

THE SANDF AS AN INSTRUMENT FOR PEACEKEEPING IN AFRICA: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THREE MAIN CHALLENGES

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Abstract

Under former President Thabo Mbeki South Africa started to play a salient leadership role in Africa and this role continues under President Jacob Zuma. In this context the SANDF has been and is still expected to be militarily geared for a peace support role. However, political functionaries, military analysts and scholars increasingly pose serious and critical questions with regard to “readiness” in the SANDF and whether the SANDF is still geared to serve purposefully, meaningfully and functionally as an instrument of foreign policy implementation – specifically with regard to involvement in peacekeeping operations. This article examines and analyses three areas of critical importance to the role of the SANDF in bringing peace and stability on the African continent, namely the strategic and financial management of the SANDF; force design and configuration; and the human resources situation. In view of this, it is pondered whether the SANDF is still ready and geared to play its role in peacekeeping operations, and whether public and scholarly criticism directed at the functionality of the SANDF is indeed substantiated and justified.

1. INTRODUCTION

The inauguration of former President Nelson Mandela on 10 May 1994 in Pretoria was a momentous event and is remembered by many for the spectacular fly-past by fighter jets and helicopters of the SANDF carrying the new South African flag. The newly formed SANDF subjected itself to its new Commander-in-Chief and furthermore committed itself professionally to the Constitution of the new democratic state. In fact, the military played a significant role in the logistics of the all-inclusive 1994 elections. In this context, Sithole (2009:1) rightly states that “[t] here is no doubt that the apartheid regime commanded one of the most sophisticated and capable military forces on the African continent with the capability to derail any democratic process. The politicians could not have put together the agreement that ushered in the new South Africa without the military’s acquiescence, especially given its role in apartheid South Africa where it would not be wrong to say it was almost on par with the civilian government.”

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Since 1994, the new Mandela government wished to distance it from the past of regional power politics and economic dominance over Southern Africa, but rather to identify South Africa with the promotion of human rights, peace and development on the African continent (Southall 2006:1). The new government, therefore, introduced a low-risk approach and policy that not only revived international diplomacy, but deliberately placed limitations on and reduced the use of the military instrument in South Africa's foreign policy. The Mbeki era (since 1999), however, brought about the re-emergence of the military instrument in South Africa's foreign policy, linking direct national interests (often identified with the African continent) with broader foreign policy goals (Du Plessis 2003:106,115). In fact, it could be argued that the military was chosen to facilitate South Africa's foreign policy goals in Africa in view of its strength and capabilities. The military's re-entrance into the foreign policy domain was strikingly articulated by the former Chief of the SANDF, General Sipiwe Nyanda (2003:1): "South Africa has just recently become involved in peace missions in Africa, and more deployments are on the horizon. After a healthy pause, post 1994, during which time the SANDF integrated and transformed, the SANDF is on the march – a march for peace, development and prosperity."

However, in recent times, political functionaries, military analysts and scholars increasingly started to pose serious questions with regard to "readiness" in the SANDF and whether the SANDF is still geared to serve meaningfully and functionally as an instrument of foreign policy implementation (Vreÿ 2010:2). In February 2010 the Minister of Defence (and Military Veterans),² Lindiwe Sisulu, admitted that "[t]here is the impression out there that defence is in shambles, that it is a time bomb and that it would not be able to defend the country" (*Business Day* 2010). Earlier, *Sunday Tribune* (2009) reported that the SANDF is in an "appalling" state of readiness and that it could not even handle much beyond the most trivial crises. In this context Sithole (2009:1) points out that the integration process since 1994 has taken place in an environment of dwindling resources as the new democratic government prioritised budgetary allocation to portfolios such as education, health and social welfare. This compels the following pressing questions (Sithole 2009:1): Was the integration process as seamless as it appeared? Were the changes without pain and dislocation? These questions are indeed of relevance as the military is still expected to play a significant role in pursuing South Africa's foreign policy goals at a global, continental and subcontinental level with specific reference to conflict resolution, peace initiatives and development.

In the context of the above, this article starts with a theoretical explanation of the military instrument in foreign policy implementation, followed by a brief overview of the SANDF as an instrument in South Africa's foreign policy

2 The Ministry of Defence was renamed to the Ministry of Defence and Military Veterans in 2009.

implementation. Against this background the article examines and analyses three areas of critical importance to the role of the SANDF in bringing peace and stability on the African continent as a matter of foreign policy implementation, namely the strategic and financial management of the SANDF; force design and configuration; and the human resources situation. In the final instance, the question is posed whether the SANDF is still ready and geared to play its role in foreign policy implementation – specifically peacekeeping operations – and whether public and scholarly criticism directed at the SANDF is indeed substantiated and justified.

2. THE MILITARY IN FOREIGN POLICY

Heywood (1997:360) states that militaries are political institutions of a very particular kind. Militaries are able to play different roles in political life. The most important of these are the following:

- **Militaries are instruments of war:** The central purpose of militaries is to serve as instruments of war that can be directed against other states or societies if such need arises.
- **Militaries are guarantors of political order and stability:** The coercive power and operational efficiency of militaries are not only of significance in international relations. Militaries may also be decisive factors in domestic politics.
- **Militaries are potential alternatives to civilian rule:** The control of weaponry and coercive power gives them the capacity to intervene directly in the political domain which can lead to the establishment of military rule in extreme cases.
- **Militaries are interest groups:** This implies that militaries could seek to shape or influence the contents of policy itself. More often than not, militaries are “insider groups” in the sense that they are represented in the key policy-making bodies and processes and so possess an institutional power base.

Having said this, militaries may also function as instruments of foreign policy (Heywood 1997:359). Du Plessis (2003:108-110) points out that foreign policy, once formulated, can be implemented by various means. This relates to the methods used to conduct foreign policy, or what is commonly known as the techniques or instruments of foreign policy. In this regard, a distinction is generally made between four types of instruments, namely the political, economic, psychological and military techniques.

Of these four, the first and last, namely the political and military techniques, are especially of interest and relevance. The political technique involves diplomacy and is considered to be the traditional, peaceful and most direct instrument of foreign policy. This technique is practiced by representatives authorised to act on behalf of the governments of states or other legitimate and recognised political

functionaries. The military instrument involves the use of military means and is a technique of last resort. It is generally associated with the coercive use of the armed force in a situation of war, but also includes military approximations short of war, such as military threats, military intervention, military aid and related assistance. It could also involve the pacific use of the military in peacekeeping operations. In this context, the military instrument (or techniques) refers to a diversity of ways in which military power can be applied, and is not limited to the conduct of war.

In both peace and war, military means constitute a foreign policy instrument in its own right, albeit linked to other means and strongly supported or facilitated by diplomacy. An inverse relationship invariably exists between diplomacy and military means in the sense that militaries have their own networks of attachés and intelligence sources. Militaries also have their own direct links with their foreign equivalents. Although sometimes dichotomous, the relationship between diplomacy and military means, military force in particular, has always been evident and recognised. Military capabilities provide a background of assuredness and stability for diplomacy. Since the diplomatic influence of states is to a significant extent associated with their military power, diplomacy and military matters are never really divorced. In other words, the diplomatic instruments are conjoined in theory and in practice to a significant extent. Moreover, the military instrument is an integral part of foreign policy implementation (Du Plessis 2003:110-111; Hill 2003:82-83).

One of the major changes in patterns of diplomacy since the early 1990s has been the increasing use of military co-operation and assistance in the international community. These changes did not come about through the traditional roles of militaries as providers of defence capabilities, but rather as instruments for attempting to build co-operative relations and helping to prevent or resolve conflicts (Cottey and Foster 2004:15). This, of course, stands in stark contrast to situations where foreign ministries find themselves in a situation of structural rivalry with militaries; where militaries pursue sectional interest and are lacking in the co-operative capacity traditionally found in the diplomatic domain (Hill 2003:82-83).

In the South African context Du Plessis (2003:106,132) points out that the military instrument has become more salient in South Africa's foreign policy, most notably in the form of peacekeeping operations of varying types in support of diplomatic initiatives to resolve conflict. Esterhuysen (2010:16-17) also states that during the Mbeki administration – considering the importance of peace and security in South Africa's foreign policy outlook on the continent – the SANDF practically became South Africa's leading foreign policy instrument in Africa.

3. CHALLENGES FACING THE SANDF AS A PEACEKEEPING INSTRUMENT

The *White Paper on South African Participation in International Peace Missions* (hereafter White Paper on Peace Missions) was compiled by the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA – now Department of International Relations and Co-operation), approved by Cabinet on 21 October 1998 and tabled in Parliament on 24 February 1999. The White Paper on Peace Missions starts with an opening statement to the effect that since 1994, domestic and international expectations regarding South Africa's role as a responsible and respected member of the international community have steadily grown. It is also specifically acknowledged that international expectations have included a hope that South Africa will play a leading role in international peace missions (DFA 1999:5).

Towards the end of 2002, the SANDF clearly linked South Africa's military-strategic objectives to "promoting security", which was defined as the provision of external deployment or support to enhance security in support of decisions by the executive. In practical terms, this entails sub-regional, regional or international peacekeeping operations (SANDF 2002:5). In its latest Strategic Plan (2009-2012), the Department of International Relations and Foreign Affairs (formerly Department of Foreign Affairs) explicitly states that peace, security and stability are prerequisites for Africa's socio-economic development. In this context, South Africa will continue with efforts to contribute towards the operationalisation of organs of the AU concerned with peace and security, such as the AU Standby Force and the Early Warning Centre. South Africa will also continue to play a role in peace building in post-conflict states (Department of International Relations and Co-Operation – DIRCO 2010:9).

South Africa's foreign policy initiatives can be considered as fitting the profile of a "middle power" in the international community. More specifically, South Africa's status could be described as a "middle power" globally and as a "great power" continentally (Southall 2006:3) – although some scholars would argue that South Africa is still an emerging middle power. South Africa certainly developed a high profile in Africa and stepped into a leadership role through its various foreign policy initiatives on the continent. The South African government even officially declared itself ready, able and willing to take a permanent seat on the UN Security Council (Spies-Kemp 2008:106,113).

As already pointed out in the theoretical exposition, the international and diplomatic influence of states relates to a significant extent with their military power, implying that diplomacy and military matters are never completely divorced. In this regard, it should be clear that the SANDF has been plagued by several political and institutional problems and challenges – thus leading to the pressing question: Is the

SANDF still geared to play its role in foreign policy implementation, or is there a growing disequilibrium between the SANDF on the one hand, and South Africa's evolving role and profile as a significant role-player in the developing world and the broader international community on the other? In the section below, the article specifically examines and analyses three interrelated areas of critical importance to the role of the SANDF in foreign policy implementation: the strategic and financial management of the SANDF, force design and configuration, and the human resources situation.

3.1 Strategic and financial management of the SANDF

Since the early 1990s South Africa saw the demise of the apartheid political system. Furthermore South Africa, in common with most of the international community, witnessed a reduction in defence expenditure. Specifically, defence spending averaged 16,4 per cent of the State's budget in the 1980s; it ranged from a high of 22,7 per cent in 1982 to 13,7 per cent, but rose to 15,7 per cent of State spending in 1989. By the mid-1990s, defence spending had been reduced to less than ten per cent of total State spending (Global Security 2001).

Viewed from another angle: where the defence budget was at 4,6 per cent of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in 1989/1990 (Abrahams 2001:2), defence spending was reduced to less than three per cent of GDP by the mid-1990s, i.e. less than ten per cent of total government spending (Global Security 2001). In real terms the defence budget was cut by 50 per cent between 1989 and 1997 (Abrahams 2001:2). Since the 1990s the country's defence expenditure has been pinned down at approximately 1,6 per cent of the GDP; i.e. between six and seven per cent of government expenditure (Kruys 2004:11). In an overall sense, because of cuts in defence spending, there has been a downscaling of the military and, as a result, a number of bases became redundant. The down-swinging defence budget also translated to a cut in the personnel budget of the SANDF. In March 1999 the Minister of Defence approved plans to reduce military personnel from 93 000 to 70 000 permanent posts (including civilians) (Harris 2001:69; Global Security 2001). It is widely believed that the declining budget had serious implications in terms of the maintenance of bases and equipment, and on the ability of the military to perform its primary and secondary functions – and ultimately on force readiness (Engelbrecht 2001:2; Global Security 2001). It soon became evident that the South African Navy (SAN) and South African Air Force (SAAF) desperately needed some rejuvenation by way of new equipment.

Against this background Cabinet decided on 18 November 1998 that South Africa would procure the following military equipment:

- 28 Gripen light fighter aircraft and 24 Hawk lead in fighter trainer aircraft to replace the SAAF's Cheetah and Impala aircraft.

- 40 light utility helicopters to replace the Alouette helicopters (which have been in service since 1962).
- Four patrol corvettes from a German frigate consortium to replace the present ageing strike craft of the SAN (which have been in service since 1979).
- Three submarines from a German submarine consortium, which would replace the ageing Daphne submarines (which have been in service since 1971) (Department of Defence (DOD) 1999:1).

Cabinet's decision was based on the *Defence Review* of 1998, which determined that the specific force design required for South Africa should be a high-technology core force, sized for peacetime, but which could be expanded to meet an emerging threat (DOD 1998:1).

Yet, the addition of new equipment to the inventory of the SANDF did not undo the medium- and long-term effects and impact of the dwindling defence budget on the SANDF. Military capabilities must be supported by structures such as headquarters, training establishments, general support bases and administrative service centres. Such operational and support structures must be fully functional and sustainable. The full costing of such structures is based on their annual cost regarding personnel, operating and capital equipment maintenance, and replacement.

In successive design exercises conducted by the Department of Defence towards the end of the 1990s, the full costs relating to capabilities and force elements amounted to and required an annual budget of around two per cent of GDP (Le Roux 1999). Yet, the defence budget did not increase and the current budget, in fact, amounts to only about 1,2 per cent of GDP. The dwindling defence budget is highlighted by the fact that the budget allocation for defence decreased from 7,9 per cent of total government spending in 1994 to a projected 3,8 per cent of total government spending in the 2009/2010 financial year (Makwetla 2009:4). In the course of 2009, the Parliamentary Portfolio Committee on Defence recommended an increase to 1,7 per cent of GDP, while the Department of Defence even maintained that there was a need for a defence allocation of two per cent of GDP. In fact, it was warned that if the required funding would not be forthcoming, the SANDF would have to shrink to a size that "is both viable and sustainable over the long term". Furthermore, it was argued that certain defence capabilities would have to be reduced and others would be "completely lost", with the country facing significant security risks and the SANDF would be facing these risks with severe limitations (Engelbrecht 2009a; Portfolio Committee on Defence 2009).

The Parliamentary Portfolio on Defence also asserted that the SANDF has come to a crossroad. The Committee suggested that a decision has to be made at the highest political level on the future of the SANDF and the question is: should it be utilised as a national asset properly and adequately funded for its (foreign policy) mandate, or should it continue its "current downward spiral of becoming

inadequate to fulfil its constitutional mandate?” The Committee maintained that a well-maintained Defence capability will immensely enhance South Africa’s role in promoting democracy and prosperity on the continent, and that a mandate-driven defence force and force structure should be realised (Portfolio Committee on Defence 2009).

From the above, it should be clear that reduced military spending and a dwindling defence budget are of considerable interest and importance to policy demands placed on the SANDF. In short, budgetary constraints place a strain on the capability of the SANDF to meet the policy demands associated with South Africa’s (political) role in conflict resolution, peace initiatives and development. This even implies that there is a growing mismatch between defence funding and what is required or demanded from the defence force. In this regard, the Deputy Minister of Defence, Thabang Makwetla, frankly acknowledged that “the insufficient budget of the SANDF continues to be a cause for concern... we hope we can come up with innovative ideas to ensure that we keep the SANDF in a state that is commensurate with its obligations” (Makwetla 2009:4).

The above-mentioned financial challenges are, however, not new to the SANDF. In 2003, the former Chief of Joint Operations in the SANDF, Lieutenant General Godfrey Ngwenya,³ urged caution against overstretching the capacity of the SANDF in deploying more troops in peace support. He specifically pointed out that in July 2003 close to 2 500 members of the SANDF were deployed to the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Burundi and Ethiopia, and that the SANDF’s force structure did not allow for more deployments on foreign soil (*Rapport* 2003:6) – implying that South Africa has effectively reached a ceiling as far as troop contributions were concerned.

Similar to recent political statements, the former Minister of Defence, Mosiuoa Lekota, stated in 2004 that “[f]or a country that has responsibilities such as we [do], with regional partners that are not so strong, it seems unavoidable that our country must consider raising defence expenditure”. In fact, Lekota stated that he would like to see defence spending increased in stages from the figure of about 1,6 per cent of GDP to about two per cent (*Sunday Times* 2004:19). This statement was a reiteration of an earlier address to Parliament in June 2003 when Lekota said that “[w]e are deploying twice as many members of the defence force than was anticipated in the defence review (of 1998), while our budget, as anticipated in the same review, has not been met” (*Sunday Times* 2003:4).

As far as the financing of peacekeeping operations are concerned, it should be noted that the White Paper on Peace Missions provides that the Department of Foreign Affairs (currently International Relations and Co-operation) will take the lead in securing finances for participation in specific peacekeeping operations.

3 Currently Chief of the SANDF.

However, there has been a constant challenge to secure funding for force deployments. When the President signs a declaration in relation to foreign deployment the required funding does not immediately become available for a particular activity. In recent years, the SANDF was compelled to meet all operational commitments from its normal budgetary provisions with additional funds only becoming available at a later stage. Furthermore, in the case of a United Nations (UN) mission, the SANDF can be reimbursed for authorised levels of personnel and equipment, but reimbursement is dependent upon specified verification processes and reports completed in the mission. In other words, theoretically there are funds outside the existing DOD budget for peacekeeping operations, but the administration of resources is such that there is a practical challenge to find funds for immediate needs, thereby putting additional financial pressure on the SANDF (ACCORD Research Team 2007:40-41).

Realising the fact that South Africa's defence policy (being published in 1996) was outdated, the Minister of Defence (and Military Veterans), Lindiwe Sisulu, tasked her military advisor, Lieutenant General (retired) Maomela "Mojo" Motau to produce a long-awaited review of South Africa's defence policy. At the time of writing the drafting team was expected to come up with a document in December 2010. This document is intended to consider major changes in the defence environment over the past 15 years and according to Sisulu, "will be informed by a clear-eyed assessment of what we want our foreign policy to achieve" (DefenceWeb 2010).

Another challenge of considerable importance to the SANDF – and closely connected to the above – is the problem of force design and configuration. This will be discussed in the section below.

3.2 Force design and configuration

The South African *Defence White Paper* and the *South African Defence Review* commit the SANDF to the preservation of the country's sovereignty and territorial integrity. This is the key *raison d'être* for the existence, maintenance and funding of the SANDF (Williams 1998:37). As already explained, Cabinet's decision to purchase new equipment for the SANDF (specifically for the SAN and SAAF) was based on the *Defence Review*, which determined that the specific force design required for South Africa should be a high-technology core force, sized for peacetime, but which could be expanded to meet an emerging threat. In the policy development it was concluded that the SANDF should be designed for its "primary object" (protection of the RSA's sovereignty and territorial integrity), and that it has to provide other services through its collateral utility (Le Roux 2006:4).

However, this paradigm has been highly contentious and criticised or questioned by several authoritative defence analysts and scholars. Even a serving top officer, Major General Len le Roux, (former) Chief Director: Strategy and

Planning in the SANDF, argued that the premise that a defence force designed for its primary function only will be able to execute its other functions through its collateral utility, is not valid. This view is based on the point that defence against external aggression implies certain characteristics in equipment, operations around one's borders, internal lines of communication and the relative proximity of support structures. Peacekeeping operations and related missions, on the other hand, have different demands. Such demands include:

- Protracted deployments over vast distances;
- long-range logistical support;
- air and sea transportability; and
- interoperability with other national forces.

The emphasis in peacekeeping operations and related missions, therefore, shifts from heavy ground mobile forces to light air and sea mobile forces. The kind of functions executed also place specific demands on force design. To this end, there will be a quantitative and qualitative difference between a force design based on a primary function orientation, and a force design which is required or utilised for a broader spectrum of modern defence functions (Le Roux 1999).

In the scholarly domain this opinion was also strongly advocated by (the late) Dr Rocklyn Williams, who since 1997 especially started to advocate viewpoints in this regard. Williams (1998:23-38) basically argued that there was an obsession with the primary function in force planning, and that it was wrong to adopt an attitude of "we design for the primary function and we execute the secondary functions with the collateral utility derived from the primary force design". He argued that the SANDF had neither the budget, the equipment nor the personnel to execute secondary functions on the basis of collateral utility. He also maintained that it was primarily in the secondary functions arena that most militaries have tended to be deployed in recent times. By the same token, he asserted that the South African military of the future would be increasingly configured around non-traditional roles or secondary functions.

Another authoritative defence analyst, Dr Jakkie Cilliers, Executive Director of the Pretoria-based Institute for Security Studies, also constantly asserted that the SANDF's force design was based on "an incorrect interpretation of the primary function", and that such paradigm skewed the SANDF force design. "I have often argued, and continue to believe that the core orientation of the SANDF should be to serve as 'a force for crisis prevention and crisis intervention', not conventional defence." This is based on the point that "the requirements for participation in operations under a UN or AU mandate remain high, and the expectations upon South Africa massive" (Cilliers 2006:10). The future tasks of the SANDF are not going to involve participation in conflict in the classical sense, but rather involvement in operations of a low intensity and of a counterinsurgency type within a multilateral

environment where South Africa is often going to serve as a lead or framework nation (Cilliers 2006:9).

Generally, several analysts basically argued that under the primary function logic the SANDF is not only suffering the steady erosion of its conventional capabilities, but that the SANDF has probably reached or will reach a point where these capabilities can only be maintained at the expense of the ability to conduct peacekeeping operations or related tasks. It was also argued that the unlikelihood of an external military threat has consistently undermined the credibility of a force design ostensibly motivated by the need for defence against external aggression. Focusing on the primary function is thus not facilitating or enabling the execution of secondary tasks, which are precisely the tasks that the SANDF is currently performing and will be called upon to perform in the foreseeable future.

Today, it seems that a steady erosion of conventional capabilities is indeed more and more becoming a grim reality. Practically, it should be noted that the SANDF's lean budget is starting to have a very negative impact of especially retaining highly-skilled soldiers in the SAN and SAAF. To cite one example: In an unprecedented and frank way, the Chief of the SAAF, Lieutenant General Carlo Gagiano raised his concern – even delivered a damning verdict – about defence capabilities, specifically with regard to the following (*Sunday Times* 2010:4):

- The budget for the Hawk squadron, used to train pilots to fly Gripen fighter jets, is not enough to keep the aircraft airborne for 2 000 flying hours a year, i.e. half the optimal flying time.
- The air force cannot afford a permanent maintenance contractor for its aircraft.
- There are delays of more than a year in obtaining spare parts for aircraft.
- There are an insufficient number of trained pilots, instructors and ground crew to ensure a sustainable core of fighter pilots.
- The air force flagship squadron of 26 Swedish Gripen fighters will only be able to fly for a total 250 hours a year, i.e. enough to train one pilot to NATO standards.

In recent years, analysts have not only been critical towards issues relating to force design, but have also directed their criticisms towards the ability of the SANDF to respond to crises or other demands placed on the military as a foreign policy instrument in general and a peacekeeping instrument in particular. Helmoed-Römer Heitman, correspondent of *Jane's Defence Weekly* and probably South Africa's most authoritative defence analyst, argues that “[t]he reality (of the SANDF) is that the state of readiness is appalling: The SANDF is in no way capable of handling anything but the most minor crisis” (as quoted in *Sunday Tribune* 2009). He argues that the present SANDF could not mount an effective intervention to stabilise Zimbabwe or rescue its peacekeeping troops in places such as Darfur.

A recent acknowledgement that challenges relating to force design have negatively impacted on South Africa's role in promoting peace and stability in the region came from the Deputy Minister of Defence, Thabang Makwetla, who admitted that there is a need to update South Africa's defence policy in respect of the increased obligation to contribute to stabilising parts of the African continent. He also acknowledged a need for a review of the distinction between primary and secondary functions, as well as a need to strike the right balance between the primary and secondary functions, and to give peacekeeping its rightful place in the role and functions of the SANDF (Makwetla 2009:3).

Be that as it may, it should be clear that there is indeed a need to direct force development and force preparation towards the optimal support for peacekeeping operations in Africa. If unaddressed, the SANDF is likely to lose more and more of its status as a professional organisation ready to meet the difficult challenges presented to South Africa as a political actor involved in complex regional and international affairs. In brief, the SANDF would be ill-equipped to support the South African government in meeting its future external challenges. As much as the SANDF is probably still the best equipped armed force on the African continent and is ideally placed to support the AU's Standby Force (Engelbrecht 2009b), the assumptions on which current South African force designs are based are not facilitating the SANDF to play an optimal role in pursuing South Africa's foreign policy goals at a global, continental and subcontinental level.

Finally, another area that has a major impact on the ability of the SANDF to play a significant role in pursuing South Africa's foreign policy goals is the personnel situation. The following section expands on this in more detail.

3.3 Human resources challenges

The integration of erstwhile adversaries into a single South African military was a mammoth task, but it was a project that coincided with a better life for all South Africans. However, barely six years after South Africa's white dominated military was integrated with the guerrilla armies it had once fought against, the London-based *International Institute for Strategic Studies* (IISS) commented that "racism remains all-pervasive and morale is rock-bottom" (IISS 2000:1). In 2009, 15 years after integration, Baker (2009:6) states that morale in the military "is now at a low ebb", vital equipment is often unavailable or broken, and there is a high incidence of health problems.

These views are certainly to be taken seriously, especially after South Africans had been alarmed by a violent confrontation between soldiers and police officers on the grounds of the Union Buildings (which is home to South Africa's Presidency) in September 2009. In fact, responses and comments in the media suddenly stood in stark contrast to a general disinterest from the public in military affairs (Vrey

2010:2). Many South Africans felt that the organised instruments of a modern state are not supposed to engage in running battles on the President's front lawn. Much of this confrontation related to human resources challenges. In the words of Butler (2009): "With its expensive modern surface vessels and submarines, the navy should be effective in its sphere of operations. Cynics, however, argue that its reach is limited to False Bay. The air force is likewise formidably equipped, but it suffers from severe human resource problems." Even more cynical is the view that the bright side to military incapacity in South Africa is that the potential for army interference in civilian government is greatly reduced.

Earlier, in February 2008, protest action by the SANDF in support of better salaries and promotions policies, accompanied by threats to disrupt the opening of Parliament by militarised unions, had started to evoke concern about the human resources situation in the SANDF. Max du Preez (2008:14), veteran political journalist, stated that for a very long time he had the impression that the SANDF was in "deep trouble", but after the protests at the Union Buildings he was "sure of it". As far as Du Preez is concerned, a culture of discipline and being above party politics saved the South African transition to democracy from derailing. The problem with the new defence force, he argued, was that the guerrilla components that had been integrated into the SANDF, were highly ideologised with low levels of training. Moreover, the leadership in the SANDF was not strong enough to turn it into a professional force after 1994 (Du Preez 2008:14) and the SANDF became a top heavy force after having to absorb the top brass from several former enemies (Sithole 2009:3).

For Heineken (2009:10) the above-mentioned protests relate to poor human resource management in the SANDF, which resulted in the formation of military unionisation. An inability of military leadership should specifically be blamed for rising discontent in the SANDF. At the same time, it should be noted that a seething discontent in the SANDF has been highlighted by several role-players as far back as the early 2000s. Critics especially claimed that integration had failed, communications had broken down, grievance procedures had been counter-productive and solid leadership had been lacking. Even the erstwhile Chairperson of the Portfolio Committee on Defence admitted that the human resources challenges in the SANDF were of a very serious nature (Moore 2003).

Recently, the issue of competent leadership in the Department of Defence has especially been highlighted after the Acting Secretary for Defence (the most senior position in the Department), Mr Tsepe Motumi, had to be "defended" by the Minister of Defence (and Military Veterans), Lindiwe Sisulu, following a "shockingly poor performance" before Parliament's Standing Committee on Public Accounts early in 2010. At the same time, the Minister admitted to having been baffled and shocked by the way Motumi had "crumbled" in the face of pressure by

members of the Committee. In this regard, Motumi was unable to answer questions about the Department's management of tangible assets after nine years of qualified audits from the Treasury (*Business Day* 2010).

Generally, criticism on the state of leadership, human resource management, officership and capabilities in the SANDF came from scholars, journalists and opposition politicians on a wide spectrum. Gennady Shubin (2008:34-37), a Russian (military) researcher attached to the *Institute for African Studies* in Moscow, for instance, openly criticised racial quotas as a problem "which are leading to the lowering of the general level of training for generals, officers and non-commissioned officers". As far as Shubin is concerned, weakly prepared officers with an evident lack of competence – "very inexperienced and mostly incompetent" – are rapidly promoted to the higher ranks. He also stated that a public demonstration of the SANDF's fighting capabilities in South Africa left him with a "comical impression".

Another issue of serious criticism was that of an ageing profile in the military, as well as high incidences of HIV/Aids. From the official opposition in Parliament the point was hammered that the average age of a private is 32 compared to that of about 22 in most other armies. As far as HIV/Aids is concerned, ministerial claims that the infection rate was below 23 per cent was met with incredulity. Instead, claims were made that the real infection rate was around 40 per cent. Be that as it may, the figures are high and a high prevalence has severe implications with regard to medical costs, low productivity, and poses a threat to combat readiness in the SANDF (Shah 2005:9). Institutionally, the problem of health in the SANDF is further complicated by the fact that in 2010 almost 40 per cent of the available posts for medical doctors and specialists at the SANDF's three hospitals in Pretoria, Bloemfontein and Cape Town, were vacant (*Burger* 2010:2) – indicative of the human resources challenges currently facing the SANDF.

Finally, the question is: what practical impact are human resources challenges having on the SANDF's role in facilitating conflict resolution, peace initiatives and development? In this regard it should be noted that South African peacekeepers in Burundi and the Democratic Republic of Congo were found guilty of more than 1 000 cases of misconduct in the period 2002 to 2006, according to statistics released by the SANDF's operational law directorate. More than half of the violations involved absence without leave, disobeying lawful commands and drunkenness. There were also 230 serious criminal cases, including assault, indecent assault, theft, rape and murder. According to the statistics at that time, several other criminal cases were also pending, and these even involved high-ranking officers, including a general, four colonels and six lieutenant colonels. Against this background, a senior officer in the SANDF stated that the high numbers of offences committed

by members of the SANDF was an embarrassment to South Africa's peacekeeping initiatives on the continent (*Sunday Times* 2006:13).

The SANDF previously defended itself by arguing that when comparing the SANDF with other regional military forces, no yardstick had been laid down against which the SANDF could be measured. As far as the military leadership was concerned criticism against the military should be treated as a matter of opinion as the SANDF did not consider itself to be in competition with other forces. It was also stated that South Africa's force levels, force structure and capabilities would not be dictated by external roleplayers or requirements. "It is all too easy for distant critics to criticize the SANDF's ability to participate in peace missions" (DOD 2001:1). Still, the question remains: where does this leave the SANDF as a policy and peacekeeping instrument?

4. APPRAISAL AND CONCLUSION

South Africa, being an economic powerhouse in Africa – largely on the basis of its strong private sector and sound constitutional dispensation – remains politically committed to play an important role in stabilising and developing the African continent. Under former President Thabo Mbeki South Africa started to play a salient leadership role in Africa and this role continues under President Jacob Zuma. In this context the SANDF has been and is still expected to be militarily geared for a peace support role.

Furthermore, recent years have seen a growing determination by African leaders to seek African solutions for African problems and it is indeed desirable to seize every opportunity to enable Africans to find African solutions. While the economic and other challenges facing the continent will compel Africans to pursue outside assistance for a long time to come, the SANDF has the potential to contribute significantly to peace and stability operations on the continent (Baker 2009:39). The SANDF must, therefore, be ready not just for war, but for any challenge or occurrence that may threaten the safety and security of the country and its peoples or even our neighbours. The SANDF must also be ready to meet the country's international commitments (Sithole 2009:2).

The SANDF's incremental entrance into the peacekeeping arena in the past decade ran parallel to a complex process of transformation and substantial military change – all of which took place under conditions of financial austerity. From the above, it is clear that issues pertaining to the strategic and financial management of the SANDF force design and configuration, and the human resources situation in the SANDF are putting considerable strain on the South African military and limit it in its role as a foreign policy instrument and a peacekeeper on the continent. Practically, when defence analysts such as Heitman argues that the SANDF "is

unravelling, and that it will ever more quickly as equipment runs out of useful life, as pilots leave for lack of flying and technical personnel for better salaries, and as experienced officers retire and good juniors leave in disgust” (*Sunday Tribune* 2009), cynics cannot be blamed for arguing that it is almost too late for the SANDF and its political leadership to reverse and rectify the situation. Certainly, much of the criticism against the SANDF is generally justified and largely substantial, although such criticism cannot be attributed to poor or lacking military leadership only. Esterhuysen (2010:20) rightly points out that the reasons relating to the SANDF’s capability is multifaceted and multilayered, and range from a lack of experience and scarce skills to budgetary, equipment, organisational and personnel challenges.

At the same time, the fact that the South African military is under pressure does not mean that the SANDF has lost its footing in the area of African peacekeeping operations. Shubin (2008:37) rightly points out that the armies of neighbouring countries and especially those states which are hosts to South African peacekeepers have an even lower level of readiness. Indeed, South Africa remains one of the top 20 contributors to UN peacekeeping operations worldwide and, as Baker (2009:6) remarks, it is a testament to the commitment and professionalism of many members of the SANDF that they did well in the many operations they were involved in the past decade.

For the SANDF to be successful in its modern role as a military force and a peacekeeper, three elements are of importance: political will, military expertise and financial resources (Vreÿ 2010:2). Strategically, suggestions with regard to a more precise balancing of primary and secondary functions (still) seem to be apt and overdue. The need exists to develop armed forces that are suitable to the real challenges facing the SANDF – thus a force design that, in the words of Williams (1998:35), is suited to African contingencies and one that tends towards “cheaper, lighter and less technologically-intensive” capabilities.

Whether the relevant political and military decisionmakers will succeed in their efforts to work towards a much needed update of South Africa’s defence policy and thoroughly review the complex challenges relating to the military’s primary and secondary functions, remain to be seen. The same applies to finding a right formula for the future funding of the SANDF in a very complicated and challenging South African political and socio-economic context. At a very practical military level, it also remains to be seen whether the general leadership in the SANDF would be able to re-professionalise the SANDF, to train soldiers properly and maintain discipline at all cost.

In the final analysis, the SANDF must be an efficient and effective force that is well-trained, professionally led and properly equipped if it is to complement and optimally support the country’s (somewhat ambitious) continental and international diplomatic endeavours. If not, there would be a (further) degeneration of the

SANDF and eroding of its capabilities and human resources. Unavoidably there would be a (further) growing mismatch between the military on the one side, and South Africa's evolving political role and diplomatic profile in the developing world and the broad international community on the other. Lastly, it should be understood that militaries are political instruments and the future role and contribution of the SANDF in foreign policy implementation will largely be determined by the relevant functionaries in the political domain. After all, any process to bring policy and operational capability to support policy objectives in closer equilibrium is mainly determined at the political level.

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