

## **African Troops in the Portuguese Colonial Army, 1961-1974: Angola, Guinea-Bissau and Mozambique<sup>1</sup>**

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**Abstract:** The colonial powers systematically included Africans in the wars waged to preserve their order. Portugal was not an exception in this respect. Since 1961, with the beginning of the liberation wars in her colonies, Portugal incorporated Africans in her war effort in Angola, Guinea-Bissau and Mozambique through a process enveloped in an ideological discourse based on “multi-racialism” and on the preservation of the empire. African engagement varied from marginal roles as servants and informers to more important ones as highly operational combat units. By the end of the Portuguese colonial war, in 1974, African participation had become crucial, representing about half of all operational colonial troops. This paper explores in a comparative framework the three cases of Angola, Guinea-Bissau and Mozambique, seeking the rationale behind the process and the shapes it took. The abrupt end of the colonial war, triggered by a military coup in Portugal, paved the way for the independence of the colonies, but left a legacy difficult to manage by the newly independent countries. Shedding some light on the destiny of the former African collaborators during this period, the paper suggests that they played a role in the post-independence civil conflicts in Angola and Mozambique. © 2002 *Portuguese Studies Review*. All rights reserved.

(...) if it isn't to be a poor character with little utility, the European soldier will cost us too much. It is therefore natural that to the African, more adapted to the climate and much cheaper, the role will be reserved of *chair à canon* (...)

Joaquim Mouzinho de Albuquerque, “A reorganização dos exércitos ultramarinos,” *Revista Militar* 41 (7) (15 Apr. 1889)

### **Introduction**

On 25 April 1974, a military *coup* in Lisbon paved the way to an abrupt end of the long Portuguese colonial adventure and, more narrowly, of ten harsh years during which colonial authority had been challenged by nationalist wars in

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Angola, Guinea-Bissau and Mozambique. These three wars left profound marks on the shape of the economies and societies of the three countries. One of these marks was a legacy of thousands of Africans with a past of fighting side by side with the Portuguese defence forces against independence. This study seeks to discuss the historical rationale for such participation, as well as to shed some light on the post-independence impacts it produced, which are still far from fully understood.

It is almost a truism to say that the colonisation of the African continent would have been impossible without local collaboration. The stereotyped picture of immensely superior European forces defeating small, fragile and unarticulated African resistances rarely corresponds to the historical truth. Much closer to reality is the picture of European officials able to foster and manage internal contradictions, attracting African forces into their orbit to make them fight other African forces in order to install and preserve the colonial order.

In the two world wars of the last century, African troops fought in defence of the colonial powers' interests both in the African theatre and elsewhere. Particularly after the 1950s, when nationalist movements began to fight for their independence throughout the African continent, African participation in the struggle to preserve the old colonial order acquired considerable importance. Local collaboration was fundamental to guaranteeing the colonial project. Portugal was not an exception in this respect, and often resorted to the recruitment of Africans in her war effort, namely since the so-called "Pacification Campaigns" in the late nineteenth century.

The present study looks at this collaboration in the context of the wars for independence in the former Portuguese colonies—a collaboration that has to be perceived at various levels, since its nature, importance and intensity varied throughout the period in which the wars were fought. Wars tend evidently to involve everybody within the area they cover. Here it will be useful, however, to narrow the focus and look at the involvement which directly derived from the colonial strategy—the "African involvement as strategy" or, as it was called in those days, the *Africanisation* of the war effort.

This approach requires an historical perspective. Participation by African troops was indeed uneven throughout the thirteen years of the Portuguese colonial military campaigns. It began on the margins, limited to secondary roles or, at the war fronts, to population control, intelligence gathering and reconnaissance by informers and scouts. African troops became increasingly important, however, and on the eve of the military coup of 25 April 1974 Africans accounted for more than 50 percent of the contingent fighting the war. What follows is an attempt to discuss this *Africanisation* and the impact it had on ending the war. We shall also examine briefly the profound traces the process left as a heritage passed on to the newly independent African countries.

### **The Tradition of African Participation in the Colonial Army**

Until the second half of the nineteenth century Portugal was far from controlling the territories of what would become her colonies. Her sea supremacy, based on innovative boat-and-cannon technology, certainly permitted a fairly resolute coastal occupation.<sup>2</sup> However, incursions into the hinterland were occasional, carried out by individual entrepreneurs looking for stocks of food and small-scale trade, or for women. Strategic expeditions such as the one led by Paulo Dias in 1575 to control the silver mines in Angola, or by Francisco Barreto to control the gold mines of Mwenemutapa, were rare. Both men and the environment in the interior were harshly hostile, and Portugal did not have a structural reason to undertake such expeditions: Brazil was far more important than Africa, the latter being of interest only in the sense of promising gold and furnishing slaves to the New World. As a result, in the nineteenth century Portugal could claim some presence and sovereignty only in coastal strips in Angola and Mozambique, and in certain isolated posts connected through rivers in Guinea.<sup>3</sup> The vast hinterland remained only visited by traders.

In Angola, although traders within the Portuguese orbit (*pombeiros*, *aviados*, *feirantes*, *funantes*, etc.) could generally develop their activity without serious competition, the possibility of contestation by local African chiefs justified the presence of military forces, whose primary role was, therefore, to keep open the trade routes to the hinterland. During the nineteenth century, the military were, according to their nature, roughly composed of three different forces. Firstly, the “first-line” army consisting of full-time soldiers recruited locally, expeditionary corps sent from Lisbon, and deportees to the overseas territories. Secondly, the “second-line” forces, mainly local part-time volunteers, including many “civilised” mulattoes and Africans, who joined mobile companies headed by loyal African chiefs, traders, or farmers with honorary military ranks. Their role was to complement the activity of the army in times of war, or to assure administrative tasks such as tax-collection or porter control. Finally, when times were troubled, the authorities could convoke loyal African chiefs, who would come with their private armies to form what was usually known as the *Guerra Preta* (black war). This third contingent, parts of which were known as *empacaceiros* (or hunters of a wild buffalo called *pacaça*), could reach several thousand. The advantages these fighters brought to the wars waged by the Portuguese were obvious, from the fact that no expenses were involved (the war

<sup>2</sup> Malyn Newitt, *A History of Mozambique* (London: C. Hurst & Co., 1995), 21.

<sup>3</sup> Valentim Alexandre and Jill Dias, coords., *O Império Africano, 1825-1890*, Vol. 10 of *Nova história da expansão Portuguesa*, dir. by Joel Serrão and A.H. de Oliveira Marques (Lisbon: Editorial Estampa, 1998), 140-1.

booty being their reward), to avoiding regular troops' casualties and humiliation.<sup>4</sup>

Things started to change during the nineteenth century, in particular as Brazil ceased to import slaves and as Portugal, in domestic political terms, entered the new and more stable phase of "Regeneration", which offered greater opportunities to look after the colonial territories.<sup>5</sup> This was a time when, in Mozambique, a genuine transition was already under way, based on a rather sharp decline of the mercantile dynamic, gradually replaced by a new one that would be based on the management of the labour force internally and for export, as well as on establishing administrative structures down to the bottom level. In Angola, where mercantile exchanges with the hinterland preserved some vigour (alcohol, weapons, slaves, cloth, ivory), this process would only take place somewhat later.<sup>6</sup>

In any case, these transformations demanded territorial control and the breaking of local resistance in order to assure Portuguese authority. In view of the serious problems Portugal had to face from the very beginnings of her presence in Africa, particularly the long distances from Lisbon and the shortage of men, conquest was achieved to a large extent through the use of local forces, complemented by the dispatch of expeditionary troops from Lisbon and India<sup>7</sup> whenever the situation was deemed serious.

Even so, the conquest undertaken by the expeditionary forces would not have been possible without the vital participation of local contingents, either recruited directly on an *ad hoc* basis, or through political agreements with African potentates. According to Isaacman,<sup>8</sup> during the critical "pacification" campaign in the Zambezi valley in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, more than 90 percent of the soldiers on the colonial side were Africans.

Such contingents were also reinforced by units recruited in other colonial territories, as the Portuguese avoided having troops fight in their home areas and

<sup>4</sup> René Pélissier, *História das campanhas de Angola. Resistência e revoltas, 1845-1941*, 2 vols. (Lisbon: Editorial Estampa, 1986), 1: 36-40. The scheme was also developed in other Portuguese colonies. In Timor, for example, second line "Companies of Dwellers" were formed on the basis of traditional militias (*Moradores* and *Arraiais*), with the mission of controlling terrestrial and maritime borders, policing and protecting public buildings. By 1974, 53 of these companies were operating. See Eurico António Sales Grade, "Timor: O corpo militar de segunda linha," *Revista Militar* 26 (4-5) (1974): 205.

<sup>5</sup> Valentim Alexandre, *Velho Brasil novas Áfricas. Portugal e o Império (1808-1975)* (Porto: Edições Afrontamento, 2000), 233-4.

<sup>6</sup> Pélissier, *Campanhas*, 1: 35 and *passim*.

<sup>7</sup> In what had become a tradition already in those times. For a vivid example, see Alexandre Lobato, *Os Austríacos em Lourenço Marques* (Maputo: Arquivo Histórico de Moçambique, 2000), 294 and *passim*, who describes the sending of a naval force from Goa, through Mozambique Island, to surprise and expel the Austrian trade post in Delagoa Bay, in 1781.

<sup>8</sup> Allen Isaacman, *A tradição de resistência em Moçambique. O vale do Zambeze, 1850-1921* (Porto: Edições Afrontamento, 1979), 81.

understood the advantages of moving locally recruited forces from one colonial territory to another, in the struggle to impose their order. Enes mentions Indian soldiers in Mozambique,<sup>9</sup> but most significant was the participation of Angolans in the Zambezi valley campaign, as well as, a little later, of “Landim” units from Mozambique in Angola and Guinea. Units from Mozambique and Angola also went to serve in distant colonies such as Goa, Macau and Timor.<sup>10</sup>

Initially, the recruitment of local forces was unsystematic and arbitrary, mirroring other forced labour requisitions for public works or plantation undertakings. Azambuja Martins describes raids in Angola to capture “idlers”, who were tied to a rope and taken to military quarters, a procedure that made the victims of this recruitment method widely and sarcastically known as “the volunteers of the rope”.<sup>11</sup> However, as Portuguese authority and administration was extended to the bottom level, local recruitment underwent noticeable transformations and, in particular, was facilitated by the population census. This evolution is clearly evident, for example, in the Mozambican legislation on the subject. The decree of 14 November 1901, in its article 61, prescribed that every colony should have its own recruitment regulations. In 1904, a regulation stipulated that recruitment should be undertaken with the local *régulo* as intermediary, who would receive a gratification for each man recruited. In 1906 a more aggressive recruitment scheme based on the use of agents was implemented, using, as Azambuja Martins eloquently writes, “the same methods used for recruiting labour for the mines in Transvaal.”<sup>12</sup> In the face of the decreasing resistance of locals to military service, the 1914 regulation prescribed the creation of a military reserve, which permitted the engagement of 25,000 Africans, or 44 percent of the total force, in the struggle against the German invasion of Northern Mozambique during the First World War.<sup>13</sup>

From this point on, service in the armed forces began to be perceived as an important way of “nationalising” the African population of the colonies. The regulation of June 1933 stipulated distinct service branches for “common

<sup>9</sup> António Enes, *Moçambique. Relatório apresentado ao Governo* (Lisboa: Agência Geral do Ultramar, 1946 (originally published 1893), 115.

<sup>10</sup> See E. A. Azambuja Martins, *O soldado Africano de Moçambique* (Lisboa: Agência Geral das Colónias, 1936), 34, for a table of all Mozambican units dispatched to Angola, Guinea, India, Macau and Timor between 1904 and 1932. See also Pedro Pezarat Correia, “A participação local no desenvolvimento das campanhas,” in *Estudos sobre as Campanhas de África, 1961-1974* (Estoril: Ed. Atena, 2000), 144.

<sup>11</sup> Azambuja Martins, *Soldado Africano*, 9-10.

<sup>12</sup> Azambuja Martins, *Soldado Africano*, 12.

<sup>13</sup> John P. Cann, *Contra-insurreição em África, 1961-1974. O modo português de fazer a guerra*. Estoril: Edições Atena, 1998), 132. The German experience with locally recruited forces, particularly the *Askaris*, was considered in Mozambique as highly positive. In 1915, the German force in Tanganyika was composed of 2,200 European troops, 11,100 regular African troops and 3,200 irregulars, in 24 companies, each one roughly with a dozen Europeans and 300 Africans. See Mário Costa, “É o inimigo que fala. Subsídios inéditos para o estudo da Campanha da África Oriental, 1914-1918,” Lourenço Marques (1928), Arquivo Histórico Militar, 2ª Divisão, 7ª Secção, Caixa 151, N° 6.

blacks” and for “non indigenous blacks,” the latter being enrolled in the same service branches as Europeans born in the colonies. Africans were to be registered in the ranks under a Portuguese Christian name, and it was expected that military service would act as a powerful “civilising” mechanism or, in the words of General Norton de Matos, as “one of the most effective mechanisms for opening a breach in the tenebrous primitive civilisations.”<sup>14</sup>

Since the mid-1930s, the program of building the colonial forces seems to have suffered from tensions between a vision in which Europeans born in the colonies would lead as officers an increasingly African army, and the practical need to promote Africans to lead local units, owing to the limited numbers of Europeans. On a broader level, the tension was between maintaining separate armies in Portugal and her colonies within the framework of an organisational schema that dated back to 1893, or to unify the armies in a single multi-continental Portuguese army. The doubts would persist until the eve of the independence wars.

#### **Africans in the Colonial Defence Forces at the War of Independence**

After the Second World War the Portuguese army, as part of the entire colonial system, began to be forced to change as a result of international pressures and as the nationalist wars were anticipated and approaching. The *Estado Novo* was forced to repeal the *Estatuto dos Indígenas* which had assured for so long that the vast majority of the population remained without access to the status of citizens, and this required the army to deal with a new and unexpected problem: that of having a growing African contingent in its ranks. Until then the infantry recognized the categories of commissioned soldiers (white soldiers born in Portugal or in her overseas provinces), overseas soldiers (African *assimilados*), and native soldiers (Africans under the *indigenato* regime). Forced to change this system, the regime, through the decree 43.267 of 24 October 1960, introduced the new categories of 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> class soldier, in practice corresponding to the previous ones.<sup>15</sup> A little later, this too had to be changed, and although the colour of the soldiers’ skin ceased to be a criterion, two classes were established on the basis of formal education and, in particular, of the ability to speak Portuguese correctly. In practical terms this again meant a perpetuation of the old distinctions.<sup>16</sup> Even so, however, the door was opening ever so slightly for the Africans.

<sup>14</sup> Cited in Azambuja Martins, *Soldado Africano*, 17. For more on the civilising role of the army, “as a beacon that spreads the light of our civilizing action,” see Mário C. Moutinho, *O indígena no pensamento colonial Português, 1895-1961* (Lisboa: Edições Universitárias Lusófonas, 2000), 108-119.

<sup>15</sup> See Secretaria Geral da Defesa Nacional, Pº 324.10, 18 de Novembro de 1961, Arquivo da Secretaria Geral de Defesa Nacional (further SGDN) (Forte de S. Julião da Barra), Caixa 6690.5.

<sup>16</sup> See Comando Militar de Moçambique, Quartel General, nº 53546, Lourenço Marques, 4 de Dezembro de 1962, to Chefe do Estado-Maior das Forças Armadas, “Proposta da R.M.M. sobre incorporações de recrutas indígenas. Passagem à disponibilidade das Praças I que terminaram o período de obrigação normal de serviço”, Arquivo da SGDN (Forte de S. Julião da Barra), Caixa 6690.5.

Faced with the threat represented by the Africanisation of its army, a certain segment of the regime's establishment had every motive to resist. Firstly, ideological reasons played a role—paradigmatic in this respect is the strong position taken by Kaulza de Arriaga, who in 1960, as Subsecretary of State for Aeronautics, wrote to Salazar that “a defence concept based on black troops is impossible, independently of the kind of white control. (...) It is therefore necessary to reduce the strength and size of our black troops.”<sup>17</sup> This view, undoubtedly common among the upper echelons, is very well conveyed by Felgas, who commenting on the consequences of a weak metropolitan contribution to the army wrote that “it is not difficult to foresee that disorder would prevail, as well as insecurity, as happened in the first months of independence of the ex-Belgian Congo. Of course, we could adopt the same solution for Angola, to promote soldiers to colonels and corporals to generals. But the results would be identical: an army deprived of strength, cohesion, prestige and discipline.”<sup>18</sup>

Associated with this view was one that, despite all the integrationist propaganda of the *Nation in Arms*, considered the Africans as little less than potential terrorists, in the international context of the Cold War. This led the Chief-of-Staff to write, as late as 1962, that engaging the native masses in a military effort posed great risks, since they were all heavily exposed to the “propaganda of the enemy.”<sup>19</sup>

As a result, and despite the strong effort to prepare the army for the African campaigns, undertaken from the late 1950s onward, the old “philosophy” that had informed the defence and security system in the colonial territories remained basically unchanged, with “expeditionary forces” from Portugal coming to fight the colonial wars and the locally recruited ones playing a limited and secondary role as second-line troops.<sup>20</sup>

That this was indeed so is clear from the constant increase in metropolitan contingents as the wars started, first in Angola in March 1961, and then in Guinea in January 1963 and in Mozambique in June 1964. Table 1 documents a 100% increase in the total metropolitan contingent during the first half of the period of conflict (until 1967). Figures in Table 2 show a correspondent modest increase in the numbers of locally recruited forces during the same period (from 18% in 1961 to 25% in 1967).

<sup>17</sup> Subsecretário de Estado da Aeronáutica para Presidente do Conselho de Ministros, 9 de Agosto de 1960, Arquivo Nacional da Torre do Tombo, AOS/CO/PC-78j, pt3ª, 20ªsd. D.30 (I owe this information to Amélia Souto).

<sup>18</sup> Hélio Felgas, “Necessidade recíproca da ligação metrópole-províncias ultramarinas,” *Revista Militar* 13 (7) (1961): 421.

<sup>19</sup> See Chefe do Estado-Maior do Exército, nº 332.19, “Incorporação de recrutas indígenas. Passagem à situação de disponibilidade das praças I que terminaram o período de obrigação normal de serviço,” Lisboa, 7 de Fevereiro de 1962, Arquivo da SGGD (Forte de S. Julião da Barra), Caixa 6690.5. For the image of the Africans as terrorists or foreigners, see Moutinho, *O indígena*, 51.

<sup>20</sup> For the development of this argument, see Pezarat Correia, “Participação local,” 145 and *passim*.

**Table 1. Metropolitan Troops In the African War Theatres**

Date	Angola	Mozambique	Guinea	Total
1961	28,477	8,209	3,736	40,422
1962	33,760	8,852	4,070	46,682
1963	34,530	9,243	8,336	52,109
1964	37,418	10,132	12,874	60,424
1965	41,625	13,155	14,640	69,420
1966	38,519	19,550	18,868	76,937
1967	43,051	23,164	18,421	84,636
1968	37,547	22,717	19,559	78,823
1969	36,911	23,286	22,866	83,063
1970	36,174	22,633	22,487	81,294
1971	36,127	21,795	23,402	81,324
1972	34,676	22,657	24,036	81,369
1973	37,773	23,891	25,610	87,274

Source: Estado-Maior do Exército, 1988 I: 260.

**Table 2**  
**Locally Recruited Troops In the African War Theatres (With % of Total Troops)**

Date	Angola	Mozambique	Guinea	Total
1961	5,000 (14.9)	3,000 (26.8)	1,000 (21.1)	9,000 (18.2)
1962	11,165 (24.9)	3,000 (25.3)	1,000 (19.7)	15,165 (24.5)
1963	12,870 (27.2)	5,003 (35.1)	1,314 (13.6)	19,187 (26.9)
1964	15,075 (28.7)	7,917 (43.9)	2,321 (15.3)	25,313 (29.5)
1965	15,448 (27.1)	9,701 (42.4)	2,612 (15.1)	27,761 (28.5)
1966	17,297 (31.0)	11,038 (36.1)	1,933 (9.3)	30,268 (28.2)
1967	14,369 (25.0)	11,557 (33.3)	3,229 (14.9)	29,155 (25.6)
1968	20,683 (35.5)	13,898 (38.0)	3,280 (14.4)	37,861 (32.7)
1969	18,663 (33.6)	15,810 (40.4)	3,715 (14.4)	38,188 (31.4)
1970	19,059 (34.5)	16,079 (41.5)	4,268 (16.0)	39,406 (32.6)
1971	25,933 (41.8)	22,710 (51.0)	5,808 (19.9)	54,451 (40.1)
1972	25,461 (42.2)	24,066 (51.5)	5,921 (19.8)	55,448 (40.5)
1973	27,819 (42.4)	27,572 (53.6)	6,425 (20.1)	61,816 (41.4)

Source: Estado-Maior do Exército, 1988 I: 261.

Table 1 also reveals more modest increases in metropolitan troops during the second half of the war,<sup>21</sup> while Table 2 shows correspondingly a much more

<sup>21</sup> See also Quadro A in A. Afonso and C. Matos Gomes, *Guerra colonial* (Lisbon: Editorial



pronounced increase in locally recruited troops, whose number reached nearly half of the total contingent in 1973. Around 1968 there clearly occurred a certain break in the balance between metropolitan and local forces, with more marked increases in the latter. This raises the question why, despite all the entrenched resistance discussed above, did the *Estado Novo* and its military apparatus change their attitude so dramatically.

Obviously, the fact that this change occurred when Marcello Caetano replaced Salazar as President of the Cabinet was not purely coincidental. However, there are many other factors that also help to explain it.

The main argument for this Africanisation of the Portuguese colonial army has been based on Portugal's recruiting problems. In the late 1960s, according to Henriksen,<sup>22</sup> Portugal had, after Israel, the highest percentage of people in arms in the world, with an annual increase of 11% between the 49,422 documented in 1961, and the 149,090 documented in 1973. In parallel, the percentage of deserters also doubled, from 11.6 to 20.9, for reasons linked both with avoidance of military service and with the fact that Portugal was a chronic provider of migrant labour to Europe and the Americas, through a process that gradually drained a population of potential recruits already small from the start.<sup>23</sup> To these quantitative difficulties, qualitative ones also have to be added, in the sense that the expeditionary contingents had serious problems of adaptation to the African war theatres and that, as the years passed, the Portuguese army faced an acute shortage of commanding officers, with obvious consequences for its military efficiency.<sup>24</sup>

Besides the issue of sheer human numbers, the financial difficulties that Portugal experienced in coping with the three wars also shed some explanation on Africanisation. According to this argument, the burden became so unbearable that the progressive sharing of the war effort with the colonies, through increasing local recruitment and financial participation, was a way to minimise the weight. Moreover, this would seem to be quite well in line with the old Salazar principle of involving each colony in the resolution of its own problems.<sup>25</sup>

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Notícias., 2000), 518.

<sup>22</sup> Thomas Henriksen, "Portugal in Africa: Comparative Notes on Counterinsurgency," *Orbis*, 21 (2) (1977): 404.

<sup>23</sup> Estado-Maior do Exército, *Resenha histórico-militar das Campanhas de África (1961-1974)*, 4 vols. (Lisboa: Estado-Maior do Exército, 1988-89) 1: 259 and *passim*; Cann, *Contra-insurreição*, 122 and *passim*.

<sup>24</sup> The number of officers graduating from the military academy rose sharply from 68 in 1962 to 146 in 1967, but from then on started to suffer an abrupt decline to only 40 in 1973, as a result of lack of volunteers. In consequence, the military authorities were forced to mobilise conscripts to fill the huge gaps in the professional cadres. See David Martelo, "Pessoal e orçamentos. Esforço de guerra," in Afonso and Gomes, *Guerra colonial*, 519-20.

<sup>25</sup> For the discussion of Portugal's financial problems with the war, which fall outside the ambit of this article, see also, as an example among several, Ministro da Defesa Nacional to Ministro das

Notwithstanding these valid explanations, the shortage of metropolitan men and the high costs of war were not the only reasons behind the Africanisation process. Despite such difficulties and the fact that they were almost insurmountable, Portugal was indeed capable of sustaining some level of increase in the numbers of her metropolitan troops, and the costs involved were basically covered, even if at the price of going to the brink of economic and financial exhaustion.

Further factors have then to be brought in to explain the process of Africanisation. The first, which reveals one of the several internal contradictions of the *Estado Novo*, is of a historical and ideological nature. It was based on the appeal of the integrationist ideology of the Empire and its principle of race miscegenation, which translated into the revival of white settlement plans and into the “promotion” of the African populations, particularly under the short but decisive mandate of Adriano Moreira as overseas minister. In a sense, it bore elements of continuity with the early days of Salazar’s regime, when important steps were made to include an African layer at the foundation of the colonial state and administration, with the involvement of local African authorities in population censuses, tax collection, and labour recruitment in their areas of jurisdiction. As mentioned above, this “attitude” also had led to the establishment of defence forces based on the inclusion of local troops in secondary roles. The overwhelming majority of these local troops were Africans, who served mostly as auxiliaries, servants in the barracks, and, given their knowledge of the terrain, as informers and scouts.

However, the nationalist wars also introduced a new phenomenon in the sense that a much broader African involvement became required, well beyond such targeted recruitment: early on in the process the colonial authorities understood that the war was also about conquering the population. The “philosophy” of the *Estado Novo*, mixed with the first counter-insurgency techniques to “win” the population, provided the core of a colonial psycho-social doctrine based on the two fundamental concepts of *comandamento* (command) and *accionamento* (driving, setting in motion).<sup>26</sup> These served as a framework for the creation, in

Finanças, nº 833/AF/73, Lisboa, 3 de Junho de 1973, in SGDN (Forte de S. Julião da Barra), Caixa 768.2.

<sup>26</sup> According to Ferraz de Freitas, *Conquista da adesão das populações* (Lourenço Marques: SCCIM, 1965), 6, *ordering* is based exclusively on physical power and provokes the repulsion of culturally different populations, and for this reason its efficiency tends to decrease in proportion to the decline of the physical power of the one who exerts it. On the contrary, *commanding* requires knowledge and ability to handle the “social forces,” is based on participation, and promotes adhesion of the commanded. As to *accionamento*, it was defined as “the set of moves one needs to take to make sure that the population works with us and becomes prejudiced towards the propaganda of the enemy (...). [Through *accionamento*] we attract the populations into our orbit, integrate them in our environment, in our culture, in our civilisation and nationality (...). This would be one of our purposes. The other is to make them work actively with us in detecting and combating subversion (...).” (GDT/Serviços Distritais de Administração Civil, 1966:45, Arquivo Histórico de Moçambique, Secção Especial, nº 237). For the psycho-social work with local communities in central Mozambique, namely in organising popular operations conducted by traditional authorities to detect guerrilla movements, see João Paulo Borges Coelho, “A ‘Primeira Frente’ de Tete e o

the early 1960s, of local militias of several kinds in the rural areas of the three colonies, as second-line troops under the authority of the civil administration and based on the principle of self-defence against subversive attacks.<sup>27</sup> The militia took a wide range of organisational shapes, from very informal schemes of village forces acting under the authority of village chiefs, as happened in Angola,<sup>28</sup> to more institutionally militarised groups assuring the defence of the *aldeamentos*, the protected villages formed along the lines of what the British had practiced in their counter-insurgency war in Malaysia, or the North-Americans in Vietnam.<sup>29</sup>

As the war situation aggravated, and with the corresponding difficulties experienced by the armed forces, the militia contingents were brought into more active roles exceeding the traditional defensive ones. Paradigmatic in this respect was the case of Guinea, where, besides the normal militias, special ones were created for offensive operations in their home areas. This new concept, which led to the emergence of very efficient troops, mixed the old colonial tradition<sup>30</sup> with new counter-insurgency theories. These theories, to which the Portuguese high military commanders were systematically exposed from the second half of the 1950s onward, had as one of their core concepts the so-called “same element theory,” according to which the guerrillas could be fought more efficiently by troops mirroring their organisation, weaponry, knowledge of the terrain, and even race—*i.e.*, by African combat units. These theories became more extensively absorbed at a time when the need to adapt and to reinforce the Portuguese troops became more pressing.

The changes that started to occur at this point brought a new meaning to the concept of Africanisation. From now on this would not imply merely a growing percentage of locally recruited or black individuals incorporated in the regular forces fighting the nationalists, in the same sense as the French *jeunissement* in Indochina, for example. More than that, it now meant a process of creating and fostering combat units of Africans operating more or less irregularly and

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Malawi,” *Arquivo* (15) (1994): 72.

<sup>27</sup> In 1961, Adriano Moreira, as Overseas Minister, issued legislative diplomas, which created the Militia Corps as second-line forces in the African colonies. See Guilherme de Sousa Belchior Vieira, “A auto-defesa das populações,” *Revista Militar*, n° 2-3 (1962): 215. For an apology of these local militias, see for instance Jaime de Oliveira Leandro, “As acções contra-revolucionárias e a sua técnica,” *Revista Militar* 15 (1) (1963): 65.

<sup>28</sup> José Freire Antunes, *A Guerra de África (1961-1974)*, 2 vols. (Lisboa: Círculo de Leitores, 1995) 1: 408-9.

<sup>29</sup> João Paulo Borges Coelho, “Protected Villages and Communal Villages in the Mozambican Province of Tete (1968-1982): A History of State Resettlement Policies, Development and War” (Ph.D. Dissertation: Department of Social and Economic Studies, University of Bradford, 1993), 165 and *passim*.

<sup>30</sup> General Carlos Fabião, the “father” of these new militias, would say with respect to their creation: “I studied, I read ancient documents about the pacification campaigns of the end of last century [19<sup>th</sup>], and concluded that past wars in Africa had been fought more or less with the locals, particularly in Guinea”. See Antunes, *Guerra de África*, 1: 366.

autonomously, and with high levels of operational efficiency. It must be said that this change in attitude, which implied increased trust in the Africans, even if forced, was not sudden, nor was it just due to theoretical considerations. In fact, in the second half of the 1960s the military were facing serious problems related not only to a shortage of troops but also to the question of what to do with the Africans demobilised from the regular army. Old suspicions that Africans demobilised from the regular force, already capable of handling weaponry, might simply join the nationalist guerrillas, lay behind new efforts to create auxiliary troops where those men would be kept under the control of military or civil authorities.<sup>31</sup> Moreover, these troops were much cheaper than the regular ones and their eventual casualties were much “less repercussion-rich” than those of metropolitan forces.<sup>32</sup>

This Africanisation was carried out differently in the three territories of Angola, Guinea and Mozambique, not just because of different local and regional contexts, but also owing to the different attitudes and views of the respective commanders.<sup>33</sup> The results likewise varied: while in Guinea General Spínola planned and fought for the creation of a regular, entirely coherent African army mirroring the metropolitan one, having perhaps in mind a future federation of Portuguese-speaking states, in Angola the African irregular units were much more informal and diverse in nature. Mozambique somehow combined aspects of the two.

The first unit entirely consisting of Africans was probably the *Tropas Especiais* (Special Troops, commonly known by the acronym TEs), which emerged in 1966 in Cabinda, when Alexandre Taty, a former UPA/FNLA cadre, deserted to the Portuguese side with 1,200 men. Organised and controlled by PIDE, the Portuguese political police, they started to be used in action against the MPLA, which after having initiated operations in the Dembos, in Northern Angola, had spread its guerrilla activities to Cabinda in late 1964. The TEs operated in Cabinda, their home area, as well as in Zaire and Uíge, in Northern Angola.

<sup>31</sup> See, for instance, Chefe do Estado-Maior do Exército, n° 8392, “Recrutamento de Praças de 3° (Indígenas)”, Arquivo da SGDN (Forte de S. Julião da Barra), Caixa 6690.5.

<sup>32</sup> See Comando-Chefe das Forças Armadas de Angola, n/ref, n/date, “Plano de formação de novos GE no ano de 1973”, Arquivo da SGDN (Forte de S. Julião da Barra), Caixa 768, n° 6F. “The cost of their formation and maintenance is much lower than the one of regular troops. Their incorporation brings much less socio-economic problems and they are much cheaper to transport.”

<sup>33</sup> See this argument in Pezarat Correia, “Participação local,” 147. The period when Marcello Caetano was in power roughly corresponds to an important decentralization in the conduct of the wars. If formerly these were conducted in a relatively centralized manner from Lisbon, now three generals with strong views were appointed to run them from the provinces. Spínola took charge of Guinea as Governor and Commander-in-Chief in May 1968; Kaulza de Arriaga went to Mozambique as Commander-in-Chief in March 1970; and Costa Gomes was appointed as Commander-in-Chief of Angola in April 1970. In July 1969 the military operations in each theatre were centralised under each commander-in-chief.

Also in 1966, the war epicentre in Angola moved to the East, with the start of UNITA activities in that area and with the opening of MPLA's Eastern front, which became a threat to the Moxico and Cuando Cubango areas in the Southeast. Besides dispatching a TE unit to the area, PIDE also began to create what would become its private ethnic army. The first experiment was conducted by inspector Oscar Cardoso, who worked in Cuando Cubango with bushmen groups serving as scouts and information gatherers, and soon as true combat units, exploiting the cultural distance between these small men of San origin and the Bantu populations of the remaining areas.<sup>34</sup> The experiment was so successful in operational terms that the concept soon spread to other areas, particularly Luso (Luena) and Luanda-Caxito, where the *Flechas* unit was almost entirely composed of ex-MPLA guerrillas. Towards the end of the war almost all PIDE sub-delegations in Angola's war zones had their own private units of *Flechas*.

A little later, in 1968, the military also favoured the creation of their own irregular troops, the *Grupos Especiais* (or GEs, Special Groups), formed of local volunteers who were submitted to the same training as the regular military forces. Organised in combat groups 31 men strong, they were controlled by the military, usually one Portuguese battalion having one or two of these groups nearby. Beside the fact that they were cheaper than the regular troops, one of the advantages gained from the creation of this force, which operated in the North, East and South of Angola, was their knowledge of local languages, culture, and terrain.<sup>35</sup> The sharp increase in the number of GE groups also had to do, however, with problems in furnishing replacements for regular troops that had concluded their operational commission.<sup>36</sup>

Also in the Eastern area of Angola, groups of Katangese gendarmes formerly supporting Moses Tchombé crossed the border into Angola during the second semester of 1967, and were received as political refugees by the Portuguese authorities. In February 1969 they formed the Front for National Liberation of Congo, with the objective of overthrowing the Mobutu regime. At this time, facing an acute shortage of forces in the Eastern part of the territory, the

<sup>34</sup> For Oscar Cardoso's testimony on the *Flechas*, see Antunes, *Guerra de África*, 1: 401. He mentioned, in particular, that "they didn't need logistical support. Gatherers since kids, they could live out of nothing, with special ability to find food and water. We really had good operational results with them. We never had a desertion from the *Flechas*' ranks."

<sup>35</sup> Antunes, *Guerra de África*, 2: 705.

<sup>36</sup> See in this regard Secretaria Geral de Defesa Nacional, nº 1142/GU, 27 de Dezembro de 1967, Arquivo da Secretaria Geral de Defesa Nacional (Forte de S. Julião da Barra), Caixa 6114, 5C. Infiltration of SWAPO and MPLA guerrillas to the South worried very much the South-Africans, who were ready to meet the costs of Portuguese reinforcements at battalion level in the area. However, the Portuguese could do little more than reinforce the area with some extra GE groups. See Secretaria Geral de Defesa Nacional, nº 588/69, 28 de Fevereiro de 1969, and Secretaria Geral de Defesa Nacional, nº 437/RA, 22 de Agosto de 1969, Arquivo da Secretaria Geral de Defesa Nacional (Forte de S. Julião da Barra), Caixa 6114, nº 5<sup>A</sup>.

Portuguese authorities launched the project “Fidelidade” (Fidelity), based on the promise to support the “liberation” of Zaire in exchange for the participation of this force in counter-insurgency operations in Angola, particularly against the MPLA. Code-named *Fiéis*, they received military supplies and training from the Portuguese armed forces, as well as political supervision from the PIDE.<sup>37</sup> This became one of the most effective forces in counter-insurgency operations, despite chronic problems with discipline that translated into frequent riots and desertions and that stemmed from complaints about low pay and from the fact that these men did not feel they were receiving enough support from the Portuguese government in their struggle against Mobutu’s Zaire.<sup>38</sup>

At the same time and a little further to the South, a similar project, code-named “Operation Colt,” was implemented to receive a smaller group of Zambian ANC dissidents who arrived in Angola in 1967.<sup>39</sup> In 1968, PIDE organised them into a combat group of 45 elements code-named *Leais*, under the same kind of agreement as the one established with the *Fiéis*, namely to fight against the Angolan liberation movements in exchange for support in their struggle to overthrow Kenneth Kaunda’s Zambian regime.<sup>40</sup>

The wide, flexible, and diverse utilisation of African irregular troops that was practiced in Angola did not have any parallel in the other war theatres. It was the result of several specific factors. The first one was, of course, the vast area to be covered in counter-insurgency activities, together with the great difficulties the Portuguese had in replacing, let alone increasing, the number of their troops, and together with the inevitable financial aspects. The second factor was the competition among the three nationalist movements, which gave rise to desertions by trained guerrillas who went to join counter-insurgency operations. Thirdly and very importantly, it is necessary to take into account the attitude of General Costa Gomes, who managed to establish a good relationship between the military and PIDE,<sup>41</sup> one that undoubtedly allowed the spread of this kind of

<sup>37</sup> Comando-Chefe das Forças Armadas de Angola (Quartel-General), Gabinete das Forças Auxiliares, “Memorando: Acção Fidelidade”, 2 de Agosto de 1974, Arquivo Histórico Militar, 2ª Divisão, 2ª Seccção, Caixa 139, Nº 7.

<sup>38</sup> See, for instance, Zona Militar Leste, Oficial de Ligação do Comando-Chefe das Forças Armadas de Angola, Luso, 2 de Março de 1971, “Operação Fidelidade: Relatório da visita de inspecção ao campo de refugiados de Veríssimo Sarmento (Camissomba)”, Arquivo Histórico Militar, 2ª Divisão, 2ª Seccção, Caixa 139, Nº 16.

<sup>39</sup> Both Rhodesians and South-Africans expressed, in 1972, their reservations towards Operation Colt mounted by the Portuguese, on the grounds that they did not believe the Zambian ANC had enough credibility to destabilise Zambia at the time. See several documents in Secretaria Geral de Defesa Nacional (Forte de São Julião da Barra), box 5681, particularly Estado Maior de Angola, 1ª Rep, nº 2490/RA, pº 324.210 AO, 15 de Dezembro de 1972 (I thank Amélia Souto for this source).

<sup>40</sup> Comando-Chefe das Forças Armadas de Angola, Gabinete das Forças Auxiliares, n/r, Luanda, 3 de Agosto de 1964, Arquivo Histórico Militar, 2ª Divisão, 2ª Seccção, Caixa 139, nº 8.

<sup>41</sup> Interviewed in 2001, Costa Gomes said that “the reason why I got along with PIDE was the following: When I arrived in Angola already as Commander-in-Chief, I heard from the Department of Operations of a conflict which had occurred involving PIDE’s *Flechas* and a Commando company of

irregular war, so that unlike many of his fellow generals he was able to shift a significant operational burden onto the autonomous activity of the African units.<sup>42</sup> Table 3 illustrates the high level of autonomous activity undertaken by the irregular forces.

Finally, besides the already discussed advantages inherent in the employment of foreign irregular troops, the colonial authorities in Angola also had in mind interfering at a broader regional level, keeping Zaire and Zambia in particular under pressure.

Table 3

**Irregular Forces Operations in Angola in 1972. Number (With % of Total)**

Force	Jointly with the Army	Autonomously	Total
<i>Flechas</i>	128 (29)	316 (071)	444 (100)
GE	922 (31)	2,010 (069)	2,932 (100)
TE	—	342 (100)	342 (100)
<i>Fiéis</i>	369 (24)	1,170 (076)	1,539 (100)
<i>Leais</i>	—	46 (100)	46 (100)

**Source:** Comando-Chefe das Forças Armadas de Angola, Gabinete das Forças Auxiliares, Resumo da Actividade Operacional (1º e 2º Semestres de 1972), in Arquivo Histórico Militar, 2ª Divisão, 2ª Secção, Caixa 139, nº 9.

In Guinea developments were quite different in this regard. When the war started, locally recruited militia groups were created to assure the “self-defence” of the populations, freeing the expeditionary army for offensive operations. By 1966, Guinea already had 18 militia companies, and the authorities were requesting funds to create more, although still acknowledging the risks involved in having to deal with a “considerable volume of people armed, equipped and trained”.<sup>43</sup> The substitution of General Schulz, a quite conventional and

the army and resulting in some casualties. I asked myself how could PIDE be waging a war without the Commander-in-Chief knowing about it? I asked the Governor to convene a meeting with the people that mattered and told them: PIDE can do whatever wars but not on behalf of the Governor or PIDE itself. It has to be on my behalf”. See *Público* (Lisbon), 12 (4153): 14 (2 de Agosto de 2001).

<sup>42</sup> Still according to Costa Gomes, interviewed by the Washington Post in March 1971, “the African troops combating against subversion are increasing in number. Their training and experience rendered them outstanding professionals.” And in another interview with *Época* magazine, on 21 December 1971: “TEs are a very cohesive group (...) GEs are growing from year to year. (...) As do the *Flechas*. All the irregular troops have proven their merit. That is why we will make efforts to increase their numbers.” See Arquivo Histórico Militar, 2º Divisão, 2ª Secção, Caixa 194, nº 10.

<sup>43</sup> Estado-Maior do Exército, nº 2592, 7 de Setembro de 1966, and Secretaria Geral de Defesa Nacional, nº 27/66, 18 de Janeiro de 1966, Arquivo da Secretaria Geral de Defesa Nacional (Forte de S. Julião da Barra), Caixa 6879, nº 3D and 3F respectively.

conservative commander, by General António Spínola brought profound changes. Through selective recruitment among normal militias, he fostered the creation of Special Militias organised in combat groups and operating fairly autonomously.<sup>44</sup> Spínola structured these militias along the structural lines of the Portuguese army, in companies subdivided into platoons. He faced a tough battle with the upper echelons to end the distinction between metropolitan and locally recruited soldiers, arguing that discrimination against the latter involved serious risks for the Portuguese African campaign, and threatening that its perpetuation “would force us to redefine our counter-insurgency policy based on African forces.”<sup>45</sup>

This conflict continued when Spínola pressed to increase the number of special militias. Of the five requested in 1968 only two had been authorized by 1970. Lisbon’s resistance clearly had to do with financial constraints, and also with fears that “the informality brought on by the Africanisation of the war is spreading to an informality of procedures.”<sup>46</sup> It was perhaps because of this, and in an attempt to counteract the tendency of provincial commanders to keep creating new African forces that, at the end of 1971, the Minister of Defence ordered the centralisation in Lisbon of all expenses relating to the irregular troops.<sup>47</sup> In 1970, Spínola again engaged in a struggle with the upper echelons in order to create, using elite African combatants from the militias and the organizational pattern of the Portuguese army, companies of African Commandos, structured very much like normal commando companies created in the other theatres,<sup>48</sup> but manned entirely by Africans and carrying out very special combat operations both within Guinea and in Guinea-Conakry and

<sup>44</sup> Antunes, *Guerra de África*, 1: 363 and *passim*; Cann, *Contra-insurreição*, 137,

<sup>45</sup> See the exchange of correspondence between Spínola and the *Secretaria Geral de Defesa Nacional*, particularly *Secretaria Geral de Defesa Nacional*, n° 1929/RA, 13 de Abril de 1969; *Comando-Chefe das Forças Armadas da Guiné*, n° 4626/69, 10 de Outubro de 1969; *Comando-Chefe das Forças Armadas da Guiné*, n° 15746/AP/01, 22 de Dezembro de 1969; *Secretaria Geral de Defesa Nacional*, n° 1291/RA, 3 de Abril de 1970; *Comando-Chefe das Forças Armadas da Guiné*, n° 2268/AP/01, 11 de Julho de 1970, *Comando-Chefe das Forças Armadas da Guiné*, n° 2673/AP/01, 10 de Agosto de 1970; and *Comando-Chefe das Forças Armadas da Guiné*, n/ref., Abril de 1971, in *Arquivo da Secretaria Geral de Defesa Nacional (Forte de S. Julião da Barra)*, Caixa 718, n° 1C.

<sup>46</sup> *Secretaria Geral de Defesa Nacional*, Info n° 409/AF/73, 20 de Julho de 1973, *Arquivo da Secretaria Geral de Defesa Nacional (Forte de S. Julião da Barra)*, Caixa 435, n° 1B. See also *Secretaria Geral de Defesa Nacional*, n° 550/RA, 13 de Outubro de 1970, *Arquivo da Secretaria Geral de Defesa Nacional (Forte de S. Julião da Barra)*, Caixa , n° 6812, n° 1B, *Secretaria Geral de Defesa Nacional*, n° 551/RA, 13 de Outubro de 1970, *Arquivo da Secretaria Geral de Defesa Nacional (Forte de S. Julião da Barra)*, Caixa n° 6812, n° 1<sup>A</sup>, and *Secretaria Geral de Defesa Nacional*, n° 279/RA, 5 de Maio de 1970, *Arquivo da Secretaria Geral de Defesa Nacional (Forte de S. Julião da Barra)*, Caixa n° 907, n° 6C.

<sup>47</sup> SAF, n° 372/AF/72, “Encargos com forças especiais ou irregulares”, *Arquivo da Secretaria Geral de Defesa Nacional (Forte de S. Julião da Barra)*, Caixa n° 760, n° 4.

<sup>48</sup> The Centres for Commando Instruction (CICs) were created in Guinea in 1964, Angola in 1965, and Mozambique in 1969, for training these elite troops. Many of the Guinea African commando combatants were trained in Angola.



Senegal. The discussion of the project took two years and only in 1972 did they start to operate.<sup>49</sup>

In Mozambique, this process occurred a little later and in a way that combined features of the other two cases, as well as some that were specific to the area. The first stages of the war unfolded under the command of General Augusto dos Santos, an admirer of the new counter-insurgency theories.<sup>50</sup> In the mid-1960s, with Costa Gomes as second-in-command, Dos Santos sponsored important “experiments” involving local militias. One of these led to successful collaboration with the Rhodesian authorities to form units of African scouts.<sup>51</sup> However, in 1969 Kaúlza de Arriaga replaced General Dos Santos. The new Commander-in-Chief had an entirely different way of conducting the war. For a long time the operational involvement of Africans was limited to local recruitment in the regular army or in commando companies,<sup>52</sup> irregular African units being entirely out of the picture, with the exception of limited paramilitary experiments.<sup>53</sup> Only in 1973 were the first solutions involving African units implemented on the ground, with the creation of Special Groups of Parachutists and other Special Groups, formed in the central regions of the country on an ethnic basis, recruiting volunteers, and operating in particular in their home areas, in coordination with and under the control of the military.<sup>54</sup>

In contrast with the Angolan case, Kaúlza’s reservations with regard to African forces operating outside the military’s sphere of control, as well as his conflicts with PIDE, probably help to explain why the implementation of a *Flecha*-type project took so long in Mozambique. The introduction of *Flechas* was being discussed between PIDE and the Rhodesian authorities since 1972. The latter were very much interested in the unfolding events in Mozambique and favoured “lighter” and more local alternatives to the way the war was being conducted by Kaúlza de Arriaga. It is therefore probable that discrete and low

<sup>49</sup> Afonso and Gomes, *Guerra colonial*, 204-4; Antunes, *Guerra de África*, 2: 698, 719; SAF, n° 391/AF/71, 25 de Fevereiro de 1971, Arquivo da Secretaria Geral da Defesa Nacional (Forte de S. Julião da Barra), Caixa n° 907, n° 6B; Comando Territorial Independente da Guiné, CO 45-246 A/G, 21 de Fevereiro de 1973, Arquivo da Secretaria Geral de Defesa Nacional (Forte de S. Julião da Barra), Caixa n° 733, n° 3<sup>A</sup>.

<sup>50</sup> He translated himself the seminal book of Sir Robert Thompson, *Defeating Communist Insurgency*.

<sup>51</sup> See in this respect several reports in Arquivo da Secretaria Geral de Defesa Nacional (Forte de S. Julião da Barra), particularly boxes n° 772.1, 5294, 5298, 6102.1, and 3036.2.

<sup>52</sup> In Mozambique, the first four commando companies were created in Montepuez in 1969, and experienced limited growth, despite their relative operational success, to five in 1970, and eight by the end of the war in 1974.

<sup>53</sup> Including, among other, the creation of paramilitary groups linked to PIDE, acting in the North as hunters of wild game and, in fact, gathering intelligence on the nationalist guerrillas’ movements and contacts.

<sup>54</sup> Estado Maior do Exército 1989 (4), 1988: 193. For an important testimony by Captain Van Uden, one of the GEs’ trainers, see Rui Rodrigues, ed., *Os últimos guerreiros do Império* (Lisbon: Erasmus, 1995), 242 and *passim*.

profile “experiments” with *Flechas* under the aegis of PIDE were in fact taking place since 1972,<sup>55</sup> despite the difficulties.<sup>56</sup> Only in 1974, when Kaulza de Arriaga had been already dismissed by Marcello Caetano, and on the eve of the military coup that ended the war, did they start to operate on the ground.

**Table 4<sup>57</sup>**  
**African Special Forces**

Year of Creation	Theatre	Designation	Origin	Organisation	Nº of Men in 1974
1966	Angola	TEs	Ex-guerrillas	Groups (17)	800
1967	Angola	<i>Flechas</i>	Ethnic troops/ Ex-guerrillas		2,270
1968	Angola	GEs	Locally Recruited	Groups (99)	3,250
1968	Angola	<i>Leais</i>	Foreign troops		127
1969	Angola	<i>Fiéis</i>	Foreign troops	Companies (16)	2,400
1970	Guinea	Special Marines	Local troops	Detachments (2)	160
1970	Mozambique	GEs	Local troops	Groups (12)	860
1972	Guinea	African Commandos	Local troops	Battalions (3)	700
1973	Mozambique	GEs	Ethnic troops	Groups (83)	2,720
1974	Mozambique	<i>Flechas</i>	Ethnic troops		?

The comparative analysis of how Africans were used as soldiers by the Portuguese at the three fronts of the colonial wars shows that, beyond very broad

<sup>55</sup> See, in this respect, the testimony of Lieutenant-Colonel João Santos Fernandes in Rui de Azevedo Teixeira, ed., *A Guerra Colonial: Realidade e ficção* (Lisbon: Ed. Notícias, 2001), 63 and *passim*. Fernandes claims that the project had the support of the Mozambique provincial government and it was the central government that prevented its implementation in 1972.

<sup>56</sup> As late as July 1973, the army refused to supply automatic weapons to the *Flechas*, on grounds that all the lots were already consigned. PIDE approached the South-Africans who expressed a willingness to finance the supply. See Estado-Maior do Exército, n° 2522/LM, “Prioridade no fornecimento de material à delegação da DGS em Lourenço Marques com destino aos ‘Flechas’,” Arquivo da Secretaria Geral de Defesa Nacional (Forte de S. Julião da Barra), Caixa 435, n° 1C, and Estado-Maior General das Forças Armadas, n° 2333/RC, “Fornecimento de espingardas G-3 para os ‘Flechas’ de Moçambique contra pagamento da RAS,” Arquivo da Secretaria Geral de Defesa Nacional (Forte de S. Julião da Barra), Caixa 795, n° 8<sup>A</sup>.

<sup>57</sup> The numbers were gathered from several sources, including direct reports in Arquivo Histórico Militar, 2ª Divisão, 2ª Secção, Caixa 139, n° 5; and Arquivo da Secretaria Geral de Defesa Nacional (Forte de S. Julião da Barra), Caixa 763, n° 1C. They vary considerably, due to several factors including different estimation criteria.

strategic guidelines, the factors that mattered were local context and local commanders. Costa Gomes, perhaps the most successful general, sought good relations with the civilians and employed African units within the framework of a counter-insurgency technique. Spínola, by contrast, appealed for a more political and psycho-social use of African soldiers. Kaulza, the most conservative of the three, feared African forces outside his strict control and seems not to have progressed beyond his initial racist perception of the Africans as inferior beings and terrorists.

Whatever the approaches and their degree of success in terms of furthering colonial interests, the fact is that on the eve of the war's end Africanisation had been accepted as the only way of maintaining the colonial project, in circles as high as that of the Portuguese Chief-of-Staff. According to him, African troops were more efficient, more cost-effective, cheaper and susceptible of delivering better results not only in military terms, but also politically. Moreover, if properly organised in militarised villages they could fight forever.<sup>58</sup> In 1974 he therefore proposed a substantial reduction in the number of metropolitan troops and a decentralisation of the financial resources thus spared, so that the local commands could create further African units. Clearly, the plan was to promote preconditions for civil war in the African territories, if not politically, at least militarily.

#### **A Note on the Colonial African Soldiers After Independence**

Owing to several factors, the decolonisation process that followed the military *coup* of 25 April 1974 was far from smooth and planned. In Guinea and Mozambique, where the nationalists appeared strong and unified, Portugal's attempts to manage the process through referendums or political negotiations were cut short by threats that war would resume unless independence and the transfer of power were prioritized as immediate objectives. In Angola, by contrast, the liberation movement was divided, not only amongst themselves but also internally, particularly the MPLA. Moreover, profound contradictions were manifest at the level of the Portuguese decision-making circles, with the President of the Republic António Spínola trying to revive attempts at federation with the colonies, while senior government officials and the military had very different plans. As a result, decisions were very much informed by political events unfolding in Portugal, and were dominated by improvisation and the need for quick response.<sup>59</sup> This context became particularly dramatic in the demobilisation of the African forces formerly serving on the Portuguese side in

<sup>58</sup> Chefe do Estado-Maior General das Forças Armadas, "Memorando: Africanização das Forças Armadas nos TO Ultramarinos", Secretaria Geral da Defesa Nacional, n° 12131/GC, 1 de Maio de 1973, Arquivo da Secretaria Geral de Defesa Nacional (Forte de S. Julião da Barra), Caixa 1634.1.

<sup>59</sup> The debate about the Portuguese decolonisation is very much on, with some arguing that everything was done that was possible under the circumstances, while others claim that it was conducted on the basis of abandonment and betrayal.

the colonies. Enveloped in substantially different scenarios in the past, as we have argued, Angola, Guinea-Bissau and Mozambique thus experienced developments that were also quite divergent in this particular regard.

Research still needs to be done regarding the destiny of the irregular African forces in Angola. Several indications, however, point to the probability of a high level of integration. Firstly, the fact that there were three competing nationalist movements and that war resumed after the 1974 *coup* certainly favoured the integration of these highly skilled soldiers among contingents already fighting a new war, the civil one, which lasted almost until the present day. Secondly, the 1975 South-African invasion of Angola pressed the newly independent regime, which had a weak army, to recruit in great haste people capable of fighting in this new context.

FLEC re-emerged in Cabinda, integrating in its ranks most of the former TEs of Alexandre Taty,<sup>60</sup> while significant numbers of former GEs may have joined the FNLA, which rapidly became the most influential military force in the North, threatening Luanda directly. The foreign troops, particularly the *Fiéis*, quickly became a sensitive issue. At the time they numbered around 2,400 in total, based in three camps (Chimbila, Camissombo and Gafaria), and were militarily organised in 13 commando companies (*Tigres*), plus around 300 in auxiliary roles. They remained disciplined, with a strong military command, and still obeying the orders of the Portuguese armed forces.<sup>61</sup> The authorities considered several alternatives, namely their local reintegration as civilians (as most of them had left their families back in Congo, they had established new families in Angola), negotiating at diplomatic level the return to Zaire of the ones who wanted to do so, or discussing with the respective governments their passage to Rhodesia and South Africa. The two first options were discarded due to the strong animosity of the local population in the areas where the troops were concentrated. This prevented a simple demobilisation of the force, for fear of retaliations. Moreover, General Costa Gomes vetoed any contacts with South Africa and Rhodesia in this respect, fearing the aggravation of an already tense and intricate regional situation.<sup>62</sup>

<sup>60</sup> Josep Sánchez Cervelló, "La revolución portuguesa y la cuestión colonial. Que descolonización?", in Instituto de História Contemporânea da Universidade Nova de Lisboa, ed., *Portugal e a transição para a democracia (1974-1976)*, I Curso Livre de História Contemporânea, Lisboa, 23-28 de Novembro de 1998 (Lisbon: Edições Colibri, 1999), 89.

<sup>61</sup> Presidência da República Portuguesa, "Relatório" (in Centro de Planeamento e Coordenação da Direcção do Serviço Histórico Militar do Exército Português, n.º 1438/88/C, 22 de Junho de 1988), Arquivo Histórico Militar, 2.ª Divisão, 2.ª Secção, Caixa 169, n.º 17.

<sup>62</sup> Comando-Chefe das Forças Armadas de Angola, Gabinete das Forças Auxiliares, "Memorando: Acção Fidelidade", 7 de Agosto de 1974, Arquivo Histórico Militar, 2.ª Divisão, 2.ª Secção, Caixa 139, n.º 7.

In face of the uncertain future, the commander of the *Fiéis* threatened a suicidal attack against Zaire (“since we are going to die anyway, we prefer to die there rather than here in Angola”). This caused serious diplomatic concerns for the new Portuguese authorities, who wanted to keep these men in Angola as long as possible in order to avoid problems that might affect decolonisation in Angola and Mozambique.<sup>63</sup> It is nonetheless possible that substantial numbers of the *Fiéis* in fact did manage to join the South-African forces, partly because a conservatively inclined section of the new Portuguese authorities pressed in this direction.<sup>64</sup>

The main solution that emerged, however, was to contact the Angolan nationalist movements, particularly the MPLA, probing the possibility that the *Fiéis* might be accepted as political refugees in Angola. This was convenient for the movement, particularly the presidential faction of Agostinho Neto, threatened by the FNLA, which had rapidly become the most influential force in the North and must have absorbed many former GEs into its ranks. There are indications that despite Zaire’s offers of amnesty, most of the *Fiéis* were incorporated in the MPLA. The latter, also able to rely on important contingents of *Flechas*, managed to retain Luanda and to regain military control in the Northeast and in Cabinda.<sup>65</sup> The case of the *Zambian Leais* was not much different, and it is probable that they too were merged into the UNITA and MPLA forces.<sup>66</sup>

In Guinea, on the contrary, matters took quite a different turn in this regard. This was the case in territories where the nationalist war effort was the most advanced, and where the new Portuguese authorities thus had less room to negotiate. Guinea-Bissau reached an independence agreement rapidly, and the African forces that had fought on the colonial side became more than irrelevant as a threat to the new order. Consequently, many of them, particularly from the African Commandoes, were arrested and it has been alleged that hundreds, if not thousands, were simply shot after summary trials.<sup>67</sup>

<sup>63</sup> See Chefe do Estado Maior das Forças Armadas de Angola, Despacho: Acção Fidelidade, 7 de Agosto de 1974, Arquivo Histórico Militar, 2ª Divisão, 2ª Secção, Caixa 139, nº 7.

<sup>64</sup> See conclusions in Chefe do Estado Maior das Forças Armadas de Angola, Despacho: Acção Fidelidade, 7 de Agosto de 1974, Arquivo Histórico Militar, 2ª Divisão, 2ª Secção, Caixa 139, nº 7.

<sup>65</sup> See Cervelló, “La revolución portuguesa,” 93 and *passim*. According to Emile Kalambo Ilunga, interviewed in Brussels in May 1997 by Guido van Hecken, “en 1975, c’est le gouverneur portugais, qui était un gouverneur rouge comme on l’appelait, qui a favorisé la jonction entre les katangais et Agostinho Neto. (...) C’est grâce à leur participation à la guerre que Neto a pu conserver Luanda depuis 1975 jusqu’à ce jour. Alors, il y avait donc là une sorte de devoir moral du MPLA vis-à-vis les katangais.” (I thank David Hedges for this source). A little later, in 1994, the Lusaka Accord prescribed that all foreign forces should leave Angola. However, the Katanguese had been by then already formally integrated in the Angolan 24<sup>th</sup> special forces regiment, and therefore could have remained within the country.

<sup>66</sup> Again, it is possible that some elements crossed the border to join the South-Africans in the South.

<sup>67</sup> See, among other, the testimonies of General Almeida Bruno, and Mamadu Mané, in Rodrigues, *Os últimos guerreiros*, 76-77, 166-168. There are widespread allegations that lists of former African special troops were sent from Lisbon to Bissau, by someone well placed, and that these lists were used

Finally, events in Mozambique followed a direction very much in between the two former cases. Despite the uncertainty surrounding political developments until late in 1974, an independence agreement was also reached between Portugal and FRELIMO. During the dramatic events of the transition period, demobilisation of the former African troops became very difficult and offers were made by certain GE commanders to move some thousand men across the border into neighbouring Rhodesia. This was rejected by Ian Smith, the Rhodesian Prime Minister, who feared an aggravation of Rhodesia's position on the international scene.<sup>68</sup> Soon afterwards, as Mozambique became independent, a new national army was established on the basis of strong political commitment and very close ties with FRELIMO, and in this structure the old colonial troops did not have a place. FRELIMO, and particularly president Samora Machel, designed a reintegration scheme according to which all the Mozambicans who had had ties to the colonial political and defence forces should render public their biographies in order to free themselves from their past.<sup>69</sup> In practice, however, this surely aroused fear amongst these men, particularly the GEs, the majority of whom had come from the central region—exactly the same area where the first contingents of MNR/RENAMO emerged as a war of a new kind, yet with strong historical and structural connections to the previous conflict, was about to start.

The heritage of heavily armed, disciplined and militarised contingents of African troops left behind by the hasty Portuguese decolonisation process, together with varying but generally narrow integration conditions offered by the new independent regimes, are the two factors that undoubtedly created a bridge between the colonial wars and the civil ones after independence, particularly in Angola and Mozambique. These bridges do need further research.

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to locate and arrest them.

<sup>68</sup> See the testimony of Captain van Uden, one of the GEP commanders, in Rodrigues, *Os últimos guerreiros*, 248.

<sup>69</sup> Later, President Machel met with many of these Mozambicans. Some of them were arrested on the spot, while others were allowed to resume normal civilian lives. There are records of the various sessions of this meeting.