

AFRICA'S RELUCTANT NEW POLICEMAN TWIRLS HIS TRUNCHEON: THE LESOTHO EXPERIENCE AND SOUTH AFRICA'S ROLE IN PEACEKEEPING

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BUREAU CHIEF, SUNDAY TRIBUNE

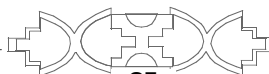
INTRODUCTION

Nothing quite concentrates the earthbound minds of stubborn soldiers deprived of aircraft as jet fighter-bombers screaming overhead.

Such was the case in Maseru, capital of the mountain Kingdom of Lesotho, on the morning of 9 September last year. Three South African Air Force (SAAF) Impala jets from nearby Bloemfontein streaked through the spring sunshine on the South African side of the border. On the Lesotho side of the fence, in the same area, was the barracks of the Royal Lesotho Defence Force, that had thrown its muscle behind King Letsie III after he was ousted from office the previous month by the democratically elected Basotho Congress Party (BCP) of Ntsu Mokhehle.

More South African firepower was displayed that day, when paratroopers from 44 and 45 Parachute Brigades staged an impressive mass drop on the South African bank of the Caledon River, with intrigued Maseru residents as a captive audience. The chief of the Orange Free State Command of the South African National Defence Force (SANDF), Brigadier André Bestbier, described the military manoeuvres as “*exercises*” to “*stabilise certain aspects of its contingency planning*”, that were necessary for the OFS Command. SANDF spokesperson, Major Merle Meyer, went on record to confirm that the contingency planning was related to the possibility that unrest could spill over the border from Lesotho. Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) spokesperson Jacques Malan had an opposite view of the proceedings. The exercise, he told reporters, was NOT related to the crisis in Maseru.

Differing statements notwithstanding, it was clear that the SANDF deployment was the stick to the carrots being proffered in diplomatic shuttling behind the scenes by South Africa and some of its neighbours, that was co-ordinated by Pretoria’s Director-General of Foreign Affairs, Rusty Evans. When the SANDF officially announced on 11 September that its “*exercises*” had been terminated and its troops returned to barracks, the point had been well and truly made. Evans announced that mediation, temporarily delayed by a death in the Royal Household, would resume and by 13 September an agreement had been reached between Letsie and Mokhehle, ending weeks of vacillating by the King and hard-line statements by the “*interim government*” in Maseru.



The successful resolution through repeated diplomatic efforts of the crisis in the Kingdom, that had dragged on from January, was due in large measure to Evans and to the judicious application of Parabat and Impala diplomacy. It marked the emergence of South Africa as the new African policeman and peacemaker.

BACKGROUND

The history of Lesotho is permeated with political intrigue, right from the time Paramount Chief Moshoeshe I began his reign in about 1820 and set about welding a number of diverse peoples into the Basotho nation. Intervention from South Africa has also been part of the landscape, starting with the decade of wars between the Basotho and the Boers, which culminated in Moshoeshe I's request for protection from Britain. From 1868 to 1959, the country of Basutoland was a British High Commission territory, like Botswana and Swaziland.

Ntsu Mokhehle, a graduate of Fort Hare University and contemporary of Nelson Mandela and Oliver Tambo, formed the Basutoland Congress Party in 1952, after joining the South African African National Congress's Youth League while at Fort Hare ten years earlier. In January 1960, the BCP garnered 73 of 162 seats in British-supervised district council elections, and in the indirect elections that followed, won 32 of the 40 seats in the Legislative Council. However, with considerable South African National Party backing, Chief Leabua Jonathan's Basutoland National Party swept the board in pre-independence elections in 1966.

The BCP remained a force to be considered and looked to be heading for a landslide win in the 1970 election when Jonathan ordered the vote counting stopped and declared a State of Emergency. The government put Mokhehle in jail and placed King Moshoeshe II under house arrest.

The BCP's return to centre stage came in 1993, when it fought national elections called by the then ruling Military Council headed by Colonel Elias Ramaema. He had overthrown General Justin Lekhanya, who in turn overthrew Chief Jonathan in what many observers said was a South African-backed *coup* in 1986. Many inside and outside Lesotho were not convinced that the military would simply hand over power, having been used to years of living in a privileged and powerful position in a small community. *"We of the legal profession have maintained a healthy scepticism about the process of democratisation. The reason is that military governments all over the world never relinquish power easily once they have seized it"*, wrote W. C. M. Maqutu in *The Mirror* newspaper in Maseru. His words were to turn out to be uncannily prophetic. In the April 1993 poll, the BCP swept the board to take all of the Kingdom's 65 constituencies. The BNP leader, former foreign minister Evaristus Sekhonyana, cried foul, claiming vote rigging and other poll irregularities. At least three foreign observer groups, from the Commonwealth, the Organisation of African Unity and the American International Republican Institute, found that the elections were free and fair.

It was not long before the BCP began making heavy weather of running the country. The economy, never strong to begin with, was in tatters and the BCP

government seemed lethargic or disinclined to disturb the *status quo*. The reduction by South African mines of labour forces had an impact on Lesotho, in reduced earnings through miners' remittances and in increased numbers of unemployed within the Kingdom. At the same time the salaries of parliamentarians and cabinet ministers were increased. The BCP's promises of job creation and improving education and health services seemed little more than empty promises to most Basotho. Sekhonyana claimed that former members of the Lesotho Liberation Army (LLA) - the armed wing of the BCP - were still operational in security companies, and were providing the BCP with insurance against political setbacks.

In October 1993 junior officers of the Royal Lesotho Defence Force (RLDF) staged a mini-mutiny at their barracks, forcing the resignation of four senior officers. The government's acquiescence on the resignation of the soldiers may have emboldened the potential mutineers and their supporters. In January 1994, disgruntled RLDF members kidnapped the chief of the air force, Lieutenant-Colonel Patrick Majare, after shooting him in an armed confrontation. A number of Lesotho pilots flew across the border to South Africa in their helicopters, claiming they were in fear of their lives. There were reports of shooting in the streets of Maseru.

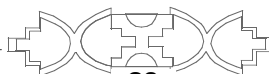
The situation had now become more than just Lesotho's problem.

PRETORIA'S IMPERATIVES

South Africa's handling of the entire Lesotho crisis involved two governments - the outgoing National Party Government and the new ANC-led Government of National Unity (GNU) - which would have had some motives in common and some differences in agenda. Irrespective of who was calling the shots in Foreign Affairs in Pretoria, it was obvious that a deteriorating situation in Lesotho would have a critical fall-out for South Africa. South African Institute of International Affairs (SAIIA) national director Sarah Pienaar aptly summarised the pressure on Pretoria by saying it had no choice but to become involved in the search for a solution, if it was to avoid an "*Afghanistan situation*" developing on its border. Pienaar pointed out that a breakdown in security in Lesotho could exacerbate the incidence of stock theft in the eastern Free State, or the number of murders of white farmers.

Nearly a quarter of the total workforce in all Chamber of Mines gold, platinum and coal mines in South Africa is drawn from Lesotho. Disruption of this workforce or demoralisation of workers in South Africa could have had implications for the mining industry. More than that, the political heavyweight trade union umbrella body COSATU got in on the act early, calling for tough measures against the usurpers in Maseru. The implied next step may have been industrial action in South Africa aimed at forcing Pretoria to take steps to restore Mokhehle and the BCP. While that would have been a unique development in South African labour and political history, COSATU indicated that it was prepared to do whatever was necessary.

In addition, the billions invested in the crucially-important Lesotho Highlands Water project could have been at risk if political instability continued in the



Kingdom. For the thirsty South African industrial heartland of Gauteng, water is as important as oil.

Wars have been fought over less.

As important for both the outgoing and incoming governments in Pretoria would have been the question of image, both nationally and internationally, regardless of public protestations of doing good for their fellow men. In the case of the National Party regime, Foreign Minister Pik Botha, consummate opportunist and political survivor that he is, could not resist the temptation to come down on the side of angels when the soldiers of the RLDF first began their mutinous activities and clashes in late 1993 and early 1994. South Africa, he warned, would not recognise any government which came to power in Lesotho as a result of a *coup*. Things had changed somewhat from the days in 1986 when Lekhanya's overthrow of Jonathan would not have happened at all without Pretoria's muscle in the form of an economic blockade. And indeed, Jonathan's own existence itself, after the 1970 *coup*, could not have taken place without "Big Brother's" approval and acceptance. In becoming involved in the crisis in Lesotho in early 1994, the outgoing National Party Government would have wanted to project an image of itself as a defender of democracy: something which would no doubt have complemented its own election campaigning in South Africa.

Nevertheless, it must be stated that both Botha and President F. W. de Klerk recognised the political realities of the day, if not the writing on the wall, when allowing President-in-waiting Nelson Mandela to become involved at the earliest stages in the shuttle diplomacy. For the ANC-dominated Government, only just installed in office, the Lesotho crisis would have been a diplomatic and political hot potato. The Government would have wanted to further enhance its favoured child status internationally by showing itself to be a defender of democracy. It could not stand idly by while a government elected by the landslide will of the people, as was the ANC itself, was simply bypassed. The expectations of people both at home and abroad would also have weighed heavily with the ANC. It was readily apparent from the uncompromising stand taken by COSATU, that King Letsie and the soldiers supporting him were regarded as forces of reaction of the same nature as the protectors of apartheid. They would therefore also be the moral targets of liberation movements such as the ANC.

Black public opinion in South Africa was outspoken and hard-line. The Sowetan, the biggest daily newspaper sold within the black community, repeatedly hit out in editorial comment during the crisis, referring to the King and his supporters in Maseru as "*thugs*" and urging the Government time and again to take the harshest action to restore the Mokhehle government, even if that meant military initiatives. When diplomatic negotiations were well underway, black paper City Press praised Mandela for his role in the mediation, remarking that he was "*breaking and challenging a long-held stereotype - particularly among Western nations - that Africans lack the initiative to solve their problems*". Newly free of the yoke of apartheid, many black South Africans had no problem with their new government "*interfering*" in the internal affairs of a neighbour. In some intellectual circles, the views of Kenyan sociologist and author Ali Mazrui have been echoed, who has suggested that



African countries that are unable to govern themselves should be placed under United Nations trusteeship.

An additional headache for the South African Government would have been how to deal with the Basotho Royal House. This would be particularly sensitive in view of the fact that South Africa has monarchies within its own borders - most notably that of the Zulu kingdom - and other traditional systems with significant numbers of adherents who would be ready to read adverse messages into any harsh treatment of Lesotho's traditional leaders.

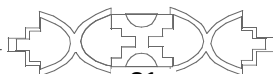
Apart from these, there were international pressures on the new Government, which was expected to be something of an African miracle and to provide new leadership to the continent. As an African "Big Brother", South Africa was looked upon to provide the military muscle through the best defence force in sub-Saharan Africa. African leaders, and in particular President Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe, who led the Lesotho peace initiatives as chairman of the Front-Line states, had felt the sting of South Africa's defence force during apartheid's destabilisation of Southern Africa in the 1980's, and seemed tempted to use that power in support of their own agendas.

As a member of the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution established by the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) on 30 June 1993, South Africa made a commitment to explore the best ways to prevent conflict on the continent, working through organisations such as the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and its political arm, the Association of Southern African States (ASAS). While the Lesotho crisis was unfolding in July 1994, Foreign Ministers of SADC member states met in Windhoek in Namibia and decided that any military intervention in the affairs of a member state would be sanctioned only after all other remedies had been tried in accordance with the OAU Charter and after the approval of the UN.

The South African Government already had the legal tools to enable it to become involved in peacekeeping. Section 227(1)(b) of the Interim Constitution states that "*[t]he National Defence Force ... may .. be employed .. for service in compliance with the international obligations of the Republic with regard to international bodies and other states*". Any deployment of forces in support of peacekeeping would only be undertaken on the authorisation of the President.

THE PROBLEMS

One of the biggest problems facing any South African action in peacekeeping, peacemaking or preventive diplomacy, is the historical baggage of apartheid. Nowhere is this more painfully evident than in Lesotho, where the previous administrations and their security apparatus developed interference into a fine art, effectively dictating the timing and direction of many political developments inside the Kingdom. The National Party Government poured money into Chief Leabua Jonathan's successful election campaign in 1966, and following Jonathan's scrapping of the 1970 election, it was Lekhanya, said to have been close to the South African Security Police, who led the South African trained Police Mobile Unit into the mountains to try to crush the BCP's grassroots support. It was, ironically, to Pretoria that Mokhehle later turned, when the

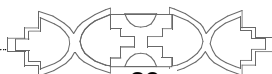


BCP's Lesotho Liberation Army operated out of South Africa against Jonathan, who had by then tried to redeem his international image by supporting the ANC.

Pretoria's economic stranglehold on the Kingdom was shown starkly when a blockade brought the Lesotho economy to its knees and led to the overthrow of Jonathan by Lekhanya, whom many said kept up his ties with the South African securocrats. There was ample evidence of previous military action in Lesotho. Cross-border raids against the ANC left scores dead, many of them Basotho citizens, while South African security forces were the ones responsible for the bloody end to the bus kidnapping drama during the visit of Pope John Paul II to the Kingdom in 1986. Any deployment of South African forces, regardless of their newly proclaimed loyalty to the Government of National Unity, could have carried with it a sense of bitter *deja vu* for residents of Lesotho.

For Evans and the other planners in the Department of Foreign Affairs in Pretoria, the bigger problem would perhaps have been conducting diplomacy in such a way that the other countries involved - primarily Botswana and Zimbabwe - would not feel that South Africa was again stealing the limelight. This appeared to be particularly the case with Mugabe, whose ambition of having his name written in the history books as an African statesman, have largely been unfulfilled. South Africa's boisterous public return to many African markets that were officially inaccessible to it during the years of apartheid, had already convinced many of its neighbours that South African businessmen would do to Africa in two years what the SADF failed to do in a decade. The other readily apparent danger was that South Africa's allies in any peacekeeping or preventive diplomatic effort not only could have their own subjective views of a particular problem, but also be considering action merely according to their own particular domestic political agendas. This was evident in the Lesotho affair, especially in the attitudes of Presidents Mugabe and Masire. Both men were explicitly concerned with cracking down hard on the military usurpers of power in the Kingdom, instead of with the intrinsic merits or demerits of the problems experienced in Lesotho. A tough stance on military *coups* and political meddling was what both Mugabe and Masire wanted from the Lesotho peacemaking efforts. Both men would have wanted to send a strong message, not so much to the Lesotho soldiers, but to their own potentially restive and dangerous armed forces at home, that any similar thoughts on their part could provoke a response that would make use of the SANDF iron fist.

From the military point of view, serious reservations were expressed about the peacekeeping role. Trying to deal with the daunting and complicated integration of around 30 000 members of Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK) and the Azanian People's Liberation Army (APLA), as well as members of the former homeland defence forces, into a new national defence force, was problematic enough. At the stage when trouble flared up in Lesotho, it was by no means certain that integration was not going to end in a disaster. Coupled to that was the fact that defence force numbers would have to be severely curtailed in the medium to long term, as budgets continued to decline in real terms. Spending plans were so tightly drawn within the defence force that there was literally no room for costly peacekeeping exercises. Planners, however, realised that



some form of involvement in peacekeeping operations was unavoidable and planning commenced. At the same time, it was emphasised to politicians that if any operations were undertaken, extra money would have to be found elsewhere to pay for them.

Less visibly discussed in public, was the real concern that the South Africa National Defence Force could find itself embroiled in a Somalia-style quagmire that could cost lives and result in a public relations disaster back at home. This was exacerbated by the Government's announcement that it would not pursue the issue of prosecuting whites who failed to report for military call-ups. The defence force made it plain that, at that point in 1994, it was heavily dependent on its Citizen Force and (mainly white) manpower for dealing with internal emergencies.

In the Lesotho saga, questions have been raised in a number of quarters about the legality of the way events developed, especially in terms of the UN Charter and its strict rules on the application of force. There is an argument that Southern African peacemakers had overstepped the boundaries in threatening with the use of force and supporting that threat publicly with the military display outside Maseru. The suggestions are certainly true that the United Nations' rules were not followed to the letter, but the counter-argument could be that there was not the time to waste on legal niceties.

THE EVENTS

Despite Pik Botha's visit to the Kingdom in January 1994, discontent among soldiers did not abate. Towards the end of that month, there were sporadic clashes between opposing groups, with mortars being fired on occasion. Lesotho's Foreign Minister Molapo Qhobela said: "*There are certain political leaders who are deliberately instigating rebellious elements in the Royal Lesotho Defence Force*". Botha warned South Africans against travelling to Maseru until the situation was clarified. On 19 January, United Nations envoy Aldo Ajello visited Maseru and talked to all parties involved about stopping the shooting. Mokhehle held talks with all opposition groups save the most important, the BNP, and the Marematlou Freedom Party. The Prime Minister again hinted darkly that grievances other than salaries were the causes of problems in the military. Commonwealth Secretary-General Emeka Anyaoku spoke to Mokhehle on the phone and described the situation in Lesotho as "*troubling*".

Towards the end of January, it was revealed that Pretoria had turned down a request for help from Mokhehle, while the Department of Foreign Affairs began talking to the OAU and UN. Pik Botha warned that any regime which seized power by force would face economic sanctions from South Africa. On 26 January, President de Klerk, accompanied by Nelson Mandela, flew to Botswana's capital, Gaborone, in furtherance of a peace initiative launched by the Front-Line States. They met Mugabe and Botswana's President Ketumile Masire. On 1 February, Commonwealth envoys Max Gaylard and Dr Moses Anafu reported that warring factions were ready to lay down their weapons. The day before that, a task force established in the wake of the meeting in Gaborone, met in Pretoria and said in its report that it believed the problems in Lesotho should be resolved by the Kingdom's people themselves. An uneasy



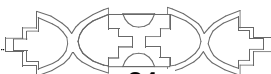
peace prevailed in Maseru until the middle of April when, following Mokhehle's stated intention to appoint a commission of inquiry to probe the January fighting, firing again ripped through the capital, and four government ministers were taken hostage by mutinous soldiers. In one of the skirmishes, the Deputy Prime Minister, Selometsi Baholo, was killed. The mediating task force was reactivated, after Pik Botha reported a request from Mokhehle for "*immediate South African mediation*". Botha repeated his earlier warning that a government formed by a coup would not be recognised and would face economic sanctions. Envoys Gaylard and Anafus returned to more talks.

Again, calm seemed to return to the streets, but it was only weeks before the BCP government was battling a new crisis, as junior policemen went on a nation-wide strike in May in support of demands for pay increases. The police were later joined by members of the country's prison service. The rebelliousness among the uniformed services continued into June. At the World Economic Forum meeting in Cape Town in June, Presidents Mandela and Mugabe warned the Lesotho dissidents in strong terms. Mugabe's remarks boiled down to establishing a task force that would "*knock some sense into*" the troublemakers in Lesotho.

Commonwealth envoys Gaylard and Anafu returned to Maseru in the last week of June, after discussions between the BCP government and Commonwealth Secretary-General Anyaoku. In July, the BNP petitioned King Letsie to abdicate in favour of his father, Moshoeshoe II, and to dissolve the BCP government. The following month, Mokhehle announced a commission of inquiry into the future of the monarchy, sparking fears that Moshoeshoe was about to be sidelined in his angling for power. On 17 August, Letsie walked into the Maseru studios of Radio Lesotho just after five in the morning to inform the nation that he had suspended part of the country's constitution and dissolved the BCP administration. Mokhehle declared the King's move *ultra vires* the constitution and thousands of BCP supporters marched on the Royal Palace, a move that resulted in the death of four protesters after troops opened fire.

Mandela discussed the crisis with Mugabe, who was on an official visit to South Africa, but the South African leader would only say that the mediation task force would meet as soon as possible. He said: "*It's premature at the moment to even think in terms of any kind of military intervention. It will depend on developments there in the coming days*". As Letsie swore in a new group of government ministers, the international community began putting the screws on Maseru. The United States described the royal coup as "*an affront to the people of Lesotho*", and suspended economic assistance to the country, including R34,5 million earmarked for primary education. The Commonwealth called for the immediate restoration of the government.

As South Africa, Zimbabwe and Botswana prepared for an emergency meeting in Gaborone on 23 August, BCP supporters announced a two day stay-away in Lesotho. Pretoria's Foreign Minister Alfred Nzo played a straight bat to the crisis, refusing to comment on calls from the ousted government for an immediate and strict economic blockade. President Mandela told Parliament in Cape Town: "*Current developments in Lesotho are of major concern to us. Needless to say, these developments have a bearing on stability in our own*



country and they do have an impact on the principled question of democracy in Southern Africa.”

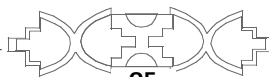
COSATU and its affiliate, the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM), meanwhile urged the economic boycott on Lesotho to be put in place as soon as possible, with the border sealed off. The day before, Anglican Archbishop Desmond Tutu was in Maseru to talk to all sides, and was later to make one of the most perceptive observations of the whole crisis: that no matter what solution would be engineered by mediation or diplomacy, there would continue to be trouble until the underlying causes of tension were dealt with.

As a follow-up to the Gaborone meeting, and as a way to avert threatened sanctions by the mediating allied countries, the Lesotho warring factions met in Pretoria on 25 August. OAU Secretary-General Salim Ahmed Salim accompanied President Masire to the talks, that were attended by Mugabe and hosted by Mandela. Letsie and Mokhehle went home with the “*deep regret*” of the three Presidents ringing in their ears. The Lesotho men were given a week to try and resolve their differences.

Reports the day after the summit quoted political sources in the kingdom as saying Letsie was ready to step down and reinstate the Mokhehle government. One of the big remaining stumbling blocks as far as the King was concerned, was how the BCP would deal with the future of the monarchy. The day before the expiry of the deadline set for 1 September, South African Foreign Minister Nzo, accompanied by Zimbabwe’s Nathan Shamuyarira and Dr G. Chiepe of Botswana, visited Lesotho unexpectedly. After more discussions, the deadline was extended and the foreign ministers departed after a tight-lipped press conference.

At the same time and behind the scenes, Pretoria’s diplomats and back room staff were bearing the brunt of the donkey work. Evans and his colleagues kept the momentum going, despite a number of public statements by the King’s supporters that they would not back down. A public statement by Mokhehle and the King agreeing “*on the principle to restore constitutional order, and embark immediately on determining mechanisms and procedures in this regard*” seemed open to different interpretations. The King let it be known that he was only intent on bringing back Mokhehle, if the Prime Minister agreed to be part of a provisional council that would prepare for new elections. The mediating group once again extended the deadline for a settlement, while Evans and his Zimbabwean counterpart, Stanislaus Chigwedere, tried to get the people from Maseru to agree.

While the head of the powerful Lesotho Non-Governmental Organisation, that were responsible for organising some of the protests after the Royal *coup*, said Lesotho could not work to “*foreign deadlines*”, the diplomats were handing a tough note to the King that warned in no uncertain terms that sanctions and possible military action would follow if the *impasse* was not ended. That military force might have been necessary, was never doubted by the diplomats involved in the discussions, although it was regarded as a remote, last-gasp option. The intransigence of the Lesotho soldiers was demonstrated graphically to Evans in person when he was at Mokhehle’s Maseru house for discussions. Outside the Prime Minister’s house, a platoon of soldiers from



one of the rebel factions, ostensibly on a training run, stopped to shout threats and obscenities. The sense of powerlessness was tangible to the peacemaking diplomats.

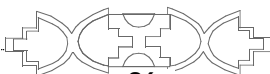
On 5 September, Evans went to Cape Town to brief the Parliamentary Select Committee on Foreign Affairs on the situation in Lesotho. The Director-General revealed that King Letsie had agreed to restore the BCP government, but had demanded certain guarantees in return. At Evans' request, Committee chairman Raymond Suttner ruled that the Press may not report details of the guarantees. Evans said an "*absolute agreement*" had been reached on handing back power to Mokhehle. The following day, though, Evans found himself the target of angry statements from the Lesotho rebels, who were annoyed by his announcements in Parliament. The attack on Evans went hand in hand with tough statements by the interim government that it would deal firmly with any strike action intended to pressurise it.

That was the somewhat pessimistic stage negotiations had reached when the Impalas and the paratroopers were deployed inside South Africa.

Those involved in the negotiations had agreed that some kind of statement or show of force should be made, and arrangements were left to the SANDF through Defence Minister Joe Modise. Diplomats were expecting something low-key, like a few Casspirs sent to the border gate. They did not, however, expect the enthusiasm or rapidity with which the military carried out its mission. Amongst those involved there was a feeling that the defence force went "*over the top*", but there was no doubt that the demonstration seemed to do the trick, with firm agreement being reached and Mokhehle back in his office within five days.

One of the major determinants in resolving the crisis, apart from the military threat, was the subtle yet firm leadership role played by President Nelson Mandela. While his underlings Nzo and Deputy President Thabo Mbeki were heavily involved in many of the issues, none carried the personal and political responsibility that Mandela had. He was acutely aware of the dangers of the process being bulldozed down a path that would not suit South Africa. Hence, when representatives of the ousted Lesotho government went to Gaborone and waited outside the conference room in the hope of being summoned by the three leaders to hear a joint declaration of the government's immediate restoration, they were disappointed. Mandela insisted that the representatives remain outside the conference room, refusing to bow to pressure to issue a heavy declamatory statement that in all probability would have done more harm than good.

Yet, the President was also firm when dealing with the King and the army rebels. His personal intervention there also had a profound impact. In one instance, two young chiefs of the Lesotho Royal House, who were amongst those holding out against a settlement, were flown with Evans to Pretoria to have dinner with Mandela. The President, whose own royal background added to his headmasterly attitude, gave him the appearance of a wise, but uncompromising, elder, was blunt but not hectoring in lecturing the young and overawed Lesotho chiefs about why they would have to advise the King to settle.



THE LESSONS

Being the new South Africa's first foray into the minefield of preventive diplomacy, Lesotho was a resounding success, at least when judged by the results. The *status quo* was restored in the kingdom without major disruption inside South Africa and without bloodshed resulting from head-on clashes. Archbishop Tutu aptly identified the lingering bitter aftertaste: without having tackled the basic problems effectively - the position of the monarchy and the failure of the Mokhehle government to deliver on its election promises, as well as the fractiousness of the military - mediation could only leave the way open for more problems in the future. One area which can fester for some time to come is the military which, under threat of superior force, will be forced into backing down. No military man likes the taste of defeat, and the experience is sure to rankle.

The other aspect of the whole process, that was aired on the Left of the political spectrum in South Africa, was the fact that it was "*the same old crew*" - Evans and his colleagues, who ably backed up Pik Botha in the pre-"freedom" days - who were still seen to be running the show. If they had not been involved, there would perhaps not have been such a satisfactory ending. The fact remains that the mediation would have reinforced the feeling among critics of the Department of Foreign Affairs that the new foreign policy was merely a subtle variant of the old. Yet, even if Evans and his team were doing the donkey work, the exercise was clearly one of co-operative decision-making by the politicians of the three countries taking part in the mediation process. That may have boded well or ill, depending on the viewpoint, for future crises in Southern Africa. Questions could be asked about how such mediators would react in a less clear-cut case, and furthermore, the definition of what constitutes a threat to peace and democracy can be a very subjective thing.

But perhaps the most worrying aspect of the Lesotho intervention was the use of South African military muscle, albeit in a conservative and judicious manner, to emphasise the points made by diplomacy. The parabat and Impala diplomacy may well have swung the day in Lesotho, encouraging South Africa's allies and especially would-be statesman Robert Mugabe, to call for it again. But the Lesotho situation is likely to be unique in terms of actual and possible scenarios in terms of African peacemaking and peacekeeping. It was an easy nut to crack. There may be other areas much less susceptible to the threat of force or to the demonstration of military might, as there might be those unfazed by the reputation of the SANDF. Down that road lies the Somalia nightmare for peace keepers.

