

ARTICLE

For Queen and Empire: British Military Assistance and Influence in Post-Colonial Botswana, 1977-1987

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Abstract

While the establishment of the Botswana Defence Force (BDF) in 1977 was a hasty product of the Rhodesian war (1966-1979), both the general structure and direction of this new armed force were a British affair. Being a former colonial master with a strong army, it was not surprising to see the BDF adopt a British military culture. However, British influence on the affairs of Botswana's new military grew significantly between 1977 and 1987. Using new oral and written primary sources, this paper explores the circumstances around the establishment of the BDF and offers a critical analysis of the nature and extent of British involvement in this period. The organic relationship between the newly formed BDF and the British government seemed inevitable. Some could see it as a natural progression for Botswana's new military to seek military assistance from its former colonial master. However, the financial motivations of Britain's Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO), and their new programme called the United Kingdom Military Training Assistance Scheme (UKMTAS) are questionable as they fostered an over-reliance of new militaries such as the BDF on UK funds. It was no coincidence that UKMTAS started operating in the 1960s when newly independent countries were struggling to source funds to build their new armed forces.

Keywords: Botswana Defence Force; neo-colonialism; British government; UKMTAS; Zimbabwe; apartheid South Africa.

Introduction

The BDF was hastily created in 1977 recruited men who had previously served in the paramilitary Police Mobile Unit (PMU) which had been the country's only means of defence towards the end of the colonial period. Though this was a direct response to the escalation of the Rhodesian war from 1964 to 1979, the entire Southern African region was also becoming increasingly militarised at the time. Since the mid-1960s, there were armed struggles for liberation in countries such as Angola, Mozambique, South West Africa (Namibia), Rhodesia (Zimbabwe), and South Africa. Being one of the few countries in the region without an ongoing armed struggle, Botswana became a safe haven for the refugees fleeing some of these countries. The escalation of the Rhodesian war following the independence of Mozambique and Angola from Portuguese colonial rule in 1975, resulted in an influx of black Rhodesian refugees. Consequently, Rhodesian security forces mounted a series of lethal cross-border incursions into Botswana in pursuit of guerillas belonging to the Zimbabwe People's Revolutionary Army (ZIPRA), the armed wing of the Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU). Though these cross-border incursions were targeted at black

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Rhodesian guerillas disguised as refugees, they were ruthless and often indiscriminate. On numerous occasions the Rhodesian forces bombed and destroyed property in many Botswana towns and villages to induce fear amongst Batswana who potentially harboured Rhodesian refugees. They also maimed and abducted innocent women and children while at the same time sexually assaulting many others (Bolaane 2013; Sibanda 2005).

With no military to defend its borders from these violent acts, the Botswana government was, by April 1977, cornered into quickly establishing its first armed force. This was accomplished through an act of parliament in a motion that passed unanimously (Merafhe 2015). A brief examination of the BDF Act No. 13 of 1977 explains the intended function of the new armed force. Part II of the Act states that the BDF would be made up of a regular force as well as a defence force reserve which may include a volunteer force at any given time. As was the case in other countries, the BDF Act established that the president of Botswana was the Commander in Chief of the armed force, and he would be responsible for defining some of its duties from time to time, including overseas work and training (Republic of Botswana 1977). The Act also emphasised that the BDF would conduct some work outside of the country's borders, be it with other African militaries or those from overseas. This provision emphasised the BDF's need for external aid to train and equip its new troops. It would also come into play soon after this by enabling the first 15 BDF officer cadets to go for training in Zambia, a long-standing partner of Botswana, between 1977 and 1978 and other countries thereafter. This provision reiterated Botswana's outward looking foreign policy which would, at some point, be enacted by deploying BDF troops outside of the country's borders for various peacekeeping operations.

According to the Act, Force Headquarters (Force HQ) exercised overall command, control, and supervision of the new force. During the formative years, Force HQ was housed in a very small building that had about eight main offices located next to the prisons building in the Village section of Gaborone. Force HQ had a clear structure outlined in the Act which included the Commander, at the time, 40-year-old Major General Mompoti Sebogodi Merafhe, his deputy, 24-year-old Brigadier Ian Khama, son of President Sir Seretse Khama, who had completed his military training at Sandhurst in Britain a few years prior, and other key branches such as administration, finance, logistics and operations (BDF Headquarter Structure – from Brigadier Ian Khama 11 May 1978, BNARS, OP 28/13).

At independence in 1966 Botswana was one of the poorest countries in the world, and the country's sorry economic situation in the late 1970s meant that recruiting for the force would be easy as many men were interested in the military (Interview with Maj. Gen. Bakwena Oitsile 18 January 2019) By May 1978, Force HQ had expanded to include a Provost Section (which later became the Military Police) under the command of a second lieutenant, Force Troops Headquarters, which included an engineer platoon, the Air Wing, armoured car platoon, a signals company, a support company, a mortar platoon, an anti-tank platoon as well as an air defence platoon. All these units had different commanding officers with different ranks ranging from second lieutenant to captain. Other units in Force HQ included the Force Training Wing (FTW) which was responsible for transforming civilians to soldiers through basic military training, the Band Wing, a medical unit, the Force Workshop company, as well as general staff and administration (*Ibid*). The first officer cadets of the BDF were only commissioned on 16 June 1978 after spending a year training in Zambia though at the same time Force HQ already had a functioning structure that included commissioned and non-commissioned officers. This is because Force HQ was made up of soldiers who had transitioned from the PMU and had received promotions to serve in those capacities.

The Beginnings of British Military Assistance to Botswana

While the BDF Act only offered the legal basis to establish the BDF, the actual framework that the BDF adopted came from elsewhere. To quickly establish the BDF, Seretse Khama's government thought it was

best to bring in military experts to conduct initial assessments of what would be necessary to carry out this immense task. This signalled the first stages of British involvement in Botswana's defence affairs. The Ministry of Defence of the United Kingdom (MOD UK) had expressed its willingness to help Botswana in this regard as soon as they heard news about the formation of the BDF (David Sprague to William Turner 4 July 1977, TNA, FCO 45/2026.) By July 1977 the government of Botswana, the MOD UK, and the FCO reached an agreement that Brigadier John Gray and Major Jonathan Swann would arrive in Botswana the following month and conduct a 3-week long survey and submit their recommendations to the president and BDF commander upon completion. Brigadier John Gray, who was 50 years old at the time, had a long and illustrious career and experience in infantry administration and logistics as well as foreign military service and advising. He had served in the Royal Regiment of Fusiliers, the Malay Regiment, he had also been responsible for the formation of the Abu Dhabi Defence Force and served as its first commanding officer (HMS Reid to B H Cousins 21 July 1977, TNA, FCO 45/2026). Apart from these duties, Gray's career made him the perfect man to turn the BDF Act of 1977 into reality. 35-year-old Major Jonathan Swann on the other hand was commissioned in the Royal Artillery regiment in 1965 in which he served until he was promoted to major in December 1974 (Ministry of Defence to Maj. Gen Merafhe 17 July 1977, TNA, FCO 45/2026). Swann's role was to provide Gray with any support he needed during their official deployment to Botswana.

Both men had been specifically ordered not to wear their military uniforms while in Botswana because their visit was seen as a sensitive political matter (Ministry of Defence to Maj. Gen Merafhe 17 July 1977, TNA, FCO 45/2026). Their task was to review the daily operations of the newly formed BDF, examine the Rhodesian threat to Botswana and advise the BDF command on the best way to respond to it. They also focused on the types of training and equipment needed to launch the new military. Their visit to Botswana had been the result of long negotiations between various parties including President Seretse Khama, General Merafhe, the FCO and the British officials at the MOD UK that began earlier in 1977. The funds needed to pay the two British officers were provided by the UKMTAS ('British military aid for Botswana Defence Force' 24 June 1977, TNA, FCO 45/2025).

UKMTAS was a British programme that accorded military assistance to its former colonies and territories which was set up in the 1960s although the British had started providing some military training to Indian, Malayan, and Pakistani students in 1959 (Stockwell 2018). It was formally run by the FCO together with MOD UK and grew to include newer members of the British Commonwealth a few years after it was established. By 1973, UKMTAS membership grew significantly as more countries developed their post-colonial militaries and thus required financial aid. This resulted in the growth of its operational budget though at times, some of its funds were constricted and limited to countries with more immediate military needs. For instance, following a financial review in 1974, UKMTAS funds were reduced which meant that the FCO had to become strategic with the aid it provided to more than 40 former colonies (Ford 2015). In the 1977/78 financial year, UKMTAS had only £1.68 million to use on aid. Prior to 1977 Botswana did not have a formal allocation of that budget but the FCO was aware of its growing security needs owing to the Rhodesian war and was prepared to support Botswana with funds ranging between £15,000 and £135,000 (D Willcocks (Defence Department) to JFR Martin 27 June 1977, TNA, FCO 45/2026).

By the end of August 1977, Gray and Swann had completed their visit, and the following month Gray submitted his recommendations to the President Seretse Khama and the commander of the BDF. Gray's report created a framework that the early BDF adopted though not all his recommendations were implemented. According to Gray's report the basic duties to be performed by the BDF included acting as a deterrent to any potential aggressor, patrolling, maintaining surveillance over selected parts of the Botswana border, and apprehending or eliminating any armed or unarmed infiltrators in areas where the

BDF was handed operational responsibility by the government. Other roles included carrying out certain ceremonial duties, providing support to the police and other civil authorities of Botswana while allowing the government to pursue peace through regional and international diplomatic channels (Report on the BDF by Brigadier John W Gray 6 October 1977, TNA, FCO 45/2027).

Because these were basic duties that could be performed by any military, we cannot say that they were Gray's invention. Furthermore, when the advisory team arrived in Botswana, the BDF already had two companies that had transitioned from the PMU. For instance, 'A Company (A-Coy), stationed in Francistown, was responsible for border patrols while B Company (B-Coy) was stationed in Gaborone and charged with presidential guard duties' (Botswana Defence Force 2017). Gray recommended the introduction of three more companies including a new company to reinforce the existing one at Francistown and two new ones stationed at Kasane and Selebi-Phikwe to properly respond to cross-border raids (Gray's Report 6 October 1977). Kasane was only 11km from Kazungula, the quadripoint where Botswana shared borders with South West Africa or Namibia's Caprivi Strip (now called Zambezi Region), Zambia, and Rhodesia. Gray had been made aware of some Rhodesian activity in the area and he saw it as a critical location to station troops. Selebi Phikwe, on the other hand, was home to one of the refugee transit camps and a copper-nickel mining town and was also near the Botswana-Rhodesia border. Gray saw these three factors as a point of interest for the (*Ibid*).

By the end of 1977, the BDF had adopted Gray's proposed model and stationed men in those areas although it took longer to construct the infrastructure needed. C Company (C-Coy) was stationed in Selebi Phikwe while D Company (D-Coy) began work in Francistown (Botswana Defence Force 2017). Gray's report suggested that the new and existing companies would be sufficient to perform the required tasks of border patrols in various areas, VIP protection and training of new troops. Theoretically, this was how things would work but, on the ground, events dictated the course of action. For instance, instead of creating a new company in Kasane, the BDF opted to station two small platoons there due to a lack of resources and manpower. Gray's report also called for the introduction of support companies, and mortar, anti-tank, and air defence platoons (*Ibid*). Because of the availability of some funds from UKMTAS, these were introduced between 1977 and early 1978.

British Military Hardware and the Development of Support Units

The framework, funding and personnel that essentially established the BDF were of British origin, and so were other components of the new military. This included most of the hardware it procured during its formative years. The ground forces served (and still serve) as the core element of the BDF. According to Gray, it was important to provide the overall ground forces with three specialised support units (or SU) that would be later named 1 SU, 2 SU and 3 SU stationed at Gaborone, Francistown and Selebi Phikwe, respectively (*Ibid*). Each SU comprised four sub-units which included the air defence platoon which became more significant in 1988, anti-tank, mortar, and armoured platoons. These support units introduced mechanised components to the existing units which they augmented with British-made Shorland armoured vehicles as well as soft skinned Landrovers that had been delivered from Britain towards the end of 1977 (BDF 2017). The purchase of these types of vehicles was undoubtedly necessary to traverse the tough terrain of Botswana as by that time only a few tarred roads had been constructed.

The introduction of anti-tank elements to the BDF was a good idea even though the Rhodesians never used tanks during their cross-border incursions. These anti-tank weapons could, however, be very effective against armoured vehicles like the Ferret and Eland and even the mine-resistant APCs like the ones used by Rhodesian forces. In his report Gray recommended that five sections, each with two anti-tank weapons be made ready to deploy to any of the companies across the country should the need arise.

Gray's recommendations were guided by the equipment that the BDF possessed as well as those that it had ordered from its suppliers. For instance, the mortar platoon according to him was supposed to be divided into five sections each armed with two medium mortars of which the BDF had already acquired in April of 1977. On the other hand, the mechanised platoons were to use Shorland trucks, some of which had been ordered but not yet delivered.

In May 1977, Merafhe undertook his first official visit to Britain that was sponsored in part by UK-MTAS, spending 10 days meeting with various defence stakeholders including the members of the Ministry of Defence, defence sales organisations, as well as weapons and aircraft manufacturers such as Britten Norman (Rowlands to Graham (Defence Department) and Mansfield 2 May 1977, TNA, FCO 45/2025). During this visit, Merafhe expressed that he was generally content with the growth of BDF personnel as it would be supplemented by bigger recruitment drives during the rest of 1977. His main reason for visiting the UK was to gather information on how best to build up the defence force including securing hardware that would facilitate logistical support for the BDF. This included rugged vehicles that would be suited for Botswana's rough bush terrain and aircraft to be used for troop transport and reconnaissance (Mansfield to HMS Reid 10 June 1977, TNA, FCO 45/2025). Merafhe had the Shorland armoured trucks and Landrovers in mind as he would order several of these upon his return to Botswana (General Merafhe to JW Gray 27 October 1977, TNA, FCO 45/2027). These were also the same vehicles used by colonial forces across the British Empire. The ubiquitous nature of these vehicles also likely made their spare parts more readily available on the market at the time. Merafhe also went on to request some training in the UK for some of the troops who were transitioning from the PMU to the BDF with courses focusing primarily on communications, motor transport and the maintenance of the Shorland trucks (MJ Maconn (Overseas Police Advisor) to DK Sprague 1 May 1977, TNA, FCO 45/2024). At the completion of his visit, Merafhe was a delighted and optimistic man. The numerous demonstrations put up by British manufacturers and defence personnel gave him the hope that he would be able to secure the equipment and training needed for his new military. However, the British officials and representatives of some of the organisations he met were left with doubts because he failed to disclose his budget which meant that it was difficult for them to suggest which hardware would be best for the BDF. This was most likely because Merafhe's budget at the time was dictated by how much UKMTAS could provide to his new force at a given time (Proposed Assistance to BDF 16 May 1977, TNA, FCO 45/2025).

Soon after Merafhe returned to Botswana, his second in command, Brigadier Ian Khama, travelled to the UK to secure three units of the BN2 Defender aircraft made by Britten Norman valued at £100,000 each, five Shorland armoured patrol vehicles with spares valued at £101,825. He also ordered security equipment that included water cannons, anti-riot gear, smoke grenades and Belgian manufactured general purpose machine guns (Arms sales to Botswana and Potential Arms sales, nd, TNA, FCO 45/2027). These were meant to augment police responses to internal unrest within Botswana including student riots during the 1970s (Makgala 2022; Mokopakgosi 2008). By September 1977, most of this equipment had been delivered while two of the three BN 2 Defender aircraft arrived in December. Due to some logistical difficulties, the third and last plane was delivered in January 1978 (Defence Sales Office to FCO, letters dated from 11 November 1977 to 3 January 1978, TNA, FCO 45/2025).

The prompt acquisition of British military hardware by the end of 1977 proved useful to the BDF as it was constructing observation posts as far as the Kazungula quadripoint. The Shorland light armoured vehicles were used to patrol that area because of frequent incursions by the South African Defence Force (SADF) boat patrols (District Commissioner (Kasane) to Office of the President 8 November 1977, BNARS, OP 28/13). On numerous occasions the South Africans crossed the unmanned sections of that border on the Botswana side of the river proceeded on foot to search for African National Congress (ANC)

and South West Africa People's Organisation (SWAPO) insurgents and interrogated local Botswana fishermen (Gumbo 2010). The Rhodesian security forces simultaneously infiltrated Botswana at the quadripoint in their vehicles and sometimes on foot in pursuit of ZIPRA insurgents. As these cross-border violations escalated in 1977, the BDF responded by building more observation posts and provided light armoured Shorland vehicles to support the troops deployed in that area.

Building the BDF's Air Wing

The command of the air has been described as fundamental to victory in modern wars. According to Douhet (1976), the Italian air power strategist, militaries that use aircraft to bombard enemy installations have an added advantage as the air space is unlimited. He further states that air power can be used to break the enemy's morale. By 1977, the Rhodesian Air Force was one of the most advanced and strongest in the region. It had a wide array of fighter jets, attack helicopters, bombers, and many other aircraft in its arsenal (*Labour's Independent Weekly Tribune* 1963; Salt 2000; Mutanda 2017). Though the BDF could never match the strength of the Rhodesian Air Force, it was necessary for it to build up its own air wing with reconnaissance, communications, reinforcement or troop transport, and evacuation amongst its top priorities (Gray 6 October 1977). The BDF air wing was, therefore, developed simultaneously with other units in 1977 drawing from Gray's recommendations. This was no easy task as the BDF had no aircraft to work with coupled with the hefty funds required to build up an air wing. The air wing started as a component of the Special Support Unit (SSU), an element of the Force Troops that also included smaller elements like the signals and combat engineers. Prior to the acquisition of the Britten Norman Defender, BDF pilot training was conducted by Kalahari Air Services, a local private company that provided several air services within Botswana (Interview with Lt. Gen. Masire 16 January 2019).

The BDF air wing began with only four Botswana pilots. These were Tebogo Masire, Ezekiel Rakgole, Jagamang Seduke and Albert Scheffers who became the core of the air wing's command structure. Fortunately, when they enlisted, they had some prior experience in the civil aviation industry. Masire, for instance, was an air traffic controller in the Civil Aviation department while Scheffers had already graduated from flying school and was undergoing training to become an assistant flying instructor with Kalahari Flying Club (Botswana Defence Force 2017). Masire, who would lead an illustrious military career and go on to become the fourth commander of the BDF between 2006 and 2012, stated that their first 40 hours of flight training was conducted on a civilian Cessna 172 aircraft provided by Kalahari Air Services (Interview with Lt. Gen. Masire, 16 January 2019).

Because the BDF did not have instructors of its own, even though Brigadier Khama had graduated from the Royal Military Academy at Sandhurst as a trained pilot, they yet again turned to the British to provide those services. In this case, the BDF hired a retired Royal Air Force (RAF) squadron leader, Anthony Maurice Durrant (commonly known within the BDF as Tony Durrant) to conduct operational training of these first four pilots and develop the BDF's Air Wing (*Ibid*). Durrant had used the BN Defender during his days in the RAF and was familiar with its operation, so it was no coincidence that the BDF opted to purchase them. In fact, Britten Norman had a policy where they offered a certain amount of pilot training with the sale of their aircraft. They were involved in Durrant's contract negotiations with the BDF and recommended him specifically (BDF 27 October 1977, BNARS, OP 28/13). Furthermore, Gray supported the decision to purchase the rugged Britten Norman BN 2 Defender arguing that it was one of the most affordable and best suited to perform the required duties (Rowlands (CSAD) to Graham and Mansfield 2 May 1977 BNARS, OP 28/13). Durrant had a strong reputation while in the RAF. Apart from being a squadron leader, he had been involved in the formation of the Ghanaian Air Force some years prior to his appointment in Botswana. His contract began in January 1978 and ran for 12 months with the option to renew it

for subsequent years. Following his appointment, the BDF needed a second experienced pilot with similar credentials but struggled to find one. Evidence suggests that that the BDF looked at hiring David Stewart Morton who had considerable expertise in the RAF between 1939 and 1973 but ended up not choosing him (General Mompoti Merafhe to Office of the President 8 February 1978, BNARS, OP 28/13). Instead, Durrant later recommended his former colleague from the RAF, Harry Haines, who was brought in to assist Durrant with training of the new pilots (Interview with Masire 16 January 2019). The two instructors then went on to develop a meticulous flight training programme that included numerous flying hours in the Cessna, lectures, as well as ground training for the first four BDF pilots with the assumption that the Defender aircraft would arrive on time. As soon as the first two Defenders were delivered, Masire, Seduke, Scheffers and Rakgole immediately started training on them as they would become their main aircraft until the purchase of other air assets in the following years (*Ibid*).

Soon after their pilot training was complete, the first four pilots joined the 11 other cadets that had completed officer training in Zambia and were commissioned as second lieutenants in 1978. The new pilots then split with two remaining in Gaborone where they were stationed at the Notwane Airbase while the other two went to Francistown where they were operating from a hangar owned by the Witwatersrand Native Labour Association (WNLA). The latter was a South African entity recruiting African labour for the mines in South Africa. It is not clear when the Notwane Airbase was built but it appears to have been an airstrip used previously by colonial officials for scheduled flights in and out of Gaborone. The move of the Air Wing to Francistown was very important because the BDF now had its own air service that could conduct much needed aerial reconnaissance of the Botswana-Rhodesia border. Given that the BDF was eager to contain the border situation, it started construction of gravel airstrips in more remote places like Senyawwe, Gobojango, Matsiloje, Mapoka, Ramokgwebana, and Maitengwe in the north-east of Botswana before they had ordered any aircraft. This was a necessary move and one that proved very helpful in facilitating logistical air support to troops deployed in these areas (BDF 20 September 1977, BNARS, OP 28/13).

The economics of building a new air wing from the ground up should not be overlooked as European aircraft manufacturers such as Britten Norman, Scottish Aviation and Swedish giant SAAB were competing for clients around this time. In fact, between 1970 and 1977, these companies had all jockeyed to supply African militaries including those of Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, Zaire, and Zambia (Palman Sales and Raftery 15 July 1977, TNA, FCO 45/2025). Because Brigadier Khama was a trained pilot, he had more knowledge than Merafhe regarding the type of aircraft that could be acquired at a reasonable price. Having recently completed the Britten Norman deal, Khama was in the market for smaller trainer aircraft to augment the BN Defender. In July 1977, while the first four BDF airmen were undergoing their flight training, SAAB invited Ian Khama to Sweden for a demonstration of their Safari trainer aircraft with the hope that he would order a few of them. Upon learning of this invitation, the British officials persuaded him to stop in the UK and view a demonstration of their B. 125 Bulldog trainer aircraft (UK correspondence files 15 July 1977, TNA, FCO 45/2025). By September Khama had completed his visit and stated clearly that he was more impressed by the Safari over the Bulldog. He claimed that the former performed extremely well in all conditions while the Bulldog's 'handling for landings was cause for anxiety at some stages' (Brigadier Khama 3-21 September 1977, BNARS, OP 28/13). It is not clear if he flew both trainer aircrafts but despite him suggesting his preference for the Safari, the BDF later purchased several Bulldog trainer aircraft possibly because it was easier to maintain compared to the Safari (Defence Sales Department Sales Files June 1978, TNA, FCO 45/2027). Surely there was nothing wrong with the acquisition of Safari trainer aircraft but the reason behind the purchase of the Bulldog was likely the existing relationship between the BDF and British arms manufacturers that UKMTAS had nurtured.

BDF Early Arms Acquisition and UKMTAS dynamics in Independent Africa

Botswana officially declared itself neutral during the Cold War. This was expressed on numerous occasions by President Khama and his cabinet when they stated that Botswana would seek funds, weapons, and training from any friendly nation despite Cold War alliance (*Botswana Daily News* 22 April 1977). This was not only a sensible policy because the two hostile neighbours, Rhodesia and South Africa were pro-Western, but it had pragmatic functions as well. It meant that Botswana, despite being a democratic state, could turn to whichever country at any given time to acquire the means to defend its borders. In this period, Botswana had relationships with North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) members such as Britain, Belgium, and the United States but it also imported weapons from China, and later the Soviet Union (Kwante and Manatsha 2016) Botswana neutrality would be reiterated in 1978 when the BDF requested help from the Indian Army, a country that spearheaded the Non-Aligned Movement during the Cold War (Interview with Maj. Gen. Bakwena Oitsile 18 January 2019).

Early in 1977, President Khama's office wrote to Donald Norland, the US ambassador to the former High Commission Territories between 1976 and 1979 asking for military aid in the form of vehicles, small arms and ammunition. Washington did not provide a direct response to Khama's request but deferred to the US embassy in Britain to assess Botswana's military needs. Eventually, the FCO agreed to supply the BDF with this aid (EJ Emery and Alec Ibbott 27 April 1977, TNA, FCO 45/2024). It was common for the US to avoid being directly involved when a former European colony asked for aid because they believed that former colonial powers and US allies like Britain and France could handle such requests (Schrader 1994). Before 1977, the United States had supplied some arms and ammunition to Botswana, but this changed when the Jimmy Carter administration started to favour a foreign policy that promoted peace in the developing world and restricted US arms sales to other nations (Mitchell 2016; Moens 1990; Dumbrell 1993). For instance, instead of providing weapons, the US preferred to give funds to Botswana for infrastructure development. In the same year, the US invested about P7 million or (about US\$700 000 today) to build a road between Nata and Kazungula but the pragmatic Norland tried to get some of those funds diverted towards a cash – strapped BDF (Emery and Ibbott 27 April 1977, TNA, FCO 45/2024).

UKMTAS had been set up to provide military aid but equally important was that its role in the post-colonial era of maintaining a British presence in the Commonwealth countries. British military assistance was an important way of continuing the commercial interests of British global arms exports that were being challenged by other European countries such as France, Belgium, and West Germany. The British believed that the provision of financial and technical training to budding Commonwealth armies using British military hardware, would ensure the continuity of British military presence in its former colonies (Stockwell 2018). It would also ensure that these militaries would continue buying and servicing British equipment on which they had been trained. UKMTAS was, therefore, an arm of British neo-colonialist agenda even though former British colonies such as Botswana and Ghana had explained that they would acquire military aid wherever it was available (Stockwell 2018).

Officially, the FCO's objectives for helping fund the formation of the BDF involved helping maintain the status quo in Botswana and to help preserve democracy and stability in the country. The FCO made it clear that the BDF needed to have a solid foundation to avoid coups and mutinies that had taken place in other former British colonies. Another objective was to leave no openings for the Russians and Chinese who were already growing closer to the Botswana government (Emery and Ibbott 27 April 1977, TNA, FCO 45/2024). This made it appear that helping the BDF was a priority for the FCO but, it had strong neo-colonialist undertones. Though Botswana never adopted a socialist ideology, it maintained a pragmatic foreign policy during the Cold War mainly for financial reasons. The then Minister of Public Service and

Information, Daniel Kwelagobe, reiterated in 1977 that Botswana would acquire the means to fight the Rhodesian threat from any country despite their ideology if they offered weapons at a reasonable price (*Daily News* 22 April 1977). Some of the earliest weapons the BDF acquired were Chinese though they did not last long owing to poor quality thus forcing Botswana to turn to the British for better ones (Maj. Gen. Merafhe to Office of the President 19 December 1977, BNARS, OP 28/13). From 1977 onwards, the FCO and UKMTAS rolled out their plan to help the government of Botswana with funds, weapons, military training as well as education for a few BDF cadres. UKMTAS also paid for Sergeant Mpala's courses at the Royal Military Academy, Sandhurst, which ran from 5 September 1977 to March 1978. He was the first of many BDF cadres to benefit from the sponsorship because from that time, MOD UK offered more course placements for Botswana soldiers (HMS Reid to BH Cousins 21 July 1977, TNA FCO 44/2025).

Between 1967 and 1976, the FCO and UKMTAS provided Botswana with capital aid amounting to £11.5 million and technical assistance of £5 million. This continued between 1976 and 1979 with general funding up to £10 million in total aid (Brief to Secretary of State's visit to Southern Africa 7 April 1977, TNA FCO 45/2024). After being established in April 1977, the BDF became extremely reliant on this aid which funded most of its arms acquisitions until the 1980s. With strong involvement of the FCO through its UKMTAS programme, the BDF continued to model itself by adopting a British military style and defence doctrine. For instance, in April 1977 Brigadier Khama had requested instructional videos from the British Ministry of Defence to help train the PMU core of the BDF on their new military duties. Khama specifically requested videos that focused on drill, ceremonial drill, fieldcraft, night patrols, day reconnaissance patrols, use of night visual aids, riot control and counter revolution operations (BDF 27 April 1977, TNA, FCO 45/2024). The British officials were more than delighted to supply those videos and any other material that the BDF requested as it was economically and diplomatically important for them.

Across the British Empire: The BDF and the Indian Army Training Team (IATT)

The presence of Indians in Botswana dates to the late 1890s after the completion of the Mafeking-Bulawayo railway. Few enterprising Indians migrated and settled in eastern Botswana such as Mahalapye, Lobatse and Francistown from Gujarat in India via Natal, South Africa. Through time, these individual entrepreneurs helped introduce the people of Botswana to modern capitalist ideas thus becoming an important aspect of the country's economy. They also brought with them their ways of life including various religions, style of dress, food, and numerous other aspects of their culture. (Makgala 2004) By the time Botswana gained independence, the Indian population was significant enough for the Indian government to commence diplomatic relations with Botswana though it was not until 1987 that India opened a high commission in Botswana. (Indian Ministry of External Affairs 2016). Since the 1950s, the Indian government under Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru officially chose neutrality during the Cold War and later took a leading role in the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), even though on many occasions, it drew some of its policies from Moscow (Barany 2012). From that period well into the 1970s, neutrality informed India's foreign policy even though it tried to take advantage of the bipolar global conflict and create its own sphere of influence among the developing nations of the world (Chitalkar and Malone 2011). However, despite being labelled imperialistic by some, India's agenda was always aimed at promoting peace and goodwill in that it became one of the most active contributors to international peacekeeping operations around the world including in Africa from the 1960s (Bullion 2005; MacQueen 2014). Moreover, in 1963 the Indian Army offered eight places to Nigerian officers at its Defence Academy in Dehradun, India. The following year it helped set up the Nigerian Defence Academy in Kaduna, Nigeria (Verma 2014; Agbese 2012).

It was India's expansive anti-colonial foreign policy, a much longer history of military involvement outside of its borders, as well as a neutral approach to Cold War affairs that drew the BDF's attention. In

April 1978, BDF commander Merafhe travelled to the Southeast Asian nation to establish new military relations. Merafhe saw the Indian Army's Anglophone personnel as well as the familiar British-style military culture as the perfect recipe to mentor the BDF. While in India, he visited the Indian Military Academy in Dehradun, Uttarakhand and other establishments, and realised that the BDF would learn a lot from the training that the Indians were conducting at the time (Merafhe to Office of the President of Botswana, 19 April 1978. BNARS, OP 28/13). Up to this point, Merafhe had been reluctant to request extensive training from nations that had more military experience as reflected by the recruitment of four British officers, two of whom were no longer actively in service. However, the escalation of cross-border skirmishes by the Rhodesian security forces meant that there was a need for better training and responses and Merafhe felt could be obtained from India. Initially, India agreed to send a small team of officers with wide ranging technical expertise to help train the BDF but later increased their presence by bringing in Indian Air Force instructors to take over from Tony Durrant and Harry Haines 1981 (Interview with Masire 16 January 2019). This new training agreement also opened doors for some of the BDF's future officers to travel to India for various courses. The initial contingent of army officers in the Indian Army Training Team included Virender Kumar, Davand Bhangui, Abnash Chander, Balkar Singh Randhawa, Shyan Lal Barolia and Charan Singh who arrived in October 1978 (Merafhe to Botswana Immigration 24 October 1978).

Merafhe also looked to add key competencies to the BDF by coming up with a list of courses aimed at officer training for his embryonic military. This included courses for officer cadets, platoon commanders, physical training, and engineering with a focus on construction of obstacles, bridges as well as the laying of mines. Other courses in his list focused on non-combat roles such as mechanical and electrical engineering, catering, administration, and management for the advancement of both commissioned and non-commissioned officers (Merafhe to Office of the President 19 April 1978). The importance of this new partnership can, therefore, not be understated as it essentially shaped the BDF into what it is today. The now retired Lt. Col. Molefe Mooketsi, who joined the BDF in June 1977 as a private, is amongst many who benefitted greatly from this partnership as the courses he took in India led him to become a commissioned officer later in his career (Interview with Lt. Col. Mooketsi 28 November 2018).

British Influences over Botswana's Defence affairs to 1987

With the establishment and early development of the BDF having been reliant on British financial aid, it was no surprise to see the former colonial power also play a key role in controlling how well Botswana defended itself against regional enemies. Following the conclusion of the Rhodesian war in 1979 which led to the establishment of Zimbabwe's first independent government under President Robert Mugabe, the BDF's attention switched to apartheid South Africa's aggression in the south of Botswana. Throughout the 1980s, the racist white minority government of South Africa had been destabilising neighbouring countries that showed sympathy towards exiled ANC members Who fought against apartheid (Stapleton 2013). Botswana was amongst many African countries that bore the wrath of the South African Defence Force's (SADF) seemingly endless bomb attacks and cross-border military raids in this period. Importantly, after 1984, Botswana no longer relied heavily on UKMTAS as it was now able to generate its own revenue through the sale of diamonds (*Daily News* 18 January 1985). This new economic lifeline meant that the BDF could now enjoy more latitude in spending and procure non-British arms and ammunition.

SADF cross-border raids were common and disrupted normal life in Botswana. For instance, on 14 June 1985 an SADF contingent crossed into Botswana at different border posts and later bombed several houses in Botswana's capital, Gaborone killing 12 suspected ANC dissidents and injuring many innocent Batswana in the process. This highly coordinated raid lasted no more than 40 minutes but left the people of Botswana pointing fingers to the seemingly ineffective BDF (*Daily News* 19 June 1985; *Mmegi* 24 August

1985). Raids like this became a common occurrence in Botswana towards the end of the Cold War period leading the BDF to scramble to bolster its manpower and equipment. One of the major developments that the BDF aimed at undertaking was building up its air wing to develop new aerial attack capabilities. However, regional political dynamics, in particular, the threat that BDF jets would pose to the South African Air Force (SAAF) superiority made their acquisition very difficult.

In light of continued attacks on Botswana, British Aerospace Engineering (BAE), formerly British Aircraft Corporation (BAC), tried to sell brand new Hawk 60, 100 and 200 series of light attack jets to the BDF but were blocked by the Defence Sales Department of the MOD UK stating that they wished to avoid an increase in tensions between the two countries (Application for the release of information and marketing of BAE Hawk series 60, 100 and 200 - Multiple 15 December 1986, TNA, FCO 105/2583). In this case, MOD UK officials feared that if they allowed the sale, it would cause an unprecedented arms race between the two neighbours (A Pocock and Mr. Humfrey to Defence Sales Department, 5 February 1987, TNA, FCO 105/2583). However, this political blockade should be understood as an instrument of British neo-colonialist agenda in the way it heavily curtailed the BDF's ability to arm itself against external aggression. Despite granting Botswana its independence, the British government still retained significant control over BDF arms purchases in this period. This factor is also echoed by the BDF's reliance on UK-MTAS funding up to this point despite growing diamond revenues. MOD UK took that stance because they wanted to appease the already belligerent apartheid government of South Africa (Pythian 2000; van Vuuren 2018).

Because the MOD UK denied BAE's prospective sale and marketing of the Hawk fighter aircraft, they devised a weak compromise of allowing BAE to sell the BDF some of its older fighter jets called the Strikemaster. These aircraft had been flying since the late 1960s and were obsolete and dilapidated at that point despite being refurbished. This is because several of them crashed owing to mechanical and pilot errors and were soon decommissioned by the BDF (MOD UK *Communique* 26 February 1987, TNA, FCO 105/2583). To MOD UK, the Strikemaster would be the best compromise for the BDF and would not raise the eyebrows of South Africa who flew far superior French made Mirage jets (*South African Observer*, 1988; *The Star* 1988; *The Observer* 1988). Despite the sour deal, the BDF air wing began training on the Strikemaster as soon as it was delivered as it was a new capability that it did not have up to that point (Interview with Lt. Gen. Masire 16 January 2019).

Conclusion

The FCO's creation of the UKMTAS during the period of African independence was no coincidence. On paper this British entity was meant to offer support to newly formed militaries or those that were transitioning into armed forces of independent countries across Africa and the rest of the British Commonwealth. Theoretically, it was meant to help new militaries arm themselves against all forms of aggression. However, it had far more cynical motives in that it created a dependency trap for burgeoning militaries such as the BDF who had few options to secure funds. In the case of Botswana, funding through UKMTAS secured a long-term client for British weapons manufacturers and suppliers. It was therefore in the best interests of the British government to control how the funds they provided were spent. The cash strapped BDF fell into this trap as it depended on these loans to purchase British weapons and hire instructors.

General Merafhe's request of Gray and Swann to come to Botswana to draw up the basic structure of what was to become the BDF, and the adoption of most their recommendations ensured the growth of the British military ethos within the BDF. The further reliance on Tony Durrant and Harry Haines as well as the arrival of the Indian Army personnel solidified the acceptance of the British military culture within Botswana's military. While there were no early indications that this was a great initiative, British officials, particularly those at MOD UK knew that they wielded certain powers that controlled how the BDF could

arm itself against the growing threat of apartheid. Their interference of the potential sale of the Hawk fighter aircraft to the BDF after 1985 was a clear indication that the BDF was at the mercy of the British government.

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