

'In an Hour, I Could be Shot Over Angola': The Geopolitical Dynamics and Experience of the 1988 Shooting of President Masire's Jet

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Abstract

Just before travelling to the Angolan capital, Luanda, to attend a summit of the Front Line States, President Quett Ketumile Joni Masire, predicted in a joke that 'In an hour, I could be shot over Angola'. Indeed, Masire's presidential jet was shot by the Angolan government forces about one hour after he had left Gaborone on 7 August 1988. This was not necessarily an amazingly accurate prediction or prophecy from out of the blue, but a notion informed by the Angolan civil war and Cold War geopolitical milieu on the ground. About a month later on 13 September 1988, Pope John Paul II during his one day State visit in Botswana said that 'Botswana was an island of peace in a troubled sea'. Masire and the Pontiff's statements were made in the context of vicious civil wars in Angola and Mozambique, and liberation wars or struggles in South Africa and Namibia – Botswana's neighbours in the southern African region. As the Pontiff indicated, this made the region a troubled sea, while the tranquil Botswana symbolised an island of peace in that volatile sea. Masire's prediction was also informed by a protracted and game-changing multinational Battle of Cuito Cuanavale in south-eastern Angola, which had raged from November 1987 to April 1988. This paper provides the geopolitical context of the Cold War, and circumstances in the region within which Masire's plane was shot. It is also an account of the doubts raised by the official explanation of how the plane was shot, and the response in Botswana as well as internationally.

Introduction

Pope John Paul II paid a State visit to Botswana in September 1988, about one month after Masire's presidential jet was shot while flying over Angola on his way to attend a summit of Frontline States leaders in Luanda. The Pope in his brief welcome speech to President Masire and the people of Botswana stated that 'Botswana was an island of peace in a troubled sea' (Paul II 1988). By this the Pontiff meant that Botswana's location in the middle of the Southern African region saw her wedged between apartheid South Africa to the south and the South African controlled Namibia (South West Africa) to the west and much of the north. The Southern African region was also experiencing vicious civil wars in Mozambique and Angola, which additionally had some bearing on Botswana. Botswana bore the brunt of the oppression of the black majority of South Africa, many of whom had fled into Botswana as refugees and exerted quite a heavy toll on the country's limited resources (Mgadla and Mokopakgosi 2013; and Makgala and Seabo 2017).

The civil war in Angola, which intensified when the country attained its independence from Portuguese colonial rule in 1975, also directly affected Botswana as mentioned above. The war displaced many Angolans who fled their country and some sought sanctuary in northern Botswana, with many eventually becoming Botswana citizens. The Angolan civil war became part of the Cold War geopolitics involving the United States of America (USA) and her Western or capitalist allies on the one hand, and the Union of Soviet and Socialist Republic (USSR), and her socialist or communist allies, on the other hand. Therefore, the Angolan conflict was a proxy war between the United States which supported

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the rebel UNITA (União Nacional para a Independência Total de Angola or National or Union for Total Independence of Angola) forces led by Jonas Savimbi. South Africa joined the Angolan conflict on the American and UNITA side. South Africa was also fighting against the South West African Peoples Organisation (SWAPO) which sought independence for Namibia. The Marxist MPLA (Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola or Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola) government of Angola received military and other forms of support from the Soviet Union and her socialist ally, Cuba under Fidel Castro. According to Masire, ‘Savimbi had visited Botswana to talk with us right after the Portuguese left, but we were worried by his South African connection. And, as time went on, it became clear that nothing other than becoming president would satisfy Savimbi’ (Masire 2006:293). Masire further writes that-

After the MPLA had established a government in Luanda and controlled a large part of the country, we recognised them as the government of Angola. Once President Neto and the MPLA had become the established government, we within the Front Line States supported them, and we tried to work with them. President Neto died in 1979, and his successor, Jose Eduardo Dos Santos, appeared to be prepared to see what the Front Line States could do for him. However, he didn’t trust the other presidents enough to candidly discuss his problems. The MPLA government always viewed Botswana with suspicion, and President Dos Santos even said we were allowing Savimbi to acquire goods in Botswana and to operate there. I had to put the record straight with the other presidents at a Front Line meeting in Lusaka.

Angola was where I experienced my most serious brush with death. In 1988, just before I had left on a trip during which we would fly over Angola, Mma-Gaone [the First Lady] and I had lunch with Mrs Lock, the widow of the former speaker of the National Assembly. I jokingly said to her: ‘Well, in an hour, I could be shot over Angola’, and we all laughed. We left Gaborone, passed over Maun, and started over Angola. As we were above Cuito Caanavale (sic), human vanity led me to say: ‘not so long ago this town below us was in the news about the hot fighting between the MPLA and UNITA’. None of us knew that at that very time we were being fired on from the ground below (Masire 2006:293-294).

Based on this statement by President Masire, it is logical to conclude that the suspicion that Botswana ever supported UNITA was only imaginary if not illusory. In addition to getting support from the American and South Africa regimes, UNITA also illegally sold diamonds in the global market to finance its operations. Both Angola and Botswana were rich in diamond, which contributed massively to Botswana’s Gross Domestic Product GDP and export earnings by the late 1980s. As Masire notes above, the government of Angola was suspicious of Botswana, believing that Botswana somehow supported UNITA against the government in power. The suspicion could have been fuelled by the fact that Botswana traded in diamonds, and UNITA was involved in diamond trafficking in the territory under its jurisdiction. However, this remains a subject for further investigation. It should be noted that some people in the South African liberation movement, members of Botswana opposition parties, and University of Botswana students also suspected that the government of Botswana had acquiesced to the South African regime and sabotaged the struggle against apartheid. Nevertheless, recent historical research has dispelled this perception and concluded that in spite of limited resources and reprisals from the powerful South Africa, the government of Botswana played a pivotal role in the struggle against apartheid (Mgadla and Mokopakgosi 2013; and Makgala and Seabo 2017).

Nonetheless, there were some aspects of Botswana’s foreign policy towards apartheid South Africa which even some opposition activists appreciated and defended. For instance, in the mid-1980s,

Botswana had a serious conflict with the South African black homeland of Bophuthatswana under its ambitious President, Lucas Mangope. In a bid to distance itself from the apartheid stigma, Bophuthatswana had tried to somehow merge with Botswana. However, Botswana did not want anything to do with Bophuthatswana or any other homeland in South Africa, and dismissed these as off-springs of apartheid. Mangope was infuriated by Botswana's policy stand, and he responded by imposing visas requirements for Botswana to enter Bophuthatswana, as well as stopping the crucial train movement between Botswana and Bophuthatswana. Consequently, an impasse ensued between Botswana and Bophuthatswana. It would seem Botswana's actions were informed by her abiding faith in the principle of territorial integrity and sovereignty of nations. The then President of opposition Botswana National Front (BNF), Dr Kenneth Koma, unilaterally approached Mangope to negotiate for peace. This was heavily criticised by some BNF activists who argued that it undermined the principled position of the Botswana government on the South African homeland system (Makgala 2006).

In the nearby Mozambique, a long civil war was being fought between the Marxist Frelimo government of President Samora Machel and RENAMO (Resistencia Nacional Mocambicana or Mozambique National Resistance Movement) rebel group bankrolled by the South African regime. Among other Southern African countries, Botswana and Mozambique provided covert and overt assistance to combatants of the South African liberation groups, such as the African National Congress (ANC), which launched guerrilla attacks into South Africa. In 1984, President PW Botha of South Africa tricked the Mozambican government into signing a non-aggression 'Nkomati Accord'. While the Mozambican government significantly scaled down its assistance to the ANC in Mozambique, the South African government did not implement its part of the treaty and continued supporting RENAMO rebels against Machel's government. The civil war brought the Mozambican economy and physical infrastructure to its knees. While Samora Machel was returning home from a Front Line States meeting in Zambia on 19 October 1986, his presidential jet was shot down in South Africa, and he was killed in the crash. It has never been conclusive as to who actually brought Machel's plane down, but strong suspicion was that the apartheid South African government was involved. In fact, Masire writes in his memoirs that 'We in Botswana always suspected that the South African government was responsible' (Masire 2006:292).

Two of Botswana's immediate neighbours, namely South Africa and Namibia were going through their liberation struggles while Angola and Mozambique were involved in brutal civil wars. The latter two had both gained their independence from Portugal in 1975 following bloody liberation wars, but were soon engulfed in civil wars within the Cold War milieu. At one point during the Mozambican liberation struggle, Samora Machel had stayed briefly in Lobatse in Botswana. This seems to have made him have affinity for Botswana and liked visiting the country. 'For some reason he [Machel] became quite attached to Botswana, even though, of course, our political and economic philosophies were very different' (Masire 2006:291). Masire does not seem to factor in Machel's previous connection to Lobatse.

The South African scene was complicated by the fact that the country was fighting in Namibia, Angola and also supported RENAMO in Mozambique in addition to facing anarchy at home. The mid-1980s brought serious turmoil in South Africa as the banned ANC's ally United Democratic Front (UDF) took the war to the apartheid government by rendering the country ungovernable. The regime responded through intensified repression and indefinite state of emergency. It also tried to force Botswana into signing a non-aggression treaty similar to the Nkomati Accord mentioned above, but Botswana rebuffed the South African 'overtures'. The consequence of this was bomb blasts and raids by South African Defence Force (SADF) in Botswana right up to the late 1980s. The SADF's worst raid was in Gaborone on 14 June 1985. Nine South African refugees and three innocent Botswana were killed while six were injured (Osei-Hwedie 1998 and Merafhe 2015).

Arguably, the most important aspect of the Angola civil war as far as the international involvement

was concerned, was the Battle or Siege of Cuito Cuanavale which raged from November 1987 to March 1988 (see George 2005). It involved the Angolan army and its Cuban and Soviet Union allies on the one hand, and UNITA and its South African allies on the other hand. ‘The stakes were high for both sides and the battle involved the biggest conventional operations of South African forces since World War II’.¹ It is worth noting that the Battle of Cuito Cuanavale led to the withdrawal of Cuban and South African forces from Angola and ultimately led to independence of Namibia in 1990. ‘The battle of Cuito Cuanavale is, however, a contentious issue, widely discussed and debated by ordinary people, participants and historians. Depending on where you stand, [the battle of] Cuito Cuanavale is described as a defeat of the South African Defence Forces (SADF), a tactical withdrawal by the SADF, or, a stalemate’.² At any rate, the civil war in Angola continued relentlessly, and South Africa was still actively involved in both Angola and Namibia when Masire’s jet was shot.

The raging civil wars in Angola and Mozambique, liberation struggles in Namibia and South Africa, the latter’s military reprisals against Botswana and the downing of Samora Machel’s presidential plane in 1986 all within the Cold War context help situate the 1988 shooting of Masire’s presidential jet in the larger global geopolitics. The August 1988 summit of the Front Line States was aimed at deliberating on how to advance the liberation struggle in Southern Africa, and Masire’s jet was shot while he was en route to Angola to attend the meeting. Matters were not helped by Angola’s believe that Botswana may have had an invisible hand in the Angolan civil war against that country’s government.

The Shooting of OK 1 Over Angola

On 7 August 1988, Masire’s presidential Jet, known as OK1, left Gaborone for the Angolan capital but never reached Luanda. The British Aerospace 125-800 plane had recently been purchased by the government of Botswana for P10 million in order to allow the President to use a Botswana owned-government plane, as opposed to hiring one from South Africa and piloted by South Africans. Such development was embarrassing because the aim of the Front Line States and Southern African Development Coordinating Conference (SADCC), which was later rechristened Southern African Development Community (SADC), was to achieve independence for colonised countries in the region, and also to reduce dependence on apartheid South Africa. However, the quest for independence from South African infrastructure and assistance was largely elusive for the neighbouring countries. For instance, President Mabutu Sese Seko of Zaire came to Botswana for the celebration of the country’s tenth anniversary of independence in September 1976 and his presidential jet, which was too big for the much smaller Gaborone international airport, overran the airport runway. There was embarrassment when Botswana authorities had no choice but to call in the same South African authorities, who were being avoided, to come and rescue Mabutu’s Jet (Makgala and Bolaane 2016). Furthermore, when Pope John Paul II left Gaborone for Lesotho in September 1988, he was warned by the South African authorities that the weather in Lesotho was bad and his plane had to make an unscheduled landing at Jan Smuts International Airport in Johannesburg. The South African Minister for Foreign Affairs, Pik Botha, had a field day and last laugh as he consorted with the Pope at the airport. The Pontiff later left for Lesotho in a car envoy with security provided by the apartheid government police (*Botswana Daily News* 15 September 1988).

In addition to Masire, other members of the delegation on OK 1 that fateful day were Ponatshego Kedikilwe (Minister for Presidential Affairs and Public Administration), Bashi Ikitseng (Chief of Protocol), and Mogolori Modisi (Senior Private Secretary to the President). Whereas government sources did not mention other delegation members by name, the journalist Douglas Tsiako of the private *Mmegi*

1 www.sahistory.org.za, accessed 9 March 2018.

2 www.sahistory.org.za, accessed 9 March 2018.

newspaper talks of Masire and his 'Magnificent Seven' (Tsiako 13-19 August 1988). The Minister for Foreign Affairs, Dr Gaositwe Chiepe, had remained home in Botswana.

It was said that the plane was flying at 900km/h when a missile ripped off its right engine (Tsiako 12-19 August 1988). The jet's pilot, Captain Arthur Ricketts, who was seconded by the British Aerospace company to co-pilot it with Botswana Defence Force (BDF) pilots, said he suddenly saw the engine fly past the aircraft for a few seconds (Masire 2006). Colonel Albert Scheefers of BDF was part of the crew. The accident happened while most members of the delegation had already finished eating their lunch. As for Masire, he was still washing down his meal with a cup of tea, while Kedikilwe was still enjoying a piece of cheese (Masire 2006 and *Daily News* 12 August 1988). Unlike most Botswana, Masire was said to have been in a habit of drinking copious amount of tea without sugar (Nasha 2015). According to Kedikilwe, the blast had badly reduced oxygen supply in the aircraft, which meant that the passengers and crew alike had only about 30 seconds to live (*Daily News* 12 August 1988). Captain Ricketts was able to manoeuvre the aircraft and the passengers were advised to wear their masks for oxygen supply. The pilot 'used his long experience and knowledge of the jet mechanism, to make an emergency safe landing' at a Cuito Bie airstrip (*Daily News* 12 August 1988).

Masire (2006:294) writes that 'I was traumatised, but I did not realise I was in real danger.... As we got out of the plane, I saw my blood streaming down my body, but I didn't know what had happened'. He was the one most badly injured in the accident followed by Bashi Ikitseng. Masire was taken to a local hospital by the Cubans who operated the Cuito Bie airstrip. Later, President Dos Santos of Angola sent his presidential jet to retrieve Masire and take him to a hospital in Luanda. It was in Luanda that Masire learned that a splinter from the engine had struck him just missing his spinal column, and stopped just before damaging his thoracic cavity. He had escaped a fatal injury much to the Dos Santos' disbelief upon meeting Masire at the hospital. 'He is a man who seldom smiles, but he gave one of his smiles and said: "You know, I don't believe in God, but if this is not a miracle, I don't know what else it is"' (Masire 2006:294).

Questions Over the Appropriateness of OK 1 to Fly Over Cuito Cuanavale

By 12 August, once back home, Kedikilwe confirmed the announcement that the Angolan government had issued an official apology to the government of Botswana for what the former described as accidental shooting of Masire's jet (*Daily News* 12 August 1988). It was said that the Angolan authorities admitted to have had mistaken the OK 1 for an enemy aircraft. When giving an interview to Botswana Press Agency (BOPA) journalists, Kedikilwe indicated that despite the shooting of OK 1, and Masire having narrowly escaped death, the relations between Botswana and Angola would remain cordial.

The shooting of OK 1 over Angola quickly led to emergence of several conspiracy theories in Botswana. With the demise of Samora Machel in his jet two years prior being very fresh in the minds of many Botswana, it was suspected that those behind Machel's death were now pursuing Masire. A local folk music guitarist even composed a song in which he warned Masire to be very careful, lest he too became a victim of Machel's fate. There was also suspicion that OK 1 might have been booby-trapped before leaving Gaborone for Angola (Tsiako 12-19 August 1988). Yet, others suspected that OK 1 had been targeted by UNITA forces in Angola. The Angolan government's apology seemed to lay to rest the speculation of who really was behind the accident. According to Tsiako: 'What the announcement has not done, however, is to explain how the plane, flying on an international route "duly cleared with the responsible authorities in Luanda", (Office of the President Monday statement) could have been mistaken for an enemy aircraft' (Tsiako 12-19 August 1988). He further observes that three days later:

International news reports had begun to put the statement of the Office of the President to question.

Quoting Angolan authorities, the news reports said President Masire's jet had been intercepted flying over a 'restricted' area. The Angolan government has said Corridor UG853D was closed to all civilian traffic due to security reasons and that all airlines had been notified of this in August (1987) last year, according to news reports. What is known is that Cuito Bie is a heavily fortified town. Asked to say whether Kuito fell within the war zone General Merafhe [BDF Commander] replied: 'it is in central Angola in the province of Bie. But what place is not a war zone in Angola anyway?'

There has generally been a news blackout from the authorities. 'The media and other interested parties are informed that Botswana Defence Force headquarters will not issue any statement nor will it authorize the crew of the aircraft to issue any statement about the incident until the Board of Enquiry has completed its task', said a BDF statement on Wednesday.

The board of enquiry Tsiako refers to was set up consisting three officers from BDF, two experts from the Department of Civil Aviation and Captain Arthur Ricketts. On the other hand, Angola was also said to be in the process of appointing a parallel commission which would benefit from expert advice from Botswana and British Aerospace. Tsiako also reported that when Masire's Private Secretary, Mogolori Modisi, was asked as to whether there had not been any communication between the Angolan jet fighter and OK 1 before the accident, he said that would only be known after the enquiry. Tsiako also claimed that before the statements were issued, a highly-placed source informed him that crew member Colonel Albeit Scheffers of the BDF was to be demoted. 'Asked why that should be, he said: "He was off-course"' (Tsiako 12-19 August 1988).

The investigative journalist also indicated that other pieces of information coming in suggested that there might have been communication problems that eventually caused the accident. Sam Mpuchane, Secretary for Foreign Affairs, was reported to have said that there were 'minor' problems in communication with Luanda only a day after the near-disaster. 'Then we asked all our foreign missions to help... London, Lusaka, all over, he said Tuesday at the airport. He said the Vice President had spoken with Minister Kedikilwe at 6.30pm, he at 10pm, and Special Branch Chief Adolf Hirschfeldt at 11 am. News reports say because of communications problems with Luanda, clearance for the Presidential jet had been sought with the Angolan embassy in Lusaka' (Tsiako 12-19 August 1988).

Whereas the investigation team set up by the government of Botswana did produce a report this became a classified document to this day. However, Masire in his memoirs does shed some light on the matter and it is highly likely that he draws from the classified report:

The Angolan forces had aimed four ground-to-air missiles at us while we were passing over Cuito Cuanavale (sic). They all missed, so they detailed two MIGs after us. One MIG fired a heat-seeking missile that hit the right engine. Our pilot later told me the missile had sheared off the engine, and he could see the engine fly alone ahead of the plane for a few seconds! If it had hit between the two engines, we would have all died peacefully, without knowing anything.

At the time there was no direct communication between Luanda and Gaborone, so we had to be in touch via Brussels. People in Botswana heard that our plane had been shot down, and they were convinced I had been killed and they were being told lies (Masire 2006:294).

Survival of the Cuito Bie Odyssey I: Response in Botswana to the OK 1 Accident

The reports of the OK 1 ordeal led to fear or grief gripping the nation, and it was considerable relief when Masire touched down at Gaborone's Sir Seretse Khama International Airport two days later. 'Be generous in prosperity and thankful in adversity'. This Bahai verse was quoted by Tsiako as having 'summed

the mood at the Sir Seretse Khama International Airport on Tuesday as the hammer and sickle-ardoned Angolan Gulf Stream 3 touched down to deliver the President and his “Magnificent Seven” (Tsiako 13-19 August 1988). As Masire points out above people in Botswana had been misled into believing that he was dead. Nevertheless, as Tsiako indicates President Dos Santos had made his jet available to take Masire back home accompanied by Angolan Foreign Minister, Van Dumen, and two doctors.

On arrival, Masire found a large and anxious crowd of well-wishers, waiting for him at the airport for an emotional welcome for him back home. Masire was ‘cheerful and most buoyant. With school-boy enthusiasm, he broke ranks with the protective cordon of plainclothesmen (sic) and Foreign Affairs officials to meet everybody and every soul’ (Tsiako 13-19 August 1988). It was reported that even though the people ‘had been advised against converging at the State House to avoid travelling long distances, still hundreds of people travelled to the Sir Seretse Khama International Airport to see the President step down from an Angolan jet’ (*Daily News* 10 August 1988). Among those present at the airport were the First Lady, Gladys Masire, and their three daughters and son, Vice President Peter Mmusi, Cabinet Ministers and Members of Parliament, Mayor of Gaborone Paul Rantao and military officers. The crowd which included men, women and children lined up the main street cheering and ululating as the motorcade proceeded to the State House for another rousing welcome (*Daily News* 10 August 1988).

Masire gave a very short speech near the State House and told the crowd that he was pleased to be back home after the catastrophic incident. He also said that the Angolans had given him a wonderful send-off when he left their country. Unlike Dos Santos, who did not believe in God, Masire told his listeners that ‘it was through the power of God, that everybody was safe and well’ (*Daily News* 10 August 1988). Indeed, God’s hand was greatly appreciated as a priest, who addressed a crowd of about 600 people, ‘spoke in a shaken voice, [and] thanked God for having saved the President’ (*Daily News* 10 August 1988). ‘The Cuito Bie Odyssey had been survived’, wrote Tsiako (13-19 August 1988).

The OK 1 crew was also showered with praise from different quarters for the great feat they performed in safely landing the aircraft under extremely difficult technical and emotional circumstances. In Parliament, the Minister of Works, Transport and Communication, Chapson Butale, commended the crew for a miraculous landing of a damaged jet. He told Parliament that what the crew achieved was still a puzzle in the aviation world (*Daily News* 17 August 1988). In particular, he congratulated Captain Ricketts and informed Parliament that the pilot had been seconded to Botswana by the manufacturer of the jet –British Aerospace to co-pilot the aircraft with the BDF pilots for some time. Butale, however, pleaded with his parliamentary colleagues not to engage in any further discussions of the incident as it was still *subjudice* in view of the fact that a commission of enquiry had already been instituted (*Daily News* 17 August 1988). He requested the parliamentarians to wait for reports by the appropriate authorities of Botswana and Angola after the completion of the investigations. At any rate, as indicated above, in Botswana the report has not been made available. At the national airliner, Air Botswana, a senior official by the name Poccock was quoted saying that ‘It shows these boys have really undergone rigorous training. They would have practiced emergency descent, but it is a feat to land a plane with a separated engine like this one. Loss of one engine leads to loss of half of the systems –air supply, pressurization and multiple failure. It was indeed a job well done’ (*Mmegi* 12-19 August 1988). Poccock also lauded the aircraft’s body frame for having taken the impact.

Masire and Ikitseng later travelled to London for medical attention and were said to be responding well to treatment (*Mmegi* 20-26 August 1988). There were unconfirmed claims that a BDF engineer who was part of the plane’s three-man crew was experiencing some difficulty with his hearing (*Mmegi* 20-26 August 1988). He was said to have played a pivotal role by ensuring continued supply of oxygen immediately after the aircraft was shot over Cuito Bie.

In mid-August, the Regent of Bangwato tribe, Kgosi Sediegeng Kgamane, paid tribute to the

Office of the President where he expressed his personal sympathy and that of his tribe regarding the OK 1 incident. According to Kgamane 'God was working through the nation of Botswana to show that he had unlimited powers over life and death. He said his office decided that he should come to Gaborone to personally express his sympathy and express gratitude that God had averted a disaster' (Pilane 18 August 1988). It is interesting that unlike many other regional leaders in Botswana, Kgamane made sure that he personally went to the Office of the President. This may have been necessitated by the fact that in the early 1980s, following the death of the hugely popular founding President of Botswana and also the uncrowned *Kgosi* (Chief) of Bangwato, Sir Seretse Khama, Masire's portrait replaced that of Seretse in the country's bank notes. The Bangwato, whose tribal territory is the largest in the country and the resolute heartland of the ruling Botswana Democratic Party (BDP) support base, were extremely infuriated by this development which had real potential to undermine Masire's presidency (Makgala 2008). In his memoirs Masire writes that he and Bangwato did make peace and cooperated.

Civil leaders and government officials in various parts of the country led their communities in prayer for the President's recovery. For instance, in Lobatse hundreds of residents among whom were the town's Mayor Ishoo Abdullah and District Officer, Janet Kgang, held special prayers for Masire (Seretse 23 August 1988). Local pastors led the prayers which were organised by the Lobatse Ministers Fraternal.

Political differences between the country's politicians across the political spectrum were set aside as messages of goodwill from politicians poured in for Masire. For instance, Motsamai Mpho, the veteran leader of the Botswana Independence Party (BIP), stated that together with his party he was quite pleased that the OK 1 team had been saved. He wished the President and others who were injured during the accident speedy recovery. 'With God all things are possible, praise the Lord', said Mpho (*Daily News* 12 August 1988). Daniel Kwele, President of Botswana Progressive Union (BPU), noted that at his party they were 'greatly perturbed and indeed shocked beyond human endurance about the incident over Presidential jet' (*Daily News* 11 August 1988). The Botswana Peoples Party (BPP) President, Dr Knight Maripe, wished Masire, his family and the delegation sympathy and speedy recovery to those injured (*Daily News* 11 August 1988). The main opposition BNF seems to have been the last to issue a message. Curiously, the BNF message does not seem to have been issued officially by the party President, Dr Kenneth Koma. Over the years the BNF had created an impression that the BDP government was out to persecute their influential socialist leader, Koma (Makgala 2005). A *Daily News* journalist reported that party official or activist, Moffat Akambakamba, was the one who issued a message of sympathy while addressing political rallies or freedom square in Serowe –the BDP's stronghold as indicated above. In his message Akambakamba 'appealed to Batswana to pray for the President's continued good health' (Otimile 22 August 1988). The freedom square is associated with entertainment and slander by politicians against their opponents (Lekorwe 1898).

Survival of the Cuito Bie Odyssey II: International Response to OK 1 Accident

There were also messages of sympathy from international leaders among whom was the President of France, Francois Mitterand. His message, which was conveyed through the French Embassy in Gaborone, read: 'It has been with great concern and deep emotion that I have learnt that you have been the victim of an accident which occurred while flying to Luanda, in order to attend a meeting of the Front Line States. On behalf of myself and the French government allow me to present to you my deepest sympathy and warmest wishes for a prompt recovery' (*Daily News* 15 August 1988). The Minister for Foreign Affairs in Belgium also sent a message stating that 'Your Excellency, having learnt of the plane accident in which you were a victim in Angola, I wish to express to you my heartfelt sympathy and sincere wishes for speedy recovery' (*Daily News* 15 August 1988). The Secretary General of the United Nations Dr Javier Perez de Cuellar's message read: 'I learned with dismay of the injury which His Excellency suffered in an airplane

accident on Sunday. On this occasion, allow me, Excellency to extend to you my warmest wishes for a very speedy recovery' (*Daily News* 11 August 1988). President of India, Ramaswamy Venkataraman, wrote that 'on behalf of the people of India and on my own behalf, I would like to convey our profound relief at your miraculous escape following an accident to the aircraft carrying you to Luanda. We wish you a speedy recovery and many more years of service to your nation' (*Daily News* 11 August 1988). Some international messages were said to have come from former leader of the South African Progressive Federal Party Colin Eglin and British diamond dealer Sir Philip Oppenheimer in London (*Daily News* 11 August 1988). The liberal Eglin had visited President Seretse Khama in Gaborone in September 1971 (Makgala and Seabo 2017).

Surprisingly, the government source, *Daily News*, did not record message of sympathy from the leaders of the superpowers, namely the United States and the Soviet Union. On 13 February 1984 Masire had sent condolences to the Soviet Union after the death of President Yuri Andropov (Kwante and Manatsha 2016). Botswana was represented at the funeral by Minister of Foreign Affairs, Archiebald Mogwe, and Botswana's High Commissioner to the United Kingdom, also accredited to the Soviet Union, Samuel Mpuchane. Again the newspaper did not indicate whether any message did arrive from British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher's office in London despite Masire having received medical attention there. Botswana had also been under British colonial rule for 81 years from 1885 to 1966 when the country gained its independence, and the country was on good terms with the UK. However, this is not to suggest that no messages were ever conveyed from these major Western powers.

Naturally, messages also poured in from some of Masire's fellow African leaders. President Abdou Diouf of Senegal sent a message reading: 'Mr President and dear brother, news of the accident of your presidential jet in which you were injured cause us extreme anxiety, but we were comforted by the fact that your life was not endangered. The government and people of Senegal join me in wishing you speedy recovery' (*Daily News* 15 August 1988). Another international statesman who sent a message of sympathy to Masire was former President of Tanzania and Chairman of that country's ruling party Chama Chamapenduzi, Julius Nyerere. His message was that '[I have been] very shaken to hear of the explosion of your plane but relieved that your injuries are not too serious. Hope that you make a speedy recovery. Africa needs you and particularly in southern Africa we need your steadfast leadership. Almighty wishes are with you' (Otimile 22 August 1988). Nyerere was quite popular in Botswana and had been a close friend of the late President Seretse Khama (Parsons *et al.* 1995). A street in Gaborone was even named after him (Makgala and Bolaane 2016). The Secretary General of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU), Ide Oumarou, also expressed shock at the news of Masire's accident and thanked God that he was recuperating. He also assured Masire of his prayers. The Egyptian Ambassador, Sayed Soliman, also expressed deep regret over the plane shooting and wished Masire speedy recovery. Perhaps, not surprisingly, no message from the South African government was recorded by the *Daily News*.

1988 Front Line States Resolutions, SADC and Cuito Cuanavale 30 Years On

The shooting of OK 1 did not stop the Front Line States' summit in Angola from going ahead as planned. Issues discussed concerned the freeing of Namibia from the shackles of South African occupation, and the ending of the civil wars in Angola and Mozambique. The concerned states resolutely backed the Security Council's Resolution 435 for the independence of Namibia. Resolution 435 proposed measures for a cease-fire, withdrawal of South African forces from Namibia, and United Nations supervised elections in Namibia.³ The Resolution which was adopted in September, 1978 led to the independence of Namibia. Therefore, the summit 'expressed total support for the results achieved during the last round

³ <https://peacemaker.un.org>, accessed 7 November 2018.

of quadripartite talks held in Geneva with a view to finding a peaceful solution in the southwestern corner of Africa' (*Daily News* 11 August 1988). At the end of the summit Angola, Mozambique, Tanzania, Zambia, Zimbabwe and even Botswana, whose President was still convalescing, issued a communiqué praising the 'constructive spirit, courage, realism and flexibility shown by the Angolan government in its peace initiatives with a view to facilitating the implementation of Resolution 435 on Namibia's independence and to guarantee Angola's security' (*Daily News* 11 August 1988).

Through the communiqué, the presidents of the Front Line States implored the Secretary General of the United Nations to facilitate the implementation of the Resolution 435 and urged the parties involved to desist from jeopardising the negotiation process. Satisfaction was also expressed by the summit concerning political regulation of troubles of the southwestern corner of Africa and 'the deep recognition to the important contribution rendered by Cuba to the Angolan people in defence of Angola's territorial sovereignty and integrity' (*Daily News* 11 August 1988). It was also reported that-

The heads of states reiterated their total support to the efforts carried out by Mozambique with a view to creating a climate of peace, stability and good neighbourliness outlined in the 'Nkomati Accord' and reaffirmed that the using of armed bandits by the Pretoria regime continue to be the main cause of tension and war prevailing in the sub-region.

They also outlined that the continuous refusal by the South African regime of establishing a democratic government contributes in increasing tension inside South Africa which also reflects negatively in the sub-region. The heads of state called on the Pretoria regime to revoke the bannings imposed on anti-apartheid organisations inside the country, to unconditionally release Nelson Mandela and all other political prisoners and to immediately begin dialogue with the true leaders of the black people (*Daily News* 11 August 1988).

The Cold War ended in 1989-1990 when the Soviet Union collapsed which also led to the end of apartheid, and introduction of a democratic order in South Africa with Nelson Mandela of the ANC becoming the country's first democratically elected President in 1994. South Africa had also withdrawn from Namibia and granted the latter its independence in 1990. Finally, the Southern African region was liberated from colonial and oppressive white minority regimes.

The defeat or withdrawal of the SADF following the Battle of Cuito Cuanavale marked the end of involvement by international armies in the protracted proxy war in Angola, and the end of the liberation struggle in southern Africa. It is, therefore, fitting and commendable that the SADC summit of 17-18 August 2018 held in Windhoek, Namibia, decided to recognise and commemorate 23 March as a Southern Africa Liberation Day (Angola Press 17 August 2018). It should be noted that the 23 March 1988, which SADC dedicated to the Battle of Cuito Cuanavale, marks the end of the liberation struggle when the armed forces from the then liberation movements of Namibia and South Africa joined with armed forces from Angola supported by the Cubans, to defeat the armed forces of the apartheid regime during the Battle of Cuito Cuanavale. August 2018 marked 30 years since the end of the Battle of Cuito Cuanavale, the 1988 Front Line States' summit in Luanda, and the shooting of Masire's OK 1.

According to Margaret Nasha, Deputy Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 1994, at one point along with Minister for Foreign Affairs, Dr Gaositwe Chiepe, they were summoned by Masire to State House. On meeting Masire he told them to immediately leave for the mountain kingdom of Lesotho where political strife was unfolding. Masire informed the two women that the army had taken over key national facilities including the international airport in the capital Maseru. SADC leaders, among whom was President Mandela of South Africa, had decided that selected member states should intervene in the Lesotho crisis. Upon hearing the message from Masire, Nasha said: 'Sir, you said the

Maseru airport is surrounded by the army. My assumption is that they are armed. What if they shoot our aircraft down?' (Nasha 2014:76). 'When the response came, I knew immediately that I probably should not have asked the question. President Masire looked at me straight in the eyes and said, "You will have died in the service of your country and our region",' continued Nasha (2014:76-77). It cannot be disputed that Masire was speaking from his personal experience of the shooting of his jet over Angola in 1988 and the fatal crash of Mozambican President, Samora Machel's jet in 1986.

Conclusion and Postscript

This paper has detailed the geopolitical context within which Masire's jet was shot at by the not so friendly fire of the Angolan government forces. We say not so friendly fire of the Angolan government forces because of the lingering suspicion Angola had that Botswana was somehow an enemy. The experiences and issues involved have been interrogated. Indeed as per the messages of sympathy and goodwill from institutions and individuals in Botswana and internationally, Masire did recover fully. He wrote in his 2006 memoirs that 'I lived with the residual pain for a year or two, and for a long time I could feel it when the weather changed. Fortunately, the pain has completely disappeared, and there were no psychological after effects' (Masire 2006:294).

For leadership, Masire was knighted by Queen Elizabeth II in 1991 in London at a ceremony attended by Margaret Nasha, who was Botswana's High Commissioner in London at the time (Nasha 2014). Hence, he started being called Sir Ketumile Masire in line with his knighthood.

As the Egyptian Ambassador Soliman had wished Masire, he continued leading Botswana as President for 10 more years as he retired in April 1998. Masire continued living for almost another decade, 19 years precisely, and he died on 22 June 2017 at 91 years of age. Although he almost died in a plane accident, he continued serving the international community as he crisscrossed the sub-Saharan African region on planes tasked by the United Nations to undertake special diplomatic missions in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Rwanda. These assignments followed a horrible civil war in the DRC in 1997 and genocide in Rwanda in 1994.

The pivotal role played by Masire in the liberation struggle of Southern Africa was also eloquently summed up during his funeral by then Zimbabwean President Robert Mugabe and former President Thabo Mbeki of South Africa. For his part Mugabe said 'Sir Ketumile Masire was one of Africa's leaders who played a crucial role in the attainment of independence by other African States. When he took over as President of Botswana in July 1980, the liberation struggles in South Africa and Namibia were at their peak. President Masire would not be intimidated by the might of the apartheid army into submission as Botswana continued to render assistance to the liberation movements in those countries (Mugabe 29 June 2017).

This was further buttressed by Mbeki when he said that 'I am certain that I speak for all the peoples of Southern Africa when I pay a heartfelt tribute to the leader we bury today, Sir Ketumile, for the central role he and his colleagues played in ensuring that this Republic and its people remained steadfast in their principled support for the total liberation of Africa. It is perfectly obvious that if he and his fellow-leaders had lost the will to resist, intimidated by the criminal might of the apartheid regime, so would have the determination of the masses of the people to support the liberation struggles weakened. However, loyal to the cause of freedom and the dignity of all Africans, these leaders, with Presidents Seretse Khama and Ketumile Masire leading from the front, stood their ground' (Mbeki 29 June 2017). He continued 'They conducted a complex political and diplomatic struggle which kept the apartheid enemy at bay while inspiring the people they led to remain ready to make the necessary sacrifices to help bring down the tyrannical white minority regimes then in power across the borders of Botswana'.

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