This paper was originally given to a National Student Congress on Revolution in Southern Africa at Oxford last March. The author is a leader of the movement for liberation in South Africa.

THE WHOLE of that part of Southern Africa which is controlled by racial minorities is experiencing either consistent and regular guerilla activity or is faced with advanced preparation for its commencement.

Angola was followed by Mozambique and they by South West Africa. For Portugal (already extended by the brilliantly successful operation PAIGC in its West African colony of Guinea Bissao) the problem of guerilla operations in its territories is beginning to assume the proportions of a major crisis. Early this year Salazar, speaking of Angola and Mozambique, conceded that “if the troubles there continue very much longer, they will diminish and destroy our ability to carry on.”

And now the guerilla front against foreign and minority rule has been extended to Rhodesia where since August 13, 1967, guerilla units of South Africa’s African National Congress (ANC) and Rhodesia’s Zimbabwe African Peoples Union (ZAPU) have been involved in armed clashes with South African and Rhodesian military forces. The official admission of government losses of 8 dead and 14 wounded in these early engagements is disputed by the ANC and ZAPU, and appears to be an underestimation in the light of the reported number of casualties which filled Rhodesian hospitals. Despite early attempts to denigrate the calibre of the guerilla forces, the scale of the fighting, the tenacity of the guerillas in hand-to-hand combat, and the effectiveness and sophisticated quality of some of the ambushes even at this early stage, were a pointer to future possibilities.
ANC-ZAPU ALLIANCE

According to press announcements, the collaboration between ANC and ZAPU guerilla forces was not coincidental but was part of joint planned action in the sense that “the fighting that is presently going on in the Wankie area is indeed being carried out by a combined force of ZAPU and ANC which marched into the country as comrades-in-arms on a common route, each bound to its destination. It is the determination of these combined forces to fight the common settler enemy to the finish, at any point of encounter as they make their way to their respective fighting zones.” This alliance has its historical roots in a situation which, in many fundamental respects, is common to both peoples. Rhodesia under Smith is more and more embracing the South African type political framework. Its survival in the face of a moderate amount of international pressure is almost undoubtedly due to the considerable bolstering up of its economy by South Africa. This same role of saviour of “white civilisation” in Rhodesia is being played by South Africa in the military field.

It is reasonable to infer that if the Smith group could have avoided calling in South African troops to cope with the first batch of guerillas it would have preferred to do so. As it is, it lays itself open to the charge that its capacity to muster sufficient internal support to deal with this type of situation is suspect. And indeed it is inconceivable that, in the long run, this micro-community of 200,000 whites could muster either sufficient resources or morale to cope with a growing guerilla movement which would in varying degrees gain the allegiance of the politically deprived 4 million Africans.

The presence of the S.A. regime’s armed forces on Rhodesian soil is an indication (if another is really needed) that the minority regimes in the whole of Southern Africa have come to regard the survival of white rule as indivisible. In this sense, South Africa’s strategic borders are more and more conceived as extending to the northernmost parts of Angola, Mozambique and Rhodesia. In this sense too there must be an extremely important strategic connection between the efforts of the guerilla forces in every part of occupied Southern Africa; and we can therefore expect increasing collaboration between all the organisations in the area which stand at the head of people’s armed units.

The enormity of the task facing ANC guerillas within South Africa itself gave rise previously to suggestions that the liberation of Southern Africa should be approached as a project to be achieved in geographic stages — first Mozambique, then Angola and in the end South Africa. This strategy appears never to have
found favour in the ANC or in any of the other liberatory move­ments: and for good reason. There can be little doubt that when Portuguese rule in Angola and Mozambique reaches a crisis point, Salazar's friends in South Africa (looking to their own future) will intervene on a massive scale. Their capacity to do so, and their capacity to meet mounting military pressures in Rhodesia, will in part be dependent upon events within their own country and in particular, on the extent to which the South African guerilla probes take root and menace internal stability. Similarly, every victory in Angola, Mozambique, South West Africa and Rhodesia, brings with it untold psychological and material advantages for armed units operating within the Republic of S.A.

SOUTH AFRICAN GUERILLAS

The ANC has not attempted to hide the fact that its guerillas are in the process of making their way to their own fighting zone. An underground leaflet — "We Are At War" — distributed recently by the ANC's illegal apparatus within South Africa, talks of the Rhodesian battles and states: "Soon there will be battles in South Africa. We will fight until we have won, however long it takes and however much it will cost."

Is this idle talk? The inherent weakness of the Smith group and the Portuguese and their vulnerability to organised military insurrection is patent. Can the same be said of South Africa at this stage? Is it not being too sanguine to expect a successful outcome to armed confrontation between the very considerable resources and weapons of the white-controlled South African state and the inexperienced lightly-armed guerillas? Where are the sanctuary-providing and logistically important friendly borders? Where are the Sierra Maestras, the jungles, the swamps, the paddy fields?

These questions have reference to the sort of model which has been built up over the years in people's minds of the ideal and classical type set of conditions which make guerilla operations a feasible proposition and they undoubtedly have an important place in any serious assessment of its prospects. But we must not overdo historical analogy. There is in fact no classical type model of physical conditions to which successful guerilla struggle conforms. Different geographical factors call for different methods and forms of guerilla struggle. I shall return to this.

POLITICAL PREREQUISITES

The only universal prerequisites are to be sought in the general political situation rather than in physical or geographic factors. Given a colonial-type situation, armed struggle becomes feasible if and only if the following political conditions are present:
Firstly, a disillusionment on the part of the majority of the people with the prospect of achieving its liberation by traditional and non-violent processes.

Secondly, a readiness on the part of the people to respond in varying degrees and ways to the call for armed confrontation — from actually joining the guerillas, to making their path easy and that of the enemy hard.10

Thirdly, the existence of a political leadership capable not only of gaining the organised allegiance of the people for armed struggle, but having also the ability to carry out the painstaking process of planning, preparation and overall direction of the conduct of operations.

A final judgment on the extent to which the present South African situation conforms to these requisites needs a little more than formal statistical and analytical equipment. It requires assessments by indigenous political activists who know and understand not only the demonstrable facts but who, in addition, have a "feel" for their people, a sensitivity to their mood and the sort of revolutionary instinct which enables them at every given stage to differentiate between the possible and the fanciful.

These qualities are nurtured by years of intimate political nexus between a leader, a people and a situation. We must approach with extreme caution the attempts of outsiders (however well-motivated) whether it be in Africa or Latin America, to legislate for others in this respect. In South Africa, as in all other countries, a true assessment of these factors is primarily the function of the liberatory organisations and their leaders.

OBJECTIVE AND SUBJECTIVE CONDITIONS

Of course, favourable conditions for armed struggle ripen historically. But the historical process must not be approached as if it were a mystical thing outside of man which in a crude deterministic sort of way sets him tasks to which he responds. In this sense to sit back and wait for the evolvement of objective conditions which constitute a "revolutionary situation" amounts in some cases to a dereliction of leadership duties. What people expressing themselves in organised activity, do or abstain from doing, hastens or retards the historical process and helps or hinders the creation of favourable conditions for armed struggle. Indeed in one sense the process of creating favorable conditions for military struggle does not end until the day of victory. Given commencement and sustaining of guerilla activity operates as an extremely important factor in creating more favourable conditions for eventual victory. But it is not the sole factor.11 Other forms
of mass activity, including those inspired by the successes of the guerilla units, also play a vital role.

Of course, no political struggle (and this is what guerilla struggle essentially is) can be taken up only on condition of infallibly favourable chances. It does not however follow that licence must be given for every act of adventurism, irresponsibility and 'trying your luck.'

There is not a single serious segment of the organised liberatory movement which does not believe that, in a general sense, political conditions in South Africa are favourable for the commencement and development of armed struggle. This does not necessarily imply a belief that there exists at the moment a classical type revolutionary situation, with an all-round revolutionary insurrection as an immediate possibility.

MILITANCY IN THE TOWNS

Is there evidence that the course upon which the ANC has embarked has a political basis in the existing South African situation? There is, I believe, abundant evidence that it has.

The Africans of South Africa have a history which is rich in resistance to alien rule not only in the initial period of colonisation, but also in the last few decades when it reached new heights. The people have over and over again demonstrated their capacity to act at a most sophisticated political level.

The 50s and the early 60s witnessed four impressive nationwide general strikes all called by the ANC and its allies. The significance of these strikes should not be underestimated. On each occasion, hundreds of thousands of urban workers risked their jobs and their consequent right to remain in an urban area, in quest not of reforms, not for better working conditions, but in response to a purely political call to demonstrate a demand for votes, opposition to racial laws, and so on. In the face of repression Trade Union organisation was minimal — and the above responses were important pointers to the high level of political consciousness which a half-century of urbanisation combined with vigorous political leadership had inculcated into the townspeople. There are many more examples to be found in the 50s and 60s which illustrate the capacity of those in the urban areas to react impressively to calls for action involving both tenacity and sacrifice: the Defiance Campaign of 1952-53, the bus boycotts of the late 50s, women's resistance against the extension of pass laws to women, the pre-Sharpeville anti-pass campaigns.

And what of the people in the countryside, which is the focal point of guerilla activity in the initial stages? Here too there
is convincing evidence of a peasantry which despite centuries of intensive repression, lacks submissiveness. In the very recent past and in many important areas it has demonstrated a capacity for action to the point of armed resistance. In Sekhukhuniland (Transvaal) in the late 50s the peasantry, partly armed, doggedly resisted the attempts by the authorities to replace the traditional leaders of the people with government-appointed servants, so-called Bantu Authorities. In Zululand similar resistance was encountered. The most intense point of peasant resistance and upsurge was amongst the Pondo in the Transkei. By March, 1960 a vast popular movement had arisen, unofficial administrative units were set up including people’s courts. From the chosen spots in the mountains where thousands of peasants assembled illegally came the name of the movement — ‘INTABA’ — The Mountain. Although this revolt had its origin in local grievances, the aim of the resistance soon became the attainment of basic political ends and it came to adopt the full programme of the ANC.13

What is also significant about many of these actions in the countryside is that despite the traditionally strict legal sanction against the possession by non-whites of any arms or ammunition, they always manage on appropriate occasions to emerge with an assortment of prohibited weapons in their hands.

These then are pointers to the validity of the claim by the ANC that the African majority of the country can be expected to respond in growing numbers to a lead which holds out real prospects of destroying white supremacy, albeit in a long and protracted war. The conviction held by all African political groupings (except those sponsored by the government) that the white state can be shifted by nothing short of violence, reflects what is today both an incontrovertible objective fact and a belief held by a majority of ordinary people both in town and countryside.

OBJECTIVE DIFFICULTIES

If then all these subjective elements in the situation tend to argue in favour of the ANC decision, what about some of the formidable objective difficulties? On the face of it the enemy of the guerrilla is in stable command of a rich and varied economy which, even at the stage when it is not required to extend itself, can afford a military budget of £186 million. He has a relatively well-trained and efficient army and police force. He can draw on considerable manpower resources because he has the support of the 3½ million privileged whites who can be expected to fight with great ferocity and conviction (albeit one that is born of economic aggrandisement).
In addition, South Africa has very influential and powerful friends. In a situation of crisis these friends may well lose their existing public inhibitions to openly associate with and bolster up the racist regime.

If there is one lesson that the history of guerilla struggles has taught, it is that the material strength and resources of the enemy is by no means a decisive factor.

Witness the resources at the disposal of the French in Algeria; at the height of the fighting 600,000 troops were supplied and serviced by a leading industrial nation whose economy was quite outside the reach of military operations. In terms of pure material strength and almost limitless resources, can anyone surpass the USA in Vietnam? And no amount of modern industrial backing, technical know-how or fire power appears to sway the balance in favour of the invaders. What about the spectacle of Grivas and his Cyprus group challenging the British Army with 47 rifles, 27 automatic weapons and 7 revolvers? ("It was with these arms and these alone, that I kept the fight going for almost a year without any appreciable reinforcements")

The answer lies in this. Guerilla warfare, almost by definition, posits a situation in which there is a vast imbalance of material and military resources between the opposing sides. It is designed to cope with a situation in which the enemy is infinitely superior in relation to every conventional factor of warfare. It is par excellence the weapon of the materially weak against the materially strong.

GUERILLA TACTICS

Given its popular character and given a populace which increasingly sides with and shields the guerilla whilst at the same time opposing and exposing the enemy, the survival and growth of a people’s army is assured by a skilful exercise of tactics. Surprise, mobility and tactical retreat make it difficult for the enemy to bring into play its superior fire-power in any decisive battles. No individual battle is fought under circumstances unfavourable to the guerilla. Superior forces can be harassed, weakened and, in the end, destroyed.

"There is a saying: 'the guerilla is the maverick of war'. He practises deception, treachery, surprise and night operations. Thus, circumstances and the will to win often oblige him to forget romantic and sportsmanlike concepts... Some disparaging people call this 'hit and run'. That is exactly what it is! Hit and run, wait, stalk the enemy, hit him again and run
... perhaps this smacks of not facing up to the enemy. Nevertheless, it serves the goal of guerilla warfare: to conquer and destroy the enemy.”

The absence of an orthodox front, of fighting lines; the need of the enemy to attenuate his resources and lines of communication over vast areas; his need to protect the widely scattered installations on which his economy is dependent (because the guerilla pops up now here now there): These are amongst the factors which serve in the long run to compensate in favour of the guerilla for the disparity in the starting strength of the adversaries. I stress the words ‘in the long run,’ because it would be idle to dispute the considerable military advantages to the enemy of his high level of industrialisation, his ready-to-hand reserves of white manpower and his excellent roads, railways and air transport which facilitates swift manoeuvres and speedy concentration of personnel.

But we must also not overlook the fact that over a period of time many of these very same unfavourable factors will begin to operate in favour of the liberation force:—

(a) The ready-to-hand resources including food production depend overwhelmingly upon non-white labour which, with the growing intensity of the struggle, will not remain docile and co-operative.

(b) The white manpower resources may seem adequate initially but must become dangerously stretched as guerilla warfare develops. Already extremely short of skilled labour — the monopoly of the whites — the mobilisation of a large force for a protracted struggle would place a further burden on the workings of the economy.

(c) In contrast to many other major guerilla struggles (Cuba is one of the exceptions) the enemy’s economic and manpower resources are all situated within the theatre of war and there is no secure external pool (other than direct intervention by a foreign state) safe from sabotage, mass action and guerilla action on which the enemy can draw.

(d) The very sophisticated character of the economy with its well-developed system of communication makes it a much more vulnerable target. In an underdeveloped country the interruption of supplies to any given region may be no more than a local setback. In a highly sensitive modern economic structure of the South African type, the successful harassment of transport to any major industrial complex would inevitably inflict immense damage to the economy as a whole and to the morale of the enemy. (The South African forces would have the task of keeping
intact about 30,000 miles of railway line spread over an area of over 400,000 square miles!)

**TERRAIN AND FRIENDLY BORDERS**

One of the more popular misconceptions concerning guerilla warfare is that a physical environment which conforms to a special pattern is indispensable — thick jungle, inaccessible mountain ranges, swamps, a friendly border and so forth. The availability of this sort of terrain is, of course, of tremendous advantage to the guerillas especially in the early non-operational phase when training and other preparatory steps are undertaken and no external bases are available for this purpose. When the operations commence, the guerilla cannot survive, let alone flourish, unless he moves to areas where people live and work and where the enemy can be engaged in combat. If he is fortunate enough to have behind him a friendly border or area of difficult access which can provide temporary refuge, it is of course advantageous, although it sometimes brings with it its own set of problems connected mainly with supplies. But guerilla warfare can, and has been, waged in every conceivable type of terrain, in deserts, in swamps, in farm fields, in built-up areas, in plains, in the bush and in countries without friendly borders.

*The sole question is one of adjusting survival tactics to the sort of terrain in which operations have to be carried out.*

In any case in the vast expanse that is South Africa, a people's force will find a multitude of variations in topography; deserts, mountain forests, veld, and swamps. There might not appear to be a single impregnable Sierra Maestra or impenetrable jungle, but the country abounds in terrain which in general is certainly no less favourable for guerilla operations than some of the terrain in which the Algerians or the resistance movements in occupied Europe operated. Tito, when told that a certain area was “as level as the palm of your hand and with very little forests,” retorted: “What a first-class example it is of the relative unimportance of geographical factors in the development of a rising.”

In particular South Africa's tremendous size will make it extremely difficult, if not impossible, for the white regime to keep the whole of it under armed surveillance in strength and in depth. Hence, an early development of a relatively safe (though shifting) rear is not beyond the realm of possibility. The undetected existence of the SWAPO training camp for over a year and, more especially, the survival for years in the mountains and hills in the Transkei of the leaders of 'Intaba' during the military occupation of the area after the 1960 Pondo Revolt, are both of importance in this context.
First outbreaks of organized violence occurred in March 1961. Various factors including division in the guerilla ranks, and events in the Congo (which accommodated considerable guerilla reserves) enabled the Portuguese temporarily to render ineffective a movement which at its height had thousands of guerillas in the field and had gained control of considerable territory in the North. In the last few years a re-grouping has taken place and once again there is evidence of guerilla activity on a number of fronts.

The armed struggle in Mozambique was launched in September 1964, by Frelimo, an amalgamation of several earlier movements. Dr. Eduardo Mandlanc, the President of Frelimo, claims to control a fifth of the country (Northern districts of Niassa and Cabo Delgado). There are reported to be 50,000 Portuguese troops in Mozambique.

According to evidence which emerged in the recent trial in Pretoria, South West African guerillas under the control of the South West African People's Organization (SWAPO) established a training camp in the territory in 1965 which operated undetected for close on a year.

Quoted in an editorial in the Johannesburg Rand Daily Mail, 6 January 1966.

According to press reports the main areas of operations appear to have been at Wankie, Zambesi River Valley, Northern Matabeleland, and the District of Bulawayo, West of the Livingstone Bulawayo railway, Urungwe district and the Siplilo district. The biggest clash lasting 48 hours appears to have been at Tjololte. The usual ploy of describing the joint efforts of the Vorster-Smith armed forces as a 'police action' is open to question when regard is had to facts like the use of Hunter jets, armed helicopters etc.


Statement issued on 19 August 1967 by Oliver Tambo, Deputy President of the ANC, and J. R. D. Chikerema, Vice-President of ZAPU.

FRELIMO has for long claimed that South Africa has been helping to arm and train the Portuguese; also that whites from South Africa have been fighting in the Portuguese units. In October 1967 the South African Foreign Minister spoke of 'mutual security arrangements' between South Africa and the other states in Southern Africa.

Che Guevara, Guerilla Warfare, Chapter 1.

Leaflet, We Are At War, issued by the ANC in South Africa.

Debray, Revolution in the Revolution, tends to proceed from the proposition that "the most important form of propaganda is military action," to a conclusion that in most of Latin America the creation of military skilled guerilla foci is sufficient to bring about favourable conditions for an eventual people's military victory. Thus he underrates the vital connection between the guerilla struggle (which in its early stages must of necessity be of a limited magnitude) and other forms of militant mass activity. He sees the FOCI (which in terms of his approach must assume overall political as well as military leadership) as having (certainly in the initial phases) to cut itself off from the local population. There are many indications, including the increasing devotion of resources to mass illegal propaganda throughout the country, that the ANC's approach on this important question is different.

"World history would indeed be very easy to make if the struggle were taken up only on condition of infallibly favourable chances" — Karl Marx in a letter to L. Kugelman, 17 April 1871.

A detailed description of these events and their significance is contained in South Africa: The Peasants' Revolt by Govan Mbeki; Penguin African Library.

Che Guevara, Guerilla Warfare, pp.120-125.