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**Spear of the Nation:**

**Evolution of a Movement and Utilization of Violence in Apartheid South Africa**

There is a general negative connotation that surrounds the concept of political violence. Most people cringe at the very thought and sound of it, primarily because most cases of contemporary political violence are existent in the most inhuman societies and states. Although this is generally the case, one can argue that political violence, in rare cases, can be used to induce a positive change in a turbulent society. Some nation-states in the modern international community utilizes violence as means to transition from oppression to liberation (Ottaway 62). A perfect example of this application of purposive violence could be found in twentieth-century South Africa. Shackled and bound in apartheid, South Africa was ruled by the white minority and was populated by the marginalized native Africans during most of the previous century. In response to decades of cruelty from Afrikaner Nationalists, social activists from the African National Congress such as Nelson Mandela, Oliver Tambo, and Chris Hani launched a guerilla group that inflicted assaults against the government for a great ideological goal.

The African National Congress was established to end the culture of apartheid that dominated the nation of South Africa from 1948 to 1994, and "to defend the rights of African people which had been previously curtailed by the South Africa Act". Struggle of the ANC became officially constitutional in 1949, and after all of the "demands and resolutions" forwarded and delegations sent to the government to address the "African grievances", the "white government remained unmoved" (Mandela 117). Like any other organization rooted in

social movements, the African National Congress evolved and, just like some other movements, produced off-shoot organizations. After the "tipping point" event of the Sharpeville massacre that occurred on the 21st of March 1960 and killed sixty-nine "unarmed protesters", Nelson Mandela, along with the other leaders of the *African National Congress* and the *Pan Africanist Congress*, realized that the non-violent way of protesting that they formulated was not enough to get their points across the government to stop apartheid (Cherry 2011). Both organizations formed their respective armed wings: *Umkhonto we Sizwe* (MK) for the ANC, and *Poqo* for the PAC.

MK is the wing of the ANC that engages in tactics of physical sabotage of government establishments, like police stations and power plants (Eades 17; Clark and Worger 62). Yet, even though they engage in strategies of physical violence, they carefully plan their attacks to avoid collateral damages of human lives, while PAC's Poqo engaged in "a campaign of terror" (Clark and Worger 62). The ANC justified MK's existence by arguing "that the government itself used violence to maintain control" (Eades 17). The establishment of MK is a crucial turning point in the ANC's political and moral philosophies. Mandela stated that "as a result of the government policy", social movements that promote violent protests were to be expected. Mandela also added in his statement that they had no choice but to succumb to violence to get the equality they were striving for. Otherwise, they would just accept inferiority for all perpetuity (Clark and Worger 62). The movements of the MK and the ANC was forced to evolve, adhering the use of violence for their cause.

The first sabotage attacks occurred on the 16th of December 1961. Spearheaded by Mandela, MK bombed government institutions and prepared for possible onslaught of guerrilla warfare. MK and Mandela chose this particular date for symbolic purposes: Afrikaner

nationalists celebrate and commemorate the anniversary of the Boer victory over the Zulu on the sixteenth of December. MK decidedly made it ironic that the white rule would be attacked on the same day (Cherry 17-18) and boost the sinking morale of the native African populace. For their first attack, they chose to detonate a bomb beneath a power station. Between the years 1961 and 1963, the pattern of MK attacks were mostly similar: bombing strategic places but keeping in track of avoiding innocent victims. From an analytical perspective, the decisive factor for this strategic pattern can be attributed to Mandela's philosophy. Mandela believed that violence is not the ultimate solution, but he could not retract from it because MK was in full swing in violent protest (Obasanjo 176). The best he could do was to avoid victimizing people in his quest to persuade the Afrikaner government to bequeath equal treatment for native Africans.

During the early years of the seventies, MK was struggling as a social movement organization. After the previous stressful decade that contained military activities in Zimbabwe, MK and the ANC dwindled in membership due to arrests and casualties. Some, like ANC leader Chris Hani, remained undiscovered by authorities. By the year 1968, there was a glaring inactivity from protesters and native Africans. This inactivity led the Afrikaner nationalist government to believe that they had successfully eradicated the "black opposition" movement (Welsh 142-143). The Afrikaner government continued to "harass, restrict, and imprison the still visible leaders of the ANC and its allies" (Johns 292). "This dormancy continued on until about 1972, when MK and the ANC started mobilizing slowly once again. The lag in movement progression was brought mostly by troubles of establishing an effective base within South Africa (Johns 292). Around 1973 through around 1976, there was an apparent rising discontentment in the township of Soweto, the largest one in South Africa designated for native Africans. Abhorrent living conditions and insecurities brought about by social abuse and oppression

propelled the people to rally (Welsh 151). This event, known as the Soweto Uprising of 1976, became another turning point in the evolution of MK and the ANC. Native African students within Soweto rallied and protested much to the surprise of both the Afrikaner government and the ANC itself. This uprising fueled another wave of nationalistic and ethnic pride in native African youths, compelling enough to make them join the MK. In the following years, instead of just planning attacks and detonating bombs, they set out to professionally learn paramilitary tactics and strategies. The crossed to Zimbabwe (then known as Rhodesia) to train how to combat more efficiently, but lack of discipline proved to be a challenge. Most of the new recruits were disappointed because they found out they need to learn war theories instead of just loading, shooting, and killing an enemy with a gun (Cherry 66).

The later years of the seventies and the early years of the eighties proved to be a challenge for the members of the MK and the ANC. Terrorist groups were starting to attract the attention of the international community, and the fear of it was growing irrational. Groups like the German *Baader-Meinhof* spurred paranoia internationally, including South Africa. The MK "took great pains" in emphasizing that they were not just a mere terrorist organization, but a legitimate guerilla group (Cherry 55). In order to reinforce this point, they detonated a bomb in Church Street around 1983. Analyzing this attack, this is a pivotal point in the evolution of the movement because, for the first time, they specifically targeted professional militia. Around nineteen people died and all of whom were members of the air force (Cherry 56).

Between the eighties and the nineties, while the MK was preparing for a full-on revolution against the apartheid government, their leaders, Nelson Mandela and Oliver Tambo, were conducting negotiations with the Afrikaner nationalist government. Later, they expounded on what they called a "two-track strategy". This strategy entailed that while there are

"preconditions for negotiations", they are cautious enough to maintain "pressure in armed struggle" in case it falls apart (Cherry 113). Evaluation of the current political climate around the globe at that time can lead to a few good hypothetical reasons why such endeavors took place. Ideologies aside, the events in the international stage around that time were undergoing drastic changes that include the ending of the Cold War with the collapse of the Soviet Union, indicating the transition of power polarity from bipolar to a unipolar system that left the United States as the sole hegemonic force. On the home front, merchants and investors were closing up shop because the social upheavals were not conducive for a successful business, and the mounting numbers of fatalities and casualties were taking its toll on the very fabric of South African morale. This necessitated another stage of adaptation and evolution for the ANC and the MK. They evolved from a non-violent group, to a group that practices political violence, to a group transitioning to be peaceful once more because of the changing social international climate.

The ANC released an official treatise that clarifies their agenda known as the *Strategy and Tactics of the South African Revolution*. In the document, the ANC stipulated all their missions and visions, one of which reiterates the importance and justification of the utilization of violence. It states that, "guerilla warfare would be necessary to destroy the apartheid state, but only as a component of an overarching strategy" that uses "educational and agitational activity" (Johns and Davis 184). What set the MK apart from other violent organizations such the *Irish Republican Army* and *Baader-Meinhof* was that the MK was ruled and regulated by an organization with rules and adherence to democracy and liberation. Within thirty years of successive combats and unrest, only 240 individuals perished because of MK (Cherry 136). It is valid to argue that this, along with the extreme restraint on all-out violence, can be the very factor that designates MK as a violent group and not a true terrorist organization.

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