

Is there a new “Swaziland Liberation” guerrilla force?

South Africa is training Swazi revolutionaries, says dissident

Michael Schmidt

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A political dissident from Swaziland has claimed that guerrillas armed with pistols and AK-47s, and with the backing of militants in the ANC-led tripartite alliance, have been holding training camps in several South African towns for a secret liberation army dedicated to the overthrow of Swaziland’s absolute monarchy.

But, the leader of the outlawed People’s United Democratic Movement (Pudemo), Mario Masuku, has denied his organisation is armed or that it plans to use South Africa as a springboard for launching a guerrilla war against the Swazi government.

His claims have been echoed by Godfrey Sibiya, the Young Communist League (YCL) leader who was allegedly in charge of ideological training.

The guerrilla force — named Swaziland Liberation, or *uKukhulwa eMaswati in seSwati* — is an official yet underground armed wing of Pudemo, the main Swazi opposition party, and has a three-pronged strategy:

- The assassination of Swazi chiefs to destabilise the tinkhundla tribal system which props up the monarchy of King Mswati III;
- The sabotage of major industries, including the key sugar and timber sectors, to undermine investor confidence; and
- Guerrilla attacks on the Swazi armed forces and police.

These claims have been made exclusively to the Saturday Star by a young man who defected from Swaziland Liberation because he believed that armed struggle would drive the Swazi people into the arms of the monarchy, which outlawed all political parties in 1973.

Masuku admitted to the Saturday Star that an alleged “combat” tendency existed within Pudemo and its youth wing, the Swaziland Youth Congress.

Masuku said Pudemo had agreed in 2003 on a “combat” strategy, which he defined as Pudemo’s ability “*to defend the people’s struggle in any form ... We did not expressly say there would be an armed struggle [but] any attacks on the structures of the organisation must be met with resistance*”.

When told about the alleged guerrilla army, Swaziland's high commissioner to SA, Muntu Phillip Mswane, laughed and then said: "*If you threaten to harm someone, you will be harming your cause, you will lose the least support you have.*"

Masuku warned that the Southern African Development Community mutual-defence protocol signed in Dar es Salaam two years ago was "a challenge for any liberation organisation. Where are your bases going to be and who are your allies going to be?"

Foreign Affairs spokesperson Ronnie Mamoepa said the government was "unaware" of any secret army – but warned that "South Africa will not tolerate the use of its territory to launch military activities against SADC member states".

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