

“THE STRUGGLE MADE ME A NONRACIALIST”: WHY THERE WAS SO LITTLE TERRORISM IN THE ANTIAPARTHEID STRUGGLE

Jeff Goodwin*

Most theories of terrorism would lead one to have expected high levels of antiwhite terrorism in apartheid South Africa. Yet the African National Congress, the country's most important and influential antiapartheid political organization, never sanctioned terrorism against the dominant white minority. I argue that the ANC eschewed terrorism because of its commitment to “nonracial internationalism.” From the ANC's perspective, to have carried out a campaign of indiscriminate or “categorical” terrorism against whites would have alienated actual and potential white allies both inside and outside the country. The ANC's ideological commitment to nonracialism had a specific social basis: It grew out of a long history of collaboration between the ANC and white leftists inside and outside the country, especially those in the South African Communist Party.

Here's an experiment in counterfactual history: Imagine that in the midst of the historic Soweto uprising in South Africa in 1976, the African National Congress (ANC) announced a new strategic initiative. Employing slogans such as “Black Power!,” “Take the Struggle to the White Areas,” and “One Settler, One Bullet!,” the ANC called for an escalation of its fifteen-year-old armed struggle against the apartheid regime. Henceforth, all white South Africans—not just the army and police—would be considered legitimate targets in the struggle against white-supremacist rule.

We can only guess how events in South Africa would have played out had the ANC adopted this strategic orientation. Perhaps the white population would have closed ranks and supported or tolerated an escalation of violence against the black population. In this scenario, growing numbers of fearful whites would have swung to the far right, redoubling their support for apartheid and rejecting any extension of political or civil rights to blacks. Nelson Mandela would still be in a jail cell. Perhaps a growing number of whites would have fled the country in fear, taking their substantial economic assets with them, leading to an unprecedented economic crisis, rising unemployment, and even greater political conflict. Perhaps the remaining whites would build a complex of walls and electric fences—and a grid of “whites-only” roads—to seal themselves off more effectively from the black population. Then again, perhaps a severe economic crisis would have caused a veritable flood of emigration, with hundreds of thousands of whites fleeing to neighboring Namibia, Australia, Europe, and the United States. In the midst of this exiting crisis, perhaps white political leaders would have negotiated a transfer of power to an ANC-led government. Perhaps many whites would have refused to accept this kind of capitulation, demanding that the country be partitioned and whites given an autonomous territory of their own—an Afrikaner Republic of South Africa, perhaps.

Wherever our imagination might lead us in this thought-experiment, one conclusion seems unavoidable: South African history over the past thirty years would look very different from its actual trajectory had the ANC defined the white population as its enemy and begun a concerted campaign of terrorism against ordinary white civilians.

* Send all correspondence to Department of Sociology, New York University, jeff.goodwin@nyu.edu.

Is this kind of counterfactual history too preposterous even to consider? I think not. After all, the ANC was not a pacifist group; it had been at war with the apartheid regime since 1961. The idea of a blacks-only liberation struggle, furthermore, was very much in the air in South Africa around the time of the Soweto uprising due to the Black consciousness movement led by Steve Biko, which was very popular among students and political activists in particular.¹ (Biko himself was severely beaten and killed by the security police soon after the uprising.) Many activists who had cut their political teeth in the Black consciousness movement would flee the country in the aftermath of Soweto, with many ending up in the guerrilla camps of the ANC in Zambia, Angola, and Mozambique. Also, the slogan “Take the Struggle to the White Areas” was later taken up by the ANC itself during a new round of conflict during the mid-1980s. Beneath this slogan, one ANC leaflet distributed in South Africa in late 1985 proclaimed, “White South Africa cannot be at peace while the Black townships are in flames” (ANC 1985). Finally, the slogan “One Settler, One Bullet!” would in fact be adopted by groups associated with the Pan-Africanist Congress (PAC), which had split from the ANC in 1959 precisely over the role of whites (white communists in particular) in the liberation struggle. (The PAC excluded whites from the organization, arguing that the liberation struggle should be led by blacks alone.) One such group, the Azanian People’s Liberation Army (APLA), would carry out several indiscriminate attacks on whites in the early 1990s.

EXTANT THEORIES OF TERRORISM

Most theories of terrorism, furthermore, would lead one to have expected high levels of terrorism in apartheid South Africa. For example, perhaps the most popular theory of terrorism suggests that political groups adopt terrorism as a strategy when they are very weak and yet desperate to redress their grievances. (This claim or rationalization also seems very popular among many groups that actually employ terrorism.) The core idea here is that groups that lack the capacity to wage effective conventional or even guerrilla warfare against repressive governments, not to mention nonviolent protest, or which fail to attain their goals even when they do employ these strategies, will turn to terrorism as a last resort. Terrorism, in this view, is a weapon of the weak (e.g., Crenshaw 1981).

In fact, the ANC did establish an armed wing called *Umkhonto we Sizwe* (“Spear of the Nation” or MK for short) in 1961. And it did so after decades of nonviolent opposition had failed to budge white rule and, more specifically, after the organization was banned by the government in the aftermath of the Sharpeville massacre of March 1960, in which 69 unarmed demonstrators were killed by police. Moreover, by the time of the Soweto uprising in 1976, MK had clearly failed to become an effective guerrilla force, as the South African Defense Forces (SADF) were simply too strong and effective. “By the late 1970s,” notes Gay Seidman, “the ANC had postponed indefinitely any real claim that it could bring down the South African government by force and began calling its attacks ‘armed propaganda’ aimed at raising black South Africans’ morale, rather than waging a full-scale war” (2000: 164). In this frustrating context, why not turn to terrorism?

Another popular theory suggests that oppositional terrorism is primarily a response to *state terrorism*. Leftist analysts of terrorism often make this claim, and it is mentioned, although not highly developed, by Herman and O’Sullivan (1989). They suggest that the “retail” terrorism of oppositional groups is caused or provoked by the “wholesale” or “primary” terrorism of states, especially powerful Western states, above all the United States. (The terms “wholesale” and “retail” terrorism, which have also been employed by Noam Chomsky, are meant to remind readers that state terrorism has been much more deadly than oppositional terrorism.) This claim certainly has an intuitive plausibility. Why else would oppositional groups turn to violence except when they confront a government that is itself unmoved by,

and indeed uses, violence against peaceful protesters, as at Sharpeville? Apartheid in South Africa is a textbook example of systematic state terrorism. Herman and O'Sullivan, for example, devote considerable attention to it (1989: chap. 2; see also Gareau 2004: chap. 5). By 1977, Biko was dead and the ANC's leaders were either languishing in prison or had been driven into exile. In such a repressive context, why not try terrorism?

Finally, yet another theory suggests that terrorism is the result of extreme social polarization between groups. Such polarization is said to exist when such groups are, for example, relationally distant (i.e., they have little if any intimate contact), culturally distant (i.e., they differ in terms of language, religion, dress, and other expressive characteristics), and extremely unequal in terms of wealth, status, and power (Senechal de la Roche 1996). "Enduring grievances" against, or "intractable offenses" by, groups that are socially distant from one's own allegedly provide the motive for organizing terrorist attacks. Thus, "terrorism is most likely in polarized conflicts where the grievance endures" (Senechal de la Roche 1996: 120; see also Black 2004: 18). By contrast, "closer civilians such as those of the same or similar ethnicity are largely immune to terrorism, especially its deadlier forms. If closer collective conflicts lead to violence at all, they produce different forms with fewer civilian casualties, such as riots, assassinations, kidnappings, and guerrilla warfare" (Black 2004: 20). Again, apartheid South Africa, which was explicitly based on the ideal of racial separation, would seem to have been a textbook example of social polarization, and there were certainly enduring grievances among the black population. If ever there existed a context in which blacks had reason to fear, hate, and kill whites, surely South Africa was it. Or was it?

WHY SO LITTLE TERRORISM?

Despite the weakness of the ANC's guerrilla army, the persistent violence of the apartheid state, and the extreme social distance between blacks and whites in South Africa, the ANC never sanctioned terrorism against whites. Groups associated with Black consciousness or the PAC's Africanist racial exclusivism, moreover, had little popular support after the late 1970s. The main antiapartheid coalition of the 1980s, the United Democratic Front (UDF), which included the country's principal labor federation, was openly aligned with the ANC—and vice versa—and refused to criticize the ANC's armed struggle, even though the UDF itself championed nonviolent resistance. "[T]he exile leadership" of the ANC, notes Stephen Davis, "sought to portray the ANC as a principled and responsible contender for power, [so] it imposed restrictions against terrorist tactics that specifically targeted noncombatant whites" (Davis 1987: 121). In 1980, the then-president of the ANC, Oliver Tambo, "even went to the extent of signing a protocol of the Geneva Convention which legally bound the ANC to avoid attacks on civilian targets, and to 'humanitarian conduct of the war,' marking the first time a guerrilla group had ever done so" (Davis 1987: 121-122).

To be sure, a number of civilians were killed by MK bombings during the 1980s. Still, as described by South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), these bombings were, with one notable exception, aimed at military targets (TRC 2003; Mokae 2004). The one exception—the bombing of a shopping center—was carried out by an unsupervised MK operative in contravention of MK guidelines, and the bombing was denounced by ANC officials (Seidman 2000, 2003). Several MK operations may be criticized for failing to take greater care to avoid civilian casualties, as indeed they were criticized by the TRC, including the bombing of a bar in Durban (thought to be among off-duty security officers) that killed three civilians. Nonetheless, it is difficult not to agree with the ANC's statement to the TRC:

Given the conditions in the 1980s, it is remarkable that so few armed attacks took place in which there was a high rate of civilian casualties. MK certainly had the capacity to kill many thousands of civilians. This would have been easy to do; but we never took this route, even under extreme provocation. When compared to the actions adopted by other national liberation

movements on this and other continents, the degree of restraint exercised by the ANC and MK is extraordinary. (ANC 1997)

This statement may be self-serving, but in my judgment it is basically correct. Even if MK only had the capacity to kill hundreds as opposed to thousands of white civilians, a terrorist campaign of this sort, including threats of more killings to come, would have fundamentally altered the terms of the political conflict in South Africa.²

So what accounts, then, for the ANC's refusal to employ, support, or encourage others to carry out a strategy of terrorism against South Africa's privileged white population? The simple answer is the ANC's longstanding commitment to nonracialism. The ANC was prepared to collaborate with—and indeed strongly encouraged the participation of—whites in the antiapartheid struggle. This included whites in South Africa, South African whites in exile, and indeed non-South African whites in Europe, the Soviet bloc, North America, and elsewhere. For this reason, the ANC's ideology embraced what we might call “nonracial internationalism.” This ideological commitment assumed that any particular white person—including whites who lived in South Africa and thereby materially benefited from apartheid (and even poor whites benefited in myriad ways from apartheid)—was a potential supporter of the antiapartheid movement. For the ANC to have carried out a campaign of indiscriminate, or what I have called categorical terrorism (Goodwin 2006), against whites in South Africa would contradict this ideological commitment, since it would have meant killing potential (and perhaps actual) allies inside the country. Further, it would undoubtedly have alienated many potential as well as actual white allies outside of South Africa.

This explanation, however, leads to the crucial question: Why was the ANC committed to nonracial internationalism? Why, more particularly, would it assume that whites who lived in South Africa were potential supporters of the antiapartheid movement? The answer to this question is that some whites, especially those in or close to South Africa's multiracial Communist Party, who were disproportionately Jewish, had long supported the antiapartheid movement. This political alliance with communists, I argue, became the main social basis of the ANC's nonracial internationalism, which survived and indeed deepened after the ANC turned to armed struggle in the 1960s. Again, it was this nonracial internationalism that preempted any tendencies within the ANC toward adopting a strategy of terrorism against South Africa's privileged whites.

The alliance between the ANC and the South African Communist Party (SACP) was solidified in the mid-1950s, shortly before their joint turn to armed struggle. The formation of this alliance was by no means a foregone conclusion. In the 1940s, militant leaders of the ANC's Youth League (formed in 1943), including Nelson Mandela and Oliver Tambo, sought to expel black communists from the ANC and doubted the wisdom of working with white groups. In fact, most communists were not white, although whites probably comprised a majority of the party's leadership.³ Like other Africanists, they thought the struggle should be carried forward by blacks themselves, were suspicious of foreign ideologies, and feared that Communists had ulterior motives. The Africanists, led by Robert Sobukwe, would eventually break from the ANC in 1959 and establish the Pan-Africanist Congress (PAC) (Pogrand 1990). But Mandela, Tambo, and most other ANC activists did not exit with Sobukwe. By then, they had become convinced of the virtues of nonracialism and had abandoned their earlier anticommunism. Why? According to Robert Price, their shift in thinking began after the electoral victory of the National Party (NP) in 1948:

Bringing as it did the introduction of new apartheid policies of racial domination as well as draconian new security measures, NP rule altered the strategic environment for those opposed to minority rule. The fact that the full power of the state was now directed single-mindedly at the preservation of minority rule emphasized for those in the opposition the need to garner political resources wherever they might be found. (1997: 156-57)

Price adds that in the subsequent, and heretofore unprecedented, mass-based resistance campaigns that the ANC organized against apartheid policies, “Indians and White leftists participated along with Africans, and . . . many in the ANC leadership entered into close personal cooperation with radicals of other race groups” (1997: 157). Virtually alone among the white population, white communists demonstrated a willingness to work with the ANC in militant antiapartheid campaigns. Two small, white antiapartheid political parties, the Liberal and Progressive parties, were founded in 1953 and 1959, respectively. But these avoided militant tactics and kept their distance from the ANC and Communist Party.

Communists’ status in the eyes of black activists was no doubt bolstered by the banning of the Communist Party—long before that of the ANC—by the Suppression of Communism Act passed by the white parliament in June 1950. The party officially disbanded itself at this time. Evidently, even whites could be deemed enemies of the white state. Still, if cooperation with communists had not always been easy for ANC activists, neither was cooperation with the ANC a simple matter for communists. Some party members (and other leftists) doubted the wisdom of an alliance with the “bourgeois” ANC, whose recent Africanist tendencies and anticommunism was all the more worrying. In 1953, however, the Communist Information Bureau or Cominform (the successor to the prewar Comintern) declared that communist parties in colonial and semicolonial countries should adopt a “national democratic” strategy and no longer “challenge the leadership of the bourgeoisie in national struggles or fight for an alternative leadership by the working class” (Fine and Davis 1990: 128-129; quoted in Younis 2000: 87). Not surprisingly, when the Communist Party was secretly reorganized in 1953, it sought closer ties with the ANC and provided much of the impetus behind the white Congress of Democrats (COD), which was formed in October 1953 (Everatt 1991; Lazerson 1994).

The COD was the white component of the Congress Alliance, a united front of South Africa’s racial groups, led by the ANC, which in 1955 adopted the nonracial “Freedom Charter” as its manifesto. “South Africa belongs to all who live in it,” it famously declares, “black and white.” The apartheid regime attempted to break up this front in December 1956, arresting 156 Congress Alliance leaders and members: 105 blacks, 23 whites (13 of whom were Jewish), 21 individuals of South Asian descent, and seven mixed-race (“colored”) individuals. This was an unfortunate reminder to the public (from the government’s perspective) of the multiracial character of the antiapartheid movement. Ninety-one of those arrested were eventually charged with high treason. The infamous Treason Trial continued into March 1961 before all the defendants were acquitted. ANC leader Chief Albert Lutuli, who was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1960, would write: “if there is one thing which helped push our movement along nonracial lines, away from narrow, separative racism, it is the Treason Trial, which showed the depth of the sincerity and devotion to a nobler cause on the white side of the color line” (quoted in Sharp 2005: 457).

Thus, during the 1950s (as in the decades to come), black ANC activists came to work shoulder to shoulder—and to suffer shoulder to shoulder—with white communists like Joe Slovo, Ruth First, Sam Kahn, Rusty Bernstein, Ronnie Kasrils, Denis Goldberg, Ben Turok, Harold Wolpe, and others. The evident dedication of these individuals to the antiapartheid struggle strongly reinforced the ANC’s nonracialism, as well as what we might call its anti-anticommunism. M. B. Yengwa, who was active in the ANC Youth League in the 1940s and was elected to the ANC National Executive Committee in 1952, described his own deepening commitment to nonracialism as a gradual learning process:

The National Party made laws against the Communist Party, it made laws against the coloured, the Group Areas Act, and so forth. We felt that, no, we are all lumped together and we must all fight together. This was a natural process of learning about our common struggle against apartheid, and we were able to discover in actual practice that our fight was against the common enemy. The whole concept of non-racialism developed imperceptibly, slowly, but I’ve become a convinced non-racialist. I am repeating this point over and over and over again: the struggle made me a non-racialist. (quoted in Frederikse 1990: 53)

Thus, by the time the ANC and SACP established *Umkhonto we Sizwe* (MK) in 1961 (and MK would have been the organization most capable of carrying out any extended, organized campaign of terrorism in South Africa), the ANC had forged a close, working relationship with the Communist Party, which also meant close, interpersonal ties with whites. In fact, the party was very much present at the creation of MK. Driven underground after 1950, the party had long contemplated the feasibility of armed struggle in South Africa. Joe Slovo would soon become MK's chief of staff. Jack Hodgson, who fought in North Africa during World War II, "was considered the military expert among MK cadres" (Lazerson 1994: 232). Ronnie Kasrils would later become MK's head of intelligence.

At its founding, the leadership of MK—above all, Nelson Mandela—not only explicitly rejected terrorism as a strategy, but, at least initially, was ambivalent about launching a campaign of guerrilla warfare against government forces. In the beginning, MK limited itself to economic sabotage. In fact, the public statement that announced the formation of MK did not promise a violent overthrow of apartheid, but expressed hope that its sabotage campaign would lead the Nationalist Party to rethink its repressive policies and thereby *prevent* civil war:

We of Umkhonto we Sizwe have always sought—as the liberation movement has sought—to achieve liberation without bloodshed and civil clash. We do so still. We hope—even at this late hour—that our first actions will awaken everyone to a realization of the disastrous situation to which the Nationalist policy is leading. We hope to bring the government and its supporters to their senses before it is too late, so that both government and its policies can be changed before matters reach the desperate stage of civil war. We believe our actions to be a blow against the Nationalist preparations for civil war and military rule. (quoted in Johns and Davis 1991: 139)

Alas, this plea proved to be premature by approximately thirty years. It "fell on deaf ears," wrote Slovo. "The regime responded with a series of laws which made sabotage a capital crime and gave the security forces a free hand to detain without trial and engage in torture in the police cells—all this with no access to legal assistance and without scrutiny by the courts" (Slovo 1997: 185).

In July 1963, the police raided the MK's command center in the Johannesburg suburb of Rivonia, arresting most of the MK high command (Mandela had already been detained in August 1962). In all, seventeen people were arrested, including five whites (all Jewish and all members of or close to the Communist Party). In the subsequent Rivonia Trial, which concluded in April 1964, eight of the nine defendants were found guilty and sentenced to life imprisonment, including Mandela, Walter Sisulu, Dennis Goldberg, and Govan Mbeki (the father of Thabo Mbeki, who was later elected president of South Africa). Only Rusty Bernstein was acquitted. The team of attorneys for the defendants was led by Bram Fischer, scion of a distinguished Afrikaner family, an Oxford graduate, and a communist. (Fischer himself was detained in September 1964, rearrested in 1966 for violating the Suppression of Communism Act and conspiring to commit sabotage, and sentenced to life imprisonment; he died in prison in 1975.) Mandela, speaking from the dock during the trial, succinctly explained the reasons for the ANC-SACP alliance:

It is perhaps difficult for white South Africans, with an ingrained prejudice against communism, to understand why experienced African politicians so readily accepted communists as their friends. But to us the reason is obvious. Theoretical differences amongst those fighting against oppression is a luxury we cannot afford at this stage. What is more, for many decades communists were the only political group in South Africa who were prepared to eat with us, talk with us, live with us and work with us. They were the only political group which was prepared to work with the Africans for the attainment of political rights and a stake in society. (quoted in Frederikse 1990: 89)

Notice that Mandela does not quite say it, but the implication is clear: The only whites who were “prepared to work with the Africans” were Communists.⁴

Why were so many white communists Jewish? One scholar estimates that 40 percent of the South Africa’s postwar white left was Jewish, even though Jews comprised only 4 percent of the white population (cited in Marks 2004: 893-894). After all, the majority of South African Jews were not antiapartheid activists, let alone communists. Like most other whites, most Jews supported apartheid or accommodated themselves to it. Indeed, the prosecutor at the Rivonia Trial, Percy Yutar, was Jewish. Most Jewish communists, moreover, were alienated from and largely disowned by South Africa’s Jewish community. Yet a number of historically contingent events had pushed or drawn Jews into the party by the 1950s:

In the 1920s and 1930s, the lack of a South African identity to relate to, the nefarious relationships between fascism and apartheid, antisemitism and anti-Black racism and the high incidence of Jewish political organization all created structures and contexts within which many Jews could be politicized. After 1945, the experience of the Holocaust and the condemnation of those who stood by and did nothing during it, led many young South African Jews to ask how they themselves could stand by and do nothing about institutionalized racism in their own country. During both periods a significant minority joined the Communist Party. (Israel and Adams 2000: 162)

Of course, this does not adequately explain exactly which Jews, from which social backgrounds, joined the party, nor why more did not do so, but it does point to the main contextual factors that help explain this puzzle. In any event, had there been no Jews in South Africa, the role of whites in the antiapartheid struggle would have been less prominent, and the ideology of nonracialism may have been more difficult for blacks to accept.

A few dozen, mainly white, South Africans became involved with a group called the Armed Resistance Movement (ARM), which was formed in September 1961, shortly after the arrests at Rivonia. Like MK, ARM—some of whose members had ties to the small, anti-apartheid (and anticommunist) Liberal Party—embarked on a campaign of sabotage in 1963. “MK publicly dissociated itself from these saboteurs, whom they thought ‘temperamentally inclined towards deeds of derring-do’; but privately they agreed to coordinate their actions” (Sampson 199: 157). Most of ARM’s members, however, were rounded up in July 1963 and the group destroyed. One year later, however, John Harris, who had been involved with ARM, took it upon himself to plant a bomb in a crowded Johannesburg railway station; the bomb killed an elderly woman and badly disfigured her twelve-year-old granddaughter. Harris was arrested, convicted, and executed (Sharp 2005; see also Cohen 2005).

THE ANC IN EXILE

By the mid-1960s, the ANC leadership was in prison or exile. For the next quarter century, the organization would attempt to infiltrate MK cadres based and trained in nearby African countries into the South African countryside or townships in order to wage guerrilla warfare against the apartheid regime—with limited results. Despite the modest results of this strategy, the ANC adhered to nonracial internationalism during this period and refused to employ terrorist tactics. Robert Price has argued that the condition of exile served to reinforce the ANC’s nonracialism, even as it undermined the viability of racially exclusive groups like the PAC, which was also forced into exile in the mid-1960s:

The multiracialism with which the ANC entered the period of exile placed it in an advantageous position to receive diplomatic, economic, and military support from foreign patrons. Given the distribution of wealth and power in the global system, the sources of significant support were largely in countries that were White. Unburdened by an ideology of Black racial

exclusiveness, the ANC was able in this “White world” to use its primary asset for tapping into these resources: its moral claim in opposing a racist and hence heinous sociopolitical order. (Price 1997: 159)

The ANC received considerable financial assistance from Scandinavian countries as well as—thanks to its alliance with the Communist Party—extensive financial and military aid from the Soviet Union and its allies. Solidarity movements in Western Europe and the U.S., moreover, provided aid and assistance of various types to the ANC, and they had considerable (if uneven) success in imposing sanctions and regulations of various types, including U.N. sanctions, on military aid to the South African government, on trade and investments, and on sports and cultural exchanges with South Africa (e.g., Fieldhouse 2005; Thörn 2006). It is difficult to imagine that this kind of aid and solidarity would have flowed to the ANC had it begun a terrorist campaign against white South Africans. Price also points out that the condition of exile forged closer ties among South Africans who were forced to live abroad:

A common set of problems and the shared statuses of foreigner, exile, and refugee created the context for a level of supportive social interaction, and consequent personal ties, between White, Black, Indian, and “Coloured” South Africans that would have been impossible in apartheid South Africa. Within this setting, “non-Africans” came to play very significant roles in the political, military, and educational structures of the exile movement. (1997: 160)

In 1969, the ANC opened up membership in the organization for the first time to whites and other non-Africans, and it created a Revolutionary Council that included non-Africans to oversee its military operations. Jack Simons and Ray Alexander Simons, a married couple and longtime communist activists, were the first white ANC members.

The PAC by contrast, given its Africanist exclusivity, had to rely on less resourceful third-world countries, including several sub-Saharan African states (mainly Tanzania) and, at least for a while, China. The alliance with China induced the organization to declare itself Maoist, which reinforced its tendency to view the ANC as controlled by white communists who took their orders from Moscow (a view shared, ironically, by many powerful white people in Pretoria and Washington). “Perhaps at least partly as a result of its tenuous access to the resources required for organizational growth,” Price argues, “the PAC’s years abroad were ones of intense crisis, characterized by extreme sectarianism and bitter internal conflicts. It barely survived the period of exile as a functioning organization” (1997: 159).

During the early 1980s, the ANC’s nonracialism also allowed it to forge strong ties to an emerging power on the South African scene: trade unions. “While the membership of these unions was overwhelmingly African, in many of them White leftists and intellectuals played important staff roles—providing vital skills in the areas of research, strategic planning, public relations, and the like” (Price 1997: 162). In 1985 these nonracial unions joined together in the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU). By March 1986, COSATU and the ANC formalized an alliance: COSATU would represent the interests of South Africa’s working class, while the ANC would lead the “national-democratic” liberation movement. Wood concludes that “the ANC’s nonracialism contributed to its success, for without it, important links would have been jeopardized: those to the SACP, to international financial and political support, and, most important, to the nonracial COSATU unions” (2000: 143).

The ANC’s nonracialism remained intact during the crisis that began in the mid-1980s, when South Africa’s black townships exploded in myriad forms of protest, the number of industrial strikes increased dramatically, and MK cadres carried out a growing number of sabotage operations and, in some cases, helped to galvanize and direct township unrest. The ANC’s call to “make the townships ungovernable” was realized to a great extent. But the ANC and MK could take only a small share of the credit for this, and the ANC leadership understood that it was in no position to confront militarily the apartheid regime, whose army and police remained largely loyal and intact. A revolutionary seizure of power was not on the

horizon—or even beyond the horizon—and to launch a terrorist campaign at this time would have simply played into the hands of the “securocrats,” the most reactionary, hardline elements in Pretoria.

It is true, as I noted earlier, that in 1985 the ANC adopted the slogan “Take the Struggle to the White Areas.” But this was not a call to attack white civilians. In describing what “taking the war to the white areas means,” the ANC advocated “spreading the consumer boycott to all areas of the country,” organizing “well-planned demonstrations in White suburbs,” and systematically attacking the army and police in white areas. The ANC stressed that “White democrats and all antiapartheid Whites have a special role to play” in terms of winning over “as many Whites as possible to the side of freedom and nonracialism,” fighting military conscription, and even joining the ANC and MK (ANC 1985).

Instead of adopting more radical tactics, the ANC let it be known that it was interested in negotiating a way out of the crisis. Elements in white South African civil society—clergy, journalists, academics, and, most importantly, businesspeople—reciprocated. Beginning in 1985, the ANC met in Zambia “with prominent Whites from virtually every significant sector of South African society” (Price 1997: 164). In 1987, the ANC began meeting secretly with leading figures in the Afrikaner establishment. The ANC’s nonracialism obviously facilitated these negotiations, which in retrospect proved to be a dress rehearsal for the more serious negotiations between the ANC and the government in the early 1990s that ultimately led to democratic elections based on universal suffrage. (The collapse of the Soviet bloc in 1989-91 also undermined any remaining dreams—or nightmares—that a socialist revolution was still possible in South Africa.) The PAC, needless to say, never sought such negotiations, nor was it sought out by white leaders. Had the PAC or a group like it been the dominant antiapartheid organization during the 1980s, it is difficult to imagine that a negotiated transition to democracy could have occurred.

CONCLUSION

I have argued elsewhere that when insurgent political organizations indiscriminately attack civilians, they generally attack those large and unprotected categories of civilians, and only those categories, which are perceived as benefiting from, supporting, and/or having a substantial capacity to influence governments that are themselves seen to employ extensive, indiscriminate violence against the insurgents and their constituents. In other words, insurgents attack civilians whom they hold complicit in government repression, and they generally do so in order to end or avenge such violence (Goodwin 2006). This accounts for terrorism by Palestinian groups against ordinary Israelis, Tamils against Sinhalese in Sri Lanka, Chechens against ordinary Russians, and al Qaeda and related groups against Americans and Europeans. By this reckoning, however, a great deal of terrorism directed against South Africa’s privileged white population should have occurred during the apartheid era. But my theory has an additional codicil: If a significant number of “complicitous civilians” are seen by the insurgents as potential allies (or as capable of being influenced by nonviolent appeals or protests), then they will not be indiscriminately attacked. Whether specific categories of civilians will be perceived as potential allies by insurgents, furthermore, depends mainly on the prior history of political interaction and cooperation (if any) between these civilians and the insurgents. Terrorism is more likely where there has been little such interaction or cooperation, resulting in weak or fleeting political alliances between the insurgents and complicitous civilians.

The codicil to my theory was added precisely to account for the absence of extensive categorical terrorism in South Africa. As we have seen, despite conditions in South Africa that scholars have linked to oppositional terrorism, the African National Congress, the country’s most important and influential antiapartheid political organization, never sanctioned

terrorism against the dominant white minority because of its commitment to nonracial internationalism. This ideological commitment, moreover, had a definite social basis: It rested upon a long history of collaboration between the ANC and white leftists inside and outside the country, especially those in the South African Communist Party.

The type of crosscutting political collaboration that we see in the South African case seems to be quite rare in ethnic and nationalist conflicts; especially rare is collaboration that extends upward into armed organizations associated with one or another party to such conflicts. For example, one did not find, and it is difficult even to imagine, a white Frenchman in a position of leadership in Algeria's National Liberation Front. Or a British paramilitary group collaborating with the Irish Republican Army. Or an Israeli Jew directing the armed wing of a Palestinian liberation movement. And yet one did find Joe Slovo and other white communists in positions of leadership in the ANC's armed wing. Is it too great an exaggeration to suggest that the actions of a relative handful of Jewish communists may have prevented the ANC from adopting a strategy of terrorism—a decision that would have had momentous consequences for both the nature and ultimate outcome of the antiapartheid struggle? If South Africa managed to avoid a terrible race war, should not much of the credit go the Communist Party?

NOTES

¹ "Black consciousness defined a Black person as anyone who had suffered oppression under apartheid. Hence it redefined the term Black in South Africa to include 'Coloreds' [i.e., persons of mixed race] and Indians; essentially anyone who was not White under the government's apartheid laws" (Price 1997: 175 n. 12).

² The claim that the ANC actually had the capacity to carry out an extensive terrorist campaign within South Africa is supported by Seidman, who points out that "In a deeply segregated society, it would have been easy to kill random whites. Segregated white schools, segregated movie theaters, segregated shopping centers meant that if white deaths were the only goal, potential targets could be found everywhere" (2001: 118).

³ In 1950, the party's 2,000 members consisted of approximately 1,600 Africans and "Coloreds," 250 Indians, and 150 whites. However, of the 46 delegates to the party's 1945 Johannesburg district conference, 25 were white; these delegates elected a district committee that consisted of nine whites, three Africans, and an Indian (Israel and Adams 2000: 152).

⁴ It may be relevant, or at least symptomatic, that a young white writer by the name of Nadine Gordimer—who won the Nobel Prize for literature in 1991—allegedly helped her friend Mandela prepare his courtroom statement.

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