

# **In defence of the 'star and key of the Indian Ocean': A contemporary history of the Mauritian Police Force**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

The island of Mauritius—lying as it does in the middle of the Indian Ocean—has unique defence and security characteristics. Its geographical location made it attractive to major seafaring nations as a refuelling and staging post. The island is a volcanic promontory, measuring 1,870 km<sup>2</sup>, and situated 800 km east of Madagascar. Mauritius includes the dependencies of Rodriguez Island, the Agalega Islands, the Caigados Carajos Shoals and the Chagos Archipelago.<sup>2</sup> The most recent example of superpower interest was the use of the island of Diego Garcia in 1991 as a staging post for attacking the Iraqi military in Kuwait. (Diego Garcia was part of Mauritius until 1965, when it was sold to the United States [US] by the colonial authority, Britain, just before handing over control of the island to the local people in 1968.)

A second permanent feature of the islands with security implications is the weather. Associated with its geographic location, the islands experience cyclones every year. These are capable of wreaking havoc on infrastructure, creating a permanent need to put in place disaster relief structures that border on quasi-military organisations, instead of the normal fire brigade or civil defence structures that are common elsewhere.

Throughout the years, Arab and European imperial powers, later joined by the US, have competed for control of the islands. Since the early 16th century, an immigrant population of adventurers, imperialists and monopoly capitalists—who then brought in military units, slaves

and indentured labour to participate in the different functions of a monopoly economy—populated the islands.

The majority of the people brought in had ethnic ties with Europe, Africa, Asia or the Indian sub-continent. These ethnic factors subsequently ‘compelled’ Indian–British colonial administrators to take an active interest in the affairs of Mauritius. This interest was to continue after India’s independence in 1947, and today India is still one of the group of countries with an interest in the islands. India, as an emerging middle power in the international arena, has also provided security-related assistance to Mauritius—a recent celebrated case being the failed attempt to repair a badly constructed Coast Guard frigate, acquired from Brazil.

This chapter traces the evolution of Mauritian security policy and practice from independence in March 1968 to the present. The chapter seeks to provide an understanding of the context of the security and defence challenges that faced Mauritius on the eve of independence, and how the state responded then and afterwards.

#### **GENERIC ELEMENTS OF THE CONCEPT OF SECURITY AND THE STATE**

Since the rise of the nation state system in the late 15th century, states have a dual security challenge: defence from external attack; and the maintenance of internal security. This duality, however, has today merged into a seamless web in which it is difficult to distinguish between the two elements. Consequently, notions of defence and security represent two sides of the same coin, as states are required to pay equal attention to each in order to be effective. To understand the background to this state responsibility that has developed over the past 500 years and become a core function, we have to turn to the experiences of more established states, such as the US and those in Europe. Europe provided us with the model of the nation state as we know it today, while in the case of the US, the struggle to create a nation state began with attempts to wrest political control from the imperial powers in 1776. This struggle lasted until 1865, after the Civil War that had begun in 1861. In the case of both Europe and the US, the result was an increased awareness of the vulnerabilities that were likely to befall a weak state, and consequently the need to establish strong security structures that addressed both external and internal threats. This realisation informed a common set of related principles that have now become standard for the new and emerging states.

In Africa’s case, the phenomenon of independent states only arrived with the ‘winds of change’ in the form of decolonisation in the 1960s.

This development also incorporated the security concept that informs this paper. States have had to address the following key challenges:

- External threats to territorial integrity.
- Creating an ability to pacify internal proxies that are willing to work with external partners in undermining national security.
- Ensuring the security of the state and its institutions.
- Setting up internal security structures concerned with the maintenance of law and order.

Based on a careful mix of the above, a state can then embark upon the next step—engaging with other states in the international relations arena.

#### **BACKGROUND TO MAURITIAN DEFENCE AND SECURITY CONCERNS**

In the context of the Southern African Development Community (SADC), the island of Mauritius provides us with an example of a state whose foundations were laid at the height of the era of mercantilism, imperialism and colonialism practised by competing European powers. The presence and interests of outside powers flow from the location of the island in the middle of the Indian Ocean in an area that dominates lines of communication between continents, representing ‘the key to the Indian Ocean’. Mauritius also forms an important rest-and-refit platform for crews on extended trips. These considerations make the islands critical for seafaring powers as a geo-strategic facility for operations in Africa, the Middle East, the Indian sub-continent, and even Australia.

From the late 12th century, control of the destiny of Mauritius has been characterised by competition among different seafaring and maritime powers for physical control of the islands and their environs. Prominent among the early settlers were the Arabs, operating from the east coast of Africa. Their seafaring interests were motivated by the influence of the Sultan of Zanzibar, whose empire included Persia and parts of the Middle East. The Arab presence was prominent from 1502 but went into natural decline through the century. Next were Portuguese merchants and explorers travelling the East India trade route, who discovered the usefulness of Mauritius nearly a hundred years later. The Portuguese remained in control until the 1590s, but they too went into the self-exhaustion trade mode, as had happened to the Arabs before them.

It was during this period that some Dutch merchants travelling the Spice Route were blown off course and ‘discovered’ Mauritius, resulting

in an official occupation by the Dutch merchants from September 1598. In 1633, the Dutch merchants renamed the island, Mauritius, after their own imperial Prince Maurice of Nassau. In keeping with the mercantilist period characterised by a close relationship between the state and traders, the Dutch state in 1638 formally recognised the occupation of the islands. The Dutch held on to the islands for the next 50 years, until the commercial reasons for doing so began to recede.

For the next two generations, the island did not have a dominant occupying power. This situation later changed when the French—who already controlled the nearby island of Reunion—were looking for a good harbour and deeper ports. In 1721, the French occupied Mauritius, renaming it Isle de France. Later, in a process that received a further fillip in 1767, French kings actively encouraged the acquisition of colonial possessions. As a result, investment and trade with the islands blossomed. This gave rise to a French ‘Plantocracy’, which manifested with the arrival of Europeans drawn from French prisons, along with more African slaves, entrepreneurs and prostitutes.

The French only moved to occupy Mauritius after the Dutch had long departed and following a period of neglect. Long before this event, in 1658, the Dutch had decided to cut their losses and relocate to the Cape of Good Hope. The texts reflect that in that year “all except a sailor and two female slaves who had taken refuge in the woods, were evacuated to the Cape”.<sup>3</sup> The French presence was to continue until war broke out between France and England during the rule of Napoleon Bonaparte. This European War led to a change in the control of the island following France’s defeat. Before this event, however, the French introduced features of government and security, the influence of which has survived to this day—for example, the French legal and judicial systems, language, trade and investment, as well as the model for the organisation of security.

Another characteristic feature of this group of islands is its people. The islands were populated during the different historical periods, with groups arriving in waves comprising Arabs, European adventurers, conquerors, agents of imperialism and traders. Based on their commercial and security interests, the dominant elite, supported by their governments, brought in thousands of African slaves and, after the abolition of slavery in February 1835, indentured labour mainly from India.

The abolition of slavery had a particularly salutary effect on the islands’ population when over 60,000 former slaves were released and had nowhere to go; almost all ended up living on the island and provided a readily available source of labour. The effect of this was, of

course, to drive down wages. Given these conditions, the later arrival of indentured labour from India further entrenched the low levels of remuneration available to workers on the vast plantations. These joined the former slaves who were now marooned on the small island and who were forced to return to their earlier work as nominally “paid labour”.<sup>4</sup>

These developments led to an economy featuring extreme levels of wealth and poverty. At the top of the socio-economic and political heap was the merchant capitalist elite, drawing its members from the ‘maritime classes’ that were deeply committed to the social legacy of slavery—values that dominated during the Ancien regime.<sup>5</sup>

Meanwhile, the Abolition Act and the subsequent ‘release’ of the slaves turned out to be a financial boon to slave owners on the island who received compensation totalling £2.1 million over six years. This was an era of accelerated primitive accumulation, never to be repeated.

Owing to the proximity of Mauritius to China, a small Chinese free immigrant class of merchants and traders also arrived on the islands and have a presence there even today.

As we write, the ethnic composition of Mauritius still resembles these early foundations with Indians comprising 68% of the population, Creoles 27%, Chinese 3% and French 2%. Languages spoken include Creole, French, English, Hindi and Urdu.

Each newly arrived ethnic group had a distinct language, religion and cultural influence that has been more or less retained. For example, the merchant and capital classes have continued to occupy these positions in present-day Mauritius, while the former slaves and indentured labourers are still firmly located at the bottom of the social and economic ladders.

Throughout the period, Mauritian society reflected three classes which shaped security policy, identified alliances, influenced command-and-control and comprised the local labour force. These were:

- representatives of controlling imperial powers;
- monopoly capitalists; and
- labourers who began as slaves and, after 1865 when slavery was abolished, indentured labourers.

The foundations of the common political, socio-economic pattern that characterises Mauritian security emerged at this time. Its first main feature was the arrival of a particular power interested in occupying the island. This represented the front end of imperialism and defined the strategic imperatives in the critical areas of trade, investment, security

and internal social construction. Second, agents would proceed to develop a local economy and populate the country with classes able to sustain the community. Convergence of the two features was critical to the type of economy that developed, which was largely based on producing for export at hugely subsidised rates and feeding into almost guaranteed markets.

Throughout its history, Mauritius has produced goods and services aimed at foreign markets, including sugar and tourism for Europe. The disruption to international trade and the search for new raw materials following the American Civil War of 1861–65 benefited the rise and consolidation of the sugar industry on the island when Europe was looking elsewhere for alternative supplies from America.

Yet another common principle established during the period was in the area of security. In each period, the controlling imperial power provided its own forces to act as the first security structure, linked to armed forces that could be called upon as reinforcements. For instance, the East India companies established by the Portuguese, Dutch, British and French agents all operated under their national flags, with a mandate provided for under the charter accorded by the monarchy, and they could expect military support from government forces when it was required. Consequently, although only lightly armed forces were physically located on the island, these represented the vanguard of larger metropolitan forces.

## **MAURITIAN POLITICAL AND SOCIAL HISTORY**

The core of Mauritius's security challenges therefore lies in the nexus of maintaining a balance between competing external and local or national interests. In practice, this involves attempts to understand and locate Mauritian strategic interests at a point at which the two interests diverge.

In order to provide clarity to present-day security challenges facing Mauritius, we need to briefly revisit the island's social and economic history from about the late 17th century to February 1968, or just before independence. It is hoped that this will provide a better understanding of past developments in this area.

### **COLONIAL SECURITY POLICY**

During the periods of colonial rule by the Arabs, Portuguese, Dutch, French and British, security for the colonial possessions rested on two considerations. The first was external attack by a covetous imperial

power. However, until the formal agreement of 1884 that recognised facets of the charter which granted European monarchies the right to demarcate the world into spheres of influence, no power in control of Mauritius was ever threatened. Stated differently, the Malays, Arabs, Portuguese, French and Dutch all lost interest in occupying the island before the next power became interested. The external threat for colonial administrations was therefore addressed through diplomatic channels in the European capitals.

More threatening, however, was the need to control the slave community, associated with marooning<sup>6</sup> and rebellion. As a result, each controlling power deployed military contingents in support of the commercial classes and their enterprises. In terms of localising and expanding this capacity, it was only during the French period that the foundations for an internal security policy and structure were established. In 1762, the French organised a new force, tasked with the responsibility of suppressing disorder and rebellion.

This arrangement was further consolidated in 1790 when the internal security police were transferred to the National Gendarmerie. Three years later, the force had an expanded role: general policing; national militia (as part of the French army); and National Gendarmerie.

By 1803, the force was reorganised, following the declaration of war with Britain under Order No 32. This restructured the National Gendarmerie into a cadre force that was capable of expansion as the need arose, to a force as large as four brigades or just under 5,000 troops. When war broke out, however, the French force on the Isle de France was no match for the British. On 29 November 1810 a British expeditionary brigade from India comprising the Madras Volunteers Battalion, the Madras Native Infantry Regiment and the Bengal Volunteers, commanded by Lt Gen Sir John Abercomby, landed on the north of the island. After a brief skirmish they soon overwhelmed the French force and laid siege to the capital, Port Louis.<sup>7</sup> The sparse French military presence capitulated.

Four years later, the surrender was celebrated in far-off Europe through the 1814 Paris Treaty of Capitulation. Britain, the new colonial power, then renamed the island after its former Dutch name, Mauritius. A British governor was put into place, reporting to the Colonial Office. In 1815, Britain deployed contingents from the King's African Rifles (KAR) drawn from the East African command in Kenya, Nyasaland (now Malawi), Uganda and Tanganyika (now Tanzania). This force was augmented by Indian 'volunteer' troops when *HMS Madias* landed in the north of the

island carrying the Madras Native Infantry and Bengal Volunteers. By 1931 the size of the island's forces had risen to 2,694, now comprising the Mauritius Regiment, two naval squadrons and an air force. Each of these forces was commanded by British officers and they soon identified themselves with the social and ethnic cleavages that already existed in the Mauritian society.

## **MAURITIAN DEFENCE POLICY—EXTERNAL AND INTERNAL DIMENSIONS**

THE ERA OF THE 'FATHER OF THE NATION' (SIR RAMGOOLAN): 1968–82

There are at least four distinct dimensions that, combined, provide an overarching understanding of the challenges and status of Mauritian security policy in the post-colonial era. These affect the perception of the internal and external threats and the country's response to the creation of its own defence and security structures.

The first factor is a keen appreciation of the continued need to align the country's interests with those of the superpowers. This phenomenon was made abundantly clear during the delicate negotiations for independence in the 1960s. At the time, Britain, as the withdrawing colonial power, disposed of the island of Diego Garcia that lies 1,900 km south-west of Mauritius to the US for £3 million, with the knowledge of the incoming government of Seewoosagur Ramgoolan in 1965.

The US needed a secure location in the Indian Ocean on which to base troops and equipment for its strategic interests. The US had always maintained a presence in the area. In 1794, an embassy had been established under the French rule. This survived the imperial power transfer to the British, but was closed in 1911. It reopened in 1967 and three years later, a resident ambassador was appointed.

Diego Garcia can accommodate 15–20 fully laden vessels and its runways are long enough for B52 bombers. There are also facilities for thousands of troops away from prying eyes. The US Central Command took over the island and has been there ever since.

The then premier, Seewoosagur Ramgoolan, who had been appointed chief minister in 1961 and premier in 1963, was party to the secret negotiations.

The agreement to allow the US to take over the island also meant the relocation of the entire indigenous population of Diego Garcia. Some 1,800 members of the Ilois community, which had been on the island for five generations, were ordered to leave. In an evacuation operation that

started in 1971, the entire population had been removed to, or rather dumped on, nearby Mauritius.<sup>8</sup> As a result, an international outcry was raised on behalf of the Ilois. The take-over of Diego Garcia and the plight of the Ilois became an issue for the United Nations (UN) General Assembly,<sup>9</sup> which on 16 December 1971, through Resolution 1514, expressed its “deep concern” at the “fraud and illegal act” between the two imperial powers. While the issue of Diego Garcia later became muted, the plight of the Ilois continued to draw international attention, creating an imported security problem for Mauritius.

In 1972, the British government paid £650,000 to the Mauritian government on condition that the Mauritian government would provide land for the Ilois and that no further funds would be asked for. By 1978 these funds had still not been disbursed, and it was only when the rule of Ramgoolan ended and before the 1982 elections that the money was distributed—at the rate of £650 per individual. At this time, the British government provided a further £4 million as well as land worth £1 million in a final settlement. However, the mainstream political parties in Mauritius have accepted the realism associated with their own country’s stability and have steered clear of championing the Ilois issue despite obvious international support. This development shows a major constraint and the nature of *realpolitik* in the Indian Ocean.

The second dimension is the foreign policy and defence agreements signed by the incoming government at the time of independence with Britain, France and, by association, the US. The Anglo-Mauritian Defence Agreement of 1968, reaffirmed in 1975, gave France and Britain responsibility for external affairs and defence of the islands.<sup>10</sup> This agreement also provided Mauritius with “guaranteed British assistance both for external and internal security” in return for Britain establishing and maintaining a radar station on the island.<sup>11</sup> Section 5 provided for “assistance, advice, administrative support and training in matters of defence as well as combating foreign aggression.”<sup>12</sup> This agreement was later lodged with the UN. The arrangement survived until 1975 when Britain, responding to its own internal cost-cutting measures, announced that it would withdraw its military contingent—“much to the regret” of Prime Minister Ramgoolan.<sup>13</sup>

Meanwhile, an equal Treaty of Co-operation was signed in the same year, 1968, with the French, not only as a balance to relations with Britain but also recognising French regional security interests in the area.<sup>14</sup> Mauritius also established close relations with India as a foreign power that formed part of the colonial and ethnic make-up of the country.

The third factor lies in the lucrative and preferential trade relations established between Mauritius and the European Union (EU)—with Mauritius represented in discussions with France and Britain and the West in general. The Accord de Port Louis conferred associate status as a member of the EU, with Mauritius recognised as an exclusive economic zone for processing sugar and eligible for EU developmental fund grants.<sup>15</sup> This has since been codified under the African, Caribbean and Pacific protocol.

The fourth factor is the incidence of riots; a factor that is particularly acute on an island with little or no bordering areas that can act as a safety valve and reduce any built-up tension. Rioting that has engulfed the whole island appears to be easily precipitated by football hooliganism or student protests, while other causes have been work- or strike-related, or those associated with serious car accidents, especially accidents involving the running-over of pedestrians. Up until 2004, there were eight major riots on the islands (see Table 1).

During the constitutional talks preceding independence, three serious riots occurred. The first was on 1 May 1964 when ‘an explosion of communal violence’ occurred which the regular police, the auxiliaries and other elements of the Special Mobile Force failed to quell. At this time, the total strength of the security forces tasked with internal security was five officers and 246 men. Four years earlier, in 1960, the British had in preparation for granting full independence withdrawn a contingent of the KAR that had been on the island for 150 years. Given the deteriorating security situation, a state of emergency was declared on 14 May 1964.<sup>16</sup>

In what came to be known as Operation Fishplate, Britain then ordered the deployment by air of a contingent of the Coldstream Guards based in the Gulf of Aden in the Middle East.<sup>17</sup> The Coldstream Guards were to remain on the island until 15 December 1964. In June 1965, the Police Reserve Unit (PRU), known in French as *Maintien de L’Ordre*, was transferred from the capital, Port Louis, to Vacoas—for easier deployment in emergencies—and renamed the No. 1 Riot Unit. A summary of the most serious riots is given in Table 1.

The message here was that the local security and police contingents needed to be strengthened or reinforced in order to manage the threats posed by the riots. A second riot occurred in 1966 and was barely contained. At the end, a second riot unit was mobilised at the Bean Bassin police training school and transferred to Line Barracks in Port Louis, a location that had recently been evacuated by the new No. 1 Riot Unit.

**Table 1: Serious riot incidents in Mauritius between 1968 and 2004<sup>18</sup>**

January 1968	Racial violence
November 1993	Football
18 December 1994	Vale—football
12 May 1995	Camp—Chapelon
March 1996	Football
6 September 1997	Abercombe
26 April 1997	Palma
21 February 1999	Kaya
5 April 1999	Rodriguez
23 May 1999	Aujalay Stadium
2004	Football <sup>19</sup>
<i>Other prior strikes and riots</i>	
1911 Strike/riots	
1937-38 Sugar strike <sup>20</sup>	
1971 Dock workers' strike <sup>21</sup>	

The overall strength of the Mauritian police force had been increased to 1,340 personnel, organised along British infantry regiment lines into A, B, C and G companies, with the last being a support company equipped with heavier weapons. The force also benefited from parallel French assistance<sup>22</sup> that provided training and equipment for a mobile wing, a self-sufficient engineering squadron, a maintenance/services unit, a transport unit, and a medical unit. The result was clearly a strengthened police force with paramilitary units.

A police contingent was also established on the 110 km<sup>2</sup> island of Rodriguez, 650 km east of Mauritius, with a population of some 35,000. Five police stations were established around the island, which has a maximum length of 18 km. This force comprised a chief of police, a superintendent, nine sergeants and some 60 constables.

The increased security requirement after 1966 was recognised by the 1967 Mauritian Public Order Act, promulgated in 1970.<sup>23</sup> State response to continuing internal unrest included mass arrests and deportations to less populated islands of the Mauritius group, with the intention of severing communications between emerging anti-establishment leaders.

Barely three months before independence in 1968, a third riot broke out in which 29 people were killed, 246 houses burnt and 597 houses ransacked.<sup>24</sup> The departing governor was forced to summon British

troops from Malaysia to help stabilise the situation. Consequently, independence on 12 March was declared amidst an increasingly precarious security situation for the new government. The failure of the local police to contain the series of riots from 1964 until 1968 made it difficult for the government to distance itself from the country's 'international partners'. The policy of the newly independent Mauritius was not to be self-sufficient for its own security but to operate within the existing and dominant Western sphere. In terms of this policy, there have been regular visits to the islands by foreign warships.

The three considerations on which the country's foreign and security policy are based can be summarised as:

- achieving a balance in its relations with France and Britain;
- exploiting the consequences of the 1965 transfer of sovereignty of Diego Garcia to the US; and
- gaining privileged access to Western markets and aid.

Some of these elements have borne practical fruit. For instance, the US began providing coastguard training and other assistance to the Mauritian security forces, thus giving them a semblance of control over the vast surrounding ocean. The Indian government has also contributed to the island's naval security with manpower training.

Owing to the unique nature of the Treaty of Capitulation, the French presence and influence have never disappeared. In the area of defence, French aid and assistance totalled 578.9 million francs between 1970 and 1986, since then it is estimated to amount to some 60 million francs a year. All these forms of assistance contribute to the stability of the Mauritian economy.

#### EVOLUTION OF THE MAURITIUS POLICE FORCE, 1968–2005

The security policy and structure of the Mauritius Police Force (MPF) in 1968 comprised the Regular Police (the first line), the Special Support Unit (called to support the above in emergencies) and the Special Mobile Force (SMF)—a para-military force with a capability to restore order.

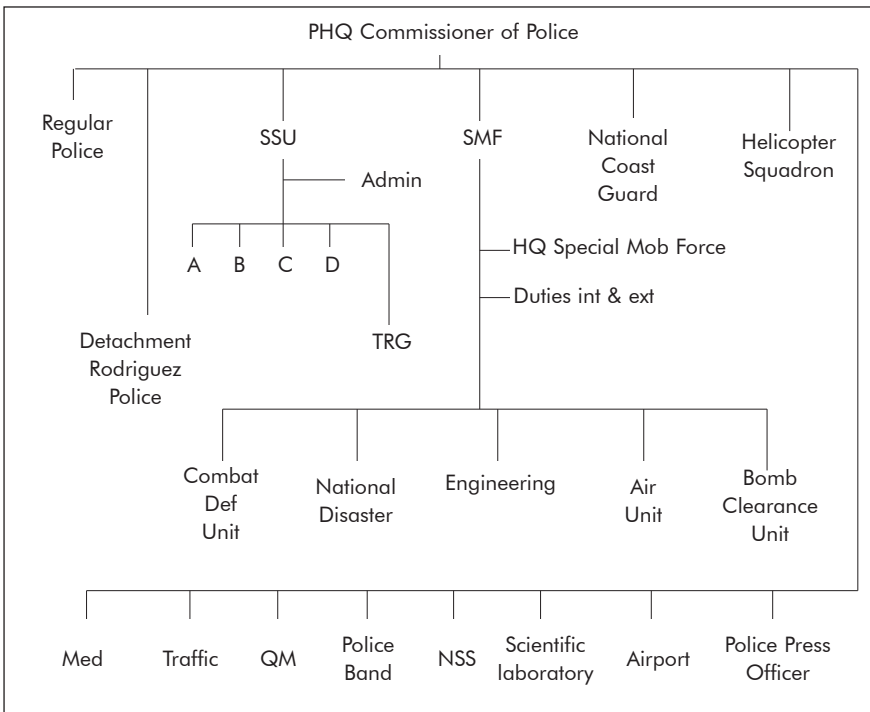
The country's elected prime minister is the commander-in-chief of the force, with control shared with the minister of home affairs. The permanent secretary in the prime minister's office has day-to-day responsibility for the police. The permanent secretary is also head of the civil service, underlining the 'civilian character' of the police and security forces. Under the

permanent secretary, the uniformed forces are commanded by the commissioner of police and his deputy. Assistant commissioners head the various branches of the force, with the officer and other ranks' structure comprising assistant superintendents and their deputies, chief inspectors, inspectors, sub-inspectors, sergeants, corporals and constables. Figure 1 summarises the organisation of the various branches.

In 1987, the Police Reserve Unit was renamed the Special Support Unit, and comprised five operational units or companies and a training wing. Its main tasks were: security of sensitive and vulnerable points; crowd control; search and rescue; criminal investigation; and escorting dangerous prisoners. This structure was inherited from the country's colonial and more recent past, especially the British empire and the subsequent Commonwealth grouping established as an alternative to the colonial relationship during the 1960s.

The 1,340-member MPF experienced minor changes over the next 36 years. These appeared to be linked to the cycle of strikes or riots and

Figure 1: Mauritian Police Force



inquiries. Each minor restructuring was intended to improve areas then found deficient. In this way, the MPF increased its firepower without necessarily changing its designation or its composition, which always comprised the minimum number of personnel. The next section discusses the major changes and some of the reasons for them.

#### MAJOR CHANGES

The first significant change occurred in 1974–6 when the MPF created an air wing equipped with helicopters. France donated the first helicopter in 1974 and India provided a second helicopter two years later. In 1990, a further air detachment equipped with Dornier aircraft was created, with two of the four aircraft with which it was equipped coming from Russia. As a result, the air wing and the air detachment were transformed into the Mauritian Air Service (MAS) on 17 July 1990. The role of MAS was to police the islands, and it was tasked with protecting life and property, deterrence and protection of ports, including ‘creeping line ahead search’, flag-showing and sector and radial search and rescue.<sup>25</sup>

The area of responsibility included the UN-recognised 200-nautical mile or 380 km exclusive economic zone. In undertaking these duties, the responsibilities included both security and economic protection activities, such as environmental protection, anti-smuggling and drug enforcement, protection of maritime assets, and minerals and precious metals, including oil and gas exploration.

The second qualitative expansion of the MPF occurred on 3 April 1974, when the Mauritian naval unit received its first ship, the *Amar*. This was followed in 1987 by major investment and legislation, after key recommendations had been made by the Coastal Security Committee in 1985. The committee had outlined the roles and duties of a national coastguard that required both ships and aircraft. Part of its task included protecting more than 24 recognised ports on all the islands.

The National Coast Guard was established on 22 January 1987, with equipment supply starting on 24 July of the same year.<sup>26</sup> The following five ships were acquired: CGS *Vigilant* (the only off-shore vessel), CGS *Observer*, CGS *Guardian*, CGS *Retriever* and CGS *Rescuer*. The CGS *Vigilant*, purchased from Canada in June 1996 for Rs322 million and built in Chile over a 23-month period, has since developed serious structural shafting and design defects and has had to be grounded in the harbour around Port Louis. In November 1999 the *Vigilant* was sent to Mumbai,

India, for repairs costing Rs10.2 million, and in December 2000 she was again returned to India for similar repairs at a cost of a further Rs16 million. Despite these repairs, the *Vigilant's* hull is still seeping water. The government has since been advised to sue the ship-building company to try to recover the losses that have been due to bad workmanship.

In 1992 the country also established a Motorised Patrol Force, organised as a commando unit and with a capacity to be transported by mobile infantry vehicles as well as the MAS. All these new units form part of the MPF.

#### THE RAPID EXPANSION OF THE MPF AFTER 1999

On 21 February 1999, a popular local singer, Joseph Reginald Toppize (aka Kaya) was arrested and died in police custody under suspicious circumstances. His death led to widespread riots and strikes throughout the island. After calm was restored, a commission of inquiry was appointed, led by Justice Keshoe Mataden. This commission produced some far-reaching recommendations. For the purposes of this chapter, we concentrate on the recommendations directed at the further strengthening of the security services and on how these were put into practice.

In material terms, allocations towards security increased by 29% at the end of that year.<sup>27</sup> Apart from the new equipment ordered, the police also received authority to increase the MPF establishment with 1,000 new recruits over a 24-month period, for which Rs2.2 billion was set aside.

What is evident from the pattern of military expenditure in Mauritius over the past 17 years, as reflected in Table 2 (*over page*), is that allocations for security purposes have been consistently well below the 1.5% of GDP, which the World Bank and UN see as being adequate without upsetting national development goals. For Mauritius, expenditure allocation is too small for a paramilitary force, the air and naval units as well as to the majority of policing structures that are responsible for the defence and security of the islands.

A second point to take away from this aspect of military expenditure is that the table reflects allocations from the country's budget and does not reflect sums donated by, among others, France, Britain, India and the US, which countries have provided materiel support in either cash or kind.

For instance, for nostalgic, cultural and language reasons, as well as for long-term strategic purposes and given the unique nature of the

**Table 2: Expenditure on the MPF, 1988–2005**

Year	Rupees (million)	US\$ equivalent (million)	% GDP
1988	63.0	6.5	0.2
1989	96.5	8.8	0.3
1990	137.0	10.9	0.3
1991	164.0	12.3	0.4
1992	178.0	12.7	0.4
1993	190.0	12.3	0.3
1994	213.0	12.9	0.3
1995	234.0	13.3	0.3
1996	233.0	12.4	0.3
1997	206.0	10.3	0.2
1998	203.0	9.5	0.2
1999	228.0	10	0.2
2000	246.0	10.3	0.2
2001	262.0	10.4	0.2
2002	285.0	10.6	0.2
2003	304.0	10.9	0.2
2004	328.0	11.3	0.2

Note: Current exchange rate: ~30 rupees to one US dollar; ~35 rupees to one Euro.

Source: The Swedish International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) military expenditure database, <[http://first.sipri.org/non\\_first/result\\_milex.php?send](http://first.sipri.org/non_first/result_milex.php?send)> (28 July 2005).

Treaty of Capitulation and the French presence in the nearby Island of Reunion, France has continued to provide significant military assistance to independent Mauritius. For the 16 years from 1970–1986, France disbursed to Mauritius over 578.9 million francs (US\$89 million). Since then, Paris has to-date offered 60 million francs (US\$9.2 million) a year, or a total of 1.2 billion francs (US\$184.6 million) to the government in Port Louis.<sup>28</sup>

Owing to the consistent military budgetary support from the former colonial powers of Britain and France, once suspects that political leaders in Mauritius now expect these contributions, keeping their own allocations constant or strictly below 0.5% of GDP.

The picture painted by the resource allocation and leverage in Mauritius's defence and security area is consistent with its security policy. The country has carved out a role for foreign support while limiting its own institutions to an internal security role with only a peripheral immediate maritime search and rescue function, which resonates with supporting the burgeoning but critical tourist sector.

## CIVIL—MILITARY RELATIONS

The political act of balancing the racial and ethnic quota system on the islands is also reflected in the way the police are perceived to relate to the different groups. A survey<sup>29</sup> undertaken by the University of Mauritius Centre for Applied Social Science Research, led by Professor M. Joynathsing, reveals interesting comments on the nature and perception of civilian—police relations. Overall, 68% of the people agreed with the view that the police were doing a good job in controlling crime and in their service to the public. Examined by ethnicity, 77% of Hindus fell into the above category, while 74% of Muslims also found the performance of the MPF favourable. A lower-than-average 66% of Creoles reported their satisfaction with the police.<sup>30</sup> Almost all those questioned called for more police on the streets, citing an increasing incidence of crime. It is also true that being a member of the police force is a sought-after job. Recruits are all volunteers who must meet stringent criteria in order to qualify.

Although still heavily dependent on sugar exports, the economy of Mauritius is thriving. Sources of revenue are manufacturing 31%, trade and tourism 29%, the public sector 18%, and agriculture and fisheries with some 11% each. Mauritius has continued to maintain a foreign policy that balances national interests with the interests of the West, India and Malaysia, the Indian Ocean Rim Association, Francophone countries and the Southern African Development Community (SADC).

Since the country's independence in March 1968, the MPF has grown to 10,000 active-duty members, supported by 8,000 national police for internal security, 1,400 members of the SMF and paramilitary units, 688 members of the National Coast Guard, 270 members of the special riot control support unit, and 100 members of the Air Helicopter Rescue (Tourism Early Warning) unit, making a total complement of 20,458 to protect a population of 1,210,447 (July 2003 census). These men and women are organised as:

- regular police (MPF), including the detachment on Rodriguez island;
- the Special Support Unit;
- the National Coast Guard;
- the SMF (paramilitary);
- the MAS Helicopter Squadron under the MPF; and
- the Women's Police Unit (although the members of this unit serve as integrated elements, they take account of ethnic and religious sensibilities).

## CONCLUSIONS

This chapter has tried to define the context of a frontier/island community and the linkages and proxy relationships that exist with external powers. A question posed concerned the roles that imperial powers have played and what functions they have allocated to Mauritius. The discussion has also tried to address some of the critical political dynamics that inform the relationships of the different ethnic and interest groups in the community.

In Mauritius, a force under the control of the police of just over 20,000 has been established since independence. The force has more power and punch than those of most armies in Southern Africa, especially when we consider the Intervention Mobile Regiment, the National Coast Guard and other elements. Its role is confined to internal stability and the immediate environs of the islands, as well as an increasing demonstration of search and rescue capacity.

The MPF has also been carefully integrated into the framework of Western powers working closely with the island—with France, Britain, India and the US completing the two-legged requirement and capability demanded of states that have accepted a responsibility to provide adequate security.

## NOTES

- 1 I wish to thank associate professor Dr Sheila Bunwaree of the University of Mauritius who agreed to co-author this chapter and provided invaluable assistance in terms of organising interviews and research materials, and who accompanied me during the research. Unfortunately, Dr Bunwaree fell ill soon after the research was completed and was unable to participate further. I shall forever remain grateful for her willingness to help and for her assistance given.
- 2 JE Meade, *The economic and social structure of Mauritius: Report to the governor of Mauritius Legislative Council*, Sessional Paper No.7, 1960, p 1; see map provided.
- 3 LW Bowman, *Mauritius—Democracy and development in the Indian Ocean*, Westview Press, Boulder, London, 1991, p 9.
- 4 *Ibid*, p 18.
- 5 *Ibid*, p 13.
- 6 Independent slave communities that had broken away from controlled group(s).
- 7 Mauritius Police Force hand out, *A brief history of the military garrison in Mauritius 1810-1960*, <<http://ncb.intnet.mu/pmo/police/divisions/departments/smf/>>, (16 November 2004).
- 8 Bowman, *op cit*, p 160.
- 9 *Ibid*, p 148.

- 10 Section 5 of the protocol provided for, “assistance, advice, administrative and training” support to Mauritius
- 11 Bowman, op cit, pp 79, 141-43, 149, 160; LJ Mootooveeren, *Policing public disorder in Mauritius: A critical view—An assessment of the impact of the ‘warning’ on rioters in February 1999 riots in regions of Roche Bois and Bambous*, unpublished Bsc dissertation in Police Studies, University of Mauritius.
- 12 Bowman, op cit, p 31.
- 13 Ibid, p 144.
- 14 Ibid, p 141.
- 15 *Budget Speech 1973-74, Minister of Finance*, p 9.
- 16 LJ Mootooveeren, Mauritian Police Force,
- 17 *Report Director of Audit for year ended 30 June 2001*, Vol.1, p 37.
- 18 S Buscuth, *The effectiveness of the Mauritius Police Force in the February 1999 mass riot: A case study*, August 2004, BSc (Hons) dissertation, Department of Police Studies, University of Mauritius; R Ramsawock, *An overview of the law and order situation post-independence: Evaluation and recommendations*, August 2004, BSc (Hons) dissertation, Department of Police Studies, citing road-traffic, football, student riots and general workers’ strikes/riots, pp 1-8; *The Matadeen Report 2000* on the “Kaya” riots and David Shattock Inquiry, May 1998; Duobdeo Audit, *A critical examination of criminal intelligence gathering in Mauritius*, BSc (Hons) Police Studies, 2003; Chitdukhira, *History of Mauritian experience in Democracy*, 2002.
- 19 Ramsawock, op cit, p 8.
- 20 J Francis, Role of the police in the socio-economic context, *Mauritius Police Magazine*, 1976, p 16.
- 21 Ibid,
- 22 *Report Director of Audit*, p 31.
- 23 Ibid p 32.
- 24 One of the remarkable aspects of working in Mauritius is the availability of data and statistics, given the advantages of a closed and island community.
- 25 *MAS Annual magazine*, 1992, p 126.
- 26 *Report Director of Audit on the accounts of the Republic of Mauritius*, 30 June 2003, pp 55-56, 57; See also *Report Director of Audit on the Accounts of the Republic of Mauritius*, 30 June 2002, p 51.
- 27 *Budget Speech Mauritius Republic, Minister of Finance*, 2003, p 46.
- 28 French assistance is now in Euros. The exchange rate was 6.5 francs to the Euro when the transition was made.
- 29 Mauritius Social Attitudes Survey, 2002
- 30 CASR Report 2002 cited, pp viii, 81.



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