

OPERATION BOLEAS UNDER MICROSCOPE, 1998-1999

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1. INTRODUCTION

Lesotho held its elections on the 23rd May 1998 under the auspices of the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC), headed by Advocate Sekara Mafisa. The newly formed Lesotho Congress for Democracy (LCD) unexpectedly won 79 out of 80 constituencies. Unexpectedly, because LCD was a relatively new party in Lesotho's political scene and more importantly because the emergence of this party triggered an unprecedented bitterness among political élite and the electorate alike which had a cumulative effect of casting a thick cloud of doubt over its performance in the elections race. The statistical computations reflected the following results:

Party's name	No. of votes	% of votes	No. of seats
Lesotho Congress for Democracy (LCD) ²	3 550 049	60,7	79
Basutoland National Party (BNP)	143 073	24,5	1
Basuto Congress Party (BCP)	61 193	10,5	0
Marematlou Freedom Party (MFP)	7 460	1,3	0
Others	16 244	2,9	0 ³

Though the elections were declared free and fair by the IEC and the international observer groups, the defeated parties expressed their unhappiness and reluctance to accept the outcome of the election results. They mobilized their supporters, which resulted in the paralysis of the LCD government. The SADC delegates entered and left Lesotho without proposing an acceptable political solution.

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² LCD was formed in June 1997 after a split within the then ruling Basutoland Congress Party (BCP). It was formed under the leadership of the then Prime Minister and the leader of the BCP, Ntsu Mokhele. He continued to serve as Prime Minister as he commanded the support of the majority in the National Assembly. The LCD replaced the BCP as the ruling party.

³ **Mopheme - The survivor**, "The outcome of the polls", 6 July 1998, p. 15.

The findings of the Langa Commission, which did not find any rigging in the outcome of the elections of 1998, did not go down well with the defeated parties. Instead the operations of the LCD government were brought to a standstill and a coup was eminent. In response to the possibility of a coup, the Lesotho Prime Minister, Pakalitha Mosisili, appealed for SADC military intervention, which resulted in Operation Boleas.

2. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF OPERATION BOLEAS

At about five o'clock on the 22nd September 1998, 600 members of the South African National Defence-SANDF (1 ISA Infantry, 44 Parachute Battalion, School of Armour and Medical Health Services) under the code name of Operation Boleas commanded by Col. Robbie Hartslielief entered Lesotho. An estimated 300 members of the Botswana Defence Force (BDF), with white flags over their military vehicles, entered Lesotho on the afternoon of the 23rd September 1998, to assist the SANDF in restoring law and order in Lesotho. Elijah Lengwaila, Senior Permanent Secretary in the office of the Botswana President, Festus Mogae, confirmed the deployment of the BDF: "Our troops arrived in Lesotho (on Tuesday) and will remain in there until the situation is stabilized. The situation in Lesotho has reached a high state of anarchy. The government of Lesotho has been reduced to a position where it is unable to govern."⁴

On arrival in Lesotho, the SANDF announced that they had come to restore peace and stability, but on the contrary, Sechaba Kalake, a Mosotho patriot, did not agree with the announcement of the SANDF as a peacekeeping force. He argued: "A peacekeeping force never comes unannounced in the early hours of the morning. Peacekeeping forces are identifiable and the people of the country know about their presence. We are not children. We know the difference between an invading force and a peacekeeping one."⁵

The two countries had differing interpretations of their mission and its source of legitimacy. For example, on entering Lesotho, the BDF flew a white flag, indicating that it saw itself as a peacekeeping force. The BDF behaviour contrasted sharply with that of the SANDF which entered Lesotho at dawn as an invasion force, pounding the Royal Place, the two army barracks in Maseru and the small Lesotho Defence Force (LDF) garrison at Ha-Katse. Moreover SA flaunted the SADC emblem as a source of its legitimacy and authority. This was contradicted by the BDF who said that it had sent its troops to Lesotho at the behest of the Troika countries (SA, Botswana and Zimbabwe), the guarantors of political stability in

⁴ **Mail and Guardian**, "BDF in Lesotho", 23 September 1998, p.7.

⁵ **ISAS-NUL** (Lesotho clippings): Post-electoral crisis Vol. 2, November 1998, p. 113.

Lesotho following the mediation of the crisis triggered by the 1994 short-lived palace coup.⁶

Several reasons caused the late arrival of the BDF in Lesotho. First, routes to Maseru were problematic. Second, there were problems at the SA/Botswana border post, because the BDF members were not allowed an immediate entry into SA on their way to Lesotho, thus indicating a lack of planning and co-ordination with other state departments in SA.

Furthermore, the time available for planning and preparation to execute a task of that magnitude was insufficient, thus causing an outcry in the national and international media with SANDF bearing the brunt of criticism.⁷

The skirmishes between the SADC forces and some rebellious members of the LDF lasted for two days. Among others the mutinous group within the LDF were inspired by utterances of Molapo Qhobela, the leader of the BCP, who emphasised that "any intervention from outside will be interpreted by our people as aggression against Letsie 111 and his Kingdom... Lesotho is a sovereign state not a SADC colony."⁸

3. THE REASONS FOR OPERATION BOLEAS

The SADC Peacekeeping Force entered Lesotho for the following reasons:

1. The desperate Lesotho Prime Minister, Pakalitha Mosisili, invited them. The security situation in Lesotho was deteriorating by the hour, and the Government was rendered ineffective by the protesters. The LCD government was entitled to make its request according to Article 2(7) of the United Nations.
2. To save a legitimately elected government in danger of being overthrown in a coup d'état of rebel soldiers and other unscrupulous elements.
3. To stabilize the situation and create an environment in which negotiations could continue in earnest, in order to bring about a lasting political solution.
4. To curb political chaos in which government vehicles were confiscated by the opposition groups due to the collapse of law and order.
5. The palace ground was occupied by an intransigent mob of demonstrators, urged on by their leaders to hold Maseru hostage and the state-run Radio Lesotho was hijacked and closed down.

⁶ FK Makoa, "The challenges of the South African military intervention in Lesotho after the 1998 elections", *Lesotho Social Science Review - A Journal of the Faculty of Social Science, NUL*, Vol. 5, No. 1, p. 91.

⁷ *Salut*, July 1999, p. 23.

⁸ *Mail and Guardian*, "South African troops alert as Maseru mutinies", 18 September 1998, p. 3.

6. The LCD government was unable to govern.
7. The lives of the ministers were threatened and their cars were stoned.
8. The rampaging demonstrators congregated at various offices, denying workers entry and threatening to occupy the government offices.
9. The SADC made it clear to its member-states that "no unconstitutional seizure of political power shall be tolerated", and some rebellious LDF members had violated that clause by dismissing their 28 commanding officers, after allegations that they had conspired with the ruling LCD to rig the outcome of the elections.⁹
10. The mission was to locate and identify destabilising resources, to disarm and contain them and to strike where applicable with necessary force to eliminate the threat.
11. SA had also intervened to protect some of its economic interests like the Water Highlands Scheme in Katse and Muela.¹⁰

4. THE IMMEDIATE REACTION TO THE INTERVENTION

The intervention of the SADC did not only trigger reaction from the Basotho in Lesotho; various sectors reacted differently. The South African government expressed its condolences to the next of kin of those who fell in the line of war (civilians and soldiers) and stressed that "the South African government recognizes members of SANDF who have laid down their lives as heroes in defence of stability and democracy in South Africa and Southern Africa. They will be given their honour in tribute to their loyalty..."¹¹

Cars bearing SA registration were stoned. It was not uncommon to meet people in the streets of Maseru shouting: "We do not want South Africa".¹² Looters helped themselves to merchandise from Metro Cash and Carry, Pep Stores, Shoprite, OK Bazaars, Jet Stores and Sales House outlets including butcheries. There was a complete destruction of Maseru, and Mamello Morisson, a spokesperson of the opposition group, confirmed the situation when she said: "But now look at our city - it has been destroyed".¹³

Some political allies of the ANC remained strangely silent in the wake of the SADC intervention and the destruction of Maseru. While the highest organs sup-

⁹ ML Pherudi and SL Barnard, "The dawn of the political cloud over Lesotho 1998 elections", **Journal for Contemporary History**, Vol. 24, No. 2, p. 47; K Matlosa, "Lesotho after 1998 elections: What went wrong?", **Southern African Political and Economic Monthly**, Vol. 11, No. 12, October/November 1998, pp. 5-6.

¹⁰ <http://www.tristitute.org/ojpcr/2-2neethling.ht> (Accessed October 2001.)

¹¹ **The Citizen**, "Lesotho-SA will face economic pain", 24 September 1998, p. 11.

¹² **Ibid.**

¹³ **Mail and Guardian**, "To the people of Lesotho ... sorry", 25 September-1 October 1998, p. 20.

ported the intervention, the ANC partners appeared unable to draft a quick response. Human rights bodies, opposition parties and media became vocal in condemning the operation. The response of the South African Communist Party (SACP) came a week after the intervention. It did not join the general condemnation, but welcomed the reaction as a healthy and broad-based South African dictate for military action beyond borders. The Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) admitted through Mxolisi Dlamini, the organization's International Affairs Officer, that a statement from COSATU was long overdue: "We haven't made a statement because we have not been in contact with any of the Unions in Lesotho."¹⁴ Dlamini further blamed the delay on the poor communication system in the Kingdom, because the telephone lines had been cut. The National Union of Mine Workers (NUM) would not comment either. A union official said their structure had many ties with Lesotho labour organizations, and as the situation was sensitive, the NUM had not adopted a position on the situation. Dr Barney Pitso of the South African Human Rights Commission sidestepped the issue by saying, "the activities of the SANDF is not directly a matter for the commission to become involved in".¹⁵

The South African Bishops' Conference was far more outspoken. They expressed shock at the tragic loss of life, wanton destruction of property and the fleeing of business people from Lesotho. The Bishops condemned Operation Boleas as "ill advised and ill-prepared" and further submitted that "SA's participation is in stark contrast to the hospitality offered by Lesotho during the apartheid era".¹⁶ The Archbishop Njongonkulu Ndungwana of the Anglican Church in Cape Town felt that the turmoil in Lesotho should have been avoided. He argued that the Lesotho electoral system should rather have been addressed than sending the army with the war tanks, and the role of the monarchy in the whole transition should also be explained. He advised the Basotho that they should constitute a structure like the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, not based on the South African modalities but on the Basotho style so that they could find a lasting solution to their political impasse.¹⁷ The South African Council of Churches (SACC) charged that the intervention of SA and Botswana in Lesotho had neglected the principles of negotiations and non-violence that had defeated apartheid. In a more forceful way, the SACC urged Southern African governments to refrain from military interventions - they should allow countries to solve their own political differences amicably.

¹⁴ **Mail and Guardian**, "ANC Alliance partners quiet on invasion", p. 7.

¹⁵ **Ibid.**

¹⁶ **Ibid.**

¹⁷ **SABC 2**, News Bulletin, 25 September 1998.

The Deputy Chief of the SA Army, Major Roland de Vries and Chief of Special Forces, Brigadier General Borries Borman, also condemned the operation. Borman argued that the wrong people had been sent into Lesotho and they had lacked intelligence. It was a shame that the SANDF could not adapt to the terrain.¹⁸ Richard Cornwell of the Institute of Security Studies also voiced his criticism. He submitted that the intelligence available for the operation had clearly been defective because it seemed as if the force had been told to expect little or no resistance, meaning that each soldier went into the battle with one arm behind his/her back,¹⁹ thus becoming vulnerable.

Stan Maher, the partner of Sergeant Jeremy Sax's mother, was critical of the government's involvement in Lesotho, saying, "It seems to me a totally pointless and amateur decision to send troops into a situation where generals have run away, and the military backing the opposition... the only thing we could do was to become the jam in the sandwich. It seems an extremely ill-conceived and amateur operation... I don't know what they hoped to achieve."²⁰

Some leaders of the opposition parties in SA shared the sentiments that Lesotho had been invaded and its sovereignty undermined. Mike Muendane, the Secretary-General of the Pan-Africanist Congress (PAC) said that the government's move showed up its incoherent and confusing foreign policy. Supporting the view of the PAC was the president of the Azanian People's Organization, Mosibudi Mangena, who said: "Military intervention suggests that actions of these countries (SA and Botswana) are directed more by wish than principle."²¹ None of the opposition parties appreciated the intervention by SADC in Lesotho despite the prospects for the obliteration of democracy.

The Democratic Alliance (DA), led by Tony Leon, accused the ANC-led government of having acted unconstitutionally by not informing the parliament or getting the approval of the cabinet for entry into Lesotho. Leon held the government responsible according to Section 201 of the South African Constitution, which states that only the President may authorise the employment of the Defence Force in fulfilment of an international obligation. In collaboration with the DA was the leader of the United Democratic Party (UDM), Bantu Holomisa, who commented that it had been confirmed that the decision to send troops to Lesotho was not taken at cabinet level.²² The main concern of both the DA and UDM was that there was no proper consultation on the part of the government before despatching the

¹⁸ **ISAS-NUL** (Lesotho clippings), p. 73.

¹⁹ **Ibid.**

²⁰ **Ibid.**, p. 13.

²¹ **Sowetan**, "I send in SANDF troops", 23 September 1998, p. 2.

²² **Sowetan**, "The Lesotho affairs: SA's foreign policy lacks co-ordination", 2 October 1998, p. 19.

SANDF on an SADC mission in Lesotho. In times of a serious crisis, there is discretionary power, which is what the then Acting State President, Dr MG Buthelezi, used.

Contrary to the opposition parties in SA, both the ANC and the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) endorsed the intervention in the neighbouring Lesotho and applauded both the SANDF and BDF for a job well done.²³ It was not strange that the two parties did not react negatively to Operation Boleas. The ANC is the government and the relations with the IFP had greatly improved at that time. Often when both President Mandela and his deputy, Thabo Mbeki, were out of the country on diplomatic missions, the IFP leader, Dr Mangosuthu Buthelezi, was accorded the status of acting as the State President. Such a gesture of trust and confidence in Dr Buthelezi by the ANC leadership, helped to generate and nurture the amicable relations between the two parties. Most importantly, they agreed on the preservation and protection of democracy in Lesotho.

Molapo Qhobela, the leader of the BCP, was not satisfied with Operation Boleas and expressed his view as follows: "The allied forces were betrayed by the battle-shy ruling LCD which had lost touch with what was happening in the country. He (President Mandela) is honestly deceiving himself. As soon as SADC leaves, we go back to square one. I am not going to disclose what we are going to do."²⁴

The Justice and Peace Department of the Lesotho Catholic Bishops Conference (LCBC) also raised concern that SA as a country had used the SADC as an umbrella to fulfill its own interests. The absence of a white flag as a symbol of peace and warning of the operation, was a sign of invasion rather than of a peacekeeping mission. The LCBC further maintained that the SADC had not undertaken a thorough research before sending its troops into Lesotho. Bombings of Makoanyane Barracks, including its hospitals, and the killing of civilians, including women and children, were signs of invasion, not of peaceful intervention.²⁵

The Botswana political parties shared the sentiments of their counterparts in Lesotho and condemned Operation Boleas. The leader of the Botswana National Front (BNF), Dr Kenneth Koma, argued that instead of uniting the people of Lesotho, the soldiers engaged them in a war that resulted in their death. He further charged that the SADC leaders should have sat down, looked at the findings of the Langa Commission and acted on the findings, which suggested irregularities in the

²³ Pherudi and Barnard, p. 50.

²⁴ **ISAS-NUL** (Lesotho clippings), p. 36.

²⁵ **Mopheme - The survivor**, "Invasion not intervention", 13 October 1998, p.6.

elections. The United Action Party leader, Ephraim Setshwaelo, said Botswana's military intervention was uncalled for because a peaceful solution could have been reached had they not sent the troops. He further remarked that it was surprising that the two countries were intervening on behalf of a party which had been accused of rigging the elections. He concluded that if intervention of this nature are not condemned, the SADC will in the end be reduced to a machine whose overall duty is to maintain dictators and despots. For his part, the Executive Secretary of the Botswana Congress Party, Raphael Sikwane, wondered why countries that opposed military intervention in the Democratic Republic of Congo had seen it fit to send troops to Lesotho. Joining the chorus, the leader of the United Socialist Party, Nehemia Masubele, said that his party's view of the issue was simply that Lesotho had been invaded by foreign troops whom he said should be pulled out as soon as possible to let the Basotho solve their own problems. Modubele emphasised that there was no need for the BDF to protect the illegitimate government since the elections had been rigged.²⁶

As far as the media reports were concerned, the intervention operation in Lesotho became South Africa's school of hard knocks, especially in the light of the higher than expected rate of casualties. Newspaper headlines referred to Operation Boleas and its consequences as "the incursion that went wrong", "[f] earful milestone for South Africa", "SANDF blunder", "[a] city ruined by bungled intervention" and said that "Lesotho tarnishes SA's peacemakers image". The following reports reflected and typified the general attitude of a large part of the media: "Apartheid South Africa had a history of being cruel and arrogant towards this mountain kingdom that very few people outside SA ever heard of ... They (our neighbours) maintain that the new SA is every bit as arrogant towards them as the old SA was... The real damage has been done at home. Mistakes that send boys in body bags demand straight answers. We need some assurance that this will not happen again."²⁷ One reporter portrayed the general outlook as follows: "The SA forces were also dangerously understrength, more than likely because of poor intelligence about the level of resistance anticipated and entered the country prepared for the best case rather than a worst-case scenario. So instead of securing the capital and preserving peace and stability, as was the mission's intention, SANDF troops became tied up in a protracted battle with mutineers, giving opposition supporters the opportunity to plunder, loot and burn the city center."²⁸

²⁶ M Molomo, "External military intervention in Lesotho's recent political crisis", **Lesotho Social Science Review - A Journal of Social Sciences**, NUL, Vol. 5, No. 1, June 1999, p. 157.

²⁷ **Business Day**, "Chaos in Lesotho", 25 September 1998, p. 2.

²⁸ **Ibid.**

It soon became clear that the media played a vital role in interpreting new events in respect of Operation Boleas. Predictably, government spokespersons quickly responded to the aforementioned reporting. In fact, the media establishment was challenged for its perceived inaccurate or biased reporting on the operation. Fink Haysom, Legal Advisor in the office of the President, blamed the media for its blindness to the value and the sacrifices behind Lesotho's intervention, which resulted in an unprofessional rush, and fashionable and superficial judgement.²⁹ In addition, presidential spokesperson, Parks Mankahlana, publicly claimed the following: "The candidness of our government does not deserve to be rewarded with verbal abuse and disingenuous disregard ... We all depend on the media to know what is happening in the country and the world. There is therefore an obligation on the part of the media not only to report accurately, but to offer informed comments as well. True, the media has an entertainment role. But entertainment of the opponents of the government cannot happen at the expense of decent comment..."³⁰

5. MISCALCULATIONS OF THE SANDF/SADC DURING OPERATION BOLEAS

During Operation Boleas, the SA intelligence services could not quickly come to grips with true facts on the ground. The SANDF acted on inadequate and incorrect information. First, the events in Lesotho took place so quickly that there was no time to establish facts on the ground. Second, there were time constraints. Third, only a brief study of the area was done after the request of the Lesotho government for military assistance.³¹

They were led to believe that they would have the support of the Basotho, and as a result only 600 soldiers were sent to Lesotho. Hoping for a hospitable reception, the SANDF expected no resistance at all. Worst of all, they did not even wait for the BDF contingent,³² and the late SA Minister of Defence, Joe Modise, said: "We did not expect that they would resist in the way they resisted."³³ The Intelligence Department could not detect that there was an underground bunker in which a huge amount of ammunition was hidden and that it could also be used as a sanctuary.³⁴

²⁹ <http://trininstitute.org/ojpcr/2-2neethling.htm>

³⁰ **The Star**, "Mankahlana in defence of the Boleas", 5 October 1998, p.7.

³¹ Interview with Major CJ Lourens, 1 ISA Parachute Battalion-Tempe Base, 28 March 2002.

³² **City Press**, "Wrong signs in Lesotho", 27 September 1998, p. 5.

³³ **Sunday Times**, "SA intelligence in Lesotho", 27 September 1998, p. 4.

³⁴ **Lekhanya**, 4 July 2001. (The underground bunker (UB) was designed by a Swiss architect and was constructed under Project 214 in 1994. It cost about M30 million. It has two hospitals that could accommodate 60 patients, 2 generators in case of a power failure, medical facilities, food, water and a communication system. Inside the UB, SADC forces found dozens of boxes marked "agricultural equipment" which contained Eastern European weapons, tens of thousands of rounds

The operatives failed to pick up that a quantity of ammunition had been removed from the military bases - about 53 loaded trucks with ammunition had left Makoanyane Base for an undisclosed destination. Neither were they aware that the rebels had planned to take up ambush positions on the hillside and around the palace to take on any foreign intervention, hence SANDF members were shot first when they arrived in Maseru.³⁵ The utterances of people like Molapo Qhobela were not taken seriously, because he had warned that they were ready for any foreign intervention. The opposition parties must have mobilised military support for their mission.

Furthermore, the operatives failed to establish that a number of LDF members, including the rebel groups, had taken their weapons home after work. Therefore, when the SANDF entered Lesotho, the rebel groups were armed and positioned themselves and shot at the SANDF. That accounts for the casualties of the SANDF immediately after their entry into Lesotho.³⁶

6. BREAKING DOWN OF DISCIPLINE AMONG SADC FORCES DURING OPERATION BOLEAS

Some of the BDF members camping at Ha-Bofihla in Mafeteng were rumpling their stature and were falling victims of alcoholism, dagga smoking and the harassment of women and young girls. On Saturday 26th September 1998, shortly before the lunch hour, two of the BDF soldiers armed with rifles were seen staggering across the road to a near-by liquor shop, and sending some of the residents to buy them liquor in exchange for food. The BDF Chief Commander, Lt Marhafa, confirmed the decline of behaviour among his members when he told the media in Lesotho: "The behaviour of our men now raise eyebrows on their discipline."³⁷

In another shocking development, some residents in the village of Thabana-Morena were embittered by inhuman searches carried out on them by the SADC troops. Their household articles, such as knives, were confiscated. "But we do not keep knives as weapons. We thought they were looking for guns",³⁸ said one disgruntled resident.

³⁵ of AK47 ammunition as well as 662 000 rounds of R4 and R5 rifles, 20 tons of automatic weapons, 10 000 7,67 and 5,65 automatic weapons, and half a million 5,56 patrons.
³⁶ **City Press**, 27 September 1998.
³⁷ **The Star**, "Rebels in Lesotho", 23 September 1998, p. 4.
³⁸ **Mopheme - The Survivor**, "Discipline among SADC soldiers", 27 September 1998, p. 6.
Ibid.

The community of Ha-Leqele was seriously intimidated by the SADC. The latter randomly fired shots at night in the direction of the civilian residential areas, and that resulted in the malicious damage to property like walls, doors and windows.³⁹ Though SADC troopers were not allowed to shoot in the direction of civilian homes, Maj. Lourens claimed that at one time or the other they had to shoot because gun shots had come from that direction, therefore they had to fight fire with fire.

Not only the gunfire but even the mortar rockets were randomly fired. One of the mortars from the direction of Makoanyane Base landed in the private property of Mr Pitso Sekholome, who was staying in a three roomed-house with eight occupants. The mortar blasted the house and shattered the windows, his face was damaged and his daughter (who was pregnant) was shocked and miscarried.⁴⁰ The elderly Pitso still bears the scars on his head and body caused by the mortar. The rocket number is A48 DXLZM1.

The other incident at Ha-Leqele involved an SADC (SANDF officer), known only as Swaer (the name often given to a male person who is in love or about to marry a girl in a family), who was killed by an LDF member called Notshi over a Mosotho girl called Lieketseng. At the time of the shooting in a shack, Swaer was so drunk that he could not defend himself and was shot in the chest several times.⁴¹ Lieketseng's neighbour, Mampho Letele, confirmed that around 20h30 the previous night, she had heard gunfire and in the morning "people saw a dead SANDF soldier lying in the pool of blood".⁴² The other members of the SADC came after the message had filtered through to them and they harassed the male occupants of the village, accusing them of murdering their colleague. Since then, the villagers lived in fear of what would happen next. Each night members of the SADC surrounded the village, shooting in the air, while others went from house to house knocking on the doors. Witnesses said that if they came to a house and found both a husband and a wife there, they claimed to be searching for illegal weapons, but when they found a woman, they raped her. If they found a man, they asked him whether he had not seen any members of the SADC force.⁴³

³⁹ Interview with K Phathe, assistant to Chief Mphuhlana Moholi of Ha-Leqele, 3 February 2002.

⁴⁰ Interview with M Pitso, the victim of the random mortar-rocket shooting during Operation Boleas, Ha-Leqele, 3 February 2002.

⁴¹ Interview with M Letlisa, the occupant of a shack in which an SANDF officer was killed, Ha-Leqele, 3 February 2002.

⁴² Interview with M Letele, resident of Ha-Leqele, 3 February 2002.

⁴³ **Ibid.**

7. THE MERITS OF OPERATION BOLEAS

Through Operation Boleas law and order was restored and subsequently democracy was protected. Political anarchy was suppressed and a basis for constitutional order was created. The deposed military seniors returned to their offices. The democratic process functioned once again. Lives were saved, wanton destruction of property was curbed, an imminent coup d'état was frustrated, and the government and the people of Lesotho were enjoying peace and tranquility as they performed their daily business without fear.⁴⁴

A Civil-Military Operation Centre (CMOC) was created in Maseru through the help of the SADC. It consisted of the SA High Commissioner (chairperson), a representative of the High Commission of SA (vice-chairperson), and the chief of the LDF, the Director-General of the Lesotho National Security Services, a representative of the BDF, a representative of the SANDF and the Humanitarian Adviser.⁴⁵ The composition of the CMOC was an attempt to ensure wide civil/military involvement and participation, resulting in stability in Lesotho. Its overall objectives were as follows: First, to co-ordinate civil and military affairs between the SADC forces and the Lesotho authorities. Second, to assist with and to co-ordinate the normalization of the security situation in Lesotho. Third, to oversee security-related issues and liaise with government departments, the business community, NGO's and other related structures on security matters and humanitarian relief.

Conflicting parties in Lesotho found solutions in talking to each other. On the 2nd October 1998 a Memorandum of Understanding was signed by all conflicting parties which among others agreed to hold the elections within a 15-18 months period, revise the electoral system and bring about inclusivity in all matters leading to the new dispensation in the country, hence the formation of an interim political authority which prepared the country for the 2002 elections.⁴⁶

8. THE AFTERMATH

There were casualties on both sides. Those who died on the side of the SANDF were as follows: Captain (Dr) Johan Nel and sergeant Jeremy Sax who belonged to the 7 Medical Battalion of the SA Military Health Service. Other members were lance-corporal Owageng Mothupi; lance-corporal Sambonga Mtengwane; private

⁴⁴ SALUT, July 1999, pp. 26-7.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ The Mirror, "Memorandum of Understanding", Vol. 1, No. 44, 14 July 1998, p. 2.

Phillip Tshweu; riflemen Albert Mogogane; Sikhum Mafuta and Lucas Maqwaqa.⁴⁷ (These belonged to the Parachute Battalion).

On the side of LDF the situation was as follows: About 16 LDF members were shot guarding the Lesotho Water Project at Katse Dam.⁴⁸ According to Maj. Gen. Lekhanya, the leader of the BNP, the 16 LDF members were killed with white phosphorus 12,5 rockets from a helicopter. They were burned and roasted alive. Some were crawling for help but their heads were blasted with bullets.⁴⁹ Their names were: T Ramshole; T Kali; L Mokobisane; T Sepono; S Mofoka; M Selialia; L Mohapi; T Takane; M Motseki; M Thejane; T Hala; L Mokaleli; C Senoe; L Matabane; M Ntisa and L Lekoro.

The city center of Maseru was destroyed by fire. A building known as Mokorotlo (Mokorotlo is a delicately hand-woven grass hat worn with pride by Basotho), which was a tourist attraction on entering Maseru, was looted and burned down. Mokorotlo served as one of the sources of income for the country. Most tourists would not leave Lesotho without taking something of the Basotho heritage with them.⁵⁰

According to K Molopo, a sad account of arson and looting affected the employment rate of the country. In Maseru, a total of 141 business establishments which had employed 1707 people, were looted and burned. In Mafeteng, 87 business centers were looted and burned and 702 people lost their jobs. In Mohale's Hoek, about 16 businesses were looted and burned; about 150 people lost their jobs. In Butha-Butha two business centers were burned and 46 employees lost their jobs. The overall situation was characterised by 246 business enterprises that were looted and burned, resulting in the loss of 2 609 jobs. The average monthly earnings lost by 2 609 persons amounted to M2 548 990.⁵¹

Criminals exploited the political turmoil to their advantage. BOP camera crew members Mark Klusen and Brian Taylor were robbed of their car in Maseru by a gang of youths armed with a 9mm pistol. Pulitzer-winning photographer Greg

⁴⁷ **Mail and Guardian**, "From funeral to funeral", 2-8 October 1998, p. 7.

⁴⁸ Makoa, pp. 83-4.

⁴⁹ Interview with Maj. Gen. JM Lekhanya, former chairperson of the Military Council and the present leader of the BNP, 4 July 2001. (Figures from the LDF and SADC indicated that about 113 people had died, which should be a lesson to all the parties involved that military intervention and skirmishes have unpleasant repercussions. The LDF counted 47 civilians and 15 injured, whereas the SADC counted 58 civilians and 8 of its members, making a total of 113, excluding bodies which had been collected in various parts of the country. Neither the Red Cross nor the government has yet confirmed the civilian death toll because many families were believed to have buried their deceased without notifying the country's civil authority.

⁵⁰ Pherudi and Barnard, p. 50.

⁵¹ **Mopheme - The Survivor**, 13 October 1998, p. 8.

Marinovitch was shot in his leg while covering battles between intervention troops and the rebel LDF members.⁵² Cars bearing SA registration numbers were stoned indiscriminately, forgetting that some of the Basotho were working in SA and their cars were bearing the SA registration.

A strong training team, consisting of both SANDF and BDF members, remained in Lesotho. That group embarked on Operation Maluti, which assisted in the retraining and the restructuring of the LDF in accordance with the principles of defence in a democratic setting, and also acted in an advisory capacity.⁵³

The SADC discarded unused ammunition and took some to Tempe Military Base in Bloemfontein for storage. The ammunition was stored for one and a half year. Not all ammunition was stored at Tempe Base; there were rifles left for protection of strategic places. Some of the ammunition was detonated by Operation Sardien. Those detonated included 3000 mortar bombs, hand-grenades, 189 RPG's, 34 destruction sustainers, 365 81MM striker mechs, anti-riots VIG fise, 1200 5,56mm bullets, and 100 9mm 12,7 bullets. A total of 3 843 surplus weapons were destroyed.⁵⁴

On the 15th May 1999, the last remaining SADC forces in Lesotho crossed the border into SA, marking the end of Operation Boleas. A total of 776 soldiers were withdrawn, 400 from SA and 376 from Botswana. To commemorate the auspicious occasion, a demonstration parade was held in the DOD Mobilisation Centre outside Bloemfontein. One of the speakers at the occasion, Mr Alfred Nzo, the then Minister of Foreign Affairs, congratulated both SA and Botswana forces since that was their first joint operation. He further declared that "this concept of joint operations is likely to be the pattern for the future and will be a key part of SANDF training from now on..."⁵⁵

9. CONCLUSION

Operation Boleas had a number of lessons for the SADC member states, inter alia that coups would not be tolerated, which seemed to have been a norm particularly in the Lesotho politics, because since independence in 1966 there were 4 successful coups (1970, 1986, 1991 and 1994), 3 attempted coups (1974, 1991 and 1996), and an undeclared one in 1998.

⁵² **ISAS-NUL** (Lesotho clippings), p. 19.

⁵³ Lourens, 28 March 2002.

⁵⁴ **Ibid; Mopheme - The Survivor**, "Crying over LDF mass arms destruction", 20 October 1998, p. 1.

⁵⁵ **SALUT**, July 1999, p. 27.

It is also important to note that some of the leaders within the protesting political parties agreed that the elections had not been rigged, but their protest was intended to push for a government of national unity. Through such means they formed the IPA, constituted of all the parties which had participated during the 1998 elections.

Despite the negative connotation attached to the operation, it saved Lesotho the great embarrassment of another coup in less than five years, and it further shows that the region is interdependent. Though some sectors argue that individual countries should solve their internal problems, not all countries have that potential, particularly where the army is partial.

Operation Boleas could be described as a home-brewed strategy for solving regional problems. This remedy should not only be applicable to a situation where the interest of one country is at stake, because this will ultimately divide the region into alliances.