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CIVIL-MILITARY RELATIONS IN MALAWI: HISTORICAL CONTEXT AND CONTEMPORARY DILEMMAS

Note: A version of this paper was prepared for the Centre for Conflict Resolution, University of Cape Town, as a Working Paper (1997). To my knowledge, this working paper was never actually published.

AJE Charman[1]

Unlike most southern African post-colonial military institutions, the Malawi Army had not, prior to entering the Mozambican civil war in 1986, captured much international attention. Since independence in 1964, it had been positioned on the margins within the state security establishment, kept numerically 'small' and denied significant investment in training and modern weaponry. By contrast, the ruling Malawi Congress Party's para-military organisation, the Malawi Young Pioneers (MYP), was institutionalised and afforded extra-ordinary powers within the security establishment. From the mid 1980s, the army was moved strategically closer to the centre stage occupied by the MYP and security police. This paper will argue that this shift was initiated partly in response to the changing regional geo-political dynamics after the establishment of the SADCC in 1980, but was also a move by President H K Banda to counteract powerful elements within the ruling party who had launched an internal struggle to succeed his rule.

By 1992 this re-alignment was geared up. As the political conflict surrounding the democratic reform process intensified, President Banda looked to the army to maintain order. Malawians themselves began to view the army as the one institution in the state security establishment that would respect human rights. In response to civic concerns, soldiers mutinied in December 1993 and launched Operation Bwenzani against the MYP. The motivation for this action should be understood as a response to

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a situation of 'catastrophic equilibrium within the state'. The soldiers' aim and mission was to disarm (and demobilise) the ruling party's paramilitary structure, including the MYP. After three days of fighting, the soldiers returned to their barracks with their mission successful. The 'third force' obstacle to multiparty political campaigning had now been removed. As a result, the democracy process moved ahead unimpeded, culminating in the 1994 multiparty elections, which brought a change in government, and the founding of a new constitutional order based on international principles of good governance and respect for human rights.

This paper presents a study of civil-military relations in Malawi, looking at both the historical context and contemporary dilemmas. It seeks to answer three principal historical questions. Firstly, what was the impact of the legacy of colonial military organisation on the form and function of the post-independent army? Secondly, why was the Malawi army kept numerically 'small' and technologically poorly equipped when investment was channelled into para-military structures, notably the Police Mobile Force and the MYP? Thirdly, why did the army gain in stature from the mid 1980s, capturing the centre stage in 1993, and how does this help our understanding of Operation 'Bwenzani'. The paper, moreover, attempts to address the most important contemporary dilemma facing civil-military relations in Malawi, that is how can civilian influence over the military, made possible under the new constitution of 1994, be strengthened and translated into the supremacy of civilian control? Additionally, the paper examines some recent civil-military tensions and relates these to the issue of civilian control.

Section One: The colonial militarisation legacy

1.1. The Kings African Rifles (KAR)

Under the Nyasaland colonial administration, the local military establishment was inextricably shaped on two fronts. Internally, its role was to pacify indigenous opposition and enforce compliance with colonial rule. Externally, its function was to assist in the maintenance of British colonial hegemony in other British colonies, a task that required both fighting men and labour.

The military machine needed for internal pacification in the late nineteenth century predated the organisation of British Central African soldiers in a formation representative of discipline, rank and hierarchical command. These armed forces, characteristically, were hastily assembled in an ad hoc fashion and relied as much on indigenous military skill as on European weaponry. They came into existence under the leadership of settlers and entrepreneurs (not incidentally, as many early colonists had military backgrounds) to conduct war against slavers, defiant chiefdoms, tax defaulters and almost any grouping against whom the agents stood opposed.[2] Despite the relative swiftness of these armies' military achievements, inspired by the reward of bounty, the colonial authorities saw the need to institutionalise the military within the state structure. The organisational form of the colonial military was set out as early as the 1890s with the founding of the Central African Rifles, a formation initially staffed with Indian troops.

The 1st and 2nd Battalions of the Kings African Rifles (KAR), which evolved in 1901, brought a specific colonial form to the European military machine.[3] Its most outstanding feature was the replication of British East and Central African administrative authority (and, similarly, operational procedure) in military uniform. The KAR amalgamated the region's disparate African Rifles under a tight command structure comprising a

[2] There are many secondary sources that provide details about these internal military pacification activities. See McCracken (1977).
[3] Moyse-Bartlett's (1956) semi-official history of the KAR is the most comprehensive study of the African Rifles. See also Shepperson (1960).

small-handful of British regimental officers, chosen as men capable of acting militarily 'on the spot', while African recruitment was carefully undertaken to ensure compatibility with the ethic categorisation of 'indirect rule'. The African recruit, moreover, was prized not for his hereditary fighting capabilities (indeed many of the most militarised ethnic groups in the region, such as the Ngoni, were, initially, deliberately excluded) but rather for his unflinching ability to remain loyal to command. As the official Nyasaland Handbook was to report, the African soldier was prized not for the 'implicit confidence' he held in his officers, but because he was 'very amenable to discipline' (Nyasaland Handbook, 1921, p. 258).

Apart from its resemblance to colonial administration, the KAR was seen as the embodiment of British military hegemony over the subjugated East and Central African populations. As Njoloma (1991, p. 1) has noted, the KAR did more than fight wars, they enforced authority, collected taxes, built roads and communication networks, and undertook surveys. But the Rifles' impact was even more profound in cultural terms. [4] As a state institution, they provided a model of regimented order, whose primary characteristics - unity, loyalty, obedience and discipline – would subsequently form the cornerstones upon which the Malawi Congress Party (MCP) strove to build the independent nation.

1.2. The two world wars

At the outbreak of hostilities between Britain and Germany in 1914, the KAR was militarily well prepared to assist the British campaigns in German East Africa (present day Tanzania). The Rifles had already seen

[4] This was noticeable, from early days, in the male *malipenga* (and similarly, *mbeni, mganda,* and *kalela*) dance societies, whose origins derive as a symbolic imitation of the African Rifles' brass band. See Shepperson (1960, p. 27). These societies continue to 'dance' *malipenga* and although their popularity among men has, in some quarters, been overshadowed by games such as football, respect for discipline, rank and hierarchical authorities has remained an enduring attraction to men joining a *malipenga* troop.

active service in Mauritius, Somaliland, Kenya, and the Ashanti Wars on the Gold Coast.

To supply men for the war-effort, the British authorities went on a KAR recruitment drive, overtly aimed at the southern Yao and lakeshore Tonga, ethnic groups from which recruits were readily forthcoming (Page, M.E., 1978, p. 88). A total of 18 920 men subsequently saw active service with the KAR. Yet the campaign depended less on soldiers than on porters. Thousands of labourers were required as carriers for military portage. Unable to obtain the necessary work force, the Protectorate authorities resorted to coercive colonial labour recruitment techniques, arresting tax defaulters who were then press-ganged into service and forcing chiefs to provide labour. It is estimated that approximately 257 250 men were recruited as carriers through these methods (Nyasaland Handbook 1921, p. 271). As an expression of their hatred towards enforced labour recruitment, the carriers (*tenga-tenga*) called the East African campaign *'the war of thangata*' (McCracken, 1986, p. 142; see also, Nyasaland Handbook, 1921, p. 271).

The loyalty and fighting prowess of the KAR soldiers during the war of '*thangata*' gave the authorities sufficient reason to justify its continued military strength after the Armistice of 1918. The potential future value of the KAR was recognised by a number of notable military strategists, including the South African leader General Smuts. Their views reinforced the colonial recruitment preference for the KAR's major ethnic constituents, the Yao, who were now widely regarded as an outstanding 'martial race', particularly well suited to modern European military organisation.[5] With the Rifles future role and function in defending British hegemony justified, post-war recruitment efforts were further tailored to accommodate the comparatively poorly educated southern Yao. The Yao and those recruits passing as Yao would subsequently comprise

approximately half the KAR soldiers during the inter-war years.[6] The creation of an ethnic bulwark of reliable tribesmen within the military establishment, comprising Yao and neighbouring Nyanja peoples, was not, however, simply an expression of 'indirect rule'.[7]

For the Nyasaland authorities, creating ethnic administrative and organisational boundaries strengthened the state's ability to deal with rising African political discontent. During the war, the rebellion led by Rev. John Chilembwe had served to expose the deep dissatisfaction felt among Christian converts and mission graduates with their subservient location in colonial society and restricted career opportunities. Whereas the African elite sought political integration and social advancement, the Yao (an ethnic constituency in which Islam had developed strong roots) were patently more reliable to defend colonial rule against political strife.

The Second World War saw the KAR military machine brought back into combat mode. The Rifles were deployed in North Africa, India and the Far East, where they contributed notably in the Burmese campaign. For those soldiers who fought in these battles, the war would be remembered as '*nkhondo ya tiyi*' (*the war of tea*), a name with a double meaning. Explicitly, the name refers to their experience of the eastern tea-producing lands, yet implicitly, '*nkhondo ya tiyi'* implies that the war, for African recruits, was 'fought in relatively greater comfort' than the gruelling labour required in the East Africa campaign of World War I.[8]

1.3. Nationalist struggle and paramilitary repression

[6] Shepperson (1960, p. 25) warns scholars to recognise the 'frequent askari habit of entering himself in official K.A.R. records under a false tribal designation'.

[7] The bias in military recruiting was similarly replicated in the police through recruiting KAR former soldiers; according to 1926 figures, 91% of police recruits had had some military, and possibly East African war, experience (see McCracken, 1986, p. 142).

[8] For most African soldiers, the war experience would sour upon their return home when confronted with the social adjustment of military demobilisation. The British authorities would contribute little resources (technical or financial) to facilitate African demobilisation.

By the late 1940s, as the Cold-War got underway, the most pressing concern for British colonial rule, having allied itself to American efforts to halt Soviet expansionism, was to maintain the lid on nationalist struggles and proto-revolutionary movements. Accordingly, an Empire wide scheme was initiated in 1949 to prevent communist infiltration of the African nationalist organisations. In Nyasaland, the surveillance and intelligence gathering function of this Cold-War security endeavour was put into the hands of the Security Branch, a semi-autonomous division within the police force. Within a decade, the Security Branch was re-organised along the lines of military intelligence to enhance its surveillance capacity and renamed the Special Branch.

The permanent 1st and 2nd Battalions of the KAR, for their part, were to remain semi-mobilised in order to participate in the Empire war theatre, should their services be deemed necessary in fighting anti-colonial liberation movements. The creation of the Central African Federation in 1953 led to the amalgamation of the region's African military machines, as a result of which a provision was made for a higher non-commissioned African rank, senior to Regimental Sergeant-Major. Shortly after this development, the 2nd Battalion KAR was dispatched to Malaya to assist in the war against Chinese guerrilla fighters.

During the late 1950s and early 1960s the role of the military as potential civil guardians and defenders of colonial authority was eclipsed by the emerging security divisions within the police force. The para-military Police Mobile Force (PMF) brought an organisational form to this security agenda.[9] The PMF unit was staffed with fourteen European officers (some with experience in Palestine) and two hundred 'illiterate' recruits, drawn predominantly from former KAR ranks (thus reflecting the Yao and Nyanja ethnic security bulwark), and who, unlike the regulars, did not receive the five months basic police training. The PMF role was

[9] McCracken (1986, p. 140) is the leading authority on this subject.

simply to provide a 'striking force' against riotous crowds, suppressing political disturbances.

By the late 1950s the PMF had expanded to nine platoons (each 330 strong), stationed at Mzuzu, Lilongwe, and Limbe, with six platoons kept at Zomba, the colonial capital, in reserve. By comparison with the two KAR battalions, the PMF was better equipped and more tightly disciplined. This build-up in the police security apparatus was focused specifically on the Nyasaland nationalist movement, led by the African Congress.

Political agitation began to peak in late 1959 and there were sporadic violent confrontations with the PMF. The Governor of Nyasaland, Robert Armitage, called for military assistance to suppress the growing uprising. Federal Prime Minister, Welensky, ordered detachments of the KAR and the Royal Rhodesian Regiment to be sent to Nyasaland, where they were joined by police reinforcements from Northern Rhodesia and Tanganyika. These forces, through their combined strength, were largely accountable for enforcing the state of emergency on 3 March 1960 after Rhodesian troops shot dead 20 nationalist protestors at Nkhata Bay. Although the Nyasaland battalions of the KAR participated alongside the security forces that imposed this countrywide political crackdown, it emerged not closer to the PMF, but was rather more sidelined.

Malawi gained its independence on 5 July 1964. On that date, the 1st Battalion of the Malawi Rifles was born, commanded by Brigadier T Lewis, a British regimental officer. The President, Dr Banda, assumed the position of Commander-in-Chief, a continuation of the colonial tradition of resting supreme control of the armed forces in the highest political office. Brigadier Lewis' appointment was undoubtedly a compromise to Rhodesia's regional security fears, which the British had sought to defend during the Lancaster House negotiations over the dissolution of the

Central African Federation. The KAR military machine was, otherwise, to undergo no dramatic change in the next two decades. It would remain strategically orientated towards the western stage of the sub-regional Cold-War theatre, potentially capable of fulfilling a role in the anti-Communist affront. But whereas the 1st and 2nd battalions of the KAR had travelled to defend British hegemony throughout the continent, the independent Rifles would not (officially) leave home territory until the mid 1980s.

At this stage it is important to ask, why then did the post-colonial Malawian Government choose to gear its military machine low, especially against the background of intense regional military conflicts? The answer is surely to be found in the country's internal political developments. In understanding this post-colonial military strategy, the starting point must begin with the historical event of the 1964 'Cabinet crisis' and subsequent state security restructuring.

Section Two: Independence

2.1. The 'Cabinet crisis'

A month into independence, a 'Cabinet crises' exposed deep tensions between Dr Banda, leader of the Malawi Congress Party (MCP) and President, and his 'young' Cabinet colleagues over both substantial policy issues (including the country's stance on pan-Africanism) and the President's openly dictatorial leadership style. On foreign policy, for instance, the President opposed developing ties with the People's Republic of China and adopted a conservative, though pragmatic, stance on the issue of Portuguese colonialism. At the 1964 Organisation of African Unity (OAU) meeting, he explained: 'colonial history and the colonial geography make it impossible for me to cut off all relations with Portugal, diplomatic, commercial, cultural and otherwise, because colonial history and colonial

geography have denied [Malawi] a port of its own'. The 'crisis', which then took place on 8 September 1964 at a special Parliamentary session, saw Banda go on the offensive against his disloyal ministers, sacking Bwanausi, Chirwa, Chiume, and Chibambo (Ross 1997, p. 11).

The day after this event, hundreds of protestors (including a significant proportion of civil servants) gathered in Zomba and in support of the dismissed ministers. In response, Dr Banda mobilised a popular defence of his Presidency and historical role in the liberation struggle. In the late stages of the struggle for independence, he had become mythologised as 'Saviour of the Nation' within the MCP structure, thus acquiring a dedicated grassroots support base. With these supporters standing firmly behind him, Dr. Banda unleashed a struggle against his political opponents. The troops in the terror campaign of political suppression that followed came from the newly created Malawi Young Pioneers (MYP), an outgrowth of the Malawi League of Youth. Assisting the repressive PMF (which had remained staffed with European officers), the MYP set about harassing protestors and rounding up detainees.

The strongest opposition towards Dr. Banda came from the followers of Henry Masauko Chipembere, a cabinet minister and a significant political figure from the southern Region, who chose to resign in sympathy with his dismissed colleagues. Chipembere was as a result banished to his hometown, Mangoche, in southern Malawi. From the hills surrounding this town, Chipembere sought to co-ordinate a series of guerrilla confrontations with the security forces, including a successful raid on Mangoche police station, culminating in an attempted insurrection.[10] Chipembere's ill-fated struggle – which failed due to poor strategy and the efforts of the European officers who succeeded in keeping the security forces firmly in support of the President – did not discourage other rebellious challenges. But none would prove as ambitious in scope

[10] The best authority on this event is Short (1974, pp. 227-230).

and as challenging to security force loyalty. Within a year of Chipembere's attempted insurrection, the rebel flame had been largely extinguished, although exiled dissidents continued to plot the President's overthrow. For more than two decades, the security establishment, particularly the police and the MYP, would maintain a vigilant watch on suspected political opponents.

The threat to MCP rule was addressed, strategically, through a restructuring of the inherited security establishment in three areas: first, the Malawi army was to be kept 'small', its ethnic division merely altered in favour of supportive MCP groups (particularly the President's own Chewa people); secondly, the security branch of the police was further developed along the lines established by the Rhodesian Federation and; thirdly, in order to provide a counter-balance to the state security institutions, a para-military structure was established within the ruling MCP (and subsequently institutionalised as part of the state military apparatus) whose members were to be recruited from the militarised sections of the Women's League, the League of Malawi Youth and the Young Pioneers.

2.2. Malawi Young Pioneers (MYP)

The 'cabinet crisis' and insurrectionist events gave the President a political justification to formalise his Party's militarisation strategy. Neither the military nor the police were capable of fulfilling this political role of nation-building; and so the process was centred within MCP structures.

Dr Banda's thoughts on mobilising women and the youth to defend the nation and thus advance the ruling party's ideology were profoundly influenced by his experience of the Ghana Young Pioneers whilst resident in that country. As early as 1962, five young men and four women were

chosen from the youth and women's league structures to attended training in Ghana as 'instructors' (Department of Information, 1969). A year later, a National Youth Movement was launched to enliven the old League of Malawi Youth which had begun organising young radicals and militants five years previously. As a movement to mobilise the youth, it's ideological goals were initially to tackle 'poverty, disease, and ignorance', although these, increasingly, took a back seat to the violent campaign against disunity, disloyalty, ill-discipline, and disobedience.

To train the movement for this offensive, the ruling party accepted an offer from the Israeli Government to provide 'expert advisors on youth education and training' (Department of Information, 1969). The decision in 1963 to embrace Israeli expertise was a clear indicator of the foreign policy orientation that the independent Government would adopt. Assisted by these 'experts', the first Malawi Young Pioneer (MYP) youth leadership course was held in 1964 at Nasawa. The establishment of Young Pioneer training bases in 1965 enabled the original leadership-training course to be transformed into a more comprehensive education programme. Although firmly rooted in political indoctrination, basic training embraced the following subjects: improved methods of agriculture, civics and citizenship, youth leadership, literacy and basic education, rural vocational training, hygiene, first aid and health, whilst for girls, training included 'homecraft'. Between 1964 and 1971, 11 530 boys and 639 girls underwent training, and from the early 1970s onwards approximately 2 000 boys and 150 girls were recruited annually.[11] Officially, the Young Pioneers' Movement was regarded as an 'army for development', spearheading the 'new war on poverty, ignorance and disease'.

The Young Pioneers were fundamentally dissimilar to the league of Youth. As Ross (1997, p. 9) points out, the Pioneers was 'not an organisation of young radicals and intellectuals aiming to ginger up the

[11] Malawi Young Pioneers. Spearhead for Progress (Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, 1972).

party … [It] was a uniformed organisation made up primarily of young people who had failed to climb the educational ladder'. The image of the MYP as a home for school dropouts and the unemployed became internalised amongst a thug element as recognition of their political acceptance within the nationalist movement. The presence of these individuals within the ruling party, however, was not fully endorsed until the aftermath of the 'Cabinet crisis'.

After the 1964-1965 insurrections, President Banda acted swiftly to create a formal role for the MYP within the security establishment. As he explained, the Pioneers were 'not out to persecute anyone, but they are there to see for me, to hear for me, [and] to help the security forces' (Short, 1974, p. 229). Within days of this speech, the Young Pioneers Act was passed, making the movement an official state security organ; several months later, an amendment to the Act prohibited the police from arresting a Young Pioneer without consulting the cadre's district commander. By this time, a clear structure in the movement had evolved. The President, as Commander-in-Chief, was its supreme authority, whereas the day-to-day affairs fell to the Commander, a position that, in effect, fell under the centralisation of power within the office of the President and his Cabinet. As a national security institution, a headquarters was established at Limbe, which controlled three regional offices, one for each of the northern, central and southern regions. The regional offices were each headed by an Assistant Joint Commander, under whom responsibility was divided between a Development Officer and a Political Officer. While out in the field, at the settlement schemes and agricultural development sites, a Discipline Officer sought to maintain the Pioneer ethos and adherence to the movement's authoritarian principles.

A central component of the MCP's societal militarisation policy was to instil national acceptance of the ruling party's guiding principles of

unity, loyalty, discipline, and obedience. One aspect of this strategy was the enforcement of Party membership. Failure to display the necessary membership card was a punishable offence, with the Young Pioneers assuming the primary role in policing the 'law' and dealing with offenders. Subservience to the ruling party had to be expressed publicly, through attendance at rallies, display of badges and other Party paraphernalia, and acceptance of the anti-modern cultural ethos forcibly imposed on Malawian society from the early 1970s (see Phiri, 1998, pp. 158-164). Those members of social and religious sects who refused to conform to these norms, in defence of their ideological beliefs, were persecuted systematically. Acting with the President's endorsement, the MYP terrorised the country's Watchtower Movement (Jehovah's Witnesses) between 1967 (when the Witnesses church was outlawed) and the late 1970s. At the height of this purge, in November 1973, approximately 21 000 Jehovah's Witnesses fled from beatings and arrest into Zambia, while in the southern region, a further 35 000 were reported to have crossed the border and taken refuge in Mozambique.[12]

Section Three: The Militarised State

3.1. MCP strategic re-alignments

In a strategy to suppress the Malawi Army, logistically and as an indigenous institution, the force was kept 'small' numerically and European officers retained all senior positions of command until 1970. Only in 1972, with the indigenous army leadership resolutely loyal to the ruling party, was General G Matewere appointed as General Officer Commanding of the Army. The most significant movement of Africans within the force since independence had been in relation to the re-constitution of ethnic divisions, favouring central region tribal groups.

[12] Africa Watch. Where Silence Rules. The Suppression of Dissent in Malawi (1990, pp. 63-67) and Fiedler (1996).

Long serving soldiers in the force and deserving of promotion were sidelined, whilst Chewa and Nyanja officers (including G Matewere and M Khanga) were catapulted into senior positions.[13] Although it is not fully known to what extent the army was re-organised along ethnic lines, an examination of statistics revealing similar changes in the police is illuminating. Between 1960 and 1970, the percentage of Chewa policemen in the force rose from 12.6% to 20.5%, whereas the percentage of Yao fell from 14% to 10% (McCracken, 1986, p. 144).[14]

President Banda kept 'his small army' subordinate, though not insignificant, throughout the 1970s and 1980s whilst the security police and the MYP were steadily militarised and enlarged (Lwanda, 1993, p. 133). The army's primary role, domestically, was to provide a parade-ground exhibition of the four cornerstones of MCP rule, that is, unity, loyalty, obedience, and discipline. In return, the soldiers were kept notably well fed, issued with generous food rations comprising maize and other household staples.

As a concomitant strategy to army marginalisation, the MCP transformed the militarised section of the Pioneers into a formidable para-military strike force. The para-military MYP were given specialised training in armed combat and weaponry, while select candidates were sent abroad (for example, to Israel and Taiwan) to further their military expertise. The initial justification for MYP military instruction was to provide graduates for the army and police, and thus further extend the ruling party's influence into the armed forces. However, the Pioneer para-militaries grew steadily and autonomous from these institutions. Details of its development are still sketchy and largely clouded in secrecy; to the extent that government funding was disguised under 'General Services'.

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[13] This process was (later) accompanied by purges. See Lwanda (1993, p. 113).

[14] It must be said, however, that these changes in ethnic composition are partly attributable to the development of the Central region, which expanded economically due to the tobacco industry and the relocation of administration to Lilongwe.

Nonetheless, as early as 1970 a known para-military MYP division had come into existence, with weapons and ammunition stockpiled.[15]

3.2. Malawi's expansionist ambitions

In the aftermath of the 1964 'Cabinet crisis' President Banda's views towards the OAU's foreign policy directives on Portuguese colonialism and settler colonial independence hardened. He rejected closer ties with Tanzania, rejected the proposal to develop a lakeshore port on the Tanzanian shoreline of Lake Malawi with sea-rail connections, and would not agree to invest in the Tanzam railway project.[16] President Banda was understandably weary of alienating the economic and militarily powerful white settler governments in Salisbury and Pretoria, especially in view of his determination to maintain an alliance with a western anti-Communist support base. As reward for this diplomatic stance, the settler regimes in Rhodesia and South Africa provided his government with financial aid and access to Mozambique ports. But President Banda had a more sinister foreign policy intention in rejecting closer ties with neighbouring African countries.

At the 1964 OAU Cairo meeting, cited above, Dr. Banda drew attention to the profound economic disability bequeathed on many of the new African nation states due to their landlocked position. The pan-Africanist solution to this colonial legacy, expounded at the meeting, was to forge greater African economic and political unity. But to President Banda, the problem lay in the arbitrariness of colonial boundaries and the solution, therefore, required the reconstitution of these national boundaries. In order to give his ideas an African credence, he propounded the redrafting of colonial boundaries in accordance with pre-colonial state formations. Within Malawian domestic politics, the President's thoughts

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[15] Personal Communication, former MYP para-military.

[16] In this regard, Dr. Banda's views shifted considerably after his return home in 1959; then, he had expressed support for a northern federation, comprising Nyasaland, Tanganyika, and Northern Rhodesia.

on Malawi territorial expansion emerged as successive re-interpretations of his political 'dreams' or 'visions' experienced whilst in detention in Gweru prison during the 1959 state of emergency. These policy formulating 'dreams' (including 'dreams' of the formation of the University and the relocation of the capital from Zomba to Lilongwe) were used ideologically within the MCP to map-out its strategy of nation-building (see Lwanda, 1993, pp. 218-219). President Banda's territorial ambitions were thereby cast as a 'dream' of establishing an enlarged Malawi state stretching eastwards to the Mozambique coastline, vaguely resembling the 17th century Maravi confederacy.

The first state initiatives towards the realisation of this 'dream' are noticeable in Malawi involvement in the Frelimo (Mozambican Liberation Front) armed anti-colonial struggle.[17] Frelimo had launched a guerrilla war against the Portuguese authorities in northern Mozambique in 1964. During the next decade the Malawian government played a shadowy diplomatic role in this struggle. The Malawian leadership, which cautiously entertained its strategic options, tried to maintain a political stake in both armed camps.

In shaping his relations with the Portuguese, President Banda looked to the opportunities for fulfilling his expansionist 'dream' through involvement in the Portuguese counter-insurgency activities. As early as 1965 he began political dealings with prominent Portuguese businessmen (supposedly representing President Salazar) who were linked directly to the counter-insurgency strategy, convincing Frelimo sympathisers to believe that the Malawian leader had entered into a security pact. For

[17] Malawian involvement in the Mozambican independence struggle was initially directed through the Christian Service Committee (CSC) as assistance to the refugee crisis. With the southern border region soon regarded as posing a natural security threat – having been identified as 'both a receiving area for refugees as well as a former centre for guerrilla activity for local political dissidents against the government' – the government saw the CSC interventions as providing a spring board for MCP / MYP political surveillance. The from 1967, when Party security technocrats began to contemplate more serious para-military and cross border activities, the CSC projects were terminated and their schemes turned into MYP bases. See Mein (1972).

assisting the Portuguese military against the Frelimo guerrillas, so it was rumoured, Malawi would acquire in exchange her long desired corridor to the sea. The truth of these secret diplomatic dealings is still not known. Nonetheless as a partial compromise, in 1969 Malawi obtained a railway line through Nampula province from the border at Nayuchi to the coast at Nacala, funded with South African capital (Hanlon, 1986, p.131).

3.3. Rombezia

On the flip side of the Malawi-Mozambique equation, President Banda and Eduardo Mondlane, Frelimo's popularist leader, had a shared interest in destabilising Portuguese rule. Mondlane desired to shift the armed struggle southward, towards Frelimo's ideological heartland. Despite the opportunity that this presented for collaboration, the Malawian leadership chose instead to exploit the divisions within the Frelimo hierarchy as a means to weaken its influence in northern Mozambique. From 1962 until the assassination of Mondlane in 1969, these internal party conflicts gave the Malawian state several opportunities to subvert Frelimo's liberation goals. Among the offshoot groups to emerge as a consequence, the most serious political rival to Frelimo was Coremo, initially based in Lusaka. In 1968, a splinter group called UNAR developed within the Coremo political nexus. Its headquarters were in Blantyre, Malawi.[18] Backed ideologically, financially, and possibly militarily by the host country, UNAR initiated a struggle for the unification of Rombezia, a territory between the Rovuma and Zambezi Rivers (Vines, 1991, p. 13).

Malawian security involvement in this struggle, dating from the early 1970s, is little known, except financially, where scholars have noted the connections between the government and the ex-Portuguese settler

[18] Other ex-FRELIMO groups to receive Malawian 'sympathy' and 'hospitality' were FUNIPOMO and PAPOMO (Vines, 1991:53).

business-military network which, having set up base in Malawi after 1974, championed this cause. After a decade of low intensity guerrilla activity, UNAR was to re-emerge as PRM – Partido Revolucionario de Mozambique – then becoming Africa Livre, headed by two former Frelimo members, Amos Sumane and Gimo M'Phiri. There is little known about PRM activities, except that armed bandits operating in its name killed sporadically to obtain weapons and loot.

The basic aim of the Rombezia campaign was to develop a counter-revolutionary force to Frelimo. Its main ideological objectives were to win the political hearts of the Mozambican northerners, thereby acquiring their sympathy for a guerrilla struggle to create, through war, an independent state between the Rovuma and Zambezi rivers. As this struggle developed, the Malawian connection, involving high officials in the MCP and MYP structures, grew more active in supporting Africa Livre militarily and logistically (Minter, 1994, 91, 102). Africa Livre was to carry forward the Rombezia struggle from roughly 1976 until 1982, during which time its activities were largely independent of the Renamo (Mozambican National Resistance) struggle. Throughout the 1970s, the Rombezia guerrillas performed poorly in combat, apart from a few minor successes in isolated areas of Zambezia province. Yet in the early 1980s, Africa Livre's increasing success exposed Malawian involvement, prompting bi-lateral security talks between Presidents Banda and Machel. As a result of the pressure that these talks brought upon the Malawian state, its security strategists (working in partnership with Portuguese ex-settlers) realised that their plans for Rombezia would best succeed if more indirectly linked to the Rhodesian (and subsequently South African) backed Renamo military machine.

3.4. Support for Renamo

Under the Renamo guise, Malawian support for the destabilisation of Mozambique continued until 1986, at which point the continuation of its neo-imperialist initiative threatened to alienate Malawi from the SADCC community, both politically and economically. By this stage its dual political agenda was becoming increasingly non-viable. Membership of SADCC had cost Malawi the destruction of its trade routes through Mozambique, while its support for Renamo was alienating the Banda regime from its neighbours.

At a Front Line States' summit meeting held in Malawi on 11 September 1986, President Banda was confronted by the Mozambican, Zimbabwean, and Zambian leaders – Samora Machel, Robert Mugabe and Kenneth Kaunda respectively - over his country's continued support for the rebels.[19] As a result of this pressure, on the 4 December 1986 the Mozambican and Malawian leaders agreed to set up a security commission. A security pact was signed shortly thereafter. These foreign policy initiatives had a dramatic impact on the Malawian security establishment. Whereas throughout the Rombezia episode, the Malawian army had remained sidelined, with most covert military activities undertaken by the MYP para-militaries, in April 1987 its soldiers were sent into Mozambique to guard the Nacala railway line.

The decision to contribute troops to the Mozambican civil war, while marking the ascendance of the army to a prominent position within the security establishment, did not mean the curtailment of Malawian sympathies for Renamo. The activities of the movement's conservative Christian sympathisers, operating as missionaries within Malawi, for instance, were permitted to continue providing logistical and ideological

[19] It was not long after this meeting that S. Machel was killed in a place crash. In the Malawian press, calls have been made for the country's former security establishment to reveal the 'truth' about possible Malawian involvement in the supposed assassination plot behind his death. See the editorial comment in *Weekend Nation* (27-28 June 1998). See also Phiri and Ross (1998, pp. 334-352)

support (Vines, 1991, p. 58; and Personal Communication, Malawian journalist.

3.5. The South African connection

The relationship between Malawi and South Africa, built upon economic dependence and regional security objectives, was not always as 'close' as the regime's critics have claimed. Hanlon (1986, pp.235-242) has identified three distinct 'phases' in the political relations between the two countries: first, the initial 'close' phase, accompanying Prime Minister BJ Voster's *détente* initiative and the substantial South African capital investments (including soft loans) in infra-structure projects; second, 'a slight cooling' phase, beginning in 1975 after the decision to ban South African mine labour recruitment (to satisfy the tobacco estate demand for migrant labour) and shadowing Malawi's increased involvement in the Rombezia struggle; and a third from the early 1980s, where Malawi took active steps to 'de-link' economically and move towards aligning herself politically with the SADCC member states. In this third phase, Malawi would suffer directly from South African destabilisation efforts, targeted at cutting-off her communication lines with Mozambican ports.

In all three phases, the connection between the Malawian army and the South African security establishment was comparatively 'weak', reflecting the army's marginalised position. Among the formal military ties developed between the two countries, was an agreement, formed in the early 1970s and lasting into the late 1980s, to train Malawian military personnel. South Africa furthermore agreed to build a patrol vessel for use on Lake Malawi, with the Navy training the necessary staff and officers (du Toit, 1992).

The involvement of the South African security establishment with the MYP para-militaries and security police was, by contrast, more

technically and logistically important. The details of this connection are still obscure, apart from knowledge of the frequent meetings and exchanges between prominent security personal. In order to understand the persistence of strong informal security ties between South African and Malawian security technocrats, despite fundamental changes in Malawian foreign policy, one must take account of the internal political succession struggle within the MCP.

From the early 1980s President Banda's control within both the MCP and state structures began to loosen. This change was attributable, not least, to his ailing physical condition and his growing dependence on leading Party officials, including John Tembo and John Ngwiri. As the President began to show signs of weakening his political hold, these individuals begun to intensify the struggle for succession of the MCP and the presidency. An analysis of this internal struggle is beyond the scope of this paper. The relevant implications of this struggle in terms of control over the security establishment were made apparent in the Mwanza murders (see Vines, 1991, pp. 56-57). In 1983, four leading politicians – Dick Matenje, Aaron Gadama, Twaibu Sangala, and David Chiwanga, were murdered after their arrest at a police roadblock. The significance of the Mwanza murders, according to van Donge, was that while decision-making powers were then centralised in the higher echelons of the President's office, the security system gave senior individuals sufficient authority to authorise actions consistent with the MCP agenda without direct recourse to Presidential consent (van Donge, 1998, pp. 47-51).

This case supports the argument that Malawian security technocrats could, and indeed did, entertain various agreements and agendas with South African agents without necessarily conforming to national policy security objectives.[20]

[20] See, for instance, 'Top S.A. police help Banda crackdown', *Weekly Mail* (4/9/1992).

Section Four: Demilitarisation and Democracy

4.1. Army ascendance

In 1980 the army Commander General, Graziano Matewere, retired. At the time, it was widely though that his 'enforced' retirement was a calculated move to prepare the military for combat duties within the sub-region. His successor, General Khanga, a close confident of President Banda, possessed the capability and aggression to fulfil the leadership role of a 'hawk' in the late Cold War atmosphere of southern African geo-politics. Indeed, the shake-up of the Malawi army hierarchy must be seen in the context of Banda's efforts to reposition the military at the heart of his country's security establishment. The primary reason for this move was the new foreign policy orientation that accompanied Malawi's participation in the SADCC. It is also evident, however, that the decision to change the army command was taken to counteract the growing influence of high-ranking Party officials within the police and para-military structures.

The independence of Zimbabwe in 1980 threatened to further tilt the balance of super-power influence towards the Communist powers. To counter-balance these political developments in Southern Africa, the American government sought to foster ties with regimes and political organisations (including insurgency groups) which were not just anti-Communist, but tolerant of the gradual South African reform process. Whereas during the 1970s the American influence both in Malawi and in the sub-region was relatively weak, it expanded significantly during the years of the Reagan administration. In President Banda, this administration found a leader who was supportive of both American policy objectives. He was not only vehemently anti-Communist, but also strongly committed to international business relations with South Africa and the West.

4.2. The Reagan doctrine

From the early 1980s, military ties between America and Malawi were strengthened. Several Malawian officers were sent to the United States for further training, among them Manyozo, Funsani, Kabefu, and Njoloma. These officers, on their return, brought new ideas of specialisation and professionalism to the ranks, contributing individually towards the creation of an army intelligentsia.

The army under General Khanga benefited from a sharp increase in military expenditure, including funds channelled to the intelligence branch under the budgetary heading of 'general expenses'. Aided by increased expenditure during the 1980s, the army expanded its ranks rapidly. Whereas throughout the 1970s the force numbered a little over 2 000 men, in 1987, when the first batch of soldiers (reported at 400) were sent to Mozambique, the figure stood at 5 250, with the junior officer ranks swelling proportionately. This upward trend was to continue until the early 1990s. Between 1991 and 1993, on the eve of the democratic transition, the army increased in size from approximately 7 250 to 10 000 soldiers (Lwanda, 1991, p. 222).

Military expenditure, both in absolute terms and as a percentage of gross domestic product (GDP) rose in real terms during the late 1980s, largely as a result of the deployment of Malawian troops in Mozambique. Since 1989 the level and share of military spending has fluctuated quite significantly (peaking in 1993), but the overall trend has been downwards. In 1997 the level of military spending was over 20% lower than in 1989, while the share of military spending in GDP was 0.8% (the lowest level in nearly 10 years), down from 1.5% in 1988/1989. Malawi's absolute level of military spending, and military burden (as a % of GDP) is significantly less than its neighbours. In 1997 military spending in Zambia was US$59

million (1.7% of GDP), in Mozambique US$72 million (3.9% of GDP), and in Tanzania US$123 million (3.4% of GDP) (see The Military Balance, 1999, p. 304).

Table 1: Military Expenditure, 1988-1997

Figures are in US$ million at constant 1995 prices and exchange rates. Figures in italics are in percentages.

Year	**1988**	**1989**	**1990**	**1991**	**1992**	**1993**	**1994**	**1995**	**1996**	**1997**
Military Expenditure	17.4	18.8	17.7	15.8	17.6	19.1	18.1	14.7	15.1	14.2
% of GDP	*1.5*	*1.5*	*1.3*	*1.1*	*1.4*	*1.3*	*1.5*	*1.0*	*0.9*	*0.8*

Source: SIPRI Yearbook. 1999. *Armaments, Disarmament and International Security*. Oxford University Press: Oxford.

The rapid expansion of the army during the 1980s was propelled on three fronts: first, internally, as a measure to strengthen President Banda's control in the leadership power struggles in the MCP; second, externally, through the army's engagement in the Mozambican civil war; and third internationally, through the United States military ties built under the auspices of the Reagan doctrine.

The military connection with the United States developed further under the Bush Administration. American aid for the Malawi army increased by 63 % between 1989 and 1990, rising from US$1.4 million to US$2.2 million. The dramatic strengthening of military ties with the United States was undertaken in justification of the doctrine of 'constructive engagement'. The argument put before Congress was as follows:

> Malawi has been a reliable partner in helping to bring about peaceful change in southern Africa. Malawi has also been a valuable force for moderation, maintaining a dialogue with South Africa while moving to improve its relations with Mozambique and Zimbabwe. U.S. security assistance helps Malawi to continue this role, and to maintain its current orientation and policies, thus contributing to stability in this sensitive region. Moreover, the security relationship serves as a symbol, to friends and adversaries, of continued U.S. readiness to play an active and constructive role in southern Africa."[21]

The American desire to ensure the continuation of this regional security relationship simultaneously required leadership continuity. The struggle for succession was thus identified as potentially threatening to U.S. interests. As Lwanda (1991, p. 243) has argued, the military influence was seen as an 'important factor' in influencing the outcome of the Presidential succession struggle, at least as a counterweight to the para-military MYP.

4.3. Army dissatisfaction

Under the terms of the 1986 joint security pact between Malawi and Mozambique, the army was committed to protecting the Nacala railway line. Since independence the army had not (officially) left Malawian soil. Its official role in the Mozambican civil war was, however, to prove detrimental to moral. Unable to succeed in 'securing' the corridor from Renamo attack and preventing the loss of lives, many soldiers returned to the country disillusioned. There are no official figures for the numbers of Malawian soldiers who died whilst defending the Nacala railway corridor, although unofficial reports indicate that the figure was unacceptably high

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[21] '*Congressional Presentation for Security Assistance Programs*, Fiscal Year 1991, p 4', cited in Africa Watch. *Where Silence Rules. The Suppression of Dissent in Malawi* (pp. 101).

for public consumption. Officers and soldiers were reportedly angered by continued reports of MCP complacency in Renamo activities, either directly through the security establishment or involving leading Party personalities. By 1993 an estimated 1 500 soldiers were on duty in Mozambique, representing 15% of the total armed forces (The Military Balance, 1992-1993, p. 203).

The democratisation process in Malawi, although by comparison with neighbouring states slow to begin, picked up dramatically during 1992. The most important event in galvanising the clandestine opposition forces into a political movement was the Catholic Bishop's Pastor Letter, read aloud in parishes throughout the country during Lent celebrations. In a an overtly political statement that struck at the heart of the authoritarian Banda regime, the Bishops' declared: 'Nobody should ever have to suffer reprisals for honestly expressing and living up to their convictions, intellectual, religious or political'.[22]

In the many spontaneous acts of political defiance that followed shortly thereafter, rank and file soldiers began to play a noticeable role. Soldiers were reported to have encouraged and participated in the first student demonstration by Catholic students at Chancellor University College, Zomba. Most importantly, the presence of the army was largely absent from the security crackdown unleashed against internal opposition forces. In the political debates that soon captured the public imagination, it was said that the army's neutrality in the political arena had been secured. According to one such report, senior and middle ranking officers were rumoured to have met with President Banda to express their unwillingness to undertake security policing duties.

In acknowledgement of the army's neutral role in the democracy struggle, the forces were accorded the freedom of Lilongwe in November

[22] Living our faith, Pastoral Letter of the Catholic Bishops of Malawi, Lent 1992.

1993. At the ceremony, the City Mayor declared: "citizens now mix freely with the soldiers and they feel safe and secure in their presence.'"[23]

For many citizens, as Newell (1995, p. 165) has argued, the army was the one national security institution totally independent of the MCP (see also Lwanda, 1991, p. 222). The Party influence within the army, although still important, had weakened considerably under Army Commander General Khanga. He had personally resisted attempts to involve the army in the succession struggle, having refused to support Tembo's appointment to Party leadership in February 1992 when the President took a sabbatical. Due to ill health his guiding role was short lived and he resigned in June 1992 (Lwanda. 1991, p. 290). Thereafter the army was left devoid of strong and respected leadership, divided internally between the MCP strongmen, Major-Generals Liabunya and Manyozo, and the rising professional officer corps and junior ranks.

It was against this background, turmoil in army leadership and disgruntlement among the rank and file, that operation Bwenzani must be understood.

4.4. Operation Bwenzani

Operation Bwezani, or 'Chitedze', as it was also known, was triggered by the shooting of three soldiers by MYP cadres in Mzuzu on 1 December 1993 following a bar room brawl.[24] At that historical juncture, the year old democratisation struggle neared crisis point. Prior to Operation Bwenzani, the government had agreed to a National Consultative Conference to discuss the fate of the estimated 1 500 armed Pioneer para-militaries, known as the 'armed party'. The Malawi opposition argued that the MYP presented the most formidable obstacle to

[23] 'Army-civilian relations now fraternal – mayor' *Daily Times* (15/11/1993).
[24] The events of operation Bwenzani were not well covered in the local press; indeed, the official *Daily Times* makes no mention of the initial shooting. For scholarly analysis, see Newell (1995).

a democratic multiparty election. Under pressure from the international community, the government agreed, at the above conference, to gradually demobilise (and disarm) the Pioneers, incorporating the 'armed party' into the police and military institutions.[25] President Banda's consent to this decision was not surprising. The appointment of Steven Chimutu, a civil servant, in 1990 as head of the MYP suggested to commentators that Dr Banda was concerned to re-establish his control over the para-military section (Newell 1995, p. 162).

Before the planned demobilisation of the MYP, junior ranked army officers organised Operation Bwezani. Instigating a mutiny of Army Command, these officers led rank and file soldiers against the Pioneer bases (and other MCP strongholds, including private homes), in an operation whose aims were to disarm the movement and destroy their logistical capacity. In the planning and orchestration of Operation Bwezani, the Army Commander, General Yohane, and other senior commanders, had effectively no role. Their control over the military had indeed weakened since General Khanga's retirement in 1992. The effects of long running internal army disputes and the politicisation of junior and middle rank officers as a result of participation in the Mozambican war had exposed the weakness of Commander Yohane's authority.

The operation lasted three days, with intense fighting between soldiers and para-militaries, and resulting in 25 deaths. As a result of Operation Bwezani, by 6 December 1993 the MYP had been largely disarmed.[26] Although some para-militaries fled the country to neighbouring Mozambique, possibly as many as 2 000, the organisation's fighting and logistical capacity was largely destroyed.

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[25] 'MYP disarming makes progress' *Daily Times* (1/12/1993).
[26] 'Army pledges loyalty' *Daily Times* (6/12/1993).

The disarming of the MYP created a political environment conducive to the advancement of the multiparty reform process. The election that was subsequently held in 1994, bringing the United Democratic Front (UDF) into power, was noted for the political tolerance, which existed amongst competing parties.

Operation Bwenzani was equally significant in reforming the military institution. After the event, once the soldiers had returned to their barracks, President Banda took immediate steps to address some of the grievances within the rank and file that had given rise to the breakdown in order and discipline, allowing junior officers to initiate the mutiny. On 7 December 1993, President Banda addressed the nation, appealing for calm, and announced the immediate appointment of a Minister of Defence, a portfolio that he himself had guarded since independence: 'I understand the Army have had several grievances … I intend to appoint a Minister of Defence very soon. This is to ensure that the needs and requirements of the Army are looked after.[27]

This crucial reform marked a significant step toward civilian control over the armed forces. The new Minister of Defence, Major-General W Mponela, had as his first task to address army grievances. Although the issues at stake were never made public, they were reported to include dissatisfaction with the proposal to incorporate the MYP para-militaries within the army.[28] As the rank and file had undoubtedly lost confidence in the Army command, Generals Yohane, Manyozo and Liabunya were placed on retirement (Newell, 1995, p. 176). Generals D Maulana and M Chigawa were then appointed Army Commander and Deputy Commander respectively. The investigation into grievances resulted in the improvement of service conditions, including pay increases and better allowances.

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[27] 'Ngwazi consoles bereaved families' *Daily Times* (8/12/1993).
[28] 'Government reacts to NCC proposals' *Daily Times* (6/12/1993).

Section Five: Civil Military Relations after 1994

5.1. Democratic government

The 1994 multiparty general elections brought Bakili Elson Muluzi and the United Democratic Front (UDF) to power. The new government, backed internationally by human rights bodies and donors, made a determined start to ending Malawi's authoritarian past. There were significant security reforms, such as the disbanding of the repressive Police Mobile Force (PMF), while draconian security legislation that had once afforded the police and Young Pioneers wide-ranging powers to detain political opponents was scrapped. Laws on imprisonment were similarly overhauled and some of the most notorious detention centres were shut down.[29] Civilian control of the army was entrenched through the appointment of a parliamentary Defence and Security Committee and the creation of a Ministry of Defence. The Malawi Army Act is currently (1999) under review by the Law Commission.

It has recently been argued that the post Operation Bwenzani army was a 'transformed institution':

> "by the early days of 1994 the Malawi Army was a transformed institution and there was no guarantee that it would always abide by such remonstrations [the calls from civil society in 1992/1993 for the armed forces to stay out of politics] as it had done. Perhaps of greatest concern was the combination of the new, virtually revolutionary zeal of the lower ranks and junior officers with the more restrained, but still very real, determination of the institution as a whole to retain its place within the Malawian state" (Newell, 1995, p. 178).

[29] See Amnesty International Report (1994 and 1995).

The potential threat of the army, or more accurately, certain sections within its ranks, to the new government no doubt justified the gradual demobilisation of those soldiers surplus to peacetime requirements. Slow to begin, the demobilisation process gathered pace after 1995, a process which has continued until the present time, resulting in a reduction in the military machine by more than half the size it had been during the Mozambican war.

Table 2: Malawi Armed Forces, 1991-1999

Year	Total Active	Marines	Air Division	Para-Military
1989-90	7 250	100	150	500
1990-91	7 250	100	150	500
1991-92	10 750	100	150	6 000
1992-93	10 500	100	150	6 000
1993-94	10 000	200	200	1 500
1994-95	10 000	200	200	1 500
1995-96	7 800	200	200	1 500
1996-97	9 800	220	80	1 000
1997-98	5 000	220	80	1 000
1998-99	5 000	220	80	1 000
1999-00	5 000	220	80	1 000

Source: International Institute for Strategic Studies (various years). *The Military Balance*.

If the army had indeed been 'transformed', a strong influence in shaping the 'new' institution came from the United States military. The Bush Administration strongly resisted pro-democracy lobby groups calling upon the United States government to impose sanctions and cut military

ties with Malawi as a means to force political change.[30] Just as his predecessor saw the value of developing close militaries ties with the Banda regime to strengthen American influence in regional peace-building strategies, so too has President Clinton continued to consolidate this relationship. The foreign policy framework through which this development took place was the African Crisis Response Initiative (ACRI).

5.2. The African Crisis Response Initiative (ACRI)

Unsuccessfully proposed in 1996 as the African Crisis Response Force (ACRF), the idea behind ACRI was to provide an institutional linkage between the United States and African militaries for the purpose of carrying out peacekeeping and humanitarian relief operations.[31] The Clinton Administration's stated policy objective was to promote peace and stability on the African continent. Yet this policy was criticised for American failure to intervene militarily in the Rwandan civil war and Burundian genocide. After the politically and militarily unsuccessful campaign in Somalia, where US troops became casualties of the civil war conflict, congressmen argued for a far more limited crisis response programme. The ACRI was thus conceived as a means to strengthen the capacity of African militaries through professional training to undertake humanitarian and peacekeeping duties in the continent's conflict situations. The intention was to train 10 000 – 12 000 African soldiers, comprising 500-800 troop battalions, as a peacekeeping force that could be mobilised to work alongside British, French and Danish trained forces and also African independent efforts.[32]

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[30] Africa Watch. 1990. *Where silence rules. The suppression of dissent in Malawi*, p.102).

[31] See Africa Policy Report: The development of the Africa Crisis Response Initiative (Africa News Online, 1988), African Crisis Response Initiative (ACRI): A peacekeeping Alliance in Africa (Project on Peacekeeping and the United Nations, 1988), and Levitt (1988).

[32] African Crisis Response Initiative (ACRI) (www.whitehouse.gov/Africa/issue.) In lending its support to ACRI, the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) was particularly concerned with the initial ACRF's intention of creating a standing military force, favouring nothing more than a technical intervention.

From a training perspective, ACRI's goals are to produce a professional, apolitical military force, respectful of international conventions on human rights and able to co-ordinate with other ACRI armies in peacekeeping duties and humanitarian operations. Accordingly, the main ACRI aims are as follows:

1 Ensuring inter-operability among peacekeepers by standardising communication and conducting joint training exercises;

2 Developing the capacity to respond rapidly and effectively to emergency situations in Africa;

3 Engaging in traditional peacekeeping duties as authorised under Chapter VI of the United Nations Charter, to uphold political settlements or stabilise conflict situations;

4 Assisting in humanitarian relief missions.[33]

The training programmes began in July 1987 in Uganda and Senegal, in September in Malawi, in February 1998 in Mali, and in March 1998 in Ghana. By late October 1998, Ghana, Malawi, Mali, Senegal, Uganda, Benin and Mozambique had all committed battalion size forces to the ACRI. Although the ACRI concept sought to build upon established United States military connections, the official criteria for selecting these militaries was that they had proven their acceptance of 'the supremacy of democratic civilian government' (Levitt, 1998, p. 102). Apart from its demonstration of its respect for civilian government in the aftermath of Operation Bwenzani, the Malawian army had joined ACRI on the back of the experience it had gained from participating in Rwandian peacekeeping duties. As part of the UNAMIR force, five Malawian Army officers were

[33] African Crisis Response Initiative (ACRI): A peacekeeping Alliance in Africa (Project on Peacekeeping and the United Nations, 1998). The overall responsibility for ACRI training fell upon the U.S. European Command, with field training undertaken by experts and troops from the 3rd and 5th Special Forces Groups (Airborne), based at Fort Bragg, North Carolina. Each training exercise, lasting approximately 60 days, was to be allocated $3.1 million, of which $1 million was intended to cover the costs of 'military equipment'; no weapons, however, only 'non-lethal equipment' was to be supplied. The participating armies would instead receive small quantities of ammunition (solely for training purposes), nigh vision goggles, generators, communications, mine detectors, water purification systems, uniforms, canteens and backpacks.

sent to Rwanda in 1994 as observers. A year later the Malawian observer contingent rose to 14 and was joined by 197 ground troops. [34]

Despite the technical United States military assistance arising from the ACRI, the Malawi Army's logistical capacity has declined considerably since its departure from the Mozambican war. It is now estimated that the Army's stock of weaponry - comprising 20 Fox, eight Ferret, and 12 Eland reconnaissance. vehicles, 9 105 mm towed artillery pieces, eight L16 81 mm mortars, and 15 *Blowpipe* SAM – are less than 50% serviceable. The Maritime Wing has two patrol craft while the Air Wing only has a few transport aircraft and helicopters. [35]

5.3. Civil-military tensions

Since 1994, evidence has begun to emerge that the army's respect for the 'supremacy of democratic civilian government' and its tolerance of the emerging civil society is not unshakeable. There are two incidents worth considering in evaluating the future internal development of the Malawian army towards the ACRI ideal of an apolitical, internationally operable, professional institution. First, the supposed army mutiny engineered by the late Lieutenant Colonel James Njoloma, and second, the army raid on the *Daily Times* newspaper.

The murder of Army Commander Chigawa in April 1995 shocked the nation and drew attention to the rise in crime and civil disorder following the democratic transition.[36] Small arms now began to proliferate in crime circles. The public sense of lawlessness was heightened by largely

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[34] See *The Military Balance* (1994/5 and 1995/1996).
[35] See *The Military Balance* (1999/2000).
[36] 'Victim of insecurity – Army General shot dead by robbers' *Daily Times* (21/4/1995). According to the official police report, the suspect arrested for this crime fell off a moving police vehicle and was crushed to death in the process. See 'Foundation slams police' *Malawi News* (5/5/1995) and 'Mpinganjira contradicts police' *Daily Times* (2/5/1995). According to the official police report, the suspect arrested for this crime fell off a moving police vehicle and was crushed to death in the process.

unsubstantiated reports on the continued violent activities of former MYP cadres who had escaped disarmament.

Within a week of the General's death, the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) reported that the army had foiled an attempted mutiny.[37] As a result, six soldiers had been arrested, while the ringleader was at large. Soldiers were reportedly 'unhappy' with the Government audit of Malawi army accounts, although no precise details of this event or its participants were given. A few days later, details began to emerge. A mutiny was planned at Kamuzu Barracks, Lilongwe, 'incited' by Lieutenant Colonel James Njolona and involving five unnamed soldiers. The ringleader, Lieutenant Colonel Njoloma, was still at large. President Muluzi responded by moving swiftly to consolidate his government's influence within the army, promoting Lieutenant General Owen Binauli to the rank of General and appointing him Commanding Officer, and similarly promoting Major General K Simwaka to Lieutenant General and Brigadier G Mautanga to Major General, appointing them to the positions of Deputy Commander for Administration and Deputy Commander for Operations respectively.[38]

For observers in civil society, Lieutenant Colonel Njoloma seemed an unlikely figure to challenge the new democratic constitutional order. If there was anything to doubt in the ringleader's loyalty, it was possibly the threat that he personified towards the army's long founded anti-intellectualism, a surviving colonial legacy. James Njoloma was one of the first university graduates (having obtained the degree of B.Soc.Sc from Chancellor College, University of Malawi) to enter the military in 1981. His rise through its ranks was nothing short of meteoric. After attending courses at the military college in Silima, he was sent to the Royal Military Academy, Sandhurst, England, where he obtained the Nigeria Trophy for

[37] 'Coup attempt dismissed' *Daily Times* (24/4/1995).
[38] 'Army colonel at large, wanted' *Daily Times* (27/4/95).

the best overseas student officer. A few years later, having returned to Malawi and been based at Army Headquarters, Njoloma attended a specialised course at a United States 'army strategic installation in Arizona'.

Njoloma wrote and compiled in 1991 an official pamphlet commemorating the army's centenary, entitled 'The Malawi Army – A Hundred Years Today'. In addition to these military credits, he obtained a Masters degree from Chancellor College and further pursed his deep intellectual concerns and association with the University as a part-time sociology lecturer.

After his arrest, Lieutenant Colonel Njoloma was found guilty of inciting a mutiny among junior officers by military court martial and sentenced to 15 years hard labour. The court martial itself raised a number of contestable legal issues: why was Section 76 (3) (a) of the Malawi Army Act, which limits military jurisdiction to cases of officers below the rank of captain, not applied? Hence, critics have asked why the case was not referred to a 'court of competent jurisdiction'? And, further, whether the presiding officer had the power to rule on Lieutenant Colonel Njoloma's submission of 'no case to answer', without having first gained the consent of other serving officers of the military tribunal or consulted the Judge Advocate?[39] These issues were to form the basis of a long running appeal case. Shortly before the case was due for consideration, Lieut. Col. J. Njoloma was taken to Zomba hospital whereupon he died on 23 July 1998.[40] The cause of his death was said to have been malaria.

Civil-military relations began under the UDF Government with high expectations of mutual understanding for the principles of democratic government. While the army had won much credit for its professional and

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[39] *The Nation* (4/8/1998).
[40] *Daily Times* (24/7/1998).

apolitical conduct during the struggle for democracy, the newly democratised civil society strove to defend human rights and to instil respect for civilian authority within the security forces.

The first signs that the positive relationship between the military and civil society was beginning to fray arose from the press criticism and protest from civic bodies over the court martial of Lieutenant Colonel J Njoloma. Until then, public debate had given little attention to civil-military affairs, choosing to ignore the apparent politicisation of the army in support of the ruling party and the occasional sign of ill discipline in the behaviour of soldiers. The Njoloma case prompted fierce criticism from the opposition MCP run press, especially the *Daily Times* and *Malawi News,* directed at the Army Command and government for the unconstitutional trail.[41] Its provocation of the army was geared upwards after the publication of an article in January 1998 by independent journalist K. Nkosi entitled 'Aids and men in the military. Case of Malawi and Mozambique'.[42] The article insinuated that aids was rife in the army, reporting that as many as 19 or 20 soldiers were identified as HIV positive every month, the cause of which could be traced to the Mozambican civil war when Malawian soldiers were supposedly sexually active with local women.[43]

Soldiers from Blantyre barracks responded to this criticism by raiding the newspaper's offices and 'damaging various pieces of technical equipment'.[44] It is unclear whether the soldier's unconstitutional action had the full consent of the army hierarchy, but it is likely that senior officers nodded their heads in sympathy. Although the Minister of Defence (initially) denied army involvement, the newly appointed Army

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[41] The uneasy relationship between the *Times* and the Army, in fact, goes back to 1994 when the newspaper began its criticisms of Operation Bwenzani. See 'Soldiers get angry: Chigawa goes to see Rev. Longwe' *The Democrat* (19/8/1994).
[42] 'Aids and men in the military. Case of Malawi and Mozambique' *Malawi News* (27-2/12-1/1998-99).
[43] For a similar, though unspecified, perspective, see 'An African Soldier' *The Democratic* (19/8/1994).

Commander Joseph Chimbayo subsequently confirmed that 'frustrated' soldiers acting alone had undertaken the raid.[45] According to an army spokesman, the offending article had been 'too strong'. Adding to this statement, the Army Commander gave the newspaper a piece of 'friendly advice', advising journalists 'to crosscheck information when writing about security matters'.[46] Yet the offending article's content (AIDS is, no doubt, a major health problem facing active service armies globally, not least in Africa) and concern with the situation among Malawian soldiers was certainly not unjustifiable. A few months after the *Daily Times* raid, it was reported that the army had begun to include condoms as standard issue items.

A little under two weeks after the raid on the *Daily Times*, President Muluzi implemented a major personnel shuffle within the security forces. He replaced the Inspector General of Police, General P Chikapa, the Army Commander General K Simwaka, and his deputy Lieutenant General G Mantanga. Since his election in 1994, this was the fourth time that the President had acted to change the heads of the army and the police force. These key positions were then fulfilled by General K Chirambo, General J Chimbayo (the former head of the Armed Forces College at Silima), and Major General M Chiziko respectively.[47] This decision was justified by the need to equip the army with a new leadership capable of shaping a role for the military in the national fight against crime. The army has, in recent months, expanded its involvement in this traditional policing sphere of responsibility. Whether or not the crime situation has justified the involvement of the army in crime prevention is debatable, but the encroachment of the military into non-military areas of government cannot be constitutionally justified.

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[44] In addition to the *Daily Times* reports (6/1/1988), see Malawi. Outlook for 1988/89. The Economist Intelligence Unit, Country Report, 2nd Quarter 1988.
[45] 'Army Commander's honesty versus Defence Minister's lies' *Malawi News* (1-7/8/1998).
[46] *The Nation* (30/7/98).
[47] Malawi. Outlook for 1988/89. The Economist Intelligence Unit, Country Report, 2nd Quarter 1988.

Conclusion

In December 1993, the Malawi Army finally captured centre stage in the state's security establishment. Prior to this the army's most significant role since independence was guarding the Nacala railway line from Renamo incursions at the tail end of the Mozambican civil war. Until the early 1980's, the Malawi military institution had been deliberately shaped in perpetuation of the colonial military legacy, relegated to the margins of the post-colonial state's militarisation strategy. President Banda kept the army 'small' and, through internal restructuring, created a loyal ethnic bulwark. He denied the emergence of an intellectually minded, professional officer corps. As supreme ruler, it was his intention to suppress the potential of the military to challenge MCP (single party) rule in which he and his associates had their power base. On the sidelines of the security establishment, the army's most important function in the single party regime was to provide a symbolic representation of the four ideological cornerstones of the Malawi Congress Party, that is, unity, loyalty, obedience and discipline.

This paper has argued that the MCP party-state machinery moved swiftly after 1964 and the infamous 'cabinet crisis' to remove the challenge from various nationalist groupings competing for state power. The frontline troops in this violent campaign of civil repression were the ruling party's youth wing, the Malawi Young Pioneers ((MYP), aided and directed by a colonial institution, the Police Mobile Force (PMF). The latter was mobilised and trained as a para-military strike force in the late 1950s specifically to counter the African nationalist movement. As part of a process of centralisation of state power within the ruling party, the MYP was subsequently institutionalised as a branch of the state security establishment. It grew, thereafter, increasingly autonomous from ruling party control and became dominated by high-ranking technocrats within the Office of the President. The MYP came to represent the militarisation

of the state and the ruling party's control over the state. The movement functioned as an internal security police, empowered to arrest and harass political dissidents and opponents of the MCP. It also provided an armed division for deployment in covert operations in the Mozambican civil war and other foreign arenas in which Malawi had unspecified security goals.

The re-alignment of the Malawi security establishment from the mid 1980s, with the army rising in stature, can be ascribed to three factors. First, under the Reagan doctrine, the military was seen as a reliable partner in United States efforts to maintain domestic political stability (and orientation towards the west) during the late Cold-War era in southern African. United States technical and financial assistance to the Malawi army increased significantly during the late 1980s. Second, the commitment of Malawi to SADCC demanded that the army play a greater role in regional defence and peacekeeping strategies. Third, as his control over the ruling party began to falter, President Banda looked to the military to play a key role in his strategy for ensuring the continuation of his political legacy. The internal political in-fighting among MCP leaders to succeed the ageing Dr Banda, it is argued, led to a succession struggle which divided loyalty to the president and undermined his control over the MYP and the police. In order to counteract their influence, the President sought to shift the military inwards, towards the centre stage.

Seen in the wider Malawian political context, President Banda's strategy played into the hands of the opposition forces challenging the regime for multiparty democracy. The decisive action of the army in disarming the MYP in operation Bwenzani should therefore be understood in terms of what Ian Roxborough (1979, p. 122) has described as a 'situation of catastrophic equilibrium within the state'. This situation arises from a stalemate in the competition among different political interests (underlying class divisions) for state power.[48] A 'third force', in

[48] For an example of 'catastrophic equilibrium' within the state, see Hanekom (1998, p. 158).

this case the army, then steps in to restore political credibility in the system and (subsequently) enables a political outcome congruent with dominant social class interests.

The initiative of the middle rank officers in conspiring to mutiny against their commanding officers, and then leading the soldiers back into the barracks highlights the internal dynamic within the military that compels it to undertake a 'Bonapartist' intervention. It is unlikely that the mutinying officers would have taken this course of action had they not had an agenda of dissatisfaction against the army hierarchy. Yet apart from internal grievances, a key factor appears to have been the politicisation of the army in the society wide struggle for political reform and the democratisation of the state. As further evidence of this motivating cause, it is worth considering a recent army press statement, issued in response to a newspaper report claiming that the Malawi Congress Party was to sue the army for the damages caused to its property during the said operation.

> "While our [i.e. the Nation's] thoughts may be embroiled in whether Operation Bwenzani is worth talking about or obviated today, the Malawi Army does not wish to be reminded by [sic] the massive task and grief the debacle surrounding the Malawi Young Pioneers disarmament made. The loss of three soldiers on 1 December 1993 after being shot by members of a paramilitary wing of the then ruling party, should have been an incitement to civil catastrophe that has until now remained averted by the Defence Force. [T]his cannot be erased on the minds of the Malawi Army's rank and file including families of the deceased. The Operation may have been overwhelming but could not have been executed at anytime considering what the country was going through at the time. The soldiers that took to disarm the MYP by force did not act under the

influence of any individuals other than the obligation to save Malawians." [49]

For President Banda and his senior army officers, Operation Bwenzani would herald the end of the MCP one-party state system. The 'third force' most likely to scupper the democracy movement, the MYP, was disarmed and demobilised. The President, as a result, relinquished his control over the army, creating as standing departmental head the position of Minister of Defence. This important move towards civilian control of the armed forces was then carried forward under the new constitution of the multi-party state. Legislation has since been enacted to disband the state's para-military structures and abolish draconian security measures.

As a mobilised fighting machine, the army has in recent years downsized significantly in terms of numbers, capabilities and logistical operability. These trends provide evidence of a process of state demilitarisation since 1994. At another level this process of demilitarisation has also been accompanied by state and NGO initiatives to address the psychological effects of militarisation (especially human rights abuse) and establish conflict resolution civic bodies. Yet these initiatives have been largely focused on the victims of state violence rather than its perpetrators. The Pioneer cadres (and demobilised army soldiers), in particular, have received little attention and support. Many of these individuals have, however, found alternative employment. The dramatic rise in crime since 1994 spawned the emergence of private security companies who aimed their recruitment drive squarely at former MYP cadres and army soldiers. Although dissatisfied soldiers and Pioneers have been implicated in the rising levels of crime, it is now thought that as

[49] *New Vision* (7/8/1998). This press statement was issued in response to the article 'MCP slaps Army with K19.3m suit: Seeks compensation for Operation Bwenzani', *The Nation* (4/8/1998).

demobilised soldiers they no longer pose a significant threat to national security.

Despite the positive legal and institutional steps towards state demilitarisation, civilian control over the armed forces (and security divisions, including police) has yet to become firmly entrenched. At the level of the state, civilian influence through parliament (via the Defence Ministry and Defence and Security Committee) has sanctioned the consolidation of the army's position at the heart of the security establishment. Its credibility among the donor and NGO international community has certainly been bolstered through the army's participation in the ACRI and other regional peacekeeping and humanitarian relief deployments. It is still too early, nevertheless, to judge whether the military, through its involvement in these initiatives, has made strides towards developing into a 'professional, apolitical military force that respects human rights'.[50]

At the level of civil society, however, civilian influence in shaping the form, role, and function of the army has lost valuable ground from the position that civic bodies and organisations held in 1994 when shaping the new constitution. If we consider the incapacity of civil society to effectively protest against the mutiny trial of Lieutenant Colonel Njoloma by court martial and the 1998 raid by soldiers on the offices of the *Daily Times*, as two examples of unconstitutional behaviour by the army, then it is clear that civilian control outside parliament remains weak and ineffective.

Malawi was once known as a country 'where silence rules'. If civil society, backed by the international community, cannot deepen their control and oversight over the security establishment, then a 'third force' – to use Roxborough's conception – may yet seize state power for its own

[50] 'Us-Trained African Forces Tool for Peace, by L. Kozaryn' (American Forces Press Service. www.dtic.mil/afps/news/9804141).

self-interests. As recent studies of contemporary African warfare have shown, African militaries do not just intervene in civil government to control a power vacuum, either in pursuit of a 'Bonapartist' strategy or to oversee the transfer of power; their military doctrine is not theoretical, but rather its overriding rationality is to seek reward through power and possession (de Waal, 1996). There have already been signs of ill discipline within army ranks.[51] Civil society must counter these developments at all three levels: first, through parliamentary pressure groups to influence military expenditure and monitor the performance of line ministries (police and defence); second, through pressure on donors and international agencies to ensure that funding and technical assistance to the security establishment is channelled through parliament; and third, by strengthening the human and material capacity of civil bodies to participate in democracy and thereby to enforce Malawian leaders to abide by the constitution.

[51] See 'Coup Scare … As Malawi Army arrests 15 soldiers' *Daily Times* (9/9/1998) and 'Alleged coup attempt disturbing' *Daily Times* (9/9/1998). Having broken the story, the *Daily Times* did not thereafter publish further reports and commentary on the subject.

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