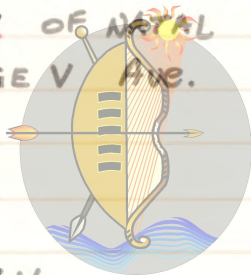


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REVOLUTION and Counter-Revolution IN

SOUTH AFRICA



An interview with Gerard Chaliand
conducted by Professor Hermann Giliomee

GUERRILLA WARFARE

Widely recognised as one of the world's experts on liberation movements and insurgency warfare, Gerard Chaliand has lived and worked in at least a dozen third world countries which have seen armed warfare, in Southeast Asia, South America, Africa and the Middle East. His experiences include living through the American bombing of North Vietnam and living with a band of Afghan rebels resisting the Russian occupation; his personal friends include Amilcar Cabral, charismatic leader of the PAIGC liberation movement in the Portuguese West African colonies; his publications include the widely studied 'Revolution in the Third World'.

In this interview with Professor Hermann Giliomee, published with kind permission of 'Die Suid Afrikaan', Chaliand brings his comparative knowledge of revolutionary struggles to bear in assessing the guerilla and liberation movements of Southern Africa. He stresses the importance of foreign support and outside sanctuaries to guerilla forces, illustrated by the continued strength of Renamo in Mozambique and Unita in Angola, as compared with the ANC in South Africa, which faces a crisis following the signing of the Nkomati Accord. He concludes that only two options remain open to the ANC in South Africa, neither of which are likely to be instrumental in bringing down the state.

Giliomee: With your extensive knowledge of guerilla movements, is it possible for a state to win a war conclusively against insurgents?

Chaliand: Yes, I believe that a state can win a war conclusively against insurgents. If we look to the wars of the last three to four decades we see that those insurgent movements which were successful had fought against colonial powers who had overseas colonies. The majority of these insurgencies did not win militarily. In fact the only

exception was Dien Bien Phu in 1954 where the Vietnamese defeated the French colonial power in a decisive battle.

All the other examples that we know have been *political* victories. The army of the metropolitan power was never defeated. In Algeria, for instance, the French, militarily speaking, had won. The defeat of the French was a political one. The people in France had become tired of the war and of holding on to Algeria.

As opposed to the Americans or French in Vietnam, victory over ANC insurgency is vital for a resolute South African state

The preconditions for effective and protracted insurgency do not exist in the South African scenario

In Vietnam too, the American defeat was political rather than military. The war was lost domestically with the loss of political will and support in the States itself.

Giliomee: How would you place the war on South Africa's borders in this world perspective?

Chaliand: If we systematically analyse counter-insurgency warfare we see that what counts is the determination of the state. The

bases beyond the borders. In South Africa the ANC insurgents lack outside sanctuaries. With the Nkomati agreement, the state has won a very important battle against the ANC.

Giliomee: Mozambique, Angola, Vietnam were situations where colonial powers backed down in the face of insurgency. But what about Zimbabwe? For the white Rhodesians it was vital to win.

Chaliand: The guerillas in Rhodesia could not have beaten the whites decisively. The war could have gone on for many years if Rhodesia had not been pressured by the US, Britain and — most importantly — South Africa to settle. Unlike the South Africans, the Rhodesians never established a firm and sophisticated system of control — we are talking here of South Africa's divide-and-rule system based upon the homelands, the segregated African townships which can easily be isolated by the security forces and the large numbers of informers that have infiltrated organisations hostile to the state. Moreover, the Rhodesian guerilla movements ZAPU and ZANU had sanctuaries, particularly in Mozambique.

To sum up: in South Africa you have a resolute state, it considers the battle as vital and the insurgents lack sanctuaries. The preconditions of protracted insurgency do not exist in South Africa. Since Nkomati the ANC is compelled to organise inside South Africa. This is always much more difficult and much easier to crush.

Giliomee: If we look at the different liberation movements — how would you rate the ANC, Unita and Swapo in a universal perspective?

Chaliand: If we look at levels of organisation, the South African liberation movements are still a far cry from the great movements of the Chinese and the Vietnamese. I knew the Vietnamese guerilla leaders first hand and they were without any doubt people with extraordinary organisational abilities. None of the movements in Southern Africa are in the same league. There are a certain number of deficiencies: in organisation, in seriousness, in timing and in lack of discipline.

Against this background I would say that Unita is a movement that must be taken seriously as it is a movement that has genuine roots in Angola. They enjoy the support of the largest ethnic group in Angola, the Ovimbundu, which form about forty percent of the population. Nobody can rule without the Ovimbundu, if you really want to create a nation in Angola transcending ethnic divisions. But it is difficult to say what Unita would be without South African support. Without sanctuaries and foreign assistance, liberation movements decay.

I believe the South African state will fight in Namibia for longer than most people think. It has no interest in a Swapo government in Windhoek. I have heard many people say the war is costly but that has not prevented many



Acknowledgement: Die Vaeeriano

Unita guerillas lay plastic explosives on the Benguela Railway at Cangonga (Angola).

state must be resolute. Secondly, the battle against the insurgents must be considered by the state as one that is vital to win. For the United States or the French it was never vital to win in Vietnam. For the South African state the war against ANC insurgency is vital. From the viewpoint of the insurgents, the guerillas must have access to sanctuaries or

states from waging war for ten years or more.

Can South Africa win the war against Swapo conclusively? There are two vital factors to take into consideration. Firstly Swapo has a serious demographic weakness. Namibia is underpopulated. Most of the recruits from Swapo are Ovambos who altogether total only half a million people. It has limited resources. If it loses 5 000 men it is badly hit. If the South African state deals severe blows to the main body of Swapo it has to go on the defensive, to low intensity war.

Secondly, South Africa uses the method of hot pursuit into foreign territory which gives the South Africans much more freedom to manoeuvre than western colonial powers had. All in all, South Africa is not winning but nevertheless has succeeded in weakening Swapo; it is preventing Swapo from winning.

Giliomee: To come back to the ANC. Why would the ANC be so drastically affected if South Africa can make the same kind of agreement work with Mozambique, Zimbabwe, Botswana and perhaps even Angola?

Chaliand: The South Africans have devised a new technique in counter-insurgency warfare. This is the technique of using guerilla warfare against powers who give sanctuary to guerillas targeted against it. Renamo in Mozambique has no popular support inside but it does not need it. Using that kind of guerilla technique one just engages in hit-and-run operations and sabotage in order to weaken the state and to destabilise it. One forces the state to engage in perpetual mobilisation, politically and militarily. This is a lesson which the United States most probably learnt from South Africa. It is now applying it in Nicaragua.

At least South Africa is innovative somewhere . . . if one can be forgiven for some black humour. The Nkomati agreement, if it can be enforced, is a very serious blow to the ANC. It is not possible to overestimate its importance. The ANC faces a crisis. It has to redefine what it realistically can do now in a quite new ball game.

Giliomee: What would the main options of the ANC now be?

Chaliand: Only two options are available. The most probable is low intensity terrorism. That is not too difficult to generate. You do not need much money or many men. The second option is working within legal institutions — if the state makes any credible institutions available to blacks. This option is crucially dependent on the kind of support the ANC can get if they go for entering the government's legal structures.

Giliomee: Is there any precedent of liberation movements transforming themselves into a non-violent, legal movement?

Chaliand: (Pause) I don't recall any.

Giliomee: What does it do to a state, if it attempts to engage in successful anti-insurgency warfare? Is it possible to maintain civil liberties at home?

Chaliand: It depends on the intensity of the

struggle. In low-key guerilla war many of the civil liberties can be maintained. But no state which uses torture can condemn terrorism, especially if the target is selective, that is, not against civilians as the ANC has done most of the time. Torture also corrupts the state. When it becomes known it creates widespread feelings of guilt and uneasiness among the part of the population on which the state depends for support. In South Africa, by the way, I see little sign of guilt, except in rather small circles.

What the state tries to do is to have exceptional measures against the insurgents and to keep civil liberties for its own population.

Giliomee: Can one maintain this kind of border line in one political system? Is it not too tempting just to waive civil liberties aside?

Chaliand: The South African state has been quite successful in keeping a western democracy for whites and something quite different for blacks. But, if the threat becomes larger, states almost automatically proceed to harsher measures. To force your newspapers and television station not to report on the insurgents and not to report on the crimes committed by the security forces is already a victory for the other side. It all depends on how important democracy is for a society.

Giliomee: Looking at the other side, it has been the tendency (if one leaves out the Pretoria bomb) of the ANC to engage only in selective terrorism. Would it not be better for them to escalate terrorism in order to polarise South African society? Is the ANC policy perhaps related to a statement you make in one of your books that a revolutionary war should be convincing and meaningful by itself?

Chaliand: The ANC has chosen to exercise low intensity pressure through sabotage. It has made a strategic choice. It has not antagonised whites by killing whites indiscriminately, which I find a wise policy.

Indiscriminate violence tends to only occur when the insurgent movement is firmly established and has got a strong internal organisation and when the war is already in an advanced stage. Nothing of that exists in this country as far as the ANC is concerned. All that can be achieved by random terrorism is to escalate oppression — which will take a heavy toll from blacks. So I think the ANC has been extremely sensible and acting in its own interests not to engage in random terror. For a guerilla organisation, at this early stage in South Africa, it makes more sense to weaken the country in its basic resources — energy, bridges, communications, industries. This also is serious business for the state. It requires mobilisation and money on the part of the state to guard all those things that can be hit. Industrial and infrastructure sabotage is very spectacular and it scares off foreign capital. It is more effective to do this than to engage in random terror which creates martyrs on one hand and victims on the other. UDA

Destabilisation, an innovative technique in counter-insurgency warfare, forces hostile states into perpetual political/military mobilisation

The ANC has two options after Nkomati: continued low-key terrorism or transformation into a non-violent, legal movement

The use of torture corrupts the state itself and creates widespread feelings of guilt among government supporters

Indiscriminate violence occurs only at an advanced stage of war when the insurgent movement is firmly established internally