NATIONAL LIBERATION IN PORTUGUESE GUINEA, 1956–1974

PATRICK CHABAL

'The wide plains have caught fire,
There is nowhere to hide.'

The history of nationalism in Portuguese Guinea is first and foremost the history of a successful war of national liberation. The Guinean nationalist party, the Partido Africano da Independência da Guiné e Cabo Verde (PAIGC), was the first in Africa to seek and achieve independence through armed struggle. As such, Guinean nationalism marks the transition from the 1950s and early 1960s when independence was achieved largely through constitutional and political means to the late 1960s and 1970s when armed struggle became prevalent. The development of nationalism in Portuguese Guinea added a new dimension to the evolution of African politics in general and of Southern Africa in particular: Angola, Mozambique, later Namibia and Zimbabwe followed. Therefore its significance to the history of decolonisation in Africa cannot be underestimated.

Nationalism in Portuguese Guinea is best analysed in the light of what is known about other twentieth century wars of national liberation and revolutions (China, Vietnam, Yugoslavia, Algeria, Cuba) rather than from a purely African perspective. There are a number of historical and conceptual issues raised by the Guinean case. Firstly, what were the dynamics whereby a movement of national liberation was transformed into a party capable of launching an armed struggle in the African context? Secondly, what exactly were the most significant factors which explain the success of the PAIGC. There was no a priori reason to assume that it could evolve the political structures and strategy which would lead to such an outcome. It is therefore important to avoid 'reading back' into history.

This article will seek to delineate the most plausible links between the PAIGC's intended goals and its achieved ends. This will be best done through an examination of the political, military, and social policies of the party rather

The author is presently completing a PhD thesis on Amilcar Cabral at Trinity College, Cambridge.

1. This was one of the favourite sayings in the PAIGC. It comes from one of the war songs to have emerged during the struggle. It is in créole, the mixture of Portuguese and African languages widely spoken in Guinea and Cape Verde. Cabral often used this saying in his speeches. See A. Cabral, 'Organiser de mieux en mieux nos forces armées, Unité et Lutte, Vol. 2 (Paris: François Maspéro, 1975), p. 199.

2. Although the PAIGC was created as, and indeed was, the nationalist movement for Guinea and Cape Verde, this article will only be confined to Guinea. It is important to note that today the PAIGC is in power in both countries and that it is working for the unity of the two.
than through a mere recording of the historical facts. Finally, this paper also seeks to provide the necessary background for a discussion of what is arguably the most intriguing and important issue raised by the Guinean case: the nature and role of political leadership. Although Amilcar Cabral, the founder and leader of PAIGC, is not the focus of this article, the relevance of his leadership will emerge as one of the major themes for discussion.

Colonial Context

Although the Portuguese were the first to reach the coast of West Africa in the 15th century and at one point had control over most of it, the Berlin Conference left them only with the small territory of Guinea and the Archipelago of Cape Verde. Cape Verde and Guinea became separate administrative provinces in 1879 but the mainland was not ‘pacified’ until the late 1930s. By then the Salazar regime in Lisbon was holding power and Portuguese attention turned towards the richer colonies of Angola and Mozambique.

Portuguese Guinea, a small territory of around 36,000 km² (the size of Belgium) and 500,000 inhabitants is wedged between the former French colonies of Senegal and Guinée. The main ethnic groups in Guinea (Fulas, Mandingas, Manjacas and Balantes) are related to those of adjacent French-speaking countries as the boundaries between them were quite arbitrary. Up to one third of the inhabitants of Guinea are Muslim, most notably the Fulas and Mandingas. The rest are animist since only a handful were christianised. Traditionally, the coastal ethnic groups have produced rice for subsistence while the people of the interior have relied on millet and other cereals. Cattle was also kept in the higher and drier savanna of the interior. This, then, was the territory over which the Portuguese exercised control in the thirties: an artificially defined, small and poor territory with no apparent resources and a reputation for a fearsome climate.

In broad outline the Guinean colonial administration was similar to that in existence in the other Portuguese African colonies of Angola, Mozambique, São Tomé and Principe and Cape Verde. Despite various changes over the years,

3. The Archipelago is composed of a dozen of islands, 400–500 kms. due West off the coast of Senegal. They were uninhabited when the Portuguese set foot there and were thereafter slowly populated by slaves brought from the mainland. Consequently, the majority of today's 250–300,000 Cape Verdeans are of mixed European-African descent.
4. In the 1930s. Today the population is around 800,000. The latest census was carried out in the summer of 1979.
the Salazar regime installed a tight and centralised system of colonial rule everywhere. Each colony was under the control of a governor (governor-general in Angola and Mozambique) who was usually a military officer directly appointed by the Overseas Ministry. The governor had virtually absolute power and was only accountable to Lisbon: he ruled on legislative and financial matters, had executive power, and was directly responsible for law and order. As with the French, the Portuguese instituted a system of direct colonial rule based on the principles of assimilation. Colonial authority was vested locally in the hands of the chefe de posto (district officer) who worked with the assistance of African collaborators, traditional chiefs or, as was more often the case, 'colonial' or appointed chiefs. The chefe de posto was all powerful: at once administrator, police chief, judge and tax collector.

The colonial administration remained far cruder in Guinea than in Angola and Mozambique. There, legislative councils, although largely token, were introduced in the 1950s whereas in Guinea the governor formally ruled alone until after the beginning of the colonial war, seeking or ignoring the advice of the consultative government council. In short, Portuguese colonial rule was rigid and centralised largely because the Portuguese regime continued to view its function primarily in terms of law and order at a time when French and British colonies were experiencing a measure of political and social progress. By the early 1960s Portugal had made some 'cosmetic' changes in its colonial administration, mainly due to UN pressure. In practice, however, colonial rule was the same as in the 1930s. Moreover, most of the changes which did occur concerned Angola and Mozambique, not Guinea.

It was not only administratively and politically that Guinea was the most neglected of the Portuguese colonies. It is widely recognised that Portugal did less to promote economic and social development than any other colonial power. The evidence suggests that it did substantially less in Guinea than in Angola and Mozambique, clearly the two most important colonies. Colonial rule in Guinea was crude and the benefits it brought were few. Much like the rest of West Africa, Guinea was turned into a supplier of primary agricultural products. The production of groundnuts was made mandatory while emphasis was placed on other products which the Portuguese could profitably export: coconut, palm oil, timber, etc.

such was not changed by the Portuguese. Traditional colonial devices were used to guarantee the increased production of export crops: heavy taxes were levied and crop targets instituted. The shift to export crops had the overall and long-term effect of reducing the villagers' ability to produce sufficient amounts of food and replacement seeds for themselves. By the 1950s, Guinean agriculture was showing clear signs of decline and distortion.

The economic and commercial structure of Guinea 'indicated the colonial economy's increasing vulnerability and incapacity to develop.' By the fifties, the balance of external trade was increasingly unfavourable to the colony. Commerce was in the hands of Portuguese private firms and the Portuguese government had done nothing to encourage investment in Guinea. They themselves had invested little beyond what was required for the exercise of colonial rule. There was no industry, no railroad, and a very limited road network. Guinea was believed to have no mineral or other resources and was consequently of little interest to industrialists and government alike. Economically, colonial rule offered no prospect for development for the colony. Guinea, in that sense, was markedly different from Angola and Mozambique where Portugal had invested heavily. There they had sought to establish substantial white settlements and had encouraged massive foreign investment in mining, industry and transport after the Second World War.

There were few social benefits which Africans could derive from Portuguese colonial rule—and fewer in Guinea than in the other colonies. Portugal itself was under the control of a powerful and effective fascist regime where no political rights could be exercised and where social benefits were non-existent. However, the situation was even worse in the colonies because of the legal distinction made between the assimilados and the indigenous. Only the former were entitled to the same 'benefits and privileges' as Portuguese citizens. Although the stated aim and the most cherished justification of Portuguese colonialism was the assimilation of its African population, the number of assimilados in the colonies remained insignificant: less than one per cent generally, and in Guinea less than 0.4 per cent.

One of the many requirements for the status of assimilado was literacy in Portuguese. Very few Guineans could fulfill that condition. On the whole there were fewer schools and more illiterates in Portuguese colonies than in the

11. The large Portuguese firm Companhia União Fabril (CUF) had a near monopoly in the country.
12. The only serious monograph on Guinea (up to the fifties) is A. Teixeira da Mota, Guinée Portugaise (2 vols.) (Lisbon: Agência geral do ultramar, 1954). Teixeira da Mota, a Portuguese civil servant, gives plenty of factual evidence about the dismal record of Portuguese colonial rule.
13. There were several hundred thousands settlers in Angola and Mozambique at the time of independence.
15. In Portugal itself illiteracy was as high as 40 per cent. See Cabral's discussion of Portugal in 'La vérité sur les colonies africaines du Portugal', in Unité et Lutte, 1, p. 81.
rest of Africa and the situation was worse than in Angola and Mozambique. In the Portuguese colonies state or official education was not available to the Africans; it was the privilege of the whites and assimilados. The education of the Africans had been placed entirely in the hands of the Catholic Church through an official agreement with the Holy See (1940). The nature and level of the education provided by the Church were such that few of the pupils acquired even the most rudimentary skill in reading and writing. Catholic education was ostensibly not designed to develop literacy but rather to promote 'good and civilised behaviour and attitudes'. At any rate very few Guineans even had access to that second rate education. Virtually none had gone to secondary school. It was estimated that, by the 1960s, only fourteen Guineans (some of them from Cape Verde) had had access to higher education. The situation concerning health was not much better although in that area the data is even less reliable and more difficult to interpret than for education.

To a large degree, then, Guinea had been left undisturbed by the Portuguese. This was only partly due to the reputedly bad climate of the colony and much more to the fact that Portugal, the poorest European nation, had neither been able nor willing to invest or attract investment into Guinea. There had rarely been in Guinea until the beginning of the war, more than 2,000 Portuguese, mostly civil servants or merchants. Thus the social and political structures of the population of Guinea had not been seriously altered by colonial rule. It was mainly the traditional economy which had been disrupted by the imposition of heavy taxation and the obligation to cultivate export crops.

Few observers at the end of the 1950s would have lent any credence to the feasibility of an armed struggle in Africa—but least of all in Portuguese Guinea, the smallest and most backward of the Portuguese colonies. Colonial rule had not reached beyond the confines of the cities; cities were few and small. The impact of the colonial economy had been minimal. Unlike Angola and

16. See the very good discussion of education in Guinea by Rudebeck, op. cit., pp. 27–31.
18. Portuguese development plans make no mention of secondary schooling before the opening in 1958 of the Liceu Honório Barreto in Bissau. The number of students attending that school, most of them white, were, according to Portuguese statistics, around 200. III Plano de Fomento para 1968–1973, p. 79.
20. Not counting the armed forces. See Rudebeck, op. cit., p. 10. See also Teixeira da Mota, op. cit., II, p. 62.
21. In 1960, Bissau, the capital, had around 25,000 inhabitants. Bolama and Bafatá, the next cities in importance only had a population of slightly more than 3,000. Abshire and Samuels, op. cit., pp. 18ff. The total urban population of the country was at most 50,000. Rudebeck, op. cit., p. 41.
A Brief History of Nationalism, 1956–1974

The development of nationalism in Portuguese Guinea underwent several stages. The PAIGC was created in 1956 after attempts to set up legal, cultural and sports associations had failed. Its programme, which called for independence and the unity of Guinea and Cape Verde, did not differ significantly from similar manifestoes put forward in the neighbouring French colonies. Between 1956 and 1959, the PAIGC attempted to develop the sort of semi-legal/constitutional agitation which was proving successful in the British and French colonies. At the time the party was pitifully small and almost entirely concentrated in Bissau (the capital of Portuguese Guinea) and some of the other major cities. The core of the party, many of whom were Cape Verdeans, was composed of what Cabral later described as ‘petits bourgeois’: civil servants, office employees, salaried workers. Despite their efforts the party remained small and, given the repressive context of the time, found it difficult to convey a credible nationalist message.

The early PAIGC policy was a total failure because the Portuguese, unlike the British and the French, never envisaged initiating any ‘dialogue’ with the nationalist party and took every opportunity to imprison its militants. In August 1959, partly as a result of PAIGC agitation, Bissau port and dock workers called a strike (it was not the first) which the Portuguese decided to break by force: at least fifty were killed and several hundreds wounded. Following this incident,

22. Travelling and migrating was reduced in Guinea because of the notable lack of adequate transport and communication.
24. There are no known remaining documents from that meeting but three of the participants have given similar accounts of it. See, for example, Luiz Cabral’s version in ‘Da formação do partido à proclamação do estado’, Nô Pincha, II, 228 (19 September 1976). Luiz Cabral, Amilcar’s half brother, was President of the Republic of Guinea-Bissau until late 1980.
25. Certainly at the early stage many of the party leaders were Cape Verdeans. For example, of the six who created the party at least three, Amilcar and Luiz Cabral, and Aristides Pereira, were.
27. An eye-witness account of the incidents is recorded by João Emílio Costa, a dock worker at the time. ‘Since Pidiguiti We Never Looked Back’, Sowing the First Harvest. Revolution in Guinea-Bissau (Oakland, California: LSM Information Center, 1978), pp. 35–38.
known as the Pidjiguiti massacre, Cabral ordered the party to go underground and its cadres to make their way to the newly independent Republic of Guinée.28 The PAIGC leadership called for a war of national liberation based in the countryside.29 Cabral himself left Portugal where he was working and arrived in Conakry (capital of Guinée) in early 1960.

The PAIGC was preparing for war with little more than good intentions. The party itself consisted of a few dozen cadres and a small number of young people who had answered the PAIGC call and had managed to reach Conakry. On the whole they were of rural origin, recent migrants to the cities and many of them illiterate. In 1960, the PAIGC had no weapons, no financial resources and no international contacts. It had no experience of political mobilisation, little knowledge of military matters and only the faintest notion of what the Guinean countryside was like. It was not allowed in Senegal and, despite Sékou Touré’s later statements to the contrary, had little support from Guinée.30 As the PAIGC was the first African nationalist party to call and prepare for a war of national liberation there was precious little experience to go by. Cabral, the PAIGC leader, must have been considered by many at the time as an idealist or a fool. He was neither and, as it turned out, he was the PAIGC’s most important asset. The development of nationalism in Guinea cannot be understood without reference to his leadership.

Little had prepared him for this political role.31 He was a Cape Verdean agronomist, born in Guinea in 1924, and educated in Portugal where he had been a brilliant student. He was at the time regarded as a young and promising engineer. He had published widely in his field and was highly regarded by his Portuguese colleagues. Unknown to them, however, he had steeped himself into political and social literature while a student in Lisbon. He had become thoroughly acquainted with the cultural movements (most notably Négritude) which had led so many privileged and educated young Africans to ‘return to their African roots’. Unlike many, however, he had become determined to go beyond this cultural revolt and to seek an end to colonialism by political means. His ideas were shared by many of his African colleagues in Lisbon, among whom Agostinho Neto, Marcelino dos Santos, Mario de Andrade and others later became prominent nationalists in their own countries.

Cabral took a job as an agronomist in Guinea between 1952 and 1955 in order to acquaint himself with the country and people he proposed to ‘liberate’ but of which he knew nothing. Because of his profession he was asked by the colonial authorities to conduct the first agricultural survey of Guinea.32 This was an

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28. To avoid confusion I shall refer to the Republic of Guinea as Guinée and to Portuguese Guinea as Guinea.
29. Amilcar Cabral, Revolution in Guinea (London: Stage 1, 1971), p. 31; and Davidson, op. cit., p. 32.
32. It was published in 1956 as ‘Recenseamento agricola’, op. cit.
unexpected opportunity as the work required that he travel to all parts of the country and analyse the economic structures of agricultural production of the various regions and ethnic groups. The knowledge which he acquired of the countryside and of the socio-economic structures of the various ethnic groups was invaluable and unique. Indeed it was an experience which no other African nationalist leader had had. Cabral was able, as he later explained, to initiate contacts and discussions with villagers in order to probe their consciousness of the meaning of colonial rule and see how they might be willing to lend support to a nationalist movement. As a result of these contacts, Cabral grew markedly more realistic. What was truly remarkable, however, was the extent to which he understood the villagers, their modes of thinking, their way of life, the priorities which guided their lives and the problems they faced. There is no doubt whatever that this understanding was a key factor in the development of the PAIGC strategy and the success with which it was put into practice.33

Between 1960 and 1963, the PAIGC prepared for the armed struggle. Scores of cadres were trained in Conakry and sent to the Guinean countryside to carry out political mobilisation.34 The political preparation for the war, Cabral revealed later, was by far the most difficult part of the liberation struggle. The villagers were not easily convinced by these young and inexperienced cadres.35 Following the 1961 uprisings in Angola, repression in Guinea was greatly increased: many cadres and villagers were denounced and lost their lives. By 1963, the PAIGC had secured recognition, if not willing support, from Sékou Touré and had managed to transport weapons to the interior of the country. The armed struggle was launched early in 1963 under very difficult conditions and with a great shortage of arms.36 Small guerrilla groups operated in regions where they had gained the support of the villagers, seeking first to paralyse Portuguese troop movements and then to consolidate their hold over the area. The Portuguese were clearly not expecting a guerrilla war inside the country but rather incursions from Guinée. They were taken by surprise and, lacking experience, they suffered high casualties.37 The PAIGC guerrillas

33. This is made perfectly clear by the way in which Cabral was training the cadres in Conakry. The various accounts that we have from cadres who were trained at the time show how Cabral focussed entirely on the practical questions: how the villagers thought and how they would react to the nationalist message. All these accounts emphasise this particular aspect of their training. See Chabal, op. cit., Chapter III.
34. During the early years the cadres were sent abroad for military training: China at first, then Morocco, Algeria; later to the Soviet Union and other Eastern European countries.
35. For an account of that period by a village see ‘Relato de um camponês; os anos de guerra em Morés’, No Pimcha, II, 228 (19 September 1976).
36. This is well illustrated by the accounts of Bana and Oswaldo, two guerrilla commanders of the early days, who described to Chaliand the appalling difficulties they had at the beginning of the struggle. See Gerard Chaliand, Armed Struggle in Africa, (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1969), pp. 72–87.
37. The PAIGC war Communiqués gave great details about Portuguese losses. The Portuguese never denied these figures and they never published casualties. The impact on the Portuguese was dramatic. While in 1961 their military presence totalled 1,000 men, by 1963 it had gone up to 13,000. See figures in Joaquim da Luz Cunha, et al., A vitória traita (Lisbon: Editorial Intervenção, 1977), p. 77. Their figures are taken from official military documents. The authors of the book were Portuguese military commanders in Guinea, Angola and Mozambique.
made surprisingly rapid progress during the first two years of the war despite continued lack of equipment. By 1966, the recently created PAIGC Armed Forces (FARP) were in full operation and the Portuguese were on the defensive.

By 1969, the PAIGC was in control of 60 per cent of Guinean territory in which about 50 per cent of the population lived (300,000–400,000). Already then, as we know, the Portuguese military had acknowledged that the war could not be won by military means. Consequently, the newly appointed governor of Guinea, General de Spinola, embarked upon the strategy of what he called ‘Guiné melhor’ (a better Guinea). This involved the massive injection of funds into the colony in an effort to develop economic and social opportunities for the population still living under Portuguese control. Food was made more plentiful and more readily available, schools were opened, hospitals were built, houses erected, credit was made available to farmers, trips to Portugal and Mecca were organised for loyal collaborators, etc. Political rights were now to be exercised by the indigenous population through an advisory Council of Guinea composed of traditional or appointed chiefs loyal to the Portuguese. An intensive propaganda campaign was organised on the radio to discredit the PAIGC. Political prisoners were released and some added their voice to the official propaganda.

Militarily, Spinola set out to Africanise the army. He created elite commandos (similar to the Selous Scouts in Rhodesia) and developed the technique of helicopter-borne attacks on so-called free-fire zones—the PAIGC liberated areas—where the troops were free to, and in fact did, wreak havoc, destroying villages, killing villagers, burning crops and slaughtering cattle. By then the policy of ‘strategic hamlets’ had largely failed and the Portuguese military command was desperate. On the whole these policies were unsuccessful but they did create additional hardships for the inhabitants of the liberated areas. In the end, Spinola’s plans for a ‘Guiné melhor’ brought little, if any, additional support for the Portuguese.

Between 1969 and 1973, the PAIGC consolidated its military advance until the Portuguese were confined to the major cities and a reduced number of fortified camps. Although Cabral was assassinated in 1973 as a result of a plot by the Portuguese secret police, the PAIGC went on to carry out the most important 38. See 1969 issues of Libertação, the PAIGC paper which reproduced a summary of all war communiques.
39. On the ‘Guiné melhor’ program see, among others, the PAIGC reaction: Amílcar Cabral, L’an VIII de la lutte armée de libération nationale (Conakry, PAIGC, 1971).
40. Much of this information was given to me by Major Otelo de Carvalho, who worked with Spinola during the period 1969–1973, particularly in the propaganda section. Interview with Major Otelo de Carvalho, Oeiras, 4 December 1978.
41. The most damaging voice was that of Rafael Barbosa, who had been the first president before he was imprisoned.
42. The policy of ‘strategic hamlets’ tried by Spinola’s predecessors was the anti-guerrilla tactics consisting in forcibly moving the villagers to protected villages in order to prevent contact with the guerrillas. It was used in Vietnam, Algeria, Rhodesia, etc., and has never worked satisfactorily.
43. The Portuguese were so desperate that in November 1970 they launched an ill-timed and ill-prepared invasion of Conakry designed to topple Sekou Touré and destroy the PAIGC leadership. It failed miserably.
44. For note, see next page.
and ambitious offensives of the war, destroying or taking over key Portuguese positions on the southern border and in the north.\footnote{45} Furthermore, it successfully put into operation the newly acquired ground-to-air missiles, destroying in the course of 1973 half the Portuguese Air Force and therefore effectively neutralising it.\footnote{46} Without the Air Force, the Portuguese army admit that the PAIGC could have won an outright military victory in 1974.\footnote{47} The PAIGC's political position in the country was so strong and its international standing such that it was able to proclaim independence in September 1973 and be immediately recognised by a majority of the world's countries.\footnote{48} How was it possible? How was the PAIGC the first African movement of national liberation to achieve independence through armed struggle?

The second part of this article will bring analysis to bear on the understanding of the PAIGC success in achieving national liberation on its own terms. For conceptual and historical reasons the analysis will focus firstly on the political and military aspects of the PAIGC strategy and secondly on the party policies in the areas in which it had acquired control.\footnote{49} We shall look at the more immediate factors underlying the military progress of the PAIGC. We shall then examine in some detail the structural factors characterising the PAIGC's long-term policies and whether these justify the claim that a new society was being constructed in Guinea. At the outset, however, we must look at the context within which the PAIGC operated to determine whether there were historical or objective factors facilitating the development of a successful armed struggle.

It has been argued that one or several of the following factors explain the apparent ease with which the PAIGC made progress. (1) Portuguese Guinea was an exceedingly small territory by African standards, easy to infiltrate and where guerrillas could carry out operations and leave the country in a matter of days. (2) The PAIGC had free access, shelter, and support in the two neighbouring countries of Guinée and Senegal. (3) Portuguese Guinea was a very backward country lacking the complexity of other colonies such as Angola,

\footnote{44} Cabral was killed by disgruntled elements of the PAIGC who were operating as agents of the Portuguese secret police and who had been promised a vague form of 'autonomy' within the Portuguese Empire if they succeeded in eliminating the PAIGC leadership. Despite Cabral's death the plot failed in all its objectives. For a detailed discussion of the assassination and its implications see Chabal, op. cit., Chapter V.

\footnote{45} See PAIGC Communiqués for that period, particularly on 6 June 1973 about the fall of Guineledje, a major camp on the southern border.

\footnote{46} Interview with Manuel Santos (Manecas), Bissau, 20 March 1979. Santos was one of the PAIGC commanders in charge of anti-aircraft defence.

\footnote{47} Interview with Major Otelo de Carvalho. See also interview with Colonel Carlos Fabião, Lisbon, 7 December 1978. Fabião was appointed Governor of Guinea after the April revolution.

\footnote{48} Within three weeks around 60 states had offered recognition. By the spring of 1974, the number was over 80. Not a single Western government, however, recognised the country until after the coup in Portugal. The Republic of Guinea-Bissau was admitted to the OAU in November 1973. In September 1974 it was recognised by the Portuguese government and admitted to the UN.

\footnote{49} Historically, this is the chronology of events: political mobilisation first, then armed struggle, finally reconstruction of the liberated areas. Conceptually, it is also the order in which Guinean nationalism should be examined because it reflects the logical development which takes place in successful national and/or social revolutions.
Mozambique or Rhodesia, thus making it easier for guerrillas to operate. (4) More generally, Portuguese colonialism was weak and the Portuguese military consequently unable to invest all the necessary resources in the colonial wars. (5) Finally, Portuguese Guinea was less important to Portugal than Angola and Mozambique and as a result less effort was made to counter the nationalist challenge.

Although there is some truth in the second point, there is no obvious correlation between the others and the PAIGC success. As concerns (1) and (3), it can equally well be argued that a smaller more backward country is more easily controlled by a colonial or foreign power.50 (4) and (5) are factually wrong: proportionately the Portuguese devoted more men and resources to the colonial wars than have other Western countries (e.g., the United States in Vietnam), and proportionately more in Guinea than in Angola and Mozambique.51 More importantly, however, as the Vietnamese and Algerian wars have made abundantly clear, the determining factor in a Western nation's failure to maintain control over an alien territory seeking independence through armed struggle is the political nature of wars of national liberation—not the military might which even the mightiest can muster. This was also certainly the case in Guinea.

A. Political Factors

Political factors are always more relevant to the understanding of national and/or social revolutions than military ones. This is particularly the case for the PAIGC where the dominance of the political over the military aspect of the struggle determined all the other policies. It was built into the structure of the party and was enforced with extreme vigour and consistency. It is therefore appropriate to begin our discussion with an analysis of the party itself.

Although the PAIGC was created in 1956, it was totally transformed in 1960 when Cabral came to Conakry to assume full charge of a party now preparing for war. He and the rest of the leadership rebuilt the party evolving new structures and training new cadres. The organisation of the party as such differed little from nationalist movements elsewhere.52 In the party guidelines, for instance, Cabral stressed four basic principles: revolutionary democracy, democratic centralism, collective leadership, criticism and self-criticism. The definition of these principles was similar to the standard ones given by nationalist, socialist or revolutionary parties the world over. Democratic centralism, for

50. In fact, I feel that on balance the size and backwardness of Guinea were favourable to the Portuguese.

51. Official Portuguese military documents show that, on average, 20% of the armed forces deployed in the colonial wars were in Guinea, 50% in Angola and 30% in Mozambique. Given the size and population of Guinea, these figures show quite clearly that the war was toughest in Guinea and that the Portuguese had to devote, proportionately, more resources and men there. This is confirmed by my interviews with Portuguese officers. See Luiz Cuhna and others op. cit., pp. 58 and 64.

52. Because of shortage of space I restrict my comments to what I take to be specific to the PAIGC and what is most relevant to an understanding of its success.
example, was seen very much in the Leninist sense. But perhaps the concept of revolutionary democracy gives a better idea of the specific nature of the PAIGC. As Cabral saw it, it meant the balanced relations of power between the leaders, the party cadres and the people. It is clear, therefore, that he never under-estimated the importance of party organisation and discipline. What is more relevant to our discussion, however, is the way in which the principles were applied by the men and women who formed the PAIGC.53

In this respect, there were two features of the party which were important to its successful development: the nature and quality of the party cadres and the adaptability and flexibility of the party structures over the years. Both of these directly reflected Cabral's leadership. He believed that men, not party cadres, were the key to the development and organisation of a party capable of evolving and adapting new policies. It was undoubtedly on the human aspect of his political training that he placed the greatest emphasis. In fact, he took personal charge of the training of all the cadres during the early years of the struggle. Most of them were dedicated but illiterate young villagers or city dwellers with no political knowledge or even consciousness, little experience of political agitation and even less understanding of war. Their training was essentially political and combined an emphasis on the history of Guinea and Cape Verde, an explanation of the mechanism of colonial rule and of the necessity for liberation with the most detailed preparation for the work of political mobilisation they would have to carry out in the countryside. Constant stress was placed on the political nature of the armed struggle. The support of the villagers, they were told, could only be acquired and maintained if and when the party policies were understandable and beneficial to them.54 In short, a concrete and pragmatic approach prevailed emphasising the difficult but indispensable task of mobilising the reluctant villagers inside Guinea. The care with which the cadres were trained largely explains their dedication and effectiveness.

The PAIGC underwent several changes during the war, all designed to correct inadequacies and to provide practical solutions to concrete problems. For example, the PAIGC started out as a highly decentralised party out of necessity. This meant that often cadres operating in the countryside exercised a large degree of autonomy which resulted in frequent abuses of authority. The leadership responded to this situation by re-defining patterns of authority and increasing central control. Later, the party was de-centralised once again, reflecting the new reality of control over the liberated areas where priority was

53 Some of the important documents concerning the party are: Amilcar Cabral, ‘Palavras de ordem gerais do camarada Amilcar Cabral aos responsaveis do partido’ (Conakry: PAIGC, 1969), and Algumas Principios do Partido (Lisbon; Seara Nova, 1974).

54 On the nature of the training and its effectiveness see particularly the testimonies of two young PAIGC cadres, Nino and Chico Tê, later to become top guerrilla commanders and successive prime-ministers in independent Guinea-Bissau. ‘Nino: Senti orgulho...’, Nó Pintcha, II, 225 (12 September 1976). In order to improve the training of the cadres, Cabral would have them act out to him (who played the part of the reluctant villager) the words and arguments they would use for mobilisation. See Chabal, op. cit., Chapter III.
now given to reconstruction, and no longer on war alone.\textsuperscript{55} On the whole, then, the PAIGC was constantly adapting itself to the conditions imposed by the struggle, taking particular care to combat party bureaucracy and insufficient sensitivity on the part of the cadres towards the population of the liberated areas. The greatest emphasis was placed upon the successful integration of party cadres to local life and on the harmonious development of the links between the party and the villagers.

The first and most important aspect of the PAIGC strategy was political mobilisation. Although the party had had no experience in the countryside, Cabral seems to have understood from the beginning that the only feasible and realistic policy was to gain the political support of the villagers. It would have been totally futile, he argued, to launch the armed struggle before such mobilisation had been effectively carried out.\textsuperscript{56} Political mobilisation in the context of Guinea at the time literally meant going from village to village seeking to gain the confidence of the rural population. This was not always forthcoming and it remained one of the central objectives of the party to win not only the tacit but the active support of the villagers.\textsuperscript{57}

As in all revolutions in which the peasantry played a major role (most notably China and Vietnam) this proved an exceedingly difficult task. The PAIGC suffered many setbacks. Repression was very severe for villagers who were found to have had contacts with the guerrillas. Villagers at times denounced the cadres who were then arrested, tortured and killed. The fact simply is that conditions in Guinea were not particularly favourable to mobilisation. As we have noted, unlike other colonies, there were no new or compelling reasons which might have stirred the villagers into action: exploitation and repression were not noticeably worse in 1960 than they had been in 1950 for those who refused contact with the PAIGC. It is therefore all the more remarkable that with so few cadres the PAIGC was able to do as much as it did between 1960 and 1963, succeeding in its efforts to achieve sufficient political mobilisation in order to launch the armed struggle on a firm footing.

The military successes which the PAIGC obtained in 1963 and 1964 show how effective political mobilisation had in fact been. As the guerrillas were

\textsuperscript{55} It should not be inferred from these remarks that the PAIGC was anything but a very well organised and tightly-knit party. No war of national liberation would succeed in the absence of such a party. My remarks are intended to show the change and evolution of the PAIGC, not its lack of organisation.

\textsuperscript{56} It must be re-emphasised that this was a new context in the Africa at the time. It is also one which was entirely Cabral's. He said later that he had not read Mao Tse Tung until 1961.

\textsuperscript{57} This is what Cabral said later: 'It was a difficult problem to solve for the struggle: how to prove to the peasant that he was exploited on his own land. We could not mobilise people by telling them: 'Land to those who till it', because here there is no lack of land... We therefore had to find appropriate forms to mobilise our peasantry instead of using terms that our people could not understand. We never mobilised our people on the basis of the struggle against colonialism. It does not work. Instead we used simple language understandable by all: why do we fight? who are you? who is your father? what is your situation? have you paid your taxes? has your father paid his taxes? how much do you get for your groundnuts? has anyone been taken prisoner in your family?'

operating entirely from within the country they would not have have survived, let alone have made progress, without the support and participation of the villagers. This success can only be explained by the fact that Cabral managed to instil in the cadres he trained the belief that mobilisation was possible and to give them the practical tools they would require once in the villages. It is here that Cabral’s experience in and understanding of the countryside helped. This extreme emphasis on the importance of political mobilisation and on the cadres’ ability to live with and relate to the villagers continued throughout the war and is evident today.58

Another important aspect of the party was its lack of ideological dogmatism or rigidity. While its general social and political orientation might broadly be defined as socialist, PAIGC documents are singularly devoid of abstract references to ideology such as, for example, Marxism-Leninism or African Socialism.59 There is, on the other hand, a constant concern with the nature of the Guinean revolution and repeated reference to the concrete aspects of the situation prevailing in Guinea at the time.60 Cabral, who used Marxist theory in his analytical texts, consistently refused to be drawn into ideological discussions or definitions.61 He emphasised to the PAIGC cadres and to the outside world that a successful national revolution would evolve its own ideology partly from the general body of socio-political doctrines but more importantly from the economic, social, and political reality it faced in the country itself.

This unusually pragmatic attitude towards ideology had several distinct advantages. Firstly, it greatly enhanced the cohesion of the party and facilitated political mobilisation in the countryside. It meant that, at all levels of the party, documents and discussions could easily be understood and transmitted. The PAIGC expressed its ideas, goals, and methods through a medium readily intelligible to all cadres and villagers. This partly explains the success with which the cadres managed to approach and convince villagers before the war began.

Traditional reluctance to accept foreign ideas was reduced because the ideas expressed were neither new nor foreign. In addition, such absence of ideological and abstract jargon removed the barrier and hierarchy which, more often

58. The early policy of sending the cadres back to their region of origin on the grounds that they would be more easily acceptable and would know the language and customs had to be abandoned. It turned out that traditional pressures which they could not always resist were too great on the guerrillas. As from the mid-1960s, the PAIGC systematically sent cadres to all regions and rotated them on a regular basis.

59. This is very clear in the programme. See ‘Programa do partido’ (PAIGC, n.l., n.d.).

60. Perhaps the most famous statement on the PAIGC’s ideology is the following. ‘Always remember,’ Cabral told his cadres, ‘that people are not fighting for ideas, nor for what is men’s mind. The people fight and accept the sacrifices demanded by the struggle in order to gain material advantages, to live better and in peace, to benefit from progress, and for the better future of their children. National liberation, the struggle against colonialism, the construction of peace, progress and independence are nothing but hollow words devoid of any significance unless they can be translated into a real improvement of living conditions.’ Amilcar Cabral, ‘Palavras de ordem gerais’, op. cit., p. 23.

61. On this aspect see the answer he gave to a question asked in London in 1971 in Our People are Our Mountains (London: Committee for Freedom in Mozambique, Angola and Guinea, 1971), pp. 21–22.
than not in revolutionary political organisations, separates those who know how to manipulate the changing ideological idiom from those who do not.

Secondly, this aspect of the PAIGC worked to reduce the frequency and intensity which ideological disputes might have had within the party itself. Since there was no ‘party line’ or immutable body of ‘correct ideas’, the tendency and temptation to exclude cadres—thus hence to split the party—on the basis of dissenting political opinions was limited. And, indeed, the PAIGC was one of the rare political movements in Africa not to be plagued by ideological disputes and party splits. Finally, this lack of doctrinal rigidity enabled the PAIGC to avoid becoming involved in the divisions and disputes which have beset the socialist world, especially since the Sino-Soviet split. The PAIGC was one of the few movements of national liberation to maintain good relations with the Soviet Union and its allies as well as with China.62 This also allowed, and still allows, the PAIGC to pursue a vigorous foreign policy of non-alignment, seeking and obtaining aid and support from a wide range of countries.

There are two further distinct, but related, political factors which must be taken into account when seeking to analyse the success of the PAIGC: the first has to do with the question of nationalist unity in Guinea, the other concerns PAIGC diplomacy. The lack of unity among and within nationalist movements in Africa has probably been the single most vexing problem. It is therefore important to see how the PAIGC achieved unity. One is tempted to answer that the PAIGC side-stepped the issue. It got on with the job of political mobilisation and armed struggle and the problem took care of itself. It is after all clear that the structure and ideology of the party made it relatively immune to internal splits while its political strategy in the countryside made the task of political competitors a difficult one. The PAIGC was visibly the only party to carry out the nationalist struggle.

But the process was not nearly as smooth as it appears to be and the evidence shows that the PAIGC leadership was well aware of the dangers of disunity and worked hard to avoid them. Partly through persuasion and diplomacy, partly through cunning, Cabral rapidly coopted the most serious nationalist competitors inside and outside Guinea. This was achieved by careful and sustained efforts to accept, rather than exclude, any self-proclaimed nationalist. At the same time, he made visible and repeated efforts at coming to terms with those rival nationalist groups which refused to cooperate with the PAIGC.63 Whether genuine or not such efforts at least served the purpose of showing the outside world that the PAIGC, the strongest and most credible nationalist movement in Guinea, was attempting to collaborate with its weaker rivals in order to achieve unity. Although this attempt at complete unity failed, by the mid-1960s the

62. Originally, the PAIGC had better relations with China. Later, the Soviet bloc supplied most of the military equipment. But the PAIGC remained friendly with both.
63. The rival nationalist movements, based in Senegal, joined in the Frente da luta pela independência nacional da Guiné-Bissau (FLING). The history of the FLING can be found in Ronald Chilcote, Emerging Nationalism in Portuguese Africa (Stanford: Hoover Institute Press, 1972), pp 603ff.
PAIGC had succeeded in establishing itself as the only legitimate and effective national liberation movement in Guinea and Cape Verde. Some of the rival movements survived until independence but never obtained recognition from any African country or from the OAU.64 This de facto nationalist unity was one of the great strengths of the PAIGC. Thus, unlike the MPLA in Angola, for example, it received undivided support and aid from African and other nations and from international organisations.

This would hardly have occurred, however, without the PAIGC’s active and aggressive diplomacy.65 Cabral laid the utmost importance on foreign relations because he firmly believed that it was an indispensable instrument in the struggle for national liberation. Over the years, he devoted relatively large amounts of time on diplomacy. His aim was to disclose the nature of Portuguese colonial rule, virtually unknown in the early 1960s, and to publicise the struggle of the liberation movements of the Portuguese colonies and the achievements of these movements in the areas they had liberated. Although Guinea was the smallest and least strategically significant of the Portuguese colonies, the PAIGC soon found itself at the forefront of the diplomatic campaign to gain recognition and support. Cabral became the spokesman for the various liberation movements through a common organisation, the CONCP.66 His recognised diplomatic skills played an important part in the growing opposition which emerged against Portuguese colonialism in world opinion and international bodies at the end of the sixties.

Historically, PAIGC diplomacy proved effective at three levels. Firstly, it secured the support of Guinea’s neighbouring countries: Guinée and Senegal. When in 1960, the PAIGC began to re-organise in Conakry, it had only the most reluctant acquiescence from Sékou Touré and it was not even allowed to operate in Senegal. Within three years, the PAIGC received full cooperation from Guinée and tacit support from Senegal. Without it, it is clear that the struggle in Guinea would have been slowed down considerably. Secondly, the PAIGC rapidly managed to gain aid from China and the Eastern bloc countries. More noteworthy, it succeeded in maintaining that support and by the end of the war was receiving assistance from a large number of countries and international organisations (the Scandinavian countries, the World Council of Churches, and UN Agencies like the FAO or UNESCO).

64. Although the FLING continued to exist in Senegal it was not officially recognised by the government. By the mid-1960s, President Senghor had shifted his support to the PAIGC although Senegal never gave the PAIGC the same support as Guinée. Senghor told me in an interview that it was Cabral’s impressive stature and arguments which had led him to change his mind about the PAIGC. Interview with President Leopold Senghor, Dakar, 2 April 1979.

65. Chilcote’s quantitative analysis of the documentary output of the liberation movements from the Portuguese colonies shows that the PAIGC as a whole produced far more than all the others put together. See Chilcote, op. cit., Introduction. A quick glance at the PAIGC paper, Libertação, shows that Cabral or a party delegation attended most meetings in or on Africa.

66. The CONCP, Conférence des organisations nationalistes des colonies portugaises, included the PAIGC, the MPLA, the FRELIMO, and the CLSTP (for São Tome and Principe). More often than not Cabral was the CONCP’s spokesman.
Finally, the PAIGC pursued a systematic policy of overture towards and cooperation with the Portuguese. These ranged from messages sent to the Portuguese Armed Forces to radio broadcasts directed at the Portuguese people themselves.\textsuperscript{67} But by far the most important aspect of this policy was the influence which the PAIGC acquired over the ideas and policies of the Portuguese opposition (both inside and outside Portugal) and, ultimately over the armed forces themselves.\textsuperscript{68} PAIGC diplomacy towards the Portuguese was successful because it emphasised the fact that the war was not against the Portuguese people but only against the regime. The colonial people and the Portuguese, Cabral argued, had a common interest in halting the war and ending Fascism in Portugal. In addition, the PAIGC unequivocally stated its intention of having privileged relations with a democratic Portuguese state after independence had been achieved.\textsuperscript{69}

\textit{B. Military Factors}

The PAIGC would scarcely have survived, let alone have developed, if it had not been successful militarily. It was after all the war which determined the outcome of the nationalist struggle. Here again there are strategic and structural reasons why the PAIGC evolved a successful war of national liberation. Strategically, it was able to find original ways of applying the principles of guerrilla warfare to Guinea. Structurally, it developed efficient and flexible fighting units.

The basic strategy was evidently to attack and harass the Portuguese everywhere and at all times, to cut all means of transport and communications and isolate them in the fortified areas where they had to retreat.\textsuperscript{70} It thus became a matter of time before the Portuguese had to withdraw from the weaker to the stronger fortified positions and eventually to the cities. Here the small size of the country played against the PAIGC because the density of fortified camps set up by the Portuguese throughout the country was very high. The important principles of the PAIGC military strategy can be briefly summarised as follows. (1) It was absolutely necessary to conduct the war entirely from within the country, never through raids from neighbouring countries. (2) No area should be taken over unless political mobilisation had been adequately carried out and the support of the population guaranteed. (3) The PAIGC must defend at all costs liberated areas against counter-attacks and reprisals in order to maintain its

\textsuperscript{67} For some examples of the messages addressed to the Portuguese in Guinea see ‘La stratégie de mobilisation politique’, \textit{Unité et Lutte II}, pp. 9–36. Radio broadcasts to Portugal were made from Algiers on the radio station of the Portuguese democratic opposition in exile.

\textsuperscript{68} There is no space here to give detailed evidence; see Chabal, \textit{op. cit.}, Chapter V.

\textsuperscript{69} This is in fact what has happened. Since the April Revolution in Portugal, the relations between the two countries have been excellent. Portugal has participated in the reconstruction of Guinea-Bissau. Guinea-Bissau today often acts as intermediary between Portugal and Angola and Mozambique, who have not had very good relations with Portugal.

\textsuperscript{70} Here again there is no space to go into the details about the PAIGC military strategy. This section is therefore not exhaustive but rather discusses some of the original and effective aspects of the PAIGC military strategy and tactics.
credibility. (4) The war was to be ‘clean’, i.e., terrorism, attacks on civilian targets and reprisals were ruled out on principle; Portuguese prisoners and deserters were to be well treated. (5) PAIGC casualties had to be kept at the lowest possible minimum by adhering rigidly to the basic principle of guerrilla war of avoiding frontal attack or confrontation with a better equipped Portuguese army.\(^71\) (6) The guerrilla war was to move from the countryside towards the cities, encircling them but not seizing them. It would be far too costly in terms of lives, Cabral argued, to take over (and especially to hold) cities.

Although the ultimate success of the PAIGC does indicate that these principles were followed with a large degree of consistency, it would be factually wrong to suggest that the armed struggle evolved without difficulties.\(^72\) The main problems which the PAIGC faced, as do all guerrilla movements, concerned politics. It was difficult, and not always possible, to train cadres with sufficient political consciousness and discipline to adhere to the above principles and to accept, in practice, the dominance of the political over the military wing of the party. The most common and damaging mistake arose from the often irresponsible behaviour of certain cadres who abused their military power and alienated the population. This problem, in fact, reached dangerous proportions and threatened the very existence of the party during the first years of the war.\(^73\) As a result, in 1964, after a year of armed struggle, the PAIGC convened what later came to be known as the Cassaca Congress which effectively crushed the militarist tendency developing among some guerrilla cadres. Cabral was particularly aware of the dangers of a situation in which some local guerrilla commanders had established themselves as ‘local chiefs’ by force of arm.\(^74\) The arbitrary use of the PAIGC military strength was leading to a considerable loss of support among the population. Cabral desperately wanted to avoid the risks of ‘wilayism’ which had beset the Algerian war of national liberation.\(^75\) The Cassaca Congress re-established the dominance of the political over the

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\(^71\) This was crucial for the PAIGC because their forces always remained small in number: 5,000–10,000 throughout the war. The evidence I have seen supports the PAIGC claim of very low casualties. Casualties for the entire war are estimated at 1,000–2,000. Interview with Manuel Santos.

\(^72\) Cabral was surprisingly open about these problems. Discussions relating to the deficiencies and inadequacies of the FARP can be found in many PAIGC documents. See particularly the texts of the Seminario dos quadros, 19–24 Novembro (Conakry, 1969).

\(^73\) Luiz Cabral, president of Guinea-Bissau, was quite explicit about the point. See Luiz Cabral, op. cit., and also interview with Luiz Cabral, Bissau, 11 March 1979.

\(^74\) Cabral wrote after the congress: ‘Moreover, a tendency towards militarism has begun to appear. It stems from the fact that fighters as well as cadres have forgotten that we are armed militants, not militarists (militares). This is a direct consequence of inadequate political work within the armed forces.’ Amilcar Cabral, ‘Avoir conscience de la situation de la lutte à chaque instant’, Unité et Lutte II, p. 190.

\(^75\) Cabral knew the Algerian case well as he had been there often and had been in contact with FNL leaders. The ‘wilaya’ was the military region during the Algerian war of national liberation. Ultimately the military commanders of the regions became all powerful and independent from the FNL leadership. More generally the Algerian struggle suffered from the dominance of the military wing of the party over the political leadership of the party despite the decisions taken at the Conference of the Soummam. See William Quandt, Revolution and Political Leadership in Algeria, 1954–1968 (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1969), pp. 99–101.
military—a policy subsequently enforced with the greatest vigour. But even more importantly, the Congress began a thorough re-organisation of the party.

Although inadequate political training was partly to blame for the militarism of the early years, the PAIGC leadership now sought to develop structural safeguards against a tendency which is built into the very dynamics of guerrilla war. The decisions taken at and after the Cassaca Congress led to the separation of the political and military aspects of the struggle and the creation of distinct political and military structures. The original autonomous guerrilla groups were gradually replaced by a national army, the FARP, capable of operating anywhere in the country. The basic fighting unit of the FARP was the bi-grupo (double group), a combination of two distinct commandos of 15–25 men normally operating together but capable of separating and remaining operational. This gave the FARP extreme flexibility of action. Bi-grupos could also be brought quickly together when necessary into units of several hundred men coordinated by a pre-arranged command structure. The structure of the bi-grupo was found to be the most suitable to the conditions in Guinea and was maintained until the end of the war.

New geographical and hierarchical structures were set up and regional commands created for each front (south and north, later east). A central organ, the Conselho de Guerra (War Council), was now in direct control of all military operations. The regional command was in effect the key to the new military edifice as it was in constant contact with the War Council and the lower echelons of the military in the field. It is largely because of the skills and dedication of the regional commanders, the best PAIGC cadres, that the party military structure became so effective.

However, by far the most original and important innovation made by the PAIGC to ensure political dominance within the military was the system of ‘dual command’. At all levels of the military apparatus, from the bi-grupo upwards, leadership was exercised by two men: the commander, who was the ultimate authority for military operations and the political commissar, second in the military hierarchy and in charge of political mobilisation. Unlike the experience of the Russian Red Army during the civil war, the distinction between the two men was not a military one since it was frequently the case that positions between them could be, and often were, inter-changed. All political commissars were also qualified military commanders but their specific responsi-

76. They were usually armed with rifles, light and heavy machine guns and mortars. Later some special groups carried heavier artillery: 75 mm and 105 mm cannons.
77. An attempt had been made in the mid-1960s to create larger fighting units but the idea was abandoned after it became obvious that they did not operate satisfactorily.
78. It is relevant to point out that Amilcar Cabral was at the head of the Conselho de Guerra and generally kept a very close control over military operations.
79. ‘Dual command’ is my own term. It is not to be found in PAIGC documents because in practice there was no separation between the two men. There was no rank either in the military units except for that of commander and political commissar.
80. In the Russian case, the political commissars were not military commanders but party cadres responsible for keeping a check on the military commanders, many of whom were former Tsarist officers.
bilities concerned the political aspects of the war. Clearly, the idea was to build into the structure of the armed forces an effective check against militarism and it is significant that the system of dual command survived all subsequent re-organisations of the politico-military structures of the party.

C. Social Factors: the Construction of a New Society

To many, the most significant aspect of national liberation in Guinea was the reconstruction of the liberated areas. For the PAIGC this was evidently the most effective way of gaining and maintaining the support of the population. But it was also a great deal more than that. The attempt at constructing a new society in the liberated areas was based on the conscious premise that the revolutionary transformation of Guinea had to be initiated before, not after, independence. In fact, Cabral saw the development of the liberated areas as the very basis for the development of the independent state. To those who asked him what policies the PAIGC would pursue after independence, he usually responded by pointing out to what had been achieved in the liberated areas. There is little doubt, moreover, that the achievements of the PAIGC in this respect largely explain its eventual success in Guinea. By 1966, when the party was already in control of substantial areas of Guinean territory, priority was placed on reconstruction. To the PAIGC this meant essentially two things: improving the living conditions of the villagers and giving them a greater measure of control over their own life. To what extent did they succeed?

Following the Cassaca Congress, extensive guidelines were issued concerning the political, economic, social and military aspects of reconstruction. The party and its ancillary structures were re-organised in order to meet the new demands placed upon the PAIGC by the dynamics of the liberation of large areas of the country. New political structures emerged under the direct control of the villagers and these quickly developed as local organs of power and administration: village committees were elected by the villagers themselves. The five members of the village committees, two of whom had to be women, had clearly defined functions in the various areas of social, economic and political activities. These committees did much to translate into practice the PAIGC slogan that liberation meant 'power in the hands of the people'.

81. The most impressive also to all the outside observers who visited the liberated areas during the war. There were many because the PAIGC had a policy of open door to foreign journalists and observers. Cabral was also visibly much more concerned with the construction of a new society than with the war itself as he made it abundantly plain to all those outside observers.
82. This is one of the reasons why the size of the army was kept to a minimum. One of the other reasons is that the PAIGC leadership did not want to commit more men than they had to do. They were concerned to send as many as possible abroad for technical training. Finally, a large army is usually a threat to the political control of a war.
83. This section is one where I have had to be the most sketchy and to limit my remarks to the briefest summary. It is, however, well covered in Rudebeck, op. cit.
84. See, among others, 'O I Congresso (Cassaca) mudou a face da luta e temperou o partido para a libertação', in Nô Putch'a, II, 137 (17 February 1976).
85. The president of the village committee was in charge of agricultural production, the vice-president of security and local defense, the third member of health, education and other social services, the fourth of supplies and distribution of food to the FARP, and the last one of census, civil registry and accounting. See Rudebeck, op. cit., pp. 124–132.
Greater cooperation and better coordination were developed between party and villagers. The utmost care was taken by the PAIGC to prevent the armed forces from behaving like an army of occupation which 'lived off the people': all food had to be acquired from the villagers, not taken away. The armed forces were also used in agricultural labour whenever possible. Most observers agree that the village committees were active and effective organs of management. In addition, and somewhat to the PAIGC's surprise, they also acted as agents of modernisation. They were sometimes composed of non-traditional authorities, often younger people, who derived their authority from their election and commanded respect. Over time their influence grew and they successfully introduced changes in the villagers' way of life.

It was in fact around the village committees that the new social and economic institutions were established. In the economic sphere, a system of *Armazéns do Povo* (People's Stores) gradually replaced the Portuguese commercial network. They supplied the population with the goods they could not produce themselves, mostly basic necessities, and collected agricultural surpluses for distribution throughout the country and even exports abroad. By 1968, there were 15 stores. In addition to their economic functions, the stores served distinctly political ends because the PAIGC wished to break the commercial leverage the Portuguese had as the villagers' only suppliers of goods. The successful operation of the commercial system was crucial because the PAIGC had abolished taxation and the use of money, returning for the duration of the war to a barter system. Such a system could only work if and when the PAIGC stores supplied what the villagers wanted at a price lower than the Portuguese stores. This 'price war' with the Portuguese was intensified after Spinola had introduced a deliberate policy of dumping in an attempt to demonstrate the concrete advantages of his 'Guineá melhor'. Despite real difficulties the system of *Armazéns do Povo* worked relatively well. Agricultural production also evolved favourably on the whole—even allowing for some exports—although Cabral's hope of greater diversification and cooperative production did not materialise. The fact, however, that despite the war the PAIGC managed to organise production and distribution to the satisfaction of the population was a very tangible result.

In the social sphere, the results were even more apparent as the Portuguese themselves had done so little. Between 1964 and 1974, the PAIGC developed a new and relatively extensive health system and a system of primary schooling

86. Exports included rice, coconut, rubber, crocodile-hide, and kola nut (the highest foreign currency earner). See Rudebeck, *op. cit.*, p. 183.
87. Cabral was particularly concerned about the economic power which the colonial power could wield. He wrote in detail about what he called 'economic resistance'. See Amilcar Cabral, *Alguns tipos de resistência* (Lisbon: Seara Nova, 1974).
88. This was not Cabral's opinion. He was highly critical of the PAIGC performance in the economic sphere. In my opinion, this is due to the fact that he clearly saw the economy as the major bottleneck in the future and that he would have wanted greater progress to be made before independence.
which covered the liberated areas. By the 1970s the villagers were undoubtedly benefiting from better health care and education. By 1969, there were nine hospitals and 117 dispensaries inside the country (three hospitals outside for long-term treatment) and about 15,000 pupils attending primary schools. A literacy campaign was being carried out among the almost totally illiterate members of the FARP. In addition, several secondary schools had been opened to train pupils before they could be sent abroad for further education. When in 1964 the PAIGC had initiated health care they did not have a single doctor; by 1971 they had twenty. Small as the figures undoubtedly are, in the context of Portuguese Guinea they represented significant advances over what colonial rule had provided. Life was simply better than before, and the villagers knew it.

In 1966, a new judicial system was introduced in the liberated areas. Its most original feature was the direct participation of the villagers in their own justice. Village *Tribunais do Povo* (People’s Courts) were created to which the judges were elected by the villagers from their own village. The judges, like the village committee members, were only maintained in their position so long as the villagers were satisfied that they were carrying out their duties satisfactorily. As in the case of the election of the village committees, the PAIGC interfered little with the choices made. The courts, which settled non criminal offences, followed traditional law (with only minor modifications) and sought reconciliation and retribution rather than punishment. Both the committees and the courts seem to have worked relatively well because the best and most respected villagers were usually elected. In addition, there was great community and peer pressure to cooperate with these new institutions and to comply with the decisions taken. The PAIGC reported, for example, that petty crime diminished considerably after the introduction of the village courts.

By 1968, local defence and security had been placed entirely in the hands of the villagers and arms had been distributed to the population. The original People’s Militia were replaced by local armed forces (FAL) with much better military training and greatly increased fire power. The FAL quickly became an important component of the PAIGC forces and an essential factor in the protection of civilians when the Portuguese intensified their helicopter attacks. They also relieved the FARP from civilian defence duties and increased their offensive capacity. Finally, they gave the villagers a sense of security they had never had before. The evidence shows quite clearly that, despite the small size

89. Rudebeck, *op. cit.*, pp. 188 and 206.
90. Ibidem, p. 188.
91. The most important documents concerning justice are: ‘Lei da justiça militar de 19 de setembro de 1966’ (Conakry: PAIGC 1966) and ‘Projecto de revisão da lei da justiça militar’ (Conakry: PAIGC, 1972).
92. Major offences or crimes were tried either by regional courts or by the supreme court. Both included representatives from the region where the crime was committed.
93. People’s Militia had been created after the Cassacá Congress but they were poorly equipped and trained and mostly acted as a police force. The new FAL were military units of men and women.
of the country and the intensity of the Portuguese air attacks, there were few civilian casualties.94

By 1971, the PAIGC considered that the development of administrative, social, economic, political and judicial structures in the liberated areas (around 70 per cent of Guinean territory and over 50 per cent of the population) justified its claim to be a de facto party-state.95 The party leadership estimated that they were in a position to achieve independence despite the continued Portuguese presence. Between 1971 and 1973, therefore, Cabral turned his attention to the creation of new political structures and to the preparation for independence. This required not only the establishment of appropriate state and government bodies inside the country but also intense diplomatic activity abroad so that the right of the PAIGC to exercise sovereignty over the country should be in no dispute.96

The most significant aspect of the PAIGC policies concerning the preparation for independence was the decision to break the party-state equation by creating democratic state institutions separate from the party. To that end, elections were held in 1972 to select regional councillors and members of the national assembly.97 A popular national assembly (ANP) thus came into being. This certainly was, and remains, the only example of a national liberation and/or revolutionary movement holding democratic elections before independence. The election procedures did not follow liberal democratic traditions but rather the single list system where the option was to vote 'yes' or 'no' to the entire list. The important part of the elections, therefore, was not the ballot casting exercise but the nomination process.

The villagers themselves selected their representatives to the regional councils and there is plenty of evidence to suggest that, when the candidates were not acceptable, they were not nominated.98 Again, as in the case of the elections for the village committees and courts, the PAIGC interfered little although it did supervise the nomination procedures. An important safeguard was built into the electoral process to prevent the PAIGC from gaining absolute control of the newly elected organs: two-thirds of the candidates had to be non-party members. This restriction was, in fact, applied so strictly that even village

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94. There are no official figures but PAIGC reports and communiques show that, after the villagers had been moved out of their villages into safer places, casualties would have been a few hundred per year at most. This is indeed very low compared to other wars of national liberation where, as a rule, the population suffers heavily.

95. By party-state, the PAIGC meant a party which had all the attributes of a state-government except legal international recognition. The term was intended to convey the picture that the PAIGC was already running the country successfully. See Aristides Pereira, op. cit.

96. Here Cabral's realism showed again. There would be no point, he argued, in declaring an independence that no one else would recognise. This is also the reason why he remained against the formation of a government in exile. Given the problems of the GRAÉ in Angola or of the POLISARIO today, one can only concur.

97. The elections for the regional councillors were through universal suffrage. Regional councillors then elected members of the National Assembly from among their own number.

committee members, although not formally PAIGC members, were not eligible unless they resigned.

Although it is difficult, if not impossible, to validate the claim that such elections were democratic in the Western liberal sense, it is possible to conclude that they were free, fair, and representative. This interpretation is confirmed by the results of the 1976 elections, the first after independence, in which a substantial number, and in certain cases a majority, of 'no' votes were recorded in areas where either the candidates were not acceptable or PAIGC support was low.99 It would therefore be wrong and misguided to argue that only a strict recourse to liberal democratic procedures—particularly multi-party system and party competition—lend meaning and legitimacy to a political process. In the final analysis, the basic reason why the elections were free and fair (indeed, took place at all) lay less in the elections procedures themselves than in the nature of the PAIGC, the support it had acquired in the liberated areas, the relationship it had developed with the population, and the social and political structures it had established in the villages. On the whole the PAIGC had encouraged, and continues to encourage, the role of local institutions as centres of countervailing power to party rule. This was what the leadership saw as the best check against party abuses.100

This article has, of necessity, restricted itself to the broadest outline of events and interpretation. The analytical part has sought to bring out the salient features and the significance of national liberation in Guinea in terms which might enable comparisons with other African and non-African cases. The argument developed suggests a combination of factors to explain the success of the PAIGC. But little has been said, and then only implicitly, about the role of leadership in general and about Cabral in particular. Passing reference was made to Cabral’s unique experience in the Guinean countryside and to his skills as a political teacher and a diplomat.

However, the evidence generated during the course of research on Guinea-Bissau makes it abundantly clear that Cabral was the key to the success of the PAIGC. Although the argument cannot be adequately developed here, a number of points can be made.101 Firstly, most decisions in the PAIGC were taken by Cabral and he was in fact the undisputed leader, thinker and strategist of the party. Secondly, it can be established with a certain degree of precision how the most original and significant aspects of the PAIGC political strategy were directly the product of Cabral’s views and ideas. For example, the decision to create a party around the policy of unity between Guinea and Cape Verde and the refusal to use terrorism as a political weapon,

99. The PAIGC had little support in some of the areas still controlled by the Portuguese at independence, especially in the cities, partly because the population there feared victimisation—which did not occur.
100. This is indeed the major reason for the elections as it is obvious that, given their position in 1972, the PAIGC could easily have dispensed with such an exercise.
101. This is, however, the subject of my proposed Cambridge thesis.
can only be traced to Cabral.102 Thirdly, using counterfactual analysis it is possible to suggest, obviously not to prove, that in the absence of Cabral nationalism in Guinea would not have developed as it did, much as the Russian revolution would in all likelihood not have succeeded without Lenin.

The historical evidence suggests that the single most important factor which prompted the Portuguese revolution of April 1974, in which the armed forces overthrew the fascist regime and restored democracy, was the prospect of military defeat in Guinea. It can also be shown that Cabral had a direct influence on the military who organised themselves into the Movement of the Armed Forces (MFA) which carried out the Lisbon coup. The April revolution in turn restored democracy in Portugal and ushered in decolonisation in the other Portuguese colonies. The independence of Angola and Mozambique had a direct impact on the situation in Southern Africa. Although we must beware of 'one man history', it is important not to overlook the distinct role of Cabral's leadership, not only inside, but also outside, Guinea.

102. The recent coup in Guinea-Bissau, in which the Prime Minister J. B. Vieira ousted President Cabral, raises questions as to whether such policies have been adequately pursued since independence.