

Defence and Foreign Policy: The case of South Africa

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Research Paper



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An investigation of the role of the armed forces in South African foreign policy.

This research paper is part one of two. Part two has been published as a FAK report titled: "The South African National Defence Force: Midwife of Peace in Africa?".

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Introduction

“...any form of participation in peace operations is an extension of South African foreign policy...” (DFA 1999 p. 30)

The many years of military counter-insurgency operations in southern Africa meant that South Africa was perceived, both regionally and internationally, as possessing, in relative terms, a significant military capacity. In the immediate aftermath of the transition in 1994, therefore, it was supposed that it would be able to play a central part in the resolution of future conflicts in southern Africa.¹

However, the first post-apartheid decade showed South Africa to be very reluctant to undertake this particular international military role for both practical and political reasons. Politically, it proved difficult to deploy the new South African National Defence Force (SANDF) in international missions in Africa, just a few years after its predecessor, the South African Defence Forces, had itself been a main source of conflict.² There was within government a fundamental disbelief in the coercive tool, a fundamental change from the apartheid era, where the armed forces were the main provider of security for the state. In practical terms too, the SANDF had undergone a far-reaching transformation and reduction process following the transition to democracy in 1994, which at least temporarily reduced its capacity as a defence force. The defence budget had been reduced from 4.4 per cent (in 1989) to a projected 1.2 per cent of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) by 2009, one of the lowest percentages in southern Africa (Parliament 2007).³

However, as this paper will argue, the ANC government has slowly come to acknowledge that the military tool is instrumental in its attempts to fulfil the country's post-1994 foreign policy ambitions of reform, stability and development in Africa. This resembles what Adrian Hyde-Price argues of the EU, namely that it can only function as a source of democratic reform if it is also a “Centaur”⁴ – half man and half beast – willing and able to use force as part of a comprehensive security strategy (Hyde-Price 2004: p. 4). The reasoning seems to be that South Africa cannot achieve its diplomatic goals in Africa of creating peace, stability and development without being willing to use its coercive tool: that is, there can be no effective South African engagement with the African Renaissance⁵ without the support of the SANDF, comprehensiveness being the key word. That said, the international role played by the armed forces in the current government is somewhat different from the one they played during the white minority rule of the apartheid era. The perception of threat differs significantly from especially the era of then president Pieter W. Botha, when South Africa was seen as the target of a total communist onslaught. At that time, the SADF had to deter this threat and to redirect the confrontation away from South African soil. Today Foreign Minister Nkosazana Zuma has claimed that the SANDF is an integral part of South Africa's new foreign policy ambition of creating an African renaissance (Zuma 1999). This paper will scrutinise the role of the SANDF in South African foreign policy and it will discuss whether the SANDF is prioritised and can be considered an integral part of Pretoria's foreign policy?

Post-apartheid South African foreign policy and peace diplomacy

“Around the globe new conflicts and divides are surfacing. The chasm between the industrialised North and the underdeveloped South is deepening. If there is to be global harmony, the international community will have to discover mechanisms to bridge the divide between the rich and the poor. South Africa can play an important role in this regard because it is situated at a particular confluence of world affairs”.
(Mandela 1994)

Without peace and stability, Africa will never achieve harmonious and sustainable development. This is how Mbeki's priorities were described in a July 2003 issue of *Africa Confidential* (*Africa Confidential* 2003). The creation of peace and stability is seen as the cardinal task in creating a basis for future development in Africa. The South African government has accepted that South Africa must play an influential role in the attempt to create and secure peace and stability in Africa, something that will also benefit South Africa itself. As part of its general foreign policy strategy, South Africa has assumed a benign leading role in attempting to solve conflicts, and it has been very active as a peace-broker, especially in Africa, but also as a bridge between the industrialised North and the marginalised African continent. In a very idealistic speech to the South African Parliament in 2001, Foreign Minister Nkosazana Zuma explained:

“Our foreign policy, therefore, is not only anchored in our domestic policy, but on this very fact and responsibility...that South Africa offers hope for all humanity. Thus, we cannot only strive for a better life for South Africans, but we have to contribute to the ongoing struggle for a better world. That is what gives us a degree of moral authority in the world”. (Zuma 2003)

Wanting to do well and to do the right thing have often been articulated by the ANC government in general terms. However, this ambition can in itself constitute a direct challenge to, for instance, leaders who have different political agendas, for instance security for themselves or their regimes and/or states. Zimbabwe or USA could be examples of this. The other side of this is that critical voices have been raised against other elements of the ANC government's foreign policy, which critics see as benefiting narrow South African political and economic interests (Alden and Soko 2004 p. 368). South Africa is therefore directed by political idealism, loyalty towards past friends of the ANC, and its domestic interests and ambitions (Nathan 2008).

While the Nelson Mandela administration claimed it would be a partner to and not a hegemonic power in the region and the continent more broadly, the international community, for its part, called for South African leadership in Africa. Leadership should here be understood as giving direction by setting an example for others to follow (Schwarzenberger 1959 p. 250). In relation to this, then

Vice-President Mbeki⁶ stated in a September 1995 address to the South African ambassadors that:

“...the strength and persistence of the international focus on South Africa puts the South African Government of National Unity under pressure to contribute positively and constructively to the global community. The Southern African region expects a positive contribution from South Africa in terms of their own development. They expect that we interact with them as a partner and ally, not as a regional super power....” (DFA 1996 p. 7)

The new ANC government has on several occasions stated that it believes South Africa’s destiny to be tied to Africa. South Africa has therefore attempted to take on the role of a benign regional leader and mediator to help stabilise and create the fundamental foundations for development in Africa, for the sake of South Africa as well. Alden and Le Pere suggest that

“The contradictions between the self-imposed constraints of a ‘benign’ hegemon, for whom regional consensus was preferred over the naked exercise of power, and the aspirational politics of South Africa as a middle power with a selfproclaimed transformative destiny for the continent, continue to shape its diplomacy in Africa.” (Alden & Le Pere 2004, p. 54)

This stresses the immanent contradiction which can be detected in South African foreign policy, because, as mentioned above, even seemingly benign and humble ambitions might be considered a threat and hostile action by other states. The South African ambition of reforming the African Union and Southern African Development Community introducing democratic principles could be seen as an example of this. Deputy Foreign Minister Pahad expressed this very eloquently when arguing back in 1996 that

“We start from the premise that South Africa is committed to human rights. The problem we face in this regard is the issue of possibilities and limitations on South Africa in the real world. How do we get human rights enforced and implemented in the international environment? There must be a possible [sic] contradiction between South-South co-operation and the values which we may want to protect. There has to be interaction between theory and practice.” (Quoted in Mills 1998, p. 1)

This balancing has been difficult and the ANC government has been confronted with increasing external expectations, but also domestic ambitions, to serve as a regional leader in trying to stabilise Africa. It is not clear whether any of the regional powers in Africa, including South Africa, have the capacity to take on

this responsibility. The failure of African regional powers to effectively prevent and solve conflict and instability in Africa has disappointed major international powers, especially in the West.

As a result, and because of the seemingly increased strategic importance of the African continent, the role of the regional powers is directly and indirectly being challenged by the increased presence and interests in Africa of major international powers such as the USA and China. Both states attempt to secure control over strategic resources, especially oil. China's interest in Africa seems basically to be of a mercantile nature, however, support for mainland China's position on Taiwan also plays a role. The US focus on democratic governance seemingly has lost out in competition with the priority given to the war on terror, as recently seen, for instance, in relation to the contested elections in Nigeria and Kenya, and the close US connection to Ethiopia. This might constitute a major threat to the ANC government's continental reformist ambitions, and its national attempt to cultivate future economic markets in Africa.

South Africa's active international role after 1994 has been and still is an example and a consequence of this regional role. In an attempt to maintain and consolidate this role, for instance, it has created alliances with other dominant third-world states in an attempt to reform parts of the international system such as the WTO and the UN Security Council. These are issues that have wider ramifications for the whole of the Third World and show South Africa taking on the responsibility of protecting the smaller states from what it perceives to be an unjust international system. In the 2005 Defence Update draft document, it is stated that:

"The re-entry of South Africa into the international community of states and organisations has provided a critical opportunity to promote international peace and security within multilateral fora such as the Southern African Development Community (SADC), the African Union (AU), the Commonwealth, the Non-aligned Movement (NAM), and the United Nations (UN). This is entirely consistent with South Africa's foreign policy objectives of promoting global peace and security". (DOD 2005b)

In Africa, the signing of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) Mutual Defence Pact (MDP) is an example of this.⁷ By signing this collective defence agreement⁸, South Africa, as the strongest power in the region, guarantees the security of the other signatories against outside threats and thus attempts to create a new sub-regional security regime. One of the sticking points that had to be dealt with was the emphasis in the treaty's Article 6 on the principle of collective self-defence and collective action. Interestingly, this article ended up including a "claw back clause", which says that each state shall

participate in collective actions 'in any manner it deems appropriate' (SADC, Article 6-3). However, the MDP also stresses that all collective action must be mandated at the summit level, thus blocking future interventions such as those in Lesotho and the DRC. The pact must be understood for what it is, namely a collective defence agreement which protects its members from each other and especially from external threats. But a relevant question in this regard is protection against whom and what? The most important function of the collective defence agreement is that it regulates the use of force in inter-state relations while at the same time serving as a deterrent against external military interference in, for instance, the DRC and maybe Zimbabwe. It is, however, very doubtful if this would be effected due to the "claw-back clause" in Article 6-3. It is very likely that some of the members would choose to opt-out from the MDP obligations and avoid being drawn into a conflict. Nevertheless, the MDP has a threat-reducing function as well, which is an important element in creating trust among states in a security complex. By signing this pact, moreover, South Africa has played its benign great power role, as the pact states that an attack on any SADC member is also an attack on South Africa. Thus, it provides a perception of security for the other signatory states against external aggression.

The ANC government has therefore changed South Africa's behaviour and thus its status from a pariah state to a rather benign one, this being an important parameter in creating an acceptance of its new role.⁹ It has focused on the creation of trust between South Africa and its neighbours, which had been destroyed after many years of hostile relations. As Hammerstad argues, in a slightly different context on security cooperation in SADC, "it is easier to destroy than build trust and mutuality between and within states". (Hammerstad 2003, p. 76) Along the same lines, Nathan argues that the Pretoria government is very sensitive to being perceived as a bully in its dealings with the other African states (Nathan 2005, p. 365). However, the signing of the MDP also illustrates the frailty of South Africa's regional role and position because, despite the claw back clause, it was forced to accept a collective defence agreement championed by states such as Angola and Zimbabwe. The ANC government's ambition so far, at least rhetorically, has been along the lines of creating a framework for common security, thus making collective defence redundant. The MDP, with its claw back clause, is described by the SADC members as an indispensable tool in the establishment of the new Standby capability.¹⁰ Despite its shortcomings, it could therefore be seen as the first step on the road to a security community – a nascent security community as argued by Hammerstad. However, Nathan argues that "it defies common sense" to claim, as several authors have done, that SADC is an emerging security community when several states are marred by civil strife and/or threatened by intrastate conflict. Nathan does not accept the distinction made by Söderbaum between the intergovernmental level and relations on other levels.¹¹ For Nathan, security communities include not only states, but also "individuals, citizens, groups and populations" (Nathan 2006, p. 279). In op-

position to this, Hammerstad argues that it is exactly because of developments in recent years, with the end of apartheid and the wars in Angola, Mozambique and partly the DR Congo, combined with attempts to coordinate their relations and interactions, that it makes sense to talk about a nascent security community (Hammerstad 2003, p. 77). In more practical terms the South African government has given high priority to regional cooperation, and SADC in particular, as well as to the creation of a collective security structure. The draft Defence Update document¹², says that:

“The operationalisation of the security structures and institutions of the SADC is... of paramount importance”. (DOD 2005b: p. 4 Article 15)

However, one of SADC's major challenges is that seemingly common values and norms do not exist amongst the members of the organisation, a fact which blocks the creation of a security community (Nathan 2006 p. 276). The members have committed themselves to principles such as democratic governance and first and second generation human rights; however, not many SADC members live by these principles. SADC co-operation is still understood as an association where, according to Vale, co-operation is directed by formal agreements, as exemplified by the MDP, and where the individual members prioritise national interests over collective ones (Vale 2004 p. 122f). A security community is not only based on the absence of violence, but also on the expectation of the continued absence of violence and peaceful change. However, intrastate conflicts and unrest will continue to destabilize the region, thus removing the potential of a security community to exist.

Furthermore, domestic conflicts are often hard to predict and control, especially by often weak African states, which further reduces the prospects of creating trust between states concerning continued peaceful development and change (Nathan 2006 p. 286). The ANC government's attempt to introduce democratic principles and reform in the African Union should be understood within this framework of thought. However, South Africa's reformist role is problematic, because it has shaped South Africa as “the first in a community of unequals” (Vale 2004 p. 123).

The problem is that people who expect an interventionist South African role often fail to acknowledge the painful scares of history played by the apartheid state; a history which still impedes the development of regional cooperation. The relevant question, however, is whether an alternative to South African dominance can be found, taking into account the size of the country, in terms of economy, population, geography and resources as well as in terms of political influence and international standing.¹³ The South African government has, at least rhetorically, attempted to tone down its dominant position, stating its ambition of being a partner and not a hegemonic power. However, its capacity makes it

dominant in whatever it does, i.e. by default and not necessarily by design. Its reformist ambitions for Africa, despite being introduced through political dialogue and not coercion, are for instance a direct attack on the autocratic and despotic leaders on the continent.¹⁴

The role of mediator

Since 1994, South Africa has been actively involved as a mediator as part of its continental peace diplomacy ambition. It was involved in the dialogue with the military regime in Nigeria, as well as in the SADC task group, consisting of South Africa, Botswana, Zimbabwe and (subsequently) Mozambique, which mediated between the parties in Lesotho following the 1993 constitutional crisis. South Africa has been a successful mediator in the negotiations between, for instance, Burundi and DRC; it was called in to assist during the last, critical part of the Darfur negotiations in May 2006; and it has been involved in mediation in the Comoro Islands and the Ivory Coast.

By doing so, South Africa has set, from a Western point of view, an example for an otherwise generally unstable Africa as to how the other states on the continent should behave. It is able to use constructively its apparent comparative disadvantage as an African state by offering something to both the dominant as well as the more peripheral states in the international system; it is a bridge-builder between the two spheres. Vale and Taylor even go as far as to argue that South Africa 'is acting as the go-between for today's designated "renegades" and the international system' (Vale and Taylor 1999). The ANC leadership has deliberately tried to use its non-aligned position to create a role for itself as a broker in international disputes between the centre and the periphery. This was the case, for instance, in the negotiations following the dispute between the EU and UK on the one hand and Libya on the other hand following the Lockerbie bombing, which eventually lead to a financial settlement in 2003 (Henwood 1997 p. 6). On the role of mediator, Charles King argues that:

"The local acceptance of third party assistance is, to a great degree, reflexive: the performance of mediators depends on their legitimacy, while their legitimacy waxes and wanes according to their ability to perform" (King 1997 p. 78f.).

South Africa's capacity to function as a benign leader and mediator is therefore dependent on its ability to perform. Its experience since 1994 shows that South Africa has been confronted with increasing external expectations and has increasingly been called in as a mediator in African conflicts.

Part of its comparative advantage lies in its multilateral focus, its non-offensive defence (NOD)¹⁵ inspired military posture, and its strict adherence to international laws and regulations, which makes it a trustworthy partner (Muller 2002 p. 12; Landsberg 2005 p. 201). It is a leading nation in the developing world, which, for instance, has been made visible by its chairmanship of NAM, its involvement during the WTO negotiations, its central position in the transformation of the OAU into the AU, and its dialogue with the G8 members participating in the meetings (Alden and Le Pere 2004 p. 66ff.). These are just a few examples that underline the image of South Africa as the country tries to secure for

itself a better bargaining position, regionally as well as globally. As previously mentioned, there certainly are limits to South Africa's activist role and capacity, and some authors consider it to be just another country (Vale and Taylor 1999 p. 630).

The mediation strategy has seemingly been useful for South Africa in its relations with the rest of the continent, which seems to have accepted South Africa's transition from pariah to peacemaker. The benign strategy used during its mediation initiatives has been relatively acceptable to its African partners, i.e. it has not acted as a bully, to use Mbeki's phrase, but as a partner which respects the principles of African solidarity. South Africa's quiet diplomacy must be understood within this framework.¹⁶

One of the main reasons why South Africa has been accepted as a mediator internationally is because it has chosen to comply with and accept the international rules, laws and policies that regulate the international system. However, this acceptance is closely related to the ANC government's ability to deliver the required results – an important element in being accepted as a mediator (King 1997 p. 78f.).

The role of the armed forces in foreign policy

"The President referred, in his state of the Nation Address, to our troops as 'midwives of peace, stability and prosperity'. The SANDF is a visible and tangible instrument of our foreign policy, the principles of NEPAD and the African Renaissance". (Lekota 2005)

South Africa's ambitious foreign policy has also resulted in increased calls for South African military contributions to Peace Support Operations (PSOs), often as part of the implementation of South African-brokered peace agreements. This policy envisages a pivotal role for the South African armed forces in creating the peace and stability in Africa that are seen as fundamental conditions for promoting development on the continent.¹⁷ Former Chief of Defence General Sipiwe Nyanda have argued in this regard:

"We have to put as much muscle as words into the African renaissance.... There can be no African renaissance without the military" (Cornish 2003)

This concept of an "African Renaissance" has become an integral part of the South African foreign policy strategy. Peace and security are increasingly seen as integral parts of these ambitions for a renaissance. In the strategic plan for 2004, the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) prioritised the promotion of international peace and security. Among other things, this pointed to an increasingly international role for the country's security institutions in general and for the SANDF in particular (Nathan, 2005 p. 362; Bischoff 2003 p. 186). However, serious question marks have been placed on the capacity of the SANDF to address this challenge, which Habib et al. argue is important to assess because

"If [South Africa] is to remain committed to economic rejuvenation and democracy in Africa, stability is required. South Africa as an economic and military power must assume that leading role". (Sidiropoulos, 2004 p. 59)

This means that South Africa's leadership ambitions are dependent on the capabilities of the state, including the military. However, based on Joseph Nye, its combined capacity as a state consists not only of economic and military power as hard power, but needs to be combined with a broad spectrum of 'soft power' (Nye 2002 p. 8f). Nevertheless, for a great power to be accepted and respected as such, it will need the acceptance of other states as well (Buzan and Waever 2004 p. 32). The way a state exercises its great power role and uses its capacity have a great bearing on the willingness of others to accept it as a great power. South Africa's stated benign great power strategy should be understood within this framework. Bull argues, in relation to this, that

"The great powers are powers recognized by others to have, and conceived by their own leaders and peoples to have, certain special

rights and duties...in determining issues that effect the peace and security of the international system as a whole... They accept the duty, and are thought by others to have the duty, of modifying their policies in the light of the managerial responsibilities they bear". (Bull 1977 p. 196)

However, as Little argues, the behaviour of a state cannot be understood without including the norms, institutions, rules and customs that constitute international society as a whole (Little 1995 p. 15) and the strategic culture that dominates the state itself (Baylis et al. 2007 p. 82ff). The implication of this is that South Africa cannot successfully function as a leader and mediator in Africa without having the acceptance of others, a result secured, amongst other things, by its ability to perform a role as a mediator, and its ability to implement these mediated deals with military means if need be, as Habib et al. argue. This means that South Africa has to "supply public goods", to cite Gilpin (Gilpin 1981 p. 30f.), to Africa, including security, to be able to succeed in its role as peacemaker,¹⁸ and therefore its reformist foreign policy ambitions. The statement above by Former Chief of Defence Siphon Nyanda stressed this when arguing that the renaissance ambition is dependent on the military tool being able to prop up the diplomatic initiatives as part of the general foreign policy.

The South African government's benign great power strategy also means that there are international rules, norms and laws that determine how the South African government can use its coercive tool internationally. The use of force must therefore be considered legitimate and have the appropriate mandate, that is, come mostly from the UN or be at the invitation of a legitimate government.¹⁹ The linkage between the South African government's ambition to be considered a benign peacemaker and the role of the coercive tool therefore has to be found within the framework of these mandated missions, that is, different types of PSOs. The success of South Africa's reformist ambitions and its role as a peacemaker is consequently tied to its ability to succeed as a mediator and to deliver results, including the securing of peace agreements.

Furthermore, in Sub-Saharan Africa, where most states have only a limited military capacity, the African Union has directed the responsibility to act as a facilitator for the sub-regional brigades and lead nations in PSOs to the regional powers.²⁰ This means that, for South Africa to be considered a respected peacemaker and regional power, it must have a significant military capacity and the relevant capabilities to function as a lead nation. A failure on its part to do so will undermine its foreign policy ambitions to transform itself into an internationally respected peacemaker, as well as negatively affect its regional great power status, which is already coming under challenge. For the SANDF, this means that it has to be able to provide or undertake a number of the specialised functions which its SADC partners are unable to cope with, for instance, HQ capability, sanitation and engineering capabilities, logistics, and mobility and communica-

tions equipment (Mandrup 2007a). In the new SADC ASF Brigade (SADCBRIG), South Africa pledged to provide a parachute battalion, engineering capability, sanitation capability, harbour patrol boats, signal capacity, divers, naval support vessel, air transport.²¹ By its pledge, South Africa has filled in the blanks and it will constitute the backbone of the force that is supposed to be fully operational by 2010.²²

The White Paper processes and government expectations towards the SANDF

The 1996 Defence White Paper, the 1998 Defence Review and the 1999 White Paper on Peace Missions have proved to be insufficient frameworks for meeting the international challenges that the SANDF is expected to manage.²³ South Africa, like, for instance, Denmark and most other NATO members, is not faced with any immediate conventional military threat and is not expected to be faced with one in the foreseeable future.²⁴ Nevertheless, South Africa is geographically situated in what Holsti defines as a “zone of war”, and even though the conflicts are not directed against South Africa itself, this creates a volatile situation that makes it more difficult to predict the future and conduct effective military planning (Holsti 1996). This creates problems for the military planning, which is a long-term and time-consuming exercise.

The 1999 White Paper on South African participation in peace missions was intended to set the guidelines for the country's commitment to international missions. One of the pressing issues which led to the publication of the White Paper was the national and international debates on what could be expected of South Africa in relation to its participation in PSOs. The paper says that

“Although South Africa acknowledges its global responsibilities, the prioritisation afforded Africa in South African foreign policy makes Africa the prime focus of future engagements. South Africa has an obvious interest in preserving regional peace and stability in order to promote trade and development and to avoid the spill over effects of conflict in the neighbourhood” (DFA 1999 p. 21).

The White Paper also stresses that South Africa is in principle willing to participate in all kinds of international PSOs, including peace enforcement and humanitarian assistance. However, participation in international PSOs is only of secondary importance to the SANDF. However, according to the Draft Defence Update, this is about to change, making PSOs of primary importance (DOD 2005b). On the positive side this means that the new priorities will reflect better the daily tasks of the SANDF. However, the new priority also shows the unwillingness or/and inability of the SANDF to prioritise between the different tasks of the SANDF; as a result of this, every task now seems to be of primary importance.

Since taking office in 1994, the South African government has worked on a peaceful means strategy in which the military tool is absolutely the last option. An example of such a last option was Operation Boleas in 1998, where the initial strategy of the government was to launch a proactive military operation to pre-empt an unfolding military coup in Lesotho.²⁵ Despite being a case out of the ordinary in post-1994 South African foreign policy, it showed that the ANC government was willing to use the coercive tool when its national interests was put under a direct threat, especially from a country within South Africa's direct sphere of influence.²⁶

The first real test of the 1999 political guidelines to the SANDF concerning its international engagements was the South African-led African force sent into Burundi in 2002, in which South Africa acted as the lead nation in a mission tasked to monitor the peace agreement that had been brokered by South Africa itself. Shortly afterwards, a large contribution was also made to the UN mission in DR Congo with the French acronym MONUC. This was the first time that South Africa had participated actively in a peace process beyond the negotiations or deployed a military force in an attempt to implement and monitor an African-negotiated peace deal.²⁷ The problem for the SANDF was that the 1999 White Paper turned out to be out of touch with the ambitions of the government and was declared by the Department of Defence (DOD) to have become out of date and in need of being redrafted. The demands on the SANDF for contributions to South Africa's general foreign policy initiatives, both in actual numbers and other commitments, proved much greater than anticipated in the White Paper.²⁸ Another problem for the government and the SANDF was that the latter was undergoing a process of transformation, thus limiting its capacity to act. A third challenge was that the SANDF had to alter its military doctrine fundamentally, because, as Nathan argues,

“...the White Paper adopts a broad approach to security and a narrow approach to defence. The combined effect is to downgrade the status of the armed forces in the state's definition of security, formulation of strategy and allocation of funds. Whereas previously 'security' had virtually the same meaning as 'defence', the latter is now seen as a discrete subset of the former”. (Nathan in Cock 1998 Chapter 3 p. 6)

Since 1994, the armed forces in South Africa have come under civilian democratic control, and they have been removed from the civilian sphere of society, which of course is what typically characterizes well-functioning democratic societies. The role of the SANDF had gone from being the main provider of security for the regime to being one, amongst many, government departments managing the security challenges facing the state. This also meant that the SANDF had to struggle with other government departments for resources and often lost out, because the other departments' needs were often prioritized (Mandrup 2007a; Mandrup 2007b). However, as Le Roux argues, the DOD needs to be able to show that it is capable of making rationalisations and savings within the current budgetary framework before even considering increasing its current budget (Le Roux 2004).

South Africa has had the same post-Cold War/post-apartheid political debate concerning the role and nature of the Defence Force in general. The SANDF has had to fight for its existence, because questions were asked of the need to have a costly institution as the armed forces. One thing that the SANDF has

succeeded in convincing the policymakers of is that a future defense force needs to be multifunctional and capable of undertaking a wide variety of tasks; one end of the continuum would be defined by combat missions whereas the other end would be defined by the protection of South Africa's Economic Exclusive Zone as well as by environmental protection.

The White Papers and the International Context

“The primary object of the defence force is to defend and protect the Republic, its territorial integrity and its people in accordance with the Constitution and the principles of international law regulating the use of force”. (Constitution 1996)

The focus of the 1996 White Paper on Defence on the primary function of the SANDF corresponds badly to the actual and future tasks of the force. In the draft Defence Update document it is stated that in the future “defend and protect” should have a broader understanding than the present narrow military one. In the future it should be understood to include protecting the people of South Africa against a wide range of hard and soft security challenges, including international PSOs and crime (DOD 2005b p. 15, Ch. 3, Articles 4 and 5). In April 2005, Defence Minister Lekota argued in Parliament that

“there is...a need to prioritise peace missions and give peacekeeping its correct place in the roles and functions of the SANDF...[though] We are not making an SANDF of peacekeepers”. (DOD 2005c)

According to the 1999 White Paper, and as part of the national defence review process, the South African Army (SAA) was only to allocate two infantry battalions for participation in peacekeeping operations.²⁹ This means that at all times the SAA has one battalion for deployment and one ready for rotation. If deployment into UN Chapter VII peace enforcement operations is needed, the SAA will be able to make use of a mechanised and parachute battalion (DFA 1999 p. 23), which have now been pledged for the SADC BRIG. In reality, since 2003 the SANDF has deployed three times that number continually (DOD 2007). Furthermore, despite having an establishment of approximately 78,000 military and civilian personnel, the SANDF has had problems in sustaining the 3,000 soldiers deployed in Africa continually between 2003 and 2006 (Mandrup 2007a).³⁰ However, since the introduction of the Military Skills Development System (MSDS)³¹ personnel category, and therefore a large number of new recruits, parts of this problem have been solved. However, it exacerbated another problem because the total force number has increased to 84,000, which is unaffordable (DOD 2007).

The proposed numbers in the White Paper on Participation in Peace Missions have turned out to be too limited, and consequently it was decided that the review itself needed to be reviewed by redefining the outlined primary tasks as the actual defence tasks and creating a force design that fits this challenge (Mandrup 2007a Ch. 4). At a public defence hearing in the Joint Standing Committee on Defence (JSCD) in Parliament in Cape Town in November 2004, the submissions to the committee focused primarily on the structure of the force, that is, both the tooth-to-tail ratio and the actual force numbers, as well as on the doctrine of the posture, that is, the force's offensive capability.³²

The conclusions were, broadly speaking, both in the presentations and in the replies from the DOD, that the existing force design recommended in the 1998 Defence Review was not affordable with the means presently available. However, there seemed to be no agreement concerning the future tasks of the SANDF because several submissions argued that the SANDF only had to prepare itself for traditional peacekeeping operations and increased support for the SAPS' national tasks, not more complex peace-support operations (Shelton 2004). The conclusion seems to be that the SANDF needs to be able to do it all. It is interesting to note that according to Dr Koornhoff, the ANC member of the Portfolio Committee, the SANDF should prepare itself for what he terms 'developmental peacekeeping' when deployed in Africa, that is, an increased focus on human security issues, especially disarmament and demobilisation, while maintaining a focus on conventional national-based deterrence. In other words, the SANDF should be able to do everything (Koornhoff 2004). This is, as mentioned above, also what seems to be included in the delayed and not yet publicly accessible Defence Update document, i.e. the review of the Defence Review and other important documents, where increased importance is going to be given to PSOs, giving them the same priority as, for instance, the territorial defence.

The main issue is therefore how to produce a multifunctional defence force structure in which there is a close correlation between the political ambitions and task given to the armed forces and the resources available. The defence chiefs have an extremely important dual role to play because they both have to secure the formation of a structure that is able to undertake the tasks given to it by government, while at the same time, in their capacity as advisors to government, pointing out when there is a mismatch between ambitions and resources. This requires a defence leadership that possesses an element of boldness and firmness, because it might include stating that certain political ambitions are beyond the capacity of the force.

The implications for South Africa and the SANDF of the increased focus on participation in PSO have been that international expectations concerning the country have now been expanded to include significant participation in future African peace missions by acting as the lead nation. The first example of this was seen in Burundi, where the SANDF was deployed together with troops from Mozambique and Ethiopia. The international community, primarily the UN, was looking to South Africa because it seemed to be the only state in sub-Saharan Africa with the necessary military capabilities and will to act as the lead nation in these types of operations.³³ The question that remained was to establish whether, both politically and militarily, South Africa had the capacity to undertake this kind of task.

Conclusion

The SANDF today is an integrated tool of South African foreign policy, and since 2002 it has been widely used in PSOs in Africa. It is an important tool in proping up the ANC government's ambitious diplomatic initiatives in Africa, functioning as a benign regional power and a mediator. However, the government's peaceful strategy means that the SANDF is seen as a tool to support the diplomatic effort and not a means in it self; that is, under normal circumstances, the current South African government would not choose to use military coercion to obtain a political goal, only as a last resort. The exception to this rule was the 1998 Operation Boleas, where direct South African interests were under threat.

The government's peace diplomacy, including the SANDF, seems to be increasingly focused on the principle of securing South Africa by securing the whole of Africa, including current and future economic markets and sources of resources. This is also why the ANC government is so focused on stability and on a long term strategy of political reform as adherence to democratic governance and international law seem to be the best way to create a framework for development. However, this strategy, which has characterized the Mbeki presidency, is increasingly coming under international and domestic pressure, because it has failed to produce results in, for instance, Zimbabwe. What implications this could have for the role of the SANDF is too early to say. However, it is, especially because of South Africa's historic role in Africa, very unlikely that the SANDF will be used for anything else than AU/UN mandated missions.

The recent political will to commit South African troops to African PSOs has shown that there is a severe danger of over-extending the capabilities of the SANDF. It is highly probable, given the nature of the security situation in sub-Saharan Africa, that the current deployment level of a minimum of 3,000 troops will continue for the foreseeable future. The present strength at a time of full mobilisation is eleven battalions, including civilian volunteers, of which 30 per cent have officially been declared medically unfit.³⁴ This means that the future effectiveness of the SANDF depends on the success of the HR 2010 plan, including the MSDS program; to increase the number of deployable troops.³⁵ A lack of training time will also have a severe long-term impact in this regard. National tasks are reducing the ability of the SANDF to commit troops to international missions. The problem here seems to be an inability or unwillingness to prioritise the tasks of the SANDF and thus to shape the future defence force in accordance with the "balanced force" concept described in the Defence Review, making it efficient and affordable (DOD 2002 p. 4f.; DOD 2005b). One of the problems seems to be that because defence planning deals with both potential and latent threats, long-term planning for defence against aggression must remain the basic function of the armed forces, hence the notion of an effective defence for a democratic South Africa (Koornhoff 2004 p. 12). The primary task of the SANDF is still to protect South Africa, but the definition of what to include in "protect and defend" is being expanded, making everything equally important.

However, despite these weaknesses, this new prioritisation will reflect the day-to-day tasks of the SANDF in a more realistic way and therefore make it easier for the SANDF to prioritise the international deployments.

Taking the volatile situation in Africa into account, South Africa still faces a very real potential threat to its borders and stability, primarily from non-conventional soft security sources. It is impossible to predict what kind of challenges the country might have to face in ten years' time. Security integration into the AU and the signing and ratification of SADC MDP will help create an institutional framework to work as a deterrent against threats to the state. Even though SADC MDP has been criticised for its narrow collective defence nature, it will place interstate relations within an institutional framework, thus creating a sense of security. This confidence building measure could over time create the necessary foundations for the creation of a security community in SADC, provided that the democratic development in the member states evolves accordingly. Yet although this increase in security integration will reduce further the already low conventional threat to South Africa, the arrest of two suspected South African Islamic radicals in Pakistan in July 2004 for allegedly planning terrorist attacks in Johannesburg and the high level of trans-border crime underlines the fact that other types of security challenge and 'attacks' still exist or might even increase. It should therefore also be asked to what extent the SANDF, like most other modern defence forces, is prepared for tasks other than conventional warfare. However, the major sources of instability are still social inequality in South Africa itself and the overall instability in the region.

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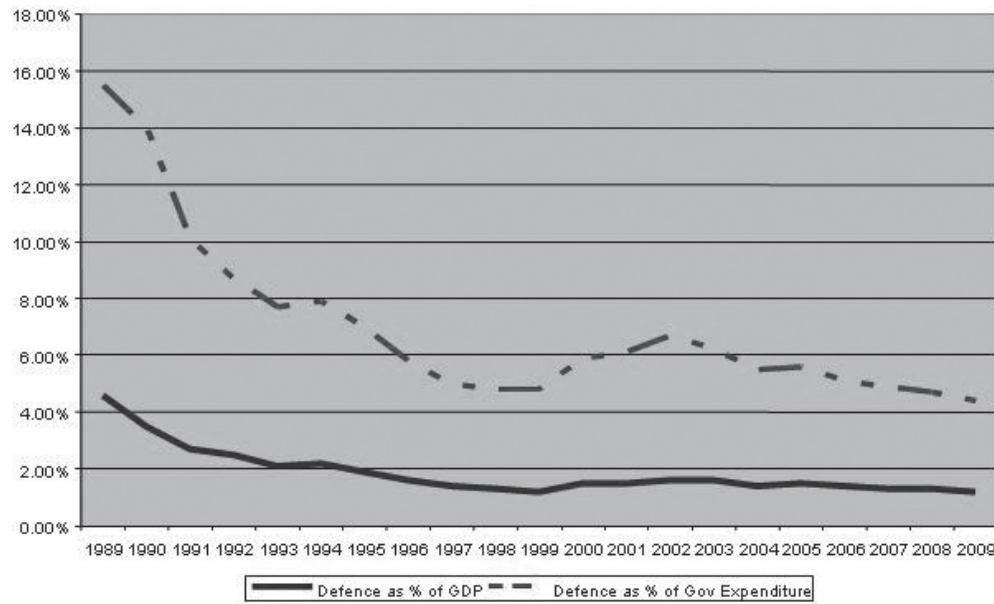
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Ratala, 2008

Rear Admiral Ed Ratala, Chief Joint Operations Division, SANDF, at Thaba Tswane, 21 February 2008 Appendix 1

Appendix 1

The Development in South Africa Defence spending



Endnotes

- ¹ For instance, expressed in then US Ambassador Thomas N. McNamara's speech in Johannesburg, 20 February 1996, on The US approach to Regional Security; and in Speech by Julius Nyerere cited by Vale and Maseko, *South Africa and the Renaissance*, p. 283.
- ² The name of the South African armed forces was changed in 1994 from SADF to SANDF to mark the transition.
- ³ For an overview of the development in defence spending see appendix 1.
- ⁴ The term "Centaur" originates from Machiavelli's description on how politicians should be able to deal with two ways of fighting, law and force; see Fyrsten, Chapter 18.
- ⁵ Current South African President Thabo Mbeki in 1997 put forward the idea of an African Renaissance, based on five fundamental elements; 1. cultural exchange; 2. emancipation of African women; 3. mobilization of young people; 4. the broadening and deepening of democracy; and 5. the promotion of sustainable development on the African continent. Vale and Maseko, *South Africa and the Renaissance*, p. 274. Furthermore, Vale and Maseko rightly argue that at least two contesting interpretations and critiques of the Renaissance ambition exist, the modernist and post-structuralist. However, it is outside the scope of this report to go any further into these divisions and the fundamentally different perceptions and critiques of the ANC government's foreign policy relating to this.
- ⁶ Thabo Mbeki was Vice-president of South Africa from 1994 to 1999 and has been President since 1999.
- ⁷ The MDP is a collective defence agreement signed by the SADC members in 2003. By April 2005 seven SADC members, including South Africa, had ratified the agreement. For further reading on the MDP and the security cooperation in SADC, see, for instance, Thomas Mandrup, *The SADC as a Security Community: Lip Service or Real Commitment?*, *Danish Military Journal*; and Nathan, *Domestic instability and Security Communities*; See also Nathan, *The Absence of Common Values and Failure of Common Security in Southern Africa, 1992-2003*.
- ⁸ Collective defence is an arrangement, usually formalized by a treaty and an organization, among participant states that commit support in defence of a member state if it is attacked by another state outside the organization. NATO is an example of this principle.
- ⁹ The term 'pariah' is widely used in the literature and will in the paper when dealing with South Africa's international role during the apartheid era, in particularly after 1977. See, for instance, Vale and Taylor, *South Africa's Post Apartheid Foreign Policy Five Years On – From Pariah State to 'Just Another Country'?*; Alden and Le Pere, *South Africa's Post- Apartheid Foreign Policy – From Reconciliation to Revival*.
- ¹⁰ South Africa has been very active in the formation of the so-called African Standby Force (ASF), which, according to the plan, by 2010 should be able to provide the African Union (AU) with a rapid reaction capability consisting of

five regionally based brigades. The responsibility for PSOs in SSA and the creation of the ASF structures have to a large extent been placed upon the regionally dominant states, for instance South Africa in southern Africa and Nigeria in West Africa.

¹¹ For further reading see Söderbaum, *The Political Economy of Regionalism – The Case of Southern Africa*

¹² The Defence Update process was initiated in 2004 and is yet to be made public. The 2005 draft document is the only public available document; however, according to sources close to the process not much has been changed in the 2008 version being negotiated in government.

¹³ The recent racially motivated attacks on immigrants and refugees from other African states means that South Africa has damaged its reputation gained as the “rainbow nation” and its relatively peaceful transition from apartheid.

¹⁴ South Africa’s foreign policy should be understood on several different levels, however. The foreign policy should at least be seen as consisting of four different tiers, that is, serving its economic interest through neoliberal trade policies, multilateralism, anti-imperialist, and democratic reform and human rights. It goes without saying that it at times is difficult to align these four policies.

¹⁵ The thinking behind NOD was based on the idea of creating a defence posture that was not strong enough to be perceived as a threat by South Africa’s neighbours, though was still strong enough to repel an armed attack on the country.

¹⁶ The term “quiet diplomacy” here makes reference to the name given by the media and the academic community primarily to South Africa’s diplomatic approach towards Zimbabwe.

¹⁷ It goes without saying that the same applies the other way around, namely that peace and stability require economic development.

¹⁸ In this paper, the term “peacemaker” covers the broad approach of peace initiatives, i.e. political mediation and peace brokering, post-conflict reconstructing and the military and police efforts. The term is furthermore widely used in the academic literature on South African foreign policy: see, for instance, Westhuizen, *South Africa’s emergence as a middle power*; Landsberg, *The Quiet Diplomacy of Liberation*.

Peacekeeping deals with UN Chapter VI type missions, Peace enforcement with UN Chapter VII type operations, Peace Support Operations is used to describe both types of operations.

¹⁹ The use of force towards war, *jus ad bellum*, is, of course, directed by the rules and regulation of the UN Charter, i.e. primarily as self-defence, and with a mandate from the UNSC ‘to protect international peace and stability.

²⁰ The road map for operationalisation of the ASF stresses that the regional powers are expected to play a central and pivotal role in driving the sub-regional ASF-initiatives.

²¹ Interview with Rear Admiral Ratala at Joint Operations Division, Thaba Tswane,

South Africa, 21 February 2008. These capabilities are not rotational. This illustrates the fact that the ASF is only supposed to be deployed for a period of up to six months after which they must be replaced by a traditional PSO force.

- ²² Admiral Ratala said that at the time of writing, early 2008, the force was a paper tiger. The SADC members had pledged the troops, but it was difficult for SADCBRIG to be allowed to inspect the pledged units, which often were not there or the pledged equipment was on order but had not arrived yet. The lack of willingness to allow inspections indicates a lack of trust between the members. Another problem facing the SADCBRIG is a lack of resources. However, Admiral Ratala was certain that despite these challenges the force would be fully operational by 2010. Interview with Rear. Adm. Ratala at Joint Operations Division, Thaba Tswane, South Africa, 21 February 2008.
- ²³ All three papers were declared outdated by both the military and policy sides in the DOD and the Defence Secretariat. Interview with SANDF Chief Director Strategy and Planning Rear Admiral Hauter and Chief of Policy and Planning, Deputy Director General DOD Defence Secretariat, Mr Motumi, in the DOD, 26 November 2003. The Defence Update has been delayed and is still, as of the end of January 2008, being negotiated at government level. The major disagreement seems to revolve around the costs resulting from the proposed structure. One of the major changes seems to be that PSOs are going to be given the same importance as, for instance, territorial defence.
- ²⁴ It can, of course, be argued that the war on terror and the events in both Iraq and in Afghanistan in particular have increasingly acquired an operational "conventional" nature, but they do not constitute a direct conventional threat to NATO members in the classical understanding of the word.
- ²⁵ It must be recognised that the constitutional crisis in Lesotho might eventually have resulted in a military coup and that the diplomatic efforts of the SADC troika with South Africa in charge had been unable to solve the conflict between the parties. That the operation itself was ill-managed and carried out by the SANDF and BDF and resulted in unnecessary material destruction is indisputable.
- ²⁶ Lesotho is a small state totally surrounded by South Africa, and which is economically dependent on its relations with South Africa, and especially the money earned by the large Lesotho migrant community working in South Africa. For further reading on operation Boleas, see (Mandrup 2007a).
- ²⁷ I recognise that South Africa at the time had committed a limited force to MONUC and that a South African protection force was deployed in Burundi in 2001 to protect returning Hutu politicians after the signing of the Arusha agreement. However, the deployment of the African force in Burundi and the DRC in 2003 was the first time that South Africa committed a major military contingency to a PSO operation. Moreover, as the first time, it was the result of and in support of a South African-brokered deal.
- ²⁸ The top management of the SANDF as a consequence met in the town of

Parys in March 2004 to discuss how to deal with the strategic challenges facing the force. They took a decision and introduced seven strategic resolutions, called the "Parys resolutions":

1. The Defence White Paper of 1996 must be reviewed; 2. The Defence Review of 1998 must be reviewed; 3. The DOD's vision was revisited and changed; 4. The DOD must revisit its structural arrangements for optimal efficiency and effectiveness, including the appropriate capacity for the Secretary for Defence and the Chief of the SANDF; 5. The DOD must identify strategic gaps and develop a Concept of Operations and a Concept of Support; 6. The DOD must improve its public image; 7. The DOD must investigate the use of a Balanced Scorecard approach as a management tool, in conjunction with the SA Excellence Model (DOD 2005a p. 24).

²⁹ An expanded South African battalion consists of approximately 1,000 soldiers, while the normal battalion size is 600-800 soldiers.

³⁰ In comparison, by 2009 the Danish Armed Forces is supposed to be able to deploy 2,000 soldiers at all times, that is out of a force of 25,000 in total. However, this target has been deferred, and in 2008 is 1,400 at all times.

³¹ The Military Skills Development System (MSDS) was started in 2003 to ensure the enhancement of the SANDF's mission readiness through the systematic rejuvenation of its human resource composition through yearly intakes of the country's youth. The MSDS also ensures a continuous provision of personnel to the SANDF reserves (Source: the DOD)

³² A selected number of submitters were allowed the opportunity to present their papers to the committee, ranging from issues concerning demobilised veterans to actual force design.

³³ I realize that this is a controversial claim, for instance, because of Nigeria's active role in African PSO, and due to the fact that ECOWAS is the only organisation to have had its ASF structure certified by the AU. However, the recent experience of AMIS in Darfur shows that SANDF was the only force to deploy with its own main equipment, while the other contributors, including Nigeria, were provided with equipment upon arrival.

³⁴ Quoted in Mail and Guardian online, 19 August 2003. Lamb sets the figure at more than 50 per cent, see Lamb, *Fighting for the Future*, p 13.

³⁵ According to the DOD's own publications, the objective of the HR 2010 plan is to create an affordable and flexible DOD HR composition, that is, to deal with the force's top heaviness. The SANDF seems to have experienced an inflation of ranks, which has created a need to right-size the composition of the force, but also increased personnel costs. DOD Annual Report 2002/03, p. 16; DOD Human Resource Strategy 2010, 2nd Edition, p. 6.

