

The odd man out: A history of the Malawi army since July 1964

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INTRODUCTION

Malawi is one of Southern Africa's land locked countries, sandwiched between and sharing border areas with Tanzania, Zambia and Mozambique. Malawi gained independence at the peak of the decolonisation process, on 6 July 1964.¹ The current population of the country stands at 12,158,924 people. Geographically, the country has 20% of its landmass (or 24,400 km²) covered by water, constituting Africa's third largest water mass, Lake Malawi. The remaining 80% (or 94,080 km²) is land, running like a thin wedge, west and along the lake and a little beyond to the Mozambique border in the south. Administratively, the territory has been divided into 24 districts, a process that has security implications for policing and the location of units. While settlement in the country is largely rural, there are some major urban areas, among which the towns of Blantyre, Zomba and Lilongwe are the most prominent.

The military history of Malawi—a subject that has so far escaped serious academic inquiry—is much more complex and unique compared to other post-colonial Southern African countries. For a start, Malawi's foreign policy from 1964 went counter to that of her newly independent neighbouring states of Tanganyika (now Tanzania) and Zambia, both of which offered their countries as the Front Line States, in line with the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) Liberation Committee's call for the total political emancipation of the continent. In contrast, the new prime minister, Hastings Banda, formed a curious alliance with the remaining

settler, colonial and apartheid regimes in the then Southern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe), Portuguese East Africa (now Mozambique) and South Africa. This decision placed Malawi and its security and defence forces in an invidious position. Furthermore, Banda took a second decision that had far-reaching internal implications for the Malawi Defence Force (MDF). Following the cabinet crisis barely six weeks after independence on 6 July 1964, four cabinet ministers were expelled from cabinet while two others resigned in disgust, claiming that Banda exhibited extreme dictatorial and intolerant tendencies. As shall be discussed fully later, over the next three to four years until 1967 some of the ministers launched internal armed insurrections or invasions from neighbouring states.

In response to this security challenge, Banda took the decision to strengthen the Malawi Young Pioneers (MYP), an organisation with links to the ruling political party, the Malawi Congress Party (MCP). This decision removed the MDF's central role and function, leading to its stagnation and neglect until December 1993 when—motivated by a growing national opposition to the receding influence of the by now very old Banda—the MDF launched Operation Bwezani against the MYP, during which the latter was successfully disarmed and disbanded.

In the interim, while attention, resources and effort from 1964 turned towards favouring the MYP, there was stagnation within the MDF, with the inherited white officers Askari arrangement remaining in place eight years into independence until 1972. The significance of this lack of reform and maintenance of the status quo was in line with the country's foreign policy. This required the MDF to continue collaborating and working with colonial forces in Rhodesia, Portuguese East Africa and apartheid South Africa. In the complex military history of Malawi, this continued even after Mozambique gained independence in 1975 and Zimbabwe in 1980.

In the following two decades until 1992, Malawi had still unexplained troops assisting both sides of the conflict in Mozambique: the MYP associated with the Mozambique National Resistance (Renamo); and the MDF now establishing a working relationship along the Beira–Nacala route with the ruling Front for the Liberation of Mozambique (Frelimo).

A clearer picture of the national role and function of the MDF appears after the May 1994 elections when the country's foreign policy underwent a fundamental shift, in line with the Southern African Development Community (SADC).

After spending more than 30 years in the international wilderness, associated with colonial and pariah states, Malawi began its full

rehabilitation by participating in international peacekeeping and membership of regional security arrangements.

This chapter therefore seeks to trace the complex events that made an impact and influenced the evolution of the MDF from independence in 1964 to the present.

BACKGROUND: PRE-COLONIAL NYASALAND ASKARIS

The foundation of the Malawi military structure was laid during two epochs, spanning the colonial period from June 1890 until the dissolution of the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland in December 1963. The first period emerged during the 1920s, after the First World War, when the existing Police Mobile Unit was charged with the responsibility to train a territorial force. These elements were soon incorporated into the British East African Command security policy as one of the units of the King's African Rifles (KAR).

According to Mungai Mutonya and Timothy Parsons, KiKAR, a Swahili variety in Kenya's colonial army, Nyasaland populated 1 and 2 Battalions of the British East African Brigade, in which a battalion consisted of about 200 soldiers led by "entirely European officers seconded from the British army who served one or two four-year terms in East Africa".²

The role of the KAR was to "protect European life and property, the abolition of the slave trade and elimination of threats from other colonial powers while supporting the expansion of the British empire".³ The role of the Nyasaland unit, however, was to 'occupy' Tanganyika as part of the League of Nations trusteeship arrangements that Britain put in place when it dispossessed Germany of its former colony.

The Police Mobile Unit trained the first military unit soon after the First World War in 1922. In that year, the governor of Nyasaland—with the support of the white-dominated legislative council made up of white merchants, traders and business people—enacted the Defence Force Ordinance that gave rise to the establishment of a defence and territorial force which included 'natives' under white officers.⁴

Small cadre sub-units of the territorial force were also established in each of the 24 administrative districts in which the district commandant headed the local defence committee. While the governor represented the local commander-in-chief, the ultimate defence responsibility rested with Britain. This structure survived, with only small adaptations in 1939 and 1944.

The second structural and role change for the military in colonial Nyasaland occurred during the early 1950s. This was as a consequence of intervention by settlers from Southern Rhodesia who motivated for the establishment of the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland. Federation had security and defence implications, and we briefly trace its impact on the Nyasaland military units that were located in Tanganyika.

FEDERATION AND NYASALAND'S MILITARY EXPERIENCE

While Southern Rhodesia viewed itself as proxy to the British Empire, its motivations in carrying out this role in Southern Africa was based on self-interest, aimed at consolidating its influence not only in the region—against perceived machinations from the Union of South Africa—but also within the Commonwealth. Consequently, based on the economic argument of amalgamation, the mooted federal concept had a strong security dimension in which the East African Brigade was expected to hand over control of several units in Northern Rhodesia and Nyasaland to Salisbury (now Harare). After securing the agreement of the Nyasaland governor to the idea of amalgamation and military integration in 1952, the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland, influenced the role(s) and structure of the military in Nyasaland.⁵

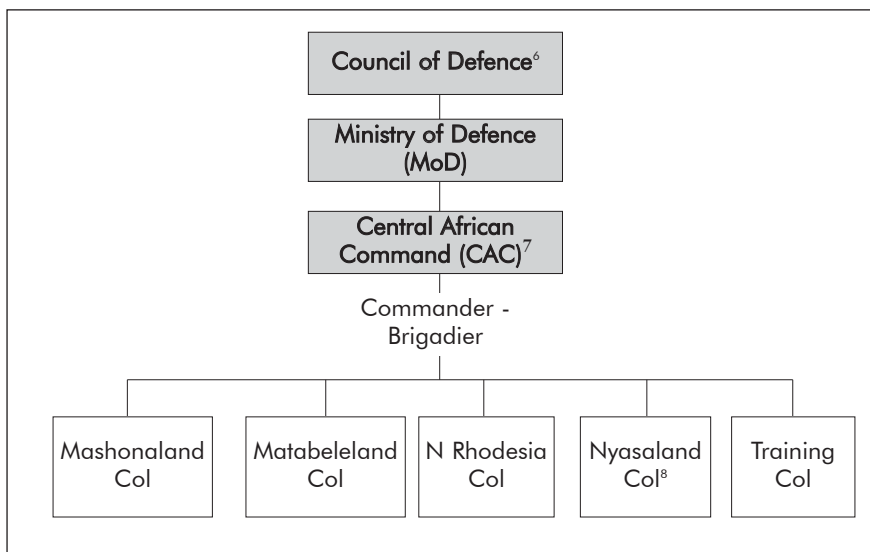
A conference to work out the security modalities was held at King George VI Barracks in Salisbury in August 1953. This followed acceptance a year earlier by the governors of Northern Rhodesia and Nyasaland of the decision to welcome the creation of the Central African Command (CAC) as the successor to Nairobi.

At this time, Nyasaland had been required to deploy a battalion in Tanganyika since 1918, following the forced departure of the German occupiers in the trusteeship arrangement that followed the war.

After the meeting, Nyasaland was now brought under the control of the CAC, with its security policy established by the Council of Defence in Salisbury. A colonel was in charge of each of the commands, answerable to a brigadier who was overall commander of the CAC based in Salisbury. A new Federal Defence Act was passed in October 1954 and only became operational in 1955. The new structure, now known as the CAC, fell under Southern Rhodesia (see Figure 1 for full organisational structure).

At the end of the two epochs covering the colonial period, Malawi was at independence bequeathed with two experienced battalions of Askaris, commanded by white officers, for the purposes of external operations and limited internal use. One of the federal army's 'successes'

Figure 1: Full organisational structure



was to mount Operation Sunrise in which “over a hundred important and influential members of the NAC [Nyasaland African Congress] ... were taken to airfields and there handed over to Federal custody for transportation to prisons outside the Protectorate.”⁹

African political activists rounded up in Nyasaland included Kamuzu Banda and his top lieutenant, Chipembere. The incarceration of the leaders was in the midlands town of Gwelo (now Gweru) in Southern Rhodesia. However, this action by the federal government was at variance with the British position: the Commonwealth and Colonial Office had already begun serious constitutional talks with the African nationalists, leading to power transfers from 1961.

Following agreement reached in April 1961 the MCP won the constitutional talks—mandated legislative council elections and had its members form the dominant faction in the new executive council that prepared the country for independence. The following year in 1962, the constitutional talks provided for independence in 1964, with Dr Banda appointed premier from February 1963. This process revealed an inexorable move towards decolonisation on the part of Britain—a development that was being resisted by the Salisbury-dominated Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland.

INDEPENDENCE FREEZE 1964–1972

Malawi's independence followed the usual pattern of post-Second World War political agitation, civil disobedience and calls for decolonisation that characterised colonial rule on the African continent. In the 1950s, several welfare and trade union-based organisations amalgamated to establish the first political parties and to champion for political independence.

In the then Nyasaland, the NAC (established in 1944) was at the forefront. Dr Hastings Banda returned to the country in July 1958 and joined the ongoing efforts of the NAC. Banda had been in self-imposed exile in the United States where he gained a medical degree, later in the United Kingdom where he operated a private practice, and finally in newly independent Ghana.¹⁰ Banda was therefore a latecomer in the process, joining a band of young and militant nationalists who were already challenging what was clearly receding British colonial control.

A gradual process of decolonisation was then unwinding during the critical period of 1959–63, during which Banda assumed the premiership in preparation for full independence in 1964. However, as Mandiza asserts, the young militants were convinced that they would be at the helm of the new nation, with the invited Banda occupying a ceremonial presidential post.¹¹

The young militants also appeared to be inclined to follow the then popular 'socialism' with links to the People's Republic of China in the foreign policy of the new nation.¹²

This perception and internal NAC–MCP political party power struggle was to erupt into a political crisis soon after independence, and impacted on the way in which the military was restructured thereafter (as discussed below).

Malawi became an independent state on 6 July 1964, ahead of all its earlier counterparts in the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland. The units inherited from the colonial and federal experience became the Malawi army.

In order to maintain brevity, it also clear that the political crisis that gripped Malawi's cabinet on 26 August when there was open confrontation with Banda resulted in far reaching implications for the Malawi army. A summary of the events showed that Banda initially quarrelled with his lieutenants in July 1964 on the 'two China' foreign policy issue. While the latter had invited Mao's China, Banda responded by extending an invitation to Taiwan. As was customary, the People's Republic of China demanded that Taiwan be excluded. Banda refused to

compromise, setting the scene for a future internal turbulent relationship.

The foreign policy difference was soon followed by what was perceived as the new government's insensitivity, after the introduction of hospital fees, the slow rate of Africanisation, and attendant low salaries for civil servants compared to the remuneration offered to white officers. Against this background, the agitation by cabinet colleagues for improvements in the welfare and pay of African civil servants soon received the support of the civil service against Banda. On 8 September, four cabinet ministers were dismissed over the differences while two others resigned in disgust. Meanwhile, the Malawi army, still under white officers, observed the British tradition of aloofness and did not involve itself in the unfolding drama.

However, elements of the MYP sided with the prime minister, and this early support was decisive in the outcome of the internal political struggle. The MYP was an organisation that had been established in 1963 as an appendage to the League of Malawi Youth of the ruling MCP. The first trained contingent of the MYP had become available in May 1964, several months before independence. The concept guiding the formation of the MYP was modelled along Ghana's Kwame Nkrumah's Young Pioneers. (Banda had spent some time living in Ghana during his exile before returning to Nyasaland in 1958 and becoming politically active within the NAC, later to become the MCP.)

The scheme was also fashioned along Israel's National Service Brigade. Israel later provided the Malawi government with critical support towards training military instructors for the MYP, as well as making available opportunities to train selected MYP leaders in Tel Aviv.¹³ Relations with Israel—a noted pariah state at the time with extensive links with settler, colonial and apartheid regimes in the then Southern Rhodesia, Portuguese East Africa and South Africa—later expanded to influence Malawi's foreign policy, recognising the settler, colonial and apartheid regimes in Southern Africa and establishing a diplomatic office in Pretoria.¹⁴

It is therefore correct to argue that from this period on, Banda chose to pursue and implement his security policy through the party-affiliated MYP rather than the Malawi army. Subsequent events with security implications at this time served to expand and consolidate the role and function of the MYP. Some movement towards laying the foundations of the Malawi army took place in early 1965, before the rupture referred to above took effect.

A Defence Act was passed in February 1965 providing for the establishment, administration, recruitment and general conditions of service of the Malawi army. The same act also provided for a reserve component and for the command-and-control structures, which gave the prime minister and commander-in-chief (C-I-C) powers to appoint the army commander in a process that was regulated by parliament. Below the prime minister was the Army Council, made up of the:

- minister of defence (chairman);¹⁵
- secretary to the president and cabinet;
- army commander; and
- deputy army commander.

Even as the normalisation and formalisation of the establishment of the Malawi army was being completed in 1965, the first military challenge to Banda's rule occurred in circumstances now popularly known as the Chipembere uprising in the districts of Mangochi and Machinga. The Malawi army and the MYP were deployed to the provinces to restore order and managed to put down the insurrection.

For the MYP, an organisation espousing undying loyalty to Dr Banda, many perceived opponents were detained, tortured, maimed or killed, forcing many others to flee into exile. Villages seen as anti-Banda "such as Mangochi and Rumphi had entire families uprooted, whole villages disbanded, schools closed indefinitely amidst hundreds of political activists and intellectuals forced to seek refuge outside the country".¹⁶

A second military challenge occurred two years later, in 1967. This was the 'Group of 21,' *Ufulu-Umodzi-M'Malawi* or also known as the Yatuta Chisiza invasion. This came from the northern border district of Mwanza with Tanzania. On 29 September, a joint police and army operation responded, killing three and capturing nine, while five others escaped.¹⁷ After this deployment, researchers agree that the MYP had become stronger with a capacity to replace the Malawi army that was then relegated to carrying out ceremonial duties, leaving the security role to the former.

Against the background of the attacks, Dr Banda instituted a number of political decisions that had implications for the security and position of the military. The first important decision was the adoption of a one-party state system in 1966, making criminal any political activities outside the MCP. Four years later, Dr Banda declared himself president for life or the *Myaya*, among other similar accolades, closing any

possibilities of supplanting him from office until his death. For any security establishment to support this political edifice as constructed by Dr Banda, it needed to be closely identified with the ruling MCP, and the Malawi army appeared too remote, apolitical and beyond the ready manipulation and influence of the one-party state system. The alternative was therefore the MYP.

THE MALAWI YOUNG PIONEERS ERA

As we have seen, the concept of the Pioneers appeared to have attracted Dr Banda's attention when he was in Ghana during the heady Kwame Nkrumah era, and was later given impetus by Malawi's close relations with Israel, where similar ideas abounded. On its formation shortly before independence, Banda provided the rationale for establishing the MYP. On completion of the first leadership course in May 1964, the premier announced that his intention was to develop an institution where youths would be taught respect and discipline, agricultural production, mechanics, aviation and other useful functions, including assisting the ruling party in its leadership role in the nation.

However, after the August cabinet crisis, as Phiri asserts, the MYP "served as a private army in the operationalisation of the one-party state dictatorship."¹⁸ In order to fulfil its tasks, Dr Banda announced in October 1964 that the MYP would receive "tractors and over 1,000 rifles". This referred to the MYP's new role of promoting food production as well as acting as the vanguard for the defence of the nation. An annual Youth Week Programme, every April, coinciding with Dr Banda's birthday, was observed first in 1968 and every year thereafter. During this period, the youths would parade not only with agricultural produce but with the latest military equipment. From then on, the MYP not only served as a superior organisation to the Malawi army, but by 1985 had a lieutenant general as commander, senior in rank to the military major general at the time. Training of the MYP leaders continued to be provided overseas, especially in the pariah states of Israel, Taiwan and South Africa.

Dedicated resources and political attention provided the MYP with capacity far beyond that of the army. While the army continued to be confined to single inherited barracks outside Zomba, the MYP established training camps in 21 of the 24 districts and recruited from all these areas. Those completing training, especially those demonstrating leadership qualities, would be sent to a central location for an advanced

one-month leadership training course before being offered opportunities for further training overseas, or admitted at the only University of Malawi or other tertiary training colleges, hospitals, agricultural institutions and automotive trade schools. On gaining a qualification, many Pioneers would then be offered employment in public or private institutions controlled and financed by the ruling party, to constitute an intelligence network nationally throughout the country. Pioneers were deployed to guard government buildings as well as to undertake policing functions with authority that was greater than the regular police or army.

The level of deployment and that of gathering, collating and providing intelligence, to which the Malawi army and even the police were partially excluded, provided a major advantage to the MYP in the execution of its dominant security role. However, it also created angst between the two organisations, as in some cases the MYP was in fact spying on the two senior institutions.

In 1968, for instance, the MYP acquired a patrol boat, launched on Lake Malawi at a time when the army had no naval units. Two years later in 1970, the MYP received its first aircraft, with three of its cadres receiving qualifying wings during an elaborate ceremony conducted in the commercial city of Blantyre. Again this was significant as the Malawi army continued to be commanded by its white colonial officers and lacked the new integral units that were mushrooming around the MYP. Owing to its impressive equipment, training, salaries and discipline, the MYP began to attract a better type of recruit, drawn from the schoolteachers and better-educated classes.

The development of the MYP previously under the auspices of an army reserve had been phenomenal, outstripping the strength and capacity of the standing army. At its height, given its widespread representation in the majority of the districts and almost unlimited but unaccountable budgeting, the militia rose to over 6,000 strong, or the equivalent of two brigades, appropriately organised around a navy and an equally correctly equipped air wing. This was a level that had never been achieved by the Malawi army at any time since its inception.

LIMITED REVERSAL OF MYP AND BENEFITS TO THE MALAWI ARMY, 1972–EARLY 1980s

For reasons that are not yet clear, the early 1970s witnessed a decline of the MYP against the strengthening of the MCP in a development that, almost by default, allowed the partial rehabilitation and growth of the

Malawi army. This short-lived period began in 1972, when on 14 May, during a ceremonial parade in recognition of the president's birthday, Dr Banda announced the promotion to brigadier and appointment of Lt Col Matewere as the new army commander of the Malawi army. This announcement marked the first change in the command of the army since independence.

Matewere's tenure was to last for eight years, until he was retired on 9 April 1980. However, any notions of accelerated Africanisation were tempered with the appointment of the outgoing commander, Brig Clements, as advisor to the president. The events in the army were also related to what was taking place in the civil service in which, during the same year, the first African secretary to the president and cabinet had been appointed in January, soon followed by the first African attorney general.

The secondment of the African commander soon benefited from events related to international and regional security developments, when on 24 May a South African Airways plane from Salisbury (Harare) was hijacked and flown to the Malawi city of Blantyre. On the 26th, a contingent from the army around the plane fired on the hijackers who immediately surrendered, allowing the evacuation and entry of the South African Defence Force to take over the process. At the end of the same day, life President Dr Banda, while speaking on public radio in glowing terms on the role of the military, announced the further promotion of Matewere to major general. This development heralded the accelerated rehabilitation of the army.

The results were not slow in coming. In 1973 there was a discernable but limited disarmament of the MYP. During the next five years until 1978, the MYP lost its marine unit to the army as well as the helicopter aviation section that was transferred to the army, while the small aircraft wing was handed to the police.

This period was also characterised by important geo-political changes in Southern Africa with Mozambique's independence in 1975 and that of Zimbabwe's five years later. This left Malawi's foreign policy with the colonial and pariah states in difficulties. However, Dr Banda did not abandon his stance and continued to interact with the proxy forces of Renamo that were now based in South Africa from their former bases in Rhodesia and Portuguese East Africa.¹⁹

Despite this policy obstinacy, Malawi found itself forced to consider the demands made by her now independent neighbours, given her landlocked geographic position.

THE MOZAMBIQUE CHALLENGE 1987–1992

The events surrounding the civil war in Mozambique soon drew all the neighbouring states into that conflict. While apartheid South Africa was aiding and abetting Renamo, Zimbabwe, Tanzania, Zambia and Botswana provided military support in different forms to the government of Frelimo. Malawi appeared again to be the odd man out, providing covert support to Renamo.

The objective of offering support to Renamo by the Malawi president was not altruistic: Banda had visions of a Greater Maravi, with claims in both the north from Tanzania and southern part with Mozambique. While President Julius Nyerere had refused to entertain Banda's territorial claims outright, Banda had still hoped this could be achieved in the south. Consequently, from 1966, at the height of the internal squabbles, Banda had deployed the MYP to patrol the border with Mozambique, collaborating with the colonial power in Portugal and the governor in Lorenzo Marques (now Maputo,) as well as with a proxy rival nationalist movement, the National Union of Rombezia led by Amos Sumane, with the aim of creating a pro-Malawi, black-controlled state in northern Mozambique. The secret operation was code-named 'Malawi II'.

During the post 1980s, Malawi's hitherto covert operation was forced to more overt levels, especially during the period 1982–86 by South Africa's increased support for Renamo, most of it now channelled through Malawi in order to avoid Russian military support and the violation of Mozambican territorial integrity that drew condemnation from the international community.

South African military support for Renamo now took the form of supplying weapons and equipment to the MYP, air-freighted to Lilongwe, further reviving the fortunes of the militia force that was on the wane during the end of the 1970s. (Lilongwe had been Dr Banda's choice of capital. Soon after independence he announced the move from Blantyre to the new centrally located capital that was then built from scratch by funds received mostly from South Africa.)

The MYP received a new lifeline, thanks to apartheid South Africa's offensive military strategy. Once the equipment landed at Lilongwe, trusted cadres from the "MYP delivered the equipment and weaponry to Renamo agents for transmission and distribution in the districts of Angonia and Tete in the west, Mulanje and Nyasha in the east."²⁰

It is conceivable that although this was a conduit, some of the equipment did remain in the hands of the MYP in order to maintain the

charade, as well as its capacity against other security institutions in Malawi. If this is taken into account, then Dr Banda's actual military expenditure becomes almost impossible to measure and ascertain as a consequence of his links with former colonial powers.

Since the northern territory of Mozambique adjacent to Malawi was also part of the Renamo stronghold, refugees from the area crossed into Malawi, many of them encouraged by the rebel movement. Renamo continued to be active among the refugee community in Malawi, "with the assistance and blessings of the MYP top leadership and Dr Banda's Privy Council".²¹

The impact of the destabilisation of Renamo and South Africa's 'Total Strategy', which sought to destroy infrastructure in the neighbouring states perceived to be assisting its own adversaries in the African National Congress (ANC), was devastating throughout Southern Africa. Millions of Mozambicans were internally displaced or became refugees in neighbouring states. All surrounding states with Mozambique, including Swaziland, South Africa, Zimbabwe and Malawi, were each holding thousands or millions of Mozambicans.²² In 1986, following the death of Mozambican President Samora Machel, Malawi was forced to sign an agreement with Mozambique to jointly safeguard its import and export route through the port city of Nacala to Nayuchi. While Dr Banda continued his relations with Renamo, also now supported by Kenya, he instructed the regular army to deploy with Frelimo.

The first external deployment of the Malawi army into Mozambique became an eye opener. Sharing experiences, information and intelligence with the *Forces Armadas de Mozambique* (FAM), officers and men from Malawi discovered the covert participation of the MYP in the Mozambican conflict. Malawian Army Commander and Commanding Officer, Gen Melvin Khanga, at the helm from 1982–92, was under pressure from his juniors to confront the president and his right hand man, John Tembo, on what they had discovered, including suffering losses at the hands of MYP collaborators with Renmao in the Mozambican theatre.

Quite correctly, Phiri asserts that the seeds to dismantle the MYP by the Malawi army received further impetus as a result of its experience in the Mozambique civil war.²³

Owing to the complexity of the inheritance of the MYP by external interests, Dr Banda had lost complete control over the agenda 'his security' apparatus was now following in an expanded Southern Africa after the 1980s.

It was during this period of the late 1980s that international opinion also changed, putting pressure on Pretoria to abandon apartheid and the support of its proxies. From 1989, when President De Klerk took office, the regional security situation started to change, and with it the loss of external supporters for Renamo, the MYP and the Malawi government. By 1990, following the release of Nelson Mandela in February of that year, even the peace process in Mozambique had begun to take a turn for the better with the first protocols leading to the Rome Treaty of 1992 signed in 1991.

However, in a development that reflected the close relationship that had existed between the MYP/MCP and Renamo, Banda's right hand man John Tembo was in attendance besides Renamo during the talks in Rome. In Malawi itself, political de-regulation was on the cards after the international community, donors, civil society and churches began to agitate for the removal of the one-party state system and Banda's life presidency. A referendum was soon held in 1993, and the electorate overwhelmingly voted for multiparty politics and the setting up of a national consultative council to begin the process of drafting a new constitution and organising elections. This development drastically changed the political terrain, cutting the ground from Banda's previous political dominance supported by the MYP.

THE END OF THE MYP

Operation Bwezani (literally, 'give back' in Nyanja) was about the violent hunting down, disarming and summary disbandment of the MYP by the Malawi army from 3–21 December 1993. The attacks followed the 1 December 1993 deliberate attack by Pioneers who shot and killed two soldiers in Mzuzu following a bar brawl. Given the general loss of prestige and standing, as well as diminishing political authority in line with Banda's curbed powers since 1991, the pent-up frustration that the army held against the MYP burst into the open. Early in the morning of 3 December, the army launched an attack on the MYP headquarters, located near the ruling MCP headquarters. Dr Banda also made an announcement on state radio, calling on the MYP not to resist and confirming that the disbandment of the MYP called for by the National Consultative Council had begun.

Once the army junior officers and enlisted men started moving against the MYP cadres, they were surprised by the associated public approval that soon fed the army action into a frenzy. The widespread MYP

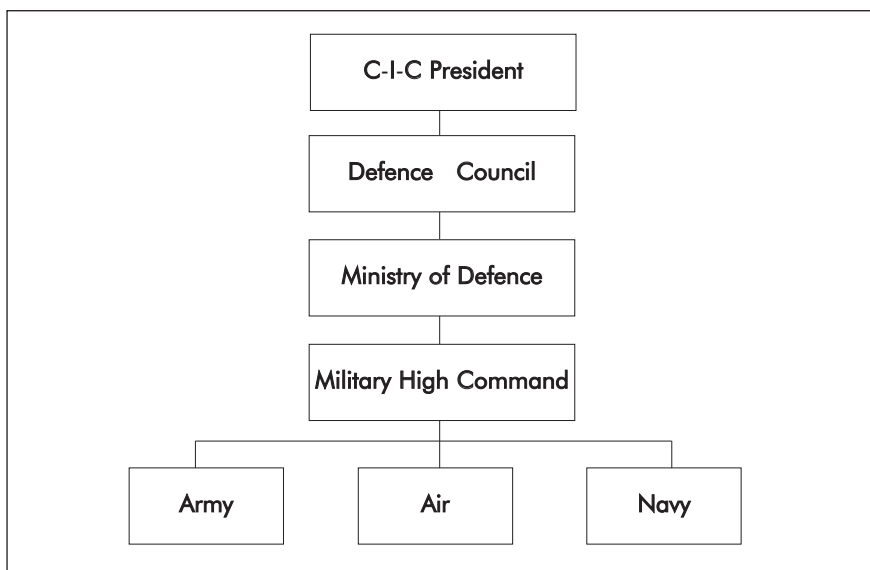
training camps and barracks were literally razed to the ground, bombarded, vandalised and looted, while cadres were chased, disarmed and summarily disbanded. Shocked and frightened MYP cadres surrendered, abandoned posts and uniforms and went into hiding either at home or fled the country into neighbouring Renamo-controlled areas in Mozambique.

Operation Bwezani was complete by the end of the month, although pockets of perceived insecurity and unaccounted for arms remained. Its conclusion marked the end of a generation of military stagnation and mismanagement that had stymied any efforts to develop the standing army.

POST-1994 MULTIPARTY POLITICS AND THE ARMED FORCES

Malawi's first post-Banda elections were held in May 1994 and brought into power the United Democratic Front (UDF), a month after a similar exercise in South Africa had brought in the ANC as a dominant partner in the new coalition government. This provided a fresh and new era for the Malawian armed forces. The passing of a new constitution,

Figure 2: New structure of the armed forces



completed on 18 May 1995, soon followed the elections. The new constitution now provides for the new defence and police acts that have since guided security and defence policy in the country.

A year after coming to power, the government of President Bakili Muluzi, through his minister of defence, proposed the formulation of a new defence policy that would provide the architecture around which the military would operate. Other challenges during the second coming of Malawian independence included financing the military while paying attention to a balanced budget, growth and development. A new structure was put into place, as reflected in Figure 2.

Political power and security policy was also distributed in various institutions, such as the National Security Council, chaired by the president with a membership comprising the ministers of foreign, defence, home affairs, finance and the chief of the defence forces. The council is responsible for all security matters feeding directly into cabinet. Implementation was made the preserve of the National Command Authority (NCA) all supported by the National Intelligence Organisation, composed of heads of intelligence, the police, army and any other duly appointed civilian(s).

Table 1 partly reflects the manpower levels of the army under the new Defence Policy of the 1990s once its previous rival, the MYP, had been disposed of.

A steady and increasing troop level, associated with the country's involvement in Mozambique and the decline of the MYP, was registered between 1990 and 1993. Following the destruction of the MYP at the end of 1993, the Malawi army reached its highest level of manpower

Table 1: Force levels, 1990–99

Year	Force level
1990	7 000
1991	8 000
1992	10 000
1993	10 000
1994	10 000
1995	8 000
1996	10 000
1997	5 000
1998	5 000
1999	5 000

since inception. However, the realities of a stagnating economy and conclusions drawn from the 1995 defence review process witnessed a sharp decline in the enlisted numbers. The decision to cut back on the number of forces when the defence review was implemented in late 1996–97 resulted in as many as half of the force being rapidly demobilised. In the end, the strength of the army settled at just below two conventional brigades, organised around the concept of a combat team that enjoys integral support arms, including air and limited naval assets.

The overt security sector reform following free and fair elections finally won the country international recognition and removed the same from the pariah pedestal that Dr Banda had placed the nation. In 1994 a series of invitations were extended to Malawi to participate in United Nations–sanctioned peacekeeping missions on the continent and beyond. Following this development, the country's soldiers have seen service in Rwanda, Angola, Kosovo, Malagasy and the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Given its new foreign policy that is in line with the aspirations of SADC, the country's units participated in regional security exercises, including 'Blue Hungwe' in Zimbabwe in April 1997 and the subsequent 'Blue Crane' in South Africa in 1999, as well as the recent similarly French-supported military exercise in Tanzania, 'Blue Tanzanite'. The engagement in the military exercises was a signal that the process of rehabilitation of Malawi's military was now a reality, both from an internal policy perspective as well as reciprocity by its neighbours. It was in this spirit that Malawi was allowed into the structures of SADC, as part of the Inter-State Defence and Security Committee (ISDSC) and its sub-committees. In September 1996, Malawi hosted its first ISDSC meeting, demonstrating complete regional rehabilitation.

The country has also been able to engage on the international level in military matters without upsetting local or regional sensibilities, as was the case during the 30-year rule of Dr Banda. To this end, Malawi has engaged in mature and fruitful military relations with the US initiative called the African Crisis Response Initiative, as well as participating in the French version of Reinforcement of African Military Capacities (RECOMP).

CURSORY ASSESSMENT OF MILITARY EXPENDITURE

As has been made clear during the Banda era of 1964 until 1993, military expenditure was resourced from a variety of sources largely as

a result of the country's policies that identified with international pariah states. In-kind and direct cash injections to the then preferred security structure, the MYP, by such countries as Taiwan, Israel, South Africa and Portugal, amounted to millions. This included helicopters and naval boats, most of which remains undeclared and is almost impossible to cost at this stage. Meanwhile, military expenditure after 1994 has been readily available.

On analysing these figures, several points need to be raised regarding military expenditure in Malawi over the past 40 years. The first is to understand that Malawi has traditionally been a poor country, made to export its labour during the colonial era to its more prosperous neighbours, with extensive mines such as the Copperbelt in the then Northern Rhodesia; gold, coal and other commodities in Southern Rhodesia; and labour was even recruited on the Transvaal gold mines in South Africa. This trend continued in the post-colonial era, with Malawi included in Africa's 38 highly-indebted poor countries under the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank programme—86% of wage earners in Malawi are employed by the volatile agricultural sector dominated by tobacco and tea exports, both of which have now been in decline.

In this context there was therefore little surplus available for military expenditure, and what was available was not necessarily significant. Taking an average of the 17 years depicted in Table 2, and what is known by outside organisations, Malawi is thought to have spent no more than US\$205.3 million—an average of US\$14.66 million a year—working out at 0.625% of gross domestic product (GDP). Taking the arguments for states to keep to the 1.5% of GDP military expenditure put forward by the UN, IMF, World Bank and others, Malawi's military expenditure has been consistently less than half the recommended figure.

More interesting is how and on whom this money has been spent. In the first phase after independence (1964–1980)—now referred to as the Banda era—military expenditure was allocated exclusively to the MYP at the expense of the stagnant Malawi army. This reserve had ostensibly become the standing army, and was over 6,000-strong at its height. The MYP had dominant security policy, was close to the life president and was the exclusive recipient of equipment, cash and training by the cited pariah nations. The generous funding resulted in the establishment of barracks for the MYP in the 24 districts and increased cadres drawn from the most educated elite of society. Before long, the MYP was equipped with helicopters, aircraft and patrol boats launched on Lake

Table 2: Malawi's military budget and expenditure, 1988–2004

Year	US\$ (million)	Kwacha (million)	% of GDP
1988	15.9	51.7	1.5
1989	17.2	62.9	1.5
1990	16.2	66.4	1.3
1991	14.4	66.5	1.1
1992	16.0	90.9	1.4
1993	16.2	113	1.3
1994	15.8	149	1.5
1995	9.8	169	0.8
1996	13.0	309	0.8
1997	16.7	434	1.0
1998	13.4	450	0.8
1999	13.0	635	0.8
2000	14.5	916	0.9
2001	13.2	1 021	0.8
2002	9.5	—	0.76 ²⁴
2003	No figs avail	—	
2004 ²⁵	11.1	—	0.7%

Source: Swedish International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI),
http://www.first.sipri.or/non_first/result_milex.php?send (30 July 2005).

Malawi—assets that were beyond both the standing army and the police. It is virtually impossible to quantify Malawi's actual military expenditure during this early phase of the country's military history.

The expenditure trend, however, changed towards the late 1980s when the assets referred to above were handed over to the army and police. This represented the second phase. This period was marked by Mozambique's independence in 1975, soon followed by that of Zimbabwe in 1980. After this, there was an obvious ratcheting up of military support to Renamo and other proxy forces in support of apartheid South Africa's military Total Strategy, which also included the destabilisation of the Southern African region.

At the time, although Malawi's forces were split between those formally working with Mozambique's FAM, and the MYP continuing its shadowy relationship with Renamo and South Africa, actual policy directing MYP activities appeared to have been taken out of the hands of President Banda. What was happening was that a convenient structure existed in Malawi, previously linked to the presidency. It could not be

denounced and now served external interests. Evidence of this assertion appears in the decline in influence of the MYP noted during 1978–80, later to be repeated in 1987 before the final confirmation in December 1993. In December 1993, at the height of Operation Bwezani, President Banda appeared on national radio and appealed to the MYP cadres not to fight back and to give themselves up to the army. This was unprecedented, although it followed Banda's agreement to opposition demands to disband the MYP, expressed during the negotiations in 1991 before the referendum of early 1993. When Banda made the public call for the MYP to disarm and conform to police orders, this was significant as it took away the basis of the MYP's existence—namely, carrying out instructions as issued by the *Ngwazi*.

Again, the financial support provided during this period is an area that cannot be quantified and may call for separate research. Suffice to say that one of the authors of a key source document used in this discussion, Kings Phiri, testifies to personally seeing weapons and equipment being received surreptitiously at Lilongwe Airport and transported to the districts in MYP hands before part of it was handed over to Renamo.

The final period is after 1994, when the Bretton Woods institutions moved to become part of the regime controlling the Central Bank in managing the budget and military expenditure. While the period coincided with the swift and permanent disarmament and disbandment of the MYP, this did not result in a rapid rise of the Malawi Army. In fact, barely three years after the new multiparty government was established, the military force level was slashed by 50% to 5,000 troops, representing a single brigade with key units of the navy, an integral air wing, training and logistics. Expenditure during the new era has since dropped to just below US\$12 million. Meanwhile, the internal role of the army has receded, except for emergency and disaster relief, leaving the army fully integrated overseas in peacekeeping missions as well as regionally within SADC.

CONCLUSION

Although Malawi now boasts three branches of the military within the army, composed of an under-strength infantry brigade size, integral air and naval wings, supported by a police force and a paramilitary mobile force unit, this development belies the difficulties faced by this institution during President Banda's 30-year rule. Banda's legacy left an

imprint on the way the evolution of the Malawian defence force developed, making the force unique in the region.

We can isolate at least three distinct reasons for the unique development of the Malawi army soon after decolonisation in 1964. The first was the internal political rupture following the cabinet crisis in August 1964, which culminated in a number of the former cabinet members taking up arms to try and topple Dr Banda. Banda responded by side-stepping the existing and inherited colonial army and substituting this with the party-controlled MYP. In effect, from 1967, the army was relegated to a reserve while the MYP assumed a more dominant security role.

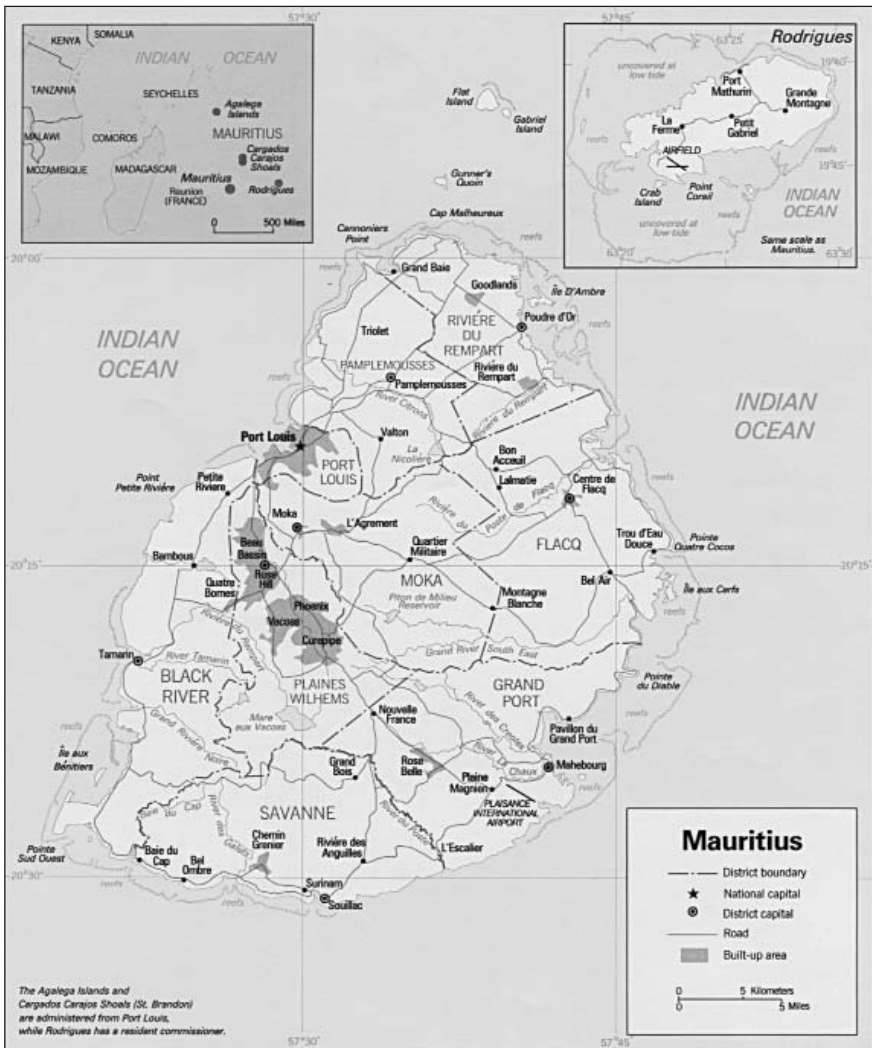
Second, was Banda's unique foreign policy in independent Southern Africa—it was the only country to actively pursue relations with former colonialists, much to the chagrin of the OAU and liberation movements in the region. This posture was to continue until 1994 when Banda was voted from office.

Finally, the Malawi army's unique development has been influenced by the political situation in the post-Banda era in which it has forged new relations in SADC, within the UN peacekeeping missions, and has played an expanded internal role, providing disaster relief and management in the absence of a competing security structure.

NOTES

- * I wish to acknowledge and thank the assistance provided by Odilile Lindiwe Onu and her internet search skills on this chapter.
- 1 CIA World Fact Book - Malawi, <<http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/mi.html>> (28 July 2005), p 1.
 - 2 M Mutonya & T H Parsons, KiKAR: A Swahili variety in Kenya's colonial army, *Journal of African & Afro-American Studies*, 25, 2004, p 113.
 - 3 E I Mandiza, Civil-military relations in Malawi: An historical perspective, in R Williams et al (eds), *Ourselves to know*, Institute for Security Studies, Pretoria, 2003, p 110.
 - 4 Ibid, p 112.
 - 5 See M Rupiya, *Development of Southern Rhodesia Armed Forces from the 1926 Defence Act to the dissolution of federation in 1963*, unpublished PhD thesis, University of Zimbabwe, 2002, pp 156-165.
 - 6 Federal Defence Act 1955 and repealed in December 1961 when the cessation of the federation was announced, leading to constitutional talks with Britain. See Rupiya, op cit, p 163. The Federal Defence Council and the related structures were answerable to the local colonial governments and ultimately to the Colonial and Foreign Office in London.
 - 7 The Central African Command was organised around military districts with the headquarters in the capital, Salisbury, headed by a brigadier.
 - 8 Commanding officer of military district whose duties included being defence/security adviser to the governor.
 - 9 R Welensky, *Welensky's 4000 days: The life and death of the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland*, Collins, London, 1964, p 127.
 - 10 Ibid, pp 84-85.
 - 11 Some of the leaders included D K Chisiza, described by Welensky as "immoderate", and his close ally Chipembere, as well as Chief Kuntaja. Ibid, p 97.
 - 12 Mandiza, op cit, p 117.
 - 13 K M Phiri, A case of revolutionary change in contemporary Malawi: The Malawi army and the disarming of the Malawi Young Pioneers, *Journal of Peace, Conflict and Military Studies* 1(1), <www.uz.ac.zw/unitscds-vol1No1.article3.html>, p 1.
 - 14 P Stiff, *The silent war: South African recce operations 1969-1994*, Galago, 1999, pp 386-7.
 - 15 Mandiza, op cit, p 119.
 - 16 Phiri, op cit, p 11.
 - 17 Mandiza, op cit.
 - 18 Phiri, op cit.
 - 19 D Martin & P Johnson, *Destructive engagement*, James Currey, 1985, pp 21-23; Stiff, op cit, pp 91, 386-387.
 - 20 Phiri, op cit, p 13.
 - 21 Ibid, p 12.
 - 22 W Finnegan, *A complicated war: The harrowing of Mozambique*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1992, pp 205-227.

- 23 Phiri, op cit.
- 24 Military of Malawi - Facts, Info, and Encyclopaedia, <http://www.absoluteastronomy.com/encyclopedia/m/mi/military_of_malawi.htm> (25 July 2005).
- 25 CIA - The World Factbook, op cit, p 10.



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