

The South African army in its global and local contexts in the early 21st century

A mission-critical analysis

G Prins

INTRODUCTION

In the kingdom of the Lozi in western Zambia, where I lived for many years, people use a special shorthand to signal deep truths – often bittersweet truths – of life. Siluyana, the ancient language of the region, has its origins in the mists of history, in the northern rain forests. It was supplanted in the mid-nineteenth century by Sikololo, a variant of Southern Sotho, which arrived when the Kololo, moving northwards because of the Mfecane, conquered the Luyana kings. Modern Silozi is a fusion of the two, but is mostly of southern origin. Today, few outside the royal court can speak or understand much Siluyana, except for proverbs and sayings – and these are the shorthand that people use. So I got very used to decoding proverbs and sayings. It is an efficient way to communicate. Recently, I was visiting the Scottish National Portrait Gallery in Edinburgh and I read something on the wall above a striking photograph that seemed very African to me:

While we are laughing the seed of some trouble is put into the wide arable land of events. While we are laughing it sprouts, it grows and suddenly bears a poison fruit which we must pluck.

I know a Siluyana proverb that has a very similar and disconcerting message.

However, although it could have been, it was not African. It was from a letter written by the poet John Keats, who died an anguished death in

Rome in 1821 at the age of only 26, fearing that his life had been worth nothing, that his name was as if written on water. And the photograph was as dramatic and disconcerting as the quotation. It was of Ethel, the distraught widow of Robert Kennedy, taken moments after the brother of the assassinated president JFK had himself been assassinated in Los Angeles. It was later revealed that Robert Kennedy had written out that quotation from Keats and kept it in the drawer in his study.

Being a person with high public office and responsibilities in his country as Attorney-General, it made sense that he did so. The sentiment is one that should guide anyone entrusted with the security of others, and especially any senior military officer. Soldiers have a *moral* duty to society to look out for those seeds of trouble while others are laughing, and to develop strategies that will by any means save the civilian population from having to eat the poison fruit. For the soldier's duty is to stand guard so that others may laugh and sleep without fear, and they should do so while avoiding the poison fruit themselves: that is the purpose of strategic planning expressed in White Papers and in Defence Reviews that operationalise them.

The military profession is one in which the balance between the virtues of caution and of decisiveness has to be more carefully struck than in any other, for people's lives are at risk. So it is easy for civilians to criticise generals who hold to techniques and systems that are tried and tested – the tactics and formations that won the last war in which they fought and won. A military that jumps recklessly from one philosophy and force posture to another runs the risk of being caught out by circumstance. South Africa's *White Paper on National Defence* of May 1996 correctly observed that 'the absence of a foreseeable conventional military threat provides considerable space to rationalise, redesign and "rightsize" the SANDF' (Chapter 4, 6.1). That was the case then, in the golden moment of the early Mandela presidency, and the opportunity was taken to forge the SANDF into quite a different body from any of the elements that were coming together at that time to create the new defence and security entity for the new South Africa.

However, an underlying theme of this essay will be to suggest that the time for that dispensation is now over. The South African Army faces a present and a probable future that is, in significant ways, radically different from the world anticipated in the 1996 *White Paper on National Defence* and articulated in detail in the 1998 *Defence Review*. Some seeds of trouble that were put into the wide arable lands

of events of that time have now sprouted and the South African Army has already been forced to pluck some poison fruits, most recently and calamitously with the surrender and disarming of SA soldiers in Darfur during Operation Cordite, the AU Mission in July 2006 (Mills and Stead 2006). My purpose here is to explain how that came about, to suggest how the negative effects can be mitigated and to offer some ideas about the parameters that might safely guide the changes demanded by South Africa's global and local contexts, as well as the responses to requests made of the SANDF by the political leadership in recent times.

Field Marshal Montgomery used to terrify officers in training at the Staff College when he enunciated the principles of warfare. The first, of universal application, is 'identify your enemy!' If you get that wrong, you get everything else wrong in consequence. The second – and Monty would emphasise the point by jabbing at some hapless young officer with his swagger stick – is to 'maintain your aim!' What the application of these principles of war means is that we need to be clear which war it is that we have in mind. Is it the last war – the one that shaped the doctrines, the equipment and – crucially – the self-image of a force? Or is it the present war – the one in which that force is now engaged and where, like every army in history, it has to struggle with the mismatch between what it is and what it can do and what it ideally should be and what it ideally should do? Or is it the war of the future? To what extent should force planning for the medium term be driven by low-probability high-impact (LPHI) events? Chapter 3 of the 1998 *Defence Review* presents what it calls a threat-independent approach, given the strategic judgement of the lack of an immediate conventional threat or of anticipated aggression without long warning time. Very correctly, therefore, it starts its analysis with contingencies and examines the possibility of invasion of South Africa. While it concludes that the risk of this is extremely low, nonetheless it is an LPHI and cannot be totally ignored as a contingency; indeed the current force structure of the army is predicated upon a classical hierarchy in the analysis of military contingencies that might threaten the laughter or sleep of South Africans.

So one of the questions I pose below is whether the assumption that a core force designed around the four criteria of credible conventional deterrence, a non-threatening regional posture, support for the civil arm domestically when required, all on a significantly reduced defence budget, can compete with a national priority also to participate in

regional defence arrangements, peace support operations, etc. and to 'perform its secondary functions chiefly with its core defence capabilities' (*South African Defence Review* 1998: Chapter 3, paragraph 9.7). Laurie Nathan and his colleagues in the Military Research Group did the job the country required at that time in the conceptual framing of the 1996 *White Paper on National Defence*. In many ways, it has defined the 'last war', the challenge of transformation a decade ago. The document is deftly drafted and analytically strong in areas that are still relevant, notably in its prescient signalling of salient features of the post-Cold War world (*South African Defence Review* 1998: Chapter 3, paragraph 5). But in certain crucial ways this is no longer the strategic environment with which the South African Army must cope. This essay is therefore a mission-critical analysis in two senses: critical for the successful performance of the mission and critical of aspects of current working assumptions.¹

WHERE IN THE WORLD ARE WE?

So where in the world are we now? To quote one last time from the *Defence Review* of 1998, 'strategic intelligence is the basis for force design, as well as early warning to ensure maximum time for expansion and defence preparation' (chapter 3, paragraph 50.1). Too true. What does the application of strategic insight provide today?

A good time and place at which to begin to ask this question would be at the Royal Geographical Society in London on a cold winter's evening in January 1904. On that evening, the second director of the newly-established London School of Economics, a geographer by the name of Halford Mackinder, delivered a paper that was described by one of the audience as being of such importance that he wished that all members of His Majesty's Cabinet had been there to hear it (Mackinder 1904). Mackinder's address that night was significant for two reasons. The first was that he sensed – as everybody did – that the turn of the 19th century marked more than only a chronological moment. There had been a fundamental shift in the terms of geopolitics. The competition between the great powers, Mackinder suggested, had frequently been alleviated during the 19th century by imperial rather than domestic competition. The option had always been there to conquer or colonise some other far-flung place, as in the 1884-85 formalisation of the scramble for Africa in that historically extraordinary carve-up that was the Congress of Berlin,

which has left the African continent with a legacy of problems in the delineation of culturally or geographically incoherent state structures. That time was now over, that opportunity expired, Mackinder said. There was no more space for horizontal expansion and, therefore, the coming 20th century, he suggested, would be one in which the great powers would be forced to sort out their differences face-to-face. And who was opposed to whom?

The other feature of the evening was that Mackinder launched the study of what was later to be known as 'geopolitics' – although he did not coin the term. He argued that the pivot of history was geographical and he suggested that there was an inherent tension between whichever power controlled the oceans and whichever power controlled the Eurasian land mass. Within the Eurasian land mass he saw the prospect of a titanic struggle for domination between Germany and Russia. Mackinder also noticed a third global geopolitical feature, in addition to what he called the 'heartland' of Eurasia and the global sea power – first led by Britain, later by the United States of America. He also identified the 'rimland'.

The rimland swept from Japan through China, South-East Asia and the Indian subcontinent and across the Middle East to include southern Europe, the British Isles and Scandinavia. As we shall see, that rim has become much more central as we enter our new, next century. What Mackinder could not foresee was how much the politics of the middle to late period of the 20th century would be dominated by the emergence of what the French geopolitician Gérard Chaliand has named the ring of underdevelopment and poverty that sweeps through the region between the tropics of Capricorn and Cancer: a fragile and unstable inter-tropical ring, which contains most of the newly-independent states that emerged at the end of colonial rule in Africa and Asia as well as the largest number of the world's poor people, the highest burdens of disease, the largest incidence of failed states, the areas with the most difficult soils and the scarcest high-quality fresh water (Chaliand & Rageau 1985). Furthermore, now an issue of rapidly rising concern, this inter-tropical ring is the area most immediately manifesting the early effects of global climate change in the form of irregularity in seasonal rains and the devastating consequences of hurricanes and floods.

A fourth feature of a modernised geopolitics identifies what Chaliand calls the 'gradual emergence of a developed southern ring linked to sea power' (Chaliand & Rageau 1986). That ring links three critical

areas in the high latitudes: countries like Argentina and Chile in South America, South Africa, the dominant power in the African subcontinent, and Australia and New Zealand. Australia is arguably playing a more influential role in world politics now than it has ever done at any time in its modern history. South Africa is at a crossroads, with forces pulling it in different directions to travel into the future, for of course that observation poses a challenge for the peoples of those regions. It suggests that their interests lie, not only for historical but also geopolitical reasons, with the sea power, and the sea power has been coterminous with the democracies of the Anglosphere. I think that South Africa's identity is clear. South Africa has joined the world's democracies and it is, for better or for worse (and I think decisively for the better), a part of 'the West', to give it its conventional shorthand – that dominant global political and economic enterprise that has brought both wealth and freedom to more people than any other arrangement for society that mankind has devised. But the West is challenged today by the fourth feature of geopolitics. For if we take Mackinder's perspective and apply it now, one hundred years after he first spoke in the Royal Geographical Society, we see that the dominating feature of the early 21st century is the rise of the rimlands.

We are seeing a rapid clarification of the terms of the contest between India and China both for influence and for raw materials and resources, and we are seeing the emergence of a 21st century quartet of great powers in the Pacific: China, India, Japan and the United States (with Russia as an aspirant participant because of energy supply). This feature of the early 21st century was almost completely unanticipated a decade ago, and partly for good but tragic reasons, which I will explain shortly. But now that it is here, it poses a set of questions about South Africa's medium to long-term strategic posture that is simultaneously grim in some parts and filled with opportunity in others.

Before we go there, there is a second major feature of the early 21st century that we must note. The 1996 *White Paper on National Defence* noted 'a tendency towards greater interdependence, regionalism and internationalism' (chapter 4, paragraph 5.2). It also saw the United Nations unbound – 'no longer frustrated by the exercise of the veto' (paragraph 5.6). The end of the Cold War was followed by a boom in peacekeeping and peace enforcement mandates and at that time many of us were filled with enthusiasm and hope for the possibility of finally giving the United Nations a muscular capacity to fulfil its Chapter VII roles in the ways that the original drafters of the Charter had envisaged.

In the same way that in the mid-1980s I had been intimately and actively involved with the exploration of concepts of non-offensive defence in Europe, in the mid-1990s I was engaged with others in the exploration of ways to operationalise UN capacity (Prins 1996, 1997). How much that world has been transformed! Four long waves of trends have coalesced since the turn of the millennium to provide the background against which great transformative shocks have occurred. Those background trends, the shocks and their unexpected consequences compose the global context within which we all reside and within which the South African Army, like all others, must prepare to play its role.

Since 2000, we have seen the simultaneous draining of power from all four of the remaining major, multilateral institutions created in the mid-20th century. The Bretton Woods institutions – the World Bank and the IMF – are under unprecedented pressure and face real competition from Beijing. The European Project for ‘ever closer union’ is dying fast – stabbed last year for different reasons by the French and Dutch electorates in their referenda to reject the European Constitution and crucified on the hugely premature launching of the Euro. NATO is now confronting the greatest crisis of its history in Afghanistan, the outcome of which is by no means clear. Lieutenant General David Richards, commander of the Allied Rapid Reaction Corps (ARRC), recently described the situation in Afghanistan as close to tipping point. If the UN-mandated NATO force failed to quell the insurrection and the resurgent Taliban within a few months, the General stated, the 70 per cent of the population who were currently indifferent to supporting either the Taliban or the Karzai government might swing to the Taliban in the hope of respite from continuing violence. In addition, the United Nations – a United Nations in which the *White Paper on National Defence* and so many of us vested so much hope ten years ago – had a major setback at the 60th anniversary summit in New York in September 2005. In essence the implicit deal between the Global South and the dominant global powers that was carefully constructed during the drafting of Kofi Annan’s High-Level Panel report (UN High-Level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change 2004; Prins 2005) collapsed. In important ways, the UN has passed into the shadows, although I retain hope that one of the pieces retrieved from the wreckage of last year’s summit, namely the Peacebuilding Commission that was one of the main recommendations of the report, may yet serve a role, not as an active agency but rather as a standards-setting body.

As for other regional organisations, the African Union has not been immune to this same bleeding away of hopes and strength. It has always lacked sufficient hard power to enforce decisions: only in the case of the coup attempt in São Tomé and Príncipe was it able to force coup leaders to step down. As every South African military leader is acutely aware, put to the test in southern Sudan the AU has both been under-resourced and suffered from 'authorisation deficit'. It has broken under enemy pressure. Whether it can be transfused from the UN mandate remains to be seen. But there is another thorn in the side of the international community. The AU has also been (and continues to be) gravely compromised by the continuing failure of the subcontinent to deal decisively with the tragedy of the destruction of Zimbabwe by Mugabe and his clique. So, for different reasons, all multilateral institutions have been drained of power and the residue has been transformed.

Two other features of the same years complete the picture. One is the arrival of the American imperial moment: a mixture of 'hard' and 'soft' power not seen since the Augustine Roman Empire. But since the compromise by the incompetence of Mr Rumsfeld and the Department of Defense of the success achieved in the removal of Saddam Hussein's tyranny, the United States has encountered a worldwide sandstorm of opposition. I think it is a mistake to underestimate either the depth or staying power of the United States and, most especially, one should not underestimate the worldwide attractiveness of the American dream to peoples of all types and conditions, which makes America still the world's most sought-after destination of immigrants and a Green Card one of the most eagerly-sought prizes among young and ambitious people the world over. Historically, anti-Americanism has had close links with the early stages of fascism, or (as in the present episode) with French resentment at its own weakness. Distinguish clearly, therefore, between anti-anti-Americanism and an unqualified support for all aspects of the current administration's policies. My position, like that of the French philosopher, Bernard-Henri Levy (2006), is very strongly the former.

The fourth long-wave feature of the global strategic environment revolves around fertility. We are witnessing simultaneously the death of Russia, the fading or greying of Europe, the rising of the Asian demographic superpowers – China and India – and the arrival of grim questions about the future dynamic of not so much fertility as the maintenance of balanced population profiles in African countries that are struggling with the consequences of pandemic disease, most

notably HIV/AIDS, and have the looming possibility of an epidemic of untreatable multi-drug-resistant tuberculosis (MDR/XDR-TB) riding on its back (Barnett & Prins 2006; Emergence of *Mycobacterium tuberculosis* 2006).

It was against this background that 11 September 2001 dawned a blue and crystal-clear day in New York. By the time that day had ended and the Twin Towers had fallen, it seemed as if the arrival of unconditional jihadist terrorism, perpetrated by al-Qaeda, was set to become the dominant strategic concern of the early 21st century. Indeed, for many, the ‘war on terror’ and the prospect of a clash of civilisations between an Islamic world in the hands of such uncompromising and apocalyptic leadership and the rest seemed set to become a security concern to trump all others. That was, however, an inaccurate formulation. Huntington’s thesis (1993) missed the point. The clashes of civilisation are occurring *within* not *between* world cultural and religious groups; and of those clashes the most bloody and hard are occurring within Islam as the tide of primary identity in the Arab world flows from bloodline and family towards religion, especially that austere, uncompromising and cruel Salafiyya version expressed by those such as Sayyid Qutb – ideological inspiration of the Muslim Brotherhood, which crushes the quietism of the Sufi (Allen 2006:20-42; Funke & Solomon 2006). The failure of the Islamic world, and especially of the Arab Islamic world, to find a viable relationship with modernity was one of the greater but overlooked tragedies of the 20th century (Lewis 2002). It is, however, ultimately an internal tragedy, only resolvable internally. We, whose fight this is not, must mainly protect ourselves from the fall-out. The military dimension of this is brutal and simple to state. There is no deterrence of unconditional terrorists, only pre-emption. It is supremely an intelligence-led task, which calls for the depth of increasing collaboration between the democracies under attack that we have been witnessing. As I argued at the Military Academy at Saldanha Bay in 2004, this is a war in which South Africa – a valued and integral part of the West – can contribute important human and intelligence assets, physical surveillance, communications and especially maritime assets.

Yet was the arrival of unconditional Islamist terrorism – skilfully harnessed by Osama bin Laden, Ayman Al-zawahiri and Khalid Sheikh Mohammed and executed by Mohammed Atta and his suicide teams – really the most important geo-strategic consequence of 9/11? The events of that day teach us two types of lessons.

At the tactical and practical level, they showed how an indomitable will, combined with the skilful obtaining of means, could lead to a new way of warfare. 9/11 was in fact a formula: Islam's agonising internal 'clash of civilisations' crisis + hijacked systemic synergisms = a risk cascade. The brilliance of the concept of operation of Osama bin Laden and his colleagues was that they had to do very little indeed to bring about the attack. It was the malign exploitation of many complex civil systems of the victims that brought the attack to completion: airline tables, flight training schools, a knowledge of skyscraper engineering, an ability to manipulate television news schedules – these were the weapons. All that was needed then was 19 men who were prepared to die and, in the process, turn civilian airliners into cruise missiles to circumvent all the formal defence and security apparatus of the most powerful state on earth. This way of war has profound implications for the way an army that aspires to keep its people safe should see itself both directly and operationally and in conjunction with the other instruments of security, and this is an issue to which I will turn in the next section. But here the important thing to note is that at the geopolitical level it is now plain that the most important consequence of 9/11 had nothing to do with any of that – not with Islam, with al-Qaeda, with Osama bin Laden or indeed with the Middle East.

What 9/11 did was to halt the steep decline in Sino-American relations that had been occurring in 2000 and 2001. The new Bush administration had come in with belligerent rhetoric and it had quickly produced a response from the Chinese Communist Party leadership, which expressed itself both in the spy plane crisis, when Chinese fighters forced down an American aircraft, and in the confrontations over the Taiwan Straits. There seemed little to prevent a continuation of this trend until the sudden shock of 9/11. Reflexively, the international community drew together in solidarity against this new threat. NATO voted Article V, probably for the first and last time in the history of the Alliance – the most extensive invocation of its core security guarantee in support of a member that had been attacked; and there was an unprecedented and applauded unanimity when the Security Council voted Resolution 1368. This authorised the removal of the source of the attack and opened the way to the coalition of states which acted to remove the Taliban regime from Afghanistan. Not only did China not obstruct the passing of the resolution but, because of its own problems with Muslim minorities, it also found common cause with the United States in its agony. Thus, the

sudden warming of relations between the US and China opened the way for one of the spectacular surprises of international affairs in modern times. It was a prime example of the law of unintended consequences.

What could not have been known was that this shock in the international arena coincided with the deep processes of generational transition that were occurring within the Chinese Communist Party and an even more momentous and longer-wave aspect of change in China's relations with the outside world. For the first time since 1433, when the Ming Dynasty abruptly ended the epic sea expeditions of Admiral Zheng He, during which his great treasure fleets crossed the oceans as far as the east coast of Africa and south to the Madagascar channel, China began to engage in a forward policy of aggressive purchasing on the world commodity markets (Levathes 1996). The underpinning prerequisite for this, however, was the growth of its manufacturing export sector, which depended upon the maintenance of the open American market. Described by some economists as the 'Japanese phase' of China's industrial and economic take-off (Japanese, because during the 1950s Japan had occupied a similar position in exporting vast quantities of cheap ticket item goods to the West), it was this move in combination with Chinese high personal savings and the foreign direct investment associated with the manufacturing boom that permitted the incoming political leadership of Hu Jintao to play its Africa card.

The speed and scale of Chinese entry into Africa has been breathtaking. The strategic objective of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) leadership is clear. Having come close to the brink with the democracy movement of the students who protested in Tiananmen Square and having seen the fate of Mikhail Gorbachev, who had allowed political reform (*glasnost*) to run in front of the transformation of the communist economy into a partner in the world economy, the CCP decided to drive vigorously towards industrialisation and urbanisation while keeping a lid on political democratisation. Whether this tactic can succeed in the medium to long term is a moot point: currently, the Chinese authorities are attempting to fight the power of the Internet, but there is no reason to think that they will succeed. A rising generation of young and well-educated Chinese may find that increasing prosperity without increasing personal freedom is irksome. And as senior Indian political strategists would be quick to remind us, once, for whatever reason, there comes a check in the current blazing speed of Chinese growth on all fronts, there is no certainty that the anachronism of a non-democratic

political establishment controlling the world's second most enthusiastic capitalists (after the Americans) can long be sustained. But that is not now; not yet.

Benefiting from the sudden warming in Sino-American relations, the continuation of foreign direct investment into China, in association with the export manufacturing-led boom and the mobilisation of the country's huge domestic savings – the three prerequisites for viable autonomous development – generated from 2003 an immense worldwide search for raw materials. The trajectory on the headline figure for Chinese commodity imports is eloquent. From a few billion US dollars in 1990, it rose to around \$50 billion by the end of the decade. Between 2000 and 2002, Chinese commodity imports increased in value from \$50 to \$75 billion, but since 2002 have gone from \$75 to \$175 billion. What that means in practical terms is that China has been prominent in driving the sustained appreciation of most industrial commodity prices in the last three years. In 2003, China displaced the US and Europe as the world's largest consumer of most raw materials. China consumed 22 per cent of global copper output (compared with 16 per cent for the US) and 21 per cent of global aluminium (compared with 20 per cent for the US). China produced 40 per cent of the world's cement and accounted for 30 per cent of worldwide seaborne iron ore trade. In 2005, China displaced Japan as the world's second largest consumer of petroleum. Consumption will probably exceed seven million barrels a day this year, nearly half of which will be imported, one quarter of that from Africa. In this pursuit, the Chinese are going everywhere, across the world: they have long-term investments for iron ore in Australia and nickel in Papua New Guinea and Chinese firms took over a Zambian copper mine from Anglo-American and are now building a new smelter there. The ruthlessness and racism that many Zambians perceive in this Chinese entry into their economy, not helped by a crude intervention in the November 2006 election campaign on behalf of President Mwanawasa by the Chinese ambassador, helped to fuel Michael 'King Cobra' Sata's ultimately unsuccessful challenge. But that is straw in the wind.

In his most recent report, the leading commentator on the subject documents how, since 2005, the Chinese National Oil Corporation has invested twice as much in oil projects in Kazakhstan, Syria, Ecuador and Nigeria as Chinese oil companies did worldwide between 1990 and 2005. Earlier this year, in Nigeria, President Hu Jintao announced US\$4 billion of infrastructure investment in return for China obtaining

attractive offshore oil leases in one of the world's most active oil exploration areas. (Much of this offshore oil activity, by the way, has a direct impact on the South African economy, since the Western oil majors source equipment and staff and locate some project management from this country.)

In its quest for African oil, two countries have become especially important for China in ways that may have a direct impact within the strategic horizons of the South African Army. In early 2006, Angola displaced Saudi Arabia as China's leading oil supplier. On his visit to the country in 2004, Hu Jintao signed agreements for very long-term contracts and, significantly, offered the country a US\$2 billion loan, explicitly as an alternative to borrowing from the IMF. But it is not only Chinese money that is likely to come to Angola. At that time, Reuters News Agency reported an Angolan government minister suggesting that up to *four million* Chinese could move to the country as a consequence of the many large construction contracts that had just been let. As David Hale observes (2006:15-16), it is hard to imagine such large-scale migration to a country with a population of only 16 million, but even if far smaller numbers, say a few hundred thousand, of Chinese arrived in Angola, it would be a major geopolitical event. Anxiety about the sheer numbers of Chinese experts entering the region, and about their preference for enclave working, exists well beyond Zambia, where it has just seen its first political expression.

In its description of South Africa's regional context, the 1996 *White Paper on National Defence* had correctly and sombrely noted that the worst-case scenario in politically volatile regional neighbours was civil war. China's aggressive pursuit of the raw material riches of Africa has attracted it also to the oilfields of Sudan, where, for the first time in China's scramble for Africa, several thousand armed Chinese police have been deployed to protect an oil pipeline. The mineral riches of Zimbabwe have also been open to China, as Mugabe has gratefully accepted Chinese substitution for other support lost to his regime, notably the withdrawal of Libyan political and financial assistance after Colonel Gaddafi decided to come in from outside the tent of the international community. But the point is clear. China has demonstrated its willingness to deal with any dictator, with any regime, regardless of its human rights record and, indeed, from the point of view of associated tyrants and dictators, has made a virtue of that fact. Mugabe has spoken gloatingly (if inaccurately) of the sun setting in the West and rising in the East.

The arrival of China so comprehensively and with such phenomenal single-mindedness and intensity across sub-Saharan Africa is a major new feature on South Africa's strategic landscape and poses a number of challenges, both strategic and tactical. The strategic challenge for South Africa is not the subject of this essay, but it must be mentioned briefly that, by virtue of its own strongly-increasing bilateral trade with China and its status as a mature economy that is well-integrated into the world economy, South Africa has a chance to increase significantly its political influence with the Western powers as it offers the world community a special and potentially influential road to Beijing. It is the tactical implications of China's arrival in Africa, however, that concern the South African Army.

In a most sustained and careful analysis of the causes and consequences of civil war, Paul Collier and his colleagues at the World Bank (and latterly at the Centre for the Study of African Economies at Oxford University) (Collier et al 2003) identified what they called a 'conflict trap'. This was the sobering discovery that the strongest correlation between the onset of civil war and anything else was with the previous occurrence of civil war in that same area. Equally sobering is the fact that the other key finding of the World Bank continues to hold with expanded data, namely that 'the greater the country's dependence on the export of primary commodities, the higher the risk of conflict' (Collier 2006:7). The implication of this, as Collier points out in this most recent essay, gives pause for thought. At the moment, the civil wars in Angola, Mozambique, the DRC and the Great Lakes region have largely subsided, but if the Collier data and analysis are accurate this post-conflict moment is particularly risky. The fragility of these post-conflict moments means that maintaining the peace produced in the resolution of terrible African civil wars, largely by careful diplomacy – diplomacy in which the new South Africa has played a prominent role – is exceptionally important. Collier suggests that the management of post-conflict periods is now the key issue in African security.

But in one large country, massively endowed with raw materials, civil war rages still and the South African Army has been drawn into the firing line. As well as protecting its oil investments, China has also provided diplomatic cover to the government of Sudan by frustrating the attempts of the international community to exercise the responsibility to protect the vulnerable African populations of the south against the predations of the northern and largely Arab Janjaweed militias. With

the UN blocked by China in this way, the African Union stepped forward. For present purposes, one cannot avoid the conclusion that, for the South African Army, the AU deployment to Sudan has been an important moment of truth, even deeper and harsher than its experience with the first post-apartheid deployment, that to central Africa after the Rwandan genocide there a decade ago.

LESSONS AND PRINCIPLES TO SHAPE ARMIES IN THIS NEW ERA

In recent times, other armies before this one have gone into peacekeeping operations to discover that the enemy was more ruthless or less deterred than expected and that peacekeeping quickly turned into peace enforcement, with serious and agile combat, or into defeat. Zambian soldiers in the UNAMSIL (United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone) deployment to Sierra Leone in 2000 were surrounded by fighters from the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) who forced two large groups to surrender. They were disarmed and their armoured personnel carriers (APCs) were taken by the rebels. As part of the RUF's psychological terrorising of the UN force, a dead Zambian soldier was flayed and his skin nailed to a tree to be found by others. This episode contributed to the collapse of the coherence of the UN force that forced Kofi Annan to appeal to members able to act to go to the rescue, a request that Britain answered in the nick of time with Operation Palliser, which rescued the UN force and the UN's reputation, as well as the people of Sierra Leone. However, of particular relevance to the South African Army's recent experiences and its current moment of strategic stocktaking is the experience of a different army.

The Dutch Army deployed a battalion (11th Airmobile Brigade) to Bosnia in 1993-95 in controversial circumstances. On the political front, Dutch public opinion was becoming increasingly anxious to see action taken to halt the ethnic cleansing of Bosnian Muslims by the Bosnian Serb army of General Ratko Mladic. The newspapers were full of editorials from writers across the political spectrum supporting Dutch participation in peacekeeping action and in 1992 opinion polls showed that 66 per cent of the public backed them. On 19 May 1993, a joint Labour-Christian Democrat parliamentary motion called for preparation of the airmobile brigade for action. There is another similarity to the new South Africa in that issues of public ethics and human rights and justice were prominent in the public mind, for Dutch

public opinion had also been one of those most actively mobilised in support of the peace movement during the latter years of the Cold War and the country had, along with Germany and Denmark, been the seat of some of the most vigorous debates about the merits of non-offensive defence as a component of a less nuclear or denuclearised Central Front. Indeed, for obvious and logical reasons, the peace activists now switched their moral concerns to the defence of human rights. In late 1992, Mient Jan Faber, a driving force of the Dutch Interchurch Peace Council (IKV) during the nuclear era and a leading proponent of the concept of safe havens, argued forcefully that those who chose not to defend the safe havens would be complicit in the Serb genocide.

The Dutch military, however, had serious reservations about the Bosnia deployment. Chief of General Staff van der Vlis and Commander of Land Forces Lieutenant General Hans Coucy were worried that the transition from a conscript to a volunteer force was not yet complete; that the equipping and training of the new professional airmobile brigade was not yet complete; that its helicopter force was far from complete; and that there was a danger of being sucked into a second Vietnam. In particular, the military was resistant to the idea of deployment to the UN-declared 'safe areas' of Zepa and Srebrenica, which had been mandated under Resolutions 819, 824 and 836. What the Ministry of Defence did not know was that in early September 1993 the Dutch UN Ambassador Niek Biegan had already promised Dutch troops for the safe areas and that when Defence Minister Ter Beek met the UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros Ghali on 7 September 1993 and offered the services of the 11th Airmobile Brigade, he failed to exclude the safe areas as a possible destination.

Since no other nations were willing to offer forces for the safe areas because, as the UNPROFOR commander was later to write, 'no nation that sent forces to join UNPROFOR ... had any intention of committing those forces to battle or indeed of risking them at all', in November 1993 it was to Srebrenica that the DUTCHBAT was deployed (Smith 2005). But given that strong aversion to possible involvement in offensive operations to which General Smith referred, it was deliberately configured before deployment to look as non-offensive as possible, under the principles of non-offensive defence, consistent with force protection only. So wheels were used rather than tracks, because tanks are deemed more offensive than wheeled vehicles – although in the event the battalion deployed with its standard tracked YPRs, but with deliberately

downsized armaments: the standard 25 mm cannon had been replaced with a .50 heavy machine gun, deemed 'less aggressive'; similarly lighter 81 mm mortars were substituted for the 120 mm battery. Deployment without the battalion's organic helicopters was accepted and – crucially – DUTCHBAT deployed into the pocket without a robust and secure logistic air bridge possibility (if necessary) for resupply. This latter was not higher in the planning priority because the deployment was so firmly identified as being in peacekeeping mode. Resupply was by road and was dependent upon Serbian permission. War supply would not be required. So DUTCHBAT had only 16 per cent of its ammunition inventory in July 1995 when the worst happened. In their definitive account of the deployment, Honig and Both (1996:120-125) concluded that '[t]he fundamental flaw with the Dutch decision-making process ... was that it was driven almost exclusively by moral outrage. The public, parliament and the government all wanted to do something about the war. But few considered carefully whether something that was actually *useful* could be achieved.' In the event, General Mladic was not playing that game. He was playing hardball and the nature of the Dutch deployment gave him the initiative.

In the summer of 1995, Mladic began probing and escalating attacks on the safe areas. His aim was to clear them. In July, 30 Dutch peacekeepers were taken hostage, but in effect the whole Dutch battalion and 20 000 women and children were hostages in the Srebrenica enclave. At that time the UN command did not know that 7 000 Bosnian Muslim men and boys had been murdered. The Dutch were rendered passive, unable to protect the people or even themselves. When eventually the full scale of the humiliation of the Dutch at the hands of Mladic became known in The Netherlands, it triggered a profound national self-examination and it traumatised the Dutch Army for years. At the time, it was all a major operational headache to the new UNPROFOR commander General Smith, who had taken over that January. Unaware of the massacres, he arranged for the evacuation first of the refugees and then of the Dutch soldiers. As the buses left, rows of empty shoes were seen at the roadside, an ominous portent for what was shortly to be confirmed, because on 10 August American satellite reconnaissance photographs were angrily produced by Ambassador Albright in the UN, showing *prima facie* evidence of the killings.

The problem that bedevilled the Dutch deployment to Bosnia is one that has been common to many UN peacekeeping missions. General

Philippe Morillon was the UNPROFOR commander in Sarajevo in 1992-93. He had personally travelled to Srebrenica and, speaking from the balcony of the post office, had dramatically pronounced that the people would never be abandoned. He had demanded more permissive, more open rules of engagement from his UN masters, but this had been denied him. Upon retirement in January 1996 he gave a long interview in which he sets out the problem of peacekeeping eloquently:

... there was a confusion of aims, between two ideas: we had to be impartial and I was impartial. But not neutral. They are not the same thing. My motto is '... only passivity is dishonourable' ... New York's understanding was this 'angel-ism', this illusion that we could remain passive ... the illusion that the mere presence of UN soldiers with blue helmets and the blue flag would help to prevent the explosion ... (Vulliamy 1996)

Morillon raged against '... the idea that we were only there to protect ourselves, our soldiers. This,' he said, 'was unacceptable to me ... we wanted nothing to do with the mandate but with the *spirit* of our mission ... which was to protect the population. To achieve that we had to be able to use force against anyone denying or even questioning our freedom of action' (Vulliamy 1996:10). It was this inability to distinguish between impartiality and neutrality that nearly sank the UNAMSIL mission in Sierra Leone and it was a primary aim of the commander of the British rescue force, Brigadier (now Lieutenant General) Richards, to switch the UNAMSIL mindset into support for the elected Kabbah government.

Back in Bosnia, the story has a further lesson for the South African Army. For after the nadir of Srebrenica, General Smith decided not to remain passive and, with the aim of rebuffing the Bosnian Serb army and the means he had to hand, he found a new and subtle way in which to use his force.

Following an earlier hostage-taking, in May 1995 Smith had formed a battle group based on a British Army battalion held on the Dalmatian coast for the purpose of quickly intervening to rescue future hostages, and this move gradually developed into quiet plans for a rapid reaction force (RRF). It was under UN command but not in UN colours and consisted of armoured infantry and an artillery group equipped with SP heavy artillery. The core of the force was Anglo-French, but the French were only prepared for their artillery to be used in support of French forces,

who were in Sarajevo, and Smith did not have enough helicopters to deploy and serve British guns in sufficient quantity away from the Sarajevo area. The RRF had been stealthily deployed on Mt Igman overlooking Sarajevo, so the fight he was looking to pick with Ratko Mladic needed to be in and around Sarajevo. However, it was now agreed by the political authorities that air power could also be made available from NATO's Fifth Tactical Air Force, available to Smith (the UN commander) under a 'dual key' arrangement with Admiral Smith, the NATO southern region commander: 'Smith to Smith', as the key was known.

On 28 August 1995, mortar rounds landed in the Markale market in Sarajevo, killing 25 people. Smith stalled Mladic long enough in the investigation of who was responsible for the attack to be able to poise his force and to turn the dual key to give access to air support for the RRF. He also secretly withdrew the British battalion in Gorazde without Mladic realising it, depriving Mladic of a hostage-taking opportunity. Then he told Mladic that investigations had concluded that Bosnian Serb mortars were implicated and began offensive operations to lift the siege of Sarajevo. It is the manner in which this was done, as well as the fact of having the RRF artillery capability, that carries a useful lesson for the SA Army.

General Smith met Mladic several times before he turned force onto him, moving from a phase of confrontation to one of conflict. Of these meetings he wrote, '...over the next two months I met Mladic on two more occasions, which led me to form the view that he was very much in charge of his army and command appeared to be centred on him. He was respected by his subordinates ... he had the following of his army.' These close human observations were computed within what Smith calls his 'thesis' on what exactly his enemy was, both physically and morally, and caused him to conclude that 'I needed to appear to Mladic as being unpredictable and out of his control' (Smith 2005:347,351). So when the moment for action came, Smith's use of airpower in particular, and the sequencing of his targets, seemed to have little logic unless understood in the context of these observations. For he had concluded that Mladic was a strongly controlling personality and that if he could break his confidence in being in control of his own army, he might break him psychologically as a man. Therefore the targets were chosen in order to show Mladic in his ops room, each morning, that as bridges were dropped, transmitters destroyed, sector by sector, slowly and deliberately, he was losing contact with his forces. The target behind the physical targets was 'his need to control'.

In Serbian culture, failure in the responsibility of the son to protect the bones of the ancestors is seen as a shameful dereliction of family duty. Smith therefore selected a military target in the village where Mladic's parents were buried and, night after night, the bombs rumbled up that valley, shaking their bones and the general's sanity. Smith (2005:366-67) writes, 'I brought heavier weapons to this battle of minds than hitherto within a plan, and had the ability to exploit the results'.

Psychological attack was also the tactic employed by Brigadier David Richards, the commander of the British rescue force that went to the assistance of UNAMSIL in Sierra Leone in 2000. The situation there, as mentioned above, was that there had been mass surrenders of Zambian soldiers to the advancing Revolutionary United Front, who, yet again, were moving towards Freetown. Indeed, the Zambians' APCs were used by the RUF to hasten them on their way. The UN force commander was tied down by that perception of UN peacekeeping that General Morillon described at the time of Srebrenica as 'angel-ism', and so a rescue had to be made or the risk existed that one of the UN's largest peacekeeping deployments might actually be militarily defeated in the field.

After having successfully assisted Jordanian and Indian army elements of the UN force to stand and halt the advancing rebels, Brigadier Richards then designed a psychologically-led operation that relied very heavily upon collaboration with the intelligence assets of the Sierra Leone army, to create such fear and uncertainty in the minds of targeted rebel commanders that they literally abandoned their positions and fled into the interior of Sierra Leone. Operation Palliser was accomplished within a span of one month and exemplified ways in which a force commander with a small but highly capable joint services force can help create the conditions for economic and political confidence in the wider population, while at the same time applying poison that can help to destroy the enemy forces from within by breaking their morale. So the breaking of Mladic and Operation Palliser are both examples that may be useful as the South African Army looks at how to respond in its doctrine, in its force sizing, posture, training and deployment to simultaneous challenges regionally that the government neither wishes to, nor should, avoid.

In the context of a peacekeeping operation that pushes the peacekeeping envelope, a deployed army has to find ways to adapt itself to fight in a different way, or risk defeat. Since the ratio of will and resolve to capability is three to one, the suggestion is that armies and their generals

who can make that switch to understanding the different nature of their context most quickly will be the most likely to prevail. In Vietnam, the Americans chose to escalate the application of destructive power to a point where that small country was receiving greater tonnages of bombs than Europe in the Second World War, yet America still lost. In the successful containment of the Malayan emergency, Field Marshal Templar evolved the strategy of intelligence-led operations linked to an increased use of light and special forces and helicopters. His motto was that successful staff work was overwhelmingly intelligence-led because, in this way, the counter-insurgency force could avoid becoming fixed by an enemy that otherwise always has the advantage. Mao Zedong famously described the successful guerrilla as a fish who swims in the water of the people, but General Smith has a rather more useful analogy. Irregular forces, now the norm in the sorts of operations that the South African Army might face, are more like rhizomes: plants that propagate underground through root connections between separate plants and which cannot be destroyed by lopping off the visible stems and leaves. Such pruning, if anything, puts strength back into the invisible root system.

The only way to destroy a rhizome is to change its growing environment: to dig it up, to trace the underground root connections or to spray it with a systemic poison so that it takes its destruction into itself through its own natural systems. The former tactic, history has shown, cannot be achieved by kinetic means. No amounts of bombs do the digging up. Paul Collier and his colleagues, seeking to explain the conditions that can maintain a post-conflict peace and allow it to prosper rather than to collapse back into the conflict trap, find that 'one reliable way of bringing risks down is economic growth' (Collier 2006:9). The role of the military in such a tactic is classically that which Smith describes of creating and then protecting the conditions within which this other more potent agent can do its work. The poison to destroy the rhizomes of the Janjaweed militia in southern Sudan, for example, or the various forms of unconditional terrorist that now so preoccupy the rich world is applied by psychological means. Fear is a potent paralysing agent if one can find a way to get the enemy on the run. Smith's campaign against Mladic's mind, Richard's against the RUF – all propose the pre-eminence of the psychological in modern operations.

In fact, the move to emphasise the psychological leading edge is not an innovation. It is merely a recovery of the third of Clausewitz's three modes of operation, originally defined by him in his book *On War* in

1832. Clausewitz distinguished between offensive operations against a locality, an objective or enemy forces and defensive operations against all three. Within that matrix of six, of course, the safest course of action to protect the force is to take offensive action against the enemy force and so to gain the initiative. Positional defence of the non-offensive defence sort is a much riskier option because the passive force risks becoming fixed by the agile one. But there much staff college teaching seems to end, forgetting the third mode of operation against the enemy forces, which is psychological: 'to take the enemy by surprise. This desire is more or less basic to all operations, for without it superiority at the decisive point is hardly conceivable ... surprise therefore becomes the means to gain superiority, but because of its *psychological effect* it should also be considered as an independent element. Whenever it is achieved on a grand scale, it confuses the enemy and lowers his morale' (Von Clausewitz, 198; my emphasis). Surprise is indeed a universal element and a principle of force planning in a way that the perceived offensiveness of the force can never be; for offensiveness is in the eye of the beholder and in the heart of the perpetrator, not in the inanimate weapon that lies in the hand or in the concentration or distribution of deployments.

For the purposes of the South African Army, the prime lesson of the pre-eminence of the psychological edge fits within a broader account of what armies can – and cannot – do to support peace and security. We can now find these conveniently displayed in General Smith's book (2005). It is a book based on a 40-year career, during which he served in many roles and many theatres. As well as his service as both UN and NATO Commander of Forces in Bosnia in 1995, where we have just viewed him in action, these included tours as commander of the training mission for the integration of the Zimbabwean Armed Forces shortly after independence, as commander of the UK Armoured Division in the 1990-91 Gulf War, as General Officer Commanding Northern Ireland (1996-99) and as Deputy Supreme Allied Commander of NATO. As arguably Britain's most experienced and successful fighting general since Montgomery, his word carries weight.

The most important insights that Smith offers come not from the large (and contentious) thesis that major industrial warfare has vanished to the point of improbability in the future, but rather from the lessons he draws for armies that were conceived and formed for the philosophy of industrial warfare, but now find themselves in very different

circumstances. This is as much a tension for the South African Army as for others and is reflected in the 1998 *Defence Review* in the way in which the various options that are suggested are in fact incremental versions of each other, but predicated upon the same basic force mix – the classical industrial army force mix of light and heavy armour, mounted infantry, artillery and (in the South African case) modest provision for close air support. However, before we move in the closing section of this essay to consider constraints on the choices for the South African Army that are thrown up by the changed world and its recent experiences in it, let us first review the six major trends that describe modern warfare, warfare that, in General Smith's words, 'is no longer a massive single event of military decision that delivers a conclusive political result'. More than ever, the military component in the conduct of politics by other means is seen to be contingent, and this analysis certainly holds for any of the theatres within which the South African Army perceives itself likely to be deployed. Smith's trends are as follows:

- '*The ends for which we fight are changing* from the hard absolutes of interstate industrial war to more malleable objectives to do with the individual and societies that are not states.' This observation follows from the first and framing statement about the strategic environment of South Africa that appears in Paragraph 5.1 of Chapter 4 of the seminal 1996 *White Paper on National Defence*, which states that 'the vast majority of armed conflicts are taking place within rather than between states'. So there is common ground here in a forward-looking recognition of the way in which a rising international concern for human rights has expressed itself in the philosophy of the responsibility to protect human rights. The doctrine of the responsibility to protect, first articulated by the 2001 International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty, was adopted and extended in the report of the High-Level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change commissioned by Kofi Annan – the single most important report that the United Nations has produced in its 60-year history. Although much of the work of the report was derailed after the anniversary summit in September 2005, along with the Peacebuilding Commission, the concept of the responsibility to protect was retained and the two together bond firmly with the initial orientation of the South African *White Paper on National Defence*, as well as its contingent observation that these developments 'together with global media and communication systems,

present a profound challenge to the notion of the sanctity of state sovereignty and national borders' (Paragraph 5.3).

This in turn leads directly to Smith's second major trend:

- '*We fight among the people*, a fact amplified literally and figuratively by the central role of the media: we fight in every living room in the world as well as on streets and fields of the conflict zone.' It is this fact that has undermined the morale of armies that do not understand it, as the Americans experienced during the latter stages of the war in Vietnam. But it also contains an essential truth, which is recognition that in the spectrum of a force that is deployed by a military formation, the kinetic forms only part, and in important ways a diminishing part, of that spectrum. In Smith's formulation of the interplay between confrontation and conflict, it is usually the psychological weapon that is the leading edge deployed by a force that is successful in the sort of circumstances that the South African Army is likely to face now and in the future. This is what he demonstrated in the way he broke Mladic in Bosnia; this is what the RUF did to terrorise the Zambian soldiers in Sierra Leone; this is what David Richards did to frighten the wits out of the RUF.
- '*Our conflicts tend to be timeless* since we are seeking a condition which then must be maintained until an agreement or a definitive outcome, which may take years or decades.' This truth is in profound tension, particularly for the democracies, with their desire to expose their forces to harm as little and for as short a time as possible. Yet, as the records of the more successful of the UN's peacekeeping operations show, a long-term presence may be not only unavoidable but also desirable, as part of achieving the original aim. Central to the profound misunderstanding of the operation upon which they were embarking with the removal of Saddam Hussein was Mr Rumsfeld's and the Pentagon's view that the United States could liberate and then depart; the US did not 'do' nation-building. Arguably, the initial military deployment is the easy bit; and, as the tragic history of this gravest of geopolitical errors since 9/11 now reveals, the failure to plan properly for the follow-through means that it is all the harder to achieve the end state of a situation in which the Iraqi people can again laugh and sleep without fear of the poison fruit that grows and threatens their futures. 'Full-spectrum planning' for peace enforcement and

nation-building with a plan right through to normalisation is critical in all such situations. Rwanda and the DRC are both regional cases in point that give cause for concern that the follow-through has not been sufficiently well thought through.

The fourth of Smith's trends is the one that expresses a potential Achilles heel in the armour of all democratic forces that care about the life of their soldiers:

- '*We fight so as not to lose the force*, rather than fighting by using the force at any cost to achieve the aim.' Clearly, every commander seeks to achieve his objective with the minimum loss of life, both to his own force and to the people among whom the war has now inevitably to be conducted. In fact, the arrival of precision and of data fusion means that if the human intelligence and the political leadership is clear-sighted, then the technical possibility exists of achieving political objectives at far lower human cost than in the era of industrial warfare. It is also an admirable trait of humane societies that the life of every soldier is held to be important. However, if (and Smith illustrates this in detail from his Bosnian command) nations deploy for theatrical rather than military reasons and in the expectation that their soldiers will not see combat, then the likelihood of defeat in the face of an enemy that does not share those constraints is obviously increased. The old Roman proverb remains as true as ever: *Si vis pacem, para bellum*: 'Those who wish for peace should prepare for war.' But, as the South African debate has shown more clearly than any other worldwide in the last ten years, there is great tension about the balance to be struck and, as I shall shortly explain, I think that there are irreconcilable objectives which require choices to be made now, especially in the light of the Darfur experience.

General Smith's fifth trend states:

- '*On each occasion new uses are found for old weapons*: those constructed specifically for use in a battlefield against soldiers and heavy armaments, now being adapted for our current conflicts, since the tools of industrial warfare are often irrelevant to war amongst people.' In fact, this has always been true, since the natural and proper conservatism that directs military force planning means that the

soldier never has physical means to hand that are precisely adapted to the task that he or she is asked to perform. This is where a thoughtful and talented commander makes all the difference. Equipment that was designed for other purposes, or that is inadequate in some aspect of range or armour or firepower, can be compensated for by excellent command leadership. The reverse is not true.

Finally, Smith observes:

- *'The sides are mostly non-state* since we tend to conduct our conflicts and confrontations in some form of multinational grouping, whether it is an alliance or a coalition, and against some party or parties that are not states.' *That characteristic was highlighted early on in the 1996 White Paper.*

To these must be added two other eternal truths: that you should never deploy a force that you cannot recover after victory, or in defeat; and, secondly, too often forgotten in the preoccupation with 'teeth' over 'tail' in the public discussion of defence matters, you should never deploy a force that you cannot successfully supply. In his classic study, Martin van Creveld (1977) shows brilliantly how logistics have been the forgotten dimension that explains the difference between victory and defeat in both pre-industrial and industrial warfare. The Dutch discounted the primacy of logistics in the Srebrenica deployment and were, in consequence, paralysed.

So, to recapitulate, I have suggested that we are now well-launched into a new era of geopolitics where many of the multilateral instruments of the 20th century are decreasingly available to us; where the importance of the new quartet of great powers in the Pacific is rising; where the principal geostrategic significance of 9/11 has been the explosive arrival of China as a dominant player on the world commodities market in general and on the African continent in particular. The Chinese arrival has served to erode the likely benefit of confidence and security-building measures (CSBMs) as a means of conveying peaceful intent in South Africa's immediate environment, because China's strategy of dealing with despots and dictatorships, regardless, has thrown down the gauntlet to all societies, South Africa prominently included, that value and promote the defence of fundamental human rights. Finally, the Chinese scramble for Africa directly created the circumstances in Sudan within which the

South African Army has found itself deployed and tested. Chapter 5 of the 1998 *Defence Review* set obvious and prudent requirements: that South African participation in international peace support operations would only be engaged upon with caution and that, in any case, such operations would have clear mandate mission objectives and realistic criteria for terminating the operation. Reality is rarely as tidy as this and the AU deployment to Sudan is the current reminder of that fact.

Within this unexpectedly different world, I have then proposed the value of General Sir Rupert Smith's recent analysis of the trends that compose 'war among the people', in which he has signalled those areas of critical tension that arise when forces conceived and designed for one world and purpose find themselves used and deployed in another. I have used three historical episodes to illustrate first that the force planning principles in the South African *Defence Review* carry significant risks – the Dutch experience at Srebrenica in 1995 shows us this – and secondly that using a non-conventional configuration of ways, ends and means can give a psychological edge, which can deliver a decisive victory without requiring changes in physical deployment – scale or equipment – that might be interpreted as signalling aggressive intent. The breaking of Mladic by the RRF and the rescue of the UN and of Sierra Leone in 2000 are examples in this regard.

QUESTIONS AND CHALLENGES TO THE SOUTH AFRICAN ARMY

The essential question raised by the foregoing analysis is the degree to which the 'core force' approach in South Africa Army force planning is robust and viable. The critical paragraph is Paragraph 8 of Chapter 3 of the *Defence Review*. It calls for the preservation of regeneration capabilities, the maintenance of a credible conventional deterrence, the establishment of a peace-time force with a non-threatening posture to contribute to confidence-building measures, and a willingness to participate in regional defence arrangements, to engage in peace support operations, to co-operate in support of the civil arm with the South African Police Service and in exceptional circumstances to restore law and order. This is not hypothetical. After the violence in Khutsong the SANDF was called in, and some business federations are calling for the deployment of troops at Christmas-time to combat the rise in cash-in-transit robberies. These sorts of duties can be credibly performed from a bolstered core force. The maintenance of a core

force, to be bolstered at need from the part-time force and volunteer forces, is a proven formula for classic national defence: it is what the Israeli Defence Force does. But the question that this essay seeks to raise is where the outer edge of the envelope lies. The requirements of 'war among the people', especially through the medium of opposed deployments in hostile environments in a context of multinational co-operation and command, are difficult to achieve by this strategy. Specifically, the ruling requirement is that as a secondary function of the army's Rapid Deployment Ground Force 'two motorised infantry battalion groups will be prepared for peacekeeping operations on a relay basis' and 'the capabilities of the mechanised and parachute forces will be used in peace enforcement operations if required' (*Defence Review* 1998: Chapter 5, Paragraph 35).

For me, two questions arise. The first is whether, in the light of changed circumstances and recent experience, this is the right way to ask the question to which the answer is a South African provision. The example of the successful Sierra Leone operation in 2000 suggests that specialised deployable joint force headquarters structures, with a strong emphasis on tactical intelligence and its employment in psychological operations in co-ordination with highly-trained light forces (marines and paratroopers), are important, as well as the availability of close air support, certainly from helicopters and ideally from fixed-wing aircraft, as well as an adequate provision of transport helicopters for battlefield mobility and resupply. The lesson of what went wrong in Bosnia is also a lesson that tells us that non-offensive defence is not a principle of warfare; it is only an approach that may have value in specific places and at specific times. I was intimately involved in the promotion of principles of non-offensive defence on the central front during the most dangerous period of the so-called 'Second Cold War' in Europe in the mid-1980s, and while I remain convinced that we could have done more to cool the dangers in that situation than we did – and now that history is open to us we know how very lucky we were to have avoided a nuclear exchange, by accident more than by design, by virtue of the prevailing highly poised deployments of the Warsaw Pact and USSR versus NATO – I never believed then and do not believe now that the principle has automatic exportability. The Dutch experience in 1993-95 was an illustration in detail of that. So to be quite blunt, I would rather see the manifestly non-aggressive intentions of the South African state expressed by other means than in the force design of its military.

I want the South African Army to be able to act as a force for good and I share Professor Collier's anxiety that the present period of post-conflict tranquillity, following the ending of several terrible civil wars, may not be a permanent ending unless steps can be taken rapidly to capitalise upon these fragile episodes of peace. All that, however, is predicated upon not simply ending Mugabe's disastrous dictatorship north of the Limpopo, but ending it in ways that show that the states and peoples of east, central and southern Africa are willing to make this heinous outlaw answer for his crimes against his people before a properly constituted court, in the way that the peoples of Sierra Leone and Liberia have brought the authors of their misfortunes to book, most recently Charles Taylor, now in The Hague awaiting trial. Upon this test, the eyes of all the international community are fixed. If Mugabe is allowed to slip away to meet his Maker before encountering human judges, the credibility of the organs of regional peace and security, which are now under construction in this region, will continue to be gravely compromised.

This is urgent because I have suggested quite strongly that I do not see the Chinese engagement as likely to play a positive role in keeping peoples from falling back into the conflict trap, although I do see the Chinese scramble for Africa as a great opportunity for a new dimension of active South African diplomacy. The Zambian election also starts to suggest that the Chinese may over-reach themselves in their urgent appetite for Africa's natural wealth, as other imperialist powers have done before them.

The second question about the current prescription for South African Army force design for overseas operation is whether it is actually achievable in practice, even if it were a complete prescription, which I doubt.

Since they are much in public debate in South Africa, reference only is needed to the three difficult local impediments that constrain the South African Army's ability to perform the missions as currently prescribed and that we have been scoping for the future.

The first is that by international standards the SANDF and the army in particular now has a rapidly ageing force structure, particularly in relation to experienced privates and sergeants. While not a problem for some missions, such as support of the civil arm, it is a problem for any force that contemplates expeditionary missions. Secondly, and related, there is a difficulty with the loss of key skills through early retrenchment

of former SADF personnel to make space for new cadres of young, black officers and NCOs. That the force should mirror the nation of which it is representative is both proper and fine, but the achievement of the challenge of transformation, at a time when the force is being put under operational test, is exceptionally delicate and hard. It is not for a foreigner to give South Africans lessons on how best to strike this balance, only to observe the dangers that can come from imbalance. This issue has been made all the worse by one of the bitterest fruits South Africans are now being forced to eat, which, unknown to us all, was planted into the wide field of events many years ago. I refer, of course, to the terrible national experience of HIV/AIDS.

In our recent report for UNAIDS (2006), Professor Barnett and I explained how the relationship between a military force and HIV/AIDS is rather like the relationship between a condenser and an electrical current. There has been much uninformed opinion expressed – we call them ‘factoids’ – to the effect that since soldiers are by definition randy, soldiers are always more highly infected with HIV/AIDS than the general population and, therefore, are a danger to it. This is neither true nor false: it is simply the wrong way to frame the issue. What we do know from imperfect data is that circumstance determines whether a military force is a risk to the population among which it is deployed or within which it lives, or whether it is at risk from its deployment from the people with whom it lives: that gradient determines whether the virus is transmitted outwards from the military force or is received inwards into it; and this is entirely dependent on time, place and circumstance. Thus we know, for example, that in the West African United Nations deployments the low-prevalence Indian UN soldiers experienced infection and took it back to India with them. The Indian military medical services, acting in part upon advice from the South African military medical services (advice that I was honoured to be able to help transmit), now has in place excellent arrangements for surveillance, counselling and treatment.

It is now clear that, at an earlier stage in the South African epidemic, the SANDF may have unknowingly played a role as one of the introducers of the virus, which seems likely to have returned from the Angolan wars with infected members of the apartheid-era forces and also to have travelled south with some of the returning former guerrillas. These are simply now matters of history and it does appear that the prevalence rates within the SANDF are now not much different from those pertaining in wider civil society, of which it forms part. Since the national experience is

so ghastly and since the highest at-risk groups include many of those who are at their most vigorous, this has compounded the problems of both training and retaining new cadres, especially of young, black officers, in much the same way that other sectors of the economy have found it necessary to 'triple bank' training to ensure an adequate supply of new staff. As mentioned, I have had the privilege of learning closely about the way in which the SANDF has sought to put in place the necessary medical surveillance, counselling and treatment services for personnel through the Masibambisane (Beyond Awareness) Campaign and the Phidisa trial. I have been impressed by the professionalism and candour with which that task has been engaged. But it does not make the problem any easier in the short term (Barnett & Prins 2006; Loubser 2004).

In this essay, I have argued that the South African Army is again at a crossroads, faced with choices in just the way that it was so momentously positioned ten years ago: so momentously and so miraculously, for one must never forget the example South Africa set to the world, despite all the problems I have been describing, when it made the transition into the new democracy without itself falling into civil war. It is a tribute to all the peoples of South Africa that to many in the outside world the closeness of that possibility – and it was very close at certain points in the period just before 1994 – is now largely forgotten.

But, as I wrote at the beginning, employing the observation of the poet Keats, it is the duty of soldiers always to watch vigilantly for the first signs of seeds inadvertently planted that may, if not quickly weeded out, bear poison fruit that must then be plucked. I hope this essay is in some small way a contribution to that task. It is a large task and a long task. But, as we say in one of my favourite Siluyana proverbs, *liywa limweya ka liolo ndopu*: an elephant does not go rotten in a single day!

ENDNOTES

1. A balanced account of how Laurie Nathan and Jo Modise struck the balance between competing priorities immediately after the 1994 elections, and which also discusses interestingly the influence of the 'non-offensive defence' (NOD) school of thought in Europe upon thinking in South Africa at that time, is given in Jordaan, E and Esterhuysen, A 2004. South African defence since 1994: The influence of non-offensive defence. *African Security Review* 13(1): especially pp. 62–64.

2. A full account of the Sierra Leone operations can be found in Prins, G 2002. *The Heart of War: On Power, Conflict and Obligation in the 21st Century*. London: Routledge.
3. For a direct discussion of the differences between the west and south/central African contexts, see Prins, G December 2006 An interpretation of the significance of the second battle of Waterloo. *Economic Affairs* (special issue guest edited by P Collier).

LIST OF REFERENCES

- Allen, M 2006. *Arabs*. London: Continuum.
- Barnett, T and Prins, G 2006. AIDS and security: Fact, fiction and evidence – A report to UNAIDS. *International Affairs* 82(2):359-368.
- Chaliand, G and Rageau, J-P 1985. *Strategic atlas: A comparative geopolitics of the world's powers*. New York: Harper & Row.
- Collier, P, Elliott, V L, Hegre, H, Hoeffler, A, Reynal-Querol, M and Sambanis, N 2003. *Breaking the conflict trap: Civil war and development policy*. New York: The World Bank.
- Collier, P 2006. African security: What the statistics suggest. *African security: Commodities and development*. Whitehall Report 4-06. London: The Royal United Services Institute.
- Funke, N and Solomon, H 2006. *Exploring Islamic fundamentalist ideologies in Africa*. Pretoria: Africa Institute.
- Hale, D 2006. The rise of China and India: Implications for African growth and security. *African security: Commodities and development*. Whitehall Report 4-06. London: The Royal United Services Institute.
- Honig J W and Both, N 1996. *Srebrenica: Record of a war crime*. New York: Penguin.
- Huntington, S 1993. The clash of civilisations. *Foreign Affairs* 72(3):44-57.
- Emergence of *Mycobacterium tuberculosis* with extensive resistance to second-line drugs (worldwide, 2000-2004) 2006. *Journal of the American Medical Association* 295(20):2349-2350.
- Levathes, L 1996. *When China ruled the seas: The treasure fleet of the Dragon Throne, 1405-1433*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Levy, B-H 2006. *American vertigo: Travelling America in the footsteps of Tocqueville*. Translated by C Mandell. New York: Random House.
- Lewis, B 2002. *What went wrong? Western impact and Middle Eastern response*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Loubser, A 2004. HIV/AIDS and the military environment – A perspective. Pugwash Meeting No. 297: A second exploratory workshop, Limpopo, South Africa, 25–28 June 2004 [online]. Available from <http://www.pugwash.org/reports/ees/south-africa-2004/sa-loubser.htm> [accessed November 2006].
- Mackinder, H J 1904. The geographical pivot of history. *The Geographical Journal*, 23:421–437.
- Mills, G & Stead, S 2006. *Before we put our soldiers in harm's way*. *Business Day*, 5 December 2006.

- Prins, G 1996. The applicability of the “NATO model” to United Nations peace support operations under the Security Council. *UNA-USA International Dialogue on the Enforcement of Security Council Resolutions*, 2.
- Prins, G 1997. Preparing for combined and joint operations to maintain international security. *UNA-USA, International Dialogue on the Enforcement of Security Council Resolutions*, 4.
- Prins, G 2005. Lord Castlereagh’s return: The significance of Kofi Annan’s High-Level Panel on threats, challenges and change. *International Affairs*, 81(2):373-391.
- Smith, R 2005. *The utility of force: The art of war in the modern world*. London: Allan Lane.
- South African Defence Review* 1998. 1 Military Printing Regiment, Pretoria, South Africa, 1998.
- United Nations High-Level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change 2004. *A more secure world: Our shared responsibility*. New York: United Nations.
- Van Creveld, M 1977. *Supplying war: Logistics from Wallenstein to Patton*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Von Clausewitz, K. *On War*. ed M Howard and P Paret, Princeton, UP.
- Vulliamy, E 1996. Only passivity is dishonourable (Interview with General Morillon). *The Guardian*, 12 January 1996, p.10.
- White Paper on National Defence for the Republic of South Africa. Defence in a Democracy*. 1 Military Printing Regiment, Pretoria, South Africa, 1996.