatment. Fortunately, on doctors' advice he did not interrupt his treatment, even when Julius Nyerere invited him to attend the summit of the frontline states. His health soon improved sufficiently for him to join the delegation during the discussions at the Old Square. At a meeting with Boris Ponomarev, Tambo described the latest developments in South Africa and the region. When he spoke about the summit of the frontline states, a look of disbelief appeared on Ponomarev's face. He said: 'We have received different information', and asked a message received from Tanzania to be translated into English. 'This is not the meeting that I participated in', commented Nzo, who represented the ANC at the FLS meeting.

Whatever sources the Soviets had, the most valuable were discussions on the situation in South Africa and the region with representatives of the ANC and the SACP. Pretoria's officials did their best to question the ANC's vision. Thus, Kobus Meiring, then South African deputy minister of foreign affairs, once stated that there were 'signs that the USSR had come to the realisation that the ANC has over the years led it by the nose with falsehoods about the situation in South Africa and that it was beginning to understand the complexity of the South African question'.²³⁴ But far from spreading falsehoods, ANC and SACP comrades always helped to develop a realistic picture of the complexity of the situation.

234 *Argus*, Cape Town, 13 September 1988.

The year 1985 witnessed a further upsurge in the South African liberation struggle in various forms from mass protests to MK operations. The delegates of the ANC consultative conference, in Kabwe, Zambia, decided that the next conference, in five years time, would take place inside South Africa. That year was special for the USSR as well. Soon after the election of Mikhail Gorbachev as general secretary of the CPSU CC, a slogan of 'acceleration' was proclaimed. Initially the new approach was somewhat technocratic and focused mostly on the development of the machine-building industry as a locomotive of the growth. But before long, a broader slogan appeared. A new political term was coined: 'perestroika', meaning 'rebuilding' or 'restructuring'.

The failure of Gorbachev's rule, which resulted in the collapse of the Soviet Union and restoration of capitalism, led many people to believe that perestroika was a mistaken approach from its inception. However, Yegor Ligachev, then the number two in the Soviet hierarchy, believes that socialist perestroika was successful initially, when it was carried out 'within the framework of socialism', but its second stage meant 'disorganisation of the economy ... destruction of the Party and the USSR'.²³⁵ Many articles and books described perestroika primarily as the period of the USSR's alienation from the ANC and its rapprochement with Pretoria. But the history is much more complicated. As other spheres, the perestroika period in Moscow's relations with the South African liberation movement can be divided into two parts, and in the first three or four years the developments were quite positive and dynamic.

Indeed, initially the socialist nature of both internal and external policy was very clear. In his first speech as general secretary Gorbachev declared:

People abroad who share our views may rest assured: in the struggle for peace and social justice the Party of Lenin will as always closely co-operate with fraternal Communist, workers' and revolutionary-democratic parties and will champion the unity and co-operation of all revolutionary forces.²³⁶

The mood of optimism was felt by Joe Slovo, who took part in the celebration of the fortieth anniversary of the victory over Nazi Germany in May 1985. The same spirit prevailed in February 1986, at the 26th Congress of the CPSU, when the ANC was represented by Alfred Nzo and Joe Modise, and the SACP by Joe Slovo and Eric Mtshali. Slovo, who arrived in Moscow from Lusaka after midnight, just hours before the congress opened, was quite impressed by Gorbachev's report, like everybody else; with his typical sense of humour Slovo said: 'The proof is that I did not fall asleep.'

Because Gorbachev advanced the idea of political settlement of regional conflicts in his speech, many academics and politicians regarded it as an entirely new approach. Yet Moscow had been involved for many years and in many regions in a search for political solutions: from Korea to the Middle East and from Vietnam to South Asia. There was nothing wrong with such an approach to southern African problems as well, provided that the solution took into account the interests of the liberation

²³⁵ *Sovetskaya Rossiya*, Moscow, 20 March 2006.

²³⁶ Quoted in *The African Communist*, no. 102, 1985, 79.

movements and frontline states. Soon Gorbachev had an opportunity to confirm this. At a dinner in honour of the Angolan president Jose Eduardo Dos Santos in May 1986 he declared:

There exists a reasonable and realistic alternative to bloodshed, tension and confrontation in Southern Africa. It presupposes an end to aggression against Angola and other liberated states, the speedy granting to Namibia of independence – but of genuine independence, not fictitious independence, as the USA and the RSA would like – and finally, the liquidation of the inhuman apartheid system.²³⁷

The eradication of apartheid was pointed out as one of the three pillars of Soviet policy towards southern Africa and, indeed, the conflict was finally resolved on the basis of those pillars.

The upsurge of the mass democratic movement in South Africa created new opportunities. After discussing these developments with the ANC and SACP, the International Department organised meetings (or workshops) in 1985 to brief the Soviet NGOs, publishing houses and research bodies, and to encourage their contacts with legal opposition organisations in South Africa. We received a list of organisations and personalities from the ANC to invite to the USSR.²³⁸ However, the ANC proposed to begin with ‘moderates’, such as students from the University of Stellenbosch.

The first was Chris van Wyk, then editor of *Staffrider* magazine, as the representative of Ravan Press to the International Book Fair in Moscow in September 1985. The next visitor was Jennifer Mohamed, daughter of Professor Ismail Mohamed, a prominent figure in the UDF. Only one young woman from home found her way to Moscow to the World Festival of Youth and Students in July 1985, only to be detained upon her return to South Africa. The Youth Festival International Preparatory Committee also invited Desmond Tutu and Allan Boesak. They were unable to make the journey. However, Tutu and Boesak visited Moscow a few years later.

The CPSU CC took a special decision in 1985 to speed up anti-racist propaganda. The launching of the Afrikaans service of Radio Moscow and the introduction of a course of Afrikaans at Moscow State University were part of this plan. Further steps on co-operation in information and other fields were discussed in October 1985 with a special delegation of the ANC, led by Thabo Mbeki, then the head of its Information and Publicity Department. Two delegations of ANC educationalists visited Moscow in the same period.

Thus, the first phase of the perestroika period witnessed an intensive exchange of opinion between Moscow and the ANC, although this process was not free of hitches. One was a last moment cancellation of the consultations between Moscow, Havana, Luanda, ANC and SWAPO, scheduled for late June 1986. It was envisaged as a high-level meeting to be attended by the leaders of the liberation movements,

²³⁷ *Pravda*, Moscow, 9 May 1986.

²³⁸ The United Democratic Front (UDF), Azanian Students Organisation (AZASO), National Union of South African Students (NUSAS) and the End Conscription Campaign (ECC) were recommended in particular.

ministers, and CC secretaries. The Soviet side was supposed to be represented by Foreign Minister Edward Shevardnadze, Defence Minister Marshal Sergey Sokolov, and Boris Ponomarev. However, rather suddenly Oliver Tambo suggested to the newly appointed Soviet deputy foreign minister Anatoly Adamishin that the meeting should be postponed.

This came as an unpleasant surprise to us, more so because the names of the ANC delegates had already been received from its headquarters in Lusaka. We suspected that the reason was not just technical and to find it the writer went to Berlin in August 1986 to meet with the ANC president who was undergoing heart treatment there. My conversation with Tambo confirmed that by that time he was ready to frankly discuss any 'delicate' questions with those Soviets whom he knew personally. He explained (just as we suspected) that in such a broad meeting, information might be leaked and could be used against the ANC by those who tried to present it as a Soviet proxy. Therefore he preferred bilateral or multilateral talks on a smaller scale. In addition, Joe Slovo and Chris said that Tambo had expected the conference in Paris to result in Western sanctions against South Africa, and did not want to endanger these actions.

The meeting in Berlin was significant in another respect: for the first time Oliver Tambo touched on the prospects of a political settlement in South Africa as something realistic. He even mentioned the possibility of suspending the armed struggle by the ANC. It was clear in the mid 1980s that the time for negotiations between the ANC and Pretoria, or at least for talks about talks, was approaching. However, in every attempt to involve the ANC, the South African authorities demanded its distancing from Moscow. Thus, in May 1984, the South African Ambassador to Paris, Robert du Plooy, said that because the political situation in Southern Africa was changing so quickly, 'anything is possible – even rapprochement with the ANC'.²³⁹ But, apart from the cessation of armed struggle and recognition of the 'sovereignty of the South African government', renunciation by the ANC of links with the Soviet Union was a precondition.²⁴⁰ Then, when Professor Hendrik van der Merwe of the University of Cape Town, who was close to some important figures in the National Party, went to Lusaka to meet the ANC representatives in August 1984, he confirmed that Pretoria insisted on its pre-conditions for talks with the ANC, including the severing of relations with the USSR and other socialist countries.²⁴¹ The ANC leadership publicly rejected such preconditions.

Soon after the meeting in Berlin, Joe Slovo asked, on behalf of Tambo, to arrange a meeting with Gorbachev. Such a meeting became feasible and potentially important for several reasons. The huge prestige enjoyed by the Soviet leader would raise the international standing of the ANC and, with the growing influence of the ANC, it became easier to convince Gorbachev (or rather his entourage) that its leader deserves such an honour. Besides, initially Gorbachev was more accessible to African leaders than his predecessors. The meeting between Tambo and Gorbachev took place in the

239 *Citizen*, 12 May 1984.

240 *Ibid.*

241 Discussion with A. Nzo, Moscow, 14 February 1985.

Kremlin on 4 November 1986. The ANC president went to Moscow at the head of the ANC delegation from Maputo, where he had attended the funeral of Samora Machel, who was killed when his Tupolev-134 plane crashed inside South Africa.

Even such a tragic event was used by Pretoria to engage with the USSR. When a diplomat from the consular section of the USSR Embassy in Maputo visited South Africa to meet Vladimir Novoselov, an injured Soviet flight engineer,²⁴² Pik Botha tried to send a political message to Moscow through him. He told the official that Pretoria was ready to maintain a position of political neutrality and wanted to develop co-operation with the USSR in every field, including the marketing of gold, diamonds and other minerals. Then he sent a senior official from the Department of Foreign Affairs to accompany the technical team who went to the Soviet Union to investigate the black boxes of the crushed plane. Unfortunately, the Soviet Embassy in Mozambique, perhaps in a spirit of reciprocity, issued him with a visa without prior approval from Moscow. Under the circumstances it was decided that contacts with him would be limited to Vladimir Lebedev (later councillor in Pretoria, but then a low-ranking diplomat), and then only informally at meetings of air safety specialists. Later, the South Africans stationed in Maputo tried in vain to obtain a Soviet response to matters raised by their emissary.

Another attempt apparently originated in the South African Special Services. Giovanni Mario Ricci, an Italian businessman, head of GMR,²⁴³ tried in vain to become a kind of intermediary between Pretoria and the Soviet Embassy in the Seychelles.

The Tambo-Gorbachev meeting can perhaps be regarded as a pinnacle in Moscow's relations with the ANC. In the communiqué the two leaders appealed 'to all who are interested in the peaceful and free future of the peoples of Southern Africa to collectively search for ways to solve the problems'.²⁴⁴ The only point of disagreement was Gorbachev's reluctance to fix dates for his visit to southern Africa. He had already been invited by several countries, including Zimbabwe and Tanzania, and Tambo was insisting that such a visit would transform the situation in the region. Gorbachev, while agreeing in principle, appealed for revolutionary patience.

It was clear that apart from local sources (especially papers prepared by the International Department), Gorbachev's assessment of the South African situation had been influenced by his discussions with Western leaders. He described how at his recent meeting with 'a candidate to the post of the West German Chancellor' (probably he meant Hans-Dietrich Genscher) he had exclaimed: 'Something should be done about South Africa!'

At the end of the meeting Gorbachev informed Tambo confidentially that P. W. Botha was 'knocking on our door through a third, even a fourth party. But,' he added, 'we are not in a hurry', and assured him that any step in this direction would be taken only after consulting Tambo and his colleagues. Unfortunately, before long he broke this promise.

242 L. Shinkarev, *Gorkiy dym savanny* (Bitter smoke of savannah), (Moscow: Sovetskaya Rossiya, 1989), 328-329

243 One of the members of its board was none other than Craig Williamson, at that time a director of the Longreach Company, a front for the South African Military Intelligence.

244 *Pravda*, 5 November 1986.

Gorbachev's meeting with Tambo took place some weeks after the summit in Reykjavik and the Soviet leader was visibly disappointed with Reagan's refusal to accept his proposals on the reduction of nuclear missiles. He strongly criticised the American interpretation of the talks. Against this background, the claims of Stephen Ellis and his so-called co-author that Moscow had 'committed itself to withdraw its forces or to refrain from seeking the overthrow of the existing order [in South Africa], leaving the field to the USA and its allies on the ground' in Reykjavik look ridiculous.²⁴⁵ The same is true of their assertion that South Africa was included in Reykjavik 'in the category of countries where the USSR would henceforth refrain from aggression', and that the Soviet Union agreed it would no longer 'throw its weight behind the effort by the ANC and the SACP to ferment a revolution in South Africa.'²⁴⁶ In fact, the published minutes of the summit show that South Africa was not mentioned in the Gorbachev-Reagan discussions.²⁴⁷

The reality at that stage (the situation changed later) was exactly the opposite. Oliver Tambo was quite correct to state at the press conference:

We emerged from that meeting strengthened by the knowledge that the Soviet Union stands firmly with us in the struggle for a united, democratic and non-racial South Africa, an independent Namibia and a peaceful region of Southern Africa. We draw immense satisfaction and inspiration from the fact that the Soviet Union is resolved to contribute everything within its possibilities and, within the context of our own requests, to assist the ANC, SWAPO and the peoples of our region to achieve these objectives. The Soviet Union is acting neither out of consideration of selfish interest nor with a desire to establish a so-called sphere of influence.²⁴⁸

Indeed, the Gorbachev-Tambo meeting not only signified a higher level of bilateral contact, but also brought about intensification of Moscow's ties with the ANC. In particular, military matters were discussed the next day by Tambo and his colleagues with General Valentin Varennikov, then the first deputy head of the General Staff. Then Anatoly Dobrynin, who took over the post of party international secretary from Ponomarev, assured the delegation of the USSR's '100% support for the ANC – and, if you want it, 120% support'.

Dobrynin, as Gorbachev had earlier, backed the ANC proposal to explore the possibility of joint Soviet-American actions against apartheid. By that time, Washington was in a hurry to establish official contacts with the ANC. In Tambo's words, the US Ambassador in Lusaka was even interested in the shape of the table for future talks, though Washington was still worried about the ANC's relations with the USSR and the SACP, and, in particular about the communist members of its NEC: 'Were there 15? 13? 19?' (Now, 20 years later, these figures are shown to be a gross underestimation.)

245 Ellis and Sechaba, *Comrades*, 182.

246 *Ibid.*

247 *Mirovaya ekonomika i mezhdunarodnye otnosheniya* (World Economy and International Relations), no. 4, 79-86; no. 5, 81-90; no. 7, 88-104; and 8, 68-78.

248 Tambo, *Preparing for Power*, 233.

After the meeting in the Kremlin between Tambo and Gorbachev, the official press release, agreed by both sides, declared that a political settlement in southern Africa could be achieved. It would have to be based on three major conditions: an end to Pretoria's acts of aggression against independent African states; the granting of independence to Namibia in accordance with UN resolutions; and the removal of the apartheid regime in South Africa as 'the primary cause of the conflict situation in the region'.²⁴⁹

The opening of the ANC mission in Moscow was another important issue discussed during Oliver Tambo's visit in November 1986. Philip Nel, then the head of the Institute of Soviet Studies at Stellenbosch University, wrote in his book on Soviet policy towards South Africa:

The clearest indication of the traditional Soviet uncertainty about the true potential of the ANC is to be found in the fact that the USSR only allowed the ANC to open an office in Moscow in 1986 ... Why did the USSR wait for so long? The obvious explanation is that the USSR was definitely sceptical about ANC claims that were not always a reflection of the real state of affairs.²⁵⁰

In fact, Oliver Tambo was particularly careful about an office in Moscow. He constantly acknowledged Soviet support, but was concerned about the accusation that the ANC was a Soviet proxy, especially since he thought that the office would be financed by the Soviet government.²⁵¹

However, the need for such an office was becoming evident with the intensification of bilateral relations and the ANC headquarters tried to find a solution. First, they had suggested that its representative in the GDR should be given a certain status in Moscow as well. Then, in January 1985, Alfred Nzo requested an ANC representative with the limited function of maintaining contacts with South African students (at that period they were scattered in fourteen Soviet cities) and the relevant Soviet organisations. However, it was felt in Moscow that an office with such limited functions would cause confusion about Soviet attitudes towards the ANC. Eventually, when the ANC stance in the international arena became more assertive, Tambo made an official request for a fully fledged ANC mission to be opened in Moscow. Following the decision of the CPSU CC and the relevant Order of the Council of Ministers, the opening of the ANC mission to the USSR was officially announced in January 1987 during the visit of a delegation led by Johnny Makatini, the head of the ANC International Department, to participate in the commemoration of the ANC's 75th anniversary.

From its beginning, the mission enjoyed full diplomatic privileges, though it was accredited to an NGO, the Soviet Afro-Asian Solidarity Committee, and was financed by the non-governmental Soviet Peace Fund.²⁵² These included diplomatic immunity

249 *Pravda*, 5 November 1986.

250 Nel, *Soviet Embassy in Pretoria?*, 57.

251 Discussion with J. Jele, Moscow, 16 May 1982.

252 Anatoly Karpov, former world chess champion, who headed the Soviet Peace Fund, disclosed recently that about 60 per cent of money coming to the fund at that time was from the Russian Orthodox Church; *Literaturnaya Gazeta*, Moscow, 12-18 April 2006.

and the right to hoist the ANC flag on the premises and use it on the official car.²⁵³ Again the ANC delayed the opening of the mission, apparently waiting for the launching of other offices of similar status. Steve Tshwete, who was a guest of the Soviet Afro-Asian Solidarity Committee in May 1987, reported to the ANC headquarters: 'The whole trip – from the beginning to the end – was one grand experience with the Soviet people whose depth of commitment to our struggle is immeasurable.' However, he added: 'The Soviet Solidarity Committee and other comrades I have met harped on the urgency of an ANC office in the Soviet Union.'²⁵⁴ The head of the mission, Siphon Makana, who ultimately arrived to Moscow in mid November, wrote to Alfred Nzo: 'Yesterday I was at the office of the Soviet Afro-Asian Solidarity Committee ... This [opening of the mission] seems to be a more serious affair than we have thought.'²⁵⁵ Regrettably, the ANC did not use the mission to its full capacity. Though it was agreed that two persons with diplomatic status would staff the mission (in addition to several Soviet employees), Makana was the only South African there for most of his stay in the Soviet Union, precisely when the developments in the USSR demanded much more attention and analysis.

The first signs of danger were noted by two South Africans, Jack and Ray Simons, at the Second Soviet-African Conference in June 1986. Professor Gleb Starushenko, the deputy director of the Africa Institute, called for 'comprehensive guarantees for the white population' in South Africa in an address to the conference.²⁵⁶ This initiative by Starushenko, who spoke in his personal capacity, was quite acceptable, especially in the spirit of perestroika, and some of his proposals were realistic, though they contradicted the current official positions of the ANC. Others were rather eccentric, such as a proposal for a chamber in a future South African parliament 'possessing the right of veto, on the basis of the equal representation of four communities'.²⁵⁷ Starushenko's paper was followed by an interview in Harare in 1987 to *Work in Progress* magazine by Victor Goncharov, also a former deputy director of the Africa Institute. Neither was a specialist on South African affairs,²⁵⁸ and this was evident from numerous factual mistakes. But their presentations caused a lot of emotion among Western and South African 'Sovietologists'.

The *Soviet Review* wrote: 'Since taking power, Gorbachev has been using academics more and more for foreign policy purposes, often as vehicles to introduce new ideas (see for instance Starushenko's and Goncharov's ideas about South Africa).'²⁵⁹ Yet neither Gorbachev, nor any other leading Soviet figure knew about 'Starushenko's and Goncharov's ideas'. The damage control had to be done by the International

253 MCHP: ANC Lusaka Collection, Rules, governing the privileges and immunities granted to the Mission of the African National Congress (ANC) of South Africa.

254 MCHP: ANC Lusaka Collection, Report on 'Week of solidarity with the peoples of southern Africa' compiled and prepared by Steve Tshwete.

255 MCHP, ANC Lusaka Collection: S. Makana to A. Nzo, 15 November 1987.

256 G. Starushenko, *Problems of Struggle against Racism, Apartheid and Colonialism in South Africa* (Moscow: Africa Institute, 1986), 12.

257 *Ibid.*

258 For example, Starushenko named Winnie Mandela and Desmond Tutu as co-chairpersons of the UDF.

259 *Soviet Review*. Stellenbosch, no. 4, 1987, 30.

Department. In fact, initially those who knew about the positive development of Moscow's relations with the ANC treated such accidents with a sense of humour and joked lightly: 'The role of academics is to confuse the enemy about our real intentions.' Unfortunately Western and South African 'experts' applied their own standards to Moscow's relations with the ANC. They did not believe that there could have been relations of mutual respect between a superpower and a liberation movement. Thus, seeking to provide evidence that the '[South African Communist] Party imposed on the ANC a rigid pro-Soviet line in foreign affairs', Stephen Ellis stated that 'the ANC never even had a representative in Washington until as late as 1989'.²⁶⁰ But it had nothing to do with a pro-Soviet line. Moscow would never have interfered in the opening of the ANC office anywhere in the world and the blame should have been put on Washington: the opening of the ANC official mission there was delayed for many years because of the resistance of the US Administration. Even when the ANC opened its mission to the UN, its head initially could go no further than ten miles from UN headquarters.²⁶¹

Their other striking feature is a kind of megalomania: these academics grossly overestimated the place of South Africa in Soviet foreign policy and, therefore, their own importance. Christopher Coker, a British academic, wrote in 1988: 'The [all-white] election was a blow to those in the Kremlin who were committed to the Leninist proposition that a split in the ruling class was a necessary if not a sufficient precondition for a revolution.'²⁶² But among the top leadership of the USSR, nobody noticed the results of that election, even if they did indicate significant splits within the white community. The same scholar claimed that a 'radical reassessment of Russian support for the ANC' was happening in 1987, and quoted an unnamed member of the Soviet Party's Central Committee as saying on a visit to the West in 1988 that: 'We cannot carry the ANC into the Union Buildings and we don't wish to do so.'²⁶³ No CC member knew what the Union Buildings were. Besides, and more importantly, carrying the ANC to power was a task for the South Africans themselves.

Quite the opposite of Coker's words, in 1987/8 relations between the USSR and the South African liberation movement reached their peak. The growth of Soviet multifaceted support was strengthening the position of the ANC and thus helping to create a favourable climate for serious negotiations. Besides, it was increasingly difficult for Pretoria to use the total onslaught bogey in a less tense international environment.

To justify their claims, some academics depended on Gorbachev's speech at a dinner in the honour of Mozambican president Joachim Chissano in August 1987:²⁶⁴

We don't believe in the thesis 'the worse, the better'. There is no doubt that the elimination of racist rule by means of a political settlement is in the

260 Stephen Ellis, 'The South African Communist Party and the ANC in Exile', Amsterdam, 1992, 6. Paper in the possession of the author.

261 Discussion with J. Jele, Johannesburg, 25 November 1993.

262 C. Coker, 'South Africa and the Soviet Union', in Venter (ed.), *Challenge*, 310.

263 *Ibid.*, 311-312.

264 Nel, *A Soviet Embassy*, 8

interests of all the people in South Africa, black and white. We should seek and find the ways which lead to such a settlement. It is time for Pretoria to understand that too. We are in need of new ideas, a new approach and collective efforts.²⁶⁵

This statement, elaborating the Soviet line on South Africa, was a product of the collective efforts of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and CPSU International Department and could not be regarded as a departure from previous policy. It merely adequately reflected significant changes in the southern African situation.

The approach to the political settlement was discussed in detail at confidential closed-door trilateral consultations involving the Soviet Union, ANC and Cuba in Moscow in September 1987. The holding of these consultations reflected a higher self-confidence of the ANC leadership. It is hardly accidental that Oliver Tambo had suggested organising them soon after his meeting with George Shultz in January 1987. The ANC delegation to the Moscow meeting was led by its president and included all the senior office bearers of the organisation: Alfred Nzo, Joe Slovo, Thabo Mbeki, and Joe Modise. Anatoly Dobrynin and Jorge Risquet led the Soviet and Cuban delegations. The consultations proved that there was a common position on all major issues. Oliver Tambo and his colleagues spoke of a growing number of countries, organisations and individuals that wanted to be intermediaries between the ANC and Pretoria. They were especially worried that Washington wished to be the only mediator in future talks.

This prospect worried the Soviets as well, especially taking into account how the talks on the Angolan-Namibian settlement were evolving. For a long time, until Cuba and later the USSR joined in, the Luanda government had to confront not only Pretoria, but also the USA, who were supposed to be impartial mediators. To avoid such monopolisation, the time had come to establish a line of regular contact between the USSR and the South African government, obviously after consultation with the ANC. This was also necessary because the ANC at that time was exploring several channels of communication with Pretoria. During the tripartite consultations in Moscow in September, Anatoly Dobrynin confidentially raised the issue with Oliver Tambo and received a positive response. However, the ANC president suggested waiting a bit, because they expected the regime's intentions to be clarified at a forthcoming visit to Lusaka of Pretoria's informal go-between (probably Professor van der Merwe). A few months later, contacts between Moscow and Pretoria became unavoidable when the Soviet diplomats began to play the role of informal observers at the talks on the political settlement in South West Africa.

The similarity between the positions of the ANC and Moscow was confirmed by Oliver Tambo's speech at the celebration of the 70th anniversary of the October Revolution in Moscow in November 1987:

The concern of the imperialist powers is that any change in South Africa must preclude any alteration of the capitalist system in our country and

²⁶⁵ *Izvestiya*, 4 August 1987.

leave South Africa within the orbit, and as an integral and dependent part of the world imperialist economy and under its political domination. The imperialists are concerned that any transformation in South Africa which actually brought about the changes they fear would affect not only our country but would also have a decisive and strategic impact on the greater part of our continent.²⁶⁶

During that visit, Andrey Gromyko, then the chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet, bestowed on Tambo the Order of People's Friendship in a ceremony in the Kremlin (on his 70th birthday). By that time the ANC had apparently become concerned with a prospect of generalisation of the ways of solving international conflicts. Joe Slovo stated at the international meeting of delegations from many countries after the anniversary celebrations:

There are certain regional conflicts (and our own struggle is one of them) when the prospect of political settlements or real negotiation does not yet depend on diplomatic manoeuvre but rather on the building up of the strength of the liberation forces and escalating blows against the Apartheid regime ... This does not mean that those who run the apartheid state will never be forced to seat themselves around a genuine negotiation table.²⁶⁷

These concerns were taken into account in a confidential letter sent by the CPSU CC to friendly organisations, including the ANC and SACP, after the third Gorbachev-Reagan summit in Washington in December 1987:

While discussing the problems of regional conflicts and other issues with Americans we have stressed the point that our aspiration for a dialogue with the US by no means should be construed in such a way that we give up the solidarity with the liberation struggle of peoples or ignore the interests of the developing countries. Never and under no circumstances shall we deviate from the course of supporting the right of nations for independent development, never shall we go for any accord with Americans at the expense of or to prejudice the peoples of developing countries. For us solidarity with those who struggle for national liberation, against imperialism and neo-colonialism remains a permanent factor which is not influenced by the temporary changes.²⁶⁸

The nature of Soviet contacts with anti-racist forces and the prospects for political settlement were important subjects for discussion with a delegation of the SACP in April 1988. It was led by Joe Slovo, and included Chris Hani. The author noted

266 Statement of President of the ANC Comrade Oliver Tambo at the international meeting held on the occasion of the 70th anniversary of the Great October Socialist Revolution, November 2-3, 1987, 4.

267 Statement of the delegation of the South African Communist Party to the meeting of delegations, 5 November 1987, 4.

268 MCHP: ANC Lusaka Collection: Assessment of the outcome of the Washington summit between general secretary of the CPSU Central Committee Comrade M.S. Gorbachev and US President R. Reagan.

that delegates were pleased to hear from Yegor Ligachev that the South African revolutionaries were better placed to assess the situation and to work out a combination of all the necessary forms of the struggle – organisational, political and armed. He declared the Soviet support for such a course and said that although the communists would prefer the peaceful solution, the time had not yet come.

The most striking example of co-operation and mutual trust in a very sensitive field was Soviet involvement in Operation Vula, aimed at the creation of an armed underground network inside South Africa, which began in 1988 and went into the post February 1990 period.²⁶⁹ It included assistance in infiltrating the future ministers Mac Maharaj and Ronnie Kasrils, and future chief of the SANDF, Sipiwe Nyanda, who commented:

The Moscow visit of 1988 was the final leg of my preparation to infiltrate the RSA. It afforded me the opportunity to brush up on my disguises and gain more confidence on these. More identities were added to existing ones, enabling me to shed some of them as I advanced from Moscow to Schiphol (Holland) to Nairobi (Kenya) and to Matsapa (Swaziland), thus breaking the trail and preparing for a safe infiltration into the RSA ... From an operational point of view, the Moscow leg was probably the most important for my cover story. Without exception, those who were not privy to the information believed I was in the Soviet Union for [military] studies. The enemy therefore never expected me to be right on his doorstep!²⁷⁰

Other forms of technical assistance for underground activity, including the so-called party technique, were provided. Thus, responding to an SACP request, Moscow took a decision 'to organise in March–April 1981 a course of special training [in the USSR] for a SACP representative on the party technique for the period up to six weeks.' (The words 'party technique' had to be hand-written by an International Department official into a blank space: even most reliable typists were not to know the nature of the training.)²⁷¹ The importance of this training could not be overestimated, as is seen from the report of an unnamed SACP activist: 'After an initial survey of the problems I encountered in the work and also in my techniques and methods, the [Soviet] instructor decided that I needed a training course from scratch.' Describing the methods of secret writing he/she adds: 'All these methods, even if heavily scrutinised and checked with those special security techniques, should not be detectable. These methods were all developed by USSR experts and are not generally known of by Western intelligence agency – except of course in the instances which we are aware of.' The activist recommended the acquired knowledge to be shared with another trusted comrade: 'That Ronnie [Kasrils?] is given sufficient time for me to teach him in the way that I was taught and

269 Described in Kasrils, *Armed and Dangerous*; www.anc.org.za/ancdocs/history/vula.html (Timothy Jenkin).

270 Sipiwe Nyanda to Vladimir Shubin, 10 December 2002. See also Shubin, *ANC: A View from Moscow*, 332–338, 360, 381. On 11–12 July 1989, when Pretoria and Western propaganda were claiming that the USSR had 'dropped' the ANC, Moscow was still the safest place for Tambo and other ANC leaders to meet Mac Maharaj, the head of their underground machinery.

271 RSAMH: Collection of declassified documents, Decision of the CPSU CC Secretariat St 240/46gs of 5 December 1980.

with equal thoroughness so that our standards correspond. (I am assuming that apart from Ronnie there isn't anyone else who train(s) people regularly.)²⁷²

Parallel to assistance to the ANC in the most sensitive fields, such as Operation Vula, the development of ties with the broader legal opposition in South Africa was encouraged. Another, more far-reaching decision of the CC Secretariat was adopted in 1988, on the initiative of the International Department, to facilitate ties between Soviet organisations and socio-political forces in South Africa that showed a critical attitude to apartheid. South African journalists were also given an opportunity to visit Moscow. The first was supposed to be Allister Sparks, but he postponed his visit. Meanwhile, Tim du Plessis of *Beeld* and Johan Vosloo of *Rapport* had met some Soviet NGO representatives at the ANC-organised international conference in Arusha in 1987 and expressed their wish to visit Moscow. At that stage, every visit by a RSA passport holder to the USSR had to be endorsed by the CPSU Secretariat after consultations with South African comrades.

Allister Sparks, who visited Moscow in August 1988, wrote:

Nor is it only the Soviet Union that is making this reassessment. Eighteen months before, in the course of a long interview in Lusaka, the leader of the South African Communist Party Joe Slovo told me of his belief that the transition in South Africa would come about through negotiations rather than military victory or revolutionary overthrow. There isn't a single struggle in the post-war [post-World War Two] period in the colonies which hasn't ended at the negotiations table ... If there were any prospects of settling this thing peacefully tomorrow, we would be the first to say let's do it.²⁷³

A 'pilgrimage' to Moscow by prominent anti-apartheid figures from South Africa continued. Bishop Tutu visited in June 1988 for the millennium celebration of the Russian Orthodox Church, followed by Alex and Jenny Boraine from the Institute for a Democratic Alternative for South Africa (IDASA). On this organisation's initiative, a conference was convened in Leverkusen in West Germany in October 1988 at which Soviet academics, headed by Professor Vassily Solodovnikov, prominent members of the ANC (including Joe Slovo and Thabo Mbeki) and South African anti-apartheid intellectuals were present. No doubt, it was a significant step for a better understanding of the policies of the ANC and Moscow.

He 'froze his meeting with Mandela'

Gorbachev's rule can be divided into two periods, though it is difficult to determine the watershed. It became increasingly visible in 1989, when 'perfection of socialism' and 'democratisation' began to turn into the restoration of capitalism and authoritarian style of work. However, probably a cut-off point was the CPSU CC's session in November 1988, when the Old Guard, including Andrey Gromyko and Anatoly Dobrynin, had

272 MCHP: ANC London Collection. (No title)

273 A. Sparks, *The Mind of South Africa* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1990), 366.

to leave the party's top echelon. The next step was the election of Gorbachev as USSR president in 1990. Thereafter decisions which could cause political complications for the USSR were often taken by Gorbachev without proper discussion, unilaterally or in collaboration with close allies such as Eduard Shevardnadze and Alexander Yaklovlev, who replaced Dobrynin as the CPSU international secretary.

Unfortunately this distinction is applicable to the Soviet policy towards southern Africa as well. For instance, the negotiations on an Angolan-Namibian settlement went rather rapidly in 1988 without the direct participation of SWAPO (although, according to Sam Nujoma, Angolan and Cuban leadership were constantly briefing that organisation on its progress),²⁷⁴ and this worried the ANC leadership. They felt that their organisation 'was being surrounded in an offensive to cut it from the decision making process'.²⁷⁵ Speaking about the position of the African states, Joe Slovo said at the meeting of the National Working Committee in early October 1988: 'Some of our friends eager to avoid conflicts were tempted to encourage the process [of moving towards a détente] and leaving impressions that even in the Soviet Union there was a bias towards pushing for a negotiated settlement.'²⁷⁶

Slovo already knew that this bias was not merely an impression. On 20 August, *Pravda* published an article by Boris Asoyan, then a consultant in the MFA African Department. Asoyan wrote about 'the disunity and amorphousness of the anti-apartheid structures' in South Africa and claimed that over the previous decade 'the colour of one's skin is losing significance as a determinant of economic life'.²⁷⁷ Joe Slovo replied to Asoyan in the same newspaper, reminding him that 98 per cent of the South African GDP was produced in enterprises owned and controlled by capitalists belonging to a white minority that constituted less than 17 per cent of the population. In his opinion, Asoyan was wrong in depicting the ANC as one among many anti-apartheid forces, 'just as the regime and Margaret Thatcher are endeavouring to do'.²⁷⁸ He also insisted that the 'decision by Pretoria to sit at the negotiating table with Angola and Cuba' was not unexpected, as Asoyan claimed,²⁷⁹ but a result in particular of the battle at Cuito-Cuanavale that marked a major shift in the balance of forces in the region which 'delivered Pretoria to the negotiating table'.²⁸⁰ Slovo questioned the reason behind Asoyan's 'damaging detour':

Could it be derived from an endeavour to force the South African reality into an abstract and universal strategic conception? We in the South African revolutionary movement greatly welcome the clearing in the world, to use Asoyan's words, of 'the mist of confrontation'. But the mist of universal conciliation can be equally damaging to correct analysis.²⁸¹

274 Nujoma, *Where Others Wavered*, 377.

275 MCHP: ANC Lusaka Collection, Meeting of NWC, 4 October 1988, 3.

276 *Ibid.*

277 *Pravda*, 20 August 1989.

278 *Pravda*, 1 October 1989.

279 *Pravda*, 20 August 1989.

280 *Pravda*, 1 October 1989.

281 *Ibid.*

Slovo was probably right. Though writing in a personal capacity, Asoyan almost certainly reflected Shevardnadze's 'universal' line in the ministry on so-called deblocking of regional conflicts. But he went much further than his boss. This became clear at a situation analysis at the CPSU International Department. The summary of such meetings was done in a way similar to Chatham House rules and, naturally, a wide spectrum of opinions was expressed. But Boris Asoyan surprised everybody, including his superiors in the MFA, when he tried to convince the meeting that the apartheid system should not be abolished because white minority power guaranteed the preservation of the highly developed South African economy and the Afrikaner nation. In doing so he posed several questions: Why do we need black majority rule? What progress of humanity? There are dangerous tendencies in the ANC, an age-long envy of the rich ... Why do we reject a variant, proposed by the National Party? He claimed that although the ANC was longing for power, it did not have a programme and furthermore the assurances that they did not want to push white people into the sea were not substantiated.

Asoyan astonished most of the participants. But in 1989 another 'expert' from another government department characterised the ANC as a narrow exile organisation. In his opinion, none of the 'Lusaka leadership' of the ANC would join a future South African government; in fact, he expressed the view that they did not want to return. Most probably, this ignorance was a product of discussions with Western diplomats and with white people from South Africa, including those whom we used to call 'art critics in civilian clothes'.

However, the general conclusions of the meeting were realistic, namely that it was difficult to imagine better tactics than the ANC was following at the time. Most participants expected that the ANC would have to make concessions during future talks, but it was not going to sacrifice its major principles. The meeting concluded that the initiatives by Pretoria to establish relations with the USSR were driven by the necessity to end its political isolation and economic sanctions, and by its hope to use Moscow as an instrument for pressurising the ANC and the Mass Democratic Movement (MDM). 'We should not agree to play such a role, allotted to us by the West and by the RSA, we must have our own policy. By "dropping" the ANC our country would not gain anything either in the economic or political field.'²⁸² Alas, this warning was soon disregarded by the outgoing leaders of the USSR and the incoming leaders of Russia.

Oliver Tambo led an ANC delegation that visited Moscow in March 1989 at the invitation of the CC of the CPSU and the Presidium of the USSR Supreme Soviet. The head of the Soviet delegation was Anatoly Lukyanov, the first deputy to Gorbachev in the state structures. However, Tambo was not received by Gorbachev. The level was lower than that in 1986, although the international prestige of the ANC had grown considerably. At the time, Gorbachev was spending most of his time on contacts with the West in a futile search for soft credits and high technology and avoided meetings with African leaders. However, the ANC leadership and

282 Author's notes taken at the meeting.

those Soviet officials who were dealing with African affairs in Moscow felt that in a rapidly evolving situation in southern Africa, a new meeting was needed, with or without Gorbachev.

At the meeting with Lukyanov in the Kremlin, Tambo analysed developments in southern Africa. He thought that after the withdrawal of the SADF from Angola and on the eve of the implementation of Namibia's transition to independence, Pretoria had to look for a new survival strategy. It was in search of contacts with the ANC, but was afraid to deal publicly with the organisation because its own propaganda had made the ANC untouchable. Against the background of the attempts of numerous ambassadors and special representatives who were 'trying to cultivate' the ANC, its president wanted Moscow to be a part of the solution of the problem; he felt that the South African situation should not merely remain the concern of the US, UK and other Western states. In response, Lukyanov spoke in strong language about the need for further broadening of economic and other sanctions against Pretoria and emphasised that the settlement of regional conflicts did not mean the sacrifice of the struggle for national and social liberation. With regard to South Africa, it meant the eradication of apartheid.

Lukyanov also emphasised that the Soviet Union became an observer of the Joint Commission on South West Africa at the request of Cuba and Angola, which were its members alongside South Africa and the USA. 'The attempts by South Africans to move the discussion to the questions of the bilateral relations were resolutely rebuffed by us. We want full clarity. If there will be any moves, you would be the first we consult, to seek advice from.' He confirmed that in broadening contacts with the legal opposition in South Africa, the Soviet Union was acting on the recommendations of the ANC. 'We cannot see everything: whom to support and whom to hold back for some time.'²⁸³

At a final press conference in Moscow, Oliver Tambo described his visit to Moscow in March 1989 as 'the most successful'. He underlined that there was no change at all in the Soviet attitude to the ANC. But even before the delegation left Moscow, there was news from London: the BBC reported a 'secret' meeting between Soviet, British and South African academics in Stoke d'Abernon, Surrey, England. Anatoly Gromyko, director of the Africa Institute, who headed the Soviet team, claimed that the British and South African mass media had distorted the gist of what he said at the meeting. Indeed, one participant in that seminar even claimed that 'no Soviet academic of any repute' wanted to see the ANC in power in South Africa. Gromyko expressed regret that the British organisers had failed to comply with his request that representatives of the ANC should be invited to the meeting.²⁸⁴ But he should have taken care of this invitation himself, and at the very least inform the ANC mission in Moscow. This oversight contradicted the official position stated by Lukyanov and allowed the Western and South African propagandists to overshadow the successful talks conducted with Oliver Tambo in the Soviet capital.

283 Ibid.

284 Press-Release, Novosti Press Agency, Lusaka, 23 April 1988.

Damage control was needed, and to some extent a visit to the USSR by an IDASA delegation (headed by Frederick van Zyl Slabbert, following an invitation by the Solidarity Committee in April 1989) helped, though it had been planned well in advance. The delegation said in a statement:

It would be a dangerous distortion of reality to seize upon the personal view of any single academic or official to determine what the official policy of the USSR is or how it has possibly changed with regard to South and Southern Africa ... We found no evidence at all that the USSR is putting pressure on the ANC to abandon the armed struggle before the conditions for a negotiated settlement had been created by those in power in South Africa, or that the USSR is considering abandoning support for the ANC in favour of closer contact and relations with those who are in power in South Africa at present ...²⁸⁵

However, with institutional and political changes in the USSR, such a position was becoming more questionable. Many international matters that had previously been the domain of the ruling party became the responsibility of the MFA. But with the exception of some diplomats who had worked in the frontline states, its officials had rarely dealt with the ANC, having specialised in inter-governmental relations. As Joe Slovo put it, 'Soviet diplomats may have their heart in the right place, but they look at South Africa as at a chess board where some politicians were playing; they don't understand the role of the mass struggle.'²⁸⁶

The position of the minister, Shevardnadze, was becoming rather ambivalent. In a speech to the UN General Assembly in September 1989 Shevardnadze pledged 'to oppose ... resolutely all kinds of violence, no matter what had caused or motivated it',²⁸⁷ thus denying the right of South Africans to fight against the racist regime. Indeed, the ANC's methods of struggle, especially armed actions, were not in line with theories of a 'non-violent world' advanced by Gorbachev and his confidants, Shevardnadze in particular. Such an approach was not welcomed by those in the USSR who had been involved for many years in the support of the liberation struggle. Persistent attempts to explain the futility of the MFA's new approach were undertaken by Vassily Solodovnikov. In 1989–1990, having returned to the Russian Academy of Sciences, he sent several letters to Shevardnadze,²⁸⁸ expressing his 'concern with our position in Southern Africa. There is such a process in development that can lead to erosion of our political prestige not only in that region but also on a larger scale.'²⁸⁹

However, Shevardnadze, grey-haired by that time, well deserved his nickname 'Silver Fox'. He would skilfully adapt his language to the circumstances. It was manifested during his discussion with the ANC leaders, including Alfred Nzo, Joe Slovo and Thabo Mbeki in Lusaka on 20 March 1990, on his way to Namibia's

285 Statement by IDASA delegation on their visit to the USSR.

286 Discussion with J. Slovo, 10 January 1989.

287 *Izvestiya*, 27 September 1989.

288 V. Solodovnikov, 'Policy of Gorbachev-Shevardnadze on South Africa (1987-1991): Position of the Soviet Afro-Asian Solidarity Committee', in Eidelberg and Shubin, *Southern Africa*, 129-135.

289 *Ibid.*, 131.

independence celebrations. Shevardnadze emphasised that Moscow and the ANC should 'consult, talk and coordinate our actions'.²⁹⁰ 'We would be ready to work with you on all of this ... We are ready to work with you in your revolutionary work.' Referring to material aid, he confirmed: 'The obligations we have pledged we will fulfil.'²⁹¹ From the minutes of the discussion, it is not clear whether Shevardnadze managed to convince the South Africans of his 'noble' intentions. Thabo Mbeki, in response, warned against negative changes in Soviet policy: 'We want the USSR to be a leader of anti-apartheid forces. That position should not be compromised ... The USSR should continue to be seen as not beginning to establish links with a system on its way out ... We wouldn't want a negative perception of the USSR among our people.'²⁹² At the same time, the ANC representatives were flexible enough: they objected neither to a possible meeting of Shevardnadze with De Klerk in Windhoek nor to his hints at the possibility of a permanent presence of Soviet diplomats in South Africa.²⁹³

After the unbanning of the ANC²⁹⁴ and the transfer of its headquarters to Johannesburg, it became necessary to establish a new line of communications. After consulting the leadership of the ANC and the SACP (who raised no objections), an agreement was reached between Moscow and Pretoria on 26 February 1991 to exchange liaison missions attached to the Austrian embassies in South Africa and the Soviet Union. The Soviet press statement underlined the restricted nature of the new missions: 'The creation of the Sections of interests does not mean the establishment of diplomatic or consular relations ... and [they] are deprived of the right to use the national flag, emblem and other state symbols.'²⁹⁵ (Protocol-conscious Pretoria's representatives had a lower status than those in the ANC office.) The attitudes of the ANC and SACP to developments surrounding the opening of the Soviet mission in Pretoria were positive because it was headed by Dr Alexey Makarov, who was well known to most of their leaders from the days that he was an interpreter with the first MK group in Odessa, especially after 1970, when he began to work in the Solidarity Committee and later in the CPSU International Department.

The struggle (sometimes overt, often covert) to defend the Soviet policy towards the South African liberation movement was conducted on several fronts, across the institutional structures. The friends of the ANC found another ally in the USSR Foreign Ministry when Vladimir Kazimirov, previously ambassador to Angola, was appointed head of the African Department in early 1991. A new situation analysis was held by the International Department in April 1991. There was broad participation, and a variety of views were expressed. Although a few of the participants were eager to establish trade links with South Africa, most agreed that a curtailment of ties with

290 MCHP: ANC Lusaka Collection, Report on the ANC Meeting with the Soviet Foreign Minister. 20 March 1990, 1.

291 *Ibid.*, 6.

292 *Ibid.*, 4.

293 *Ibid.*, 6.

294 Alfred Nzo and Joe Slovo heard about the unbanning of the ANC and SACP on 2 February when they were going to leave Moscow for Stockholm to meet with Oliver Tambo, Walter Sisulu and the other political prisoners recently released from Robben Island.

295 *Pravda*, 28 February 1991.

the ANC would inevitably bring the Western countries to fill the vacuum, and that this was already taking place to some extent. It was correctly anticipated that the talks in South Africa could be derailed, perhaps even several times, but finally a settlement would be reached.

By mid 1990 another disturbing issue had surfaced in the relations between the USSR and the ANC: the question of Nelson Mandela's visit to Moscow. A message of congratulations from Gorbachev and an invitation 'on behalf of the USSR leadership' to visit the USSR, drafted in advance, were sent to Mandela via the Soviet Embassy in Zambia and the ANC headquarters there. A delegation of the Soviet Afro-Asian Solidarity Committee, headed by Vassily Solodovnikov, went to Lusaka to greet Mandela. 'We in the ANC believe,' he told them, 'that the Soviet Union will support us at the present crucial stage of the struggle.'²⁹⁶ Those in Moscow who were involved with the ANC regarded his visit to the Soviet Union as the highest priority. Siphon Makana reported to the ANC headquarters on 11 April 1990: 'A few days ago I met the local cdes. Their main interest was to find out if cde Mandela's programme will allow some space for him to come in this direction. But their appeal is that HQ should indicate in good time for them to prepare.'²⁹⁷

But uncertainty followed: dates suggested by the ANC to Moscow were not suitable and vice-versa. However, although valid reasons were given (almost) every time for Gorbachev's failure to meet Mandela, the main reason was not a technical one. Anatoly Chernyaev, Gorbachev's assistant for international affairs, later wrote:

Gorbachev had a kind of good nose for the persons who had no prospects and were 'useless for us' ... He 'froze' his meeting with Mandela, though both academics and Foreign Ministry officials (true, with some resistance from my side) more than once argued wordily that it must be done: that one [Mandela] travelled all over the world, everywhere – at the highest level – and yet could not come to Moscow! Gorbachev did not believe that by feeding the ANC and supplying it with arms we were assisting the correct process in the RSA. He did not stop it 'automatically'; he had no time to do it. And he realised that it was one thing to receive Mandela even in Washington and another thing in 'red' Moscow, suspected of the expansion of communism.²⁹⁸

Gorbachev's nose was apparently not so good: Mandela soon became a universally respected president and Gorbachev a detested (at least in Russia) ex-president. Chernyaev's account is an obvious attempt to rewrite history. Gorbachev voted for every decision of the CPSU Secretariat or Politbureau in support of the ANC, including military matters. He warmly received Oliver Tambo in still 'red' Moscow in October 1986, while in the last years of his rule, when the issue of Mandela's visit came up, nobody really believed that Gorbachev was interested in the expansion of communism.

²⁹⁶ Archive of the SAASC, SAC, Summary of discussion with N. Mandela, Lusaka, 28 February 1990.

²⁹⁷ MCHP: ANC Lusaka Collection, S Makana to A.Nzo, 11 April 1990.

²⁹⁸ A. Chernyaev, *Shest Let s Gorbachevym* (Six years with Gorbachev) (Moscow: Progress – Kultura, 1993), 195.

Nevertheless, steps had to be taken to maintain Soviet contacts with the ANC at the highest possible level. In November 1990 Walter and Albertina Sisulu were invited to visit the USSR for a rest. At the reception on the USSR National Day (the anniversary of the 1917 revolution), Sisulu was introduced to Gorbachev, who assured him that Mandela would be welcome in Moscow. Then, while in the Crimea, they visited the MK group in Perevalnoe. An official delegation of the ANC (the last one to visit the USSR) followed in December 1990. Henry Makgothi, ANC deputy secretary general, and Rashid Patel (Aboobaker Ismail, later major general in the SANDF), a member of the MK High Command, had discussions with Gennady Yanaev, member of the Politbureau and new international secretary of the Communist Party. Yanaev made it clear that, while clumsy statements by some Soviet representatives could create a wrong impression about the position of the Party and the Soviet state, the USSR reiterated its solidarity and support to the ANC. His assurances gained extra weight when he was elected to the new post of the USSR vice-president two weeks later.

The last high-level contact between the SACP and the CPSU occurred four months later, when Joe Slovo went to Moscow for a short working visit. Slovo met Vladimir Ivashko, deputy to Gorbachev in the CPSU, on 23 April 1991. They discussed not only the current situation in both countries and inter-party relations, but also 'the prospects of relations between the USSR and a future democratic South Africa'.²⁹⁹

At the ANC national conference, convened at the beginning of July 1991 in Durban, the Soviet side was represented by the author of this chapter from the CPSU and two colleagues from the Solidarity Committee. This event was unforgettable. Over 2 500 delegates rose and started applauding as soon as Walter Sisulu, the chair of the session, mentioned 'our natural ally', even before he said the words 'the Soviet Union'. Nelson Mandela received the Soviet delegates on 3 July 1991. He put it very clearly: 'Without your support we would not be where we are now.'³⁰⁰ At the same time, he was visibly worried about the delays to his visit to the USSR.³⁰¹

A strongly worded report about the meeting was presented to Gorbachev. He again made promises, and the deputy foreign minister, Valery Nikolaenko, was urgently sent to South Africa in August 1991 to appease Mandela. He conveyed Gorbachev's '[verbal] message, in which the invitation to the ANC leader was confirmed'.³⁰² On the surface, the crisis was averted, but Alexey Makarov wrote in a private letter that Nikolaenko's attitude towards the ANC was rather ambivalent. Such moods, as well as articles openly hostile to the South African liberation movement, reflected the political struggle that was evolving in the Soviet Union. Some newly born 'democrats' were in a hurry to throw out any policy previously conducted by Moscow. Others had already been co-opted (Pretoria was always skilful in this field) and were anxious to get on the gravy train of visits, conferences and honoraria.

299 *Pravda*, 24 April 1991.

300 *Ibid.*

301 Discussion with N. Mandela, Durban, 3 July 1991.

302 *Izvestiya*, 12 August 1991.

However, further trouble arose in 1991 when the USSR government, in the situation of a worsening economic and financial crisis, took the decision to stop free military training of foreigners in the country. The decision was all-inclusive. The ANC leadership and its friends in Moscow were deeply concerned, and on Friday 16 August the CPSU International Department sent a report to the Crimea, where Gorbachev was on holiday, urging the continuation of free MK training, as had been done for almost three decades. This happened to be the last paper on the African issue from the International Department, because over the weekend the situation in the USSR changed drastically. A so-called coup by Gorbachev's closest assistants took place on Monday 19 August, followed by a counter-coup led by Boris Yeltsin.

A situation of dual power arose for several months, with Gorbachev, the USSR president, technically still at the top, and Yeltsin, the president of Russia, concentrating real power in his hands. Whatever differences they had on other issues, both were ready to embrace Pretoria. The MK cadres were sent away, while Pik Botha was arrogant enough to come to Moscow on a 'private and unofficial' visit on 7 November, officially still a national day. On 9 November 1991 he signed a protocol with the USSR new foreign minister, Boris Pankin, formally restoring consular relations between the two countries. Moreover, Pankin promised to establish full diplomatic relations and abandon sanctions before long.³⁰³ ANC spokesperson Carl Niehaus called the decision 'premature',³⁰⁴ but promises of consultations were forgotten and soon afterwards it was announced that F.W. de Klerk would undertake an unofficial and transit visit to Moscow in December 1991. The only reason it did not occur was the decision of the Belovezhskaya troika (the leaders of Russia, Ukraine and Belarus: Yeltsin, Kravchuk and Shushkevich) at their meeting in the Belovezhskaya Pushcha forest near the Soviet-Polish border on 8 December to dissolve the USSR.

When Boris Yeltsin replaced Gorbachev in the Kremlin, the situation deteriorated. Yeltsin's government followed the position of the West on many major issues of foreign policy. As far as South Africa was concerned, it went even further. While major Western powers were doing their best to build or broaden the bridges to the ANC, Yeltsin was in a hurry to develop ties with Pretoria at the expense of the ANC. Such steps involved the establishment of diplomatic relations with Pretoria in February 1992 and the dropping of financial support to the ANC office in Moscow.

The collapse of the Soviet Union and Moscow's cessation of political and practical assistance to the ANC in late 1991 undoubtedly had a negative effect on the talks that began in South Africa. It is hardly accidental that when it came to power, the ANC adopted an intransigent position because of the establishment of diplomatic relations with Pretoria in February 1992 and the assurances given to De Klerk by Yeltsin in the Russian capital on his visit in May 1992.

However, the twist in USSR/Russian policy towards South Africa did not remain unchallenged. When Yeltsin was welcoming De Klerk in the Kremlin, Themba

303 Quoted in N. Anderton, 'From Gorbachev to Yeltsin. Moscow-Pretoria Relations at a Time of Change'. Unpublished paper. University of Stellenbosch, 1994, 11.

304 *Pravda*, 11 November 1991.

Thabethe, the head of the ANC mission, was invited to the House of Soviets, the premises of the Russian parliament, which was later shelled by Yeltsin's tanks, in October 1993. There he discussed 'the present stage and the prospects of political, economic and cultural relations between Russia and South Africa' with the Co-ordination Council of the Opposition. A message to Nelson Mandela, signed by a group of the opposition leaders, was forwarded to the ANC envoy.³⁰⁵

Nevertheless, because of the absence of a broad anti-apartheid movement in Russia, the actions of the opposition, though they irritated Yeltsin's government and perhaps forced it to think twice before taking further steps towards Pretoria, could not have a decisive impact on its policy. It was the ANC's victory in the 1994 election that led to some positive changes in Moscow's policy towards South Africa. The prospects for the development of South Africa's relations with Russia were strengthened after the defeat of the overtly pro-Western political forces in the Russian elections.

What were the reasons for the drastic changes in the attitude of governmental and other structures in Russia towards South Africa? It seems that originally the main reason for the changing policies was (usually futile) attempts by Gorbachev and later Yeltsin to find short cuts to obtain quick credit, loans and investments, almost irrespective of the source.³⁰⁶ A second factor was the personal benefit received by people who started to deal with the South African regime and the white establishment in general, either directly or indirectly. A third reason related to the political and social changes in Russia, that is, the restoration of capitalism (even if the leaders would not admit it for a long time), which presupposed a break with old allies and friends.

The final and perhaps most disgraceful reason for the change was the rise of xenophobia and outright racism, caused by the deterioration of living standards in the course of 'reforms' and vicious propaganda that portrayed the Soviet assistance to Africa as one of its causes. Meanwhile the white people in South Africa were depicted in the media as potential victims of black majority rule.

Summary of Soviet support to the liberation movements

Too often fields and forms of the Soviet support to ANC are reduced by outside observers to the military sphere. Indeed, the assistance to MK (and the underground activities of the ANC and the SACP) constituted an important field, but just one of the fields of interrelations between the USSR and the liberation movement in South Africa.

One of the most important was political and diplomatic support by the USSR to the anti-apartheid struggle in South Africa. Politically Moscow supported the struggle against colonialism and racism from the first days of the 1917 revolution. Moscow's consistent diplomatic support to the anti-apartheid struggle began from the moment this issue was raised in the UN, demanding more effective actions. For example, after

305 Press Release. The meeting between a leading member of the Supreme Soviet of the Russian Federation and the ANC Chief Representative in Moscow, 4 June 1992. In possession of the author.

306 Just one example: the R100 million revolving credit to Russia announced after de Klerk's meeting with Yeltsin remained entirely a paper agreement.

Steve Biko's death in detention on 12 September 1977 and the banning of non-violent organisations, the West had to agree to the mandatory arms embargo against South Africa. The Security Council resolution was a heavy political blow to the Pretoria regime. The position of the Soviet Union, expressed by the USSR ambassador to the UN, Oleg Troyanovsky, was strongly supportive of the embargo actions: 'This decision can serve as a point of departure for application of the regime of effective sanctions against Pretoria.'³⁰⁷

Professor Vassily Solodovnikov (the first Russian citizen to be awarded the South African Order of Companions of O.R. Tambo) recalled that when he came as Soviet ambassador to Lusaka in 1976, Western ambassadors used to say: 'Why are you dealing with the ANC? ... The ANC does not have any support inside the country.' In his opinion, 'the Western countries maintained their unfriendly attitude towards the ANC almost till the end of the 1980s, and only when they saw that the ANC was rapidly advancing to the victory they hurried to make "friends" with it.'³⁰⁸

Soviet political support to the ANC (and SACP) was not conditioned by the movement's relations with other countries – including China – even when Moscow's relations with Beijing were strained for many years. True, the Soviets looked with some suspicion on those African leaders who visited China frequently, but hardly tried to stop them. In 1982, when the Chinese approached the SACP, its leadership decided to send Mabhida to Moscow for more information about China's internal and external policies. An SACP document describes his finding: 'G. S. [general secretary] reported on consultations with CPSU ... CPSU of the opinion that we should be cautious but should not reject the overtures [by the Chinese].'³⁰⁹ It is clear that the Soviet Union did not dictate their position to the SACP, nor did they prevent the SACP from developing relations with China.

The same approach was consistently applied to Moscow's relations with the ANC. On the eve of the talks on a political settlement, on 19 January 1990, the *Star* wrote: 'In private discussions Soviet leaders have increased pressure on the ANC.'³¹⁰ That was utterly wrong, perhaps unfortunately, but there were no private discussions whatsoever between the Soviet and ANC leaders. As far as official high-level meetings were concerned, the author was present in Moscow at all of them for almost a decade, and can give evidence that 'pressure' was never put on the ANC.

Gail Gerhart, in her review of my book on the ANC, rather sceptically wrote:

He [the author] seeks to discredit the idea that the ANC, which depended on Soviet aid, was ever really under the sway of the Kremlin; instead its relationship with the Soviet Union was a reciprocal one of friendly mutual trust. As he sees it, the Soviets dispensed weapons, equipment, money,

307 *Izvestiya*, Moscow, 6 November 1977.

308 *Sovietskaya Rossiya*, Moscow, 23 September 2004. This is true not only with reference to diplomats. Thus, the ANC was not included in the index of the book by J. Seiler, *Southern Africa Since the Portuguese Coup* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1980).

309 MCHP: YDC, Minutes of P.B. Meeting held on 17 February 1983 in Maputo.,2.

310 *The Star*, 19 January 1990.

training, scholarships, air tickets, medical care, and paid holidays in return for the satisfaction of helping a noble cause.³¹¹

I did not describe any Soviet 'grand design' because there was none. One should not forget that, according to the 1977 USSR Constitution, 'supporting the struggle of peoples for national liberation and social progress' was regarded as one of the aims of the Soviet foreign policy.³¹²

A peculiar feature of the material assistance to the liberation struggle was that although it was funded largely from the state budget, ANC's requests used to be handled by the International Department of the CPSU CC. The most secretive were matters of financial assistance. The scale of funding fluctuated in the three decades. It dropped in 1973 to \$150 000 to the ANC and \$50 000 to the SACP, probably because of the immediate gloomy prospects of the struggle within South Africa, especially after the failure of Operation J, and more emphasis on the liberation war. In the 1980s, \$100 000 was provided annually to the ANC and just \$60 000 to the SACP, and later \$100 000 for each organisation. As opposed to the early 1960s, all these sums were rather modest, but in contrast to the support from most other countries, they were particularly important because they were provided at the discretion of the leadership of these organisations and therefore could be used for armed and other sensitive activities.

Soviet support in kind was much more substantial. Humanitarian assistance to the ANC, which began in 1963, included supplies, through Soviet government channels and NGOs, of food, clothes, cars, trucks, stationery, sportswear and building materials. According to Russian government sources, the total value of humanitarian assistance to the ANC in kind from 1963 to 1990 was 16 million roubles.³¹³ But this figure does not reflect the true picture and simple conversion into dollars at any given rate of exchange only distorts the picture further: many goods were exceptionally cheap in the USSR. In addition, this figure is not all encompassing because it does not include the material assistance provided by the Soviet Afro-Asian Solidarity Committee and other NGOs, usually with funds provided through the Soviet Peace Fund, which comprised voluntary contributions by the USSR citizens.

A peculiar field of assistance, which is not included in any statistics, was provision of air tickets and transit facilities for numerous ANC delegations and representatives to enable them to attend international conferences and visit various countries, as well as contributions to budgets of those conferences. This form of assistance was especially vital in the earlier stages of the ANC struggle, when its resources were very limited.

The CPSU, Solidarity Committee and other NGOs received South Africans for rest and medical treatment in the USSR. More than once this helped to save ANC members from severe illnesses or disabilities. Furthermore, South African doctors and nurses were trained in the USSR, among them the incumbent minister of health Manto Tshabalala-Msimang and late Lieutenant-General Themba Masuku. The

311 *Foreign Affairs*, March-April 2000 (vol. 79, no. 2).

312 Constitution (Fundamental Law) of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics Adopted at the Seventh (Special) Session of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR Ninth Convocation on October 7, 1977, article 28.

313 *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, Moscow, 8 August 1992.

Soviet Union also supplied the liberation movement with medicine and medical equipment, and in the 1980s Soviet doctors were sent to the ANC camps in Angola.

From 1962 onwards, South African students travelled to the USSR for academic and political training. About 200 ANC members completed training in Soviet tertiary institutions, mostly with master's and some with PhD degrees. (The official government figure is 145, but does not include those South Africans who were registered as citizens of Lesotho, Zambia or other southern African countries.) In addition, another 200 ANC and SACP members studied at the Institute of Social Sciences (the International Lenin School), while dozens studied in trade union and youth schools. The system of training at the ISS was rather flexible: from some weeks to a couple of years. Among its graduates are President Thabo Mbeki, minister in the presidency Essop Pahad, the secretary of defence January Masisela (Che O'Gara), and the director-general of the Department of Foreign Affairs Ayanda Ntsabula.

Last, there was the Soviet assistance for Umkhonto we Sizwe. The total value of 'special equipment' (military supplies) to the ANC from 1963 to 1990 was about 36 million roubles. However, the price of many items was exceptionally low in the Soviet Union, and this was particularly true of arms. The list of equipment received by the ANC will give a clearer picture: several thousand AK-47s of various modifications, over 3 000 SKS carbines, over 6 000 pistols, 275 grenade-launchers, 90 Grad-P missile launchers, over 40 Strela 2M anti-aircraft missile launchers, 20 Malyutka anti-tank rocket launchers, over 60 mortars, etc.³¹⁴ All of these weapons, as with any other goods, were supplied to the ANC with the full knowledge and consent of the independent African states under special agreements with Moscow.

The Russian press reported that from 1963 to 1991 a total of 1 501 ANC activists underwent military training in Soviet institutions.³¹⁵ However, this figure did not include graduates of the Northern Training Centre, and thus was well over 2 000 including the South African president, former deputy president and several ministers. Of the first group of ANC commanders incorporated into the new SANDF in 1994, everybody underwent military training in the USSR, except one, who was trained by the Soviets in Angola.

Bulgaria: A case study of other Eastern European solidarity and support

The attitudes of Moscow's East European allies to the liberation struggle in South Africa were similar, though the scale of their involvement differed. The ANC could rely on them in the most difficult moments. For example, at the end of 1972, when the struggle was at its nadir, an ANC delegation visited Czechoslovakia, GDR, Hungary, Romania and Bulgaria and contact between the ANC and Eastern Europe resulted 'in a tremendous increase of assistance'.³¹⁶

³¹⁴ Ibid.

³¹⁵ *Segodnya*, no. 3, 1993.

³¹⁶ 'A Brief Report of the Revolutionary Council', 1979, 14.

Apart from the USSR and GDR (discussed elsewhere), Czechoslovakia was most active in support of the ANC before the 1968 political crisis in this country. Later, in the 1970s and 1980s, a similar role was played by Bulgaria.³¹⁷ Valuable documentary evidence of the connection between the Bulgarian Communist Party (BCP) and the ANC and SACP soon after the system of apartheid had been established can be found in papers of the BCP and the memoirs of party members of those times. Sympathy for the anti-apartheid struggle was initially expressed in the 1960s. However, the decolonisation processes were prevailing in that decade and the BCP demonstrated its support to this struggle more in declaration than in practical matters.

Information on the issue of apartheid in the 1960s is contained mostly in the Bulgarian government's papers. The attitude of Bulgaria towards apartheid and the situation in South Africa is expressed in the bilateral documents between Sofia and the young African countries. Speeches by government members or Bulgarian diplomats who presented the official Bulgarian policy of strong objection to the regime of apartheid represent another form of state document. They used the formula that the struggle against racial discrimination, apartheid and neo-colonialism was a major concern for Bulgarian foreign policy.³¹⁸ This formula had variations, but its core meaning was put in all official papers from the 1960s to the end of the 1980s. Initially the ANC was not mentioned in this sort of document, because it was not yet a partner of the BCP or of the official Bulgarian authorities. Therefore the state of Bulgaria was not bound to provide any practical help and real action against apartheid.

The declarations and protest notes by the Bulgarian Foreign Ministry against apartheid and repression in the RSA, sent to Pretoria also, are available in the 1965–1968 period.³¹⁹ On the other hand, no documents about the ANC, SACP or the anti-apartheid struggle have been found in the archives of Bulgarian social (non-governmental) organisations for this period. However, very interesting information is contained in the recollections of members of the BCP. They mentioned that old and unmarked weapons had been collected to be handed to the comrades of the SACP.³²⁰ However, this is not confirmed by the archives of the International Department of the BCP Central Committee.

Nevertheless, some connections between the BCP and the ANC and SACP did exist in the 1960s. This is evident from the protocols of talks, held decades later in Sofia, where the participants recollected meetings and discussions from those times.³²¹ Thus, Moses Kotane met members of the BCP during his stay in Bulgaria in the 1960s. Sindiso Mfenyana, later the ANC chief representative in Berlin, met with Bulgarian

317 Central State Archive (*Centralen Derjaven Arhive*, hereafter, CSA) contains the archives of Ministry of Foreign Affairs, archives of the Bulgarian Committee of Solidarity with Peoples of Asia and Africa (CSPAA), of the Central Committee of the Dimitrov Communist Youth Union (DCYU) and the party archives of the Central Committee of the Bulgarian Communist Party (BCP).

318 CSA, Archive of the Foreign Ministry: collection 350, inventory 3, archive unit (hereafter a.u.) 9.

319 CSA, Archive of the Bulgarian Committee of Solidarity with Peoples of Asia and Africa (hereafter CSPAA): collection 858, inventory 3, a.u. 12, 33.

320 Interview, D. Konov, member of a People Resources Committee, Sofia, 10 November 2004.

321 CSA, Archive of the CSPAA: collection 858, a.u. 65.

communists in 1968. A Bulgarian representative and unnamed ANC members were in contact in Havana at an international conference in 1965.

The situation changed in the following decades and there is rich documentation that shows that relations with the ANC and SACP became more active in the 1970s and 1980s, when Bulgaria could conduct an active foreign policy of support at international level and bilaterally. Since the 1970s, the communication between the ANC and NGOs in Bulgaria has become documentarily traceable,³²² although at government level the situation did not change. Relations between the Bulgarian NGOs and the ANC were sufficiently documented and could be sorted in groups, depending on the organisation.

The leading part in relations between Bulgarian organisations and the ANC was played by the Bulgarian Committee for Solidarity with the Peoples of Asia and Africa (CSPAA). It was a filter, distributing the engagements taken towards the ANC to other organisations and institutions. Among them were Bulgarian universities and high schools,³²³ where many young members of the ANC or South Africans recommended by the ANC were educated. The CSPAA was also engaged with trade, industrial and transport organisations, which supplied and transported goods for the ANC.³²⁴ In spite of the special features of the socialistic state system, which presumably controlled and directed all organisations in the country, the CSPAA included, the members of the ANC who visited Bulgaria held their meetings with the CSPAA as a civil NGO. Because of this, the talks were generally held in a less official and friendlier atmosphere. The topics varied from the international situation to the problems of South African students in Bulgaria.

The CSPAA was responsible for establishing contacts with the South African students in Bulgaria, who were united into a local students' organisation. Archival documents show that in the period 1983–84 the number of South African students was quite significant at 63. Students from the ANC began to attend Bulgarian schools and universities much earlier, around the beginning of the 1970s. In the 1970–1989 period more than 100 South African youths studied in Bulgaria.³²⁵ (This number does not include those who were undergoing military training. For example, in 1976–78, ten MK members were trained in Bulgaria.³²⁶)

Unfortunately, regular correspondence between the CSPAA and the South African student organisation is missing from the archives and it is impossible to trace these relations in detail. However, available materials demonstrate their diversity. Thus, in 1978 the CSPAA assisted 20 ANC students to obtain temporary jobs in the Bulgarian agrarian sector, with the idea of earning money for the struggle.³²⁷ It helped a delegation of the local student organisation to take part in the Conference of the ANC Youth Section in Hungary. Following a personal request of Alfred Nzo, the wedding of the

322 *Ibid.*: collection 858, inventory 3, a.u. 66.

323 *Ibid.*: collection 858, inventory 1, a.u. 220.

324 *Ibid.*: collection 858, inventory 3, a.u.17.

325 *Ibid.*: collection 858, inventory 2, a.u. 28.

326 'Brief Report of the Revolutionary Council', 1979, 6.

327 CSA, Archive of the CSPAA: collection 858, inventory 2, a.u. 8.

head of the Youth Section, Eddie Funde, and Nosizwe Toni was organised. During his visit to Sofia in 1980, Eddie Funde addressed a plea to the CPSAA for help in building a school (SOMAFCO) and a clinic for the needs of the ANC in Tanzania.³²⁸ In 1986, Raymond Nkusu and R. Morongo visited Bulgaria during their trip to the socialist countries, to learn about the studying process and behaviour of the South African students.³²⁹

The CPSAA was also engaged in activities that were not necessarily requested by the ANC or SACP, but were connected with the anti-apartheid struggle, such as the organisation of photo-exhibitions, concerts, and meetings of Bulgarian workers. The participants in these meetings adopted resolutions and addresses to Bulgarian and international institutions in expression of their support for the struggle against apartheid. In 1975, a symposium was held in Sofia under the title 'Racism in South Africa'.³³⁰ The representative of the ANC office in London was invited to take part, and Alex la Guma and his wife Blanche arrived. The ANC delegates also participated in the events of a broader agenda in Bulgaria. Thus, when a seminar with the topic 'Significance of the United Fronts' was held in Sofia in 1976, Joseph Nhlanhla, who represented ANC as a member of the delegation of AAPSO, attended. In addition, Bulgarian expenses were used to bring another delegate, Eric Mtshali, who was living in Dar es Salaam.³³¹ When Sofia hosted the World Parliament of the Peoples for Peace in 1980, the ANC president Oliver Tambo, together with Sam Nujoma and Angela Davis, was among its most prominent participants.

Some of the contacts between the ANC and CPSAA were indirect. On the instruction of the BCP Central Committee, CPSAA responded positively to the ANC appeals for transportation of its members to Africa from Europe and vice versa, which necessitated their stay in Bulgaria for transit. For example, at the personal pleas of Alfred Nzo and the ANC representative Sindiso Mfenyana, air tickets to Lusaka were provided for Mothupi Malaka and Nomvume Nene in 1986. The CPSAA had an annual budget for salaries, official trips and annual contributions to international organisations, such as the AAPSO. Every other expense had to be approved by the BCP, which would order the Ministry of Finance to transfer the money to the CPSAA. For example, in 1981 it requested 49 000 leva – a considerable amount of money – to assist SWAPO and the ANC, and part of the money was to be spent on plane tickets.³³²

It is difficult to determine the amount of money that was spent on the needs of the ANC, but without any doubt it was considerable. Contributions to the AAPSO budget were supplemented by money for air tickets, especially targeted for liberation movements, and part of them covered the needs of the ANC.³³³ The CPSAA assisted in holding the Emergency International Conference, organised by AAPSO in Addis Ababa in October 1976. Because of a personal request by Alfred Nzo, \$500 and four

328 *Ibid.*, a.u. 13.

329 *Ibid.*

330 *Ibid.*: collection 858, inventory 3, a.u.55.

331 *Ibid.*: collection 858, inventory 1, a.u. 102.

332 *Ibid.*: collection 858, inventory 1, a.u.140; Archive of the BCP Central Committee: collection 136, inventory 60, a.u. 64.

333 CSA, Archive of the CSPFA: collection 858, inventory 3, a.u.56.

plane tickets were provided for ANC delegates to the conference. Other examples were making 10 000 badges for the 75th anniversary of the ANC and publishing the 'Solidarity' booklet.³³⁴

Most of the contacts between ANC and the CPSAA were responses from the Bulgarians to concrete requests for help. These demands were usually for goods, first aid, medicines and for the daily needs of MK cadres, even propaganda materials. The ANC received spoons, forks, jackets, fishing-tackles, matchboxes, blankets, mattresses, sewing-machines, clothes, and textiles from Bulgaria. In 1974, the cost of the goods (medicines, clothes, food and clothing) was estimated to be 45 000 leva.³³⁵ For 1975 the list was not specified, but the cost of goods was indicated: up to 30 000 leva.³³⁶

The year 1976 witnessed a substantial increase in assistance to the ANC. According to an agreement between the BCP Central Committee and the ANC, represented by Alfred Nzo, humanitarian aid was provided to the sum of 89 400 leva. The first consignment of goods cost 10 000 leva.³³⁷ The rest of the money was to be spent according to the needs of the ANC in Dar es Salaam. Then, in June 1979, 529 containers with 12 500kg of medicines, shoes, canned meat and fish, soap, salt, sugar and cigarettes were shipped for the needs of the ANC to Luanda.³³⁸

In some cases, assistance had to be provided urgently. When Anthony Mongalo, the head of the ANC office in Berlin, and its representative from London visited Sofia in 1980 to take part in the World Peoples Parliament for Peace, they brought an urgent request for aid for their fighters in Angola, who were short of food. The demands for canned meat and vegetables exceeded 10 thousand leva, which the CSPAA did not have on hand, and the committee asked the Party Central Committee for financial help.³³⁹ They acted on the basis of an agreement, negotiated at a meeting between the Bulgarian president and Todor Jivkov, general secretary general of BCP, and Oliver Tambo and Yusuf Dadoo. (Jivkov received the ANC president in June 1979.³⁴⁰)

The annual report of the CSPAA for 1981 contained information about a visit of Siphso (Simon) Makana, head of processing and information in the ANC Department of Intelligence and Security, but it noted only that important information was exchanged. The same year, with the help of the Bulgarian Red Cross, humanitarian aid – food and medicines to the amount of 15 000 leva – was provided to the ANC.³⁴¹

An ANC delegation led by Eddie Funde and Joyce Dipale met a representative of the CSPAA in 1983, and were given a present for Nelson Mandela's birthday from the workers of Rila factory in the town of Russe.³⁴²

334 Ibid.: collection 858, inventory 1, a.u.96.

335 Ibid.: collection 858, inventory 1, a.u.62.

336 Ibid.: collection 858, inventory 3, a.u.65.

337 It consisted of 1,5 tons of canned fish, 3 tons of rice, 4 tons of soap, 3 tons of lard, medicines, 1 ton of cigarettes, 500kg of sugar, 500kg of beans, 3 tons of canned veal, 3 tons of milk powder, 2 tons of salt, 1 ton of instant soups, and 3 200 pairs of shoes and boots.

338 CSA, Archive of the CSPAA: collection 858, inventory 3, a.u.66.

339 Ibid.

340 *For Solidarity*, Sofia, 1979, no. 4, 2.

341 CSA, Archive of the CSPAA: collection 858, inventory.3, a.u. 58.

342 Ibid., a.u. 64.

In 1986, at a meeting with the CSPAA chairman Slavtcho Transki, Mongalo was promised 2 000 military shoes and uniforms for 1 000 MK cadres. In the same year M.D. Naidoo, ANC representative to the International Committee on Southern Africa (ICSA) in London, sent a request to Sofia for financial and material support to mobilise public opinion.³⁴³ The request was for money, plane tickets, office equipment, badges and booklets.

There is information in the archives about the provision of medical treatment for ANC members in Bulgaria. In addition, the youth organisation of the BCP invited five children of ANC members for a summer holiday in Bulgaria in 1987. The ANC office in London organised annual solidarity bazaars, where goods and souvenirs, in particular Bulgarian goods, were sold and the income was transferred to the ANC. In Sofia the goods were prepared by Dulcie September, at that time a student in Sofia.³⁴⁴

The archive documents of other Bulgarian NGOs show their involvement in supporting the ANC. For example, in 1988 members of the ANC Youth Section were invited to a one-month political course in the School for Political Science of the Bulgarian Communist Youth.³⁴⁵ On the occasion of the Year for Struggle against Apartheid, announced by the UN in 1978, the Bulgarian Women's Committee organised an open public discussion. Even the head of the politically neglected Bulgarian Orthodox Church, Patriarch Maxim, made an official statement in the mass media against the apartheid regime, undertaking to gather hundreds of protest letters.

The archive documents of the CSPAA for 1987–1990 are short and contain mostly information to the CC of BCP about talks and meetings, and no names are given of the participants or the topics. However, in 1987 the government announced widely how Bulgaria had helped the anti-apartheid struggle of the ANC.³⁴⁶ The leading role in the relations between the ANC and Bulgarian organisations was played by the Bulgarian Communist Party. No activity towards the ANC, by whatever organisation or institution, was possible without its consent. For example, in 1987 the BCP authorised an additional 80 000 leva to the ANC from the Bulgarian Fund for Peace and Solidarity, composed of donations by Bulgarian workers.³⁴⁷

However, in the archives of the Party, as far as they are accessible to the public, the information is insufficient. The earliest document is from 1972 and concerns the visit of Alfred Nzo and his meeting with Boris Veltchev, a member of CC of the BCP.³⁴⁸ ANC delegations were invited as guests to every congress of the Party. In December 1973, the BCP received the SACP delegation of Yusuf Dadoo, Chris Nkosana (Hani), Moses Mabhida, Joe Slovo and Michael Harmel. At the meeting, an interesting fact came out: in 1948 Yusuf Dadoo had personally met Georgi Dimitrov, the most

343 Ibid.: collection 858, inventory 1, a.u. 32.

344 Ibid.: collection, 858, inventory 2, a.u. 13.

345 CSA, Archive of the Central Committee of the Dimitrov Communist Youth Union (DKMS): collection, 1053, inventory 11, a.u. 555.

346 CSA, Archive of the CSPAA: collection 858, inventory 3, a.u.143.

347 CSA, Archive of the Central Committee of the BCP: collection 1, inventory 64, a.u. 838.

348 Ibid.: collection 136, inventory 60, a.u.101.

famous leader of the BCP and general secretary of the Communist International in 1934–1943.³⁴⁹

An important aspect of BCP relations with the ANC was co-operation in the military field. After the visit of an ANC delegation in 1978 to Sofia the BCP CC decided to grant the ANC help to the sum of 347 620 leva. It had to be military supplies: machine-guns, carbines, sniper rifles, cartridges. They were transported to Luanda by the Bulgarian military distributor KINTEX.³⁵⁰ Following a request by the SACP, the Secretariat of the CC of the BCP agreed to host a clandestine meeting of the SACP CC in the last three months of 1986. Fourteen or fifteen people were expected. The preparations were made in deep secrecy and the expenses were paid entirely by the Bulgarian side.³⁵¹ The meeting took place in November and Joe Slovo was elected SACP general secretary and Dan Tloome its chairman. There is also a reference to a visit to Bulgaria in 1987 by Alfred Nzo and later Gertrude Shope from the ANC Women's Section.³⁵²

Unfortunately, no documents are available in the Bulgarian archives about relations between the ANC and Bulgarian institutions or organisations in the later period. Political changes in Bulgaria that began in 1990 affected its relations with the ANC, as with other East European countries. Nevertheless, with the ANC in power, even the forces abroad that were hostile to it, overtly or covertly, had to surrender to reality and build relations with the democratic South Africa. The development of these relations was facilitated because several members of the South African government, dozens of members of parliament, and most of the new SANDF top echelon have firsthand experience of Russia or other East European countries and are well aware of their potential. Thus, for the people of these countries, the years of co-operation with the South African liberation movement have not been in vain.

Whatever importance the practical support by Moscow and its allies had, especially in the crucial moments of the liberation struggle, their greatest contribution to the elimination of apartheid was not in material assistance or the provision of training facilities, but in encouragement of non-racialism in the ANC through fraternal relations, which developed between citizens of these countries and the South African freedom fighters.

349 *Ibid.*, a.u.131.

350 *Ibid.*: collection 1, inventory 64, a.u.525.

351 *Ibid.*: a.u.824. The SACP leadership wanted to hold a CC meeting in Bulgaria in 1983, but for some reason this did not materialise.

352 CSA, Archive of the CSPAA: collection, 858, inventory 3, a.u.143.

