CHAPTER FOUR

From a destabilising factor to a de-politicised and professional force: The military in Lesotho

Khabele Matlosa

INTRODUCTION

Some three decades ago, the military in Lesotho was considered one of the major internal factors for political instability, which was the hallmark of the authoritarianism of yesteryear. Today, however, the military has been greatly reformed and restructured. The current restructuring and security sector reforms have gone a long way in inculcating a new culture of professionalism and de-politicisation of the forces—much to the benefit of the country’s democratisation process and internal discipline within the Lesotho Defence Force (LDF).

This chapter interrogates the historical evolution of the LDF since independence in 1966 and highlights contemporary trends in terms of civil–military relations. The discussion throughout the chapter is anchored upon the following assumptions:

- The historical and contemporary state of the military in Lesotho has been influenced by various external factors at the global and regional levels.

- Political developments in Lesotho itself have also shaped the nature and role of the military from 1966 to date.

- Governance of the military is crucial for an understanding of both the professionalism (or lack thereof) and de-politicisation (or lack thereof) of the LDF.
Policy development and visioning have become critical elements in restructuring and security sector reforms since the late 1990s.

Although enormous progress has been registered in the improvement of civil–military relations in Lesotho since the onset of democratisation in 1993, various challenges still remain if the success record is to be sustained.

Following these prefatory remarks, we discuss the contextual backdrop to the historical development of the military in Lesotho and briefly introduce the key concepts that recur throughout the chapter. Thereafter the debate and analysis focuses on the development of a modern army in Lesotho; the military governance regime; the constitutional and legal framework governing the military; the institutional arrangement for the LDF; policy development and visioning within the military since the mid-1990s; the human and financial capacity of the LDF; and regional security issues and the challenges these pose for the LDF. The concluding section wraps up the debate and recaps the key observations and research findings.

CONTEXTUAL FRAMEWORK

Lesotho gained political independence from British colonial rule in 1966. As was the case in various other transitions from colonial rule to self-rule in Africa, the newly independent Lesotho state inherited the Westminster constitutional and institutional arrangements. Hence the modern army in Lesotho was bequeathed by the British colonial power and was indeed built by the British personnel with considerable succour from neighbouring South Africa.

Initially, the army evolved as a paramilitary police—the Police Mobile Unit—in the 1960s, transforming into a modern army—the Lesotho Paramilitary Force—in 1980 and subsequently elevated to a defence force proper in the 1980s when it assumed the status of the Lesotho Defence Force. However, following the military coup of 1986 which witnessed the demise of Basotho National Party (BNP) rule and its replacement by a military junta initially led by Maj Gen Justin Metsing Lekhanya, the name of the army was changed to the Royal Lesotho Defence Force.

This was meant to underpin and cement the symbiotic relations that existed between the military and the monarchy (read: military–monarch alliance) during that period. This relationship, however, was short-lived
and witnessed political tension and conflict of various kinds between the King (the late Moshoeshoe II) and former head of the military junta, Maj Gen Lekhanya.

Since the political transition of the early 1990s—whose apogee was marked by the holding of a democratic election in 1993—the military force comprises about 2,100 people (including the army and air wing) and is now known as the Lesotho Defence Force (LDF).

It is worth noting that the above changes or transformations of the military in Lesotho were not just changes in name, but rather a profound metamorphosis of the military from its infancy in the 1960s up to its present status. These transformations were also informed by interesting changes, too, in terms of the governance arrangements of the military in Lesotho.

Whereas there have been shifts and twists regarding institutional arrangements for the governance of the military over time since the 1960s, one common denominator throughout all the phases of military evolution in Lesotho is that the prime minister has remained commander-in-chief of the forces. However, it is worth noting that in the earlier periods, tensions have simmered between the prime minister as head of government and the king as head of state regarding the governance of the military.1

Fortunately, these tensions were resolved following the democratic transition in the country in the early 1990s. Thus, quite obviously, following this transition and judging by the encouraging progress registered thus far through the on-going security sector reforms, the governance of the LDF has improved considerably; although, of course, much still remains to be done to consolidate the achievements and avoid reversals. But one thing which is abundantly clear is that never again can the military assume state power in its own right as it did in 1986—a professional culture within and civil control over the forces has been firmly institutionalised thanks to the 1993 democratic transition, the amendment to the constitution in the same year and technical assistance from South Africa, Botswana and India around security sector reform aimed in the main at entrenching a culture of professionalism and civil control.

THE CONCEPTUAL FRAME OF ANALYSIS

It is important from the onset that we clarify some key concepts in this discussion. These include ‘security sector’ and ‘governance’, and then
‘security sector governance’. The notion of security sector denotes both formal and informal security formations in a given country, including those civil institutions that play an oversight role over the operations of these security institutions. In this paper we confine our discussion to the army and as such do not extend our coverage to other security organs in Lesotho.

The concept of governance simply refers to various ways, systems, procedures, rules, regulations and institutional arrangements for running the affairs of either an organisation or a nation at large; hence, governance is clearly distinct and distinguishable from government, for the latter refers to officers who man state institutions for the purposes of making governance possible. Here again our discussion is limited to the governance of the army in Lesotho.

From the above definitions of the concepts ‘security sector’ and ‘governance’, it is thus easier to define ‘security sector governance’, which in this context implies the way in which various organs of the security establishment (both formal and informal) are managed and administered. Much of the debate on security sector governance poses the critical question around civil control over the security establishment for the purposes of accountability and bringing the security sector aboard the current democratic transformation occurring in the African continent in general, and in Lesotho in particular.

Whereas there is general consensus in the governance literature on the commendable progress that Africa, and Lesotho, have made in terms of democratic transition since the early 1990s, serious questioning is going on within both policy and academic discourses around problems and prospects for democratic consolidation. Various scholars have raised issues around perceived democracy deficits that could threaten the progress already made and reverse the gains achieved to date.²

It is no exaggeration to posit that one of the key challenges for democratic consolidation following a successful transition clearly revolves around security sector governance in Africa; and it is within this context that we unravel governance challenges facing the military in Lesotho.

It is worth emphasising that security and the role of the military in Lesotho—as elsewhere in Southern Africa—have been drastically recast by various important recent developments.

First, the end of the Cold War has changed global threats to the national security of our countries due to the removal of the ideological rivalry between the then Soviet Union and the United States (US)—
which had in turn divided the world’s countries into these two camps, making it easy to define external or potential threats.

Second, the demise of apartheid also reshaped regional security in a fundamental way in that states are no longer able to use South Africa’s regional destabilisation of yesteryear as a reference point in defining external threats.

Third, the end of the Cold War and the demise of apartheid also changed the conflict patterns away from those of an inter-state form to the currently all-pervasive intra-state conflicts principally propelled by struggles over scarce resources.

Fourth, security itself is becoming increasingly contested and is not as straightforward as it was thought to be in the past: Whose security? What type of security? And, therefore, what should the role of the army be?

Today, states of the world, Lesotho included, face the dilemma of whether or not they perceive security in a state-centric fashion as national security, or in much more socio-economic terms as human security; but then still caught in the horns of dilemma as to how to advance national interest.3

Fifth and finally, accelerated globalisation has also affected the security landscape globally and poses new challenges for states, including the problem of global terrorism—even as this has tended to be politicised by the Bush administration in the US for its own national security and strategic interests on a global scale.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF A MODERN ARMY

Various accounts abound regarding the historical evolution of the military in Lesotho and the political significance thereof, including the manner in which the military has made its own distinctive imprint on Lesotho’s contemporary governance trajectory.4 Most of these accounts have elaborated the factors that led to the establishment of the army in Lesotho in the early 1980s. There were both internal and external factors that accounted for the establishment of a modern defence force in Lesotho.

Internal factors had a lot to do with power struggles between the then ruling BNP and opposition parties. The former reckoned that it had to beef up the security machinery in order to enhance its political edge over the opposition. External factors had to do with the deteriorating relations between the BNP government and the then apartheid regime,
which presented a serious external security threat; more so given that
the latter had assisted the opposition Basutoland Congress Party (BCP)
in establishing the Lesotho Liberation Army to mount a proxy war
against the former, which was seen as being too sympathetic to the
African National Congress—hence the military incursion into Lesotho
by the South African Defence Force in 1982 that killed 42 people.

It was also rather ironic that the BNP regime, which had been firmly
anchored upon the military, would be dislodged by the military itself
through a coup in 1986.

Thus between 1986 and 1992 the military ruled Lesotho on their own
account during an era that marked the worst form of authoritarianism in
the small and impoverished country.

However, the transition from military to civilian rule in 1993 did not
lead to a quick and assured resolution of the military’s involvement in
politics. Thus, this chapter focuses mainly on contemporary
developments around Lesotho’s military in the new democratic
dispensation following the 1993 democratic transition.

Lesotho’s transition from military dictatorship to multiparty
democracy has not been a straightforward and smooth process. As in
most other African countries, the military-to-civilian rule transition
trajectory in Lesotho was fraught with political intrigue, and mutual
mistrust and tension among the contending actors and stakeholders.

Given the historical partisan politicisation of the security
establishment, it is an exaggeration to posit that the armed forces posed
the major threat to Lesotho’s democracy following the transition. Not
only had the forces been imbued with partisan politics over the two
decades of uninterrupted praetorian rule of the BNP, they had
themselves presided over a military dictatorship from 1986 to 1992, as
indicated above. But it needs to be pointed out again that the then ruling
BCP pursued rather confrontational policies which hardened, rather
than softened, the negative perceptions of the military towards the new
democratic project.

Combined with the confrontational attitude of the new regime
towards the army was another failure on the part of the government:
reintegration of the armed forces.

The faction-fighting within the army, the confrontation between one
faction of the army with central government, and the police strike that
took place in 1994, thus underlined Lesotho’s historical political crisis
which has always undermined legitimacy of the rulers. The turbulence,
therefore, had less to do with salary demands by the security
establishment; it was a veiled political challenge to the new BCP government to safeguard interests and security of forces, which are historically aligned to the BNP.

It goes without saying that a new government inherited the security establishment which had been moulded after the image of another political party that ruled the country for a long time, and clearly such forces would not easily co-operate. Ironically, however, the BCP assumed power without a clear vision and programme of containing political discomfort of these forces, hence its hasty recourse to invitations of external forces in its attempts to quell the turbulence caused by the army in early 1994.5

When King Letsie III unconstitutionally ousted the BCP government on 17 August 1994, it was quite clear that Lesotho’s democracy experiment had reached a cul-de-sac. The King’s move was complex because it was informed by a constellation of political interests of the monarchy (and its supporters), the armed forces and the opposition BNP.

This travesty of Lesotho’s fledgling democracy was reversed through the intervention of President Nelson Mandela of South Africa and President Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe, and ultimately a memorandum of understanding was signed in September of the same year in which Botswana, South Africa and Zimbabwe became guarantors of Lesotho’s democracy on behalf of the Southern African Development Community (SADC). This regional governance arrangement remains today, and since 1998 Mozambique has been added to the list of guarantors of Lesotho’s democracy. Although this regional arrangement has helped considerably to restrain the military’s involvement in politics as well as to stabilise Lesotho’s political system, it has brought into sharp relief the dilemma of national sovereignty to the small, impoverished and landlocked country. It has further reinforced Lesotho’s hyperdependency on South Africa both economically and politically, and this has now been extended to the SADC region through the 1994 memorandum of understanding.

We wind up this section with a brief note regarding continuities and discontinuities on the nature of military doctrine since independence. The military doctrine in Lesotho since 1966 has favoured the Commonwealth military tradition, and this is no surprise given that Lesotho was a British protectorate. But again, given Lesotho’s dependence on South Africa, the Commonwealth military tradition has tended to be somewhat diluted by the South African doctrinal principles, and this even more so since the 1986 military coup. Today, LDF officers undertake much of their training in South Africa. Be that as it may,
an Indian Military Team of 22 persons has been deployed within Lesotho since 2000 ... and will be assisting them with the retraining and redesign of all aspects of their Defence Force. It is likely that doctrinal principles of the Indian Army will feature more prominently in both the doctrine and training culture of the LDF in future.6

The next section turns the spotlight on another complex aspect of the contemporary history of the military, namely civil–military relations.

CIVIL–MILITARY RELATIONS

There has been a robust debate around civil–military relations in Lesotho, especially since the 1980s when the country experienced military rule. We have argued elsewhere7 that a useful approach to understanding the historical context of the current pattern of civil–military relations is to classify Lesotho’s political development into four broad phases and to assess the type of civil–military relations under each phase.

We proposed that the first phase could be classified as the era of embryonic or infant democracy during the period 1965–70 in which civil–military relations were generally stable, given the stability of the immediate post-independence political system.

It is worth noting though that prior to the 1965 elections, a heated controversy surrounded the nature of civil supremacy over the armed forces in independent Lesotho. Some political forces advocated the view that the armed forces be headed by the king (as head of state), while others argued that the prime minister (as head of government) be vested with powers to head the armed forces. With independence, the prime minister was given powers to head the armed forces.

We identified the second phase as the era of de facto one-party authoritarianism spanning the period 1970–86, which was marked by unstable civil–military relations predicated upon patronage and politicisation of the armed forces, both of which compromised the professionalism and ethical integrity of the defence force. During this period, the BNP government exercised stringent control over the armed forces and constructed the forces after its own political image in order not only to ward off external threat, but also to emasculate internal opposition.

The intense disagreements, faction-fighting and leadership squabbles within the BNP during the mid-1980s not only threw the ruling party
into disarray, but also pitted it against the armed forces primarily over issues of internal law and order, and sour relations with apartheid South Africa following the latter’s military raids in Lesotho in 1982 and 1985.

The relations between the ruling party and the armed forces deteriorated so drastically that in 1986 the army undertook a military coup thereby dislodging the BNP government with tacit support from apartheid South Africa.8

We proposed that the 1986 military coup ushered in the third phase in Lesotho’s political development, namely the era of military authoritarianism between 1986 and 1993, which was a continuation of deteriorating civil–military relations as the military had turned itself into an executive; once again professionalism was sacrificed on the basis of political expediency, and internal paralysis within the LDF was noticeable. Party political activities were banned by a decree notoriously known as Order No. 4. Not only was democratic governance suffocated, but the socio-economic conditions of ordinary Basotho worsened as the military junta adopted, and in 1987 began implementing, the International Monetary Fund and World Bank structural adjustment programme.

The fourth phase that we identified was the era of fragile democracy from 1993 to 2000, which followed the withdrawal of the military from direct control over the state, largely due to both internal and external pressure for democratisation and demilitarisation. This fourth phase has witnessed the withdrawal of the military from state power and the ascendance of civilian authority after the 1993 election.

Initially, problems of adjustment to the new political reality saw protracted conflicts between the executive authority and the LDF, leading to faction-fighting within the forces over the army’s relationship with the BCP government,9 and the temporary displacement by King Letsie III by a democratically elected government in 1994.10 Tension resurfaced after the 1998 election with conflict between the opposition parties and the ruling party. But despite the conflicts of 1994 and 1998, this current phase has marked major shifts in civil–military relations, especially regarding the momentum of legal, institutional and policy reforms that have thus far been put in place.

The current and fifth phase spanning the period 2001 to date has been marked by various kinds of institutional engineering aimed at redressing identified democracy deficits of the earlier phases.

On the electoral front this process witnessed the replacement of the first-past-the-post system by the new mixed-member proportional
representation system. This was first put to the test in the 2002 general elections and has in part contributed immensely to the country’s current political stability.

On the military front, this current phase has been characterised by considerable improvement in civil–military relations and concerted effort towards security sector reform, with external assistance from Botswana, South Africa and India.

The most important lesson that the above historical context poses for security sector reform is that under conditions of authoritarian rule, civil–military relations are bound to be weak and unstable, whereas under democratic rule they tend to be relatively stable.

Another lesson worth noting from this historical context is that once the military takes over state power and rule on their own, internal discipline within the forces deteriorates; consequently, the military as an institution gets overwhelmingly destabilised by its own rule. This explains in part why the military administration was marked by internal disorder and revolt of the officer corps against the military top brass, resulting in the dissipation of the force’s internal cohesion.11

CONSTITUTIONAL AND LEGAL FRAMEWORK

The LDF is established by article 146 of the 1993 Constitution as amended, which states that “there shall be a Defence Force for the maintenance of internal security and the defence of Lesotho”. Although the head of government still remains the commander-in-chief of the forces, actual command is vested in the commander who is appointed by the king on the advice of the prime minister.

On 29 March 1996, the Prime Minister as the Minister of Defence and Internal Security introduced a bill in Parliament which amended the 1993 Lesotho Constitution with the sole purpose of providing a more effective and efficient governance machinery for the LDF.

The amendments to section 146 of the Constitution basically included that:

• the prime minister as the elected head of government has powers to determine the operational use of the LDF;

• powers of command of the LDF are vested in the commander; and

• the appointment and removal of the commander of the LDF rests
with the king as head of state and the constitutional monarch, acting on the advice of the prime minister, the head of government.

There are therefore three main stakeholders or actors in the governance of the military in Lesotho, namely:

• the king, as head of state and constitutional monarch;
• the prime minister, as head of government and minister of defence; and
• the commander, as head of the defence force.

The above constitutional arrangements are buttressed by enabling legislation that further streamlines the governance of the military in line with the evolving democratic dispensation in the country. A Defence Force Act was enacted by Parliament in 1996 and aimed at providing the structure, organisation and administration, as well as discipline for the forces and matters incident thereto. The Act is consistent with the overall constitutional provisions as outlined above; however, it clarifies further command, control and administration of the LDF and defines the role of the commander much more clearly.

The commander determines and implements such measures that he considers necessary for:

• command-and-control;
• maintenance of proper discipline;
• improvement or simplification of organisation, methods and procedures; and
• securing the most economic and efficient utilisation of the resources provided for the maintenance of the LDF.

The commander is therefore accountable to and reports regularly to the prime minister and minister of defence on matters under his jurisdiction, both on operational and policy issues relating to the LDF.

**THE INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK**

The main institution that has been established recently for the purposes of efficient and effective governance of the LDF is the Ministry of Defence, with the prime minister as the minister of defence, and the day-to-day administration of the ministry vested in the principal secretary
and his/her deputy. The main functions of the Ministry of Defence are to:

- formulate and execute defence policy;
- provide the central operational and administrative headquarters for the LDF; and
- act as the organisation which procures equipment for the LDF.\textsuperscript{12}

The establishment of the Ministry of Defence in 1995 represents an important move towards institutionalisation of civil control of the forces by elected civil authority, and the enhancement of accountability of the forces to the executive organ of the state as well as the legislature through the minister in charge. Thus, administrative accountability of the LDF filters through the Office of the Principal Secretary in the Ministry of Defence through the minister, the executive (Cabinet), the legislature (Parliament) all the way to the king as the pinnacle of the legislature and head of state.

In a nutshell, the LDF, through the Ministry of Defence, is accountable to Parliament. The Ministry of Defence provides for the efficient management of activities and the effective utilisation of resources and assets of the LDF in a more economic manner. It provides for civil control and co-ordination of the various activities of the forces, and development of appropriate defence policy for the LDF.

Part of the institutional framework aimed at enhancing civil control over the LDF is the Defence Council, which is established in terms of the Lesotho Defence Force Act, 1996. The Defence Council comprises:

- the minister of defence, who is the chairperson of the Council;
- the principal secretary of the Ministry of Defence;
- the commander of the LDF;
- the secretary to be appointed by the minister; and
- two other members appointed by the minister for a period of three years (renewable).

The primary functions of the Defence Council are to:

- make recommendations to Cabinet on the formulation and implementation of defence policy;
- make recommendations to Cabinet on the terms and conditions of service of members of the LDF; and
• inquire into and deal with complaints and grievances by any member of the LDF.\textsuperscript{13}

To all intents and purposes, the establishment of the Ministry of Defence and the Defence Council is clear testimony to the enormous strides made by Lesotho to professionalise the military and try to cut its umbilical cord with partisan political activities in which the LDF has been so embroiled in the past, much to the detriment of democratic governance and internal discipline within the LDF.

With all fairness, although the democratic transition of the early 1990s was bedevilled with serious hiccups—including violent conflicts between the military and the government—this has changed dramatically since the late 1990s when these institutional arrangements were set in motion. The LDF as we know it today is much more professional and less political in both its worldview and in the execution of its national duties. This is a positive development for Lesotho’s fledgling democratic governance. The professionalism that is evolving within the LDF is also a positive development for the cohesion of the force, which has been rocked by internal faction-fighting over the past decade.

However, the link between the minister of defence and the head of government must be severed in order to further institutionalise de-linkage between the military and politics. Presently, the prime minister is the minister of defence and the head of government at the same time, and this arrangement translates into an overwhelmingly centralised institutional framework. Lesotho needs to consider an arrangement whereby the Ministry of Defence is detached from the Prime Minister’s Office, with its own distinctive minister responsible for defence matters.

Incidentally, wide-ranging recommendations regarding decentralisation of the governance regime for the LDF were made during a three-day dialogue workshop on civil–military relations in Lesotho organised in 2000 by the Institute for Security Studies (ISS). These recommendations included, among others:

• the need to build public trust in the military;
• the need for a broadly inclusive process informing the restructuring and security sector reform measures;
• concerted efforts towards de-politicisation of the military;
• strengthening the civilian oversight over the military; and
• the need for the establishment of a defence and security portfolio committee of Parliament.\textsuperscript{14}
The current governance structure of the LDF is summarised in Figure 1. At the top of the LDF is the commander-in-chief, currently Phakalitha Mosisili, who is also simultaneously the head of government and the minister of defence. Mosisili also chairs the Defence Council, which in turn advises Cabinet on defence policy. Defence policy is developed by the Ministry of Defence in close co-operation with the LDF headquarters under the leadership of the commander, Lt Gen Makhula Mosakeng, who is in charge of the management and all operational functions of both the army and air wing. Civilian staff of the Ministry of Defence are answerable to the principal secretary of the Ministry, while military staff are answerable to the LDF commander through the LDF headquarters.

It is evident from Figure 1 that the prime minister wields enormous power vis-à-vis the governance of the military in Lesotho. This is explained by reference to the historical evolution of the defence force, which has been structurally linked to the political party in power as well as to the historical power struggle between politicians and the palace over control of the LDF.15

This centralisation of power within the Prime Minister’s Office needs to be reviewed in the light of progress in Lesotho’s democratisation project, as well as the advances that have been made in security sector reform, with a view to emphasising an increasing role for civil society...
and Parliament in defence matters. It is surely against this backdrop that participants to the earlier mentioned ISS workshop made a specific recommendation that “the Prime Minister should oversee all ministries and not hold portfolios such as that of defence”.16

The operational structure of the Lesotho army is as follows:

- defence headquarters;
- 7 x infantry companies dispersed throughout the country;
- 1 x support company with 81 mm mortars;
- 1 x armoured reconnaissance company;
- 1 x artillery battery; and
- 1 x logistics support group.17

DEFENCE POLICY

Policy development that provides a well-defined vision for the defence force has historically been lacking in the LDF. Only since the recent past has the LDF started developing its long-term policy framework. Policy development is an important hallmark of best practice in the governance of countries and organisations/institutions.

The Ministry of Defence in May 1995 developed a defence policy. A brief background to this policy is needed, if only to suggest that there were both external and internal factors for its development. On a global scale, the end of the Cold War and the onset of accelerated globalisation recast regional and national security imperatives, and even small countries such as Lesotho have not been left untouched by these global developments.

At a regional level, the demise of apartheid and concerted efforts towards regional integration and security co-operation have drastically reshaped the regional security architecture to the extent that all regional states have had to rethink and re-order their security and defence mechanisms. Regional security imperatives through the SADC region are inextricably linked to continental security imperatives within the framework of the African Union (AU), and Lesotho is a state party to both supranational institutions. Finally, a major domestic factor was the democratic transition of 1993, which was followed immediately by tense and conflict-ridden relations between the military and the government, as well as violent faction-fighting within the military. All these factors had direct and indirect influence on the development of the defence policy.

The policy aims to reposition Lesotho’s military in the context of the
kaleidoscopic changes at global and regional levels, and with a view to addressing civil–military relations at home. The policy states that:

the day to day guarantee of security lies in the maintenance of national and international order, and in particular, in regional stability. To achieve this, Lesotho must maintain a minimal, unified national defence system, which should be professional, well-trained, highly motivated and well equipped.18

More specifically, the policy has a clear objective to restructure the LDF in fundamental ways. In line with the policy, the LDF should be:

- **Apolitical:** Organised, trained and managed to serve the government of the day and the entire people; importantly it should uphold and respect the Constitution of the Kingdom of Lesotho.

- **Accountable:** Well-disciplined and accountable to government and the people through clearly defined political mechanisms of control. There is need for the people to have confidence in their defence force—in its discipline, integrity and professional ability.

- **Capable:** A military capable of undertaking its primary task—that is, defence of the territorial integrity of the country—while playing a constructive peacetime role.

- **Affordable:** Defence should not represent an unaffordable burden on the economy.19

It is within the context of this policy that we are able to understand the security sector reform measures that have been put in place since 1999, with technical support from Botswana, South Africa and India.

**HUMAN RESOURCES AND FINANCIAL CAPACITY OF THE MILITARY**

The LDF has a personnel strength of about 2,100 and comprises two military branches, namely the army and the air wing. According to the Ministry of Defence’s defence policy:

the LDF is at present organised into 11 companies each comprising approximately 120 personnel. This includes a Headquarters company,
Air Squadron and Band and Engineering. The majority of personnel are based at Headquarters or Makoanyane Barracks, which is in the suburbs of Maseru. At all times there are two companies on operational duties outside Maseru: invariably one in the north and one in the south of the country. Two platoons at Headquarters and two at Makoanyane are on operational standby. The remaining companies will be on stand-down. Companies rotate weekly through these tasks.20

In terms of the size and geo-political location of the country, the size of the force is not a contested issue. What is hotly contested, though, is the amount of public resources made available to the LDF. This relates to the overall resource endowment of the country and how scarce resources are allocated between and among various government departments.

The state of economic growth and development plays an important role in influencing civil–military relations. This is because the economy determines the amount of resources that the executive authority is able to avail to the security forces. This is crucial for the defence budget, which often competes with other demands on the country’s scarce resources. Thus far the defence budget has always ranked among the traditional top three—namely, education, health and defence. For the first time, the 2002/03 national budget relegated defence spending to fifth position in terms of resource allocation prioritisation.

The five top ministries allocated a larger chunk of the budget were: Education with M777.2 million (22% of the total budget); Public Works with M324.9 million (9.2%); Health with M289.7 million (8.2%); Finance with M275.1 million (7.8%); and Defence with M178 million (5.0%). Interestingly, the then Minister of Finance and Development Planning, Mohlabi Tsekoa, justified increased defence spending to Parliament as follows:

Defence costs are largely inflated by aircraft insurance and purchase of spare parts. Insurance and spare parts costs rose sharply following the events of September 11, 2001 in the United States. It is Government policy to restructure defence in accordance with realities in the Lesotho context.21

Again, defence ranks fifth in the current national budget for the fiscal year 2004/05, as follows: Education and Training with M953 million
(22.0% of the total budget); Finance and Development Planning with M554 million (12.8% of the total budget); Health and Social Welfare with M322 million (7.4% of the total budget); Public Works and Transport with M289 million (6.7% of the total budget); and Defence and National Security with M216 million (5.0% of the total budget).  

Defence expenditure should not amount to a diversion of scarce resources away from socio-economic goals to militaristic ventures, especially under conditions where no serious military threat exists.

THE REGIONAL SECURITY CHALLENGE FOR THE MILITARY

It is appropriate and apposite to premise our discussion in this section on the assumption that the size and geo-political location of Lesotho considerably shape and influence the country’s role and position in regional common security efforts.

Put more explicitly, and rather provocatively, Lesotho’s small size, impoverishment and landlocked status have inhibited the country’s assertive and influential role in SADC’s current efforts towards common regional security. Lesotho’s external security horizon is overwhelmingly dependent on South Africa. Joint patrols involving the LDF and the South African National Defence Force are a regular feature along the Lesotho–South Africa border.

It is worth noting though that Lesotho is an active member of the region’s supranational entity—SADC—and participates meaningfully in all SADC activities. Lesotho has contributed its military personnel during regional peacekeeping exercises such as Blue Hungwe (1998) and Blue Crane (1999). Lesotho was in fact chair of the Inter-State Defence and Security Committee in 2001 and also chair of the Organ on Politics, Defence and Security (OPDS) in 2003. It is the co-chair of the OPDS in a troika including South Africa (current chair) and Namibia (incoming chair).

In a sense, therefore, Lesotho’s foreign policy in the region, though somewhat weak and reactive, does embrace the conviction of the political elite that national security today under conditions of globalism and regionalism is inextricably intertwined and interwoven into regional security measures and mechanisms. In this regard, Lesotho embraces the significance of a regional security institution such as the SADC OPDS.

In a recent review of SADC aimed at major restructuring and the development of a five-year Regional Indicative Strategic Development Plan, the key strategic priorities included consolidation of democratic
governance as well as the establishment of a sustainable and effective mechanism for conflict prevention, management and resolution.23

On the basis of the review process, the new structure of the OPDS as agreed upon by member states is as follows:

• The Organ shall be co-ordinated at the level of Summit on a Troika basis and reporting to the Chairperson of SADC;
• The Chairperson of the Organ shall be on a rotational basis for a period of one year;
• The Member State holding the chairperson of the Organ shall provide the Secretariat services;
• The Chairperson of the Organ shall not simultaneously hold the Chair of the Summit; and
• The structure, operations and functions of the Organ shall be regulated by the protocol on Politics, Defence and Security Co-operation.24

Currently, the OPDS is fully operational under the leadership of South African President Thabo Mbeki. Lesotho’s Prime Minister, Phakalitha Mosisili, was, as mentioned, chairperson of the OPDS in 2003. Despite the initial paralysis of the OPDS and lack of a clear role for SADC on the security front, as mentioned, South Africa, Botswana and Zimbabwe have been heavily and directly involved in containing Lesotho’s protracted and often violent conflicts, and the three countries, together with Mozambique, are the guarantors of Lesotho’s democratic governance.

A key challenge facing Lesotho today in relation to regional security imperatives is precisely how best the leadership of the country can reposition this small and landlocked nation in the context of post-apartheid South and Southern Africa. Lesotho needs much stronger bilateral co-operation arrangements with South Africa, without necessarily sacrificing its commitment to multilateral regional efforts towards common security.

Although it has taken a painstakingly long time for the leadership of both countries to appreciate this stark reality, it is encouraging, and indeed commendable, that they have finally established the Joint Bilateral Commission of Co-operation. Established and signed on 19 April 2001, the key objectives of the Bilateral Commission are to:

• guide the strategic partnership between the parties;
• promote mutually beneficial economic integration between the two countries with the aim of closing the existing economic disparities;

• promote co-operation in the field of science and technology with the aim of bridging the technological divide which exists between the two countries;

• cultivate and promote good governance, beneficial social, cultural, humanitarian and political co-operation and facilitate contact between the public and private sectors of the parties;

• maintain peace and security between the two countries and general stability in the Southern African region through collective action based on respect for democratic institutions, human rights and the rule of law;

• co-operate and harmonise the position of the parties in addressing multilateral issues of common interest; and

• facilitate movement of people, goods and services between their two countries taking into consideration the unique geographic position of Lesotho.

In order to operationalise the Commission and facilitate the realisation of the above objectives, four working groups or clusters have been established, namely the:

• Economic Cluster;

• Good Governance Cluster;

• Security and Stability Cluster; and

• Social Cluster.

It is still too early to make an informed judgment and assessment of progress thus far in this direction. It is, however, fair to observe that slowly but surely positive steps are under way in the redefinition of Lesotho–South Africa relations, and only time will tell whether or not the two countries will reap mutually beneficial developments arising
from the Bilateral Commission, especially in respect of democratic governance and security.

Be that as it may, Lesotho has played an important role in shaping the current regional security architecture in SADC, for it was during its tenure as OPDS chair that the SADC Strategic Indicative Plan for the Organ (SIPO) was developed and subsequently adopted at the SADC Summit held in Mauritius in August 2004.

SIPO commits SADC member states to:

• promote and safeguard the development of the region against instability arising from the breakdown of law and order, intra-state and inter-state conflicts and aggression;

• promote political co-operation among member states and the evolution of common values and institutions;

• prevent, contain and resolve inter- and intra-state conflicts by peaceful means;

• promote the development of democratic institutions and practices by state parties and encourage the observance of universal human rights;

• observe and encourage state parties to implement the UN Charter, AU Constitutive Act and other international conventions and treaties on peaceful relations between states;

• develop the peacekeeping capacity of national defence forces and coordinate the participation of state parties in international peacekeeping operations;

• enhance regional capacity in respect of disaster management and coordination of international humanitarian assistance; and

• develop common foreign policy approaches on issues of mutual concern, and advance such policy collectively in international fora.25

It is within the context of this new thinking around regional security that the LDF has been involved in various regional peacekeeping training initiatives organised mainly through the Harare-based Regional Peacekeeping Centre since the late 1990s.
CONCLUSION

Lesotho’s democratic transition has resulted in considerable progress being made in terms of improving the LDF’s governance machinery. This has included improved professionalism of the force, the extrication of the LDF from partisan party politics, enhanced civil control over the force, accountability of the LDF to Parliament, and advances in the on-going process of security sector reform.

All these are indeed commendable strides forward in terms of institutionalisation of democratic governance of the military sub-sector in the country. However, much more still remains to be done in order to ensure that the gains made thus far do not lead to complacency and/or possible reversals.26

Challenges for the consolidation of democratic governance in the military include the following:

- Parliamentary oversight needs to be strengthened through relevant standing and portfolio committees.

- There should be effective implementation of the defence policy and finalisation of the draft Strategic Plan for the LDF in order to add more value to the improved civil–military relations and security reforms.

- There is need to further decentralise governance of the LDF and avoid centralisation within the Prime Minister’s Office.

- Democratic governance of the LDF is also dependent upon the successful democratisation of Lesotho generally.

- The democratic culture and practice that is emerging in Lesotho ought to change in a positive manner the attitude of both the political elite and society at large towards the military.

- There should be recognition that the LDF ought to play an increasingly developmental role, over and above its traditional security roles.

- An emerging culture of public trust and confidence around the role of the military since the mid-1990s needs to be solidified and consolidated through, among others, greater access to information on security sector reform to broader stakeholders, including civil society organisations.
The LDF has begun to play a greater regional role in Southern Africa through SADC, and in the African continent through the AU. This is bound to continue as the region and the continent strive for deeper integration; and this implies further and possibly more complex responsibilities.

This chapter has sketched the mode of governance for the military in Lesotho. It is abundantly evident from the above that since its early days, the military in Lesotho has evolved from an embryonic force to a professional defence force that has fairly sound and robust institutional mechanisms for ensuring civil or democratic control.

The constitutional and legal framework for the governance of the military is clear in terms of defining the parameters for control of the defence force by an elected civil authority. Yet again, the institutional framework is clearly defined in terms of which public institutions are responsible for ensuring civil oversight and accountability of the LDF to the executive branch of government and less so to the legislative branch.
NOTES


6 <www.iss.org.za/AF/profiles/Lesotho/secInfo.htm1>


10 Mothibe, op cit.

11 See Southall & Petlane, op cit; Machobane, op cit.


15 See Matlosa, Military rule and withdrawal from power: The case of Lesotho, op cit.

16 Philander, op cit, p 4. Emphasis added.

17 <www.iss.org.za/AF/profiles/lesotho/secinfo.htm1>

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19 Ibid, p 2.
23 SADC, Regional Indicative Strategic Development Plan (RISDP), Gaborone (mimeo), 2003, p 10.
25 SADC, Strategic Indicative Plan for the Organ (SIPO), SADC Secretariat, Gaborone (mimeo), 2004.
26 See also Philander, op cit.