

THE CLAUSEWITZIAN TRINITY: REASSESSING THE SOUTH AFRICAN MILITARY'S RELATIONSHIP WITH ITS POLITY AND SOCIETY

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Abstract

This article provides an historic–theoretical understanding of civil-military relations in South Africa and an outline of important influences on South African civil-military relations at present. Historically, a well-developed professional officer corps shaped South African civil-military relations. Africa's post-independence history, though, is full of examples indicating that neglect of the military often translates into domestic risk and a dwindling of military professionalism. Post-apartheid South Africa seems to emulate this example. The South African military may be in the barracks at present. However, there are clear indications that, in the longer term, the military risks promotion of elite interests, patronage and uncompetitive practices rooted in a single political party. This tendency is rooted in a general decline of military professionalism due to factors such as a declining defence budget, obsolete military technologies, a diminishing role of Parliament in overseeing the military function, the nature of operations and institutional factors such as a distorted professional self-image of military personnel.

Keywords: Military; defence; civil-military; professional; South African National Defence Force (SANDF).

Slutelwoorde: Weermag; verdediging; burgerlik-militêre; professioneel; Suid-Afrikaanse Nasionale Weermag (SANW).

1. INTRODUCTION

The Clausewitzian trinity, i.e. the relationship between a country's armed force, its polity and its society matters, directly affects the security of a nation³ and the effectiveness of its armed forces.⁴ As such, civil-military relations are at the same time an input, as well as an output of military professionalism; it affects the nature of military professionalism in the armed forces directly, whilst military professionalism is also an important building block of civil-military relations. The

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3 See the discussion in SP Huntington, *The soldier and the state: The theory and politics of civil-military relations* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1957), pp. 84-85.

4 AR Millett *et al.*, "The effectiveness of military organisations". In: AR Millett and W Murray (eds), *Military effectiveness: Volume 1 – The First World War* (Boston, MA: Unwin Hyman, 1988), pp. 4-6.

strategic success of all things military is dependent on civil-military relations in both democratic and authoritarian states. The “civil” part is the leading or senior entity in the relationship⁵ and demarcates the technological, mental, intellectual and institutional qualities of the military through control of both the employment and resourcing of the defence realm. Politics may therefore have a defining influence on military discipline and cohesion, morale and initiative, courage and toughness, the willingness of the military to fight and the readiness of its personnel to die if necessary.⁶

The reverse feedback that characterises all strategic decision-making and the disparity between a polity’s strategic aspirations and affordable resources is not only placing civil-military relations in the public domain, but is also guaranteed to exacerbate tensions in the culturally diverse political-military marriage. Politicians are idealists by nature. As Colin Gray argues, politicians (in both democratic and authoritarian states), by virtue of their craft, perceive or fear wide ramifications of action, prefer to fudge rather than focus, and like to keep their options open as long as possible by making the least decision as late as feasible.⁷ Military professionals, in contrast, are driven by the need to simplify, focus, decide and execute. Yet, with the civil component as the senior partner, the civil-military dialogue is at the same time mutually beneficial and unequal.⁸ Like most relationships, the civil-military dialogue is highly volatile and particularly vulnerable to political, security, and socio-economic changes that may dramatically affect the responsibility of, and the funding for the armed forces.

The mere existence of military power gives rise to a unique set of problems in relations between and within states. Between states, the instrumentality of military power drives the unfolding of the so-called “security dilemma”.⁹ In the domestic realm, military power gives rise to a unique relationship with the polity and society, often referred to as the “Clausewitzian trinity”. An understanding of the Clausewitzian trinity directs the conceptualisation of both civil-military relations and civilian-military relations as the military respectively interact with both the polity and the society it is supposed to protect. The core civil-military

5 MT Owens, “What military officers need to know about civil-military relations”, *Naval War College Review* 65(2), 2012, p. 67.

6 M van Creveld, *Fighting power: German and US Army performance, 1939–1945* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1982), p. 3.

7 CS Gray, “Why strategy is difficult”, *Joint Forces Quarterly* 22, Summer 1999, p. 11, <<http://www.au.af.mil/au/awc/awcgate/jfq/1434.pdf>>, accessed 19 March 2015.

8 See Ch. 7, “The unequal dialogue”, in EA Cohen, *Supreme command: Soldiers, statesmen and leadership in wartime* (New York: Free Press, 2002).

9 As a political construct, the security dilemma entails that, in seeking military power and security for themselves, states can easily threaten the military power and security aspirations of other states. See B Buzan, *People, state and fear: An agenda for international security studies in the post-Cold War era* (New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991), p. 295.

problematic concerns the military's interaction with both society and the government it is serving. Security, political change and societal support for military action are therefore three key ingredients in the civil-military setup.

The article attempts to reassess the key factors underpinning the current state of civil-military relations in South Africa. The first part of the article attempts to provide a historic-theoretical understanding of civil-military relations in South Africa. The second part focuses on a number of important influences on civil-military relations in South Africa at present. The discussion is based on official documents, speeches and opinions of political office bearers and interviews with members of the South African military.

2. THE POLICY FRAMEWORK: LINKING THEORY, HISTORY, IDENTITY POLITICS AND GEOGRAPHY

Theoretically, civil-military relations are typically conceptualised with either military professionalism or political loyalty as key construct. It is possible to argue that emphasis on military professionalism reflects a bottom-up approach to civil-military relations, since professionalism demands from the military, as the junior partner, to stay within the realms of its professional sphere and serve the polity and society with an emphasis on military effectiveness. An emphasis on political loyalty reflects a top-down approach to civil-military relations. It is directed by efforts from the political realm, as the senior partner, to keep the military in the barracks. If military professionalism informs the civil-military make-up in society, the military constitute its locus of control. The locus of control shifts towards the political realm if political loyalty constitutes the driving civil-military metaphor. Of course, as Huntington rightly points out, the political make-up within society is widely divergent and raises the question of political loyalty to political institutions, ideologies and parties.¹⁰ The result is a penetrative model of civil-military relations where the reigning polity attempts to ensure political loyalty through penetration of the military with its ideas and loyalists.

Historically, a well-developed professional officer corps shaped South African civil-military relations. Philip Frankel noted that, before 1994, the long-standing professional British heritage of the South African Defence Force (SADF) ensured, "the technical subordination of the military to civil political authority".¹¹ This tradition was supplemented by various South African statutes that barred South African military personnel from any partisan political activity. The 1987 White

10 For an in-depth discussion of the different civil-military relation's models, see Huntington, pp. 80-84.

11 PH Frankel, *Pretoria's Praetorians: Civil-military relations in South Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), p. xvi.

Paper on Defence, for example, stated explicitly that all members of the SADF, “are by regulation prohibited from taking part in, or encouraging any demonstrations or procession for party-political purposes”.¹² Frankel thus describes the SADF as highly professional in its political relations with the apartheid government. The SADF enjoyed functional autonomy in return for its subordination to civilian rule. The absence of political interference from the 1960s onwards led to an absence of factionalism in the military and, thus, less incentive for officers to intrude into government affairs.¹³ Over time though, and primarily because of PW Botha’s rise to power and Magnus Malan’s appointment as Minister of Defence, civilian oversight over the SADF declined and, specifically in the 1980s, operations were conducted of which neither the public nor Parliament approved. In addition, the SADF became an important political entity within the country and, although its members and institutional culture were a-political, the SADF, as an extension of the apartheid government, was not non-political. Due to conscription and politically informed perceptions of high levels of military threats, military values predominated in society, and the defence budget constituted a disproportionate part of the national budget. In combination, this made for a highly militarised society. Yet, unlike the rest of Africa, South Africa had no history of deliberate military intervention in politics or the undermining and frequent usurping of civilian rule.

The SADF’s involvement in counterinsurgency and the influence thereof on its professional ethos were reinforced through identity politics. On 31 May 1961, the then Prime Minister, Dr HF Verwoerd, noted, “The Republic of South Africa is the only sure and stable friend the Western nations have in Africa.”¹⁴ There is absolutely no doubt that the SADF, as an expression of the white South African society it served, identified itself with the Western way of war and, by implication, tried to emulate the kind of military professionalism associated with what Stephen Biddle described as the modern military system in the Western way of war.¹⁵ An overview of the characteristics of this modern military system¹⁶ provides an interesting analysis of the professional ethos of the SADF at the same time. The SADF ethos was, firstly, an approach to conflict and the use of armed force that relied heavily on technology. This, however, does not imply universal technological

12 Republic of South Africa, *Briefing on the organisation and functions of the South African Defence Force and the Armaments Corporation of South Africa Ltd* (Cape Town: SA Naval Printing Press, June 1987), p. 6.

13 HM Howe, *Ambiguous order: Military forces in African states* (London: Lynne Rienner, 2001), p. 52.

14 Republic of South Africa, *Oorsig oor verdediging en krygstuigproduksie: Tydperk 1960-1970* (Pretoria: Defence Force Headquarters, 1971), p. 9.

15 S Biddle, *Military power: Explaining victory and defeat in modern battle* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), p. 28.

16 G Parker, *The Cambridge illustrated history of warfare: The triumph of the West* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 1-11.

superiority. Rather, it is firstly an approach in which technology is used as a substitute for numbers and in which technological innovation and the need for the “technological edge” are pursued. Secondly, it is an approach that highlights superior training and discipline as a means to foster cohesion in the technical and tactical realms of war. Training and discipline are tools for the creation of a cohesive fighting force that may consist of culturally and racially diverse groups of people. Thirdly, the modern military system relies on an aggressive military doctrine that has its roots in the Clausewitzian paradigm of total defeat, destruction and annihilation of the enemy.¹⁷ This military doctrine is shaped, however, by acceptance that past examples could and should influence present practice (i.e. the need to learn from experience).¹⁸ Thus, the Western way of war is, fourthly, shaped by a willingness to accept ideas from all quarters and to adapt to present realities in the warfighting domain. The ability to change and at the same time conserve military practices through an effective system of military learning provides for a dynamic military ethos. An ability to finance relatively expensive military change, technology and war, lastly, underpins the modern military system.¹⁹ The modern system poses difficult political and organisational problems that prevent many states from implementing it.²⁰ Yet, it was the SADF’s emulation of these basic characteristics of the Western military ethos that made it retain “a functional autonomy highly unusual in Africa during the 1970s and 1980s”.²¹ There is no doubt that the SADF had a typical Western operational warfighting approach to military professionalism.²²

Apartheid South Africa was an economic and educational success for its white population and through conscription and the reserve force system, the SADF had access to the best available manpower. A well-nurtured threat perception (the *swart* and *rooi gevaar*) created a sense of fear in the white community that, until the late 1980s, ensured their continuous support for the SADF in general and for conscription in particular. Quality manpower, technology and a well-financed military ensured the development of the SADF into a professional, well-trained and well-led organisation whose white manpower deficiencies were augmented by the use of white-led indigenous forces. However, it was a military that was racially based and which excluded the largest part of the South African population from its ranks.

17 Parker, pp. 3-6.

18 *Ibid.*

19 *Ibid.*, pp. 1-11.

20 Biddle, pp. 48-51.

21 Howe, p. 51.

22 See, for example, the discussion of South African military exploits in the 1980s in PL Moorcraft, *African nemesis: War and revolution in Southern Africa, 1945-2010* (London: Brassey’s, 1990).

As a highly militarised state before 1994, the military was due to be an integral part of the transformation of the public sector in South Africa.²³ Immediately after 1994, a process was initiated to demarcate the civil–military environment within which the newly created South African military, officially known as the South African National Defence Force (SANDF), was to exist and operate. The process eventually led to the acceptance of the 1996 *White Paper on Defence*,²⁴ the 1998 *Defence Review*²⁵ and eventually also the 1999 *White Paper on South African Participation in Peace Missions*.²⁶ The development of these policy documents was extensive and very consultative. Views from the public, academics, think-tanks, the government and the military were incorporated into a comprehensive policy that addressed a wide range of issues – from civil-military relations and broad policy issues to more structural issues such as force design options.²⁷

Together with the 1996 Constitution, these documents laid the structural foundation for the civil–military framework of the military in a democratic South Africa. Chapter 11 of the South African Constitution makes provision for a defence force that must be structured and managed as a disciplined military force. The defence force is required 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. The 1996 *White Paper on Defence*, in a discussion entitled “Military Professionalism”, indicated that stable civil-military relations depend to a large extent on the professionalism of the armed forces. The challenge, according to the White Paper, is to define and promote an approach to military professionalism which is consistent with democracy, the Constitution and international standards. Such an approach is described in terms of the following political, ethical and organisational features:

- acceptance by military personnel of the principle of civil supremacy over the armed forces, and adherence to this principle;

23 J Cilliers, “Introduction”. In: J Cilliers (ed.), “Continuity and change: The SA Army in transition”, *ISS Monograph* 26, August 1998.

24 South African Government Information, Department of Defence, “Defence in a democracy”, *White Paper on National Defence for the Republic of South Africa*, 1996, <<http://www.gov.za/documents/national-defence-white-paper>>, accessed 19 March 2015.

25 South African Government, “South African Defence Review”, 1998, <<http://www.gov.za/documents/south-african-defence-review-1998>>, accessed 19 March 2015.

26 South African Government, “White Paper on South African participation in peace missions”, 24 February 1999, <<http://www.gov.za/documents/south-african-participation-international-peace-missions-white-paper>>, accessed 19 March 2015.

27 L Nathan, “South African case study: Inclusive SSR design and the White Paper on Defence”. In: L Nathan (ed.), *No ownership, no commitment: A guide to local ownership of security sector reform*, <http://www.academia.edu/2315525/No_ownership_no_commitment_a_guide_to_local_ownership_of_security_sector_reform>, accessed 19 March 2015.

- the maintenance of technical, managerial and organisational skills and resources, which enable the armed forces to perform their primary and secondary functions efficiently and effectively;
- strict adherence to the Constitution, national legislation and international law and treaties;
- respect for the democratic political process, human rights and cultural diversity;
- the operation of the Defence Force according to established policies, procedures and rules in times of war and peace;
- a commitment to public service, chiefly in defence of the state and its citizens;
- non-partisanship in relation to party politics; and
- the building of a South African military ethic based on international standards of officership, loyalty and pride in the organisation. This will serve as a basic unifying force that transcends cultural, racial and other potentially divisive factors.²⁸

The education and training programmes of the SANDF are seen as the cardinal means of building and maintaining military professionalism, “to meet international standards of competence and professionalism”.²⁹ The overarching goal of the education and training programmes is to establish an institution that is professional, efficient, effective and broadly representative of the South African population. Education and training are seen as the primary vehicles for the development of, “the political and ethical dimensions of military professionalism”.³⁰ The White Paper is very specific in terms of the subjects that the education and training programmes should address:

- the key elements of the political process in a democracy;
- the constitutional provisions on fundamental rights and defence;
- the significance of the Constitution as supreme law;
- the principles of democratic civil-military relations;
- international law on armed conflict;
- respect for multi-cultural diversity and gender equality; and
- the normative dimensions of military professionalism.³¹

28 South African Government Information, Department of Defence, Ch. 3: Civil-military relations, par. 30.

29 *Ibid.*, Ch. 6: Human resource issues, par. 2.

30 *Ibid.*, Ch. 3: Civil-military relations, par. 35.

31 *Ibid.*, par. 37.

It is interesting to note that the White Paper specifically emphasises the need for government to take account of the professional views of senior officers in the process of policy formulation and decision-making on defence through the Defence Staff Council, the Council on Defence and the structure of the Department of Defence – including the Secretariat of Defence. From a policy and structural perspective, the foundation for the development of a professional military force was laid through the Constitution and the 1996 White Paper on Defence. Policy, though, is nothing more than an expression of intention linked to a process of formation in operationalising the intention.³² The question is how these provisions and stipulations were implemented and what kind of force the SANDF turned out to be.

Since 1994, South Africa had a very explicit focus on Africa in the “consolidation of the African Agenda”.³³ The geographical focus on Africa encases the country’s African identity. More specifically, the policy outlook of the post-1994 South African government contains a very explicit grounding in an Africanist and anti-imperialist agenda.³⁴ This agenda contains an implicit expression of both anti-Americanism and solidarity with allies around the world from the period of national liberation. The politics of sentiment and solidarity inform South Africa’s strategic orientation towards Africa and its role on and towards the African continent. This explicit alignment with Africa is in stark contrast to the focus of the apartheid government, which projected itself as part of the European civilisation. In short, identity politics matter and had a defining influence on the development and employment of the South African military after 1994.³⁵

This very deliberate break with the past, with an emphasis on the African identity through a geographical alignment with Africa, informs South Africa’s civil-military outlook. Militaries in Africa face a unique set of difficulties that, in most cases, tend to endanger the professionalisation of the armed forces. African armed forces are known for their widespread interference in the political and economic realms. Militaries find it challenging to interact with parliament, civil society organisations and other civilian entities. At the same time, most African civilian officials lack in-depth understanding of security issues and institutions.

32 See the discussion in G Louw and AJ Esterhuysen, “The South African military in transition: Part 1 – From strategy formulation to strategy formation”, *Scientia Militaria. South African Journal of Military Studies* 42(2), 2014, pp. 1-26, <<http://scientiamilitaria.journals.ac.za/pub/article/view/1092>>, accessed 19 March 2015.

33 South African Government, Department of International Relations and Cooperation, “Strategic plan, 2013-2018”, 2013, <http://www.dfa.gov.za/departments/strategic_plan_2013-2018/index.htm>, accessed 19 March 2015.

34 L Nathan, “Consistency and inconsistencies in South African foreign policy”, *Foreign Affairs* 81(2), 2005, p. 363.

35 See E Sidiropoulos, “South Africa’s emerging soft power”, *Current History*, May 2014, pp. 197-202.

Thus, Houngnikpo argues, productive engagement, cooperation and mutual respect are elusive, and frustration in both the military and political realms is common.³⁶ Many African countries experience a lack of military professionalism because of a disconnection between the role and responsibilities of those responsible for security and defence policy *formulation* and those tasked with the *implementation* of the security and defence policy.

In a discussion of “The roots and results of African military unprofessionalism”, Howe³⁷ provides a detailed exposition of the reasons underpinning this disconnection between the political and military worlds in many African states and, more specifically, the reasons for the inability of many African militaries to demonstrate both technical capabilities and political responsibility. Firstly, military professionalism in Africa is often negatively affected by ethnic-based recruitment or a process of sub-national favouritism. Of course, many African states are not nation states and are made up of many different ethnic groups. Skewed recruitment often leads to the over- or under-representation of certain ethnic groups in the militaries. Secondly, domestic deployments have an undermining influence on military professionalism, more specifically by severing the relationship with certain parts of the population or the political elite. Very often, domestic deployments discriminate in a subtle way against opposition parties and their supporters. African militaries are, thirdly, professionally affected by a lack of urgency. Their operational tempo is often not very high. Howe notes, for example, that African states often refrain from interstate conflict and their ability to garner foreign military support has reduced the need to develop capable militaries. This situation often allows governments to structure their militaries for political loyalty.³⁸ Fourthly, the professionalism of African militaries is regularly undermined by corruption through wasting of defence money on irrelevant equipment and military personnel focusing their attention on private financial endeavours. The procurement of new equipment is frequently accompanied by large-scale corruption. Lastly, many African polities establish special presidential security units to counter-balance the political support of the military. These forces are often a variant of private military companies because they protect the ruler and his regime, rather than to defend the nation.³⁹ In combination, these factors inhibit the development of a culture of military professionalism in many African states. This, unsurprisingly, leads to the question of the extent to which South African civil-military relations have been affected by this nexus between politics, identity and geography.

36 MC Houngnikpo, “Africa’s militaries: A missing link in democratic transitions”, *African Security Brief* 17, January 2012, p. 2.

37 See Howe, Ch. 2.

38 *Ibid.*, p. 47.

39 *Ibid.*, p. 44.

3. KEY FACTORS SHAPING CIVIL-MILITARY RELATIONS

At present, a number of considerations inform the nature of civil-military relations in South Africa. The factors highlighted are highly interrelated and are not presented as a complete list.

3.1 Military technology

It would not be wrong to argue that the public image of the military in democratic South Africa has predominantly been informed by the corruption that accompanied the so-called Strategic Defence Package of the late 1990s.⁴⁰ And, given the current presidential commission of enquiry, the weapons procurement is due to haunt the military for a long time to come. The irony is that, at present, the military is faced with, firstly, a strategic disconnect between the nature of current operations⁴¹ and the type of equipment that formed part of the Strategic Defence Package;⁴² secondly, a defence budget that does not make provision for the sustainment of the equipment that was procured; and thirdly, in some cases, a lack of qualified personnel to employ the equipment operationally.⁴³

The Navy, in particular, is confronted with the reality that only half of its frigates and one of its submarines can be manned at any one time. The draining of qualified operational and technical personnel and a reluctance to serve at sea seem to be driving the personnel problems. The personnel problems are ascribed by defenceWeb to, “a sense of entitlement and self-enrichment amongst members” that is bloating personnel costs and the leadership that is being forced to, “take orders from a political party rather than the government”.⁴⁴ The well-known South African defence analyst and commentator, Helmoed-Römer Heitman, ascribes the personnel problems of the SANDF to a draining of combat and technical staff and, “some strange appointments”.⁴⁵ In the Navy, only around 85% of positions aboard the frigates are filled, and of those, only two thirds by qualified personnel.

40 A fact that was pointed out by J Cilliers, Director of the Institute for Security Studies, at the SA Army Seminar 21: Reconstruction and development in Africa – Prospects and implications, Military Academy, Saldanha, 1 March 2012.

41 Ground operations, predominantly peace missions, that necessitate force projection and sustainment over long distances.

42 The equipment was predominantly informed by the notion of self-defence and the sustainment of naval and air superiority.

43 G Martine, “SA Navy crippled by lack of qualified personnel”, *defenceWeb*, 1 August 2013, <http://www.defenceweb.co.za/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=31410:sa-navy-crippled-by-lack-of-qualified-personnel&catid=108:maritime-security&Itemid=233>, accessed 19 March 2015.

44 *Ibid.*

45 *Ibid.*

The Air Force, likewise, “is fast approaching crisis point” in terms of its operational ability and the lack of technical support to sustain its aircraft. Twelve of the 26 Grippen fighter aircraft that has been procured as part of the Strategic Defence Package have already been placed in storage and most of the A109 light utility helicopters have been grounded. More than 500 specialist aircraft technicians were retrenched when the SAAF failed to renew a maintenance contract with Denel Aviation early in 2013. The consequences of the lapsed contract are already showing with many of the Grippen fighters who have to be cannibalised to keep ten of the Grippen fighters serviced. Due to budgetary constraints, at least half of the SAAF’s fleet of Augusta light utility helicopters cannot fly and many of the pilots are losing their currency on this type of aircraft. These considerations should be seen against the background of the need for new transport aircraft to replace the 50-year-old C-130BZs, the urgent requirement for maritime patrol aircraft and unmanned aerial vehicles and the very high demand for VIP transport.⁴⁶

The personnel and equipment problems in the Army is well-documented and simply “unsustainable”. Armies are personnel-driven instruments of power and the South African Army, in particular, found it very difficult to adjust to post-1994 South African labour laws in the introduction of a typical military up-or-out personnel management system. At the same time, the prime mission equipment in the South African Army faces “block obsolescence”.⁴⁷ The 2014 Defence Review, for example, concluded that, “The Defence Force is in a critical state of decline, characterised by: force imbalance between capabilities; block obsolescence and unaffordability of many of its main operating systems; a disproportionate tooth-to-tail ratio; the inability to meet current standing defence commitments; and the lack of critical mobility. The current balance of expenditure between personnel, operating and capital is both severely disjointed and institutionally crippling.”⁴⁸

The corruption that accompanied the acquisition of military technology in the 1990s, the widely reported difficulty the military had to operationalise these technological platforms properly, the growing demand within the military for new equipment – in the Army in particular⁴⁹ – and the general inability to project a positive image of effectiveness, had a decisive negative influence on the relationship between the public and the military. These realities also form the backdrop against

46 K Helfrich, “SAAF ‘crisis’ caused by underfunding”, *defenceWeb*, 25 July 2013, <http://www.defenceweb.co.za/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=31330&catid=74&Itemid=30>, accessed 19 March 2015.

47 South African Government, “South African Defence Review 2014”, Chairperson’s overview, par. 13, <<http://www.gov.za/documents/south-african-defence-review-2014>>, accessed 19 March 2015.

48 *Ibid.*, Chairperson’s overview, par. 34; also see Ch. 9, par. 49.

49 Anon., “The Army is ‘unravelling’”, *IOL News*, 2 August 2009, <<http://www.iol.co.za/news/south-africa/sa-army-is-unravelling-1.453636#Ugy-BJI3DnE>>, accessed 19 March 2015.

which the public view several recent Air Force crashes, the death of 14 troops in the Central African Republic (CAR) and the Guptagate affair.

3.2 Defence budget

It is impossible to consider present South African civil-military relations without reflecting on the defence budget. In general, the military is of the opinion that not enough money is spent on defence, whilst the civilian population tends to question defence spending. South African defence spending, as a percentage of the gross domestic product (GDP), is relatively small compared to these budgets in the majority of countries in the Southern African Development Community (SADC). In 2013, SADC countries spent about 2,4% of their GDP on defence compared to South Africa's 1,2% (see Table 1).

Table 1: Defence spending in Southern Africa as a percentage of GDP⁵⁰

Country	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
Angola	4,8	4,1	4,5	4,4	3,4	3,7	4,3	4,2	3,5	3,6	4,8
Botswana	3,7	3,1	2,9	2,7	2,8	3	3,3	2,5	2,4	2,3	2
Lesotho	2,8	2,5	2,5	2,5	2,5	1,7	2,8	3,2	2,3	2,2	2
Malawi	0,5	0,8	1,4	1	0,9	1	1,2	*	0,8	1,3	1,4
Mozambique	1,3	1,4	0,9	0,8	0,9	0,8	0,9	0,9	*	*	*
Namibia	2,6	2,5	2,6	2,5	2,6	3	3,4	3,6	3,5	3,2	3,3
South Africa	1,5	1,4	1,4	1,3	1,2	1,2	1,3	1,2	1,1	1,2	1,2
Swaziland	1,6	1,7	2	1,9	1,8	2,1	3	3	2,8	2,8	2,9
Tanzania	1,1	1	1	1	1	0,9	1	1,2	1,3	1,2	1,2
Zambia	*	1,9	2	1,9	1,3	2	1,7	1,7	1,6	1,6	1,7
Zimbabwe	3,1	4,1	2,1	2,9	*	*	*	1,3	2,2	3,2	3,4
Average										2,26	2,39

Note: * = information not available

When compared to defence spending in the major and leading powers of the West and East African regions, Nigeria and Kenya in particular, South African defence spending is relatively on a par⁵¹ (see Table 2). However, the global average for defence

50 Data from the database of the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), <http://www.sipri.org/research/armaments/milex/milex_database>, accessed 17 March 2015.

51 The Kenyan defence budget should be seen against the background of the security challenges in East Africa in general and the instabilities in neighbouring Somalia in particular.

spending in 2013 was 2,4% of the GDP.⁵² Even though there is a global trend of reduced spending on defence, South African defence spending is already way below the global average. However, it is important to consider the fact that South Africa, despite the reduction in defence spending and unlike many of the countries in the SADC, is a regional hegemon with a regional military responsibility. This specifically pertains to peace missions. South Africa's recent proposal of and commitment to the creation of an African Capacity for Immediate Response to Crises (ACIRC) as a temporary multinational African interventionist standby force, is a typical example in this regard.⁵³

Two critical factors are driving the effect of defence spending on civil-military relations in South Africa. The first is the needs of the population in general, and the social inequalities in the country in particular.⁵⁴ This is informed by the very expressive alignment of the security establishment with and the commitment by government to the idea of human security.⁵⁵ Defence spending is firstly questioned from a philosophical perspective with security that is supposed to be guaranteed through non-military means. Secondly, the South African government has committed itself to peace and security on the African continent.⁵⁶ Although government is not very explicit about the role of the military in this regard, the military has become, if not the primary instrument of South African foreign policy in Africa, then one of the primary instruments.⁵⁷

Table 2: Defence spending as a percentage of the GDP of the leading powers in West, East and Southern Africa⁵⁸

Country	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
Kenya	1,7	1,6	1,7	1,7	1,8	1,9	1,9	1,9	1,9	2,1	1,9
Nigeria	0,9	0,7	0,6	0,5	0,6	0,8	0,9	1	1,1	1	1
South Africa	1,5	1,4	1,4	1,3	1,2	1,2	1,3	1,2	1,1	1,2	1,2

52 As provided by SIPRI, <<http://www.sipri.org/research/armaments/milex>>, accessed 17 March 2015. Also see the discussion on "World military spending", *Global Issues*, 30 June 2013, <<http://www.globalissues.org/article/75/world-military-spending#WorldMilitarySpending>>, accessed 19 March 2015.

53 K Helfrich, "SANDF battalion for ACIRC", *defenceWeb*, 7 August 2014, <<http://www.defenceweb.co.za/index.php?option=article&id=35768>>, accessed 19 March 2015.

54 Sapa, "SA has the highest social inequality in BRICS – Report", *Times Live*, 15 October 2012, <<http://www.timeslive.co.za/local/2012/10/15/sa-has-highest-social-inequality-in-brics-report>>, accessed 19 March 2015.

55 South African Government Information, Department of Defence.

56 See South African Government, Department of International Relations and Cooperation.

57 See the discussion of the military as an instrument of South African foreign policy in M Schoeman, "Foreign policy and the military: In service of reconstruction and development". In: T Neethling and H Hudson (eds), *Post-conflict reconstruction and development in Africa* (Cape Town: UCT Press, 2013), pp. 213–217.

58 Information from SIPRI.

It is difficult to balance these commitments from a civil-military perspective. The first necessitates a shift in government priorities away from defence and security with an accepted accompanying decline of the defence budget – the so-called peace dividend. The second requires an increase in defence resources and capability. The first consideration is furthermore underpinned by the need for the defence force to employ as many South Africans as possible. The second consideration places a high demand on the operational budget of the Defence Force. In the 2015 budget cycle, defence was allocated R44,579 billion from the national budget. This is about a R1,7 billion increase over the previous financial year's allocation, but when inflation and the exchange rate, particularly as regards the American dollar, are taken into account, it becomes an effective decrease in the SANDF's operational budget.⁵⁹ To make matters worse, South Africans face the reality, to quote Greg Mills, “[that] there is increasing confusion between the interests of person, party and public policy when it comes to foreign and domestic affairs, especially over questions of purse”.⁶⁰

3.3 Role of Parliament

One of the key challenges confronting civil-military relations in South Africa and something that is closely linked to the politicisation of the military in general and the very close relationship between the military and the Executive, concerns the oversight role assigned to Parliament in terms of the Constitution. More specifically, there are increasing signs of ignorance from both the military and the Executive in this regard. Personalities seem to play a key role in the reluctance to brief Parliament and its Portfolio Committee on Defence on certain key aspects of defence and the defence industry. This specifically concerns the President, consecutive Ministers of Defence and specific Members of Parliament – those of the opposition in particular. The detail concerning Parliamentary oversight and the responsibilities of the Executive, the Defence Secretariat and the Defence Force is somewhat of a grey area. The Constitution requires full disclosure of all defence activities, unless good reasons could be shown for withholding this information, in which case meetings between the Portfolio Committee and Department of Defence should be closed, i.e. not open to the public.

59 K Helfrich, “Defence allocation in National Budget not enough”, *defenceWeb*, 26 February 2015, <http://www.defenceweb.co.za/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=38166:defence-allocation-in-national-budget-not-enough&catid=111:sa-defence&Itemid=242>, accessed 18 March 2015.

60 G Mills, “SA’s ‘bit of this, bit of that’ foreign policy”, *Brenthurst Foundation News*, 29 November 2011, <http://www.thebrenthurstfoundation.org/a_sndmsg/news_view.asp?I=120781&PG=287>, accessed 19 March 2015.

In the recent past, the strenuous relationship between the Defence Force and the Executive on the one hand, and Parliament on the other, was demonstrated by the disinclination on the side of the Defence Force and Executive to brief Parliament on important defence issues. The examples featured very prominently in the media. The first is the debate on the briefing of the Portfolio Committee on Defence by the SANDF on its combat readiness. The Minister of Defence made use of a wide range of actions to delay the briefing to the Portfolio Committee, and opposition parties accused her of a cover-up.⁶¹ The second is the failure by the Department of Defence over the last four years to provide Parliament with information on arms procurement, “in spite of the Department’s own policy on armament acquisition requiring that bi-annual and ad hoc reports be submitted on all armaments acquisition programmes to Parliament”.⁶² Many of these projects are financed through the secret Special Defence Account. It eventually transpired that the amount may be as high as R4 billion of which no information was supplied to government. This seems to be a particular thorny issue between the opposition parties and the ruling ANC concerning the procurement of VIP transport aircraft for use by the President and other senior dignitaries.⁶³ Helmoed-Römer Heitman, describes the secrecy around most acquisition projects as silly. “All it does,” Heitman argues, “is feed conspiracy theories and set up future contracts for claims of corruption by losing bidders.”⁶⁴ The third and last example is that of the report by the Department of Defence on the Battle of Bangui, which the Minister of Defence declined to share with Parliament and the Portfolio Committee on Defence. The Minister, however, did indicate in Parliament that the report has clearly shown that the security forces of the CAR apparently collaborated with the Seleka Rebels in overthrowing the government of François Bozizé, and that the Defence Force has to be better equipped with strategic force projection capabilities to sustain operations over long distances in Africa.⁶⁵

61 *defenceWeb*, “MoD urges Parliament to ask for state of readiness debate”, 12 March 2010, <http://www.defenceweb.co.za/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=7113:mod-urges-parliament-to-ask-for-state-of-readiness-debate&catid=111:sa-defence&Itemid=242>, accessed 19 March 2015; D Maynier, “Maynier: Defence in crisis while Minister Sisulu engages in political war with Parliament”, *defenceWeb*, 17 May 2012, <http://www.defenceweb.co.za/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=25622&catid=74&Itemid=30>, accessed 19 March 2015.

62 *defenceWeb*, “DoD failing to provide information on arms procurement – DA”, 30 July 2013, <http://www.defenceweb.co.za/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=31382&Itemid=242>, accessed 19 March 2015.

63 J Styan, “Sluier getrek oor aankope: ‘Geen voorlegging die afgelope vier jaar gedoen’”, *Die Burger*, 20 July 2013, p. 2.

64 *defenceWeb*, “DoD failing”.

65 J Styan, “Minister wil verslag oor Bangui geheim hou”, *Die Burger*, 19 August 2013, p. 2.

The relationship between the military, the Executive and the reigning ANC is thus not only defined by its closeness, but also by the fact that it is indeed a closed relationship. This has reached the point where the official spokesperson of the Department of Defence, for example, indicated that he believes the capabilities of the Air Force are not a topic for public debate!⁶⁶ From a civil-military perspective, it seems as if the Executive is deliberately steering the Defence Force away from transparency in its relationship with Parliament and the public. The matter is further complicated when senior officers openly talk about them being summoned to Luthuli House, the headquarters of the ruling ANC, to brief members of the ruling party on matters of defence. Given the history of the ANC as a revolutionary movement, this may be a case of the ruling party seeing the military as a natural and necessary extension of its own doctrine, structures and policies. Past behaviour is the best indicator of future behaviour. As a revolutionary movement, the tradition of the ANC is one of a political movement with its own armed military wing and its own private army, Umkhonto we Sizwe.

3.4 Operations

South African military operations at present reflect all the typical characteristics of the so-called “Western” way of war. The operations are localised in both their conduct and impact. The enemy is not necessarily defined in terms of a state and its citizens, but rather in terms of a particular ruler and regime change, and operations are driven by humanitarian concerns with an emphasis on the need to minimise so-called “collateral damage”. There is also reluctance – and it is politically unacceptable – to refer to the armed forces of the destabilising elements in the areas where the SANDF deploys as “the enemy”. In addition, South African military deployments are expeditionary in nature and may be categorised as so-called “wars of choice”, rather than of necessity.⁶⁷

As is the case in many modern, especially Western militaries, force protection is of major concern to minimise the risks to the South African forces. But unlike these militaries, the need for force protection is not necessarily rooted in a fear for “body bags”. Rather, it is guided by a military necessity to sustain itself because of the lack of strategic depth in personnel and equipment support. More specifically, the military finds it extremely difficult to sustain and replace the personnel and equipment that are deployed. Because of the nature of the operations, the South African military heavily relies on strategic force projection and long-range logistical, medical and air support. None of these capabilities are readily available

66 E Gibson, “Lugmag se vlerke geknip”, *Die Burger*, 3 August 2013, p. 1.

67 See the discussion of the contemporary Western way of war in P Williams, “War”. In: P Williams (ed.), *Security studies: An introduction* (Oxon: Routledge, 2008), pp. 151-170.

and the SANDF depends on privately contracted air support for force projection and logistics.

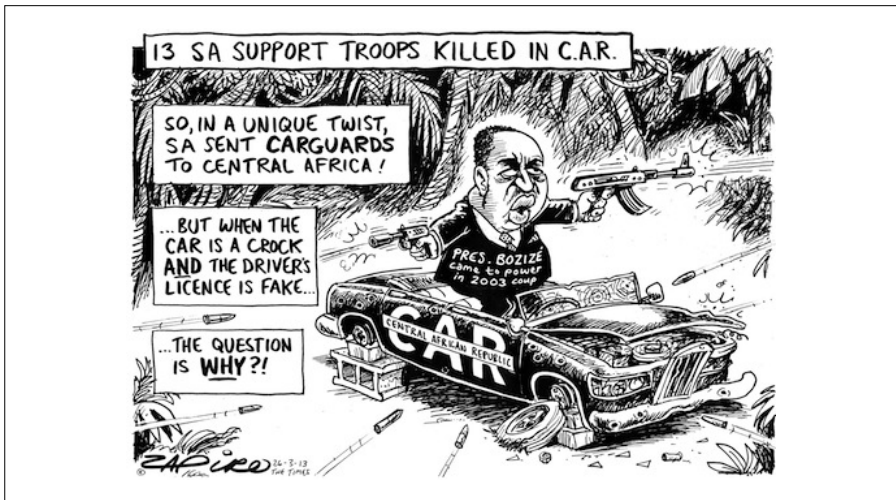


Figure 1: The nexus between national interests and military operations.⁶⁸

The key difficulty with South African military operations at present is that it is rather difficult to establish the nexus between national interests, military deployments and the use of force. The debate that followed on the deployment of the military to the CAR in 2007, and the resultant so-called Battle of Bangui in March 2013 in which 15 paratroopers were killed, serve to prove this point.⁶⁹ South African military deployments into Africa are informed by the basic political assumption of African unity that leads to the defence question of whom we are defending against. The result is that the SANDF is deploying lightly armed and poorly supported troops into volatile countries often without heavy weapons or support.

⁶⁸ Published in *The Times*, 26 March 2013.

⁶⁹ See for example F Parker, "Soldier deaths in the CAR the result of flawed foreign policy", *Mail & Guardian*, 26 March 2013, <<http://mg.co.za/article/2013-03-26-soldier-deaths-in-car-the-result-of-flawed-foreign-policy>>, accessed 19 March 2015; N Bauer, "CAR: Did Zuma defy the Constitution?" *Mail and Guardian*, 9 April 2013, <<http://mg.co.za/article/2013-04-08-zuma-constitution-car-deployment-sandf>>, accessed 19 March 2015; R Munusamy, "SA's role in the Battle of Bangui: The blood on Zuma's hands", *The Daily Maverick*, 27 March 2013, <<http://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2013-03-27-sas-role-in-the-battle-of-bangui-the-blood-on-zumas-hands/#.UhsxAxunqnk>>, accessed 19 March 2015.

A fundamental challenge in South African military operations, though, is the absence of a discrepancy between declaratory or articulated intentions and the operationalising of South Africa's foreign policy and the absence of a national security strategy.⁷⁰ From a civil-military perspective, this means that deployments, such as the one to the CAR, cannot be justified under the banner of such a strategy or be criticised because these operations may contradict the policy or strategy. What materialises instead is, "a haphazard, scatter-gun approach that invokes our national interests when convenient, and simply ignores it when it's not".⁷¹ When the public finds it difficult to establish the link between military deployments and the protection or extension of national interests, military deployments become a civil-military issue. When this is augmented by a perceived urgent need for military support in areas like border protection or counter-poaching and crime-related operations, the military is identified as an extension of the interests of the Executive – not of Parliament or the people of South Africa.

3.5 Institutional considerations

The professional self-image of military personnel and their view of the political realm are key indicators of the quality of civil-military relations.⁷² The Department of Defence has recognised a critical need for the SANDF to re-introduce itself to the local communities and to reset relations in order to indicate a clear departure from the historical tensions that existed during the struggle for liberation.⁷³ However, many soldiers prefer to distance themselves from society. Soldiers, for example, do not necessarily want to be seen in public wearing uniform. A wide variety of arguments are offered as an explanation. Many raise historical reasons or racism as a reason.⁷⁴ However, most arguments seem to be motivated by the perceived labelling of the military as useless, ill-disciplined and incompetent by society. A soldier used the example of being asked in a taxi whether he was in the military and then being blamed for being, "stupid [...] that's why you work in the

70 L Engelbrecht, "Feature: National security strategy necessary – analysts", *defenceWeb*, 20 January 2011, <http://www.defenceweb.co.za/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=13124:feature-national-security-strategy-necessary--analysts-&catid=49:National+Security&Itemid=115>, accessed 27 August 2013.

71 J Stupart, "The three things the CAR taught us", *Mail & Guardian*, 28 March 2013, <<http://mg.co.za/article/2013-03-28-the-three-things-that-car-taught-us/>>, accessed 27 August 2013.

72 DJ Snider, "Officership: The professional practice", *Military Review*, January-February 2003, pp. 3-8.

73 *defenceWeb*, "Mapisa-Nqahula to launch SANDF recruitment drive", 21 August 2013, <http://www.defenceweb.co.za/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=31624:mapisa-nqahula-to-launch-sandf-recruitment-drive&catid=55:SANDF&Itemid=108>, accessed 19 March 2015.

74 A women soldier argued that she, "[doesn't feel that she is] walking tall among civilians. Because [the] military is portrayed negatively – so I am not proud [*sic*]. When go to civvie street, they ask, 'Is there still whites in the military' – or, 'can't you get another job' – can't defend why in the army [*sic*]. We are laughing stock of the public." Woman soldier interviewed in Bloemfontein, 21 August 2011.

military”.⁷⁵ Moreover, it seems as if the military is encouraging soldiers not to be seen in uniform in public. A senior non-commissioned officer (NCO) at the Army’s primary basic training facility in Kimberley, for example, indicated that they require from their recruits to leave the unit in civilian clothes when they are given a pass. Fear that their behaviour may reinforce public perceptions of loitering, ill-discipline and misbehaviour seems to be the primary motive.⁷⁶

Soldiers are questioning the understanding of the military by the public at large. Some view this in historical perspective.⁷⁷ Others are blaming the military for not doing enough to inform the public about the military.⁷⁸ Several blame it on racism, arguing that the white population in general has become detached and that white people distance themselves from the military. The black population, it is generalised, only views the military as a place that provides work.⁷⁹ Another argument raised by many in this regard has to do with the military’s withdrawal from domestic deployment and its extensive employment in peace missions in Africa. One soldier, for example, argued that the public, “don’t understand the military, only if they have been in the military do they understand [*sic*]. They think we are just wasting money by doing peacekeeping and not helping with the problems in the country like with the illegal immigrants. But we are doing this now.”⁸⁰

It is, thus, no surprise that military personnel are ambivalent about the appreciation for their work by the public in general. Four considerations seem to inform the opinions of soldiers in this regard. The first is their immediate family and community. There seems to be greater appreciation for the military in certain communities and groupings in South Africa than in others. Because of the history of the country, many communities and groups deliberately distanced themselves from the military. Thus, the past experiences of certain groups and communities seem to direct their view of, and appreciation for, what the military is doing. Since everything in South Africa is seen through racial lenses, one officer noted, “it is much easier to impress the black population group with the Army’s presumed effectiveness and performance than it is with the whites. Maybe the former is quite happy to see a guy in uniform drilling reasonably smartly; the latter has some experience of conscription and appears to be tolerant of the Army at best and scornful at worst.”⁸¹

75 Officer interviewed in Pretoria, 26 August 2011.

76 Senior NCO interviewed in Kimberley, 24 August 2011.

77 “The history of the military caused harm and pain.” Remark by a senior officer, interviewed in Pretoria, 26 August 2011.

78 “No, we are not doing enough to inform the public. We should participate in public displays and other activities to inform the public.” Remark by soldier, interviewed in Kimberley, 24 August 2011.

79 Some use the word “employment agency” to describe this perspective.

80 Officer interviewed at the School of Infantry, Oudtshoorn, 22 August 2011.

81 E-mail correspondence with a senior Army officer, 8 September 2011.

Secondly, the relations between specific military units and the local communities also seem to inform the feeling of appreciation within the military. Certain units have a tradition of good interaction with local communities or they make deliberate efforts to establish good relations with these communities. This is visible, for example, in the relationship between the School of Infantry in Oudtshoorn and the School of Armour in Bloemfontein.

A third factor seems to be current operations, and the interaction between military personnel and the public that flows from that. Some of the soldiers who have been deployed on the border between Lesotho and South Africa remarked about the relationship and appreciation that developed between the community and the military in those areas.⁸² Another factor, that may have an influence in this regard, was expressed by a senior NCO when he noted that there will be greater appreciation for the Army, “when things start to go wrong”.⁸³

How soldiers tend to view politicians in general and their overall perceptions of political support for the military may be a direct reflection of the health of civil-military relations. The size of the defence budget seems to inform the commonly held views by military personnel of politicians and their support to the military in general. More specifically, the shift in the budgetary allocation of government from security to welfare during the 1990s, seems to have generated a collective perception amongst military personnel that the military is neglected. Many soldiers expressed strong views about the lack of military service, exposure and knowledge within the political realm; that politicians are generally uninformed about military affairs in general and, as a result, “they don’t have a clue how an army operates and what is required for a good army”.⁸⁴ Some soldiers also expressed the view that the current polity has its roots in the so-called “struggle”.⁸⁵ Thus, they argue that the military views of the ruling party politicians were shaped by exposure to the revolutionary military environment and that these politicians, as a result, do not have an in-depth understanding of the complexities of a bureaucratized statutory military.⁸⁶ Soldiers also expressed the view that the polity, “don’t even know about the good we are doing”.⁸⁷ As a result, military personnel feel they do not get recognition for what the military is doing. One officer summed this up by noting, “we are not getting enough support. They only show their support through

82 Officer interviewed at the School of Infantry, Oudtshoorn, 22 August 2011.

83 Interview with senior NCO, School of Artillery, Potchefstroom, 25 August 2011.

84 Interview with senior SA Army officer, Pretoria, 26 August 2011.

85 Referring to the so-called struggle against apartheid from the early 1960s to the early 1990s.

86 An officer, for example, noted, “not enough of them have served in the military. They don’t understand the nature of a statutory military. Their opinions were formed by a revolutionary military.” Officer interviewed in Kimberley, 24 August 2011.

87 Officer interviewed at the School of Infantry, Oudtshoorn, 22 August 2011.

more money. Soldiers are not recognised for their achievement. And we don't even receive medals and decorations anymore."⁸⁸

The most critical issue in this regard, though, is the view of many within the military that the military, in general, and its chain of command, in particular, are highly politicised. Referring to the military leadership, a senior NCO noted, "they are more involved in politics than in military matters".⁸⁹ Soldiers perceive appointments to be based on politics, not on merit. A senior NCO explained, "there is a tension between those who have experience and knowledge, and those who are appointed to posts", without these qualities.⁹⁰ In fact, many soldiers are of the opinion that senior military appointments are made not by government, but by Luthuli House. At a lower level, organisational politics are often driven by government policy imperatives concerning racial and gender representivity, the need for transformation and the reality of previous forces.⁹¹ When asked about the idea of transformation, a senior officer noted, "In the recent absence of the need to be militarily effective⁹² – and especially after the structural transformation of the SANDF had started in all earnest – 'political' imperatives have risen to pre-eminence. For the first decade or so, racial representation was at the top of the declared agenda, followed since about 2007 by gender representation. However, the subtext has always been the ascendancy and institutionalisation of venerable MK [ANC] cadres, which was especially important for the most populous, least technology-dependent and most combat-critical service – the SA Army."⁹³

A disturbing fact, thus, is that even at grassroots level in the SANDF, the military personnel are extremely politicised. An officer explained, "many soldiers want politics in the military and is (*sic*) linking everything they do to politics".⁹⁴ Another noted, "[all senior officers] have only one loyalty and that is to the [political] powers that appointed them. Affirmative action is a smokescreen for only empowering ruling party loyalists [*sic*]."⁹⁵ This prompted one senior officer to

88 Officer interviewed at 3 South African Infantry Battalion, Kimberley, 24 August 2011.

89 Senior NCO interviewed at 3 South African Infantry Battalion, Kimberley, 24 August 2011.

90 Senior NCO interviewed at the School of Intelligence, Potchefstroom, 25 August 2011.

91 "Previous forces" refer to the forces that were brought together after democratisation in 1994 to form the South African National Defence Force (SANDF). These forces consist of personnel and equipment from the SADF, the former apartheid homelands forces, and the pre-1994 guerrilla forces. The latter include Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK), the armed wing of the African National Congress (ANC), Azanian People's Liberation Army (AZAPO), the armed wing of the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC), and the Self-Protection Units of the Inkatha Freedom Party.

92 This statement should be seen against the background of the idealistic outlook of most South African political and military office bearers that South Africa does not face any conventional threat at present and, given the emphasis on human security in the policy documents, should orientate its military towards non-military dimensions.

93 E-mail correspondence with a senior Army officer, 8 September 2011.

94 Officer interviewed at the School of Artillery, Potchefstroom, 25 August 2011.

95 E-mail correspondence with a senior Army officer, 2 September 2011.

note, “the SA Army has been actively – albeit not deliberately – de-professionalised and managed into a state of competency deficiency”. Thus, he argued, “its group behaviour will become more difficult to predict in future: as the occupational culture takes hold, the discipline and logic of ‘Politics’ is being replaced with the opportunism and vagaries of ‘politics’”.⁹⁶

Linked to the increasing politicisation of the military, is the concern among military personnel about the lack of training and the quality of military equipment and weapon systems. Together with the politicisation of military personnel, this directly affects the professional self-image, the level of professionalism within the military and civil-military relations in general. Once again, many ascribe the standard of training to the lack of funds.⁹⁷ An officer from the School of Infantry, Oudtshoorn, noted, “there is not enough [political] support if one looks at the budget – not for training or maintenance or expansion”. Another stated bluntly, “our training is not enough and our equipment is old”.⁹⁸ Politicisation and the lack of training, together with the fact that, “the majority of our soldiers appear to have an external locus of control, and fail to balance their explicit human rights with their implicit responsibilities and obligations”,⁹⁹ create an increasing disciplinary problem within the military. “The disciplinary environment in the SANDF,” an officer noted, “is a political creation which the new elite initially supported, but now are finding counter-productive in terms of the movers and shakers’ agendas, declared or hidden.”¹⁰⁰ Another saw the roots of the disciplinary problem in the recruitment of the “wrong people”,¹⁰¹ whilst some blame the media for, “blowing this out of proportions [*sic*]”.¹⁰² The sluggish processing of the disciplinary problems by the military courts seems to contribute to the problem.¹⁰³ This underpins the military’s inability to, “weed out the troublemakers who are only here for personal benefit and not loyally serve their nation”.¹⁰⁴

It comes as no surprise then that leadership, command and control within the military are currently also problematic. On asking a mid-ranking officer to comment on leadership, command and control in the military, he used the words, “haphazard, ineffective, crisis management, poor planning, irresponsible”, to describe decision-making, and noted that it is, “focusing only on pleasing the political principals

96 E-mail correspondence with a senior Army officer, 8 September 2011.

97 Officers interviewed at the School of Infantry, Oudtshoorn, 22 August 2011.

98 Officers interviewed at the School of Armour, Bloemfontein, 23 August 2011.

99 E-mail correspondence with a senior Army officer, 8 September 2011.

100 *Ibid.*

101 Women soldier interviewed in Bloemfontein, 23 August 2011.

102 Officers interviewed at the School of Infantry, Oudtshoorn, 22 August 2011.

103 NCO interviewed at 1 Parachute Battalion, Bloemfontein, 23 August 2011. Also see, for example, E Gibson, “Nog geen stappe teen offisier wat kollega gryp”, *Die Burger*, 24 June 2013, p. 5.

104 E-mail correspondence with a mid-ranking Army officer, 5 September 2011.

and the emotions of the masses".¹⁰⁵ It is clear that the lack of bureaucratised command experience, political loyalties and gender relations affect the nature of leadership in the SANDF heavily.¹⁰⁶ Senior commanders are often inexperienced or uncertain, and sometimes even scared to make decisions. Commanders do not necessarily understand the basic standard operation procedures in the military and are sometimes unwilling to take accountability and responsibility for decisions. Many of the Army's male supervisors appear incapable of dealing with female incompetence and feel uncomfortable when confronted by the emotional content of female non-work-related issues. An experienced Army commander, for example, remarked, "95% of the personnel at unit level get on perfectly well with each other and would do the same in operations, I believe. The problems start when they are led by weak, incompetent, partisan or fractious commanders."¹⁰⁷

4. CONCLUDING NOTES

Africa's post-independence history is full of examples indicating that neglect of the military translates into domestic risk. To counter such a possibility the military should be geared towards wider national security objectives instead of narrow, elite- and often patronage-driven interests that are linked to one or other political party or leader. This may be somewhat of a challenge for even the most democratic of governments, but the military should at all times be employed in the interests of the broader society. The linkage between purposeful deployments whose objectives are set by elected officials on the one hand, and threatened national interests on the other should be obvious to the man in the street. The link between military employment and national interests should at the same time be carefully balanced with the defence budget. It is true that the military cannot be stronger than what the national economy can afford. Yet, that same economy may be threatened through an under-resourced military instrument. And, as was demonstrated during the procurement of the Strategic Defence Package, entrusting the military and politicians with defence budgetary decisions may be as dangerous as asking "ignorant civilians" for recommendations. Civil-military balance is a critical success factor in strategic decisions about military employment and structural decisions on defence capabilities.

Are South African civil-military relations at a crossroads? South Africa has no formal history of military rule and the country's constitutional and policy framework clearly emphasises an independent military professional sphere

105 *Ibid.*

106 The effect of gender relations on effective command and control was commented on by many of the soldiers who were interviewed in the training units of the Army.

107 E-mail correspondence with a senior Army officer, 8 September 2011.

objectively subordinate to its polity. The incumbent polity's frame of reference on civil-military relations, though, was shaped by its involvement in a revolutionary type struggle for liberation that invested the military and its leadership, in particular, in one party and one electoral outcome. It is clear that military personnel are increasingly willing to announce their political affiliations, to openly raise their party political opinions and to openly display their political beliefs. This is accompanied by a definite erosion of the professional military ethos within the military and an apathetic distanced public. And, as was noted during the era before 1994, "no formal role in politics" does not mean that the military is politically neutral. Thus, though the military might be in the barracks, there are clear indications that, in the longer term, the military risks promotion of elite interests, patronage and uncompetitive practices rooted in a single political party.

A sophisticated political awareness within the military and in its officer corps in particular is not only desirable; it is a necessity. In a democratic dispensation like South Africa, however, such political awareness should be refined, balanced and carefully directed by self-restraint. Military personnel should not only display self-restraint; they should also deliberately steer away from political identification and actual participation in party politics. Their political astuteness should be directed towards a sophisticated understanding and advisory participation in domestic policy making and parliamentary oversight and a cultivated approach to the role of the military in international politics. A relatively uneducated officer corps who are, because of their revolutionary background, very streetwise and highly politicised, yet lacking a politically refined understanding of the nature of a democracy and the role of the military in society, may be a political and security liability. What is obviously clear is that the military in general, and the officer corps in particular, lack an appreciation of the nuanced understanding of policy, the policy-making processes and politics in general. Thus, the military and officer corps are highly politicised, their political outlook is relatively uneducated, unsophisticated and unrefined. In combination with a distinct professional ethos, this may place civil-military relations under pressure.

The 1996 White Paper required from the SANDF to define and promote an approach to military professionalism that ought to be consistent with democracy, the Constitution and international standards. The outcome of this demand left the SANDF searching for a pathway to conceptualise and operationalise a typical military autocratic, highly hierarchical and bureaucratised institutional ethos, rooted in the acceptance of a universal professional military culture, in the democratic post-1994 society. The military was not very successful in establishing a typical cohesive, rather autocratic and well-disciplined, military ethos within the South African democratic society. Instead, the democratic ethos underpinned by a culture of command-from-below and management-through-consensus, was imported into

the military realm. Instead of militarising the military and transforming it into an effective tool of, and for a democratically elected government, the SANDF was democratised and demilitarised to reflect the ethos and values of a democratic South Africa. It left soldiers at grassroots level in a void, where they experience great difficulty in balancing their professional military ethos as soldiers, sailors and airmen/women with the democratic ethos of their society.¹⁰⁸

The professional ethos of the South African military and its relationship with both the executive and legislative components of government were – and still are – also profoundly influenced by the almost dogmatic acceptance of the notion of human security by the military. At the South African National Defence College, the security thinking of more than a generation of senior officers was thoroughly imbedded with the idea that South Africa’s security problems are of a non-military and human security nature. There is nothing wrong with the acceptance of a broadened outlook on security by the military itself. However, and as Richard Betts warns, military power remains an essential element of security, irrespective of the width or depth of the definition of security. The military in particular, cannot ignore the contribution or potential destructive role of military force, its position as the core element of security, and its role as one of the main actors in the security realm.¹⁰⁹ In short, nobody in society will take responsibility for military security if the armed forces are not honouring their obligation in this regard. The key problem manifests itself in the defence budget through the mixed message that the South African polity got from their military: on the one hand the SANDF was telling the polity that South Africa’s security problems are of a non-military, human security nature; on the other hand the military increasingly demanded a bigger share of the national budget for (conventional) military equipment to address the military’s growing personnel, capital and operational demands. The changes are, thus, very slim that the South African government will increase the defence budget to operationalise the 2014 Defence Review. These factors, in combination, leave civil-military relations in South Africa at a point where they require and necessitate careful re-assessment.

108 See the concluding chapter, “Reflecting on military culture” in F Vrey *et al.* (eds), *On military culture: Theory, practice and African armed forces* (Cape Town: UCT Press, 2013), pp. 263-269.

109 As quoted in J Baylis and JJ Wirtz, “Introduction”. In: J Baylis *et al.* (eds), *Strategy in the contemporary world* (3rd ed., Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 13.