

Caught between tradition and regional warfare: The *Umbutfo* Swaziland Defence Force since 1968

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INTRODUCTION

A number of factors may have motivated newly independent African states to establish defence and security institutions, such as:

- external threats against the state, including territorial claims by neighbouring states; and
- internal threats against that state.

The latter point may stem from the way in which the new power came to office (through force or peace treaty) and the effort now required to maintain that power through military means to ensure it is not snatched away by adversaries.

This chapter focuses on Swaziland and examines its motivations for establishing defence and security institutions. Swaziland was one of three British High Commission territories that included Botswana and Lesotho. The country gained independence on 6 September 1968; but before tackling the late 1960s post-colonial era we will discuss, as background, the colonial period and its legacy vis-à-vis the military history of Swaziland.

For Swaziland, the late 19th century was characterised by unique colonial interventions in the country. When Britain decided to withdraw, however, Swaziland was soon caught up in the liberation armed

struggles ravaging the region in Portuguese East Africa, now Mozambique, and apartheid South Africa. Under the 'Total Strategy' South Africa co-ordinated the political and military strategies of other colonial powers in the region, such as Portugal in Portuguese East Africa and Angola, and Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe). The apartheid-inspired Total Strategy was South Africa's response to the decolonisation wave sweeping across the African continent during the 1960s.

South Africa's aggressive foreign policy posture therefore had implications for newly independent former protectorates such as Swaziland, and impacted on the formation and characteristics of Swaziland's national security and defence policy at the time.

With the collapse of apartheid in late 1989, Swaziland was finally able to embark upon a truly unfettered home-grown restructuring of its armed forces. In this, it is evident that the central role of the traditional military culture has remained relevant to the formal and conventional defence force structure as we know it, the *Umbutfo* Swaziland Defence Force (USDF).

SWAZILAND'S COLONIAL MILITARY HISTORY—LATE 1800S TO 1902

Swaziland occupies only 17,400 km² and is nestled between the two geographic giants and former imperial playgrounds: Mozambique to the east and north, with 105 km of shared borders; and South Africa to the west and south, with 430 km of shared border. Significantly, both these countries block Swaziland from access to the nearby Indian Ocean.

For the purposes of this study, a brief social and economic history starting from the late 1800s is useful in order to provide a context for the political and military events that characterised Swaziland's later developments.

In the struggle between the Afrikaners and British colonialists, Swaziland found itself at the mercy of the Transvaal Boer Republic. The Transvaal Republic was itself anxious to secure a route to the sea in order to avoid paying the high taxes levied by the British-controlled province of Natal, through which its imports and exports had to travel. Relations between Swazi King Mbandzeni and the Transvaal Boer Republic were based on the threat of use of force. The latter held the advantage, drawn from its superior conventional military organisation, more modern weaponry and organised troops. While the Swazi's had large military formations organised according to the traditional warrior system under the Swazi chief, they were generally armed with spears and *knobkerries*.

Operating through merchants and traders, the Boer Republic in 1876 prevailed upon the Swazi King to allocate land to the Boers for exclusive purchase and use. Based on this arrangement, large tracts of Swazi farmland were made available to Boer farmers on which they produced maize, tobacco and citrus fruit, and reared beef cattle and sheep. Most of the produce was for export—back into the more lucrative South African market—denying Swazi locals similar opportunities.

The climate on the Swazi mountains favoured sheep farming during particular months of the year. In a practice known as *treksheeping*, thousands of sheep would be pushed over the border at appropriate times for pasture and grazing before returning to South Africa for slaughter and marketing. At its height, *treksheeping* involved anything between 300,000 and 400,000 sheep, let loose for foraging on specially preserved pastures in Swaziland, denying Swazi's access to those same tracts for their economic survival. For instance, as late as 1930—even after the Boer Republic had been defeated and colonial control had changed hands to the British after 1902—as much as 360,000 ha of land was still set aside for this purpose.

The arrangement in which inhabitants from the neighbouring Boer Republic benefited from the exclusive use of the land naturally raised the ire of the locals, resulting in strained relations between the community and their King during his reign.

One downside to this *trekking* practice was its impact on the fragile environment when thousands of sheep were let loose on the *veld*. A second damaging practice was that once the sheep had been herded back to South Africa, farmers burned the remaining grass to encourage the germination of fresh vegetation for the next season. The corollary of this was, of course, serious soil erosion as the wind and rain lifted fragile fertile soil off the charred earth. The fertile top-soil was quickly washed down, chocking the Usutu River system. At the time, the Usutu River had the greatest water carrying capacity south of the Zambezi, serving as the basis for peasant production in the country. The giant life-giving river measured 21 m at its shallowest point and 1,862 m at its deepest point, although this was quickly reduced as a consequence of siltation.¹

The initial trade and purchase by the Boer Republic soon increased to significant levels, motivating the Boers to seek effective occupation and control of Swaziland. In 1898, the Transvaal Boer Republic took over the administration of Swaziland. The occupation allowed further allocations of land to Boer farmers, while at the same time boosting other related commercial enterprises. The result was increased

investment by the Afrikaner business community, creating early entry points for capital. Much of this was directed towards establishing agro-based industries in sugar, forestry, citrus and related primary processing plants, designed to add value before products were re-exported to South Africa. Transvaal-based Afrikaner mining houses also joined the bandwagon, setting up iron ore and asbestos plants.

The Boer Republic's colonial control of Swaziland was, however, soon disrupted following the outbreak of war with the British. The conflict spanned the period 1899–1902, at the end of which the Boer Republic was defeated. As part of the war settlement and war booty, the Boer Republic was relieved of its authority, including its colonial possession of Swaziland.

Throughout Southern Africa, Britain established protectorates around kings and ethnic groups such as the BaSotho in Basutoland (now Lesotho), BamaNgwato in Bechuanaland (now Botswana) and the Swazis. Governors were appointed in each protectorate and they reported to the London High Commission Territories Office. Robert Coryndon was appointed resident governor of Swaziland and took up his post in the capital, Mbabane.

Governor Coryndon's tenure can be described as the third wave of colonial influence that visited Swaziland. During his governorship more land was taken and most of the African male population was turned into cheap labour for local white entrepreneurs, with many more sent to work on the Witwatersrand mines.

Coryndon had a reputation for favouring settler/capital interests. His policies assisted land re-allocation towards white farmers and entrepreneurs, entrenched the creation of labour reserves and ultimately benefited conditions for primitive capital accumulation for those classes in true frontier tradition. During his tenure Coryndon declared only a third (37.6%) of the country as 'Native Area', leaving the rest available for exclusive use by European and commercial companies. Of the 11% of the country that is suitable as arable land, white commercial farmers had exclusive access to 62%, comprising mainly pastures. This created a considerable land shortage among the local Swazis, who pressured the monarchy to act on their behalf.

Reacting to the colonial trend of land dispossession, the Swazi Royal leadership after Mbandzeni embarked upon sustained land recovery and re-purchase, mainly from white farmers who were becoming largely absentee landowners. This land recovery effort was assisted somewhat by the colonial Native Land Settlement Scheme, which returned former white reserved lands that were derelict to local people.

At independence in 1968, land amounting to 56% of what was once greater Swaziland had been recovered. However, the absence of 44% of the land—including strategic portions that provided access to the sea—has continued to weigh heavily on the Swazi body politic. The Land Commission (which survives to this day) was primary responsible for recovering lost tracts. It reported directly to the King, demonstrating the significance of this aspect to Swaziland.

The defence and security policy of the colonial administration rested on internal and external dynamics. After the Boer Republic administration had been displaced in 1902, Robert Coryndon in 1907 motivated for the establishment of a police force complete with a local police mobile unit (PMU) based in Mbabane. The role and function of the police and PMU was to:

- ensure internal security through population control;
- prepare to deal with riots and strikes;
- enforce border control;
- act as a show of force; and
- act as a Ceremonial Guard of Honour within the protectorate.

The police and its PMU paramilitary structure fell under the command of the resident governor, and further support in cases of emergency was readily available from the British military might outside the colony. The police and its complementary PMU structure were to survive into independence in 1968.

THE ROLE OF THE TRADITIONAL SWAZI LEADERSHIP

In order to properly appreciate the evolution of the military in Swaziland, we need to understand the pre-colonial and post-colonial political role and resource capability of the traditional Swazi leadership.

Traditional leaderships that survived in the protectorates played, and play, a benevolent role and leadership function within their communities. At the outset it is important to acknowledge that traditional chieftainships were not destroyed by the colonial administration. Although subordinate to their colonial masters, the kings and chiefs acted as a partial control mechanism through which the colonialists exercised their power. Consequently, the colonial administrators deliberately retained monarchs in Basutoland, Bechuanaland and Swaziland, which monarchs exercised control on

behalf of the resident governors. The political power of the monarchs was carefully preserved without making it sufficient to challenge the colonial structures. Since most monarchs had acquiesced to colonial rule they received revenue from Britain and commercial companies operating in their territories. The interaction with the new capitalist classes provided significant resources to the monarchs, enabling them to later become key players in their respective economies.

In the period after Mbadzeni's rule, Swazi King Sobhuza II had used available funds as state resources to buy back white-owned farms and return the same to Swazi sovereignty. This action endeared the nation to the benevolent monarch. (The phenomenon of affluent monarchs is unique to Southern Africa and its history of protectorates, especially when compared to the fate of traditional leaders elsewhere in Africa.)

A further advantage after decolonisation was that the former protectorates all fell under the new South African Customs Union (SACU) financial arrangement. This provided some sort of capitalist framework over the entire region and meant that each country had access to resources from South Africa's central bank in Pretoria.

Under the SACU arrangement the three protectorates had their economies harmonised under the larger economy of South Africa and fixed customs revenue percentages were worked out. During the 1960s Swaziland's share of the annual customs gross revenues in the SACU area was 0.149%, while Bechuanaland's share was 0.276% and Basutoland's was 0.885%. In total, the three countries shared 1.310%, arrived at by working out a complex weighting system of trade and other related factors.² As a direct result of this economic participation, the Swazi kingdom after independence developed into "... a successful enclave, a tribal reserve, subsisting on the export of labour and other primary produce."³

Since the monarchs were able to marshal significant amounts of resources—and apart from their roles as traditional leaders—they became central to how the armed forces were established in the post-colonial era. As commander-in-chief, the monarch in Swaziland has been able to support the civil service, the police, the military and occasionally subsidise selected areas of the country when called upon to do so.

INDEPENDENCE

With decolonisation gaining popularity across the continent in the 1960s, the political landscape in Southern Africa began to share a

common characteristic—namely, the existence of nationalists in each of the colonies who had been educated at mission schools, with the majority coming from the Catholic Roma and Fort Hare universities in Basutoland and South Africa respectively. Graduates from these institutions of higher learning comprised the intelligentsia and emerged to challenge both the colonial regime and traditional leaders who were dominant in the protectorates. This leadership role played by the intelligentsia continued even after independence. Their storm troopers were factory workers and miners, especially on the Witwatersrand: this was the melting pot for activists, drawn from migrant workers from across Southern Africa.⁴

While in 1966 both Botswana and Lesotho gained independence, Swaziland had to wait a further two years before attaining similar status. In order to prod the British government into leaving, the Queen Mother, Labotsibeni, dispatched a 12-member delegation to London to negotiate transfer of power. Whitehall acquiesced and the country prepared for independence on 6 September 1968.

With the whiff of political independence in the air, two internal groups immediately emerged as political opponents. On the one side were those in support of the monarchy, the Royalists or Imbokdvo National Movement (INM); and on the other were those drawn from the tertiary-educated intelligentsia who agitated for a reduced influence and role of the monarchy. Dr Ambrose Ngwane led the Ngwane National Liberatory Congress (NNLC) that was supported by the labour movement and which advocated for universal suffrage, and Simon Nxumalo led the Swaziland Democratic Party (SDP).⁵

However, the 1970s were to witness the most vicious protracted wars of the armed struggle in the Southern African region. Already in 1962 both the African National Congress (ANC) of South Africa and the Mozambique Liberation Front (Frelimo) had established offices in Dar es Salaam and had taken the decision to engage in armed struggle in order to fight for independence from their colonial oppressors. Against this background the stage was set for a protracted conflict period in which Swaziland was to be held hostage, as its security was tied to that of the regional players.

FORMATION OF THE ROYAL SWAZILAND DEFENCE FORCE

Five years after independence, on 15 March 1973, King Sobhuza II passed a decree establishing the Royal Swaziland Defence Force.

Knowledge of this development emerged during the King's address to the nation on various issues at his traditional headquarters at the Lobamba Royal Residence. At the close of his address, the King commanded the Second World War veterans and traditional warriors from the *Umbutfo* who were present to board waiting trucks and proceed to the nearby Etjeni Camp (located near the present Matsapha industrial site) for registration. The ready presence of war veterans at the address partly confirms the assumption that there had been some prior consultation.

The King also provided the model of the military structure to be established. The actual armed forces would therefore comprise a dual system that had at its core a small permanent force, supported by a much larger part-time, active reserve.

In the King's view, the new armed forces would be made up of only a small cadre of instructors and commanders as permanent members. The rest would be an active part-time revolving force called up for periods of six months at a time. For those called up, this period would involve initial training and some operational service before they were stood down and passed on to the active reserves. A subsequent intake inducted for yet another six months would be timed to be activated before the first group was stood down, and this would continue until all available, able-bodied males below the age of 60 had been trained. This would constitute an active reserve, ready to be called up in emergencies if required. Gradually, the rotation and short stints by volunteers would result in the whole nation being exposed to conventional military training, effectively transforming the existing traditional warrior class.

Payments offered were limited and expected not to attract significant numbers. During the six months that a volunteer would be under training and subsequent military commitments, he would be paid a monthly allowance of R36. Funds to cover the new initiative were provided by the King through the Tibiyo TakaNgwane Trust.⁶

The make up of volunteers entering the new army included elements seconded from King Sobhuza II's two trusted *Umbutfo* traditional regiments—the *Lindimpi* (watchman/guard) and *Gcina* (the final protector). These created the platform upon which the new army was to be built. Training of the new force was delegated to the Second World War veterans who were in command, assisted by the Matsapha Royal Swaziland Police (RSP).

It is illustrative to review briefly what the *Lindimpi* and *Gcina* regiments represented, as the secondment of elements from these units

was significant for several reasons. First, each traditional regiment was almost close to a conventional brigade with manpower levels at around 5,000. As a result, the combined strength of the *Lindimpi* and *Gcina* regiments was about 10,000 men. In military conventional terms, this represented a contemporary combat group of three brigades of 3,000 troops each, plus support arms or logistical back-up. The military capability of the Swazi traditional system to marshal such a force was significant. Second, for a population of just under half a million, to have in place a 10,000-strong force was also a formidable achievement. Third, there were inherent command-and-control advantages in absorbing into the new army the traditional military structure. All that was now required was to equip and train the same in conventional methods. Drawing troops of existing regiments obviated the need to address basic training and unit organisation issues, and also provided a ready and effective command structure that was integral to the units, and from the units to the head of state and commander-in-chief, and vice versa.

A fourth aspect is that the regular Swazi army emerged as part of the larger traditional military structure, and remained wedded to this system through the formal and informal appointments made. This dynamic has remained true to this day.

Finally, founding the new army on the basis of the trusted traditional forces, transferred the close links and trust generated by their earlier role as the monarchy's personal aides and protectors. The new army did not have to earn its stripes, so to speak, as this loyalty and trust was inherent; this was because cadres were drawn from the already existing traditional army, complete with disciplinary code and hierarchical command. However, the inclusion of such forces as the core of the new army strongly influenced the type of civil-military relations that developed between the armed forces and the monarchy, essentially characterised by an even closer relationship between the two, and much more pronounced deference to the King.

In practice, the more amorphous traditional force has continued to serve as the reserve to the lean, permanent regular force. This defined the relationships of recruiting, basic unit configuration, command-and-control and part-time versus full-time forces, as well as the appointment of military officers of the new army, and the link between the institution and the monarchy.

Given the challenge to establish a new force in the post-colonial era, the new roles and functions of the armed forces were to:

- defend the territorial integrity of the country;
- support the constitution and the flag;
- protect the institution of the monarchy (VIP and ceremonial duties);
- serve in support of the civil authorities; and
- assist the RSP.

The paradigm shift in post-colonial defence policy was significant. Not only had the thrust moved from controlling the population to supporting the constitution, but it now also provided for protection of the monarchy. For the first time, employment of the instrument of force had been turned inwards towards benefiting the wider interests of the Swazi people.

Second World War veteran and Prince (Sgt) Bhekimpi Dhlamini was appointed commander of the permanent cadre force. The appointment of a prince as head of the regular armed forces ensured that the traditional system and authority extended into the new structure.

When state structures are functioning in a parallel or dual system, a particular responsibility of senior office holders of institutions is to ensure the harmonisation and integration of policies between the traditional and modern government systems.

Enthusiasm for signing up into the new army was overwhelming: for Swazis, the call to arms had touched a deep chord in society. Volunteers came from the unemployed and private and public sector employees, including business people who were also prepared to fund part of the initiative. In retrospect, for the thousands of unemployed males and war veterans who came forward, an important motivating factor appears to have been the opportunity to secure gainful employment. The implications of this are discussed below.

Given the different categories for military training, many of which had not been anticipated, it was decided to create two elements that would reinforce each other. The first category followed the initial small active force engaged for six months before being transferred to the active reserve as originally envisaged. The second was to establish a part-time active reserve able to train and hold exercises at weekends, but being a segment that now existed between the permanent force and those on the active reserve list, although not formally mustered.

The development also revealed that during the colonial era the traditional military ethos of the Swazis had continued to produce age sets of trained cadres who then found themselves outside the military orbit as a consequence of taking up employment as civil servants or

going into business. The subsequent material and financial contribution by business people augmented funding from the King's Tibiyo Fund.

The call to arms by the King in the early post-colonial period provided the first opportunity for Swazis to exercise their traditional military skills, although now in a conventional setting. Since training was limited to weekends, however, the volunteers could still continue with their normal daily activities. Viewed in a wider sense, however, in cases of war or national emergency this buffer category was still part of the active reserve and would complement the small national permanent cadre force in regular employment as the standing army.

Maintaining the new active reserve list meant that a dedicated administrative body had to be put in place to manage this segment. Reaction to Swaziland's initial efforts at establishing a conventional standing army revealed the gaps that always exist between policy and implementation. Part-time force training was moved from Etjeni Barracks to Zombodze Barracks, deliberately separating the active reserve's training from that of the regular force. Equipment suitable for a conventional army, which included trucks, tents, ammunition, weapons, uniforms, bedding and rations, was sourced from Britain and South Africa.

The establishment of the new army occurred at an opportune time. Barely a month after its formation on 12 April 1973, King Sobhuzha II repealed the constitution, ruling by decree until his death (at the age of 83) in 1982. Attempts to rewrite a new constitution continue to this day.

THE NEW GEO-STRATEGIC LANDSCAPE

A year after the suspension of the constitution in Swaziland, the Southern African region experienced a seismic shift in its political and security arrangements following the armed forces coup in Lisbon in April 1974. The political change in Portugal almost immediately translated into independence for the country's colonial possessions—namely, Angola and Mozambique—by mid-1975.

For apartheid South Africa, the loss of Portuguese control of its colonies in Southern Africa was perceived as bringing ANC militants to its borders. And the subsequent coming to power of Frelimo in Mozambique only served to reinforce the spectre of ANC Umkonto we Sizwe guerrillas now hovering too close for comfort.

The nascent threat resulted in urgent security restructuring by Pretoria. The redrawing of external frontiers now considered those of former protectorates, including Swaziland, which were perceived as

possible entry and exit points for guerrillas travelling to and from South Africa. In other words, Pretoria reacted to the new geo-strategic landscape in Southern Africa by defining roles for the neighbouring states that shared borders with Angola and Mozambique. Swaziland featured prominently in this consideration.

In the case of Botswana, soon after independence the country joined the Front Line States—together with Nigeria, Tanzania and Zambia—and supported the liberation movements, although still remaining within SACU. Developments in Lesotho were also complex, with Pretoria sponsoring the opposition in order that it serve as a counterweight to the Lesotho government's perceived role in supporting the ANC.

The Swazi army struggled to evolve in this tumultuous regional security and political context, and enjoyed short-lived independence only during the first year of its formation. As we shall see, the mid-1977 period was to witness further internal upheavals that retarded the development of the Swazi army.

EVOLUTION OF THE ROYAL SWAZILAND DEFENCE FORCE UNTIL 1977

In the first four years of establishment, the Royal Swaziland Defence Force experienced several internal and external challenges that impacted on its evolution. These challenges included:

- that volunteers were not prepared to leave after the initial six-month training period;
- a burgeoning part-time force;
- a tense political environment in which the King now ruled by decree; and
- the deteriorating security situation in Southern Africa following Mozambique's hasty independence in 1975.

All these factors required an urgent review of the military thinking that was dominant before March 1973 when the formation of the defence force was first decreed.

First, the call to arms under a regular permanent force structure was met with an overwhelming response. The numbers coming forward were beyond the capacity of the emerging permanent cadre headquarters,

supported by the police, to handle. Furthermore, despite remaining in the forces there were complaints regarding the low allowances received.

Second, the suspension of the constitution had created a tense political situation in which the question of security became heightened throughout the country. For example, officers given command responsibilities came under greater scrutiny regarding their loyalties.

Third, the war veterans strongly resisted the more rigorous training regimes and demands of a modern army, and staged a 'mini-mutiny'. This was quickly resolved by the King when soldiers marched to his Royal Residence at Lobamba to complain. The King allowed the veterans to retire gracefully from the new army, with retirement packages, while creating incentives for younger people to remain.

This situation revealed, however, the military commanders' lack of decisive authority, as yet another source of appeal that circumvented their power had been created. The military commanders' response was to motivate for the creation of a military police element that would curb future similar actions. Once the initial induction and teething problems had been overcome, the new military started operating alongside the police. There was, however, now a need to redefine the security-related tasks of the two forces that reflected a division of labour.

The primary tasks of the armed forces in the area of internal security now included:

- protecting the King/monarchy (i.e. Queen Mother, princes and princesses);
- protecting royal residences across the country; and
- safeguarding key strategic points.

While the police had carried out these duties in the past, it must be remembered that elements seconded to the new army had been drawn almost exclusively from the King's personal aides and regiments. Providing them now with this role was only a continuation of their traditional role, after receiving military-oriented training.

In carrying out these duties, however, service rivalry soon erupted, with near clashes reported between the lower ranks of the new army and the established police. These were only averted by the timely intervention of senior commanders.

Military commanders also began to appreciate their daunting defence-related tasks, beyond their internal commitments, and became convinced that the training received from the RSP was inadequate to

prepare them for the new demands. Based on the commanders' recommendations, government began to scout around for military institutions elsewhere that would be willing and able to provide advanced training. Swaziland's High Commissioner to Kenya successfully negotiated an agreement with the Kenyan government to provide military training facilities and instruction, with the Kenyan Officer Training College at Lanet being made available to potential Swazi cadets.

TRAINING OF THE COMMAND ELEMENT

While the internal PMU arrangement sought to provide 'paramilitary' training to former war veterans now earmarked to become the nucleus of the new army, the first contingent to be trained was the commanders of the new Swaziland defence force. The King was advised to select a member of the PMU to be dispatched to Kenya for military officer orientation, after which the candidate would take command and facilitate the further training of his colleagues. Police Superintendent Mfanwenkosi Maseko was chosen for the task. He was attached to the 3rd Kenyan Army Rifles as part of his training schedule and returned to Swaziland in 1974 after completing the one-year attachment.

However, the choice of Maseko to command the army was opposed by elements within the monarchy, and as a result Maseko was never appointed to that post. A reason for this was because Maseko was from the Seko clan, a faction perceived to have a grudge against the King. It was therefore believed that Maseko would likely use his new position to topple the monarchy.

Consequently, six cadets were dispatched to the Lanet-based Kenyan Armed Forces Training College for a one-year officer training course. The six had been selected from the traditional *Ludlukhala* ('eat while you cry') Regiment that comprised one of the most trusted echelons of the traditional army. The *Ludlukhala* Regiment is likened to present day presidential guard units and was responsible for the personal safety and security of the King.

The young officer cadets returned to Swaziland in 1975 and were commissioned with major and captain ranks. This group was the first to take command of the Swaziland Defence Force. However, no sooner were they integrated with the older veterans, another clash occurred—again based on the apparently physically demanding training methods introduced by the new officers. A repeat of the 1973 events followed.

Some 600 soldiers all from existing traditional units marched to the King's Embo Estate, defying lawful instructions from their officers, and appealed to the King to intervene against the tough training schedule. The King listened to their pleas and prevailed upon the new military commanders to restrain themselves.⁷

Marches to the King's palace to resolve differences between the veteran soldiers and the new officers reflected not only the state of civil-military relations but also the power relations that existed between the King and the nascent officer corps. In situations as those described above, the officers were left powerless; their authority was partly restored by the method chosen by the King and Commander-in-Chief to resolve disputes involving the emerging conventional army.

The officers had not earned their stripes and therefore did not constitute a recognised structure of command in the military hierarchy that was different from the traditional structure. The establishment of an officer corps under a country's constitution is an important development, conferring powers and diluting the authority of the commander-in-chief. In Swaziland, however (which has no constitution and operates instead under the King's decree), the traditional system of command-and-control still dominated, making it impossible for the officers to exercise their new-found authority and enforce discipline.

The King's influence as commander-in-chief was and continues to be dominant, although tempered with a deliberate subordination of his own authority to the officer corps. However, the soldiers attempted to exploit the gap that existed during the institution's early phases for decisions they knew would favour their interests against the officers' interests.

When assessing the role of the King during this period, it is clear that he exercised benign leadership, playing a moderating role but at the same time undermining the military commanders' authority. In the end, each side got what it wanted in the interests of nation building and the establishment of the armed forces.

In fact, in each incident the process shifted power relations in favour of the emerging commanders through the deliberate actions of the commander-in-chief. In resolving the veterans' second march on the King's residence, the King in his benevolence instructed the young officers to concentrate their skills on new recruits and not on the veterans. It became clear that the veterans' days of service in the new army were numbered, and in 1976 many were offered redundancy and retirement packages with honourable discharge.

The departure of the veterans and the growing influence of the military officers heralded a major restructuring of the armed forces that was launched in 1977. Overall, the period 1973–76 was critical in facilitating the emergence of a trained and capable officer corps whose task was to command the new conventional and modern force, drawn from the larger traditional army.

ESTABLISHMENT OF THE USDF

Reforms carried out in 1977 were in response to several considerations. The most important of these was the publication of a new Army Code whose provisions came into effect on 10 October 1977. The Army Code provided for an armed force, with the King as commander-in-chief, comprising three elements: the army, air force and navy.

A second development was the announcement of a name change: the army was now called the *Umbutfo* Swaziland Defence Force (USDF). This was the traditional army name that had now been officially transferred to the regular force, cementing the relationship that existed between the two institutions and making them one. This was a significant development in a country where tradition and culture run deep, signifying an acceptance of the new army into the existing folds of respectability and core values, as well as forging an important national symbol of the Swazi nation.

New commanders were appointed: Col Maphevu Dhalimini was appointed Army Commander and Maj Gideon Dube (selected from one of the six officers trained in Kenya in 1975) was appointed as his deputy. Several other officers of the ex-Kenya contingent were also appointed to command positions.

The next phase focused on developing the internal capacity of the army. Under the established command element and officer corps, a number of sub-units were set up. We will assess these briefly in order to reflect on the nature of the USDF's evolution. Consignments of new weapons and equipment were also acquired as part of the restructuring effort.

The United Kingdom (UK), Switzerland, Taiwan, Israel, South Africa and Kenya all made military assistance and training available to Swaziland. However, viewed in the context of the armed struggle that was gripping the region in the mid-1970s, countries offering military assistance reflected mostly neutral or pariah states largely propped up by the United States.

INFANTRY TRAINING SCHOOL

Attention was of course placed on continuing with the basic training of soldiers in such aspects as small arms and support weapons training, tactical training, map reading and bush-craft. A new infantry training school for non-commissioned officers was established for this purpose at Mbuluzi Barracks, and Maj Jameson Mangomeni Ndzimande was appointed commandant.

INTELLIGENCE TRAINING AND UNIT

An intelligence cell established in 1976 appeared to have provided the background for the more focused restructuring of the armed forces that took into account the regional dynamics which existed at the time.

Taiwan invited 11 officers from the newly formed USDF intelligence branch to train in that country. These officers were later to become the nucleus of the intelligence branch that was formally established in 1977. A further significant expansion of this branch occurred a decade later (in 1987) when, with the assistance of South Africa, a Defence Intelligence School was set up. Again it is clear in retrospect that this development was partly motivated by South Africa's attempts to counter ANC and Pan Africanist Congress (PAC) incursions from Mozambique via Swaziland.

BORDER CONTROL TRAINING AND DEPLOYMENT

Given the geo-strategic developments during this period, emphasis was placed on training troops in border patrol duties, since the seemingly lax control at international borders was blamed for the unrelenting flow of guerrillas, and this had to be stopped.

This perception was strongest in Pretoria and was soon borne out by events on the ground. The USDF border patrol unit in the Eastern Region was particularly active, dealing with ANC and PAC military cadres from Mozambique and later, after 1980, with Mozambique National Resistance (Renamo) elements infiltrating Mozambique from South Africa. In addition to the political and military adversaries that were using Swaziland territory, smugglers, illegal immigrants and refugees were flowing across the border.

The USDF faced a different type of problem—namely, criminal activities—in the Western Region bordering South Africa, ranging from vehicle smuggling to drug trafficking.

Switzerland seconded Col Newkom to the USDF, with special responsibilities to train the military in border control duties. Newkom's operational base was the Mdzimba Mountain Barracks from where he conducted extensive border control training activities. Two years later, in 1979, Newkom's border control training unit was re-deployed to Phocweni Barracks. After completing their training, graduates were deployed along the kingdom's 535 km border. The military divided the country into 14 sectors. These sectors covered the Eastern Region with Mozambique, just beyond Mhlume and stretching all the way to Big Bend and the Western Region, adjacent to South Africa.

The sectors came under the command of seven operational base commanders that were provided with vehicle patrols. The result was the creation of an integrated web of military supervision of the entire country. Operationally, any border violations would be reported to central intelligence, while efforts were made on the ground to deploy forces to intercept violations. The military units along the border were deliberately not structured to undertake offensive seek-and-destroy operations, but simply to act as a trigger or early warning, enabling the larger South African Defence Force (SADF) to react.

COMMAND-AND-CONTROL TRAINING—BRITISH MILITARY ASSISTANCE

The UK seconded Lt John Clive Perry, with the task of assisting to set up a conventional command-and-control headquarters and hierarchy. His task went beyond this though, and included creating the modalities of civilian political control elements, such as a civilian ministry and the armed forces.

FURTHER RESTRUCTURING

Although a new constitution was promulgated on 13 October 1978, it was not formally presented to the nation and its provisions still banned the establishment of political parties. The 1978 Constitution did not materially change the role and functions assigned to the USDF,⁸ although the armed forces continued to be the source of political infighting and insecurity in Swaziland—a situation that the military has always had to take into consideration vis-à-vis broader civil-military relations within the country.

This dimension was given deeper significance when the King decided to appoint the army commander and his deputy as prime minister and

chair of the Civil Service Board (CSB) respectively. The appointments reflected a fusing of political–military relations with the King’s bureaucracy.

However, this arrangement and the ongoing restructuring of the armed forces suffered a setback in 1979 when the Army Commander and Prime Minister, Maphevu Dhlamini, died of natural causes. A power vacuum was created in the growing modern state institutions of the military and civil service, and attempts to address this vacuum appeared only to exacerbate an already difficult arrangement that was still in its experimental stages.

King Sobhuzha II appointed Deputy Army Commander and CSB Chair, Lt Col Dube, as Acting Prime Minister while the Commandant, Maj Jameson Ndizimande, was promoted to full colonel and appointed as substantive Commander of the Army on 12 February 1981.

Under the new arrangements, the former Deputy Army Commander was now Prime Minister, but with a lower military rank of lieutenant colonel; while his junior, the Commandant, now assumed command of the army with a superior rank of full colonel.

The military officers appointed to civilian posts regarded their army appointments as more important than the civilian posts. The latter were seen as almost ceremonial posts, and because of the differences in military ranks, this was a source of conflict between incumbents in the Prime Minister’s post and the Army Commander’s post.

The personal differences between the military officers was exacerbated by factions in the Royal House which split and joined the different camps. This development soon received the King’s attention, with factions imploring him to rescind his decision. After much discussion the King agreed and Army Commander Ndizimande’s promotion was annulled.

The move then left no authority with adequate rank and stature in charge of the defence forces, and created animosity among the various factions that backed the different officers. The situation was complicated further a year later (1982) with the death of the King. His death left the service chiefs’ appointments unresolved and saw differences between the elites move beyond the military to the political.

A fierce power struggle erupted between the Royal House (that is, the Queen Mother who now exercised political authority as Regent) and the Traditional Advisory Council of the *Liqoqo*. During the next few years the Queen Mother alleged attempted assassinations, coups and other related unconstitutional methods to overthrow her. Furthermore, a

direct attempt to force her to hand over power was thwarted when she refused to abdicate her position.

The power struggle that had been kept at bay during King Sobhuzha II's long reign now surfaced. Prince Bhekimpi was eventually appointed Prime Minister amid rumours that some factions, including those colluding with the military, sought to usurp political power and the institution of the monarchy. Political activists added their voices to the crisis, arguing for the opening up of the political space. These included the Swaziland Federation of Trade Unions, the Swaziland Youth Congress, the Human Rights Association of Swaziland, and the People's United Democratic Movement.

A new attempt at resolving the impasse regarding the command element of the armed forces was made in 1983. Former Deputy and CSB Chair Lt Col Dube was removed from his Acting Prime Minister post, and after being promoted to brigadier was appointed Army Commander as well as Minister of Defence. The dual political and military appointment reflected the phenomenon whereby senior military officers were expected to discharge political responsibilities together with their command functions in the armed forces. Brig Dube's appointment as Minister of Defence found him reporting to the civilian ministry. But Ndzimandze, who was made Chief of Staff and therefore remained at Defence Headquarters, was perceived to be the effective military commander. By the following year, the situation between the two military commanders and their supporters had deteriorated and was fast becoming untenable.

Amid this tumultuous environment, Chief of Staff Col Ndzimandze and Police Commissioner Titus Msibi were both arrested and imprisoned, and later relieved of their duties under a newly promulgated 60-day detention order. Next, the staid pace of replacing the late King Sobhuzha II was accelerated with the appointment to the throne of King Mswati III by two years in 1986. These actions soon created conditions of stability and allowed the armed forces hierarchy to lower their political profile for a while.⁹

Externally motivated pressure on the monarchy at this time (1984) also saw the signing of a secret security understanding with South Africa. The agreement was to regulate relations between Swaziland and its larger, dominant neighbour until the early 1990s when Nelson Mandela was released and the ANC was un-banned.

South Africa dangled a carrot which it knew the Swazis would respond to, namely, the return of lost territories. The adjoining

'homelands' of KwaMashu and KwaNgwane, where the majority of inhabitants are of Swazi origin, was offered back to the Swazi nation as part of the co-operation agreement. It was only in late 1989 that this posture was abandoned by South Africa when President De Klerk started a process of power transfer to the ANC.

RETURN TO PEACE

Rapid political developments swept through Southern Africa in the late 1980s. While the period 1984–1986 was the worst in terms of the impact of apartheid South Africa's destabilisation policy on the region, the next two years witnessed a rebound from the precipice.

The Nkomati Accord was signed between South Africa and Mozambique in March 1984, in effect representing an admission by the latter that Pretoria's actions were beginning to hurt its economy.¹⁰ In theory, Mozambique agreed to desist from hosting ANC guerrilla units, while South Africa pledged to stop supporting Renamo. In practice, however, while Mozambique observed its side of the agreement, South Africa did not. This had severe security-related consequences for Swaziland.

In October 1986, Mozambican President Samora Machel died in a mysterious plane crash near the Swazi border, in an event that represented the apex of the conflict in the region. The physical departure of South African military influence in Swaziland towards the end of the 1980s also followed controversial assassinations and raids carried out by the SADF against ANC and PAC combatants in exile in Swaziland. In 1986–87, scores of South African guerrillas were hunted down and killed in Swaziland, culminating in tension and prompting student and worker protests.

But in 1988, apartheid South Africa signed the Bicesse Agreement with Angola under the supervision of the Troika comprising the US, Portugal and Russia, which provided for the withdrawal of Cuba and the independence of South West Africa, now Namibia. The following year the De Klerk regime in Pretoria announced the release of Nelson Mandela from prison and the ANC was un-banned soon after.

This thawing of relations in South and Southern Africa had a direct (but this time positive) impact on the security situation in Swaziland. And given the turmoil that had prevailed in Swazi political circles since the death of King Sobhuzha II in 1982, this newfound peace has allowed Swaziland to attend to the consolidation of the USDF without undue external influence, as outlined below.

THE USDF IN THE 21ST CENTURY

The USDF is currently estimated to be about 3,000 strong, organised as follows (*see Figure 1*):

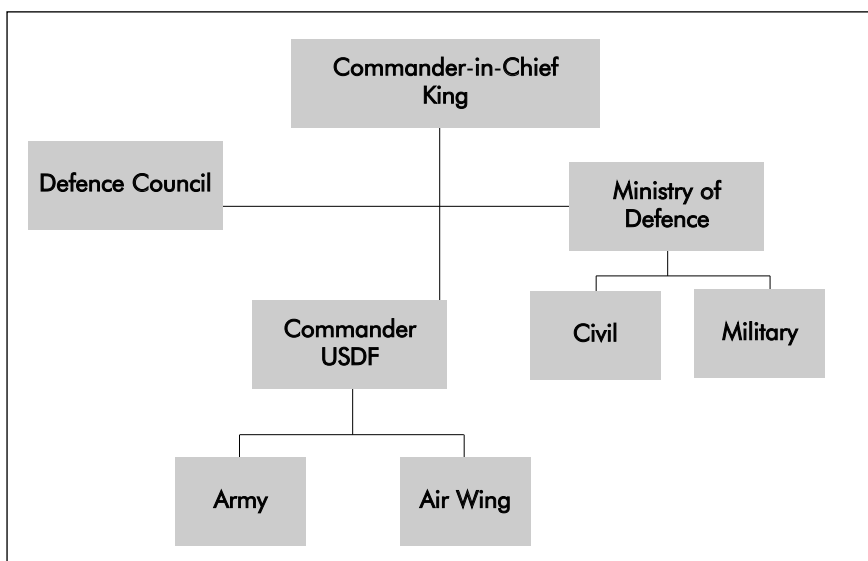
- The King as commander-in-chief.
- A Defence Council, which is responsible for advising the King on issues of national security and defence. The King appoints members to the Defence Council who are drawn from all walks of life. Among its membership is the USDF commander, who is an ex-officio member.
- A civilian-led Ministry of Defence manned by both civilian and defence force members and leaders. It is the political link between Parliament and the armed forces and is responsible for the daily political-military management of the defence forces.
- Headquarters commanded by a major general and a deputy brigadier.
- An Infantry Brigade—Formation.
- A small air wing, equipped with five planes, two helicopters, two small recce planes and two transporters, one of which is for VIP use.

MILITARY EXPENDITURE

Expenditure on the military in Swaziland from 1973 to the mid-1980s appeared minimal and was funded almost exclusively by the King. Available information shows that during the 1990s Swaziland spent an average of 1.5% of gross domestic product (GDP) on military expenditure. For instance, approximately US\$23 million (or 1.9% of GDP) was expended during the 1995/96 financial year. There has been a steady increase in expenditure after 1999, averaging US\$30 million a year.¹¹

Compared to other Southern African Development Community (SADC) countries, this expenditure places Swaziland in the middle band with, for example, South Africa, which is spending less than 2% of GDP on military expenditure—Angola and the Democratic Republic of the Congo are at the top end of the UN recommended maximum of 1.5% of GDP, while Malawi is at the bottom end of the scale.

Figure 1: Current organisation of the USDF



SWAZILAND AND THE SADC REGIONAL STRUCTURE

Swaziland is a full member of SADC and participates in all its structures, including the Organ on Defence, Politics and Security. To this end, while hosting the Chair of the Organ in 1999, Swaziland was instrumental in arbitrating a potentially explosive inter-state situation between Angola and Zambia.

At the time, Angola accused Zambian government officials under President Frederick Chiluba of being complicit in the re-supply of arms, fuel and ammunition to Jonas Savimbi's UNITA.¹²

Swaziland's successful intervention demonstrated that the country is held in high regard by its neighbours and is seen as a full partner in the regional integration drive. However, this is a double-edged sword. By the same token, SADC has exercised its leverage in internal Swazi disputes.

At the 2004 Summit in Mauritius, SADC called on King Mswati III to address the constitutional impasse gripping his country and recommended that political parties be allowed to form, thereby creating conditions for further democratisation.

CONCLUSION

Swaziland has a military culture, and as far back as the late 16th century had organised regiments. The history of the Swazi armed forces since 1968 is understandably steeped in this traditional system, to which it remains wedded even today.

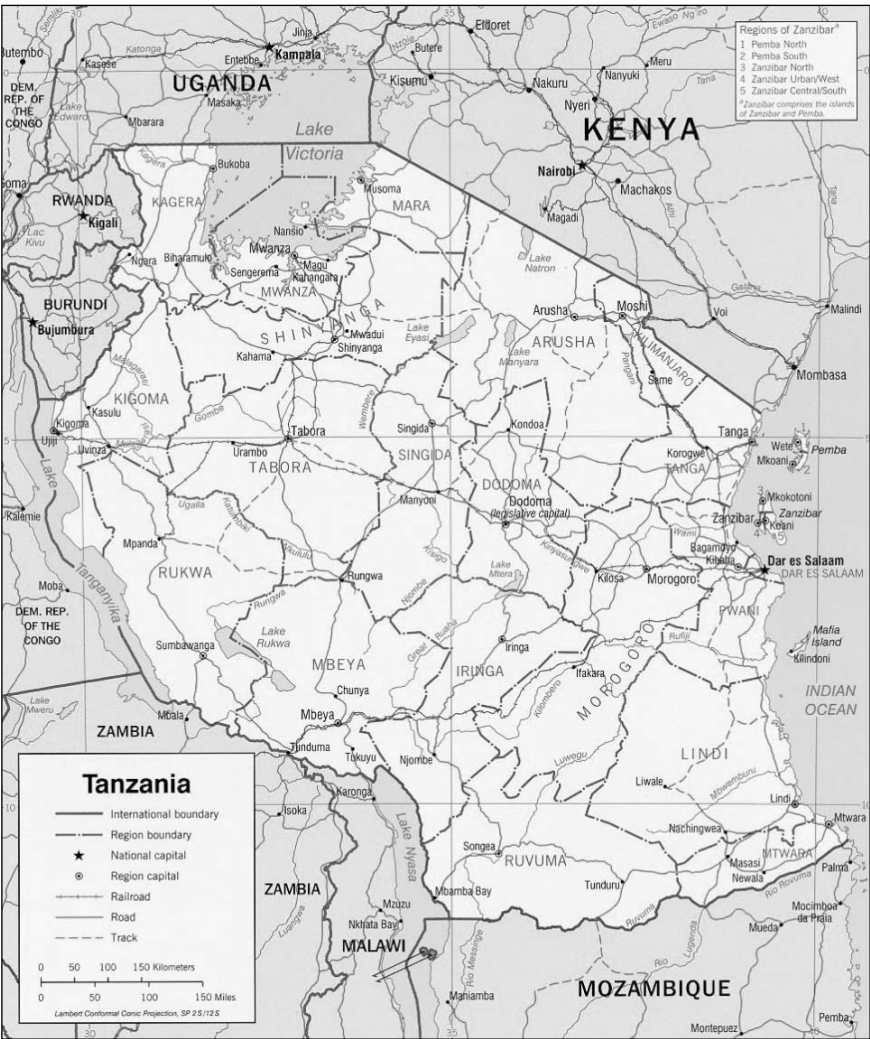
The British colonialists left the country with no more than a paramilitary capacity. A regular army with a mandate and responsibility for internal and external defence therefore had to be created from scratch.

Initially established with the expectation that the Second World War veterans would comprise the core of the new army, it was soon clear that the country needed more robust assistance from outside, which was provided by Kenya. Kenya's military assistance targeted the leadership and officer command-and-control element that was later to take charge of the new army. But Swaziland was to be caught up in the internal conflicts of its neighbours as well as in the regional warfare that lasted from the 1970s to the 1990s. Its nascent army was therefore clearly embroiled in the demands and dynamics of regional security associated with the armed struggle phase in Southern Africa. It was during this period that dimensions of border control and intelligence were extensively developed.

In practice, the Swazi experience represents complex formal and informal, modern and traditional decision-making nuances that are unique to the kingdom.

NOTES

- 1 R Palmer & N Parsons (eds), *Roots of rural poverty in Central and Southern Africa*, London, Heinemann, 1999, pp 16-19. Statistics contained in this passage are drawn from this reference.
- 2 Ibid, pp 18, 24, 131.
- 3 Ibid, p 19.
- 4 Activists such as Clement Kadalie of Nyasaland (now Malawi) were instrumental in establishing ANC branches throughout Southern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) and Malawi. Herman Toivo Ja Toivo of South West Africa (now Namibia) was also part of this generation, as were Joshua Nkomo and Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe.
- 5 J Kalley, *Swaziland election dossier 2003*, No. 1, EISA, Johannesburg, October 2003, pp 2-4.
- 6 See K Matlosa, Constitutional development, in *Swaziland election dossier 2003*, op cit, p 10.
- 7 J B Mzizi, The dominance of the Swazi monarchy and the moral dynamics of democratisation of the Swazi state, *Journal of African Elections* 3(1), June 2004, p 100.
- 8 CIA *Swaziland Fact File*, <http://www.africa/swaziland_fact_file.htm> (11 August 2004), p 3.
- 9 Prince Sibusiso Barnabas Dlamini was appointed Prime Minister on 9 August 1996 and since his tenure has allowed stability to return to the management of government affairs.
- 10 P Stiff, *The silent war: South African recce operations 1969-1994*, Galago, 1999, p 376.
- 11 CIA *country fact file*, <http://www.thebtr.com/pages/Africa/Swaziland_fact_file.htm> (11 August 2004), p 7.
- 12 O Manda, Swazi King in peace bid, *Sunday Times*, Lusaka, 9 May 1999.



Source: www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/index.html