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Armed Struggle as a Strategy of Liberation: A Global Historical Analysis of
Political Violence in the Palestinian and South African National Liberation
Movements, 1960–1995

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Table of Contents

Abstract (Deutsch).....	3
Abstract (English).....	3
Acknowledgments.....	4
Introduction.....	5
Literature and Sources.....	14
1. Theoretical Reflections on the use of political violence	18
1.1. Non-violence and Violence – mutually exclusive?.....	19
1.2. Discourses on the use of political violence by non-state actors.....	22
1.3. Legitimization of violence in national liberation movements	26
2. The beginnings of violence in Palestinian and South African liberation movements	30
2.1. ‘The Struggle’ in South Africa before 1960	32
2.2. The Palestinian Question before and after the <i>Nakba</i>	40
3. Revolutionary Spaces: Algerian, Chinese, and Vietnamese influences	45
3.1. The Algerian anti-colonial role model	47
3.2. Maoist guerrilla theory: ‘revolutionary violence’ and ‘protracted people’s war’	51
3.3. Vietnamese struggle against ‘anti-imperialism.’	56
4. The costs and benefits of political violence	60
4.1. Fatah and ANC: leaders of the movement.....	61
4.2. The ‘rejectionist’s: terrorism and armed struggle against peace	67
5. Targeting practices: Civilians as victims of liberation movements	73
Conclusion.....	79
Bibliography.....	83
Sources.....	89

Abstract (Deutsch)

Der Einsatz politischer Gewalt durch von der UN anerkannte nationale Befreiungsbewegungen ist bis heute eines der umstrittensten Themen in den Diskursen über Befreiungskämpfe. Während einige meinen, dass übermäßige Gewaltanwendung ein Symptom für „terroristische“ Bewegungen ist, weisen andere auf die Notwendigkeit von Gewalt hin, um das Endziel der Befreiung von einem kolonialen oder unterdrückerischen Regime zu erreichen. Beiden Perspektiven mangelt es an Differenziertheit, da dem Einsatz und der Intensität politischer Gewalt von Befreiungsbewegungen strategische und taktische Entscheidungen zugrunde liegen, welche zwar wesentlich mit internen Prozessen in der Konfliktzone verbunden, aber auch grundlegend von externen Einflüssen und globalen Reaktionen auf den Befreiungskampf geprägt sind. In meiner Masterarbeit, die als vergleichende globalhistorische Studie konzipiert ist, möchte ich aufzeigen, dass palästinensische und südafrikanische Befreiungsbewegungen, namentlich die PLO, der ANC und der PAC, den Einsatz politischer Gewalt von 1960 bis 1995 entsprechend ihrem globalen Umfeld einsetzten, anpassten und veränderten. Inspiriert von den Revolutionen und Befreiungskämpfen der 1950er-, 1960er- und 1970er-Jahre planten alle drei langwierige Guerillakämpfe; ihre bewaffneten Kampagnen stützten sich auf bestehende Rahmenbedingungen der Guerillakriegsführung, reagierten auf globale Kritik an übermäßiger Gewaltanwendung und versuchten, die Meinung des globalen Publikums mit ihren Gegenerzählungen zum bewaffneten Kampf und den Behauptungen ihrer Gegner zu beeinflussen.

Abstract (English)

The use of political violence by UN-recognized “national liberation movements” is, to this day, one of the most contentious topics in discourses on liberation struggles. While some suggest that the excessive use of violence is a symptom of ‘terroristic’ movements, others point to the necessity of violent means to achieve the end goal of liberation from a colonial or oppressive regime. Both of these perspectives lack nuance, as the use and intensity of political violence by liberation movements are based on tactical and strategic considerations and, though substantially connected to internal processes of the conflict zone, are also fundamentally shaped by external influences and global reactions to the liberation struggle. In my master’s thesis, conceived as a comparative global historical study, I want to demonstrate that Palestinian and South African liberation movements, namely the PLO, ANC, and PAC,

employed, adjusted, and changed their use of political violence in accordance with their global environment from 1960 to 1995. Inspired by the revolutions and liberation struggles of the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s, all three planned prolonged guerrilla campaigns; their armed struggle campaigns relied on existing frameworks of guerrilla warfare, reacted to global criticism of excessive violent campaigns, and attempted to influence the opinions of global audiences with their presented counter-narratives regarding armed struggle and the claims of their adversaries.

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Introduction

‘Today I have come bearing an olive branch and a freedom-fighter's gun. Do not let the olive branch fall from my hand.’¹ – Yasser Arafat.

This famous quote by Yasser Arafat, the Chairman of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), who issued it before the UN's General Assembly in 1974, showcases how the representative of the Palestinian people presented the Palestinian armed struggle against the State of Israel to the world. Arafat's speech at the UN was a historic milestone for the Palestinian cause on the international stage. Just one month before, on the 14th of October 1974, the UN General Assembly voted in favour of Resolution 3210 (XXIX), inviting the PLO to the General Assembly and recognising the Palestinian people as a principal partner in the so-called ‘Question of Palestine’.² The significance of the decision is also connected to the role of the PLO, as the resolution recognized the organization as the representative body of the Palestinian people.³ The decision is embedded in a period when numerous countries or supranational organizations started to acknowledge the long-lasting endeavours of several national liberation movements in Africa and Asia that demanded self-determination without foreign or colonial rule.⁴

Despite being a diplomatic breakthrough for the PLO, as its status had essentially been greatly elevated through UN recognition, the speech's purpose was also to provide an opportunity to tell the Palestinian narrative regarding their conflict with Israel to an international audience. Starting in the 1960s, Palestinian *fedayeen*⁵, who had previously been under the military command of the Arab armies, began to organize themselves autonomously, acting increasingly independently from the Arab states' militaries.⁶ After the crushing defeat of the Arab coalition in 1967, Palestinian organizations expanded their armed struggle campaigns, precipitating a renewed wave of guerrilla operations against the State of Israel. Palestinian commandos

¹ United Nations (1974, November 13). Palestine question / Arafat statement - GA debate – Verbatim record (Document No. 187769). United Nations Information System on the Question of Palestine. Accessed on 17th December 2025, <https://www.un.org/unispal/document/auto-insert-187769/>.

² United Nations (1974, October 14). Invitation to the Palestine Liberation Organization (Document No. A/RES/3210). United Nations Digital Library. Accessed 23rd December 2025, <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/189832>.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Heather A. Wilson, *International Law and the Use of Force by National Liberation Movements* (Oxford, 1988), 117ff.

⁵ ‘Fedayeen’ is the transliteration of the Arabic word فدائيين ‘self-sacrificer’. In the Arabic world, this expression has been used to describe Arab guerrillas in particular from the 1950s to the 1970s.

⁶ Mustafa Kabha, *The Palestinian People. Seeking Sovereignty and State* (Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2014), 187ff and 200–203.

occasionally infiltrated from Lebanon, Egypt, Syria, or Jordan and attacked Israeli military targets or civilian communities. Moreover, Palestinian armed groups also formed cells in the Israeli-occupied territories in 1967 and operated there against the Israeli military.⁷ Some Palestinian factions even expanded their operations on a global scale, especially through the hijacking of civil aircraft, in addition to assassinations, bombings, and assaults against businesses, cultural and religious institutions, infrastructure and sports events in Europe and Asia.⁸

The Palestinians' use of political violence was addressed extensively by Arafat in his UN speech. His subsequent explanations and contextualization of the violence recurred in global discourses regarding the use of force by national liberation movements. Overall, he denounced the categorization by some observers, in particular the USA, of the Palestinian armed struggle as a form of terrorism. In contrast, he viewed the Palestinian struggle as a liberation cause, a revolutionary act for the freedom of his people.⁹ Besides the attempt to justify the attacks against Israel, he began to connect the Palestinian experience to various historical or contemporary examples of armed struggle against occupying forces or colonial powers. By claiming that the reasons for a cause distinguish the revolutionary from the terrorist, the Palestinians' fight against Israel cannot be regarded as terrorism, just as the fight of the colonists against the British in the American Revolution, the anti-fascist resistance against Nazi Germany, or the actions of various other struggles in Asia, Africa, and South America should also be categorized as terrorism.¹⁰

Another way for Arafat to contextualize the violence was his references to numerous contemporary anti-colonial struggles and their ostensible structural and social similarities to the situation of the Palestinians. Throughout his speech, Arafat compared several times the situation of Palestinians living under Israeli control with the Apartheid Regime in South Africa. He even asserted that the alleged racism of Israelis toward Palestinians was analogous to the racial segregation of South Africa.¹¹ At one point, he even postulated that the racial discrimination exceeded that of South African Apartheid.¹² Although he did not mention them by name, Arafat

⁷ Yazîd Şāyig, *Armed Struggle and the Search for State: The Palestinian National Movement 1949-1993*, 1. iss. as paperback (Oxford Univ. Press, 1999), 202–10, <https://ubdata.univie.ac.at/AC03847427>.

⁸ Ibid., 213ff and 234.

⁹ United Nations (1974, November 13). Palestine question / Arafat statement - GA debate – Verbatim record (Document No. 187769).

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ United Nations (1974, November 13). Palestine question / Arafat statement - GA debate – Verbatim record (Document No. 187769).

¹² Ibid.

still endorsed the struggles of other national liberation movements, placing the Palestinian struggle as one amongst them seeking self-determination, free from oppression and colonial rule.¹³

The words of the PLO Chairman reflected important points regarding the discourses surrounding national liberation movements and their use of political violence. While specific movements or organizations, such as the South-West African People's Organization (SWAPO) or the African National Congress (ANC), were partially or totally categorized by some governments in Europe or North America, at least temporarily, as 'terror groups'¹⁴, supporters of these movements generally argued that these governments were merely reiterating the propaganda of the oppressors. For many liberation movements, their tactics of armed operations, including bombings, assassinations, or kidnappings, were consistent with the principles of guerrilla warfare. It is thus not surprising that political materials and communiqués, disseminated by these movements, reversed the roles by describing violent acts against their peoples and communities as 'terrorism'¹⁵ or calling non-state actors affiliated with their enemies 'terrorists'.¹⁶

Furthermore, many of the tactics and strategies that have been employed in the armed struggles of national liberation movements were conceived and tested by numerous socialist and/or anti-colonial movements earlier. From the 1950s onwards, a global circulation of ideas and theories on how to wage guerrilla warfare was disseminated by revolutionaries who actually attained their goals. The victories of the Chinese communists, the Cuban revolutionaries, or the Algerian

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ After the ANC announced that it would target British companies in South Africa, Margaret Thatcher called the ANC a terrorist organization, see Fred Bridgland (1987, October 19). 'Thatcher denounces ANC as terrorist group' in: *The Scotsman*, p.1. Accessed on 24th of December 2025. <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000540/19871019/018/0001>; SWAPO was characterized by some members of the Reagan administration as 'Soviet-inspired terrorist group and was barred from receiving U.S. funds designated for international organizations, see Glenn Frankel, 'SWAPO proves durable foe of S. Africa in contest for Namibia' in: *The Washington Post*, May 6, 1984, Digitized Version. Accessed on 24th of December 2025. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1984/05/06/swapo-proves-durable-foe-of-s-africa-in-contest-for-namibia/2d19b36e-880e-4709-9480-a6101c89edf7/>; Although the US did not officially list the ANC as a terrorist organization at the time, the organization appeared in a report for President Bush Sr. concerning 52 organizations that were described as 'the more notorious terrorist groups', see Robert Pear. 'U.S. Report Stirs Furor in South Africa' in: *The New York Times*, January 14, 1989, digitized Version. Accessed on 24th of December 2025. <https://www.nytimes.com/1989/01/14/world/us-report-stirs-furor-in-south-africa.html>.

¹⁵ Arafat mentions in his speech the 'terroristic' Zionist movement, see United Nations (1974, November 13). Palestine question / Arafat statement - GA debate – Verbatim record (Document No. 187769);

¹⁶ An article of the ANC's official magazines, *Sechaba*; describes União Nacional para a Independência Total de Angola (UNITA), an Angolese armed group that was backed by South Africa, as 'terrorists', see Marga Holness, 'Pretoria's War in Angola' in: *Sechaba*, February issue 1988, pp. 2–8, here p. 3 and 5.

anti-colonial movement also enabled the spread of guerrilla theories from Mao Zedong, Che Guevara, or Frantz Fanon.¹⁷ National liberation movements studied successful past and contemporary military campaigns, adapting strategies and tactics for their own armed struggle in accordance with their individual circumstances.¹⁸

A similar phenomenon can also be observed when national liberation movements study each other. Arafat was not alone when he compared the Palestinian situation with the experiences of other national liberation movements. Seeing parallels between the historical and contemporary situations of other liberation movements was also an act of solidarity. The South African-Israeli alliance in the Cold War had been a massive factor in the historical appearance of this special bond based on solidarity between the people of South Africa and the Palestinians. Palestinian scholars and intellectuals identified Zionism already in the 1960s as the alleged twin of apartheid. Amongst the first was the scholar and diplomat Fayez Sayegh, who defined Zionism as a form of self-segregation and supremacy, which, according to him, was one of the constituting characteristics of apartheid.¹⁹ Following Sayegh, further contributions exclusively focused on the similarities between South African and Israeli discriminatory policies but rarely centred on those who were affected by these systems, namely Palestinians and non-white South Africans²⁰.

In general, literature and comparative studies on the situation of non-white South Africans during apartheid and the history of Palestinians have proliferated over the last decades. Detailed comparisons between South African and Palestinian liberation movements emerged from the 1990s onwards. One of the pioneering studies was published by the anti-colonial thinker Eqbal Ahmad, who compared in his essay²¹ *ANC and the PLO. Painful contrasts between non-white South Africans and Palestinians*, including the similarities and dissimilarities of the respective national liberation movements. He highlighted the structural and social differences between the PLO and the ANC, emphasizing that the former was created as a government-in-exile composed of various ideologically diverse parties, whereas the latter was a singular party with a Marxist orientation.²² In addition to that, he addressed several issues, challenges, and obstacles that both

¹⁷ Z. Pallo Jordan and Mac Maharaj, 'South Africa and the Turn to Armed Resistance', *South African Historical Journal* (PRETORIA) 70 (2018): 12, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02582473.2018.1438882>.

¹⁸ See chapter 3. Revolutionary Spaces: Algerian, Chinese, and Vietnamese influences.

¹⁹ Nina Fischer, 'Palestinian Non-Violent Resistance and the Apartheid Analogy', *Interventions* 23, no. 8 (2021): 1129f.

²⁰ See for instance, Uri Davis (1987). *Israel, an Apartheid state*. Zed Books.

²¹ 'ANC and PLO: Painful Contrasts', in *The Selected Writings of Eqbal Ahmad*, by Eqbal Ahmad (Columbia University, 1992), 76–80.

²² *Ibid*, pp. 76f.

movements faced, and how their struggles differed drastically in some respects, pointing to the ANC's flexibility and emphasis on non-violent forms of resistance, while the PLO under Arafat basically devoted itself to armed struggle until the year 1982.²³

Nevertheless, many of these comparative approaches to liberation movements did not solely exist as a tool to legitimize their own cause or to form and maintain a particular relationship based on solidarity with a people that face similar conditions. Comparative studies were also conducted to understand how people in similar situations behaved, what led to their situation, how they performed in conflicts, and how they eventually attained their strategic goals, if at all. In other words, the histories and struggles of other liberation movements could serve as blueprints, a plan for achieving their own goal of self-determination and liberation. It's no coincidence that Palestinians today have adopted many non-violent strategies of the global Anti-Apartheid Movement (AAM), and even mirrored similar structures. After all, the global Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) movement drew inspiration from the massive boycott campaigns conducted by the AAM.²⁴ However, the question arises, how South Africans' and Palestinians' liberation movements influenced each other in their use of political violence.

Utilizing a global historical approach, this master's thesis comparatively analyses the use of political violence by three different national liberation movements, the PLO, the ANC, and the Pan-African Congress (PAC) from 1960 to 1995. The study aims to reveal the parallels and contrasts regarding the experiences of these three movements in the context of their armed struggle campaigns and how global shifts, external influences, and internal dynamics shaped their use of political violence. Palestinians and South Africans alike faced changing conditions and acted in accordance with their global environment. The use of political violence has been an essential, albeit not exclusive, strategy in their respective struggles and was inherently connected with ideas and theories of guerrilla warfare from around the globe. The political end goal underlying the use of political violence by liberation movements was national or internal self-determination in their homelands and the removal of the institutions or ideologies that were attributed to the deprivation of their individual and collective rights: For the ANC and PAC, the Apartheid Regime in South Africa, and for the PLO, the State of Israel and Zionism.

By applying a comparative approach, I first need to address the methodological aspects in this context. Comparisons are always difficult in history. The advantages for historians in comparing certain events, processes, persons, etc. are the results, namely similarities and differences that

²³ Ibid., 77.

²⁴ BDS Movement. "What Is BDS?" Accessed February 10, 2026. <https://bdsmovement.net/what-bds>.

could be of a social, structural, political, or other nature. Both categories, the common ground and the diverging paths, can tell us a lot about causation in history. However, it must be mentioned at this point that no historical event or process is identical to another. Two historical events that on the surface seem to be pretty similar can reveal, after a profound examination, sharp contrasts that would necessitate a reconsideration of the ‘pseudo-similarities’ in the initial assessment. By noting this, we reject and avoid the simplification of history and accept the power of historical detail, as nothing in history, be it persons, countries, or entire histories, will ever be truly analogous to each other. This revelation should motivate us to use a comparative approach on historical processes that aim towards diametrically opposed or seemingly unrelated historical trajectories, as this could help us present new, valuable findings.²⁵

Besides the global historical and historical background, this master's thesis's theoretical framework also borrows concepts and ideas that have been developed and refined within the disciplines of political science and social movement studies. The concept of ‘political violence’ encompasses multiple forms of human conflict and needs further clarification in the context of this study, as the use of violence by liberation movements has some unique characteristics that fundamentally diverge from those of states or even other non-state actors.

Thus, the first chapter focuses on adjustments and refinements that are necessary to make when applying the concept in order to analyse the armed struggle of liberation movements. This includes the exploration of the history and different perspectives regarding specific aspects of ‘political violence’, highlighting contentious topics among academics. In particular, the relation between two sub-categories of ‘political violence’ that are usually associated with non-state actors, namely guerrilla warfare and terrorism, will be illuminated. Even today many researchers refrain from using the latter sub-category, as the label ‘terrorism’ is exponentially and intentionally misused by many actors and has historically contributed to the vilification of entire movements, I will nevertheless argue in favour of using it as an analytical tool, as there is still descriptive value in it, which has inherently distinctive characteristics from ‘classical’ guerrilla warfare.

After the theoretical deliberations, the second chapter will begin with a brief historical overview of Palestinian and South African histories in regard to structural similarities and differences. Crucially, I will also cover the historical processes behind the turn from non-

²⁵ For a more detailed look into the historical comparative approach, see M. M. Krom, *An Introduction to Historical Comparison*, First edition (Bloomsbury Academic, 2020), 80–89, https://doi.org/10.5040/9781350123359?locatt=label:secondary_bloomsburyCollections.

violence to violence in all three liberation movements. The third chapter addresses the global influences regarding guerrilla warfare: all movements relied on existing ‘blueprints’ on how to wage armed struggle and harnessed strategies and theories adopted from Chinese, Vietnamese, and Algerian guerrilla experiences. While the support of those anti-colonial countries, including material aid and military training, suggested an ‘unconditional solidarity’ for movements that struggled for their right to self-determination within their homeland against colonial powers and foreign occupations, political considerations and state interests were also indispensable factors that determined the support of a country for a national liberation movement.

The fourth chapter explores the dynamics of political violence and the adjustment of strategies, as the use of excessive political violence, in the form of terrorism or other violence that involved civilians, had a delegitimizing effect on the liberation struggle, repelling potential supporters or sponsors in most cases. National liberation movements were aware of the negative image that the label ‘terrorist’ could produce, and overall decreased, or even completely abandoned, the use of violent strategies that diminished the reputation of their movements. However, depending on the context, terrorism still appeared as a tactical means, as a way to either sabotage or impede peace and reconciliation initiatives, as some movements or factions within the movements adhered to the strategy of armed struggle until liberation.

The last chapter covers probably the most controversial part of this thesis: civilians as victims of liberation movements. Liberation movements were aware that terroristic attacks on civilians would diminish their reputation among potential supporters, in particular in Western European states, as these acts lie inherently in contradiction to Western notions of righteous ‘freedom fighters’ for a noble cause. The PLO, ANC, and PAC media offered a multitude of justifications and ‘rationalizations’ regarding why civilians were harmed during armed operations. Overall, the media of liberation movements were eager to uphold a positive image of the movements to deflect potential criticism, pointing to alleged collaboration with the state, the militarization of societies, or by externalising the culpability for civilian deaths to their adversaries.

Some may ask now why I have in particular selected South African and Palestinian liberation movements. Being aware that South Africa and Israel/Palestine had different historical trajectories, my choice of these three movements was based on two factors: First, the above-mentioned trend to compare the historic and ongoing situation of Palestinians in the occupied territories, and for some even within the internationally recognized borders of the State of Israel,

with non-white South Africans living during apartheid. As I am writing these pages, several reports by NGOs, notably Amnesty International²⁶, Human Rights Watch²⁷, and B'Tselem,²⁸ and one Advisory Opinion by the International Court of Justice²⁹ have independently attested that Israeli policies in at least the occupied territories amount to the crime of apartheid.³⁰ Moreover, already an abundance of literature and studies exists that dive into the parallels, connections, but also contrasts of historical South Africa and Israel and the populations subjected to their policies.³¹

However, at this point, it should be mentioned that the allegations of Israeli apartheid should be primarily understood to describe the current situation. Some researchers have proposed the idea that Zionism is a form of segregation and racism or assert that Israel has, ever since its founding in 1948, been an 'apartheid state'. However, such claims should be met with caution. The Zionist movement has been ideologically diverse and has offered throughout its history different approaches regarding the nature of the proposed 'Jewish state'³² and the treatment of the indigenous population already living there.³³ In addition to that, the overall historic context behind the enduring occupation of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip shouldn't be forgotten, as Israel conquered the territory, to put it in the words of the historian Avi Shlaim, 'in a war that

²⁶ Amnesty International. *Israel's Apartheid against Palestinians. Cruel System of Domination and Crime against Humanity*, 2022. Accessed on 30.12.2025, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde15/5141/2022/en/>.

²⁷ Human Rights Watch. *A Threshold Crossed. Israeli Authorities and the Crimes of Apartheid and Persecution*, 2021. Accessed on 30.12.2025, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2021/04/27/threshold-crossed/israeli-authorities-and-crimes-Apartheid-and-persecution>.

²⁸ B'Tselem. *A regime of Jewish supremacy from the Jordan River to the Mediterranean Sea: This is Apartheid* 2021. Accessed on 30.12.2025, https://www.btselem.org/publications/fulltext/202101_this_is_Apartheid.

²⁹ International Court of Justice. *Legal Consequences Arising from the Policies and Practices of Israel in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, Including East Jerusalem: Advisory Opinion*, 19 July 2024. The Hague: International Court of Justice, 2024. Accessed on 30.12.2025, <https://www.icj-cij.org/sites/default/files/case-related/186/186-20240719-adv-01-00-en.pdf>.

³⁰ Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, and B'Tselem assessed that this regime of systematic segregation and discrimination extends to the entire area within the Mediterranean Sea and the Jordan River, which thus includes Israel in its internationally recognized borders, see Amnesty International. *Israel's Apartheid against Palestinians*, p 29f; Human Rights Watch. *A Threshold Crossed. Israeli Authorities and the Crimes of Apartheid and Persecution*, p. 9–16; B'Tselem. *A regime of Jewish supremacy from the Jordan River to the Mediterranean Sea*, p. 1.

³¹ I will cover some comparative literature in the Literature and Sources section.

³² More recent publications challenge the decades-long and prevailing narrative that the Zionist movement's ultimate goal has always been the establishment of a Jewish nation-state. This new literature suggests that until very late in the Mandate period, key Zionist figures preferred autonomy within a larger political entity, such as an empire or a federation, rather than striving toward an independent and fully sovereign state. For instance, see Dimitry Shumsky, *Beyond the Nation-State: The Zionist Political Imagination from Pinsker to Ben-Gurion* (Yale University Press, 2018); Yosef Gorny, *From Binational Society to Jewish State: Federal Concepts in Zionist Political Thought, 1920–1990, and the Jewish People* (Brill, 2006).

³³ An overview of the different Zionist approaches on the so-called 'Arab question' until 1948, see Yosef Gorny, *Zionism and the Arabs. A Study of Ideology* (Clarendon Press, 1987).

no one wanted'³⁴, and at times was willing to relinquish substantial parts of its 1967 conquests and resolve the situation with the Palestinians.³⁵

The second reason why I limited myself to these three national liberation movements is their representative status in terms of ideological variety and the support they received from external patrons. As already noted by Eqbal Ahmad, within the PLO, multiple factions with differing political programs and underlying ideologies existed.³⁶ After Yasser Arafat's party, Fatah, joined the organization in 1968 and has remained the dominant faction ever since. Smaller Marxist factions such as the PFLP and the DFLP had significantly fewer members than Fatah and a more marginal representation among the scattered Palestinian population, yet still exerted disproportionate influence within the organization.³⁷

The ANC, as a single party, was more homogeneous, but also had some figures with different political backgrounds or affiliations with other parties amongst its members.³⁸ Nevertheless, a comparative study exclusively focused on the PLO and the ANC would have thus created an imbalance in terms of political representation, especially as opinions within the South African resistance movement were more diverse. The inclusion of the PAC with its more exclusive Afro-nationalistic program is therefore necessary in order to depict the political positions of the South African resistance movement more accurately. One additional national liberation movement that could also have been included in this master's thesis would be the already mentioned SWAPO and its military wing, the People's Liberation Army of Namibia (PLAN). While SWAPO operated overwhelmingly in the former League of Nations' Mandate of South West Africa, which later became the Republic of Namibia, the territory was occupied and largely controlled by apartheid South Africa until the year 1990. The South African administration introduced here as well legislation that was based on racial discrimination and segregation, similar to that of mainland South Africa.³⁹ Unfortunately, the author's limited temporal and logistical resources do not allow the inclusion of more national liberation movements as

³⁴ Avi Shlaim, *The Iron Wall. Israel and the Arab World*, 2nd updated edition (Penguin Books, 2014), 252.

³⁵ For instance, the Alon plan, or the Oslo Accords.

³⁶ 'ANC and PLO: Painful Contrasts', 76f.

³⁷ Together with other PLO groups, they rejected in the 1970s and 1980s every attempt to negotiate with Israel, refusing to compromise on less than the Palestinians' demands for the right of return and the entirety of historic Palestine, see Kabha, *The Palestinian People. Seeking Sovereignty and State*, 266.

³⁸ Some researchers assert that even Nelson Mandela was a dual member in the ANC and the communist party of South Africa, see Stephen Ellis, 'The Genesis of the ANC's Armed Struggle in South Africa 1948-1961', *Journal of Southern African Studies* 37, no. 4 (2011): 657.

³⁹ Molly McCullers, 'Betwixt and Between Colony and Nation-State: Liminality, Decolonization, and the South West Africa Mandate', *The American Historical Review* 124 (2019): 1704–8, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ahr/rhz1026>.

subjects for this comparative study. Still, SWAPO and its connections with other national liberation movements will be mentioned at some points.

The author used Grammarly and ChatGPT for optimization and correctness of the language. However, all content-related changes were checked and, if necessary, reformulated by me. Content-wise, this master's thesis was preceded by two seminar papers I wrote during my master's program in Global History & Global Studies. The first was a brief essay with the title '*Conditional Solidarity? Military and economic connections between the GDR and the PLO*'⁴⁰ about the dynamic relations between the PLO and the German Democratic Republic (GDR) with a focus on the provision of weapons for the Palestinians, framed as 'material solidarity', by the East German state. The other was an extended research seminar paper with the title '*People's War in Palestine and beyond? Maoism, Che Guevara, and the internationalization of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine's guerrilla campaign*'⁴¹, and focused on the global connections of the PFLP's 'international operations', a series of plane hijackings and attacks against civil and military targets in Europe, the Middle East, and Asia. However, even as the addressed topics overlap at some points, there are striking differences between these papers, in particular regarding the conceptual nature and the handling of the content and sources in the study. Nevertheless, I still regard them as drafts or preparatory studies for my master's thesis.

Literature and Sources

So far, there is an ever-growing selection of comparative studies on the histories of South Africa and Israel/Palestine. Amongst the first who published a comprehensive comparative study on the Palestinian and South African national movements was Mona Younis. She published her dissertation '*The Liberation and Democratization: The South African and Palestinian National Movements*'⁴² and analysed in particular the elites who had an immense influence on the nation-building of the respective movements. Others focused more on political violence, such as Ran Greenstein who wrote in his book '*Anti-colonial resistance in South Africa and*

⁴⁰ Dominik Sölkner, 'Conditional Solidarity? Military and Economic Connections between the GDR and the PLO', Unpublished Essay, Universität Wien, February 2024.

⁴¹ Dominik Sölkner, 'People's War in Palestine and beyond? Maoism, Che Guevara, and the Internationalization of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine's Guerrilla Campaign', Unpublished Seminar paper, Universität Wien, August 2025.

⁴² Mouna N. Younis, 'Liberation and Democratization: The South African and Palestinian National Liberation Movements in Comparative Perspective, 1910s-1990s' (Dr. phil, University of Berkeley, 1996), <https://uaccess.univie.ac.at/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/dissertations-theses/liberation-democratization-south-african/docview/304323808/se-2>.

*Israel/Palestine : identity, nationalism, and race*⁴³ from a sociological lens about the dynamics of ‘resistance’ in these movements.

Some studies already compared violence in the context of the Palestinian and South African self-determination movements. One is *‘Non-Violence, Violence and the Palestinian Movement’* by Wendy Pearlman.⁴⁴ She analysed structural and social causes of violence in the Palestinian national movement and compared in one chapter the Palestinian movement with the experiences of South African and Irish ‘liberation movements’. However, her account is rather brief and does not explore concrete strategic frameworks and global influences that have shaped the political violence of these movements.⁴⁵ Another important contribution comes from Thomas G. Mitchell's *‘Native vs. Settler: Ethnic Conflict in Israel/Palestine, Northern Ireland, and South Africa’*.⁴⁶ This study provides a great overview of historical political violence in these regions, but the settler-colonial lens focuses on internal processes, therefore obfuscating global influences on political violence.⁴⁷

Also, I rely on a selection of global-historical literature that has already addressed the various influences and global connections between liberation movements. Julia Lowell's *‘Maoism. A Global History’*⁴⁸ provides an excellent account of the global politics of Maoist China, which supported ‘national liberation movements’ and other groups around the globe. Chamberlin's book *‘Global Offensive. The United States, the Palestine Liberation Organization, and the Making of the Post-Cold War Order’*⁴⁹ and his article *‘The Struggle against Oppression everywhere’*⁵⁰ are so far the richest and most detailed studies on the global connections between the PLO and various ‘guerrilla hotspots’ of the 1960s and 1970s, namely China, Vietnam, Algeria, and Cuba. However, Chamberlin addressed political violence in both of his writings, but he analysed first and foremost the diplomatic efforts of the PLO for global recognition.

⁴³ Ran Greenstein, *Anti-Colonial Resistance in South Africa and Israel/Palestine. Identity, Nationalism and Race* (Routledge, 2022).

⁴⁴ Wendy Pearlman. (2011). *Violence, Nonviolence, and the Palestinian National Movement*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

⁴⁵ Wendy Pearlman. (2011). *Violence, Nonviolence, and the Palestinian National Movement*, here p. 187.

⁴⁶ T. G. Mitchell, *Native vs. Settler: Ethnic Conflict in Israel/Palestine, Northern Ireland, and South Africa* (Greenwood Press, 2000).

⁴⁷ The book was published in the year 2000.

⁴⁸ Julia Lovell, *Maoism: A Global History* (Vintage, 2019).

⁴⁹ Paul Thomas. Chamberlin, *The Global Offensive: The United States, the Palestine Liberation Organization, and the Making of the Post-Cold War Order*, Oxford Studies in International History (Oxford University Press, 2012), <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&scope=site&db=nlebk&AN=477125>.

⁵⁰ Paul Chamberlin, ‘The Struggle Against Oppression Everywhere: The Global Politics of Palestinian Liberation’, *Middle Eastern Studies* (London) 47 (2011): 41, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00263201003590300>.

Moreover, I utilize different sets of sources coming from different provenances and archives. As the study handles highly controversial topics regarding the political violence of national liberation movements, detailed material on the operations of those movements is in many cases not available without consulting the local archives or still remains classified. On the one hand, national liberation movements are interested in upholding their image as 'being on the right side of history' and thus conceal information that could tarnish the memory of a 'righteous struggle for national liberation and their collective rights as a people'. Such a narrative is extremely beneficial for the movement, as many of the former national liberation movements transitioned from non-state actors to holders of government authority. In these positions, the positive commemoration of a 'just liberator' contributes to the political consolidation of the new regime and could guarantee widespread backing from the population. Exposing the dark sides of the national liberation movement's armed campaigns could thus be threatening, especially in times of political instability or before elections.

Wars and conflicts are not only fought with weapons but also with narratives and information. Primary sources used for this study highlight the 'battle of narratives', as they offer counter-narratives to the information machines of states and their allies. Many of these sources were published in English, arguably the global *lingua franca*, on purpose, as they targeted a supportive audience or sponsor abroad. For the Anti-Apartheid Movement, information campaigns were crucial to forming the opinions of the public on the apartheid regime. However, that information was also used to misinform potential supporters. In many of these newspapers, inflated numbers of attacks against security targets were intended to convince the movement and its supporters that the armed struggle was achieving success. Moreover, there is also a tendency to depict civilians as part of the security apparatus or associated with the adversaries, in order to justify or even condone deliberate attacks against non-combatants, attesting to their affiliation or involvement in the regimes of their adversaries.

On the other hand, documents remain inaccessible to prevent the narrative of the enemy from receiving credibility, as the Palestinian national liberation movement has not yet succeeded in establishing an independent and sovereign state. Many of the factions that were active in the Cold War continue to engage in violent activities against the Israeli security apparatus, in addition to numerous attacks against civilians, and therefore, are interested in keeping their strategies and tactics concealed, preventing the enemy from getting access to crucial information. In the end, that is a matter of political but also personal survival or advantage, as armed organizations such as the PFLP or DFLP are classified as terror organizations in Israel,

the USA, the UK, and the EU. These records could thus also uncover sympathizers, supporters, and sponsors, who would face prosecution and other legal consequences in their home countries for aiding a designated terror organization.

However, the inaccessibility of internal documents and records can be compensated for by selecting other sets of sources. Political material – here in particular, publications by the Information Departments of an organization – also reveals the stance of an organization regarding its positions on the use of political violence. The printing and distribution of books and pamphlets regarding armed struggle and guerrilla warfare were an intentional choice, as these actions are presented as being part of an overall strategy and offer counter-narratives, which are presented in the mainstream media or issued by state agencies. This could help them on the ‘information front’ and be useful for potential supporters, who would be able to contextualize certain acts of violence. In addition to that, foreign sponsors would have insight into how the organization or movement planned to conduct its operations and what material and assistance were required to support their cause. Whenever a publication in a foreign language other than the movement’s own is available, it is intentional and should be handled with caution. Publications written in different languages can deviate drastically, as the cultural and political context demands adjustments and alterations of the presented topics.

The political material analysed for this master’s thesis originated from different archives and sources. The ‘SADOCC. Dokumentationszentrum und Kooperationszentrum Südliches Afrika’ in Vienna, managed and maintained by the historian Walter Sauer, holds an abundance of material related to topics surrounding the region of Southern Africa, including a vast collection of books and primary sources related to the struggle of Southern African liberation movements. The documentation centre offers books published by these national liberation movements during their struggle and also has an almost complete collection of the official ANC periodical during apartheid, *Sechaba*, from 1972 to 1994, and other primary sources on Southern African liberation movements.

Other source collections were accessed through the internet. The website Marxists.org⁵¹ has a great selection of different materials regarding the history of communist and socialist movements. Publications and political material of Palestinian political and armed factions, which were associated with socialism and communism or received support from socialist or communist states during the Cold War, have also been included. However, gaps exist in many

⁵¹ Marxists Internet Archive. Accessed February 10, 2026. <https://www.marxists.org/>.

of these collections, pointing to difficulties of the hosts in acquiring and digitizing the material comprehensively and in its entirety. This presented a challenge, as magazine issues covering some of the most controversial attacks by Palestinians against Israeli civilians, such as the attack on Lod airport (1972) and the Munich massacre (1972), were not digitized. Additionally, there is an overrepresentation of material related to the far-left factions within the PLO, such as the PFLP and DFLP, whereas material from Fatah, even though it has continuously been the dominant faction in the PLO, is relatively sparse. The smaller political factions within the PLO are completely left out, but their influence and activities regarding the Palestinian armed struggle have been significantly less compared to the already above-mentioned ones. Thus, they will not be included in this study.

Furthermore, the websites FreedomArchives.org⁵² and the Internet Archive⁵³ provide digitized issues of *Azania Combat*, the official newspaper of the Azania People's Liberation Army (APLA), the military wing of the PAC. Similar to Marxists.org, the available collections are incomplete, with gaps spanning several years. Still, the digitized magazines and periodicals provide valuable insight regarding the armed campaign of the liberation movement and its views on political violence, including guerrilla warfare and terrorism.

1. Theoretical Reflections on the use of political violence

The analysis of South African and Palestinian liberation movements' experiences and their strategies in regard to the use of violence for their liberation struggles requires first the introduction of the conceptual framework of 'political violence'. Overall, political violence is an umbrella term which encompasses multiple forms of interhuman conflict. Researchers who study one particular violent phenomenon face a definitional obstacle by relying on this concept. For instance, political scientist Stathis N. Kalyvas remarks that political violence 'is an exceedingly broad and ill-defined term and, as such, its meaning and contents can be stretched almost infinitely. [...] On the one hand, the political can be defined so broadly as to fit almost all human activity, as in the popular quip "the personal is political;" on the other hand, violence can also be stretched to fit almost all types of behaviour[...]'⁵⁴. In total, Kalyvas identifies and differentiates between eleven distinct varieties of political violence, but

⁵² Freedom Archives. Accessed February 10, 2026. <https://freedomarchives.org/>.

⁵³ Internet Archive. Accessed February 10, 2026. <https://archive.org/>.

⁵⁴ Stathis N. Kalyvas, 'The Landscape of Political Violence', in *The Oxford Handbook of Terrorism*, First edition, ed. Erica Chenoweth et al., Handbook of Terrorism (Oxford University Press, 2019), 12f, <https://ubdata.univie.ac.at/AC15574329>.

for this study, only those employed by non-state actors should be considered.⁵⁵ His typology is a great overview, but lacks the necessary nuance and differentiation to depict political violence in ‘national liberation movements’.

In the existing literature, the use of political violence by non-state actors against a state is categorized differently by examining different qualitative and quantitative factors. The violent acts of non-state actors are associated in the literature with ‘rebellions’, ‘uprisings’, ‘guerrilla warfare’, and ‘terrorism’.⁵⁶ The last category has become a contentious topic in scholarship, as several authors attest to an increasingly prevalent political misuse of the term and the non-existence of an internationally recognized legal definition.⁵⁷ Variations and differences between these sub-categories of political violence arise from the temporal scope, the selection of targets, how operations are conducted, and the ultimate goal. While ‘rebellions’, ‘uprisings’ or ‘insurgencies’ can be spontaneous and vanish as fast as they were precipitated, ‘guerrilla warfare’ usually is employed as a long-term strategy and requires planning. Whereas the means of ‘guerrilla warfare’, such as bombings, sabotage, or assassinations, are overwhelmingly similar to the tactics of ‘terrorism’, some authors stress that the activities of the former category are directed against the security apparatus, including the military and the police, while the latter deliberately targets primarily civilians.⁵⁸ For this master's thesis, I will rely on the concepts of ‘guerrilla warfare’ and ‘terrorism’, as the struggle of national liberation movements is planned to last for a prolonged time from the underground, which lies more in contrast with the open and spontaneous characters of uprisings and rebellions.

1.1. Non-violence and Violence – mutually exclusive?

Equally broad as the scope of the concept ‘political violence’ is the research on the reasons for the reliance on violent means as a political tool by states and non-state actors. Depending on the field, multiple theories and models have been conceived over the last few decades in order to explain or even predict the occurrence of violence between states, intrastate violence, such as the state versus non-state actors or non-state actors against other non-state actors, and so

⁵⁵ Kalyas typology consists of: Interstate War, Civil War, State Repression, Genocide, Ethnic Cleansing, Intercommunal Violence, Organized Crime/Cartel Violence, Military Coup, Mass Protest/Rebellion, Political Assassination and Terrorism, see Kalyvas, ‘The Landscape of Political Violence’, 15–24.

⁵⁶ For instance, David Lowe (Lecturer on policing), et al., *Examining Political Piolence. Studies of Terrorism, Counterterrorism, and Internal War* (CRC Press, Taylor & Francis Group, 2014), 14f, <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&scope=site&db=nlebk&AN=668813>.

⁵⁷ More on that in the following sub-chapter, see ‘1.2. Discourses on the use of political violence by liberation movements’.

⁵⁸ Lowe et al., *Examining Political Piolence. Studies of Terrorism, Counterterrorism, and Internal War*, 14f.

on. As non-state actors are the subjects of this study, interstate violence is of no relevance here. The perspectives on political violence coming from non-state actors are connected to research in different disciplines of the humanities and social sciences. According to Bosi, Porta, and Malthaner, the ‘classic’ approaches in social movement studies and political science for the study of political violence in non-state actors have been the ‘resources mobilisation theory’ and the ‘political opportunity structure’. The ‘resources mobilisation theory’ argues that social movements must strategically deploy material resources, form and rely on social networks, and achieve social consensus to mobilise discontented individuals into activists for the movement’s cause. The innovativeness of this theory in the 1970s can be attributed to the fact that it depicted non-state actors as rational, strategically thinking movements, contrary to the contemporary socio-psychological explanations, which ascribed ‘collective behaviour’ as the driving force of movements.⁵⁹

The other presented approach is the ‘political opportunity structure’. The common ground of this concept with the ‘resource mobilization theory’ is the observation that social movements are strategic actors. Furthermore, the approach emphasizes that social movements react to and require openings in the political system, such as regime shifts, periods of political instability, or changes in the composition of elites, as the success of social movements demands the right institutional and political conditions. These encountered conditions define the repertoire of actions that a movement will use in order to attain its strategic goals. The strength of the opponent, the reaction of the state to protest, and political stability are all factors that determine how a movement will select its means for action. The closing of political opportunities, on the other hand, could entail an escalation and a transition from non-violent to violent actions.⁶⁰

As both the ‘resource mobilization theory’ and ‘political opportunity structures’ have been criticized for being too structural and static, a third concept has emerged during the 2000s, called the ‘contentious politics’ approach. Here, social movements are embedded in their environments, where they act and transform in accordance with the dynamic social changes surrounding them. This approach allows us to identify similar mechanisms in different

⁵⁹ Lorenzo Bosi et al., ‘Organizational and Institutional Approaches. Social Movement Studies and Institutional Approaches’, in *The Oxford Handbook of Terrorism*, First edition, by Erica Chenoweth et al., Handbook of Terrorism (Oxford University Press, 2019), 134f, <https://ubdata.univie.ac.at/AC15574329>; an additional insight into these approaches is provided by Wendy Pearlman, *Violence, Nonviolence, and the Palestinian National Movement*, 1st ed. (Cambridge University Press, 2011), 4.

⁶⁰ Bosi et al., ‘Organizational and Institutional Approaches: Social Movement Studies and Institutional Approaches’, 135.

contentious episodes in politics, such as strikes, revolutions, social movements, etc. These mechanisms might enable or mitigate conflicts and refer to the interactions between armed groups and the state; interactions between different armed groups within a movement and with counter-movements; and organizational dynamics of armed groups.⁶¹

Other research focuses on individual policies or the influence of culture, religion, ideology, etc. as determining factors for the transition from non-violence to violence. Violence can be perceived as a way to force the state to grant concessions or be deemed as a popular method to precipitate reforms or reverse legislation. From the perspective of the state, aggressive reactions against protesters, coercive means to prevent non-violent forms of action, and violent suppression of protests could convince the rebellious movement that a turn to violence is inevitable and inescapable. Paradoxically, 'inadequate' state violence has a similar effect, as rebels could perceive the reluctance of a state to use violence as weakness and thus conclude that extensive violent means are integral to eventually achieve their goals. Nevertheless, as some groups act in ways contrary to their strategic goals, additional research attempts to explain differences by addressing cultural, religious, ideological, or non-rational differences, assuming that the individual social environment forms and shapes the approaches to violence. Opponents of this explanation allude to the various forms of non-violent and violent approaches within cultures, and argue that the multifaceted face of a distinctive 'culture' in a region does not allow this conclusion.⁶²

Another interesting aspect regarding the use of violence is connected with the dynamics of factions within a movement. A common cause or end goal does not necessarily entail ideological alignment and similar choices of tactics. To the extent that a movement could consist of several separate groups and organizations, violent or non-violent tendencies could thus be connected to internal power struggles and rivalries. Some groups try to outbid others, as they believe that outstanding and spectacular actions will attract more recruits or sponsors than their competitors or improve their standing among the different factions.⁶³ One of the best examples related to armed factions of Palestinians is the PFLP's hijacking of civil aircraft during the 1960s and 1970s, which was (among other reasons) a tactic to draw attention to the Palestinian cause and to mobilize the Arab world.⁶⁴

⁶¹ Ibid., 136.

⁶² Pearlman, *Violence, Nonviolence, and the Palestinian National Movement*, 4ff.

⁶³ Bosi et al., 'Organizational and Institutional Approaches: Social Movement Studies and Institutional Approaches', 139f.

⁶⁴ Şāyig, *Armed Struggle and the Search for State: The Palestinian National Movement 1949-1993*, 213f.

However, some researchers downplay the influx of internal competition between groups and its connection with violence as a tactic. Wendy Pearlman, for instance, contends that the structural conditions within a movement are more important than the existence of rivalries or extreme group members. She explains that this ‘approach shifts analytical focus from activists’ rival preferences to the ways in which movements as a whole are organized. A movement will always have members with more ‘radical’ or ‘moderate’ leanings. The question is how the system of relationships internal to a movement variably constrains or unleashes their ability to pursue those inclinations unilaterally’⁶⁵.

The literature suggests that violence and non-violent ways to protest are not two diametrically opposed tactics but have a more complementary status. In that sense, violent and non-violent forms could coexist in a movement, and depending on the circumstances and conditions, are utilized in different ways. For my study, I want to emphasize this point and address the fact that Palestinians and South Africans, even when they used violence as a tactic in the analysed time period, it constituted only a fraction of their overall ‘repertoire of resistance’. Amongst the most effective means in the struggle against apartheid in South Africa were global solidarity movements, such as the British Anti-Apartheid movement (AAM). The AAM conducted boycott campaigns against enterprises, private persons, events, etc. that promoted or cooperated with the South African government. In addition to that, the AAM also provided information on the apartheid system and raised awareness of the situation of the non-white population living in the state.⁶⁶ Palestinians in Beirut also produced a form of ‘intellectual resistance’, as the PLO Information Bureau regularly published books by scholars that critically examined the history of Israel and the Zionist movement.⁶⁷

1.2. Discourses on the use of political violence by non-state actors

A famous proverb says, ‘One man’s terrorist is another man’s freedom fighter’. This proverb touches on one of the most frequently raised issues relating to the concept of ‘terrorism’: The inherent subjectivity of the terms ‘terrorist’ and ‘freedom fighter’⁶⁸. While both categories are presented as mutually exclusive, the sentence points to the existence of multiple assessments

⁶⁵ Pearlman, *Violence, Nonviolence, and the Palestinian National Movement*, 7.

⁶⁶ Matthew Graham and Christopher Fevre, ‘International Solidarity at the Grassroots: A Case Study of the British Anti-Apartheid Movement’, *Journal of Southern African Studies* (ABINGDON) 50 (2024): 134–39, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03057070.2024.2370654>.

⁶⁷ A detailed article was published in the *Journal of Palestine Studies*, see Elizabeth M. Holt, ‘Resistance Literature and Occupied Palestine in Cold War Beirut’, *Journal of Palestine Studies* (Berkeley) 50 (2021): 18, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0377919X.2020.1855933>.

⁶⁸ Lowe et al., *Examining Political Violence. Studies of Terrorism, Counterterrorism, and Internal War*, 16.

by different actors regarding the actions surrounding one specific person. Also, the effect can be amplified through factors concerning the environment, as the socio-political and historical context can determine who is a 'terrorist' and who belongs to the category of 'freedom fighters', showing a certain degree of flexibility. While the USA classified Mandela in the 1980s as a 'terrorist', public perception today sees him overwhelmingly as a positive figure in the liberation struggle against apartheid.⁶⁹

Whereas multiple concepts of 'terrorism' exist, which can also include the actions of state actors⁷⁰, I will focus in this master's thesis on national liberation movements as non-state actors. The academic approaches to the concept of 'terrorism' differ drastically from discipline to discipline. Some studies or researchers even reject the concept entirely, pointing to the moral and political repercussions of the categorisation of 'terrorism'.⁷¹ However, for advocates, the overall conceptual consensus and broadest definition encompass violence by non-state actors primarily directed against civilians. 'Terrorism' becomes here a strategy to forcefully obtain concessions from the state through fear and intimidation of the public.⁷² In that sense, 'terrorism' is delimited and distinguished from 'guerrilla warfare', as in the latter forms of political violence, security personnel and infrastructure become the primary targets of the armed operations.⁷³

Still, this approach ignores that non-state actors had different notions and delineations regarding the borders between these concepts. Some non-state actors explicitly differentiated between 'guerrilla warfare' and 'terrorism', in addition to other categories of violent activities.⁷⁴ Others regarded certain tactics involving violence against civilians as an extension

⁶⁹ Cristiano D'Orsi, "Symposium on Unbroken Bond: Tracing the Ties Between African and Palestinian Anti-Colonial Struggles – When Nelson Mandela was (Considered) a Terrorist and the "Natural Alliance" between South Africa and Palestine." *Opinio Juris*, August 9, 2024. <https://opiniojuris.org/2024/08/09/symposium-on-unbroken-bond-tracing-the-ties-between-african-and-palestinian-anti-colonial-struggles-when-nelson-mandela-was-considered-a-terrorist-and-the-natural-alliance-between-south-africa/>.

⁷⁰ See for instance, Tim Wilson, 'State Terrorism', in *The Oxford Handbook of Terrorism*, First edition, by Erica Chenoweth et al., Handbook of Terrorism (Oxford University Press, 2019), 331-347, <https://ubdata.univie.ac.at/AC15574329>.

⁷¹ Bosi et al., 'Organizational and Institutional Approaches: Social Movement Studies and Institutional Approaches', 133f.

⁷² Kalyvas, 'The Landscape of Political Violence', 23f.

⁷³ Kalyvas, 'The Landscape of Political Violence', 14, and 22ff.

⁷⁴ Nelson Mandela and his comrades from Umkhonto we Sizwe, for instance, identified four different forms of violent activities: Sabotage, guerrilla warfare, terrorism, and open revolution, see Nelson Mandela, *Long Walk to Freedom: The Autobiography of Nelson Mandela*, 2003 2013 (Abacus, 1995), 336, <https://ubdata.univie.ac.at/AC11008811>.

of ‘guerrilla warfare’.⁷⁵ In addition to that, civilians were tactically targeted within strategies that would, in large part, be characterized by the movements as ‘guerrilla warfare’ against military targets. In other instances, both ‘terrorism’ and guerrilla warfare were used as two complementary strategies that belonged to a larger framework, which also encompassed non-violent strategies. However, different perceptions and notions can be explained through historical tradition or contrasting views regarding key factors that determine what constitutes the concepts of ‘terrorism’ and ‘guerrilla warfare’ in my study, such as different notions of who belongs to the category of civilians.⁷⁶

More issues concerning the consequences of applying the term ‘terrorism’ also arise when we analyse the historical use of the term. The origins of ‘terrorism’ in the context of political violence used by state agents or non-state actors can be dated back to the 18th century, as the expression ‘Reign of Terror’ was used to describe the state violence employed by the Jacobins in the French Revolution.⁷⁷ Following the 19th century and the restoration of monarchic power after the Congress of Vienna, states expanded their surveillance apparatus in order to suppress ‘secret clubs’ and revolutionary movements aimed at undermining the dominant political authority, while various political and national uprisings and insurgencies ravaged Europe. At the turn of the 20th century, political violence employed by anarchists, primarily in the form of bombing and assassination campaigns, created an atmosphere of fear and panic in Europe, precipitating an increased transnational cooperation between European countries to act against the threats of non-state actors. Overall, state agents reacted with similar tactics and strategies against subversive elements, sometimes relying on bombings and assassinations as well.⁷⁸

Interestingly, we can observe similar discourses already in the 19th century pertaining to the generalization of non-state actors, their ideologies, and their use of political violence. As anarchist bombings and assassinations continued, many began to classify the entire anarchist movement as quasi-analogous to ‘terrorism’, failing to separate the acts of individuals from the entire movement. Historian Richard Jensen describes how press and state intermingled

⁷⁵ For instance, the PFLP and their hijackings of planes, see Bassam Abu Sharif and Uzi Mahnaimi, *Tried by Fire. The Searing True Story of Two Men at the Heart of the Struggle between the Arabs and the Jews* (Little, Brown and Company, 1995), 59.

⁷⁶ I will provide more detailed answers in chapter ‘5. Targeting practices: Civilians as victims of liberation movements’.

⁷⁷ Ben Saul, ‘Defining Terrorism: A Conceptual Minefield’, in *The Oxford Handbook of Terrorism*, First edition, by Erica Chenoweth et al., Handbook of Terrorism (Oxford University Press, 2019), 34, <https://ubdata.univie.ac.at/AC15574329>.

⁷⁸ Martin A. Miller, ‘European Political Violence during the Long Nineteenth Century’, in *The Oxford Handbook of Terrorism*, First edition, by Erica Chenoweth et al., Handbook of Terrorism (Oxford University Press, 2019), 105–11, <https://ubdata.univie.ac.at/AC15574329>.

and blurred the lines between ‘terrorism’ and ‘anarchism’, even attributing violent actions carried out by non-anarchists to the movement:

‘While in popular imagination the terrorist bomber and the anarchist became the same thing, in retrospect we know this was not true. Few anarchists became bomb-throwers or carried out violent acts. Moreover, not all the alleged “anarchist” terrorists were anarchists, the label “anarchist” simply becoming the easiest means for many journalists and some politicians and police to identify the myriad, often obscure malcontents who carried out violent deeds during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.’⁷⁹

In this respect, the problematic phenomenon of declaring specific actions as representative of an entire movement or group of people is a prevalent phenomenon in many historical and current discourses regarding ‘terrorism’. During the 1970s and 1980s, the Israeli Minister of Defence Ariel Sharon frequently declared to the public that ‘Palestinians are terrorists’, while his use of the word ‘terrorist’ was interchangeable with ‘Palestinian’.⁸⁰ Following the terror attacks on the World Trade Center in September 2001, Muslims became targets of anti-Muslim sentiments, as they were held responsible for the actions of the Islamist group al-Qaeda. This also included people who were wrongfully identified as Muslims.⁸¹

Moreover, as already briefly mentioned, categorisation of actions as ‘terroristic’ or ‘liberating’ is connected to the perspective. The subjectivity of the words ‘terrorism’ or ‘terrorist’ can be best exemplified by reading communiqués and other media of states and non-state actors. While the ANC classified its own armed operations as a ‘liberation struggle’ conducted by ‘freedom fighters’, in contrast to the violence coming from the Apartheid Regime, which was depicted as ‘terroristic’.⁸² On the other hand, the Apartheid regime described the actions of South African national liberation movements

⁷⁹ Richard Bach. Jensen, *The Battle against Anarchist Terrorism. An International History, 1878-1934* (Cambridge University Press, 2014), 7, <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&scope=site&db=nlebk&AN=656923>.

⁸⁰ Rashid I. Khalidi, *The Hundred Years' War on Palestine. A History of Settler Colonial Conquest and Resistance* (Profile Books, 2020), 151; Benny Morris, *Righteous Victims. A History of the Zionist-Arab Conflict. 1881-2001*, 1. Vintage Books ed. (Vintage Books, 2001), 534.

⁸¹ Carolyn Turpin-Petrosino, *Islamophobia and Acts of Violence: The Targeting and Victimization of American Muslims*, 1st edn, INTERPERSONAL VIOLENCE SERIES, ed. Carolyn Turpin-Petrosino (New York, 2022), <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780190922313.001.0001>.

⁸² For instance, Marga Holness, ‘Pretoria’s War in Angola’ in: Sechaba, February issue 1988, pp. 2–8.

as terroristic, even when the acts of violence were exclusively directed against infrastructure.⁸³

Even as I have outlined the multiple issues with this concept, this study will use the concept of ‘terrorism’ to refer to the deliberate killing or targeting of civilians by non-state actors in order to achieve political goals. This can manifest as a tactic within a larger ‘guerrilla warfare’ framework or be a complementary strategy to ‘guerrilla warfare’, where primarily the security apparatus of a state is the target. While members of the movements sometimes saw it as an extension of guerrilla warfare, had a broad definition of legitimate targets, or just had a different understanding of what should be classified as civilian, it still followed a similar logic: the targeting of non-combatants without a direct connection to the dominating regimes, in order to terrorize the population and ultimately force the governments to meet the liberation movement’s demands.

However, because of the overly politicised nature, in addition to their imprecise and simplifying character, the terms ‘terrorist’ and ‘terrorist organization’ will be avoided as analytical and descriptive tools, and only mentioned in certain contexts, such as the state’s categorization of liberation movements. However, liberation movements used ‘terrorism’ only in connection with ‘guerrilla warfare’, in contrast to some other non-state actors who almost exclusively base their strategies on attacks against civilians.⁸⁴

1.3. Legitimization of violence in national liberation movements

One of the biggest obstacles non-state actors could face is insufficient support for their cause. Throughout the 20th century, various social, political, and/or national movements emerged and contested the state in non-violent or violent ways. However, their success depended on a multitude of factors: material and personal conditions, their actual performance and strategy, national or international support, the stability of the state, etc. Some non-state actors succeeded without relying on external support. Still, in many instances, insurgency groups and/or political movements arguably would not have been able to achieve their strategic goals

⁸³ One of the most infamous instances has been the trial against several members of the Umkhonto we Sizwe leadership in 1962, including Nelson Mandela, who was indicted because of charges related to treason and ‘terrorism’, even though Umkhonto we Sizwe relied almost exclusively on sabotage in the first years of its struggle, see Simon Stevens, ‘Violence, Political Strategy and the Turn to Guerrilla Warfare by the Congress Movement in South Africa’, *Journal of Southern African Studies* (ABINGDON) 47, no. 6 (2021): 1020–23, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03057070.2021.1974224>.

⁸⁴ Amongst the best-known examples is al-Qaeda.

without the backing and material support of foreign powers. In Vietnam, Maoist China's material and logistical support for Ho Chi Minh and his communist faction, the Viet Minh, turned out to be indispensable in the struggle against the French colonial forces.⁸⁵

However, 'national liberation movements' of the Cold War period had a special status amongst non-state actors, as they were compared to other movements privileged in international law. First, the recognition by the UN as a 'national liberation movement' entailed the acceptance of the organization or movement as the official representative of a national and/or self-determination movement. Such recognition entailed not only diplomatic and legal consequences but also served as a symbolic gesture to acknowledge their struggle, in addition to preparing for inclusion into the international community.⁸⁶ It should be noted, however, that national liberation movements were not necessarily the exclusive representation of an entire national and/or self-determination movement. This is best exemplified by the PAC and the ANC, as both organizations had representative status for parts of the disenfranchised South African population.⁸⁷ This study distinguishes between 'liberation movements' and 'national liberation movements'. While the former category is the more broadly applied term that can encompass historic movements preceding the age of decolonization, the latter has a specific characteristic: the above-mentioned widespread international recognition as the representatives of their people.

Second, their status as a national liberation movement acknowledged their struggle against a colonial administration, a racist regime, or an alien occupation.⁸⁸ The most important document in this context is the Additional Protocols (I) to the Geneva Convention in 1977, a milestone in the codification of humanitarian law regarding conduct in armed conflict.⁸⁹ Article 1 (4) of the protocol stipulates that it applies to 'armed conflicts in which peoples are fighting against colonial domination and alien occupation and against racist regimes in the exercise of self-determination rights'.⁹⁰ Heather Wilson points out that the support by many states for Article 1 (4) was regarded as testament to the legitimacy of the use of force by liberation movements, and addresses 'the acceptability of the use of force by national

⁸⁵ Lovell, *Maoism: A Global History*, 229f.

⁸⁶ Seane Mabitsela, 'The National Liberation Movements in Southern Africa, 1962-1975: An Assessment of the Significance of the UN's Acceptance of Recognition by the OAU of the Movements', *Journal of African Union Studies* (London) 13 (2024): 6, <https://doi.org/10.31920/2050-4306/2024/13n2a1>.

⁸⁷ Wilson, *International Law and the Use of Force by National Liberation Movements*, 121.

⁸⁸ Zeray Yihdego, *The Arms Trade And International Law* (Hart Publishing, 2007), 167.

⁸⁹ Wilson, *International Law and the Use of Force by National Liberation Movements*, 127.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

movements in some circumstances.⁹¹ A crucial factor was the recognition by supranational organizations. In the case of African national liberation movements, the Organization for African Unity (OAU) proposed the inclusion of movements that were actively engaged in the struggle against the British and Portuguese colonial administrations. For the PLO, the Arab League's endorsement of the organization as the sole representative of the Palestinian people also paved the way for recognition as a national liberation movement.⁹²

Last, but not least, it is important to mention that liberation movements were privileged in international law in regard to the provision of weapons in the arms trade. Like all non-state actors fighting against the government, national liberation movements inherently operated without having access to state-administered resources, structures, and personnel in their home territories. Thus, national liberation movements had to acquire resources either through a supportive population within the country, by force, or through external sponsors of their cause. In particular, the last category proved to be crucial, as socialist states and/or countries from the Non-Aligned Movement felt obligated to aid people resisting colonialism and foreign occupation with arms and military personnel.⁹³

In the context of this thesis, how does the recognition of a national liberation movement's struggle and the legitimation of the use of force affect their use of political violence? Overall, this status has a vindicative effect on the actors of the national liberation movement, as after all, they had been vilified in the propaganda of the adversary government and their allies as 'terrorists' or 'outlaws'.⁹⁴ Their armed struggle campaigns were elevated to a 'just cause', a point that was reiterated in the media of the movements.⁹⁵ This also served as a moral argument during times when excessive violence was employed, addressing the legitimacy of their struggle even under harsher conditions, pointing to the structural and state violence that in many cases exceeded the violence employed by these liberation movements.⁹⁶

⁹¹ Ibid., 129.

⁹² Wilson, *International Law and the Use of Force by National Liberation Movements*, 118f.

⁹³ For instance, see military assistance from Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia to liberation movements during the Cold War, see Milorad Lazic, 'Arsenal of the Global South: Yugoslavia's Military Aid to Nonaligned Countries and Liberation Movements', *Nationalities Papers* (New York, USA) 49 (2021): 428ff, <https://doi.org/10.1017/nps.2020.6>.

⁹⁴ Ron. Nixon, *Selling Apartheid : South Africa's Global Propaganda War* (Pluto Press, 2016), 117 and 184, <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&scope=site&db=nlebk&AN=1337951>.

⁹⁵ For instance, here Sipho Jama, 'Questions of Justice and War' in: Sechaba, January issue 1985, p. 13–20.

⁹⁶ For instance, reports of massacres, see Burchet, Wilfred, 'South Africa's Road to Defeat' in: Sechaba, vol. 10, Third Quarter, 1985, p. 32–38.

Still, notions on the legitimacy of violence in anti-colonial or ‘liberation struggles’, sometimes even elevated to an imperative, predated the legal recognition. Some anti-colonial thinkers were convinced of the necessity of violence for the oppressed (and the oppressor). Arguably the most impactful one was the psychiatrist Frantz Fanon, whose experiences in a psychiatric hospital during the Algerian War for Independence (1954–1962) would leave a lasting impression on his writings.⁹⁷ His book ‘*The Wretched of the World*’ tells about the effects of colonial violence on the minds of the colonized and the colonizers. For the colonized to shake off this violence, they must themselves use violence against the colonizing force, for instance in the form of the settler. Revolutionary violence should here reclaim the unity, dignity, and respect of the colonized.⁹⁸ His books and essays were disseminated amongst anti-colonial movements worldwide and served as moral justification for acts of violence against settler-colonial populations.⁹⁹

Taking all this into account, it should be noted that legal and moral arguments for the use of political violence in liberation movements are more closely related to the end goal: national liberation and the reclaiming of deprived rights. The legitimization of their use of force (in a constrained manner) against colonial, foreign, or oppressive regimes, and the broad support that national liberation movements received, in particular from socialist states and the Non-Aligned Movement, were contributing factors that influenced these movements and their armed struggle campaigns.¹⁰⁰ For those reasons, in combination with their representative status at the UN, national liberation movements were unique among most non-state actors.

One might now think that all this lies in a fundamental contradiction with the formulated theoretical aspects in the last sub-chapter regarding the concepts of ‘terrorism’ and ‘guerrilla warfare’.¹⁰¹ That shouldn’t be surprising, as ‘terrorism’ and ‘liberation struggles’ are often presented as contrastingly opposed to each other, being two distinct categories on two opposite poles.¹⁰² However, to avoid misconceptions here, the author sees in ‘terrorism’ a form of political violence that is connected to military thinking. It could be a tactic, but also could become a strategy to achieve a goal. The descriptive value lies in its characterization as

⁹⁷ Max Silverman, *Frantz Fanon: Colonialism and Violence*, 1st edn, ed. David Murphy and Charles Forsdick (2009), 78, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt5vjgn6.9>.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 83ff.

⁹⁹ For instance, see chapter ‘3.1. The Algerian anti-colonial role model’.

¹⁰⁰ Liberation movements were aware of their privileged status, and referenced the Additional protocols of the Geneva Convention, see Jama, Siphon, ‘Questions of Justice and War’ in: Sechaba, January issue 1985, p. 13–20, 18.

¹⁰¹ See chapter ‘1.2. Discourses on the use of political violence by non-state actors’.

¹⁰² Jama, Siphon, ‘Questions of Justice and War’ in: Sechaba, January issue 1985, p. 13–20, 18.

pre-planned and deliberate violence against civilians to reach a preferable outcome.

Nevertheless, even though national liberation movements used terrorism to their advantage, this does not change the fact that their 'liberation struggles', *per se*, have been legitimized in international law and by large parts of the world.

2. The beginnings of violence in Palestinian and South African liberation movements

South African and Palestinians national liberation differed drastically in their respective approaches to violence as a strategy. This shouldn't be too surprising given the disparate structural circumstances and other social, economic, and political factors that these self-determination movements have faced. As outlined in the previous chapter, the tendency of armed groups to use violence in an organized fashion and as a strategy depended on multifaceted conditions and was rarely a lightheaded and ill-conceived choice. Violence as a political and system-changing tool entails risks for the movement as a whole. Extensive and disproportionate use could alienate docile supporters within the movement, be utilized by the propaganda machine of their enemies, and spark severe diplomatic blowback by beneficiary states, thus threatening external financial and material support. Additionally, colonial or ruling authorities usually responded to armed and guerrilla campaigns with extraordinary force. It served as a pretext to repress more peaceful forms of resistance and could enforce or tighten restrictive systems upon the targeted population.¹⁰³

Structurally, the origins of both struggles are connected to the arrival of European settlers and the unfolding conflicts for land and resources with the indigenous populations living in the settled territories. In South Africa, the first permanent colony was established at Table Bay in 1652 by the *Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie* (VOC). The charter company chose the location for its natural port, as the colony supplied trading ships on the routes to Europe or Southeast Asia with materials and provisions.¹⁰⁴ Already in the first decades after the founding, the colonists competed with local indigenous communities over pastureland and cattle. While wars, diseases, and trade imbalances reduced the power of the indigenous

¹⁰³ The dynamics and dialectical relationship between non-state actors and state authorities, which lie inherently in conflict, is explained by Pearlman, *Violence, Nonviolence, and the Palestinian National Movement*, 4f.

¹⁰⁴ Robert Ross, 'Khoesan and Immigrants. The Emergence of Colonial Society in the Cape, 1500–1800', in *The Cambridge History of South Africa. Volume 1: From Early Times to 1885*, ed. Carolyn Hamilton et al. (Cambridge Univ. Press, 2010), 173ff, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/CHOL9780521517942>.

population, the settlers successively expanded the borders of the Cape Colony and took possession of new territories, in addition to the occasional stealing of cattle from the indigenous inhabitants.¹⁰⁵ The settler-colonial logic behind this process accelerated in the next centuries, as the influx of new settlers pushed the frontier further inward into the continent, leading repeatedly to wars with local states and the dispossession or enslavement of the indigenous population.¹⁰⁶

In the case of the Palestinians, the first Zionist settlements were founded in 1882 and located in the centre of Ottoman Palestine. The persecution and discrimination of Jews in Europe convinced early Zionists that the Jews should resolve their plight through the auto-emancipation of the Jewish people in an autonomous or independent political entity.¹⁰⁷ While other places, such as Argentina and Uganda, were presented as favourable destinations, many within the Zionist movement desired to migrate to *Eretz Yisrael*, the spiritual homeland of Judaism.¹⁰⁸ As soon as the first settlers arrived in Palestine, Palestinian Arabs understood Zionist aspirations, fearing that the proposed Jewish political entity would violate the rights of the indigenous inhabitants. This belief was reinforced by the arrogant attitude of many Zionist settlers. As Europeans, they regarded themselves as culturally superior in comparison to the ‘backward’ Arab population.¹⁰⁹ Furthermore, the Zionist movement’s intensified efforts to purchase vast amounts of land from wealthy Arab families or local community leaders led to the expulsion and dispossession of tenant farmers residing on these lands, further increasing the animosity and hostility against the settlers.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁵ Ibid. 177–182.

¹⁰⁶ The various frontier wars of the 19th century exemplify how indigenous people, such as the Xhosa, contested with settlers over land and how colonial domination gradually restricted them to ever-shrinking territories, see Norman Etherington et al., ‘From Colonial Hegemonies to Imperial Conquest, 1840-1880’, in *The Cambridge History of South Africa. Volume 1: From Early Times to 1885*, ed. Carolyn Hamilton et al. (Cambridge Univ. Press, 2010), 322–26, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/CHOL9780521517942>.

¹⁰⁷ While some Jews argued for the total assimilation of the Jewish people into European societies, Zionists believed that European nations would eventually reject Jews and therefore proposed the idea of a Jewish state, but, depending on the person and proposal, with varying degrees of autonomy and self-governance. The term ‘auto-emancipation’ comes from Leo Pinsker, who was among the first intellectual advocates of the idea, as he wrote his pamphlet ‘*Autoemanzipation*’ after a pogrom in Odessa in 1882, see Shlomo Avineri, *The Making of Modern Zionism. The Intellectual Origins of the Jewish State*, revised paperback (Basic Books, 2017), 77ff.

¹⁰⁸ Anita Shapira, *Israel: A History*, paperback edition (Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2015), 20–24.

¹⁰⁹ Benny Morris, *Righteous Victims. A History of the Zionist-Arab Conflict. 1881-2001*, 1. Vintage Books ed. (Vintage Books, 2001), 45–50; Rashid Khalidi emphasizes that, especially after the ‘Balfour declaration’ and the establishment of the Mandate of Palestine, the voices of many Arab intellectuals became vocal against Zionist aspirations, see Khalidi, *The Hundred Years’ War on Palestine. A History of Settler Colonial Conquest and Resistance*, 26.

¹¹⁰ Khalidi, *The Hundred Years’ War on Palestine. A History of Settler Colonial Conquest and Resistance*, 27.

However, even as colonization was the common cause, notable differences must be addressed. First, whereas the indigenous population in South Africa suffered under internal displacement within the state, Palestinians were largely expelled from their homelands. While the indigenous South Africans had to endure displacements and resettlement into Bantustans, the Palestinians were dispersed throughout the entire Middle East, where they live in large numbers as stateless people to this day. This can be partially attributed to South African settlers' reliance on slaves, cheap labour workers, or propertyless peasants to maintain their socioeconomic status in the South African economy. The Zionist program 'Conquest of Labour', which sought the establishment of a Jewish proletariat in Palestine, prevented dependence on Palestinians as a labour force.¹¹¹ However, Palestinians who were allowed to remain within the internationally recognized borders of the state became citizens of Israel, and even though they endured a brutal military rule for the first 20 years of the state's existence, eventually they had more inclusive opportunities regarding political participation and individual liberties than disenfranchised South Africans who experienced the effects of public segregation on a daily basis.

Second, the forms and temporal scope of the colonization varied, as the initial settlements in both cases were at different ends of colonial history. Whereas the settler-colonialism of the Dutch and later the British in South Africa was a project spanning several centuries, Zionist settlement occurred only in a timeframe of around 70 years. The latter also emerged in the late phase of Imperialism when colonial ventures were already questioned or beginning to decline. Another peculiarity pertaining to the Zionist case is the absence of a metropole and the already existing national character of the movement before the settlement.¹¹²

Following these observations, the next two subchapters focus on the individual histories of both struggles, as I aim to highlight the similarities and differences that led to the adoption of violence as a strategy by the Palestinian and South African liberation movements.

2.1. 'The Struggle' in South Africa before 1960

The violent subjugation of South Africa by European powers culminated in the British Empire's dismantling of the Zulu Kingdom in 1879, ending the rule of the last sovereign African state that could resist British imperialism. The end of African independence also entailed questions on how black inhabitants should be treated within the South African

¹¹¹ However, Palestinian labour became essential for the Israeli economy after the Six-Day War in 1967.

¹¹² Khalidi, *The Hundred Years' War on Palestine. A History of Settler Colonial Conquest and Resistance*, 9–14; Michael Burawoy, 'Palestine through a South African Lens', *New Left Review* 153 (June 2025): 137–40.

colonial society and whether they should receive the same legal rights as the white population. The British colonial administration previously granted some indigenous people equality before the law, notably the Khoekhoe in 1828. Furthermore, the British abolished slavery in 1834 and opened, since 1872, the possibility for 'Africans' and 'Coloureds' to participate politically in the respectable government.¹¹³

However, the prospect of emancipation for non-white populations was vehemently challenged by a substantial part of the white citizens. While a set of discriminatory laws had already been introduced against the non-white population in the last two decades of the 19th century¹¹⁴, the process of disenfranchisement and exclusion from tenure accelerated after the Second Boer War, when South Africa consolidated as a dominion of the British Empire and became the uncontested power at the tip of Southern Africa. In order to pacify the Boers but also to protect the economic interests of the European-descendent population, the Empire adhered to its discriminatory laws directed against the black population, which consisted, according to the South African authorities, of the indigenous population and the descendants of sub-Saharan African slaves. As Boer landlords relied on the cheap labour of black tenants and harboured profound racist attitudes towards people of African ancestry, the 'Vereenigen Treaty' stipulated that the black population should not receive citizenship until a form of self-government was attained.¹¹⁵

Eight years later, when the self-governed 'Union of South Africa' was founded, 'black' and 'Asian' inhabitants were still not granted the same legal rights as the 'whites'; rather, the discriminatory practices were expanded. At this point, South Africa used the established legal institutions to impose additional discriminatory laws in favour of the white minority, such as the Land Act of 1913, the Native Act of 1923, and the Native Urban Areas Act of 1923, all of which were part of a series of laws that laid the legal foundation for the future enforcement of the spatial segregation of South Africa into separate areas for 'races'.¹¹⁶ In the decades after the Union's proclamation, the South African government legally enshrined segregation

¹¹³ Sheridan Johns, *Protest and Hope 1882-1934, Volume 1. From Protest to Challenge. A Documentary History of African Politics in South Africa, 1882-1964.*, 3. paperback print., ed. Thomas Karis and Gwendolen M. Carter, Hoover Institution Publications / 89 (Hoover Institution on War, Revolution and Peace, Stanford Univ., 1990), 3.

¹¹⁴ Notable examples are for South Asian labour workers, the Natal Franchise Law (1896), or for the Black population, the Glen Grey Act in 1894.

¹¹⁵ Shula Marks, 'War and Union, 1899-1910', in *The Cambridge History of South Africa. Volume 2: 1885-1994*, ed. Robert Ross et al., Cambridge History of South Africa (Cambridge University Press, 2011), 164f.

¹¹⁶ Bill Freund, 'South Africa. The Union Years, 1910-1948. Political and Economic Foundations', in *The Cambridge History of South Africa. Volume 2: 1885-1994*, ed. Robert Ross et al., Cambridge History of South Africa (Cambridge University Press, 2011), 236.

further, affecting not only matters pertaining to land and movement but also labour, civil rights, and private life. The most extreme period in the institutionalization of the Apartheid system began in 1948, when the 'National Party' (NP) won the national elections. The party already prohibited mixed marriages in the next year, and legally codified in 1950 the arbitrary separation of South African inhabitants into the racial categories of 'white', 'black', 'coloured', or 'Asian'. Additionally, the party was responsible for the implementation of the 'Homeland' policy, also known as 'Bantustans', which were promoted by the South African government as self-administrative political entities for the so-called 'natives', but were basically just another political structure to guarantee white supremacy.¹¹⁷

The opposition to racial discrimination and segregation in South Africa can already be traced back to the 19th century. Parts of the black population commenced the struggle for equal rights during the 1880s, as intellectuals founded organizations whose purpose was to strengthen African unity and formulate strategies to be represented in the government. Furthermore, newly established newspapers by black residents of the colonies covered legislative developments and criticized the gradual curtailment of the black population's rights.¹¹⁸ Overall, African approaches to politics at the turn of the 20th century were divided into two camps: political organization in cooperation with solidaric whites based on non-racial equality, or exclusively African organizations which strictly believed that 'African unity' could only be preserved without interference from 'European influence'.¹¹⁹ These sharp ideological differences should define so-called 'African politics' in South Africa and were the foundation for the famous secession of the PAC from the ANC after the proclamation of the 'Freedom Charter' in 1955.

Following the founding of the Union, the ANC was established as a response to the disenfranchisement and discrimination of the Union's black inhabitants. Community leaders and intellectuals convened on the 8th January 1912, forming a congress to formulate their grievances and express their disavowal regarding the political and legal status quo. Nevertheless, the ANC's purpose was not confined solely to challenging racial discrimination but was also designed to preserve unity among the different indigenous groups in South Africa, in order to prevent conflicts between the communities and the weakening of their

¹¹⁷ Deborah Posel, 'The Apartheid Project, 1948-1970', in *The Cambridge History of South Africa. Volume 2: 1885-1994*, vol. 2, ed. Robert Ross et al., Cambridge History of South Africa (Cambridge University Press, 2011), 335 and 348–51.

¹¹⁸ Johns, *Protest and Hope 1882-1934, Volume 1. From Protest to Challenge. A Documentary History of African Politics in South Africa, 1882-1964.*, 4f.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 6f.

common cause.¹²⁰ Following the Land Act of 1913, which allocated 90 percent of the land to the white population, the ANC commenced its first campaign by objecting to the Act before the South African government, albeit to no avail. Furthermore, a mission was sent to London in 1914, hoping that the British King George V would intervene on behalf of his African subjects and that the British public would solidarize with and support the black population in South Africa. However, the ANC met with government officials who were unwilling to meet the delegation's demands. After the outbreak of the First World War and internal disputes within the delegation, most of the delegates returned home to South Africa.¹²¹

Overall, the ANC's approach here was to resolve the existing issues through protest and negotiation. This commitment to non-violence remained publicly unchanged from 1912 to 1960 and was reflected in various forms of non-violent resistance. One common tactic for black residents of South Africa to protest against new legislative regulations or to improve their economic conditions was the strike. The increasing class consciousness of the proletariat at the beginning of the 20th century and the unionization of workers worldwide also affected South African society. One of the first major strikes occurred in 1918, when thousands of mining workers demanded higher wages.¹²² The mining strike of 1946 could mobilize between 50.000 and 100.000 participants, condemning the harsh working conditions for the primarily black labourers, who expected better salaries and benefits.¹²³

Another tactic to resist discriminatory laws and treatment was the organization of protests. Demonstrations frequently occurred after the introduction of new legislation and obligations directed against the non-white population. In 1913, the Orange Free State introduced new regulations on passes, which forced African women to buy passes monthly or face prison. After appeals to the government had failed, a protest of 600 women erupted in the town of Bloemfontein. Additional demonstrations were held in other places such as Jagersfontein and Winburg.¹²⁴ Also, under the supervision of the ANC and the South African Congress of Trade Unions (SACTU), several boycott campaigns were planned and conducted. Two notable examples involved the boycott of a bus service after an increase in fares and the general

¹²⁰ Francis Meli, *A History of the ANC. South Africa Belongs to Us* (Zimbabwe Publishing House; James Currey; Indiana University Press, 1989), 36–40.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 42–47.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 49f.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 105f.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 50f.

boycott of potatoes because of the inhumane working conditions for blacks harvesting these crops.¹²⁵

While non-violent forms had been the most common form of resistance, the further institutionalization of the Apartheid regime and the deterioration of civil rights for the non-white population slowly convinced many members of the anti-Apartheid opposition that their efforts were not sufficient and effective enough. The protests did not have the desired effect and couldn't relieve black Africans from their plight.¹²⁶ Also, the tighter grip and increased surveillance of the South African regime, which started to act against communist movements, alarmed figures within the anti-Apartheid movement.¹²⁷ Older literature identifies the 'Sharpeville Massacre' as the defining event that precipitated the armed struggle of organizations such as the ANC.¹²⁸

However, more recent research emphasizes that plans for armed campaigns against the Apartheid regime preceded the year 1960. The first proposals for organized violent operations against the South African government were formulated during the 1950s. Already in 1952, Nelson Mandela contemplated with close friends the feasibility of armed struggle in the near future. Oliver Tambo, the general secretary of the ANC between 1955 and 1958, mentioned that in 1955 some members suggested the use of violence for their cause, although, according to him, the conditions had not yet been ripe to seriously consider that decision. In the eyes of some ANC officials, violent resistance should be avoided, but in their assessment of the situation, it became inevitable.¹²⁹

Furthermore, the actual turn to armed struggle by many organizations within the South African anti-Apartheid movement seemed to be based on a more general acceptance of violence among the population. Several popular revolts and rebellions were started in the 1950s, with most uprisings occurring during the year 1959. Some ANC cadets started to burn farmers' fields on their own initiative.¹³⁰ The establishment of the 'Bantustans' in 1958 and

¹²⁵ Ibid., 129f.

¹²⁶ Pallo Jordan and Maharaj, 'South Africa and the Turn to Armed Resistance', 14.

¹²⁷ Ellis, 'The Genesis of the ANC's Armed Struggle in South Africa 1948-1961', 658f.

¹²⁸ Meli, for instance, mentions that the events of Sharpeville and the violent repression of protests afterwards entailed the adoption of tactics from guerrilla struggle and generally had 'been the beginnings of an armed resistance movement', see Meli, *A History of the ANC. South Africa Belongs to Us*, 143f; that historians now have set back the date regarding armed struggle was also mentioned by Stevens in: Simon Stevens, 'Violence, Political Strategy and the Turn to Guerrilla Warfare by the Congress Movement in South Africa', *Journal of Southern African Studies* (ABINGDON) 47 (2021): 1015, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03057070.2021.1974224>.

¹²⁹ Ellis, 'The Genesis of the ANC's Armed Struggle in South Africa 1948-1961', 659.

¹³⁰ Pallo Jordan and Maharaj, 'South Africa and the Turn to Armed Resistance', 17.

the subsequent restriction of movement, especially for women¹³¹, had been a major reason for the outbreaks in 1959. The Apartheid system's gradual institutional entrenchment and the ineffectiveness of protests and boycotts, which were only able to cause short-term results for the opponents, shifted the attention from non-violence to violence.

Nelson Mandela outlined in his autobiography why non-violent tactics were used in the first place. He describes there how the anti-Apartheid movement was influenced by Mahatma Gandhi and the peaceful tenets of his '*satyagraha*'-concept. However, for Mandela, this commitment to non-violence would be upheld only if the political circumstances allowed it:

‘Others said that we should approach this issue not from the point of view of principles but of tactics, and that we should employ the method demanded by the conditions. If a particular method or tactic enabled us to defeat the enemy, then it should be used. In this case, the state was far more powerful than we, and any attempts at violence by us would be devastatingly crushed. This made nonviolence a practical necessity rather than an option. This was my view, and I saw nonviolence in the Gandhian model not as an inviolable principle but as a tactic to be used as the situation demanded. The principle was not so important that the strategy should be used even when it was self-defeating, as Gandhi himself believed. I called for nonviolent protest for as long as it was effective.’¹³²

These considerations regarding the adoption of a more violent approach coincided not only with the political developments within South Africa but also were a consequence of global dynamics. During the 1950s, several anti-colonial or socialist movements achieved their strategic goals through prolonged armed campaigns. The victory of the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) in 1949, the French defeat in Vietnam in 1954, and the anti-colonial war in Algeria beginning in 1954 inspired movements throughout the 'Global South'.¹³³ Strategies and tactics conceived in the most successful revolutions and liberation struggles would serve as blueprints for many liberation movements, as members travelled to various

¹³¹ Women had a special vanguard role in many protests against the Apartheid regime. While the South African government initially only restricted the movement of the black male population, the extension of pass laws to black women during the 1950s entailed mass demonstrations by women. One of the biggest protests of the year 1956, organized as a 'silent protest' in an amphitheatre, could attract around 20,000 female participants, see Meli, *A History of the ANC. South Africa Belongs to Us*, 132.

¹³² Mandela, *Long Walk to Freedom: The Autobiography of Nelson Mandela*, 147.

¹³³ Ibid., 12f.

‘global hubs of revolution’¹³⁴ to profit from the revolutionaries’ know-how and personal experiences in armed struggle. Ironically, Mandela found inspiration in the Zionist movement for his armed struggle campaign. In his Autobiography he claimed that his friend and comrade Arthur Goldreich, a former member of the Zionist underground organization Palmach, instructed him in the basics of guerrilla warfare. In addition to that, he was also impressed by Menachem Begin’s book ‘The Revolt’, comparing the situation of Irgun, operating as a guerrilla force in a country without forests and mountains, to his own struggle.¹³⁵

According to Stephen Ellis, the Communist Party of South Africa (CPSA) was the first political organization to launch an armed campaign against the Apartheid Regime.¹³⁶ However, other authors, such as Thula Simpson, disagree with this thesis and point to methodological issues regarding Ellis article.¹³⁷ Nevertheless, even if the CPSA did not initiate the armed struggle in South Africa, their actions preceding the Sharpeville show how external influences shaped the decision to take up arms. When the South African government banned the party, party structures were officially dissolved but later clandestinely re-established and continued to exist in the political underground with a slightly different name.¹³⁸ The party maintained close contact with the Soviet Union and the People’s Republic of China, both of which provided South African members with funds and ideological guidance. The dependence on these superpowers also encompassed an unspoken prohibition on unilateral decisions such as the commencement of armed struggle. Previously, the party had to wait several years for the Soviet Union’s approval to collaborate with Black nationalists in South Africa. However, as Moscow and Beijing were eager during the 1960s to support national liberation movements that were aligned with their political principles, China and the Soviet Union endorsed armed struggle as early as 1960.¹³⁹

The South African Communist Party was not the only party that sought foreign assistance from the Soviet Union and China. The ANC also had communists among its members, and

¹³⁴ My concept of ‘global hubs of revolution’ derives from Eric Burton’s idea: ‘Hubs of decolonization’. He describes hubs as central localities in Africa, where revolutionaries, anti-colonial resistance fighters, members of liberation movements, etc., gather in specific cities and exchange ideas, embrace their anti-colonial struggles, form networks and structures, all with the support of the local government, see Lena Dallywater et al., eds, ‘Hubs of Decolonization: African Liberation Movements and “Eastern” Connections in Cairo, Accra, and Dar Es Salaam’, in *Southern African Liberation Movements and the Global Cold War ‘East’*. *Transnational Activism 1960-1990*, Dialectics of the Global 4 (De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2019), 25–32.

¹³⁵ Mandela, *Long Walk to Freedom: The Autobiography of Nelson Mandela*, 326 and 334.

¹³⁶ Ellis, ‘The Genesis of the ANC’s Armed Struggle in South Africa 1948-1961’, 661.

¹³⁷ Thula Simpson, ‘Nelson Mandela and the Genesis of the ANC’s Armed Struggle: Notes on Method’, *Journal of Southern African Studies* (Oxford) 44 (2018): 138–41, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03057070.2018.1404264>.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 659.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 661–664.

many of them had connections to the most influential Communist parties of that time. Walter Sisulu embarked on a trip in 1953 to Beijing and explored, following a suggestion of Nelson Mandela, the possibility of China's material support in an armed struggle campaign. However, Chinese officials assessed that the situation in South Africa was unfit for armed struggle, and despite Sisulu's protests and insistence that the ANC was battle-ready, the Communist Party officials declined his requests for assistance and advice.¹⁴⁰ The events in China prove that, for some ANC members, the strategy of armed struggle had already left the realm of being a noncommittal option among many and was, at least temporarily, actively pursued.

In regards to the Pan-Africanist Congress, the organization emerged after it split off from the ANC. Many members had first been part of the ANC Youth League and harboured a more African-nationalistic ideology. From 1952 onwards, tensions grew within the ANC, as the Africanists within the party envisioned a state that was ruled by 'Africans', while the proclamation of the Freedom Charter of 1955 and the willingness to cooperate with democratic organizations from other 'racial groups' were fiercely criticized by the African nationalists, believing that it would maintain white rule over the land. Eventually, the disillusioned Africanists resigned from the party in 1958 and founded their own organization, the PAC, some months later.¹⁴¹

The Sharpeville Massacre in 1960 against demonstrators of the organization convinced the PAC that their struggle had to transitioned from non-violence to armed struggle. Like the ANC, the PAC formed a military wing called 'Poqo', which some years later was succeeded by APLA. One core characteristic of the PAC's armed struggle campaign has been the indispensability of armed struggle for the liberation of the 'African' population. The organization wanted to proceed with this strategy until the white-minority regime was abolished.¹⁴² To achieve this goal, PAC members were, similar to the ANC, influenced by external armed campaigns and tried to adopt the tactics and strategies of other liberation struggles on the South African battlefield. According to Harries and Kondlo, Poqo might have been influenced by the Mau-Mau movement in Kenya, noting parallel structures and customs in both movements, and pointing, next to logistical and operational similarities, at the

¹⁴⁰ Thula Simpson, *Umkhonto We Sizwe. The ANC's Armed Struggle* (Penguin Books, 2016), 17f, E-Book.

¹⁴¹ Kwandiwe Kondlo and Patrick Harries, *In the Twilight of the Revolution: The Pan Africanist Congress of Azania (South Africa) 1959-1994* (Basler Afrika Bibliographien, 2009), 49–60.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 232 and 238.

prominence of millenarianism, an oath of secrecy within the movement, in addition to a similar selection of targets, namely collaborators, policemen, and white settlers.¹⁴³

2.2. The Palestinian Question before and after the *Nakba*

After the First World War, the Levant was still under occupation by the Entente. The defeat of the Ottoman Empire sparked hopes among the Arab elites for self-rule and autonomy free from foreign influence. Indeed, the British had promised in the McMahon-Hussein correspondence in 1915, the Sharif of Mecca, Hussein bin Ali, that for his rebellion against the Ottomans, the Arabs would be rewarded with the formation of a state encompassing the Arabian Peninsula, Syria, and Mesopotamia. However, European colonial powers had their own interests in the region. One year later, British and French officials secretly planned to divide Syria and Mesopotamia into their zones of interest. This infamous plan is today known as the Sykes-Picot Agreement.

With the introduction of the Mandate system, the League of Nations provided the legal legitimization for this scheme. The trusteeship of the mandates was designed to guarantee that the former colonies and territories of the German and Ottoman Empires would not cause further conflicts between competing colonial powers. A common argument for this system was the continuation of the so-called ‘civilizing mission’, as the people living in these mandates did not have, in the eyes of the European overlords, the ability or capability to form modern nation-states. This belief was based on racist perceptions and notions of European cultural superiority at the time.¹⁴⁴

The Mandate of Palestine, founded under these formulated principles, was thus an essential construct for the British to expand and consolidate their influence in the Middle East. However, one further aspect characterized this political entity. The Second article of the Constitution from 1922 stipulated that:

,The Mandatory shall be responsible for placing the country under such political; administrative and economic conditions as will secure the establishment of the Jewish national home, as laid down in the preamble, and the development of self-governing

¹⁴³ Ibid., 238.

¹⁴⁴ Nele Matz, ‘Civilization and the Mandate System under the League of Nations as Origin of Trusteeship’, in *Max Planck Yearbook of United Nations Law*, Volume 9, ed. Armin von Bogandy et al. (Brill, 2005), 52–56.

institutions, and also for safeguarding the civil and religious rights of all the inhabitants of Palestine, irrespective of race and religion.¹⁴⁵

On the one hand, a Jewish homeland, already guaranteed in the 1917 Balfour Declaration, should be created, and on the other, the rights of the local population residing there should not be infringed. Palestinian Arabs predominantly opposed the establishment of a Jewish homeland, as it went diametrically against their own interests and quest for self-determination.¹⁴⁶

However, in the competition with the Zionists for the land, Palestinians stood on unfavourable terrain. The British had no interest in releasing the Mandate of Palestine for the foreseeable future, as the geostrategic location of the region secured the sea and land routes to India. For the Empire, the national competition between Palestinian Arabs and Zionists in the following decades opened an opportunity to ensure that both forces focused on each other and would not rise up against the British colonial rulers. Moreover, Zionists could secure key positions within the Mandate administration and received more support from the British than the Arabs could ever hope for. Overall, many British officials preferred Zionists because of a perceived cultural affinity, as the overwhelming bulk of Jewish immigrants at this point originated from Europe. Some figures were even ideological supporters of Zionism, notably Winston Churchill or Herbert Samuel, the first High Commissioner of the Mandate.¹⁴⁷

Organized resistance of Palestinian Arabs against Zionism emerged already in the Ottoman Empire. Displeased with the Jewish immigration and Zionist land purchases, influential figures protested at local municipalities and before the authorities in Constantinople, objecting to the Zionist acquisition of land. Anti-Zionist, but also antisemitic ideas, became more prevalent as newspapers such as *al-Filastin*, founded in 1911, or pamphlets called for a patriotic struggle against Zionism.¹⁴⁸ Following the British occupation of Palestine in 1917, nationalists and local elites gathered in several congresses over the next few years, organizing under the platform that the region of Palestine should either be part of a Pan-Arab, Syrian, or Palestinian state, while also rejecting the idea of establishing a Jewish homeland in this

¹⁴⁵ United Nations. *Mandates for Palestine, text approved by the League of Nations Council 19th Session, 13th Meeting, 24 July 1922, UN Library Reference C.529. M.314. 1922 VI. 24 July 1922.* Accessed on the 07th November 2025, <https://www.un.org/unispal/document/auto-insert-201057/>.

¹⁴⁶ Khalidi, *The Hundred Years' War on Palestine. A History of Settler Colonial Conquest and Resistance*, 34–39.

¹⁴⁷ Khalidi, *The Hundred Years' War on Palestine. A History of Settler Colonial Conquest and Resistance*, 24–27; Morris, *Righteous Victims. A History of the Zionist-Arab Conflict. 1881-2001*, 97–99; Rashid I. Khalidi, *The Iron Cage. The Story of the Palestinian Struggle for Statehood* (Beacon Press, 2007), 31–48..

¹⁴⁸ Morris, *Righteous Victims. A History of the Zionist-Arab Conflict. 1881-2001*, 61–66.

region. Members of these congresses formulated protest notes or memoranda, published articles in various newspapers, and sent delegations to peace conferences and commissions in 1919 and 1920, where the missions insisted on Arab self-determination without a Jewish homeland.¹⁴⁹

However, Palestinian society could not maintain unity amid political differences and the struggle for power among fellow nationalists. While Palestinian political factions were almost unanimously antagonistic against the Zionist enterprise, some political figures were willing to negotiate. Still, the conflicts over power and influence curtailed the ability to engage seriously with Zionists diplomatically, as the most radical faction assembled under the authoritarian guidance of the Mufti of Jerusalem, Hajj Amin Al-Husseini, who dominated the Palestinian political landscape through intimidation and coercion for several years, preventing any form of a peaceful settlement.¹⁵⁰

One of the most prevalent forms of resistance against Zionism was the boycott. Arab political leaders rejected any proposal for a recognized representative body institutionalized by the British administration, as the implementation was always conditioned on the legitimization of the creation of a Jewish homeland.¹⁵¹ Institutional and economic boycotts gained participants during the 1935 strike and subsequent revolt, although Palestinian boycott activities were strictly monitored and upheld with force, as boycott breakers were attacked and beaten by local bands enforcing the boycotts against Jewish companies.¹⁵² In the final phase of the Mandate, the Arab League established boycott committees that targeted not only Zionist institutions but also goods and services from Zionist companies.¹⁵³

Throughout the Mandate period, violence accompanied the conflict. The first major outbursts in 1920, 1921, or 1929 against Jewish inhabitants of Palestine were the result of a multitude of factors but were not premeditated or deliberate. The tensions underlying the nationalistic conflict, rumours about the possible takeover of places of religious significance, Anti-Zionist and antisemitic propaganda, anger about the continued land purchases, and the dispossession

¹⁴⁹ Pearlman, *Violence, Nonviolence, and the Palestinian National Movement*, 29ff.

¹⁵⁰ The treatment of the Mufti's rivals and alleged 'traitors' had been researched by Hillel Cohen, *Army of Shadows: Palestinian Collaboration with Zionism, 1917-1948* (University of California Press, 2008), 43–65, 95–120 and 202–29. Some historians even suggest that Hajj Amin Al-Husseini played a decisive role in the failures of the Great Arab Revolt (1936–1939) and the outcome of the First Arab-Israeli War (1947–1949), see Kabha, *The Palestinian People. Seeking Sovereignty and State*, 15f, 40ff and 92ff.

¹⁵¹ Khalidi, *The Iron Cage. The Story of the Palestinian Struggle for Statehood*, 31–35.

¹⁵² Cohen, *Army of Shadows: Palestinian Collaboration with Zionism, 1917-1948*, 97–105.

¹⁵³ Thomas Mayer, 'Arab Unity of Action and the Palestine Question, 1945-48', *Middle Eastern Studies* (London) 22 (1986): 336, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00263208608700669>.

and expulsion of tenant farmers contributed to a dangerous situation when many Palestinian Arabs became frustrated and hostile toward Jews in Palestine. Still, Arab leaders and notables condemned these major instances of violence and helped to quell the attacks, leading to a cessation of violence and even the prevention of further escalation.¹⁵⁴

Nevertheless, violence as a strategy was adopted by the Palestinian national movement during the 1930s. As the situation of European Jews deteriorated further, more and more Jewish refugees fled to Palestine. Fearing that the immigrants would soon outnumber the indigenous population, the leaders of all major Arab factions demanded the immediate stopping of ships carrying immigrants to Palestinian ports. Furthermore, the founding of Zionist paramilitary organizations such as *Haganah* and *Etzel* instilled the fear that the Zionists would eventually conquer Palestine by force.¹⁵⁵

A major turning point was the Great Revolt of 1936–1939. Preceding the revolt was a general strike and the formation of the Arab High Committee, which coordinated the ensuing boycott and strike campaign over the following months. Furthermore, Arab bands started to attack Zionist settlements and British infrastructure. Counter-reprisals by Zionist armed underground organizations and the British efforts to disband the armed bandits exacerbated the situation and culminated in a full-scale guerrilla war. After three years, the British eventually violently suppressed the rebels by force, but the government in London also met some of their demands. The proclamation of the White Paper in 1939 curtailed Jewish immigration to Palestine and promised an independent Palestinian state within the next 10 years.¹⁵⁶

However, the Second World War and its aftershocks affected the British Empire's Middle East policy tremendously. As it struggled to maintain its colonial Empire and was unable to mitigate the tensions between the Zionist and the Palestinian Arabs, the British government handed the Mandate back to the successor organization of the League of Nations, the United Nations (UN). In an attempt to resolve the Zionist-Arab conflict, a delegation of the United Nations Special Committee on Palestine (UNSCOP) was dispatched and arrived in Palestine during the spring of 1947. Arab leaders boycotted the Committee and refused to meet its delegates, claiming they had no authority to decide over their self-determination as a people. After the delegation's return to New York and following intense discussions, the Committee

¹⁵⁴ Pearlman, *Violence, Nonviolence, and the Palestinian National Movement*, 32–34 and 37–39.

¹⁵⁵ Khalidi, *The Iron Cage. The Story of the Palestinian Struggle for Statehood*, 105–14.

¹⁵⁶ A more detailed account of the events in regards to the Great Revolt is provided by Kabha, *The Palestinian People. Seeking Sovereignty and State*, 1–15. On the White Paper, see Morris, *Righteous Victims. A History of the Zionist-Arab Conflict. 1881-2001*, 155–59.

proposed in its majority report the partition of the Mandate into a Jewish and an Arab state. Based on this report, the UN General Assembly voted on the 29th of November 1947, on ‘UN-General Assembly Resolution 181 (II)’, which was supported by a two-thirds majority.¹⁵⁷

The acceptance of the resolution by the UN General Assembly shocked the Arab population of Palestine. Political and religious leaders called for a general strike and boycott of the resolution. Violent exchanges between the Zionist and Arab paramilitaries in the meantime, intensified and escalated into a full-blown civil war. While local militias and Arab volunteer armies initially had the initiative, the *Yishuv*’s gradual mobilization of the population strengthened Zionist forces, whereas a lack of internal discipline and military coordination weakened Arab military power. After the proclamation of the State of Israel on the 14th of May 1948, the armies of several Arab countries invaded the region, but were unable to defeat the newly founded state. Following one year of fighting and several ceasefires, the weapons eventually fell silent. For the Palestinian Arabs, the First Arab-Israeli War was a catastrophe, as 750.000, a substantial part of them intentionally removed by the Zionist militias or later the Israeli army, were uprooted from their communities and became refugees.¹⁵⁸

In the following years, Israel prevented the repatriation of refugees to their former communities and destroyed depopulated villages. Although some of the expelled were able to cross the borders and return to their places of origin, many were forced to leave again. These border incursions gradually became violent as the Israeli army started to shoot at intruders, while Palestinians armed themselves. The process of escalation spiralled from reprisal to reprisal, culminating in attacks by Israelis and Palestinians on each other's communities, killing many civilians in the process.¹⁵⁹ Still, the so-called Palestinian *fedayeen* were unorganized and followed no Palestinian command, party, organization, or authority, as the disruptive effects of the *Nakba* have practically destroyed the social order and fragmented the Palestinian people as a whole. In general, Palestinian political and military self-organization was at this point quasi-non-existent, and many joined the ranks of the various Arab armies, hoping that their Arab brethren would help them reclaim their homeland.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁷ Morris, *Righteous Victims. A History of the Zionist-Arab Conflict. 1881-2001*, 177–89.

¹⁵⁸ A more detailed account of the war from the Palestinian perspective, see Kabha, *The Palestinian People. Seeking Sovereignty and State*, 85–140. From the Zionist perspective, see Benny Morris, 1948. *Der Erste Arabisch-Israelische Krieg*, Deutsche Erstausgabe, 1. Auflage (Hentrich & Hentrich, 2023), <https://ubdata.univie.ac.at/AC17023093>.

¹⁵⁹ Shlaim, *The Iron Wall. Israel and the Arab World*, 85–99.

¹⁶⁰ Kabha, *The Palestinian People. Seeking Sovereignty and State*, 168f and 186f.

The Arab League solidarized itself with the Palestinian people and demanded the return of the refugees to their communities. Some Arab states, however, had territorial claims in historic Palestine and used the Palestinian cause to motivate their own population for future wars against Israel. Nasserist Egypt had the most sophisticated approach, as it set up multiple organizations, including a government-in-exile, and branded them as representative bodies of the Palestinian people. For instance, the former Mufti of Jerusalem al-Husseini became the president of the so-called 'All-Palestine government' and represented 1955 the Palestinians in the Bandung conference. These structures effectively served as a tool to control the Palestinian refugee population in the Gaza Strip, but also exerted influence over the Palestinian people as a whole, and were also a method to bolster the country's reputation in the Arab world. The founding of the PLO in 1964 was connected to Egypt's geopolitical and pan-Arabic ambitions, as the first general secretary of the organization, Ahmed Shuqeiry, was nominated by Egypt.¹⁶¹

3. Revolutionary Spaces: Algerian, Chinese, and Vietnamese influences

As we have seen in the last chapter, non-violent means of resistance predated the strategic use of violence in both the South African and Palestinian experiences. Diplomatic interventions, institutional and economic boycotts, and mass strikes were part of the arsenal to demand the abolition of discriminatory legislation, the elevation of their legal status, and equality before the law. The deprivation of non-white South Africans and Palestinians' collective rights and exclusion from the legal and political process, in addition to the widespread curtailing of their movement and the forced acquisition of land by the apartheid South Africa and the State of Israel, were similar in terms of the implications for the disenfranchised and dispossessed populations.

Even though there are some similarities between the South African and Palestinian histories regarding the transition from non-violent means to political violence, differences should also be highlighted in the context of the struggle actually commenced by the national liberation movements. All three began their violent campaigns at different stages of this process. The PLO was founded in 1964, when the fractured Palestinian national movement already relied on political violence as a strategy, exemplified best by the incursions of *fedayeen* into Israeli

¹⁶¹ Kabha, *The Palestinian People. Seeking Sovereignty and State*, 110ff, 144, 177f, and 200ff; the territorial ambitions, including the appropriation of the Palestinian cause by Arab regimes and especially Egypt for geopolitical considerations, were also mentioned by Lutz Maeke, see Lutz Maeke, *DDR Und PLO. Die Palästinalpolitik Des DDR-Staates*, Studien Zur Zeitgeschichte 92 (De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2017), 18f, and 36f.

territory. The *fedayeen*, who were inspired by the ‘revolutionary violence’ of other liberation struggles and included the PLO, transformed the liberation movement, as the indispensability of ‘armed struggle’ for the liberation of Palestine became the dogma for the next decade.¹⁶² This coincides with the historical trajectory of the PAC, which as a political party was founded only one year before the turn to violence by South African liberation movements and also adhered to armed struggle as an indispensable tool until the end of political apartheid in 1994.¹⁶³ The ANC was, in comparison to the PAC and the PLO, a much older organisation and had, before Sharpeville a long tradition of non-violent resistance. The global anti-Apartheid movement proved in the later years of the struggle to be one of its most important strategies.

In this chapter, I want to demonstrate that these different approaches and the centrality of political violence within a liberation movement were significantly shaped by global influences. These influences manifested through multiple factors that seemed to have been instrumental for the adoption of these ideas, such as local terrain, the demographic structure of the population, the alliances of the enemy, and the material conditions available, which could influence the decision-making regarding the right approach for the armed struggle campaign. Nevertheless, as already hinted at in the last chapter, liberation movements proactively sought assistance for their armed struggle on a global scale and also took advice from the most iconic guerrilla fighters.¹⁶⁴

More broadly speaking, the armed struggle campaigns of all three liberation movements carefully observed the global atmosphere of the 1950s and 1960s, which was characterized by several socialist revolutions and the accelerating process of decolonization.¹⁶⁵ Inspired by the successes (but also failures) of past and contemporary anti-colonial and/or revolutionary struggles, the acquisition of know-how, for instance, the study of basics and principles regarding guerrilla warfare, and the formulation of strategies based on them were as essential as the struggle itself, as an unprepared, unripe, and ill-considered campaign could lead to a

¹⁶² Some researchers state that Maoist influence within the *fedayeen* movements led to the amendment of the Palestinian National Charter 1968, as now the document explicitly stated that only armed struggle could liberate Palestine, see Manfred Sing, ‘Brothers in Arms. How Palestinian Maoists Turned Jihadists’, *WDI* (The Netherlands) 51 (2011): 13, <https://doi.org/10.1163/157006011X556111>.

¹⁶³ Kondlo and Harries, *In the Twilight of the Revolution: The Pan Africanist Congress of Azania (South Africa) 1959-1994*, 264–69.

¹⁶⁴ For instance, the ANC’s request for military assistance from Mao in the 1950s, see Simpson, *Umkhonto We Sizwe. The ANC’s Armed Struggle*, 56.

¹⁶⁵ Notable examples are China, Vietnam, Cuba, Algeria, and Yemen, see Ellis, ‘The Genesis of the ANC’s Armed Struggle in South Africa 1948-1961’, 660; Şāyig, *Armed Struggle and the Search for State: The Palestinian National Movement 1949-1993*, 132; Kabha, *The Palestinian People. Seeking Sovereignty and State*, 206f.

military disaster. The global dimensions by which liberation movements have been influenced, are numerous, and some figures studied the armed campaigns of movements located in a multitude of regions.¹⁶⁶

While the decision-making process and strategy planning were far more complex and multi-layered, based on a wide range of political, social, geographic, etc. considerations, some key factors should be highlighted here, primarily with regard to the transfer, proliferation, and adoption of theories concerning guerrilla warfare and armed struggle within the three liberation movements. These factors are as follows: 1) Liberation movements tend to focus on contemporary and historic armed conflicts that seem to bear some resemblance to their own struggle, sensing an ostensible structural similarity. 2) Liberation movements adopted strategies from movements that were ideologically comfortable or close to their own political positions. 3) Military assistance by a sponsor state facilitated the transfer of guerrilla ideas and was, in some cases, even an indispensable part of the military training that was conducted in military facilities of the state or camps of allies that were also affiliated with the sponsor state. 4) Liberation movements studied an abundance of historical and contemporary uprisings, but preferred guerrilla ideas coming from victorious movements.

At this point, I want to emphasize, however, that these four factors are not strictly separated, but interconnected and, under certain conditions, also interdependent. For both the South Africans and the Palestinians, several ‘global guerrilla hubs’ emerged as the most formative for the strategic framework of their armed struggle campaigns by liberation movements - a framework for the use of armed struggle as a strategy: Algeria, Vietnam, and the People’s Republic of China. Overall, this is just a selection, as other global struggles have been influential for the strategies of the liberation movement as well, but could not be included because of the author’s temporal constraints.¹⁶⁷

3.1. The Algerian anti-colonial role model

As already mentioned above, national liberation movements tended to choose strategic frameworks from liberation struggles that shared defining structural characteristics from their

¹⁶⁶ Some ANC figures, such as Nelson Mandela for instance, studied the armed campaigns from Cuba, China, Philippines, and Mandatory Palestine, see Stevens, ‘Violence, Political Strategy and the Turn to Guerrilla Warfare by the Congress Movement in South Africa’, 2021, 1017.

¹⁶⁷ Cuba was also an influential reference point for both South African and Palestinian liberation movements, see Chamberlin, *The Global Offensive: The United States, the Palestine Liberation Organization, and the Making of the Post-Cold War Order*, 26; Stevens, ‘Violence, Political Strategy and the Turn to Guerrilla Warfare by the Congress Movement in South Africa’, 2021, 117.

perspective. Being aware of one's own circumstances and having an existing and tested approach by a non-state actor that faced comparable conditions, a sense of similarity with a struggle was a massive incentive to study a campaign in more detail or get in contact with the revolutionaries of the struggle. Particularly striking was the situation of Algeria: The anti-colonial war of the Front de Libération Nationale (FLN) from 1954–1962 against the French colonial empire had an immense political impact on the Global South, as national liberation movements noted how one of the biggest militaries in the world and a deeply entrenched settler population could be defeated through mass resistance and the excessive use of force.¹⁶⁸

South African writers and political figures observed the Algerian struggle throughout the 1950s and started to express solidarity with the experiences of the indigenous population in the colony. The political leadership of the ANC and SACP noted similarities in the structural constitution of the South African and Algerian colonial societies, including mass expropriation, migrant labour, and the division of the working class.¹⁶⁹ Overall, this observation reverberated with the SACP's formulated concept of a 'colonialism of a special type'. The French settler-colonial society in Algeria was regarded as one of the most similar counterparts, as the French Empire considered Algeria not as a simple overseas territory but as an inextricable part of the metropolitan area.¹⁷⁰ South African adversaries of the apartheid system were not alone here, as other figures saw parallels between Algeria and South Africa. While an ANC delegation visited China in 1962, the mission was invited to a meeting with the chairman of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), Mao Zedong. After explaining the situation of the liberation struggle in South Africa, Mao remarked that the ANC's policies and decisions should be based on an understanding of their own situation, although the South African struggle sounded at least similar to Algeria's for him.¹⁷¹

In the same year, the ANC sought contacts with Algeria. Several Umkhonto we Sizwe members, including Nelson Mandela, Robert Resha, and Oliver Tambo, departed in 1962 for a tour through Africa, partially to learn and receive training in guerrilla warfare in multiple countries. Initially, the ANC mission embarked on a trip to attend a conference hosted by the Pan-African Freedom Movement of East and Central Africa in Addis Ababa, in order to obtain

¹⁶⁸ Jeffrey James Byrne, *Mecca of Revolution: Algeria, Decolonization, and the Third World Order*, 1st edn, Oxford Studies in International History (New York, 2016), 111f, <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199899142.001.0001>.

¹⁶⁹ Allison Drew, 'Visions of Liberation: The Algerian War of Independence and Its South African Reverberations', *Review of African Political Economy* (ABINGDON) 42 (2015): 23 and 27, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03056244.2014.1000288>.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 33.

¹⁷¹ Simpson, *Umkhonto We Sizwe. The ANC's Armed Struggle*, 56.

funds and training from participants in the organization. A key resolution at the conference established that attendant states should facilitate the training of ANC cadets: The FLN, which was among the attendees of this conference, subsequently granted the ANC access to Algerian military training camps.¹⁷²

It's important to note that the military training covered not only instructions in the use of weapons or the study of military theories but also prepared the ANC to get familiar with its own environment, as guerrilla warfare utilizes and takes advantage of the local terrain. Following the conference, Mandela and Resha, departing from Morocco, visited an Armée de Libération Nationale (ALN) military camp approximately located in Oujda. Regarding the question of one senior commander about how he envisioned the armed struggle campaign, Mandela responded that he was impressed by the Cuban Revolution and how Castro's comparatively small band of men could conquer the country, using the mountains to their advantage. The commander pointed out the unfeasibility of the plan as the circumstances in both regions were different, pointing out that South Africa is a huge country without large mountain ranges, in addition to the South African government's military power, which was comparatively greater than dictator Batista's Cuban army.¹⁷³

Algeria, as a revolutionary space in the 1960s, also left a definitive and recognizable imprint on other liberation movements in the Global South. For the Palestinians, the Algerian role model profoundly shaped the understanding of armed struggle for some armed organizations. Paul Chamberlin summarises the importance of the Algerian War of Independence for the *fedayeen* movement as follows:

Algeria provided the most immediate source of inspiration for the Palestinian armed struggle. The fedayeen saw Algeria as a model for their revolution, a source of political and material support, and—in Arafat's words—the “window through which we appear to the West.” Fatah looked to the Algerian FLN as the archetype for its own public diplomacy campaign, adopting Algerian principles and relying on Algerian tutelage in its efforts to gain worldwide support.¹⁷⁴

One Palestinian *fedayeen* organization that was heavily inspired by Algeria was Fatah, seeing the Algerian struggle as a model for how to reclaim Palestine by a ‘popular liberation war’.¹⁷⁵

¹⁷² Drew, ‘Visions of Liberation: The Algerian War of Independence and Its South African Reverberations’, 27f.

¹⁷³ Simpson, *Umkhonto We Sizwe. The ANC's Armed Struggle*, 58.

¹⁷⁴ Chamberlin, *The Global Offensive: The United States, the Palestine Liberation Organization, and the Making of the Post-Cold War Order*, 52.

¹⁷⁵ Şāyig, *Armed Struggle and the Search for State: The Palestinian National Movement 1949-1993*, 196.

The FLN's struggle served as a prime example of how armed struggle should unite the popular base and organize people in revolutionary cadres¹⁷⁶, but also as a blueprint for the practical implementation of 'revolutionary violence'. In this context, the historian Sayigh mentions that the Fatah leadership saw, inspired by Frantz Fanon, in the use of violence by the colonized, a purifying and cleansing effect on the minds of the oppressed.¹⁷⁷

As with South Africans, Algeria also provided military access to the Palestinian fighters, as it trained, according to Yezid Sayigh, around 100 to 200 Palestinians in guerrilla warfare.¹⁷⁸ The country also served as a meeting point for other liberation movements, revolutionaries, and Third World sympathizers from around the globe, as it became a 'hub of revolution' like China or the Soviet Union. For instance, the co-founder of Fatah, Khalil al-Wazir, met the foreign minister of the South Vietnamese Liberation Front and also Che Guevara, who promised Cuban backing for the Palestinian cause in addition to other liberation movements in Portuguese Africa.¹⁷⁹ The Algerian guerrilla war against the French should also have inspired Fatah military strategists who conceived a stage of the so-called 'Stages Theory'. According to this concept, guerrillas should first weaken the enemy until Palestinian society is united, and with the collective effort and support, the pan-Arab army will eventually reclaim the Palestinian homeland.¹⁸⁰

However, other Palestinians later questioned the feasibility of the 'Algerian role model', noting structural contrasts between the Algerian and Palestinian situations. The secretary general of the DFLP, Nayif Hawatma, pointed out major differences between Algeria and Palestine, in relation to the size of the territory, the ratio of settler to indigenous population, the international acceptance of Israel's existence, and the division of socialist countries over Palestinian rights.¹⁸¹ Soon, Palestinian *fedayeen* realized that an Algeria-style 'popular war of liberation' would not be a feasible plan under these circumstances. Still, the struggle in Algeria served as anti-colonial inspiration and was also used as a moral reference point regarding the use of violence against Israeli civilians for some *fedayeen*, comparing terror acts

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., 120.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., 91.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., 102.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., 102.

¹⁸⁰ Kabha, *The Palestinian People. Seeking Sovereignty and State*, 206.

¹⁸¹ Şāyig, *Armed Struggle and the Search for State: The Palestinian National Movement 1949-1993*, 197.

to the bombings of cafés in Algiers against French settlers who were allegedly complicit with the colonial regime.¹⁸²

3.2. Maoist guerrilla theory: ‘revolutionary violence’ and ‘protracted people’s war’

Another great hub for revolution had been the People's Republic of China. On the one hand, the victory of the communists in the Chinese Civil War enabled the worldwide ascent of Maoism, a branch of communism, where ‘revolutionary violence’ in the form of armed struggle and ‘anti-imperialism’ are important attributes¹⁸³ of the ideology, the latter of which appealed to many anti-colonial movements in the Global South.¹⁸⁴ The Sino-Soviet split and the Soviet Union’s subsequent increased attention towards Africa, Asia, and Latin America precipitated an ‘arms race’ between China and the Soviet Union regarding the exertion of influence in various world regions. The PRC disseminated its anti-Soviet propaganda globally under the banner of ‘anti-imperialism’¹⁸⁵ against hegemonic forces, which were primarily identified as the USA and the Soviet Union, while supporting the emergence of various (some in name only) ‘Maoist’ organizations around the globe.¹⁸⁶

The People’s Republic of China has been instrumental for both the Palestinian and South African liberation movements. As the first superpower, China recognized the PLO in 1964 and even invited an official delegation already in 1965 to Beijing, where Chairman Mao Zedong expressed his solidarity with the Palestinians, condemned Israel by comparing the Jewish state to an ‘imperialistic base’ like Formosa (Taiwan), and guaranteed diplomatic and material support for the organization.¹⁸⁷ From the second half of the 1960s to the early 1970s, China became the number one country to ship arms and weapons to the *fedayeen*. After 1968, the People’s Republic mostly courted Fatah, the strongest faction within the PLO, giving them an over-representative presence in the state’s media compared to other Palestinian factions, and also granting them comparatively the most military aid, including spaces for recruits in

¹⁸² For instance, after the PFLP-(GC) took several civilians, hostages in an apartment in Kiryat Shamouna, resulting in a failed rescue operation by Israeli forces and the death of the hostages, they were compared to the bombings in Algier, see N.N., ‘Kiryat Shamouna’, in: P.F.L.P Bulletin issue 11, May-June 1974, p. 2, Accessed at the 06. February 2026 <https://www.marxists.org/subject/israel-palestine/periodicals/pflp-bulletin/pflp-bulletin-11.pdf>.

¹⁸³ Obviously, Maoism had, in regard to its ideology, additional defining characteristics. However, for this master’s thesis, the most relevant ones are the ones already mentioned.

¹⁸⁴ Lovell, *Maoism: A Global History*, 19 and 26f.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., 53f

¹⁸⁶ Ibid, 146ff.

¹⁸⁷ Shai Har-El, *China and the Palestinian Organizations: 1964-1971* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2024), 13f, <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-57828-1>.

Chinese military academies.¹⁸⁸ However, as some researchers have noted, China's early support was not only based on 'anti-imperialist solidarity', as support for the PLO should also help the People's Republic to diplomatically enter the Middle East and drive a wedge between the Arab states and the Soviet Union.¹⁸⁹

Nevertheless, the importance of Maoist tenets and military theories became instrumental in the armed struggle campaigns of many guerrilla factions in the Global South. Mao's experiences in the Chinese Civil War formed his vision for the communist revolution, leading to the development of a series of theories and ideas regarding the essential nature of armed struggle for revolutionaries. His ideas led him to the formulation of his most central strategic framework, the 'protracted people's war'. The basic formula of this strategy followed a three-stage model. In the first stage, a numerically inferior army retreats to a secure base, usually in the mountains or an area with difficult accessibility, and gradually weakens a superior enemy, primarily by overstretching its lines and conducting guerrilla warfare in the enemy's hinterland. In the second stage, the weaker army grows through the mobilisation of the masses, while the enemy disperses its forces and its position slowly deteriorates as a consequence of the guerrillas' activities. Guerrilla forces and soldiers of the main armies should also take the roles of educators who mobilize the masses for the communist revolution, thus inspiring the population to rise up for the people's war. In the last stage, the now superior army goes on the offensive with the help of the mobilized masses against the deteriorated forces of the opponent.¹⁹⁰

The defeat of a far superior enemy by an initially extremely weak organization reverberated profoundly among South Africans and Palestinians. For some Palestinian *fedayeen* organizations, that idea was seen as the key to victory over Israel. Within the PLO, in particular, the PFLP and the DFLP advocated for a 'protracted people's war' strategy.¹⁹¹ The ideological affinity towards Marxism-Leninism also seemed to have played a role here, and, to some extent, Maoist tendencies could be observed, at least within the political program of

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., 61f.

¹⁸⁹ Har-El, *China and the Palestinian Organizations: 1964-1971*, 3.

¹⁹⁰ Rosita Dellios, *Modern Chinese Defence Strategy. Present Developments, Future Directions* (Palmgrave Macmillan, 1990), 12f.

¹⁹¹ Yezid Sayigh, 'Reconstructing the Paradox: The Arab Nationalist Movement, Armed Struggle, and Palestine, 1951-1966', *The Middle East Journal* (Washington) 45 (1991): 196f and 201; other versions are 'People's war of long duration' depending on the source and translation, see Sing, 'Brothers in Arms. How Palestinian Maoists Turned Jihadists', 13.

the PFLP.¹⁹² Nevertheless, the Chinese battlefield was not the only source of inspiration for these organizations, as the Vietnamese experience that modified the Maoist concept later became an indispensable fixed point for the *fedayeen* to study and learn from a successful guerrilla war against a far superior enemy.¹⁹³

Marxist-Leninist and Maoist positions also became more apparent in the PAC during the 1970s, especially after the Central Committee adopted the 'New Road to Revolution' in 1975. The party leadership reflected on the failures and obstacles of the last decades and introduced a new political program that called for a 'people's war' and the education and mobilisation of the rural masses.¹⁹⁴ Even as the PAC struggled with its internal political orientation, as African nationalists and Maoists clashed internally over time, the party adhered to its Maoist strain over the next decades. The exiled leadership in Dar-es-Salaam seemed to keep hold of its Maoist positions, but the internal divisions grew over time and culminated eventually in the formation of the 'Sobukwe Forum' in 1989, which despised the Marxist-Leninist-Maoist members of the group and also demanded, in contrast to the leadership at this time, negotiations with the Apartheid Regime.¹⁹⁵

Overall, it should be noted, however, that the adherence to Maoist political principles by the PAC leadership, and more broadly the appearance of Maoist positions within liberation movements, correlated with the PRC's provision of material and financial support. This also included weapon shipments for their liberation struggles and armed training within Chinese military academies or in camps of friendly countries.¹⁹⁶ According to Julia Lowell, the PRC spent between 1964 and 1985 approximately \$170 to \$220 million for the training of around 20,000 fighters from 19 different African countries alone.¹⁹⁷ The curriculum encompassed not only weapons training or an introduction to the basics of guerrilla war, but also had certain

¹⁹² For instance, the party favoured like Mao the inclusion of the petty-bourgeoisie within the forces to attain the communist revolution, see Michel Peddycoart, 'Liberation as Revolutionary Theory and Praxis: The Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine and the New Palestinian Left, 1967-1976' (Dr. phil, University of Chicago, 2022), 59f, https://knowledge.uchicago.edu/record/3937/files/Peddycoart_uchicago_0330D_16241.pdf.

¹⁹³ See chapter, '3.2. Vietnamese struggle against 'anti-imperialism.'

¹⁹⁴ Kondlo and Harries, *In the Twilight of the Revolution: The Pan Africanist Congress of Azania (South Africa) 1959-1994*, 151.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., 194ff.

¹⁹⁶ Lovell provides a detailed overview on the Chinese support, including military training, for African governments and liberation movements, see Lovell, *Maoism. Global History*, 187–95; Palestinians received also training by Chinese instructors and advisors in military camps located in Lebanon, Jordan, Syria, Oman, see Har-El, *China and the Palestinian Organizations. 1964-1971*, 118ff.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., 195.

ideological aspects originating in Maoist thought, like the importance of ‘revolutionary violence’, in particular, armed struggle, and the theory of a protracted people’s war.¹⁹⁸

While the ideological transfer occurred partially through Maoist education in the military academies, the importance of the Chinese government in maintaining the armed struggle campaigns should not be underestimated. For some parties, the alignment with Maoist principles could have facilitated Chinese aid in the first place. The PFLP had a bad reputation among Chinese officials, initially as the party had been classified, despite the protests of PFLP members, as ‘Trotskyite’ by the political echelon, which, in addition, despised the aircraft hijackings conducted by the group.¹⁹⁹ Some PFLP figures had genuine Maoist positions, such as the spokesperson Ghassan Kanafani, who visited China already in 1965, partially because of his admiration for Mao and his hope that he could meet the chairman.²⁰⁰ China’s stance on the front changed during the first half of 1970, and was perhaps partially connected to the publication of the ‘*Strategy for the Liberation of Palestine*’²⁰¹, a political program in which the PFLP outlines its ideology and defines its enemies, including, next to Israel, ‘Zionism’, ‘Imperialism’, and the ‘Arab reactionary regimes’.²⁰² Notably, the document contains multiple references and quotes from Mao, while seemingly using some of his rhetoric and political concepts.²⁰³

Even as the People’s Republic profoundly influenced the PLO’s and ANC’s struggles, Chinese interest in these liberation movements deteriorated over the course of the 1970s. The process was more abrupt than gradual in both cases. For the PLO, the events of Black September in Jordan precipitated the growing disinterest of Chinese officials in the Palestinian *fedayeen*. The looming conflict between the Kingdom of Jordan and the Palestinian armed factions, exacerbated by the Palestinian attacks against Israel from the kingdom’s territory without Jordanian permission, the ensuing attacks from the Jordanian military against uncooperative *fedayeen*, and repeated calls of the PLO’s left-wing factions to overthrow King Hussein I,

¹⁹⁸ Har-El, *China and the Palestinian Organizations: 1964-1971*, 116ff.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., 61.

²⁰⁰ Peiyu Yang, ‘Ghassan Kanafani’s Travelogue ... Then Rose Asia’, in *Translating the Other*, with Claire Chambers and Ipek Demir (Routledge, 2024), 169, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003351986-11>.

²⁰¹ al- Ġabha aš-Ša’biya li-Taḥrīr Filasṭīn. A strategy for the liberation of Palestine. Information Department, 1969. <https://ubdata.univie.ac.at/AC16884162>.

²⁰² Ibid., 7-18.

²⁰³ For quotes, see al- Ġabha aš-Ša’biya li-Taḥrīr Filasṭīn. A strategy for the liberation of Palestine, 7, 104, and 109. For concepts, see for instance, ‘Criticism and Self-criticism’, 125; Marwin Abd el-‘Al asserted during an interview that Maoist-inclined Ghassan Kanafani was the leading contributor to the Strategy, see Marwan Abd el-‘Al, ‘Palestinians in Lebanon and the “Political Ghassan Kanafani”’: An Interview with Marwan Abd El-‘Al, PFLP’, *Arab Studies Quarterly* (London) 46 (2024): 255, <https://doi.org/10.13169/arabstudquar.46.3-4.0246>.

culminated in an open confrontation. From 6 to 8 September 1970, the PFLP hijacked several airplanes departing from Europe, redirecting them to airfields in Jordan. Even as Arafat and his allies renounced the hijackings and suspended the PFLP briefly from the PLO, a war with the Jordanian army became inevitable. After King Hussein I established a military government and Arafat decided to overthrow the monarchy, the Jordanian army started to fiercely attack PLO positions by attacking and besieging Palestinian refugee camps and PLO-controlled cities, kicking the organization out of Jordan's territory in the following months.²⁰⁴

After the forced ousting of the PLO from Jordan, China, even as it condemned the Jordanian offensive and still supported the *fedayeen*, began to decrease its assistance to the PLO. This coincided with criticism of the *fedayeen* by Arab regimes that were increasingly weary of the Palestinian guerrillas, fearing that these groups would overthrow their governments.²⁰⁵

Furthermore, the PRC had established diplomatic and economic relations with Middle Eastern petrostates, such as Kuwait and Iran. Continuing the support of, in particular, the left-wing factions within the PLO that saw the 'reactionary regimes' as enemies of the Arab proletariat would have risked Chinese interests in the region.²⁰⁶

Predating these events, the PLO's increased orientation towards the Soviet Union was also an instrumental factor. While for four years China was the only superpower that provided significant assistance to the Palestinians, Soviet interest increased after the June War of 1967 and Israel's military dominance in the region. The defeat of the Arab countries in the war and the subsequent War of Attrition (1967–1970) fought between Egypt and Israel threatened the position of Soviet allies and instilled fear in Soviet circles that the USA would expand its influence in the Middle East. Even as the Soviet Union previously criticised and despised 'terror attacks' on Israeli soil, the Union began to support the *fedayeen* and recognised the PLO as a liberation movement.²⁰⁷ Other researchers see the PRC's political hegemony over the PLO as the prime motive for the Soviet Union to compete with its communist rival over the organization.²⁰⁸ Even as the PLO realigned more towards the Soviet Union, the organization maintained diplomatic relations with the People's Republic.²⁰⁹ The PRC,

²⁰⁴ Kabha, *The Palestinian People. Seeking Sovereignty and State*, 239–47.

²⁰⁵ Har-El, *China and the Palestinian Organizations: 1964-1971*, 89–93.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 94f and 97f.

²⁰⁷ Roland Dannreuthner, *The Soviet Union and the PLO* (St. Martin's Press, 1998), 36–43.

²⁰⁸ Galia Golan, *The Soviet Union and National Liberation Movements in the Third World* (Unwin Hyman, 1988), 328.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 328.

however, channelled the material and military support towards anti-colonial liberation struggles on the African continent.²¹⁰

Still, the repercussions of the Sino-Soviet Split reached former beneficiaries of the People's Republic, as the ANC's positive stance and support for the Soviet Union after the breaking of the Moscow-Beijing alliance negatively impacted relations with the PRC and ended Chinese material support for the Congress. This development was not limited to the ANC, as other Southern African national liberation movements had to choose between Chinese or Soviet assistance. The PAC, being politically closer to the classical Maoist position, chose to support the People's Republic, therefore preventing assistance from the Soviet Union.²¹¹ The advocacy of Maoist positions within the ANC became unacceptable, in particular when visiting the Soviet Union. In a military camp in Kongwa, Tanzania, commanders punished Umkhonto we Sizwe cadets who were returning from a seminar in Odessa for supporting 'Maoist doctrines' in front of the Soviets.²¹² Also, the ANC later expressed solidarity with the Socialist Republic of Vietnam after the PRC invaded the country in 1978.²¹³ The organization condemned in this context not only Beijing but also its allies, the Cambodian Khmer Rouge, whose troops occasionally conducted incursions into Vietnamese territory.²¹⁴

3.3. Vietnamese struggle against 'anti-imperialism.'

It's certainly no understatement to say that the Vietnam War (1955–1975) was one of the most defining wars of the Cold War period. First, the Viet Minh's struggle against the colonial French Empire, and later, the National Front for the Liberation of South Vietnam (NFL)'s people's war, directed at overthrowing the US-supported South Vietnamese government, turned Vietnam, after its unification, into a magnet for liberation and guerrilla movements, eager to learn from their strategies and tactics concerning guerrilla warfare. The Vietnamese struggle impressed the *fedayeen* movement throughout the 1960s and 1970s, as the armed campaign by Ho Chi Minh in North Vietnam and later the NFL was extensively studied, in a similar fashion to the other major revolutionary movements in the Global South. Some pamphlets of *Fatah*, which were already published in 1967, explained the importance of the Vietnamese experience for the Palestinians along with the Algerian, Chinese, and Cuban

²¹⁰ Lowell provides a profound and detailed insight into Mao's and the PCR's support for African liberation movements and independent governments, see Lovell, *Maoism: A Global History*, 185–222.

²¹¹ Golan, *The Soviet Union and National Liberation Movements in the Third World*, 327f.

²¹² Simpson, *Umkhonto We Sizwe. The ANC's Armed Struggle*, 123.

²¹³ Alfred Nzo, 'The ANC on Vietnam' in: Sechaba, May issue 1979, p. 13–14.

²¹⁴ N.N., 'Notes from Vietnam' in: Sechaba, May issue 1980, p. 21–23

ones.²¹⁵ The PLO and other guerrilla forces hailed the end of the US intervention in Vietnam following the Paris Accords in 1973, while Arafat promised that the PLO would smash ‘imperialism’ in the Middle East, similar to how ‘Vietnam smashed American Imperialism’.²¹⁶ Palestinian guerrilla media also regularly lauded the struggle in Vietnam and expressed their solidarity against a ‘common enemy’.²¹⁷

Moreover, Palestinian ‘anti-imperialist’ solidarity did not merely end with words, as some *fedayeen* even promised to join them in the ‘global quest against imperialism’ by staging largely symbolic operations that were intended to support Vietnamese forces in their struggle. The ‘PFLP-International Operations’ under the leadership of Wadi Haddad in cooperation with the Japanese Red Army, a radical Marxist organisation subscribed to ‘Third-World Solidarity’, conducted a raid against an oil refinery in Singapore, destroying some oil tankers there.²¹⁸ The PFLP described the operation in its media as an attack against ‘Dutch Shell, which has played an important role in the Imperialist war against Viet Nam and South East Asia in addition to the Arab people’.²¹⁹

The Socialist Republic of Vietnam reciprocated the admiration of national liberation movements. Following the unification, the country became a hotspot for guerrillas, enabling new transfers of ideas and strategies that proved instrumental for the NFL’s victory in the war. Here, the guerrilla war proved to be essential for the development of the ANC’s ‘people’s war’ strategy in the 1980s. After Umkhonto we Sizwe suffered from substantial losses in its units, the ANC sought to reformulate its strategy for armed struggle. Partially motivated to find a solution, the National Executive Committee (NEC), including Oliver Tambo, visited the Socialist Republic of Vietnam in 1978. There, Tambo noted similarities with the Vietnamese struggle by associating the USA’s unilateral attacks against civilians with the events in Ulundi in 1880, and also connected the communist Vietnamese decisions to engage against the US and the South Vietnamese government with the start of the ANC’s struggle in 1961, next to the MPLA in 1961 and the PAIGC in 1963.²²⁰

²¹⁵ Chamberlin, ‘The Struggle Against Oppression Everywhere: The Global Politics of Palestinian Liberation’, 28.

²¹⁶ Chamberlin, *The Global Offensive: The United States, the Palestine Liberation Organization, and the Making of the Post-Cold War Order*, 185.

²¹⁷ N. N., ‘M-Day, Vietnam and Palestine’. in: Fatah. Information Office 1969, vol. I (3), p.3, Accessed on the 23rd of January, <https://www.marxists.org/subject/israel-palestine/periodicals/fateh/fateh-1-3.pdf>.

²¹⁸ Şayığ, *Armed Struggle and the Search for State: The Palestinian National Movement 1949-1993*, 348.

²¹⁹ N.N., Singapore Operation, P.F.L.P. Bulletin issue 9, March 1974, p. 5. Accessed February 18, 2026. <https://www.marxists.org/subject/israel-palestine/periodicals/pflp-bulletin/pflp-bulletin-9.pdf>.

²²⁰ Simpson, *Umkhonto We Sizwe. The ANC’s Armed Struggle*, 261.

On the 21st of October, Tambo was briefed by Major General Vũ Xuân Chiêm and Colonel Hoang-Minh Phuong on the principles of the ‘prolonged people’s war’.²²¹ The Vietnamese communists relied on Mao’s military doctrines in the Indochina War (1945–1955), which, in addition to Chinese military assistance, significantly decreased the morale of the French Empire to sustain the war effort. While Mao’s idea was the blueprint, the differing conditions and environment in Vietnam led to a modification of the strategy, in order to be more suitable for the guerrillas operating there.²²² Such a decision emphasises the need to change, to adapt, and to adjust every model according to the needs of the movement, something Palestinians and South African liberation movements understood as well.

The Vietnamese approach envisioned that, first, armed struggle would be focused on a particular area, a village or several, where the local masses would be educated and recruited for the struggle. Armed propaganda teams would distribute messages and pamphlets to the people, while the military units would still fight against the remnants of the enemy in the area. After the establishment of political structures, guerrillas would use the village as a ‘safe base’, defending these positions against the enemy. In the second phase, the guerrilla forces would now attack adversary forces, operate from the village against the adversary, but only attack at night. While the enemy army maintains the operational upper hand during the day, the clashes with the guerrillas force them to mobilise more recruits to hold the region. This area, now called a ‘guerrilla zone’, will then be, in the third stage, the starting point from where mass-mobilised and completely developed revolutionary forces will storm the enemy’s military installations and conquer them, turning the zone eventually into a ‘guerrilla base’, from where further conquest will begin.²²³

When the ANC delegation returned from Vietnam, preparations began for the implementation, as Umkhonto we Sizwe’s chief strategist, Joe Slovo, had been especially convinced of this ‘people’s war’ strategy. Following only limited successes with the turn to violence, the movement concluded that armed struggle wouldn’t be sufficient and therefore reevaluated its strategies in 1979, realising the ‘Four Pillars of the Revolution’, a plan that was inspired by the Vietnamese struggle. Here, armed struggle became one of four strategies in the following ‘people’s war’ along with the building of an underground structure in South Africa, popular

²²¹ Ibid.

²²² Lovell, *Maoism: A Global History*, 227–32.

²²³ Simpson, *Umkhonto We Sizwe. The ANC’s Armed Struggle*, 261f.

mobilisation, and the international isolation of the Apartheid Regime.²²⁴ At the start of the 1980s, 'people's war' was the overall framework through which the ANC sought to attain its goals. The ANC's Politic-Military Council assessed in 1983 that the large 'armed propaganda acts' were not sufficient, suggesting that it was time to transition to the next stage and establish 'guerrilla zones'.²²⁵

Coming back to the Middle East, the formation of 'guerrilla bases', also known as 'safe bases', based on the Vietnamese struggle, served as a defining model for the Palestinian *fedayeen* movement. In particular, the radical left-wing groups, such as the PFLP and DFLP, were determined to transform the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan into such a 'safe base', an 'Arab Hanoi', as preparation for the ensuing people's war in Palestine.²²⁶ Other Palestinian factions, such as Fatah, also played with the idea of overthrowing the monarchy, but only enacted the plan when a confrontation with the Jordanian army was imminent.²²⁷

Following the PLO's expulsion from Jordan, Palestinian armed factions tried to establish a new 'guerrilla refuge' in Lebanon. While plans for a second 'safe base' in Beirut preceded the Jordanian disaster,²²⁸ Lebanon was, according to comments by PFLP and Popular Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PDFLP) guerrillas, only suitable as a temporary base.²²⁹ A third location was proposed by the PDFLP²³⁰ in 1972, namely the West Bank and Gaza. The PDFLP envisioned a 'safe base' after an anticipated withdrawal of Israeli forces from the occupied territories. Other factions criticized this approach, seeing it as recognition of Israel and the establishment of a Palestinian rump state. The PDFLP countered, however, that this should serve as a rear base, similar to North Vietnam, for the NFL.²³¹ However, efforts to establish such a rear base had already been made several years ago earlier in Gaza. In the

²²⁴ Stephen Ellis, *External Mission: The ANC in Exile, 1960-1990*, 1st edn (New York, 2013), 121ff, <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199330614.001.0001>.

²²⁵ Simpson, *Umkhonto We Sizwe. The ANC's Armed Struggle*, 338.

²²⁶ Şāyig, *Armed Struggle and the Search for State: The Palestinian National Movement 1949-1993*, 200 and 206; Chamberlin, *The Global Offensive: The United States, the Palestine Liberation Organization, and the Making of the Post-Cold War Order*, 26; Chamberlin, 'The Struggle Against Oppression Everywhere: The Global Politics of Palestinian Liberation', 31.

²²⁷ Kabha, *The Palestinian People. Seeking Sovereignty and State*, 244.

²²⁸ Chamberlin, *The Global Offensive: The United States, the Palestine Liberation Organization, and the Making of the Post-Cold War Order*, 26.

²²⁹ Şāyig, *Armed Struggle and the Search for State: The Palestinian National Movement 1949-1993*, 291.

²³⁰ The name was later changed to DFLP.

²³¹ Chamberlin, *The Global Offensive: The United States, the Palestine Liberation Organization, and the Making of the Post-Cold War Order*, 178.

wake of Black September in 1970, Israel dismantled and destroyed the base in a military operation. A second attempt in 1972 failed as well.²³²

4. The costs and benefits of political violence

As I have outlined in the last chapter, all three liberation movements looked for existing strategic frameworks on guerrilla warfare and proactively sought to establish contacts with former revolutionary and guerrilla movements that succeeded in their quest to overthrow the government and expel a colonial or foreign power that occupied the region. A tremendous factor for the liberation movement's support was connected to sympathy and solidarity amongst countries from the 'Third World', as many of those had experienced similar struggles in their respective histories. However, as I also highlighted, in some cases the motive to support a liberation movement was not based on 'unconditional solidarity', as national liberation movements had to fulfil certain requirements that depended on the political circumstances, or the protection of diplomatic and economic state interests in a region.²³³

Besides political reasons, tactics and strategies that are employed by liberation movements can be instrumental in determining whether a potential external sponsor supports a movement or not. With that in mind, I will dive deeper into the costs and benefits of political violence in this chapter. In particular, I want to highlight how liberation movements changed their strategies and tactics in response to their global and transnational environment. This includes the easing of excessive violence, in particular terrorism, as violence against civilians can have a repellent effect on many potentially supportive states. In particular, Western states belonged to this category, something that was addressed by Vietnamese general Vo Nguyen Giap during a private conversation with Arafat, giving him the following advice: 'Stop talking about annihilating Israel and instead turn your terror war into a struggle for human rights. Then you will have the American people eating out of your hand.'²³⁴

Still, political violence in the form of terrorism was sometimes preferred despite its negative repercussions, especially as in the form of a tactical tool, thereby offering short-term advantages. In that sense, excessive violence was not used only as a strategy but also became a tactic. Political science and social movement studies describe the use of political violence

²³²Kabha, *The Palestinian People. Seeking Sovereignty and State*, 247f.

²³³ More on that, see Chapter 3.2. Maoist Guerrilla theory.

²³⁴ Chamberlin, 'The Struggle Against Oppression Everywhere: The Global Politics of Palestinian Liberation'.

due to changes in the socio-political context as an ‘opportunities and threats mechanism’.²³⁵ This theory stipulates that inclusive opportunities (like political participation) for a non-state actor can decrease the possibility of violence or begin disengagement processes, whereas closing opportunities and threats (like peace initiatives that are seen as disadvantageous to the entire movement or parts of it) can induce escalation processes.²³⁶ Thus, even as liberation movements were aware that terrorism could have an overall negative impact on the struggle in the long term, South African and Palestinian armed organizations relied on this tactic anyway, believing that excessive violence could improve their strategic position, while some factions preferred negotiations based on a compromise.

4.1. Fatah and ANC: leaders of the movement

In this context, it should be mentioned that the use of terrorism correlated with the ideological affiliation and the position within the movement. The leading figure or party of a movement had, to external observers, a representative status; this naturally entailed a certain degree of responsibility. For the PLO, Chairman Arafat and the dominant faction, Fatah, were perceived externally as the leaders of the movement, even as all individual parties of the PLO claimed to represent the Palestinian people.²³⁷ In the case of South Africa, both the ANC and the PAC had the status of a ‘national liberation movement’, making it, at first glance, more difficult to determine who was the ‘true representative’ of their people. However, with regard to the size of both liberation movements, the ANC had mobilised many more members than the PAC. Additionally, the ANC influenced the global anti-apartheid struggle more, as the various global Anti-Apartheid movements tended to support the ANC, partially because ANC members participated in building structures for these grassroots movements.²³⁸

Nevertheless, Fatah and ANC officials realised at some point that they needed to convey in the global context the image of the movement as ‘freedom fighters’, rather than ‘terrorists’. By shaking off the latter label, the movement would harness new opportunities, facilitate new contacts, and enable new alliances with persons, organizations, states, etc., which were previously hesitant to support ‘terrorists’. In some cases, a realignment in ideology was, in this context, sufficient for a movement. The history of the Soviet Union’s and German

²³⁵ Bosi et al., ‘Organizational and Institutional Approaches: Social Movement Studies and Institutional Approaches’, 137.

²³⁶ Ibid.

²³⁷ Maeke, *DDR Und PLO. Die Palästinalpolitik Des DDR-Staates*, 73.

²³⁸ Matthew Graham, ‘Campaigning Against Apartheid: The Rise, Fall and Legacies of the South Africa United Front 1960-1962’, *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* (Abingdon) 46 (2018): 1154, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03086534.2018.1506871>.

Democratic Republic's (GDR) diplomatic relations with Fatah – and more broadly the PLO – serves as a valuable case study for that observation. In the years of Ahmed Shuqeiry's chairmanship (1964–1968), Moscow ignored the Palestinian group, regarding it as a weak and extremist organization. Moreover, the close contacts of the PLO with the People's Republic of China were an additional factor that explained the reluctance of the Soviets to actively pursue contacts with the organization.²³⁹ The GDR also noted ideological differences, especially in regard to the social composition of the organization, which primarily was represented in the 1960s by the Palestinian middle and upper class, whose members adhered to traditional and religious worldviews.²⁴⁰

However, following the inclusion of Fatah in 1968 and the election of Arafat as chairman in 1969, the organization actively sought assistance from the Soviet Union. Fatah's ideological alignment and nationalistic political program were still deemed too 'bourgeois' for the Soviets and East German officials; however, by supporting the PLO, the socialist states hoped that their efforts would influence the organization and pave the way for the emergence of an ideologically comfortable party. Thus, active efforts by the East Germans and Soviets sought to unify the fractured PLO and strengthen the ideologically more 'progressive' forces within the organization by bolstering support for factions that were more inclined towards Marxism-Leninism and had an 'anti-imperialist' stance against the United States.²⁴¹

One of the greatest tests of the newly formed relationship between the PLO and the socialist states was Arafat's diplomatic efforts to garner support for the Palestinian cause from Western states. Already at the beginning of the 1970s, he claimed to Western politicians that, in contrast to the propaganda, the destruction of Israel was unfeasible, and that he primarily used this rhetoric to stabilize the PLO, arguing in favour of a Palestinian state that does not include the entirety of Palestine or that is ruled by the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan.²⁴² Still, Lutz Maeke points out that no Palestinian organization at the time distanced itself from guerrilla or terror campaigns or refrained from attacking Israel.²⁴³ The abandonment or decrease of violence was, due to internal conditions, hardly possible, and the political environment was not open to negotiations, as that would have probably torn the organization apart.

²³⁹ Maeke, *DDR Und PLO. Die Palästinalpolitik Des DDR-Staates*, 53.

²⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 55–59.

²⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 76–80.

²⁴² *Ibid.*, 153.

²⁴³ *Ibid.*

As voices for a political reconciliation with Israel after the October War of 1973 became louder, the so-called “rejectionist’ Front’, consisting of the PFLP, PFLP-GC²⁴⁴, and DFLP, demanded the end of any efforts for a political settlement with Israel. The ‘Rejectionist Front’ did not allow a premature reconciliation process, as it would have been based on a territorial compromise, while these organizations stressed the necessity of armed struggle to reclaim *all* of Palestine.²⁴⁵ According to Kabha, the Front launched several ‘demonstrations’ in the form of hostage-takings, such as the PFLP-GC’s raid in April 1974 on a youth hostel and the DFLP’s incursion into a school in May 1975. In both incidents, Israeli commandos could liberate some hostages, but the operations still entailed the death of dozens of captives.²⁴⁶ The first operation was launched to block any peace negotiations and increase the reputation of the group, entailing renewed Iraqi and Libyan financial aid for the *fedayeen*.²⁴⁷

An overall disproportionate use of political violence, in particular that directed against civilian targets, could impede the facilitation of contacts between an armed organization and a potential sponsor. GDR documents prove that the SED-state initially had a negative impression of the Marxist-Leninist PFLP in 1969, citing the front’s reservations regarding the Soviet and socialist states in the conflict and the various attacks against military and civilian targets committed by PFLP-*fedayeen* in Israel and Europe, such as bombings of supermarkets, universities, embassies, or offices of the Israeli airline El Al.²⁴⁸ Later on, the Soviets and East Germans disconnected the violence displayed by Palestinian armed groups from the PLO, emphasising that individual parties of the organizations, such as Fatah, PFLP, or DFLP, were responsible for ‘acts of terror’ and not the organization *per se*, which ostensibly condemned these operations.²⁴⁹ Lutz Maeke points to the paradoxical nature of that belief, as these above-mentioned armed factions asserted themselves as the constituted internal and external representation of the PLO, forming together the national liberation front.²⁵⁰

To contextualize this more, it should be mentioned that the ‘global operations’ of Palestinian armed groups peaked at the beginning of the 1970s, after their ousting from Jordan. While the Palestinian *fedayeen* recovered from the expulsion from their ‘safe base’, hardliners within

²⁴⁴ The Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine – General Command (PFLP-GC) was one of the multiple offshoot parties that has split from the main organization in 1968 and had Islamist leanings, see Kabha, *The Palestinian People. Seeking Sovereignty and State*, 229f.

²⁴⁵ Kabha, *The Palestinian People. Seeking Sovereignty and State*, 265f.

²⁴⁶ Ibid., 266.

²⁴⁷ Ibid.

²⁴⁸ Maeke, *DDR Und PLO. Die Palästinapolitik Des DDR-Staates*, 70f.

²⁴⁹ Ibid., 73 und 78.

²⁵⁰ Ibid., 73.

Fatah demanded revenge against Jordan and the internationalization of the struggle.

Precipitated by the PFLP in 1968, Black September members now planned global operations against all of their enemies, including Israel, Zionism, and the hostile Arab regimes.²⁵¹ For Fatah, guerrilla warfare was at this time an indispensable component of the *fedayeen*'s strategy for liberation. The PLO's constitution stipulated at the beginning that only armed struggle could liberate Palestine, a principle whose origin some researchers attribute to the Maoist influence on the organization in the 1960s.²⁵²

Still, the rise of the organization Black September within Fatah concerned the moderates, including Arafat, but as a consequence of internal power plays, his options were limited. Nevertheless, the radicals of Black September soon began to take revenge against the Hashemite Kingdom by assassinating the Jordanian prime minister in 1971 before a conference in Cairo.²⁵³ Together with the PFLP, *fedayeen* of Black September hijacked an airplane at Lod airport in early 1972, while also bombing targets in Europe, including a Dutch gas company and a German electric company, asserting that those were associated with Israel.²⁵⁴ The most well-known incident in the organization's history was the attack on the Olympic village in Munich, in September 1972, when guerrillas of Black September took the Israeli Olympic team hostage and murdered them after the German police attempted to rescue the captive athletes.²⁵⁵

Munich became a watershed moment for the leading Palestinian armed organization and its 'international operations', as Fatah now tried to end Black September's activities, fearing that the Palestinians' diplomatic achievements on the world stage would vanish as a consequence of these unrestrained attacks. The global outrage therefore forced Fatah to stop its 'international operations' and direct its attention exclusively again towards Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories.²⁵⁶ Israel, on the other hand, began, as a consequence of the

²⁵¹ Chamberlin, *The Global Offensive: The United States, the Palestine Liberation Organization, and the Making of the Post-Cold War Order*, 148.

²⁵² Sing, 'Brothers in Arms. How Palestinian Maoists Turned Jihadists', 13.

²⁵³ Chamberlin, *The Global Offensive: The United States, the Palestine Liberation Organization, and the Making of the Post-Cold War Order*, 149.

²⁵⁴ Şayığ, *Armed Struggle and the Search for State: The Palestinian National Movement 1949-1993*, 307f.

²⁵⁵ Ibid., 309.

²⁵⁶ Chamberlin, *The Global Offensive: The United States, the Palestine Liberation Organization, and the Making of the Post-Cold War Order*, 172f; Şayığ, *Armed Struggle and the Search for State: The Palestinian National Movement 1949-1993*, 310.

various terror attacks on its civilians, reprisal attacks against targets in Syria and Lebanon, inflicting civilian casualties that far exceeded the number of victims of the Munich attack.²⁵⁷

In sharp contrast to the PLO's armed factions, the ANC's military wing, Umkhonto we Sizwe, refrained from attacking civilian or military targets outside Southern Africa. The ANC realised early in the struggle that excessive, misplaced, and disproportionate use of violence would impede 'the struggle'. ANC figures knew that this kind of violence, especially in the form of terrorism, would alienate potential supporters.²⁵⁸ The organization tried to create the image of a 'sanitized struggle', presenting itself in the Western World and through the global solidarity movements as a largely non-violent and just movement that used violence only in a legitimate manner.²⁵⁹ The necessity of maintaining the correct image was of utmost importance for the liberation movement. According to Stephen Ellis, the national liberation movement used the London-based media operation, partially financed by the AAM and the International Defence and Aid Fund, as a propaganda machine, which helped, on the one hand, to create the image of Nelson Mandela as an iconic hero but also was adamant in branding all critical information regarding the organization, even if true, as 'racist' or 'pro-Apartheid'.²⁶⁰

While the ANC did not start a 'global guerrilla war', political violence based on transnational alliances and solidarity among liberation movements still became a strategy for the Congress. Following the ban and expulsion in 1962, ANC officials faced many challenges in regard to the implementation of a feasible armed struggle campaign. Being exiled was amongst the most impeding factors for the national liberation movement, as the ANC initially had no external 'safe bases', that is an operational area to retreat to for the guerrillas, ideally adjacent

²⁵⁷ Chamberlin, *The Global Offensive: The United States, the Palestine Liberation Organization, and the Making of the Post-Cold War Order*, 168 and 174.

²⁵⁸ Nelson Mandela, for instance, recounts the beginning of the Umkhonto we Sizwe's armed campaign and how he and his comrades contemplated the form of their violent activities, differentiating between sabotage, guerrilla warfare, terrorism, and open revolution. He explains in his biography that terrorism inevitably causes disadvantages for those who rely on it, as this strategy would have undermined any popular support. Thus, they chose the strategy that caused the least loss of human life, namely sabotage. Nevertheless, they still considered terrorism, alongside guerrilla warfare, as an option in case the sabotage campaign failed, see Mandela, *Long Walk to Freedom: The Autobiography of Nelson Mandela*, 336.

²⁵⁹ However, the accuracy of this self-created image by the ANC will come under scrutiny in chapter '5.2 Violence against civilians in the media of liberation movements'.

²⁶⁰ For instance, Siphos Jama, 'Questions of Justice and War' in: Sechaba, January issue 1985, p. 13–20.

to the South African border, similar to the bases of the Mozambique Liberation Front (FRELIMO), which conducted incursions into Portuguese Mozambique from Tanzania.²⁶¹

However, the South African Apartheid Regime was allied with the Portuguese Empire and South Rhodesia. All three were eager to act against national liberation movements operating on their territories, preventing the possibility for the ANC to establish a 'safe base'. In order to change this operational disadvantage, the ANC sought alliances with other national liberation movements, such as the Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU). Like other Southern African liberation movements, influenced by anti-colonial and 'anti-imperialist' ideas, the ANC lauded and nurtured the image of mutual solidarity against colonial forces and repressive regimes. Still, the alliances were also necessary from a strategic perspective, as the fall of white-minority regimes and colonial powers on the continent would have eventually threatened South Africa's position in the region.²⁶²

Insofar as solidarity had its limits anyway, as *realpolitik* also affected the ANC's relations with other national liberation movements. Briefly after the secession and decolonization of Angola from Portugal in 1975, a civil war broke out between the former national liberation movements, the National Front for the Liberation of Angola (FNLA), the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA), and the People's Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA). The USA and South Africa backed UNITA and FNLA troops, an alliance that was condemned by the ANC in its media.²⁶³ The ANC, in contrast, allied with the MPLA, which received primarily military assistance from the Soviet Union and Cuba.²⁶⁴ Umkhonto we Sizwe profited from the cooperation with the MPLA and could, in turn, get access to Cuban military training in Angolan bases.²⁶⁵

Additionally, an alliance with another national liberation movement can also open new opportunities for the armed struggle campaign of a movement, in particular when the allies attain their goal of liberation. The success of a national liberation movement could become a motivational factor, serving as a moral boost for its own struggle. Also, the state now run, in

²⁶¹ Thula Simpson, 'The Making (and Remaking) of a Revolutionary Plan: Strategic Dilemmas of the ANC's Armed Struggle, 1974-1978', *Social Dynamics* (ABINGDON) 35 (2009): 312–15, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02533950903076410>.

²⁶² Ana Moledo, "'A New Phase of Anti-Imperialist Cooperation': The Making of Liberation Alliances in 1960s' (Unliberated) Southern Africa', *Comparativ : Leipziger Beiträge Zur Universalgeschichte Und Vergleichenden Gesellschaftsforschung* 29 (2019): 20–25, <https://doi.org/10.26014/j.comp.2019.04.02>.

²⁶³ Holness, Marga, 'Pretoria's War in Angola' in: Sechaba, February issue 1988, p. 2–8.

²⁶⁴ Simpson, *Umkhonto We Sizwe. The ANC's Armed Struggle*, 240f.

²⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 252.

theory, by an anti-colonial administration that supports its former comrades in their cause, could mobilise resources or serve as a springboard and ‘safe base’ for other national liberation movements. Coming back to the MPLA-ANC alliance, the ANC harnessed Angolan territory by establishing multiple training camps for its military wing, Umkhonto we Sizwe, after Angolan independence in 1975,²⁶⁶ and upheld these bases for most of the civil war.²⁶⁷

4.2. The ‘rejectionist’s: terrorism and armed struggle against peace

The ‘rejectionists’ faced similar processes that led to the easing of violent tactics. While internal processes were important, external support proved to be one of the most crucial incentives. When Wadi Haddad, one of the founders of the PFLP, conceived the idea of airplane hijacking, he was inspired by one of the most basic principles of guerrilla warfare: hit the enemy at the ‘weak joints’, or in other words, attack him at his most vulnerable spots. Bassam Abu Sharif noted in his memoirs that Haddad pioneered the idea of expanding guerrilla warfare to the air.²⁶⁸ The PFLP had, in the beginning, issues recruiting new cadets and received much less material assistance from sponsor states than Arafat’s Fatah. The ‘international operations’ of the PFLP were intended to serve as a complementary tool to garner a positive reputation in the Arab world, mobilise the Arab masses, and force the attention of the world back to resolving the situation of the Palestinians.²⁶⁹ In addition to that, the media presence elevated the position of the PFLP in the internal power dynamics within the *fedayeen* movement.²⁷⁰ According to Yezid Sayigh, the Dawson airfield incident was also a deliberate strategy by Wadi Haddad to destroy any efforts for reconciliation between Israel and the Arab regimes, attempting to end the fragile ceasefire between both sides.²⁷¹

However, the ‘international operations’ soon became a liability for the organization. On the one hand, the hijacking of aircraft and the targeting of civilians were criticized by leftist members within the group, pointing to the incompatibility of these tactics with Marxism-Leninism, but also to the damage to the Palestinian cause and failures like the Dawson airfield

²⁶⁶ Ibid., 233.

²⁶⁷ The ANC had to leave Angola in accordance with the Tripartite Agreement in 1989, see Simpson, *Umkhonto We Sizwe. The ANC’s Armed Struggle*, 464f; Thula Simpson, ‘Toyi-Toyi-Ing to Freedom: The Endgame in the ANC’s Armed Struggle, 1989-1990’, *Journal of Southern African Studies* (ABINGDON) 35 (2009): 507, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03057070902920015>.

²⁶⁸ Abu Sharif and Mahnaimi, *Tried by Fire. The Searing True Story of Two Men at the Heart of the Struggle between the Arabs and the Jews*, 59.

²⁶⁹ Şāyig, *Armed Struggle and the Search for State: The Palestinian National Movement 1949-1993*, 213f.

²⁷⁰ Chamberlin, *The Global Offensive: The United States, the Palestine Liberation Organization, and the Making of the Post-Cold War Order*, 73.

²⁷¹ Ibid., 256f.

in Jordan. Following this criticism, some members of the group split off and formed the Revolutionary Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (RPFLP).²⁷² At the next internal congress, the organization suspended the aircraft hijackings, and Wadi Haddad was instructed to inform the leadership in advance before conducting one of his ‘international operations’. Nevertheless, he ignored these new regulations and continued to conduct aircraft hijackings in 1971 and 1972, leading eventually to his ousting from the front. Still, he maintained contacts with his former comrades and covertly financed them through his activities with his offshoot organization called ‘PFLP-International Operations’.²⁷³

On the other hand, the ‘adventurism’ also affected the relations with potential sponsors, as the events of Black September in Jordan threatened the newly established diplomatic relations with the People’s Republic. George Habash visited China one month after the events of Black September in Jordan. His visit would have included a meeting with Zhou Enlai, the prime minister of the People’s Republic, but when Enlai was informed of the looming appointment with Habash, the prime minister criticized the officials who arranged this, and he refused to meet with the general secretary of the PFLP.²⁷⁴ In addition to the fiasco in China, the Soviet Union also initially avoided contact with the organization. The attempts of the *fedayeen* to derail the ceasefire initiatives between Israel and Arab regimes, some of them Soviet allies, would have threatened the Union’s interests. Moreover, Soviet officials feared that the overthrow of the Hashemite kingdom, which would then be replaced by a militant Palestinian leadership, would eventually destabilize the region.²⁷⁵ This also might explain why the PFLP was excluded from an official PLO delegation to Moscow in 1971.²⁷⁶ According to former PFLP member Bassam Abu Sharif, the Soviet Union’s offer of material and personnel assistance, in the form of military training, weapons, and more, preconditioned on the suspension of the hijackings, convinced George Habash to end this tactic.²⁷⁷

Similar to the PLO’s ‘rejectionist’ front, the PAC also believed that the liberation movement’s long-term goal of the fall of white-minority rule could only be attained through armed

²⁷² Ibid., 300f.

²⁷³ Ibid., 304f.

²⁷⁴ Gangzheng She, ‘The Cold War and Chinese Policy toward the Arab-Israeli Conflict, 1963–1975’, *Journal of Cold War Studies* 22, no. 1 (2020): 159f, https://doi.org/10.1162/jcws_a_00928; Sayigh describes a similar In this version, however, George Habash was visiting Moscow and was barred from meeting Soviet officials. Both events may refer to the same event, see Şāyig, *Armed Struggle and the Search for State. The Palestinian National Movement 1949-1993*, 304.

²⁷⁵ Dannreuthner, *The Soviet Union and the PLO*, 44f.

²⁷⁶ Şāyig, *Armed Struggle and the Search for State: The Palestinian National Movement 1949-1993*, 304.

²⁷⁷ Bassam Abu Sharif, *Arafat and the Dream of Palestine. An Insider’s Account* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 18f.

struggle. Newspapers of the organization, in accordance with this principle, proclaimed in 1987 that ‘Azania shall be freed by the gun’²⁷⁸, as PAC officials asserted their steadfastness on this strategy.²⁷⁹ For the PAC, ‘revolutionary violence’ became a dogma, best exemplified by one of their key slogans, reappearing in their media: “One Settler, One Bullet.”²⁸⁰ Nevertheless, the organization changed its stance on armed struggle over time. Twelve years earlier, an article explained:

“We want to repeat what has been said before: negotiations and armed struggle are not necessarily mutually exclusive. The strength of the former grows from the latter, and to give up what is your strong point in negotiations is simply suicidal.”²⁸¹

The means and intensity of political violence employed change with the political circumstances and the conditions faced. As the South African state declared a national emergency during the 1980s and violently suppressed uprisings in the townships, the national movement’s adherence to armed struggle was seen as the exclusive option at the moment.²⁸² However, as the PAC had the official status of a ‘national liberation movement’, the organization had more opportunities than individual Palestinian armed factions. The organization met regularly with other national liberation movements and had the possibility to form diplomatic contacts with these movements. Meetings with well-known figures of liberation movements were depicted in the media like with Yasser Arafat in Guinea in 1987.²⁸³

A substantial part of the Palestinian and South African ‘rejectionist’ armed groups continued their armed struggle campaigns during the peace negotiations, led by the moderate parties in the South African and Palestinian struggles. The ANC began to negotiate with the South African government under F.W. de Klerk in 1989, as the latter realized that perpetuating the apartheid system was becoming unsustainable. The ANC, however, laid out in the OAU-sponsored ‘Harare declaration’ that they would only end the armed struggle campaign and

²⁷⁸ N. N., ‘Azania shall be freed by the gun says PAC official’ in: Azania Combat 1987, vol. 3, p. 11, Accessed on the 21st of January 2026

https://archive.org/details/azaniacombat/AzaniaCombat_1987_03/page/10/mode/2up.

²⁷⁹ Ibid.

²⁸⁰ In the same issue as n. 279, the slogan is reiterated several times, see *ibid.*, 14, 18, 28, and 32.

²⁸¹ N. N., ‘A Democratic Azania: PAC’s Minimum demand’, in: Azania Combat 1975, vol. 2, p. 11–15, here p. 13, Accessed on the 21st of January 2026

https://archive.org/details/azaniacombat/AzaniaCombat_1975_03/page/n5/mode/2up.

²⁸² N. N., ‘We won’t talk with Pretoria, in: Azania Combat 1988, vol. 7, p. 11, Accessed on the 22nd of January 2026, <https://s3.eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/bishopsgate/Azania-Combat-No.7-1988.pdf>.

²⁸³ *Ibid.*, 31.

enter negotiations if the state fulfilled its demands, including the end of the state of emergency, the withdrawal of troops from the townships, and the release of political prisoners, to name a few.²⁸⁴ The situation remained tense, as the South African government had not fulfilled all of the stipulated conditions, so the ANC and the state security forces continued with reciprocal acts of violence. However, after consultations between the opposing forces in August 1990, the ANC officially ended its violent activities against the state after the so-called 'Pretoria Minute'.²⁸⁵ Over the next few years, structures of political apartheid were dismantled. When Nelson Mandela became president after the elections in South Africa in 1994, former Soviet officials felt triumphant that the 'anti-imperialist struggle', which, according to their perspective, had been waged by the socialist states, the national liberation movements, and the popular bases in Western states, finally succeeded.²⁸⁶

However, not all South African liberation movements joined or supported the negotiations at first. The PAC rejected any efforts to settle with the South African government, maintaining publicly its position that armed struggle would bring the Apartheid Regime to its knees. Still, the liberation movement did not completely preclude a solution based on negotiations, as it published a letter with its conditions, demanding the reversal of the legal framework that enabled apartheid and the right to continue armed struggle as leverage against the South African government.²⁸⁷ The organization reacted to the 'Pretoria Minute' with great unease, in particular after the stalling of negotiations and renewed violence by the security apparatus in autumn 1990, believing that the peaceful transition to a liberal democracy wouldn't be possible.²⁸⁸

While the ANC suspended its violent activities against the state, the APLA reinforced its guerrilla warfare against the security apparatus, but also engaged in a terror campaign, deliberately inflicting casualties on white South Africans. The organization joined and left the negotiations for the democratic transition several times in the next years, and the PAC insisted on its right to armed struggle and conditioned its participation in the peace process on it. Eventually, an intervention from Zimbabwe mediated between the South African government and the PAC. In November 1993, both sides agreed on the cessation of all violence, and in the

²⁸⁴ Simpson, 'Toyi-Toyi-Ing to Freedom: The Endgame in the ANC's Armed Struggle, 1989-1990', 511.

²⁸⁵ Ibid., 514–520.

²⁸⁶ Sue Onslow, 'The End of the Cold War and the End of Apartheid, April 1994', *Cold War History* (ABINGDON) 24 (2024): 315, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14682745.2024.2317463>.

²⁸⁷ Kondlo and Harries, *In the Twilight of the Revolution: The Pan Africanist Congress of Azania (South Africa) 1959-1994*, 264f.

²⁸⁸ Ibid., 268f.

next year, the APLA was incorporated into the South African National Defence Force, ending the last chapter of strategic political violence by a South African national liberation movement against the state.²⁸⁹

For the Palestinians, the signing of the Oslo Accords is remembered today as a disaster. After the First Intifada faded, the negotiations with Israel opened the opportunity for the Palestinians to receive autonomy within the occupied territories. The PLO transformed from a 'national liberation movement' to being part of the Palestinian Authority (PA), which should govern Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza, however, without having independence and sovereignty. Even as autonomous governance was initially welcomed, the other stipulations of Oslo, such as the fragmentation of the occupied territories and later imposed restrictions regarding travel and access to land, drew widespread criticism from Palestinian voices worldwide.²⁹⁰ Amongst the obligations of the Oslo process, the PA had to act against the 'rejectionist's', Palestinian armed groups that still demanded that Palestinian liberation could only be achieved through armed struggle. The violent 'rejectionist's' at this time, however, were primarily not part of the PLO but Islamic armed groups, namely Hamas and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad. In the beginning, the PA acted against Palestinian armed factions and urged the parties to refrain from attacking Israel, emphasizing that they should trust the peace process.²⁹¹

The reasons for the failure of the peace process are multi-layered and complex. Some researchers point to the institutional challenges within the process, even accusing Israel of never having the intention to let the Palestinians have a fully independent and sovereign state, seeing the peace process as a scheme to decrease and outsource the costs of the occupation.²⁹² Others blame Palestinian leaders for the failure of the peace process, pointing to their reluctance to accept a settlement in 2000 and 2008.²⁹³ For some, the setback regarding the

²⁸⁹ Ibid., 273f.

²⁹⁰ Kabha, *The Palestinian People. Seeking Sovereignty and State*, 331f; Khalidi, *The Hundred Years' War on Palestine. A History of Settler Colonial Conquest and Resistance*, 199–206.

²⁹¹ Khalidi, *The Hundred Years' War on Palestine. A History of Settler Colonial Conquest and Resistance*, 214.; Benny Morris, on the other hand, asserts that Arafat only half-heartedly acted against Palestinians who attacked Israelis, including Hamas and the Islamic Jihad, as he worried about his standing in the Palestinian public, see Morris, *Righteous Victims. A History of the Zionist-Arab Conflict. 1881-2001*, 625f.

²⁹² Khalidi, *The Hundred Years' War on Palestine. A History of Settler Colonial Conquest and Resistance*, 205f.

²⁹³ Raphael Cohen-Almagor, 'The Failed Palestinian-Israeli Peace Process 1993-2011: An Israeli Perspective', *Israel Affairs* (Abingdon) 18 (2012): 566–69 and 571f, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13537121.2012.717389>.

peace process started with the assassination of Yitzhak Rabin, the Israeli prime minister who signed the Oslo Accords with Arafat, by the extremist settler Yigal Amir.²⁹⁴

However, a crucial event that arguably massively contributed to the derailment of the peace process even preceded Rabin's death: the Hebron massacre in 1994. Baruch Goldstein, a member of the Israeli far-right Kach party, entered the Tomb of the Patriarchs and killed 29 people who were performing prayers at that time. While the Israeli political leadership condemned Goldstein's actions and subsequently banned the Kach party, the massacre served as proof for the Palestinian "rejectionist's" that Israel was not interested in peace. Therefore, Hamas and Islamic Jihad responded to Goldstein's massacre with suicide bombings against Israeli civilians.²⁹⁵

At this point, the Palestinian historical trajectory diverged from the South African one, from a path to peace to a renewed flare-up of the conflict. While the PAC's violence against white South Africans could not sabotage the reconciliation of all 'races', Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad terror attacks, paired with Shimon Peres' weak performance in the election campaign, enabled the victory of Benjamin Netanyahu and the Likud in 1996.²⁹⁶ Netanyahu was and is diametrically opposed to an independent Palestinian state and tried to actively prevent the further implementation of the Oslo peace process, something which he admitted in 2023.²⁹⁷ Further efforts to revive the process eventually failed, and after the violent Second Intifada and the failure of the Camp David negotiations in 2000 and 2008, Israelis, believing that the Palestinians were not interested in peace, elected predominantly Zionist right-wing parties, thus supporting the faction that refuses to relinquish the West Bank (and Gaza) to the Palestinians, preventing the establishment of a Palestinian state.²⁹⁸

Michael Burawoy points to one factor that seemed to have been crucial here:

²⁹⁴ For instance, Avi Shlaim, see his chapter 'setback', see Shlaim, *The Iron Wall. Israel and the Arab World*, 566–84.

²⁹⁵ Shlaim, *The Iron Wall. Israel and the Arab World*, 542f and 577; Khalidi, *The Hundred Years' War on Palestine. A History of Settler Colonial Conquest and Resistance*, 214.

²⁹⁶ Ibid., 576–584.

²⁹⁷ Sharon, Jeremy, and Tol Staff. "Pointing to Hamas's 'Little State,' Netanyahu Touts His Role Blocking 2-State Solution." *The Times of Israel*, December 17, 2023. Accessed on 13th of February 2023, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/pointing-to-hamass-little-state-netanyahu-touts-role-blocking-2-state-solution/>.

²⁹⁸ This is partially connected to the Likud's ideology, historically the biggest Israeli right-wing party, exemplifies this at most, as the party still adheres to its vision of a 'Greater Israel', so a state encompassing the Israel-occupied territories, from the 1970s to the 1990s but also still today, see for instance, Shlaim, *The Iron Wall. Israel and the Arab World*, 359f and 516f.

‘When the Afrikaners came to power in 1948, they implemented the policy of the Bantustans to externalize African resistance but also secure cheap labour for agriculture and mining. However, a growing ‘liberal’ branch of Afrikaner nationalism—the so-called *verligtes*—began to use the state to advance its own capitalist projects and came to have an interest in a negotiated transition. By contrast, Zionism moved in the opposite direction, as the conservative and religious Likud party grew in strength. It was supported by Mizrahi (Arab) Jews—a growing subcaste who had themselves suffered from oppressive domination by the Ashkenazi or European Jews. In short, as the Afrikaners became more liberal and open-minded, the Zionists became more reactionary and uncompromising.’²⁹⁹

Even though his perspective lacks nuance by listing monocausal reasons for the respective histories of these complex processes that were connected to broader political, social, economic, and other factors that have also influenced the national movements of Afrikaners and Zionists, he still addresses an important point to consider regarding why the Palestinian and South African experiences have followed such different trajectories.

5. Targeting practices: Civilians as victims of liberation movements

As the last chapter demonstrates, the use of violence by liberation movements was connected to several factors, and I will list the key ones here again: First, the importance of ‘armed struggle’ seemed at least to have been influential for Maoist-inspired Palestinians and South Africans to adhere to their campaign, rejecting compromise and demanding the fulfilment of all their stipulated goals. Second, the excessive use of political violence, in the form of international terrorism and other forms of violence against civilians, isolated liberation movements, and the abandonment of these strategies or tactics was often a precondition for material support by sponsor states, though not all, as a handful of others seem to have been supportive of such acts. Third, even as national liberation movements were aware that terrorism would harm the international image of their armed struggle campaign, sometimes they used excessive violent acts as a tactical means to prevent negotiations or derail peace processes. In relation to the last point, a fundamental issue appears that had to be harmonized: Excessive violence and terrorism against white South Africans and Israeli civilians decrease in the long-term the support of the international community and are detested by the

²⁹⁹ Burawoy, ‘Palestine through a South African Lens’, 141.

populations of Western states, where leading governments, such as the US and UK, were allied with and have historically supported the Apartheid regime and the State of Israel.

To solve this problem, Palestinian and South African national liberation movements tried to influence people around the world by disseminating their narratives, as wars are not only fought on the battlefield but also in the media. South African and Palestinian liberation movements realized that with the globalization of media and the increasing importance of an international audience, the necessity of counter-narratives to the claims of their adversaries had to be presented. Chamberlin explains in a detailed manner to whom the narratives of the *fedayeen* were directed and who the targeted audience was, beyond Palestinians and the Arab world:

‘Fedayeen publications were not restricted to Arabic-language materials, however. A substantial portion of the guerrillas’ public materials appeared in English and French and was aimed at the broader world community. Designed to foster support for the fedayeen struggle, these publications found their way to newspaper offices and progressive groups around the world. Likewise, the guerrillas’ public diplomacy efforts in international forums like the United Nations, the Conference of Non-Aligned States, and the Organization for African Unity sought to speak to a global audience.’³⁰⁰

In the following chapter, I want to demonstrate that national liberation movements wanted to influence a global audience by disseminating narratives about their struggle. The most crucial aspect here was to win the hearts and minds of the people, in an effort to convince them of their cause, but also to minimise or deflect criticism in regard to excessive violence or terrorism. These efforts manifested in multiple forms, but I will focus primarily on two: how violence against their adversaries was justified and how civilian deaths were presented in the media.

I will use the Geneva Convention and its Additional Protocols as a reference point for what constitutes a civilian, namely, persons who are not involved in or active in military service or any other part of the security apparatus that is involved in the clashes with liberation movements. Liberation movements were aware of the existing legal framework. Overall, almost every war or conflict sees the death of civilians. Still, as a consequence of the wars and genocides that happened over the last century, international humanitarian law has provided

³⁰⁰ Chamberlin, ‘The Struggle Against Oppression Everywhere: The Global Politics of Palestinian Liberation’, 29.

legal frameworks that were designed to increase the protection of vulnerable groups, but also combatants, in armed conflict around the globe. A consequence of the apocalyptic experiences of the Second World War (1939–1945) has been the enshrinement of the protection of civilians in international humanitarian law, promulgated first in the Geneva Convention of 1949.³⁰¹ Later, the Additional Protocols of the Geneva Convention in 1977 introduced new stipulations, expanding the protection of civilians in armed conflicts.³⁰²

The Geneva Convention and the Additional Protocols were also used by liberation movements to emphasise the legitimacy of their struggle. Sipho Jama explores in his article ‘Questions of Justice and War’ in the ANC periodical how a just war is waged. For him, the prerequisites of a ‘just war’ are refraining from killing ‘innocent civilians’, the necessity of using violence as a last resort when no peaceful alternative exists, the prospects for success of the struggle, being waged by a legitimate authority, and the right intention toward the ends, noting that it has to remain humane.³⁰³ He differentiates between terrorism and guerrilla warfare, as the former deliberately injures innocents. In contrast, guerrilla warfare is seen here as a legitimate form of warfare, guaranteed under the First Additional Protocols of the Geneva Convention in 1977, under the precondition that the struggle is directed against a colonial power or an foreign occupation. He justifies the guerrillas’ approach of fighting without any uniforms, becoming indistinguishable from the general population in the process, as the guerrilla struggle is in his eyes, naturally a popular struggle, a struggle of the masses, that can not succeed without popular support.³⁰⁴

International law presents an obstacle here. For many armed forces engaged in guerrilla warfare, there existed an understanding of their dependence on the general population, as a guerrilla force without the backing of the people would have faced a massive disadvantage. A hostile population would have turned against these guerrillas and certainly not accepted their presence without campaigns of coercion, terror, and fear. Mao Zedong already addressed this by comparing the people to water and the guerrillas to fish: ‘How may it be said that these

³⁰¹ Gilad Ben-Nun, *The Fourth Geneva Convention for Civilians : The History of International Humanitarian Law* (I.B. Tauris, 2020), 1–3,

<https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&scope=site&db=nlebk&AN=2332819>.

³⁰² United Nations. Protocol Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949, and relating to the Protection of Victims of International Armed Conflicts (Additional Protocol I), 8 June 1977. United Nations Treaty Series vol. 1125 (1979), Accessed on the 16.01.2026, <https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/assets/treaties/470-AP-I-EN.pdf>.

³⁰³ Sipho Jama, ‘Questions of Justice and War’ in: *Sechaba*, January issue 1985, p. 13–20, here 14f.

³⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 18.

two cannot exist together? It is only undisciplined troops who make the people their enemies and who, like the fish out of its native element, cannot live.’³⁰⁵

Guerrilla movements face a predicament here. Armed forces are obligated to distinguish themselves from the civilian population while they are engaging in or preparing for an attack.³⁰⁶ The protocols, however, acknowledge that in some situations, armed forces are not able to distinguish themselves from civilians, albeit they still retain the status of combatants when they openly carry arms (1) during each engagement and (2) when this is visible to the adversary in the context of military preparations before an engagement.³⁰⁷ By blending themselves into the general population, guerrilla forces primarily follow this approach, as their indistinguishability from the population should, in theory, force the state, bound by international law, to refrain from attacking them. However, past studies have shown that states have historically tended to do the opposite, as they used extraordinary force against civilians as a response to guerrilla warfare.³⁰⁸

Overall, all three liberation movements (or, in the case of the PLO, rather the armed factions within the organization) emphasized that their use of violence was directed against military targets and that rumours about the intentional targeting of civilians were the enemy’s propaganda.³⁰⁹ In some cases, civilians were targeted, but with the allusion to their affiliation or role in the state apparatus. Politicians, prosecutors, or judges have been, in this context, favourite targets for assassinations. Also, courts, municipalities, and other state institutions were frequently attacked in bombings.³¹⁰ National liberation movements frequently attacked enterprises and companies that had connections to their enemy states, especially in regards to connections with the security apparatus. Offices of businesses and companies have also served as targets because of the economic contacts with the Israeli and South African governments, especially when they had connections to the security apparatus of those states. For example, El-Al, an Israeli airline, had its offices repeatedly attacked by Palestinian

³⁰⁵ Mao Zedong (Mao Tse-tung), *On Guerrilla Warfare*, chap. 6, quoted in “On Guerrilla Warfare,” Marxists Internet Archive, accessed February 18, 2026,

<https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/works/1937/guerrilla-warfare/ch06.htm>

³⁰⁶ United Nations. Protocol Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949, and relating to the Protection of Victims of International Armed Conflicts (Additional Protocol I), p. 261.

³⁰⁷ Ibid.

³⁰⁸ Benjamin Valentino et al., “‘Draining the Sea’: Mass Killing and Guerrilla Warfare,” *International Organization* (New York, USA) 58 (2004): 375–407, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020818304582061>.

³⁰⁹ For the PLO for instance, N.N., ‘Kiryat Shamouna’, P.F.L.P Bulletin issue 11, for PAC N. N., ‘APLA Targets are carefully selected’, in: Azania Combat 1988, vol. 7, p. 15, Accessed on the 22nd of January 2026, <https://s3.eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/bishopsgate/Azania-Combat-No.7-1988.pdf>.

³¹⁰ For instance, Simpson, *Umkhonto We Sizwe. The ANC’s Armed Struggle*, 473.

fedayeen in the 1960s and 1970s, in addition to the PFLP's multiple plane hijackings that targeting their planes. The PFLP alluded to the connection of the pilots to the Israeli military, claiming this made them legitimate military targets.³¹¹

In addition, times of excessive violence entailed expansive targeting methods that were directed at new categories of targetable civilians. In the 1980s, a great wave of violence swept over South Africa, as the government enacted a state of emergency and led an extensive and brutal suppression campaign against the population and the liberation movements that acted against the state. The excessive violence led to a change of strategies, leading to the inclusion of 'soft targets', that is, civilian spaces and white South Africans.³¹² Even though as the reports of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission determined that in many cases civilian casualties were due to mistakes and bad intelligence,³¹³ or the work of individual ANC cadets, who deliberately targeted civilians in violation to existing internal protocols, policies, and guidelines³¹⁴, the loosening of restrictions regarding 'military targets' and the broad definitions of the status of white settlers, who were accused of receiving military training at their farms, and the ANC's land mine campaign points towards the acceptance of excessive violence against some categories of civilians in the ANC.³¹⁵ This was also exemplified by the ANC's media, which lauded the landmine campaign, such as Radio Freedom.³¹⁶ Other targeted civilian groups of the ANC were trial witnesses, who were seen as 'collaborators', as some of them provided testimony regarding incidents involving apprehended cadets of the liberation movement.³¹⁷

Another mutual phenomenon shared by all movements was the rejection of culpability and the externalization of guilt in such cases, making the adversary responsible for the occurrence of civilian deaths. Here, some members of liberation movements pointed towards the (alleged) militarization of civilian areas or the use of excessive force by security personnel as reasons for the loss of civilian life. For instance, Jama maintained that civilian casualties due to

³¹¹ Şāyig, *Armed Struggle and the Search for State: The Palestinian National Movement 1949-1993*, 214.

³¹² Ellis, *External Mission: The ANC in Exile, 1960-1990*, 220f.

³¹³ South Africa. Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa: Final Report. Volume 2. Cape Town: The Commission, 1998. PDF file, 713 pp., 333, Accessed February 18, 2026. <https://www.justice.gov.za/trc/report/finalreport/Volume%202.pdf>.

³¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 328.

³¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 334.

³¹⁶ Ellis, *External Mission: The ANC in Exile, 1960-1990*, 220f.

³¹⁷ South Africa. Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa: Final Report. Volume 2., 337.

bombings and attacks are unintentional and were the consequence of the military's decision to place some of its infrastructure within cities.³¹⁸

In some cases, violence was justified in the media by reference to other historical conflicts. After the PFLP (GC) attacked an Israeli apartment building in Kiryat Shmona in 1974 and took several residents as hostages, an Israeli commando unit raided the facility, attempting to free some of the hostages but in vain. The PFLP Bulletin published an article dedicated to explaining the perspective of the *fedayeen*. On the one hand, the Israeli commando unit was blamed for the death of the hostages. Additionally, the attack was justified by asserting that the village was a 'base for expansion and forging for the colonial policies'³¹⁹ and the colonizer 'must bear the burden for the death and injury of <innocent> civilians.'³²⁰ Furthermore, the Bulletin drew an analogy to the Battle of Algiers, comparing the bombing of the European sector and the cafes, where they concluded that 'these civilians though perhaps not carrying arms that killed our revolutionaries, were part of the colonial policy and program of imposing subservience on the colonized.'³²¹

In other cases, violence against civilians was presented as a successful military operation against the military of the enemy. In March 1978, several *fedayeen* infiltrated from Lebanon to Israel, attacking passing cars and taking the passengers of a bus hostage. As a consequence, during a scuffle between the passengers and their abductors, one of the grenades handled by a *fedayeen* exploded, killing almost everyone on the bus. While all but two of the dead were in reality civilians, the PLO presented the case in its media differently, obfuscating the underlying goal of the operation, as some historians note that the attack on Israeli soil and Israel's response should derail the peace process between Israel and Egypt.³²² The 'Kamal Adwa operation' was hailed in PLO media as a successful operation in which it was claimed that 18 enemy soldiers died.³²³ The Zionists are presented in the following manner: "The only major achievement of the panic gripped Zionist authorities and forces was that they arbitrarily

³¹⁸ Jama, Sipho, 'Questions of Justice and War' in: Sechaba, January issue 1985, p. 13–20, 20.

³¹⁹ N.N., 'Kiryat Shamouna', P.F.L.P. Bulletin issue 11, May-June 1974, p.2, Accessed at the 06. February 2026 <https://www.marxists.org/subject/israel-palestine/periodicals/pflp-bulletin/pflp-bulletin-11.pdf>.

³²⁰ Ibid.

³²¹ Ibid.

³²² Morris, *Righteous Victims. A History of the Zionist-Arab Conflict. 1881-2001*, 460; Şayığ, *Armed Struggle and the Search for State: The Palestinian National Movement 1949-1993*, 426.

³²³ N.N. 'Kamal Adwan Operation', in: P.L.O. Information Bulletin, vol. 4 (6), April 1, 1978. Published by Palestine Liberation Organization Unified Information, 5-7, Accessed February 18, 2026. <https://www.marxists.org/subject/israel-palestine/periodicals/plo-info-bulletin/plo-information-bulletin.1978-04-01.pdf>

shot at a bus, which was said to have Palestinian commandos on it, which led to the death of many Zionist settlers.’³²⁴

Conclusion

The political violence of the Palestinian and South African liberation movements followed overall similar dynamics but also experienced striking differences. Starting from a gradual process of dispossession and the denial of collective rights to land, Palestinians and the Anti-Apartheid movement of South Africa began to organize themselves, reacting first with non-violent means in the form of protests, strikes, and boycotts against these policies or processes. However, as the situation on both sides deteriorated, more aggressive approaches were included as strategies that should help to attain their goals.

However, notable differences should be mentioned; the different structures of the PLO on one side and the ANC and PAC on the other have produced some significant diverging paths in terms of applying guerrilla theories and how far these operations should extend. The rivalries between the different factions within the PLO led to competition between the *fedayeen* for manpower, financial support, and external sponsors who supply arms and munitions. The lack of unity regarding coordination inhibited the ability of the organization to wage an effective guerrilla war, as factions implemented different guerrilla strategies. The ANC and PAC largely acted separately and had only in that sense internal disputes that appeared in times of tension, but still both national liberation movements competed for influence amongst the Anti-Apartheid Movement within and outside South Africa.

Some factions within the PLO expanded their ‘operations’ around the world. In particular, the PFLP earned a notorious reputation for the hijacking of planes in the 1960s and 1970s but conducted assaults and bombing campaigns against ‘soft targets’ throughout Europe, the Middle East, and Southeast Asia. However, after international pressure and internal criticism from party members, the organization decided to end its campaign, especially after the events of Black September in Jordan in 1970. By contrast, the South African organizations limited their armed campaigns to Southern Africa. The ANC cooperated with other African national liberation movements, fighting alongside them in Angola, Zimbabwe, Namibia, and Mozambique. On the international stage, the ANC avoided the ‘global guerrilla war’ against the allies of apartheid,

³²⁴ Ibid., 3.

preferring information and boycott campaigns against states and enterprises that had military and economic ties with apartheid South Africa.

In that sense, the conditions of armed struggle campaigns of all three movements strikingly resembled each other, especially as all three were non-state actors whose base of operation was located in exile. Their position forced them to adapt to their global environment and use global ideas to their advantage that could be instrumental for their struggles. Liberation movements employed strategic violence as the product of a historical process and relied on existing strategies designed by former revolutionaries and guerrilla fighters of anti-colonial wars for movements that are greatly outnumbered in comparison to their adversaries. For many liberation movements, the armed struggle was a last resort, the endpoint of failed negotiations, ignored demands, or persistent and ever-encroaching oppression. Still, violence was not seen as an exclusive form of ‘resistance’ at that point. Non-violent ‘resistance’ continued to belong to the arsenal of a liberation movement that was deeply engaged in armed struggle. In addition to that, the intensity of the armed struggle had to be adjusted and eased at times, as relations with external sponsors and supporters could have worsened with excesses of violence.

The use of political violence employed by the Palestinians preceded the PLO by decades. The PLO was founded profoundly within the violent conflict between Israel and the Arab states, and the inclusion of the *fedayeen* embarked the PLO factions’ armed struggle campaign to reclaim the homeland from which they were expelled. Still, PLO factions actually had to ease their employment of certain forms of political violence, such as terrorism on a global stage, seeing it as counterproductive to their cause. The ANC, on the other hand, conducted political violence first in a sabotage campaign that slowly evolved over decades into an armed struggle campaign that culminated into a people’s war.

Approaches to political violence correlated with the position within the liberation movements, the forces within, and ideological alignment. Influenced by the global revolutionary atmosphere of the 1960s and 1970s, spearheaded by anti-colonial and/or socialist movements, South Africans and Palestinians adopted the principles of guerrilla warfare tested on the battlefields of Algeria, China, or Vietnam. Defining factors that determined the selection of a movement’s struggle as a ‘model’ or use of a specific strategy are attributed to the perception of similarity and the success of the movement. States as patrons for military aid, including training, also facilitated the exchange of ideas, as the support of the People’s Republic of China entailed the proliferation of Maoist political positions within a movement and the endorsement of a ‘prolonged people’s war’. Maoist military theories became an essential

strategy in the first years of the Palestinian struggle and later also tremendously affected the PAC's armed engagement against the Apartheid regime. The 'People's War strategy' later also became important for the ANC, as Umkhonto we Sizwe adopted the Vietnamese modifications of Mao's tested strategy.

In regard to the dynamics, similarities are overall evident pertaining to the forms and intensity of political violence, two factors that proved to be most instrumental for diplomacy and global discourses on these movements. In contrast to other non-state actors, the goals of national liberation movements were legitimized by international law, as exemplified by the inclusion of these movements within the UN and various resolutions. However, even as legitimacy was granted, it was also not unconditional. Political violence in the form of terrorism, the use of excessive violence, or non-lethal violence that involved civilians was all in the long-term self-impeding strategies and damaged the images of some movements for generations to come. Additionally, movements or factions of the movement faced the danger to lose the support of their sponsors. The PLO felt these effects in particular with its 'international operations' on European soil, as the PFLP's hijackings and attacks of 'soft targets' in Europe, and Black September's revenge campaign caused arguably more harm in the long-term than it provided strategic advantages. The global Anti-Apartheid movement, which was, on the other hand, perceived as a peaceful resistance movement in the Western World, could garner much more support in Western countries.

A striking similarity has been the existence of "rejectionist's", a certain group that refused any negotiations with the adversary, in both regions, and their close affinity towards Maoism or Maoist concepts. The PFLP, DFLP, and PAC all tended at different times towards Maoism and to implement Mao's people's war strategy. From their perspective, only armed struggle should bring liberation, vehemently rejecting compromise-based peace initiatives. Many of those violent or excessive strategies were a tactic to increase the support, as these organizations had to compete with the leading movement that naturally received most material, financial or even diplomatic aid, as those leading movements were usually seen as representatives of their people.

So, being the spearhead of a movement entailed responsibility, as the decisions and actions chosen by the leader could alter the trajectory of the struggle, as the external perspective usually sees the leaders as representatives of the whole movement. National liberation movements were not in a position that allowed them to engage in an overall brutal manner, as they depended on external support, be it material, diplomatic, or in the form of a refuge. Still,

excessive violence and terrorism were used at times as tactical means or because of internal dynamics.

The establishment of a favourable public image in the world and the subsequent positioning of being 'morally superior' in contrast to their adversaries was regarded as a valuable asset, as public pressure against governments could have a tremendous impact on the relations with the liberation movement's opponents. Recognized by international law, national liberation movements had to adhere to international law, or else they would have been in danger of losing their legitimacy as a 'just movement' in the eyes of the world. Therefore, violence against civilians was justified, condoned, or even denied, to maintain this image towards certain audiences.

Going back now to one of the first formulated changes, were South Africans or Palestinians influenced from each other's armed struggle campaigns? Overall, the exchange of ideas on how to wage guerrilla warfare has been quasi-non-existent between the Palestinians and South Africans in the surveyed time span. Compared to Algeria, China, or Vietnam, South African liberation movements' approaches to guerrilla warfare had little effect on the PLO's armed struggle and vice versa, even though there has been an increasing awareness and intensified contacts over the decades, accompanied by the perception in the solidarity movements that the history of South Africans and Palestinians had striking similarities. Nevertheless, a multitude of reasons, several of them already listed on previous pages, may explain why both organizations have never really referenced the military campaigns of each other:

1. A liberation movement incorporates theories and ideas from movements that have already attained their goal: The selection and reformulation of guerrilla warfare theories, intentionally disseminated by the former guerrillas or willingly chosen by the national liberation movement, were connected to the success of an armed struggle campaign. Although the study of suppressed uprisings and failed national liberation movements provided valuable lessons, only the history of a victorious revolution turned into the 'blueprint' for a movement. The most notable exception here is the employment of tactics from a national movement's history, as national movements chose to reference past failings.

2. Material support and training provided by former guerrilla movements facilitated the transfer of ideas. In general, training programs conducted in sponsor states formed the approach to armed struggle of a movement. The close connection and usually the presence of high-ranking military figures on bases opened the opportunity to gain first-hand accounts from military leaders. Depending on the country, instructions became part of the study

program. Chinese training also included the introduction to the ‘prolonged people’s war’ strategy.

3. Geographical proximity and ideological similarity. As non-state actors in separate world regions, the ANC, PAC, and PLO had limited operational resources and relied on the multifaceted aid from state actors. Alliances with other national liberation movements offered little practical reason, because armed support, be it as comrades-in-arms or in the form of provisions, wouldn’t have been possible. Therefore, liberation movements usually chose their allies from the immediate geographical ‘neighbourhood’, as evidenced by the multitude of alliances that formed throughout Southern Africa. While many regions were still under the rule of colonial powers in the 1960s and 1970s, decolonization did not always entail emancipation of the colonized. Some newly independent states still upheld white-minority rule, such as Rhodesia. South Africa had also occupied some regions, like the former Mandate of Namibia. Southern African liberation movements possessed a mutual awareness of their situations and, crucially, perceived them as quite similar, which enabled and facilitated solidarity but also the exchange of ideas on guerrilla warfare.

Thus, a transfer of ideas between Palestinians and South Africans regarding strategies of liberation fully appeared only when, in 1994, political apartheid ended in South Africa. Some would now say that Nelson Mandela’s friendship with Yasser Arafat was the necessary catalyst, as their public appearances and Mandela’s support for the Palestinian cause precipitated a wave of solidarity that is to this day reminiscent of the solidarity amongst national liberation movements during the Cold War. However, I argue that the solidarity was a variable but not the most important one, as the more determining factor for the adoption of South African strategies has been the success of the ANC in its struggle, as the party harnessed multiple strategies that arguably significantly contributed to the end of the Apartheid regime. The effectiveness of international isolation as a strategy impressed the Palestinian solidarity movement and led to the rise of the global boycott movement against Israel, which is active to this day.

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