Chapter 6


Four phases in the development of the PAC’s military strategy are identified in this chapter. The first period began in 1961 with the development of Poqo (the military wing of the PAC) and the spread of Poqo activities until 1967. The second period, beginning in 1968, was marked by the transformation of Poqo into a formal guerrilla army. This period continued up to 1978 when APLA went through a change of organisation and strategic focus. APLA adopted a new plan called the New Road of Revolution. The plan was formally embraced by the organisation in 1978. Theoretically the New Road of Revolution was the military strategy and plan of the PAC until its unbanning in 1990. For purposes of clarity and to allow detail to coalesce, the period 1978 to 1990 can be subdivided into periods, i.e. 1978 to 1979; 1979 to 1981; 1981 to 1985 and 1985 to 1990. The criteria for the identification of these periods are the developments which occurred in the PAC. (These developments, even though invariably, affected the organisation and strategy of APLA). In 1978 the PAC adopted the New Road of Revolution as a military strategy. This began under the leadership of PK Leballo who was both Chairman and Commander-in-Chief of APLA. The programme was embraced as the military strategy of the PAC until the organization was unbanned in 1990. Leballo was deposed in May 1979 and a new leadership under Vusumzi Make assumed the reigns of the PAC from August 1979 to January 1981. The army was re-organised with the assistance of the Tanzanian government. The involvement of the Tanzanian government was sought to bring discipline to APLA following the aborted army coup in November 1977. T.M. Ntantala, the leading exponent of the New Road of Revolution and the entire High Command, which consisted of experienced cadres, were expelled in 1978 at the Arusha conference as a result of the insistence of a section of the army loyal to P.K. Leballo. A new leadership of the army was appointed under Vusumzi Make. The High Command as a structure of authority within the army was abolished and replaced by a Task Force. When Nyathi John Pokela took over from Make in 1981, there seems to have been no APLA military activities to implement the New Road of Revolution. Between 1981 and 1985,
Pokela phased out the Task Force and re-introduced the High Command. He was succeeded by Johnson Mlambo in June, 1985. Mlambo led the PAC as Chairman and Commander-in-Chief of APLA from 1985 to 1990. Even though Mlambo made no structural changes in the organisation of the army, he refocused the military strategy of APLA. Whether or not there was congruence with the New Road of Revolution, is an issue which will be discussed in various subsections of this chapter. Mlambo’s term of office was certainly a distinctive period in the development of the PAC’s military strategy.

This chapter analyses the development of the PAC’s military strategy from the incidence of Poqo in 1961 to the formation of a formal guerrilla army called the Azanian People’s Liberation Army (APLA). It contends that the PAC leadership upheld divergent positions on matters of military strategy. The development of the PAC’s military strategy was a contested terrain, hence the strained relationships within the organisation. The disagreements emanated from the fact that when APLA was formed in 1968, from the members of Poqo, no clear pronouncements of new rules, procedures or strategies to mark a transition from one era to another, were made. Poqo recruits were simply given a new name and were deployed to various countries for training. There was no thorough internal discussion or agreement about the fact that the PAC had started a new military strategy. Different cultures co-existed and sometimes clashed within the same army. The generation of the 1960s and the generation of the late 1970s within APLA co-existed with difficulty. As the late Mantshontsho put it “we were Poqo stalwarts and some of these boys from the black consciousness tradition could not understand us and we could not understand them. The standards of discipline were different. We were taught differently about the struggle by our old men and the young boys did not have that background”.¹ These differences can only become clear if one analyses the approaches of Poqo militants to the liberation struggle.

APLA continued to exist until the PAC renounced the armed struggle in 1994. Even though this chapter maps out trends in the development of a military strategy in the PAC,

it does not delve into the details of military operations conducted by ‘Poqo’ militants and later APLA combatants. It only analyses the development of strategic thinking around the nature of ‘war’ in South Africa, and how the ‘war’ needed to be conducted. Drawing from secondary literature and primary sources, as well as a few oral interviews, the chapter goes beyond tracking the evolution of strategy, to interpret the PAC’s understanding of the nature of war, specifically the liberation struggle in South Africa, as this had significant implications for the running of the organisation, its structures and organisational ethic of ‘right’ or ‘wrong’. The issues examined in this chapter cut across the various periods outlined. Some of the basic questions that are examined are about how the PAC defined the ‘enemy’ and whether the definition of the ‘enemy’ crystallised in military strategy. Was there a clearly defined strategy for conducting the war against the enemy and how did the strategy change over time? What were the sources of change in military strategy? To address these questions, the chapter begins with an examination of the origins of the PAC’s military strategy between the periods 1961 to 1968 and 1969 to 1990. This is a difficult area to deal with, given the complex philosophical questions around how ideology and rhetoric see their way into the concrete essence of a military strategy. The evolution of the PAC military strategy during the Leballo era and in the post-Leballo era, focusing in particular on the home-going programme (which was a military strategy on its own), initiated and defined by the PAC leadership under Nyathi Pokela in December 1981, will also be a key area of focus.

The evolution of the PAC’s military strategy is not intelligible without a proper interrogation of both ‘Poqo’ and APLA’s command structures and the relationship between those structures and political decision making structures and processes. The question of ‘chains of command’ is important because from it one can infer the internal relations of power and also determine which interest groups or power blocks had authority in determining the direction of the ‘Azanian revolution’. This attests to the significance of understanding the institutional framework of liberation movements since it was part of the very discursive conditionalities of possible successes.

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2 Interview with Z. Mnqojana, Umtata, 23 June, 1995.

The military wing of the PAC originated from the activities of “Poqo”, an underground military movement which operated inside South Africa after the banning of the ANC and PAC in April 1960. Events which led to two organisations being outlawed, were discussed in the previous chapters. They re-emerged in exile with a declaration that they were not “to walk the non-violent path anymore”. The outcome of the PAC’s campaign on the 21st March 1960 transformed the liberation struggle from one in which the emphasis was on non-violence to one of armed struggle. “The ANC founded Umkhonto we Sizwe in December, 16, 1961. Even though there was no formal re-christening of the PAC the organisation nonetheless resurfaced in 1961 bearing the name Poqo, which has since then been described as the ‘military wing’ of the PAC”. The ideological worlds of the two organisations were important determinants of the choice of strategy to wage the war in South Africa.

Within the PAC, from the date of formation, the conception of the struggle in South Africa was premised on the idea that the liberation struggle was “a war that just was and still is, for what started then” was at that point still not finished. This view is also captured by Joe Mkhwanzi, the exiled PAC’s Administrative Secretary, in his submission to the International Conference on Peace and Security in Southern Africa in Arusha, Tanzania, 1985. He said “in 1961, the Pan Africanist Congress of Azania took up the thread of armed struggle left behind by our great forebears. We took the decision to challenge the regime militarily. Necessity dictated that we should start with what we could afford. Thus emerged a weapon known as the panga. The nearest meaning attached to it by white liberals is that it is a butcher’s knife. But it is not”. Mkhwanazi compared the war which Poqo militants waged against the Apartheid government with historic wars

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4 Ibid.
between Africans and early European settlers. He traced the wars back as far as the 1906 Bambata war in the Natal colony. The interview with Mr Madasa also confirmed these sentiments as he pointed out that “as Poqo warriors, we decided to fight the Boers because we inherited the fight from our ancestors. Our strategy was based on the PAC motto: serve, suffer and sacrifice, and that is what we did during Poqo”.

What can be deduced from the above is that the beliefs and understanding of the nature of war by the various generations of PAC members, some in positions of leadership, were important sources in the formulation of military strategy. As will be discussed in later sections, the beliefs and understanding of the nature of war within the PAC were not homogeneous, hence the existence of different perspectives or ‘schools of thought’ about the nature of war in South Africa. The views of the dominant faction within the leadership constituted the position of the organisation. This was the case despite the many dissenting voices. The source of conflict was that the younger generation who joined the PAC in the late 1970s, i.e. after the 16 June, Soweto uprisings did not idealise either tradition or autarchy to map the road to the future but embraced Marxism-Leninism and Maoism as sources of strategy. The older generation who joined the PAC pre-1976 invoked the traditions of Poqo and 21 March 1960 demonstrations to focus the PAC’s military strategy and agenda. The differences of tradition based on generation gaps and political traditions were a major source of conflict in the evolution of the PAC’s military strategy.

It is useful at this stage to uncover the strategic thinking behind Poqo in order to understand the kind of politics and tradition which ‘Poqo stalwarts’ brought into APLA. From existing sources on the incidence of Poqo, there seems to have been little correlation or connection between political ideology and the ‘war’ strategy of Poqo militants. This becomes clear when one analyses the call for action written in the leaflets which were distributed in Nyanga township in December 1961. Their English translation, which appeared in the Rand Daily Mail, 23 March 1963 reads as follows:

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7 Interview with Mr Madasa, Langa, 11 February, 1987 (I was commissioned by UCT Oral History Project to interview the “old” generation of residents of Langa Township on various historical topics).
“We are starting again Africans….we die once. Africa will be free on January 1\textsuperscript{st}. The white people shall suffer, the black people will rule. Freedom comes after bloodshed. Poqo has started. It needs a real man. The Youth has weapons you need not be afraid. The PAC says this”.\textsuperscript{8}

The simple essence of this message is straightforward and appealing, but reflects at the same time a rather distorted, if not archaic theoretical framework within which a military strategy with a national liberation purpose can be located. Besides the vague sense of historical continuity of the liberation struggle, the military strategy of the Poqo militants did not seem to follow the four Basic Documents of the PAC as discussed in chapter 2. The Pan Africanist Manifesto, being the most politically elaborate PAC basic document, made reference to Communism, socialism and race or racism. All public statements by PAC leaders reflected a sound grasp of the organisation’s position on these issues. During the insurrection, however, Poqo militants reduced the organisation’s ideological statements to “a set of slogans: “we must stand alone in our land; Freedom – to stand alone and not be suppressed by whites; ‘amaAfrika Poqo’; ‘Izwe Lethu’”.\textsuperscript{9} Even though these slogans hardly make sense from the vantage point of today; they had meaning and were useful to the historical actors in the sense that the rather abstract theory of Pan Africanism was made concrete. This was done by ordinary men in an attempt to address the naked experiences of the political conditions in which they lived. The Poqo ideology and its concomitant military strategy mirrored a struggle against the conditions of Apartheid oppression driven to the very edge of despair. Poqo slogans tended to express the wrath of destitute Africans as some of those slogans went as follows: “we shall drive to the sea”; “they must go back to Europe” and these were effective in mobilising the kind of cadres needed for the Poqo uprising.\textsuperscript{10} Hence, the ‘revolutionary’ activities of Poqo resulted in various kinds of abuses and violent murders.

\textsuperscript{8} Rand Daily Mail. 23 March, 1963, also quoted in T. Lodge: The Poqo insurrection, 1961-1968. p. 182
\textsuperscript{9} Ibid. p. 182.
It is important to note at this point that the quality of membership of Poqo was also reflected through the ideas and strategy of the movement. In other words, the strategy of Poqo militants reflected the experiences and consciousness of the membership. The membership was largely drawn from a particular social category of South African society. As Lodge indicates, Poqo was a “political movement with a large following from migrant workers, but with positions held by men with at least some education, work skills and political experience”. In Langa township, Cape Town, the organisation of the movement was based on ‘homeboyism’ meaning that men from particular regions or districts, e.g. Lady Frere in Transkei, would come together and form a cell. A group of cells constituted a branch and branches formed a region. “Within each branch a ‘task force’ would be constituted from the younger men in the organisation. The ‘task force’ members would do guard duty at meetings, collect and manufacture weapons and explosives and in the event of the uprising undertake the initial attacks”.

The membership of cell structures was not only limited to migrant workers but also farm workers, as well as teachers and students in the rural areas in the Eastern Cape. These were in essence underground structures. The particular social character and organisation of the movement was not limited to the Eastern Cape but was found nationally. In other words one of the salient features of the Poqo movement was that its members came from the social background of ‘school’ people as opposed to ‘red people’. The ‘elite’ and intellectuals who constituted the core of political leadership of the PAC and who had the ideological know-how of political theory, were behind bars when Poqo started. These included the PAC’s leading intellectual, Mangaliso Sobukwe who was arrested on the 21st March, 1960.

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14 Daily Despatch, 7 March, 1963; Interview with Pearce Mfanasekhaya Gqobose, 1 August, 1996.
P.K. Leballo was also arrested. From 1962 he operated from Maseru in Lesotho as acting President of the PAC. Instead of providing ideological and political leadership in order to refine the content and traditions which the movement had spontaneously acquired, he added fuel to the fire. He summoned groups of Poqo branch leaders to Maseru in February and March 1963 and promised external support to the Poqo uprising. The Maseru based PAC leadership under Leballo promised Poqo activists that “a ship full of arms of war donated by President Abdul Gamal Nasser of Egypt would dock at Port St. Johns before D-DAY at night. The fact that the ship never showed up at all did not discourage Poqo from executing their mission”. The idea of external support for the Poqo uprising was used inside South Africa as a trump-card for mobilising mass support for the movement. This was in addition to the intrinsic benefits which included the return of land to Africans. This was an intrinsic attraction in the sense that the majority of Poqo members were “landless folk who had ventured into the sometimes hostile cities of Johannesburg, Cape Town, East London”, etc. to find jobs in order to support their families in rural areas.

With Leballo’s influence firmly entrenched, the political leadership of the PAC, mostly in Maseru, had defined the enemy as the police and the army. As Mkhwanazi puts it, “all of us knew that the South African racist settler regime is kept in power by the army and the police force”. Seemingly this definition of the enemy never filtered down to the rank and file membership of the movement which constituted Poqo. To Poqo militants the targets of attack on the day of the uprising (which was to be in early April 1963), were the police stations, government infrastructure such as the post offices, power installations and other government buildings as well as the white civilian population. Black informers, spies and collaborators which included Bantustan Chiefs were another category of targets. The disjuncture in the definition of the enemy continued and

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became a permanent feature in the organisation. This was never clarified by any of the leaders who came after Leballo.

In summary, the incidence of Poqo produced a generation of militants to whom action preceded political theory and operation superseded strategy. Short-term planning and the immediacy of results enjoyed priority over long-term planning for results in the distant future. Even though most of them had basic schooling, they were not adequately educated people. Poqo militants were also misled by P.K. Leballo. Even though he knew the ideological tenets of the PAC much better than Poqo activists, he encouraged their short-term plans in order to win their support in the PAC leadership battles in Lesotho. The militants from Poqo uprisings laid the foundations of APLA. The arrival of new recruits untouched by the events of Poqo and driven by ‘inexperienced’ ideological understanding of Pan Africanism and the liberation struggle in South Africa, was bound to generate problems. To them political theory and the quality of revolutionary consciousness preceded action. They believed in the importance of revolutionary theory to inform political activity. Hence Leballo’s radical ideological pretensions won the loyalty and support of young militants within APLA. As one informant who joined APLA in 1978 puts its, “we all adored PK because he came across as a revolutionary, clued up on revolutionary theory and we never questioned his other agendas”.  

It is interesting to compare the ideas of Poqo militants in the PAC with those espoused by other military movements during the same period. Poqo was founded, for instance, on the idea that the armed struggle was a necessity in order to mobilise the rural poor whom the PAC regarded as the peasantry, into a conscious political force which can not only overthrow the government but also seize and mould the country’s political economy to meet their own ends. This strategy was different from that of the ANC’s Umkhonto we Sizwe. To the latter, the armed struggle was a tactical bargaining stance and was thrust upon the organisation by the firm intransigence of the National Party government. Otherwise a peacefully negotiated political solution remained the preferred route. This framework and approach to ‘war’ inside South Africa, shaped the ANC’s military

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strategy throughout the exile period. To the ANC, the armed struggle was not an absolutely necessary condition of liberation; liberation could occur without the shedding of blood. The PAC operated from a completely different premise. According to the PAC, the armed struggle was justified by the fact that the ruling white minority assumed their position of dominance through the use of violence and force. Therefore it was unlikely that they would surrender their dominance and the privileges that have accrued, on their own accord. They have “to be forced to surrender”. \(^{22}\) In this sense the armed struggle was an indispensable condition for liberation. The PAC believed they could not achieve their objectives without war. \(^{23}\) Moving from different premises in terms of conceptions of the armed struggle, the evolution of military strategies assumed different forms in the two organisations. Hence one of the salient features of Poqo’s approach was the tendency to invoke history, even though dubiously conceived, and traditional identities that it implied to conjure up a sense of ‘African Oneness’ which was essentialised and defied homogeneity. This remained a feature of the PAC’s military strategy, even after Poqo. The implicit assumption was that the African masses were ready for a revolution because of their conditions of oppression and exploitation.

In terms of “revolutionary” impulse and definition of targets, the Poqo insurrection shared a number of common features with the ‘Mau Mau’ movement in Kenya which occurred in 1952, about nine years before the incidence of Poqo. It is not clear whether there was any historical inspiration drawn by Poqo from the ‘Mau Mau’ uprising or whether the strategies of Poqo were consciously based on ‘Mau Mau’ strategies. Despite the differences in particular historical experiences and context, the two movements shared common aspects with respect to organisation and strategy. Both movements operated underground and drew their support from the rural areas. The undertones of millenarianism, the idea of the sudden dawning of a more just era, pervaded the ‘all-


\(^{23}\) This is clearly stated in a confidential document compiled by APLA High Command after the 1967 Moshi Conference, see: PAC Archives: ‘Military Committee (MC) Directives to APLA’ undated; See also PAC Archives: ‘The Commissars Field Manual’, 1970, p.8.
embracing nature’ of preoccupations in both movements. Members of both these organisations were bound by an oath of secrecy and their targets were similar, i.e. black collaborators, the police as well as white civilians. It took the Kenyan government three years to contain the ‘Mau Mau’ and the South African government, five years to finally deal with the sporadic incidents of Poqo attacks.

The sources of Poqo military strategy were diverse, ranging from the spirit mediums in rural areas, to the workers in various towns of South Africa, to farm workers and a few members of the educated lower middle classes such as teachers and students. Poqo was also partly sponsored by the leadership of the exiled PAC. By 1967, the activities of Poqo had been contained by the security establishment of the South African government. Hence, 1967, marked the emergence of a new line of thinking in the PAC, firmly rooted in the political ideology and relations established with China in 1965. However, threads of continuity with the approach adopted by Poqo remained, but the exception was that a clear political theory and framework for the armed struggle was developed.


The ‘death’ of Poqo is connected to the March 24 1963 press conference in Maseru in which Leballo disclosed the plans of Poqo to mount a general uprising inside South Africa. The Basutoland police, in collaboration with South African security forces, arrested all PAC leaders they could find in Maseru, confiscated documentation which included membership lists, from Maseru head office of the PAC. Subsequently many Poqo members as well as suspected members were arrested and tried en masse in South Africa. Hence, some scholars such as Mahlangu, regard Poqo as an “uprising that never rose”. The military achievements of Poqo were limited to a series of local uprisings,

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24 The concepts are used by Tom Lodge in his article ‘The Poqo Insurrection’ in his characterisation of the movement in South Africa.
26 T. Lodge: The Poqo Insurrection, p. 192.
(which Lodge covers in detail) and also violent conspiracies inside South Africa, between 1961 and 1967.²⁸

Poqo members who escaped police arrest fled to Maseru in Lesotho where they grouped together with other exiles who had been in Lesotho since 1961. The early group of exiles started programmes in military training, even though clandestinely, under the leadership of Pearce Gqobose and T.M. Ntantala.²⁹ With funding provided by the OAU Liberation Committee, some PAC members were sent for military instruction in Congo, Ghana and Algeria. “By 1968 around 200 of these trainees, constituted what was formerly designated that year as the Azanian People’s Liberation Army”.³⁰

From the outset APLA based its military strategy on the assumption that South Africa had a significant peasant class, whose land hunger could be exploited for revolutionary goals. A similar thinking underlined the strategy of Poqo. This line of analysis went against the grain of real circumstances as depicted by the state of the political economy of rural South Africa. “The formation and structure of classes, the penetration of new relations of exchange and production”, according to Bundy, had completely altered the political-economy and landscape of rural South Africa.³¹ A sizeable landless group, whom Bundy calls the ‘rural proletariat’, had begun to grow, after the promulgation of the 1913 Native Land Act. The manner and extent of its integration into the modern economy defied its categorisation as a peasantry.³² This category of people “entered wage labour with the express intention of accumulating enough cash to buy or lease land a little later. With the twin pressure of increasing population and rising land prices, fewer and fewer were able to achieve this aim”.³³ So it appears that the peasantry, as a social class in South Africa was dying out and was re-emerging instead as a rural proletariat. This social category was identified on the basis of the fact that it could not subsist without

³¹ Colin Bundy: The Rise and Fall of South African Peasantry, preface.
³² Ibid.
³³ Ibid, p. 117.
wage labour. So the PAC’s assumption of the existence of peasants as a social class in rural South Africa and therefore an appropriate site of guerrilla activity was ill-founded. What this shows is that the very ideological framework from which the military strategy of APLA emanated was confused and lacked analytical rigour.

The new military strategy of the PAC was explained by P.K. Leballo at the Moshi conference in September 1967. The conference was summoned by the PAC leadership at the insistence of the OAU Liberation Committee. The organisation needed to resolve its internal differences outlined in chapters 3 and 4. The OAU also insisted that the PAC needed to demonstrate its commitment to waging an armed struggle against the South African government, otherwise there would be no grounds to justify the grant it received from the OAU Liberation Fund. The Moshi conference was therefore called amidst a period of stress and crisis in the PAC. Instead of using the meeting as a forum where unity could be sought, Leballo, PAC’s Acting President, used the occasion to enforce his authority and ideological stance. He outlined the new approach which he called a “people’s war” based in the countryside of South Africa. According to P.K. Leballo “guerrilla war by its nature is based, in the countryside. From this flows the conclusion that the Azanian revolution can develop from a guerrilla type of war in the countryside, extending its area of authority and then surrounding and taking over the cities”. The idea of a protracted guerrilla warfare was introduced at the Moshi Conference. This was a remarkable shift in the PAC’s understanding of the nature of the ‘war’ in South Africa because previously, and especially during the Poqo uprising, instant successes of the revolution were claimed and expected. With the new strategy there seemed to be an acknowledgement that to overthrow the National Party government would require a prolonged and carefully worked out military struggle.

A rurally based strategy and warfare was further justified in the following manner:

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36 Ibid.
“It is from the ranks of the peasants in the reserves, who starve amidst plenty, and millions of landless labourers in thraldom, ‘squatting’ on white farms, that the guerrilla forces find their most eager support, and thus the starting point in the coming conflict”. 37 From the strategy outlined above, one can also deduce who the enemy was. The ‘unprotected’, ‘isolated’ white farmers, ‘dotted over the landscape of Azania’, were the primary targets in terms of APLA military strategy. 38 The rationale for targeting white farmers was that their farms were large and isolated from one another. Besides that, they were surrounded by “a sea of 4.5 million black farm workers and their families – the most cruelly oppressed and exploited of the South African people”. 39 Besides that the terrain where most farms were located was regarded as conducive to guerrilla war because it was bushy, mountainous and sometimes forested.

Attacking white farmers was of strategic significance in the sense that the farmers would be forced off their land and bases and sanctuaries for APLA would be opened. Rudimentary organs of the new Azanian state would be set up and when the last shots were fired, it was anticipated that the revolution would have produced “an administrative and governmental apparatus of a new kind”. 40 In a way the PAC’s military strategy was seeking to emulate what happened in Mozambique under FRELIMO where liberated zones were established and rudimentary government structures were set up in the course of the war. 41 The Zimbabwe African National Union, headed by Herbert Chitepho as President and Josiah Tongogara as the Commander of the army, also adopted a military strategy similar to that of FRELIMO and APLA. The difference between the two was that FRELIMO believed in the vanguard role and leadership of the working-class in the revolution and was Soviet sponsored. The FRELIMO’s use of the rural areas was not based on a theory of a peasant based or led revolution, but was dictated by circumstances. ZANU and the PAC shared a common theoretical view of the role of the peasantry and their leadership in a revolution launched from the rural areas to the cities. “Both ZANU and PAC received the bulk of their support from China and the Maoist approach to

41 Allen and Barbara Isaacman: Mozambique: From Colonialism to Revolution, pp. 80-99.
guerrilla warfare was quite different from the theories of the Soviet Union which supported ZAPU and the ANC”. 

Whilst the first group of ZANU cadres received training from China in September 1963, the PAC’s group received training in late 1966 and was led by Gerald Kondlo. They attended lessons in military instruction, and received training in mass mobilisation, strategy and tactics at the Nanking Military Academy in Peking.

It is important to examine, at this point, the reasons why ZANU was able to wage a ‘successful’ armed struggle, compared to the PAC, and eventually win the elections in 1980. The PAC received support from the same country (China), used the same theoretical tools and strategies and received similar support from the OAU Liberation Committee, but emerged as less successful to the embarrassment of its members and sympathisers. The question which faces analysts and researchers in Southern Africa, is why this was the case. This requires a root-cause analysis. Hence, this chapter seeks to dwell on the notion of the relationship between a peasant class and guerrilla warfare, because it was the cornerstone of the strategies of the two organisations, yet it did not work well for the PAC.

In his book, Peasant Consciousness and Guerrilla War in Zimbabwe, Terence Ranger made a profound statement of analytical significance. He stated that “the revolutionary potentiality of African peasants plainly depended upon what kind of peasants they were”. This kind of prognosis is based on Ranger’s analysis of the Maka peasants of South Eastern Cameroon. As Ranger puts it, they suffered much ‘primary’ resistance to colonial occupation and much ‘secondary’ resistance to colonial administration without ever being in a position to develop peasant consciousness despite their objective existence as a peasantry. In the case of Zimbabwe, the specific history of peasants and logic of peasant aspirations, produced outcomes which were different from South Africa. In the case of South Africa, the peasantry described by Bundy lacked a consciousness of

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42 David Martin and Phyllis Johnson: The Struggle for Zimbabwe, p. 10.
44 T. Ranger: Peasant Consciousness and Guerrilla War in Zimbabwe, p. 21.
45 Ibid.
the mechanisms of their exploitation, a necessary precondition to their existence as a peasantry, in the first place. Hence, they relented, after the expropriation of land in 1913, by relating to the new economy as workers rather than as peasants. This was contrary to what happened in Zimbabwe where similar circumstances generated among the peasants a radical political programme before guerrilla political education arrived on the scene. 46

Therefore, assuming that a peasantry existed in South Africa, the PAC would still have struggled because of its failure to interrogate precisely the kind of peasantry it had to deal with vis-à-vis the commitment necessary to wage a guerrilla war against the Apartheid government. The critical point at issue is covered by Tickner in his article, Class struggles and the food supply sector in Zimbabwe. He argues that there is usually difficulty not just in mobilising the peasantries into collective resistance but also to create the necessary consciousness through people’s war but the matter is complicated further as a result of the fact that this comes to them from outside through the leadership of revolutionary intellectuals. 47

The interview conducted with Elliot Mfaxa during the course of the research brings another important element to the fore. Mfaxa indicated that at the Moshi conference, “the majority of PAC members, including members of the army, were not sure of what Leballo was trying to do. Even the leaders, very few, if there were any, knew what his plan was, in so far as the future of the struggle was concerned. His long address at the conference occurred in the midst of tension; some people had been suspended; the mood in the organisation was generally wrong, so to speak. I was not on board and I am sure many of the soldiers were not on board too”. 48 If these views are anything to go by, it means the nationalists from the Poqo era did not support the new Maoist approach to the South African war. The style of leadership in the PAC did not allow for debate of these issues. One may deduce that the PAC was not united on the strategic course that was charted by Leballo in 1967. What this shows is that added to the inappropriateness of the

48 Interview with Elliot Mfaxa, Kingwilliams Town, 23 July 1998.
Maoist ideological course chosen by P.K Leballo, the majority of the membership of the organisation did not really understand it. Even though the ideological choice was made on the basis of the fact that Poqo’s approach was closely related to the Maoist approach, theoretical formulations of the ideology were never debated internally but were imposed from the top.

Despite the confusion and disagreements which existed within the PAC at a theoretical level, there was pressure to put theory into practice. “The fervour among all fighting forces of all the Southern African liberation movements and Guinea-Bissau was quite high and support from independent Africa and the democratic world had doubled since Sharpeville. So was also the pressure on the leaders of the ANC and PAC in particular by the fighting cadres to let them go home to use the military skills they had acquired”. 49

The first major attempt was made by ZAPU’s military wing, ZIPRA and the Luthuli Detachment of Umkhonto we Sizwe, the military wing of the ANC of South Africa in September 1967 when they crossed the Zambezi river and headed for Wankie Game Reserve in Rhodesia resulting in skirmishes with the Rhodesian forces in which thirty-one guerrillas were allegedly killed. 50

After this incident, towards the end of 1967, an OAU meeting in Kinshasa “called upon the PAC to justify its continued existence and in February the following year at a meeting of the Council of Ministers in Addis Ababa, the movement was presented with an ultimatum: if the PAC did not mount any infiltration efforts by June of 1968 all OAU aid would be terminated. The organisation had been permitted by the Zambian government to establish a military base at Senkobo in the Southern borders of Zambia, where its first APLA trained guerrillas were based. PAC offices were also opened in Lusaka. The aim was to make infiltration into South Africa easy. The PAC in alliance with COREMO (Mozambique’s Revolutionary Committee), a bitter rival of FRELIMO launched an ambitious plan called Operation Crusade. 51 The aim of the operation as explained in the

50 David Martin and Phyllis Johnson: The Struggle for Zimbabwe, p. 10; M. Burger: They Fought for Freedom: Chris Hani, pp. 18-23.
The report of the TRC was to infiltrate at least 12 guerrillas into South Africa in order to establish base areas and build “armed people units” to prepare for a protracted people’s war. On the basis of interviews with Enoch Zulu, a survivor of Operation Crusade, the TRC report reconstructed the details of the battle which took place between the Portuguese security forces around Vila Peri inside Mozambique. The names of the 12 APLA guerrillas that were listed in the report include Gerald Kondlo, who was the Commander, trained in China and Algeria, Samuel Madodana Guma, the Political Commissar of APLA, Oscar Ntoni, Qhasana, Menzeleli, Twala, Bele, Enoch Zulu and Zeblon Mokoena. Enoch Zulu and Zeblon Mokoena were the only two who survived in the whole group. From the Portuguese side, security officers who were killed were Eusebio Gonclaves Nobre; Emildo Lopes Nogners and Antonio Azarias Chicavane.

Operation Crusade occurred amidst internal and external pressure. It failed, but was intended to apply Maoist strategy, i.e. the mobilisation of the people in order to conduct a people’s war. The PAC was following the strategy review of ZANU. This particular organisation realised that “if you want to win a revolution it is not only a revolution of the gun but a revolution of mobilising the masses”. A short conversation about Operation Crusade with an ex-APLA and SANDF official revealed some of the mistakes made during the launch of this initiative. The interviewee retorted, “I think one of the greatest mistakes our leadership made was to sacrifice our best combatants as well as the daring Commander of APLA forces, Gerald Kondlo. Perhaps they should have sent other cadres but not the cream of army leadership”. A possible reason why the PAC sacrificed what the interviewee called ‘the best’ cadreship might have to do with the foundational principles of the PAC, namely that leaders must be in the frontline during the struggle, as demonstrated during the Sharpeville anti-pass demonstrations.

Unlike ZANU, no official documentation could be found reflecting on the mistakes of Operation Crusade. There was also no decision to revise its military strategy. Instead

52 Interviews conducted by Mxolisi Mgxaji with Gasson Ndlovu; Mongezi Guma and Pearce Gqobose, August 1997; Also see TRC: ‘Report on the PAC/Poqo/APLA’, p. 14.
54 David Martin and Phyllis Johnson: The Struggle for Zimbabwe, p. 11.
55 APLA Notes: Pretoria, 21 December 2002.
56 This principle is elaborated in PAC Information Department: Speeches of Mangaliso Sobukwe, 1949-1959, pp. 3-64.
Operation Crusade evoked a sense of heroism. As stated in the TRC Report on the PAC/Poqo/APLA, “Kondlo left a deep inspiration among future PAC fighters who probably did not have as much fury and fun as Kondlo and his comrades had in their efforts to ‘blaze a new trail’”. 57 In the case of ZANU, the PAC’s ally, in 1966 the organisation made an effort to examine, in a special session, the failures of its military programmes. It was concluded that one of the fundamental causes of their failures was the belief that “all that was necessary to end white minority domination was to train some guerrillas and send them home with guns: this would not only scare the whites but would ignite a wave of civil disobedience by blacks”. 58 Hence, ZANU changed its strategy and focused more on a protracted programme of people conscientisation as a precondition of a successful people’s war. Criticism was also levelled “not against the cadres, but also against their superiors who hastily threw them into battle apparently for short-term political gain rather than for levelling the ground for a protracted armed struggle”. 59 This kind of post-mortem was also implemented by the ANC after the Wankie debacle in 1967. Even if the exercise in introspection was painful for the ANC (since it caused division and disillusionment among cadres who felt the Wankie battle was badly planned and ‘unfavoured’ cadres were sacrificed in that battle), it did help to revise the strategy and approach to war. In the PAC, no similar exercise was conducted. 60 At the same time it is incorrect to conclude that after Operation Crusade there were no debates or discussion about military strategy within APLA, however superficial and theoretical. All the same, it is still not clear what kind of lessons were drawn by the PAC from Operation Crusade.

6.3. APLA’s Strategic Thinking – 1969 to 1978.

After the Villa Peri incident, APLA set forth to map out in clear and specific terms its strategy for a people’s war. This was built on the overall framework developed and articulated by Leballo at the Moshi conference in 1967. The ideas of the ‘new plan’ were

58 David Martin and Phyllis Johnson: The Struggle for Zimbabwe, p. 11.
declared in a document prepared by the Military Committee of the PAC and was entitled “Directives to APLA”. The document highlighted, in broad terms, the significance of strategy and tactics in the war against Apartheid. It indicated that “the combat methods must be based on the possibility of gaining the initiative on the battle field” and forcing the “enemy” to fight the battles of APLA’s choice. In practice this meant that APLA was to “widen the target area” of activities, “spread the tempo”, increase the scope of attacks and “develop control of operational fronts”. Some of the tactics which APLA designed, to force the “enemy” to fight “as they wanted it” to, included forcing the government to scatter and spread its forces as APLA cadres were deployed in every corner of South Africa, depriving government forces of initiative in the battle and also preventing the government forces from using their best combat methods. Other combat strategies involved luring adversely situated troops out of their bases so that when they began their search-and-destroy operations and ‘terrorist raids’, APLA could strike them at the most unexpected moment away from their bases. Theoretically, this was the desired approach for APLA. Whether it was actually implemented, is another question.

Other issues covered in the strategy document were about the “factors of war” or the ingredients of a successful armed struggle. These included a “correct political line” which is correctly applied; a “heroic and disciplined people’s army; a competent military command and a strong base of operation”. These were regarded as the key areas of competence in APLA’s military strategy. Organisational tasks which were outlined in the strategy document included the building of the PAC structures throughout the country and the expansion of a people’s army. The strategy document was slender on the vital issue of mass mobilisation and conscientisation which according to Maoist strategy was a pillar of any successful people’s war. The emphasis was on combat strategy and ethics of action in the battle. The extent to which the elements of the strategy were implemented during APLA operations is difficult to assess. The reason is that after the 1967 Villa Peri incident, very few APLA attacks were recorded until the mid 1980s. This should be

62 Ibid.
63 Ibid. p. 4.
64 Ibid.
understood against the background of internal conflict that dominated the PAC during the era of Leballo. During the first half of the 1970s, the PAC spent time negotiating the route to South Africa with countries such as Zambia and Botswana. In some instances, negotiations with governments succeeded, but the problems remained with relationships between the PAC and liberation movements who controlled access to certain routes. SWAPO of Namibia, for instance, controlled the route via the Caprivi Strip into Botswana and would not help the PAC because of the latter’s ties with UNITA of Jonas Savimbi. PAC efforts stalled because of a combination of diplomatic and political factors. This attested to the failure of PAC’s political leadership to prepare politically for their armed forces.

Despite these problems, APLA made a few attempts to match theoretical strategy with some action between 1975 and 1979. A small group of PAC guerrillas ran a “program of military instruction for members of the Mngomezulu tribe, a community straddling the South Africa-Swazi border, which at that time, was divided by a succession dispute”. The three PAC instructors were captured by the South African police and that brought the enterprise to an abrupt end. Again in 1978, three APLA insurgents were arrested in Krugersdorp, after it was discovered that they had established an arms dump in the area. Again in 1979, the Transkei government arrested five members of the PAC i.e. Sabelo Phama (Gqwetha), Mack Mboya, Synod Madlebe, Xola Mketi and Mawethu Vitshima. Besides these sporadic incidents, it was quiet from the side of APLA until the mid-1980s. The formation of the Azanian National Youth Unity around 1985 injected the PAC with new life and also provided an active base inside South Africa. Its old underground networks were revived. Before the strategy of APLA during the post Leballo era is examined, it would be useful to examine its command structure first, because it changed during Pokela’s time and minor modifications were made again during the era of Johnson Mlambo.

67 Interview with Mrs Gqwetha, the wife of the late Sabelo Phama (APLA Commander), Umtata, 24 June 1995.
Most importantly, in 1978 APLA’s military strategy came under review, which led to the adoption of the “New Road of Revolution”. The detail of this new strategy are covered in the following sections of this chapter. The adoption of the “New Road of Revolution” was important in the strategic development of the PAC’s military wing. One of the interviewees referred to it as the victory of “the Marxist-Leninists over the Maoist and nationalist elements in the PAC. The victory was short-lived and hollow because the leadership of the Marxist-Leninist faction was expelled during the Moshi conference”.68 This was the Ntantala group who later in 1979, formed the Azanian People’s Revolutionary Party (APRP). The disagreements which culminated in the expulsion of a faction of the PAC, especially members of the APLA High Command, were largely over military strategy and control of the army. The Arusha conference brought no solution to the division as the events which occurred afterwards confirmed. The “New Road of Revolution” continued to be a strategy of the PAC’s military but its Marxist-Leninist tone was surpassed by a Maoist emphasis. This continued until Leballo was deposed in May 1979. From that date followed a short period of rebellion within the army, as discussed in chapter 4.

6.4. APLA’s Command Structure.

As from 1968, APLA had a command structure “based on the Chinese concept and war strategy”.69 In the TRC report it was argued that the command structure combined both elements of the PAC constitution and ‘Chinese experience’.70 The concept was premised on the idea of a Military Committee as the “principal organ of the Central Committee in the army”.71 The concept was adopted by the PAC “but with less care in the selection of personnel than in China where persons who served in this body were the most accomplished political and military cadres who handled the most complicated issues of the war plan, strategy, and the political line that was to guide the operations”.72 The Military Committee in the PAC was responsible for policy and its implementation in the

68 APLA Notes, Pretoria, 7 January 2003.
69 APLA Notes, 21 December 2002.
70 TRC: Report on PAC/Poqo/APLA, p. 16.
71 PAC Archives: MC: Directives to APLA, p. 8.
72 TRC: Report on PAC/Poqo/APLA, p. 17.
recruitment, training and deployment of cadres. It had to ensure that the ‘war’ establishment was built to meet the needs of the whole process of struggle. It consisted of the following key positions according to hierarchy and rank:

1. The Commander and his Deputy together with the Political Commissar and his Deputy.
2. The Chief of Staff and his Deputy together with the Political Director and his Deputy.
3. The Battalion Commander and his Deputy together with the Political Instructor and his Deputy and the Chief of Staff at Battalion Headquarters
4. The Company Commander and his Deputy together with the Political Instructor and his Deputy, the Platoon Leader and his Deputy, the Squad Leader and his Deputy at Company Headquarters.\(^73\)

The chairman of the PAC Military Command until 1979, was P.K. Leballo, who was also the Commander-in-Chief of APLA forces as well as chairman of the organisation. The centralisation of political and military decision-making powers later became a source of internal conflict in the PAC. Because of the portfolios he held in the army, Leballo was able to justify his interference in the management of finances as demonstrated in chapter 4. A structure below the Military Committee was the High Command and was headed by T.M. Ntantala, who was also the Commander of the army and deputy chairman of the PAC. The latter was a trained soldier from the Chinese Military Academy in Peking, Ghana and Algeria. This particular structure was manned by cadres and represented their interests. The High Command was represented by Ntantala in the Military Committee. Other members of the High Command were Gasson Ndlovu (Deputy Commander), P.Z. Mboko (Chief Political Commissar), Zeblon Mokoena (Deputy Chief Political Commissar and also a survivor of the Villa Peri battle), Jack Jako (Head of Intelligence and Security) and Theophilus Bidi (Chief of Staff).\(^74\)

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\(^73\) PAC Archives: ‘MC: Directives to APLA’, p. 9.
The interests represented in the Military Committee were not homogeneous. The agenda of the political leadership was in conflict with the strictly military agenda and interests of the army. Politicians wanted to make public statements about the sporadic military attacks whereas the army preferred to keep them secret and also wanted to stick to the criteria defined in the strategy for a protracted people’s war. Differences also existed over the allocation of resources to the army. This situation exploded in November 1977 when Leballo staged a coup against the High Command with the assistance of the new recruits who had joined APLA after the 1976 Soweto students uprisings. The group of new recruits, based at the Itumbi camp, moved a motion against the majority decision of the Central Committee for the dissolution of the High Command and the appointment of a new one, which consisted of Leballo’s loyalists, a move which was endorsed by the Arusha conference in 1978. As Gasson Ndlovu, the APRP’s Secretary for Defence, recalled, “the real reasons (for the split) were ideological and are explained in the “New Road of Revolution” which did not only rechart the strategies, tactics and ideology and politics in general we were going to follow, but also how we were going to conduct ourselves as individual partisans in that struggle, as the leaders we claimed we were”. The “New Road of Revolution” referred to by the informant was a document produced by APLA in 1975 re-charting the strategy of APLA and ideology of the PAC as a whole. It was adopted by the PAC Central Committee in 1978 but its implementation was slowed down by the pervasive leadership conflicts which stifled activity in the PAC during Leballo’s period of leadership.

The “New Road of Revolution” signalled an ideological shift in the PAC from the traditional emphasis on the peasantry to an acknowledgement of the vanguard role of the working-class, the urban-based proletariat in the South African revolution. As outlined in the document, “the working-class is the most military and revolutionary class in society. The very conditions of life of the working-class make it the most consistent and irreconcilable opponent of the capitalist order. Their position in production connects the

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75 Interview Ntsontwana, Umtata, 20 April 1996.
76 PAC Archives: Azanian People’s Revolutionary Party (APRP): ‘Crisis in the PAC’, pp. 1-15; APRP: ‘Ntantalala is gone; But his ideas will conquer’, pp. 1-5.
77 Interview conducted by Mxolisi Mgxashe, TRC Researcher, with Gasson Ndlovu, May 1997.
78 PAC Archives: New Road of Revolution, pp. 1-3.
workers with the future of the whole society”.  

Even though the “New Road of Revolution” expressed a Marxist-Leninist turn in the ideology of the PAC, a similar emphasis on the peasantry was never abandoned during the time of Leballo. The latter pointed out that the same document also emphasised “the essence of revolution in the struggle of our people for national liberation is the people’s armed insurgency - the agrarian revolution of the landless. It is the revolution of the landless peasants in the countryside and the landless labourers, who are employed on white farms, who must confiscate by force of arms, the present land held by white usurpers, for distribution among themselves”. Until he was deposed, Leballo tried to boost Maoism over Marxist-Leninism. He associated the latter with Ntantala’s faction. From the period of Make to that of Mlambo, there was an attempt to integrate and balance ideological positions within the organisation. The main ideological strands were African Nationalism and Maoism; from 1982 Marxism-Leninism revived its position with the re-instatement of Ntantala and his group. Hence Benny Bensec pointed out in his letter to Henry Isaacs that “the organisational anarchy” that existed in the 1980s “in the PAC must be related to its ideological confusion”. It is possible to concur with this assertion given the fact that the ideological positions within the PAC seemed to remain unharmonised. Ideological splits therefore occurred and resulted in the formation of the Azanian People’s Revolutionary Party (APRP) in 1979 and the Sobukwe Forum led by nationalists in the PAC in 1989. Hence the notion of the ‘struggle of the two-ways’ within the PAC, i.e. nationalists versus revolutionaries continued to characterise the PAC until 1990. As indicated in a document produced by the APRP, the PAC’s ideology was “Marxism-Leninism, Maoism-Sobukwe thought”. 

What needs to be underlined here is that within APLA, heterogeneity (the essence of the human condition), prevailed, even though tightly squeezed beneath the rubric of instructions and power relations. It is still not clear whether the “New Road of Revolution” made any practical impact on the strategic direction of APLA. It can be

79 PAC Archives: New Road of Revolution, p. 69.
80 Ibid. p. 59.
82 This is covered in detail in chapter 4.
83 PAC Archives: APRP: Ntantala Is Gone; But His Ideals Will Conquer, p. 2.
deduced from existing evidence that the “New Road of Revolution” only brought into the ideological fold of the PAC aspects of Marxist-Leninist ideology. Hence, one of the interviewees of this research indicated that “when I was in jail with Sabelo Phama in Umtata in 1979, the man was speaking a new political language which was Marxist-Leninist; his ideological outlook was different from what it was the first time we talked politics”.  

6.5. APLA Command structure, 1979-1990.

Between the 1st May 1979 and January 1981, the situation within APLA was chaotic. With the forced resignation of Leballo, cadres who supported his leadership were up in arms in the camps and unwilling to relent to a new political regime. This led to the intervention of Tanzanian troops to restore order in the PAC camps, especially at Chunya and Itumbi. This has been covered in detail in chapter 4.

The most important development is that this period marked a transition or shift in the PACs concept of the ‘army’. Even though no fundamental shift occurred in the military thinking of the army, a few changes occurred in the organisation of army structures. First, the concept of a Military High Command was replaced by a Task Force. The Task Force idea was initially introduced during the time of Poqo. The Military Committee as a structure in the army was upheld. These changes emanated from open engagements between the PAC leadership under Vusumzi Make and the general cadreship in 1980. The hostilities to the new leadership had subsided and the daunting task of rebuilding the PAC was beginning to unite cadres in the camps. Their spirits were uplifted when the news of Pokela’s arrival was disclosed. He became the new chairman of the PAC and Commander-in-Chief of APLA from January 1981. He recruited fresh blood into the Task Force of APLA. Among the people recruited, was Sabelo Phama, who became Secretary for Defence and Commander of APLA. Others were Enoch Zulu, Morgan Gxekwa and Dan Mofokeng who served as Chief of Operations, Chief of Staff and Chief

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84 Interview with Boy, Umtata, 21 April 1996.
Political Commissar respectively. They were also members of the Military Committee which remained the key source of overall military strategy in the PAC. Another committee in charge of operational strategy was initiated, but the extent to which it functioned is not clear. It was called the Revolutionary Command Council and constituted a Chairman, Administrative Secretary, Defence Secretary, Director of Foreign Affairs, one other member of the Central Committee and the APLA Command Structure. This Committee was to see “to the scrupulous implementation of Party decisions” and was also to be the “brain tank or thinking or analyzing organ of the Party” on military matters.

The main function of the Task Force was “the re-building and restructuring of APLA”. During the era of Pokela, the Task Force was enlarged as it incorporated more new members and its scope of activities was also broadened to include “contacting people home and intensifying the struggle. Its mandate was divided into the immediate, the short-term and the long-term objectives”. The Task Force was only phased out in 1982 and the High Command was again re-established. During this period 1981-1985 the focus was more on re-organising the structures of APLA and less on developing or refining the strategies of ‘waging war’ in South Africa. During this time the PAC defined its “home going programme”. The PAC ‘Home-Going Programme’ was premised on the idea that there were three things people at home wanted from the PAC i.e. “to send cadres home to train them militarily; arms for training and carrying out the programme; funds for self-help projects”. The implementation of this programme was not successful during the time of Pokela; it was disrupted by the eruptions of internal quarrels within APLA. Internal splits emanated from the suspicion that members of the APRP who were reinstated within APLA, were promoting a different agenda and had

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85 TRC: Report on PAC/Poqo/APLA, p. 18.
87 PAC Archives: PAC/Tan/1/164/9: A document from PAC cadres to the Central Committee led by V. Make, n.d, p.8.
88 PAC Archives: Minutes of the Plenary Session of the Central Committee Meeting at External Headquarters, Dar-es-Salaam, 1-7 December, 1982, p. 5.
89 PAC Archives: Meeting of the Central Committee, 21-25 August, 1982, p. 2.
91 PAC Archives: Minutes of the Plenary Session of the Central Committee Meeting at External Headquarters, Dar-es-Salaam, December 1-7, 1982, p. 6.
‘their own home-going programme’ outside the official PAC programme. The mutual suspicion within the ranks of APLA was so endemic that it delayed military activity until the late 1980s. Another initiative of the Pokela leadership to remedy the situation was to establish a Defence Secretariat which was constituted by field persons to direct and co-ordinate the activities of APLA. Available material does not make it possible to assess the extent to which all these structures improved the strategic focus of APLA during the era of Pokela. It nevertheless seems they created a foundation for improved military action by APLA during the late 1980s as will be demonstrated in the latter sections of this chapter.

The death of Pokela ushered in a new era in the leadership of the PAC. This was the era of Mlambo which brought with it a few modifications in the structures of APLA. From 1985 to 1990, the structure of APLA continued to uphold the Military Committee as the supreme policy making body and the Chairman of the PAC (Johnson Mlambo) was the head. Other members of this body were Sabelo Phama (APLA Commander), Morgan Gxekwa (Chief of Staff) and Dan Mofokeng (Chief Political Commissar), Joe Mkwanazi (PAC Administrative Secretary) and Thobile Gola (PAC Chief Representative in East Africa).

The Military High Command was restructured with the following as Heads of Departments:
Operations – Letlapa Mphahlele; Training and Manpower Development – Willie Nkonyeni; Military Intelligence – Raymond Fihla; Ordinance and Supply – Boy-Boy Mbethe; Finance and Logistics – S. Kungwane; Personnel – A. Ntabeni; Health – T. Gumede; Ideological Training and Culture – Temba Ncaphayi; Mass Work – Rufus Zonyani; Information and Research – Wilberforce Zweni. What is interesting about the restructuring of APLA under Mlambo, was that civilian members of the PAC were allowed to occupy certain portfolios in the Military Committee. Joe Mkwanazi was an

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94 Interview conducted by Mxolisi Mgxsashe with Letlapa Mphahlele, former APLA Director of Operations, 1997; See also TRC: Report on PAC/Poqo/APLA, p. 18.
95 TRC: Report on PAC/Poqo/APLA, p. 18.
example. Some departments which were fused into the Military High Command, were led by civilians, for example the Information and Research Department. During this period debates and disagreements started looming within APLA about defining the target of military attacks. The differences were mainly between the highly politicised and rather more cautious elite within APLA whom the cadres collectively labelled as ‘politicians not soldiers’ and the rank and file APLA cadres, some of whom were not “really that schooled”.  

As reflected in the TRC report, there was some disagreement “on the political advisability of targeting the farmers and civilians in general and some people saw it as deviating from the basic plan of hitting the police, security forces and the army”.  

The ‘elite’ within APLA departed from the premise that the ‘enemy’ could not be defined in terms of race, but rather in terms of a functional relationship to the Apartheid establishment, e.g. the police and the army.

The opposing line of argument advanced by militants within APLA was well-articulated by Vuma Ntikinca, a former APLA operative in Transkei. He argued that “we had a specific political and military reason for concentrating on the farms. Militarily, we wanted to open up rural areas which would serve as an extended rear base from which we would be attacking the cities in a typical Maoist strategy of ‘encircling the cities from the countryside’. We were adamant in our argument that targeting white farms was in line with PAC’s basic struggle to ‘repossess the land’. Besides, the farmers had ceased, in our view, to being mere innocent ordinary civilians. They were part of a very strong and well armed white civilian detachment of the South African Defence Force. Each farmer had licence to carry up to 14 pieces of weapons”.  

This tension was to manifest itself explicitly during the many APLA attacks launched from inside South Africa after 1990.  

It was during this period that APLA extended its command structures inside South Africa. An internal High Command under the leadership of Enoch Zulu was set up. The

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97 TRC: Report on PAC/Poqo/APLA, p. 23.
internal High Command was further divided into ten military regions and each region fell under a regional command structure.100

Documentary evidence confirms that from 1985, there were several attempts by APLA cadres to infiltrate South Africa, but they were not successful in executing the strategies they had designed as outlined in internal PAC documents. These attempts began in September 1985 and were repeated in April 1986 but both failed. Another attempt was made in February 1987 when APLA launched attacks in South Africa “in the guise of the Scorpion Gang”.101 Again on the 22 April 1987, APLA claimed responsibility for a grenade attack on municipal police which killed one policeman and injured 64 others in Soweto.102 APLA’s journal, ‘Azania Combat’ claimed that 12 ‘enemy’ agents were killed and 67 wounded in the attack.103 By 1988, “APLA operations had extended to smaller towns in the Western Transvaal. At the close of the decade APLA had become a significant participant in South Africa’s fledgling guerrilla war”.104

In summary, this chapter has attempted to traverse difficult terrain about the development of the military strategy of the PAC from 1960 to 1990. The subject is broad and complex and might probably require a thesis of its own. Initially, (i.e. 1960 to 1967) the military strategy of the PAC was not recorded, standardised and refined. It was without a clear theoretical framework but was premised on traditional forms of resistance and sought immediate results. The persons involved hardly conceived of the liberation struggle in South Africa as a process which was likely to draw-out over a long period of time. As Mr Madasa, one of the interviewees indicated “we wanted independence now not tomorrow and we all sacrificed for it”.105 From this approach to the liberation struggle emerged the tendency to exalt action over planning, practice over theory and immediacy of results over long-term benefits. This was the kind of military culture which was carried over to what was supposedly the ‘new’ era of APLA from 1968 onwards. The post-1968

100 South African Police: Location of APLA camps, arms, ammunition, personnel and operational activities, p. 11.
102 The Independent, 22 April, 1987.
103 PAC Archives: Azania Combat, no. 4, 1987, p. 3.
105 Interview with Mr Madasa, Langa, 3 September 1987.
period during which Leballo charted the ideological tenets of a new strategy premised on
the Chinese Maoist experience, could not root-out the Poqo traditions, especially at the
level where implementation of strategy was a priority. Instead the Maoist inclination of
Leballo’s leadership split ideological opinions within the PAC into three, i.e. the
nationalists, Maoists and an emerging Marxist-Leninist tendency which was later
epitomised by the New Road of Revolution in 1978. The extent to which the strategies,
which appeared good on paper, were translated into the practices of the organisation is
not clear. From available evidence, it appears as though the area of implementation of
strategies, policies and procedures was a major problem in the PAC. The post-Leballo
period, 1979 to 1990 was a short period to undo the legacy he created over the period 17
years during which he was the chairman of the PAC. Numerous attempts were made by
his successors to improve the situation within the army. The army was divided on matters
of strategy and ideology. The post-1976 Soweto uprisings brought into the PAC a new
generation of recruits, better educated and theoretically advanced than the Poqo group.
The events of 1984 to 1986 inside South Africa also brought to the PAC another
generation of recruits, more militant and really desperate for liberation. It needed firm
and strategic leadership to blend all these three traditions in a harmonious unity. The
PAC lacked this kind of leadership, instead, the leaders were themselves consumed in
leadership power battles and had limited time to devote to addressing the problems of the
army. Hence at the time the PAC was unbanned, it seemed as though the army was
accountable more to its commanders than to the predominantly civilian political
leadership.