

Military spending, socio-economic challenges and foreign policy demands: Appraising South Africa's predicament¹

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The extensive reduction of defence expenditure for post-apartheid South Africa has created challenges for force development and preparation as well as the ability of the armed forces to deliver on expectations. For example, budgetary allocations were more than halved between 1989 and 1997, a development that was soon followed by a stagnant 1.6 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP) defence allocation. This decline in financial resources also manifested itself in the human resources element, reducing the 93,000 posts declared in 1999 to the projected 70,000 (including civilians). Against this background, South Africa's socio-economic commitments as well as deployments in support of foreign policy have continued to escalate forcing the current expenditure revision to rise to 2 per cent of GDP. However, against the considerations of an increasing influence and interest in Africa and international affairs, even with a domestic unemployment rate of 42 per cent and widening income disparities, this investment is considered worthwhile. The essay argues the existence of a minimalist approach, adopted by the South African government in which there is a careful mix of foreign policy, economic rationality and limited military involvement to produce a military credible capacity that is consistent with the country's ability to finance but whose main (primary) task is to operate in support of its wider interests on the African continent. In the final analysis, the paper argues that if South Africans should compare what they are paying for the military, they would actually discover that they are paying far less than most other nations.

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Introduction

A continuous decline in military spending has been a major feature of South Africa's budgeting over the past decade. In fact, where the defence budget was at 4.6 per cent of the gross domestic product (GDP) in 1989/1990,² defence spending was reduced to less than 3 per cent of GDP by the mid-1990s, that is, less than 10 per cent of total government spending.³ In real terms the defence budget was cut by 50 per cent between 1989 and 1997.⁴ In recent years the country's defence expenditure has been pinned down at approximately 1.6 per cent of the GDP; that is, between 6 per cent and 7 per cent of government expenditure.⁵

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 have become redundant. The downswinging defence budget also translated to a cut in the personnel budget of the South African National Defence Force (SANDF). In March 1999 the Minister of Defence approved plans to reduce military personnel from 93,000 to 70,000 permanent posts (including civilians).⁶

The declining budget is widely believed to have 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.⁷ Yet, some analysts and commentators continue to consider South Africa 'relatively highly militarised' with a relative 'large military strength'.⁸ In particular, the announcement in November 1998 that Cabinet had approved a two-phase weapons purchase programme requiring an initial payout over eight years of R21.3 billion, with the option of spending an additional R8.5 billion by 2004, sparked a debate on the necessity to spend taxpayers' money on defence requirements. The following statement was typical of the reaction on the part of anti-militarist groupings:

There is growing anger that the ANC government has failed to deliver any improvement to the lives of most of its constituents. The wealth gap between rich and poor is even wider than it was during the apartheid era. Unemployment is 42%, and the number of people living in shacks continues to increase ... To the electorate, however, the arms deal has become symbolic of an appalling waste of energy and resources that could go to social improvement. The credibility of our constitutional democracy is at risk.⁹

But while some individuals and roleplayers were critical towards the acquisition of new military equipment, other commentators or observers manifested their support of the defence acquisition package:

Generals are at least talented at inducing apocalypse as they are presenting themselves as the only defence against it. So it is not always sensible to

believe their dire predictions. Yet, in the case of the SANDF, our generals appear to have a good case. Almost everyone with a claim to some military expertise – from military commanders to security analysts and opposition defence spokespeople – agrees that the SANDF is woefully inadequately equipped and underfunded.¹⁰

More specifically, defence analysts argued that key weaknesses in the SANDF are readily visible:¹¹

- The SA Army simply does not have enough troops to take on more missions, and does not dispose of an adequate airborne force for effective rapid deployment, let alone what is sometimes referred to as ‘forcible entry’.
- The SA Air Force (SAAF) does not have sufficient airlift capacity for the rapid deployment of a credible force, to sustain it and, should it become necessary, to briskly extract it. Pending the delivery of new Grippen fighter jets, it also lacks fighter aircraft suited to a distant deployment to support ground forces in a peace enforcement mission or to interdict the aerial smuggling of weapons.
- The SA Navy (SAN) does not have enough sealift capacity to deploy the equipment and vehicles of a credible force and, pending the delivery of the new patrol corvettes, does not possess a sufficient number of combat vessels to interdict seaborne weapons deliveries and to support operations in coastal areas.

Ultimately, the question needs to be addressed whether excessive or unnecessary military spending prevails in South Africa – spending that detracts from the nation’s financial health and its prospects for economic and social advancement. To this end, the aim of this essay is twofold: to assess to what extent South Africa’s military spending corresponds with its contemporary socio-economic challenges and political climate, and to view the country’s military spending in comparative international context.

Background on South Africa’s military potency

Since the early 1990s – when the demise of the apartheid political system began – South Africa, in common with most of the international community, has been witnessing a reduction in defence expenditure. 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 a low of 13.7 per cent in 1987, but rose to 15.7 per cent of state spending in 1989. By the mid-1990s, defence spending had been reduced to less than 10 per cent of total state spending. It soon became evident that the SAN and SAAF desperately needed rejuvenation by way of new equipment.¹²

The navy, whose task it is to patrol our long coastline, is barely functional. But the non-availability of spare parts internationally for South Africa's three ageing submarines makes keeping them serviceable so expensive that, at any one time, only one submarine is seaworthy. Moreover, two of six strike craft and at least five mine hunters and minesweepers have either been decommissioned, placed in reserve or cannibalised for spares in recent years.

The air force's difficulties are similar. Because of the age of the equipment and shortages of spares, the air force is battling to maintain an effective deterrent and a minimal fighting component in the air. A significant

Table 1: Military potency – top positions

Rank	Country	1996	1997	Rank	Country	1996	1997
1	United States	10.11	10.08	26	Argentina	6.55	6.63
2	People's Republic of China	8.63	8.65	27	Iraq	6.63	6.55
3	Russia	8.68	8.43	28	The Netherlands	6.73	6.52
4	France	8.29	8.25	29	Kuwait	6.28	6.51
5	United Kingdom	8.24	8.24	30	Oman	6.47	6.49
6	South Korea	7.99	8.00	31	Greece	6.48	6.45
7	North Korea	7.93	7.99	32	Burma	6.44	6.43
8	India	7.83	7.90	33	Malaysia	6.39	6.38
9	Saudi Arabia	7.64	7.73	34	Canada	6.43	6.34
10	Japan	7.61	7.58	35	Norway	6.33	6.27
11	Israel	7.43	7.42	36	Mexico	6.27	6.26
12	Italy	7.47	7.41	37	Poland	6.37	6.26
13	Taiwan	7.50	7.39	38	Vietnam	6.69	6.24
14	Germany	7.42	7.33	39	United Arab Emirates	6.20	6.19
15	Brazil	6.83	7.32	40	Sweden	6.45	6.17
16	Pakistan	7.28	7.20	41	Ukraine	6.18	6.11
17	Iran	6.79	6.96	42	Chile	6.11	6.10
18	Turkey	6.77	6.78	43	Portugal	6.00	6.04
19	Egypt	6.78	6.75	44	Yugoslavia	6.37	6.03
20	Spain	6.87	6.75	45	South Africa	6.36	6.03
21	Austria	6.69	6.71	46	Belgium	6.12	5.93
22	Indonesia	6.64	6.71	47	Switzerland	6.00	5.93
23	Singapore	6.45	6.67	48	Romania	5.87	5.88
24	Syria	6.81	6.66	49	Finland	6.02	5.87
25	Thailand	6.75	6.66	50	Morocco	5.72	5.83

proportion of attack craft – about 12 Impala fighters/trainers, 22 Mirage fighters, and 14 Cheetahs [South African-built variants of the Mirage] are out of commission or have been scrapped.¹³

From earlier studies published in the London-based *New International Security Review 1998*¹⁴ it became clear that South Africa's military power was on the wane. This index is compiled by measuring data such as force numbers, defence spending in dollars, defence spending per capita, and the defence budget as a portion of GDP. These figures are married to subjective concepts such as the government's commitment to defence and popular support for it. Although the index is said to be a fairly subjective evaluation, it nonetheless has some validity and confirmed what many analysts have maintained since the mid-1990s: South Africa's defence status was directly related to its defence budget, which had seen many years of consecutive cuts. The first 50 positions in Table 1 should be noted.

Out of the more than 180 countries surveyed in the index, South Africa – with a rating of 6.03 compared to 6.63 in 1996 – ranked 45, just above Belgium. When compared with other countries, South Africa's decline in military potency was second worst on the African continent, with war-ravaged Sudan in the first place. Globally the country's decline was fourth worst, after Croatia, Belarus and the former Yugoslavia.

It is evident from the *New International Security Review 1998* that there was no country in Southern Africa which came close to South Africa's potency in 1996. With a measure of just more than 6.00 points, the countries closest to South Africa's potency were Angola and Zimbabwe with 4.88 points each. Botswana, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique and Zambia all scored below 4.00.¹⁵ In sub-Saharan Africa, the only country that came close to South Africa was Nigeria with a score of 5.46.¹⁶

However, the consequences of the drop in South Africa's potency in the 1990s seem significant when the drop is compared with other Southern African states in the period 1998–2000, as indicated in Table 2 (taken from the Rusi Index of Martial Potency as a follow-on publication of the *New International Security Review 1998*).¹⁷

Although it is important to note that South Africa has a smaller force in terms of military personnel, it has a vastly superior force in terms of numbers of heavy weapons.¹⁸ However, it is significant that South Africa's rating dropped to a score of below 6.00 in 1998, while Angola moved to a score of over 5.00. This should be seen against the background of the fact that within Southern Africa, South Africa's drop in potency between 1996 and 2000 had by far been the worst, with Mozambique, Malawi and Lesotho reporting marginal declines in potency. Further afield, it is interesting to note that Nigeria and Sudan have moved up to scores of 6.00 and 4.88 respectively in 2000, while Egypt and Morocco have reported figures of 6.72 and 5.79 respectively.¹⁹ This means that three African

Table 2: Military potency in Southern Africa

Country	1998	1999	2000
South Africa	5.82	5.76	5.77
Angola	5.54	5.28	5.17
Zimbabwe	4.69	4.83	4.66
Botswana	4.01	4.04	3.98
Zambia	3.60	3.77	3.69
Namibia	3.43	3.58	3.58
Madagascar	3.06	3.08	3.09
Mozambique	2.41	2.82	2.83
Malawi	2.45	2.49	2.53
Lesotho	2.38	2.26	2.20

states, namely Egypt, Nigeria and Morocco, ranked above South Africa's score of 5.82 on a global scale, with Sudan only marginally behind.

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

- Nine dual-seater Grippen and 12 Hawk aircraft from British Aerospace/SAAB to replace the SAAF's Cheetah and Impala aircraft. A further option was taken on the balance of the 12 Hawk Aircraft and 19 single-seater Grippens.
- Thirty light utility helicopters from the Italian helicopter manufacturer Agusta, which would replace the Alouette helicopters that 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 that have been in service since 1971.²⁰

The cost of the equipment package was estimated at R21.3 billion over a period of eight years. If the option to procure additional equipment were exercised, the total estimated cost would rise by R8.5 billion to R29.9 billion over 12 years. Cabinet's decision 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. Importantly, the deal was combined with certain offset arrangements spanning a variety of industrial sectors and underpinning the government's industrial strategy.²¹

However, immediately after the announcement of the government's plans to equip the SANDF with new military hardware, anti-militarist lobby groups and individuals strongly objected to South Africa's 'militarisation'.²² As one commentator stated:

What seems to be driving South Africa's military decisions, given the lack of any international security risk? The first explanation is a strong military pressure group, including an extensive arms industry, much of which is state-owned. It is entirely to be expected that this group will work to maintain or increase military ... The second belief which strengthens the effectiveness of the military lobby is that a strong military brings status to a country ... This status, it might be noted, is in developed country terms rather than African terms.²³

Currently, many questions are still suspended in mid-air as regards the merits of defence spending at a time of desperately needed social spending in South Africa – questions which are difficult to clarify in the dust of discourses. Unfortunately, the merits of defence spending – specifically the procurement of new military hardware – have been further clouded as a result of allegations that there were tendering irregularities and malpractices in the concluding of contracts.²⁴ Be that as it may, the question is: how does defence spending relate to the country's socio-economic and political challenges?

South Africa's socio-economic climate and challenges

The beliefs and efforts of anti-militaristic pressure groups should be viewed in the broader context of international initiatives to exert pressure on developing states to cut back on military spending and inventories. It also forms part of post-Cold War initiatives in the international community to encourage progress in the demilitarisation of global politics. For many people, at the end of the Cold War there was hope for peace, stability and a stronger focus on human development rather than on military power. The concept of defence conversion also became a prominent issue on the international agenda with the notion that redundant military resources could now be converted for civilian use.²⁵

Admittedly, if ever a government feels the need to waste a large amount of money, it could resort to military spending to do so. For there are few items as expensive as modern military hardware. Recruiting, training and equipping modern armed forces constitute very expensive burdens for nations all over the world. Therefore, anti-militarist bodies in South Africa are able to claim that they would like to see resources used for productive purposes. In this regard, Economists Allied for Arms Reduction

South Africa, a non-governmental organisation who has been most vocally criticising the South African government's arms package, argues that

... the wealth gulf between rich and poor is even wider than it was during the apartheid era. Unemployment is 42 per cent and the number of people living in shacks continues to increase. High crime rates affect all communities, and HIV/AIDS will have some six million South African deaths expected by 2010 ... To the electorate, however, the arms deal has become symbolic of an appalling waste of energy and resources that could go into social improvement.²⁶

Based on life expectancy, educational attainment and adjusted real income, South Africa is ranked 120, between Egypt (119) and Equatorial Guinea (121), in the 2005 Human Development Index Report. With a life expectancy of 48.4 years, an adult literacy rate of 82.4 per cent and a combined enrolment rate of 78 per cent for secondary and primary schools, South Africa clearly faces daunting socio-economic challenges.²⁷ Much progress has been made since 1994 in that almost 8.4 million people have gained access to clean water, 3.8 million to electricity, 1.5 million to housing and 6.4 million to sanitation.²⁸

Still, anti-militarists and other commentators are quick to resort to socio-economic challenges in their stance against procurement of new military hardware. Gumede, for instance, argues that "South Africa should hardly be spending billions on sophisticated military hardware instead of on poverty alleviation and social upliftment".²⁹ Moreover, it is argued that failure to use the tax system to redistribute wealth has to rank as one of the great disappointments of democracy. "The feeling in some ANC alliance quarters is that South Africa's black and mostly impoverished majority has borne the brunt of freedom's price."³⁰ However, as much as South Africa's socio-economic challenges are immense and should clearly be considered in any discourse on defence spending, the country's level of defence spending should also be appraised against the background of political demands placed on the SANDF. Specifically, it should also be realised that a high premium is being placed on South Africa's political-military leadership and role in the region.

South Africa's (international and regional) political challenges

The SANDF – like all militaries – is a foreign policy instrument. In this regard, Du Plessis rightly points out that the past years have seen the re-emergence of the military instrument in South Africa's foreign policy. Specifically, whereas the post-1994 policy was characterised by a notable near-absence of the military instrument in South Africa's foreign policy, the use of military means has become more salient, most notably in the

field of peace support.³¹ This trend produces a foreign policy dilemma concerning the conciliation of international and foreign policy demands placed on the SANDF on the one hand, and the capacity for meeting these demands on the other, as discussed in the section below.

Demands placed on South Africa's political leadership

In today's community of nations, South Africa could be regarded as a 'middle power'. Currently, South Africa ranks 46 on the World Competitiveness Scoreboard 2005. Between Jordan and Portugal on the one hand, and Columbia and Turkey on the other, South Africa is the only African state among the 60 listed countries in terms of international economic competitiveness.³² The country seems to align and present itself as part of that consortium of countries that includes developed states such as Norway, Canada, Sweden and the Netherlands, and developing countries such as India, Cuba and Brazil.³³

In economic terms, South Africa's economy *vis-à-vis* that of the rest of the African continent is such that South Africa's gross national income (GNI) as a share of sub-Saharan Africa's GNI is 40 per cent, while the country's population as a share of sub-Saharan Africa's GNI is only 6 per cent.³⁴ Furthermore, with only 13 per cent of Southern Africa's area and about 21.5 per cent of the Southern African population, South Africa has nearly one-half of the region's paved roads and railroads, the seven largest and most effective ports among the region's nineteen, and a near monopoly of both telephones and host computers in Southern Africa.³⁵ Thus, not surprisingly, South African observers often contended in the 1990s that South Africa should be a leader in Africa and that inevitable responsibilities and commitments flow from its position of economic and military strength. Soon after the political transformation of South Africa in 1994, there were growing expectations that South Africa would take up its responsibilities as a potential regional leader and to exert its influence in creating a stable region. Cilliers, for instance, asserted that South Africa's position in the region was that of an economic powerhouse and that the country would, therefore, need to go to extraordinary lengths to make multilateralism, consultation and peace building reflective of its engagement in the region.³⁶ Malan similarly pointed out that

... [p]articipation in international peacekeeping is a passport to international respectability and to an authoritative voice in the debate on the future of international conflict management and the reform of intergovernmental organisations such as the United Nations, the Organisation of African Unity and the Southern African Development Community. It is through such participation that countries with far less resources such as Ghana,

Senegal, Kenya, Botswana and Zimbabwe enjoy a stronger voice in these debates – despite the considerable insight and analytical capability of South Africans in this arena.³⁷

Against this background the White Paper on South Africa's Participation in International Peace Missions starts with an opening statement 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: "These expectations have included a hope that South Africa will play a leading role in international peace missions."³⁸ The White Paper also states that South Africa is committed to responsibly fulfilling its obligations under the charters of the UN and the OAU,³⁹ as well as the Southern African Development Community (SADC) Treaty.⁴⁰ Therefore, South Africa's decision-makers became fully aware of international expectations that the country needed to play an increasingly significant political-military role in African peacekeeping requirements and international peacekeeping endeavours. In this context, the former Director-General of Foreign Affairs, Jackie Selebi,⁴¹ stated the following in an address to the South African military:⁴²

I believe it is our collective intention as constituent role-players in our foreign policy establishment, to seek, to locate the country in its rightful place in the community of nations, and to transform ourselves as a nation into a global player that is capable of making a meaningful and significant contribution to the advancement of the welfare of the nations in the world. I also believe that we are jointly seeking to rapidly develop and continuously evolve in us all, as this country's foreign policy role-players, an adequate capability to engage the international community at all levels, bilateral, regional and globally. We should all seek to situate this country as an indispensable and very necessary part of the international decision-making processes, whether such matters affect international security and peace, international politics and economics, or international trade or environment ... Given the fact that the SANDF remains Africa's most capable and sophisticated military instrument, there is naturally great expectation that this country should increasingly be involved in peace-keeping, peace-making and peace-enforcement operations, especially in Africa.

In 2002, the former Deputy Minister of Defence, Nozizwe Madlala-Routledge, stated that "we are now confronted with playing an even greater role because of the progress being made in peace negotiations in the Great Lakes Region. Our country, led by President Thabo Mbeki, has taken Africa to greater heights with the launch of the African Union."⁴³ Likewise, in a public address early in 2003, the former Chief of the SANDF, General Sipiwe Nyanda, asserted that "South Africa, has, relatively speaking, [a] wealth of resources and capabilities to contribute [to peace missions] ... South Africa

has involuntarily been thrust in a leadership role, which ultimately serves South Africa's national interest." He also stated that South Africa "has just recently become widely involved in peace missions in Africa, and more deployments are on the horizon".⁴⁴

Coinciding with the above, the Minister of Defence, Mosiuoa Lekota, stated in parliament in 2003 that as the largest economy in the Southern African region, South Africa would have to carry a great deal of responsibility for the (then still envisaged) sub-regional force⁴⁵ to be established within SADC as one of the building blocks of the African Standby Force (ASF).⁴⁶ In a similar reference to SADC and the ASF, Rear Admiral Rolf Hauter, former Chief Director Strategy and Planning in the SANDF, stated that "[e]ach individual country will have to decide to what extent it can contribute to the common good of the region and to the continent as a whole ... We, as South Africans, will have to come to terms with the fact that, as the biggest economy in the region, our country will always have to carry bigger responsibilities."⁴⁷ Moreover, the prospect of the SANDF being drawn into further peacekeeping missions was reiterated by African National Congress (ANC) member of the Parliamentary Portfolio Committee on Defence, Dr Gerhard Koornhof, who stated in August 2004 at the University of Pretoria that the SANDF "will probably result in an increase in ordered deployments in the region as we are moving towards a more collaborative approach to defence and security in our region".⁴⁸ It should, therefore, be clear that South Africa's political leadership is conscious of South Africa's profile and international demands placed on South Africa's leadership and military capacity, and that the country needs to be responsive to calls for military contributions to peacekeeping.

Meeting peacekeeping challenges and demands

By issuing the White Paper on South Africa's Participation in International Peace Missions, the South African government firmly declared that, as a member of the UN, South Africa should assist the world body in its peacekeeping task. Also, in view of its economic and military strength, many observers have identified South Africa as a key player in efforts to help ensure effective peacekeeping in African conflicts. Accordingly, South Africa has experienced "a constant barrage of calls for assistance, intervention and mediation in African crises".⁴⁹ This may appear quite dramatic, but there could be no doubt that South Africa is (sometimes rather simplistically) perceived as a regional leader. Neither could there be any doubt that South Africa would remain subject to multiple pressures to 'do something' to help put an end to fighting in conflict-stricken African states. In fact, the former Secretary-General of the OAU, Salim Ahmed Salim, made it clear during a visit to South Africa in December 1998 that he had been disappointed by South Africa's reluctance (at that time) to play a more active role in conflict resolution in Africa.⁵⁰ In this regard, former Director-General Selebi informed the South African military in 1999 that "it is no secret that many outside our borders have been rather

disappointed by the limited number of operations in which our National Defence Force has been involved in terms of peace-keeping operations”.⁵¹

However, South Africa has officially declared its commitment to playing a meaningful role in Africa and the rest of the international community, and has (at least by implication) stated its aspiration to become a permanent member of the Security Council of the UN. Against this background it is important to note that the White Paper explicitly states that participation in peace missions is increasingly becoming a prerequisite for international respectability, and for a strong voice in supranational organisations and in debates on multinational conflict management.⁵² In fact, General Nyanda made it clear that South Africa would not be taken as seriously as it should, if “we are not willing to be serious about the security in our region”.⁵³ With its contributions to the peace support efforts in especially Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and recently also in Sudan, South Africa has clearly demonstrated its commitment to be significantly involved in international peacekeeping endeavours. In this regard, it is clear that the South African government is taking the view that participation in international peacekeeping is important for playing a significant role in the international community, in Africa and in the regional environment. In view of the above, it was publicly stated in February 2003 that about 900 SANDF members were deployed on African soil. It was also announced that another 1,268 members were to be deployed within the framework of an expanded UN Mission in the DRC (MONUC).⁵⁴ This materialised in June 2003 when the SANDF deployed to the war-ravaged Kindu in the eastern part of the DRC.⁵⁵ In addition, more than 300 members of the SANDF have been deployed in Sudan’s conflict-stricken Darfur area as part of the African Union Mission in Sudan (AMIS) since 2004 – thereby making another substantial contribution to conflict resolution and peacekeeping on the African continent.⁵⁶

Today, the SANDF finds itself involved in a number of peacekeeping endeavours and a considerable number of force members have gained valuable experience in practical peacekeeping tasks. Although no officers have thus far been engaged in full-scale peace enforcement roles, the SANDF’s contributions could certainly be regarded as significant and have surely increased the country’s peacekeeping profile in political and military terms. This coincides with General Nyanda’s earlier statement that “South Africa and the SANDF are unquestionably going to play an [even more] important role in peace missions in Africa over the next decade ... South Africa could become one of the foremost contributors of forces for peace missions.”⁵⁷

This said, it should be noted that one of the realities of recent peacekeeping missions in Africa relates to financial constraints. In the past years, the extent of African peacekeeping was not limited by political will or the availability of troops, but rather by insufficient funding. Peacekeeping endeavours are by their very nature costly affairs. The recent peacekeeping experience is that even the relatively small and less logistically demanding

unarmed military observer missions undertaken were so costly that the AU and its predecessor, the OAU, were unable to finance them from their own budget. Moreover, it could be pointed out that the budget for the OAU Liaison Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea (OLMEE) amounted to US\$1.8 million per year in 2000. Its original planned strength was 43 civilian and military personnel, but it had an actual strength of 27 in 2000, comprising 11 military staff and 16 civilian support staff – directly as a result of financial constraints. It could furthermore be noted that the African Mission in Burundi (AMIB) was considerably larger than any mission the AU (or the OAU before it) has undertaken. With 3,335 personnel and an operational budget of approximately US\$110 million in 2003, it was a significant expense in the African peacekeeping context from the outset – especially when viewed against the AU budget of approximately US\$32 million in 2003.⁵⁸ Moreover, in the case of Sudan it was reported in April 2005 that “[t]he African Union Mission in Sudan in its present strength is over stretched to address the security concerns. In consequence therefore, there was the need to enhance the mission by increasing its strength and providing it with adequate logistical support.”⁵⁹ It was also reported that the mission “lacked basic elements of a balanced military force”.⁶⁰ As the AU already stood in arrears from previous budgets in recent years, observers assert that the AU would have to depend on the strength and goodwill of ‘lead nations’⁶¹ among its member states – most notably South Africa in Southern Africa – and the international community for financial support if it wishes to develop and utilise the ASF as a standby reinforcement system on the continent.

Political demands and budgetary constraints

It has already been noted that reduced military spending and a dwindling defence budget had been at the centre of significant budgetary changes in South Africa since the mid-1990s – a situation that seems to put some strain on the peacekeeping requirements emanating from demands placed on South Africa on the one hand, and the capability of the SANDF to meet such requirements and challenges on the other. In this context, the Minister of Defence warned parliament in June 2003 that “[w]e are deploying twice as many members of the defence force than was anticipated in the Defence Review, while our budget, as anticipated in the same review, has not been met”.⁶²

Against this background, the former Chief of Joint Operations in the SANDF, Lieutenant General Godfrey Ngwenya,⁶³ likewise urged caution against overstressing the capacity of the SANDF in deploying more troops in peace support. Specifically, it was stated in July 2003 that close to 2,500 members of the SANDF were deployed to the DRC, Burundi and Ethiopia, and that the SANDF’s force structure did not allow for more deployments on foreign soil⁶⁴ – implying that South Africa has effectively reached a ceiling as far as troop contributions were concerned. Yet, the figures continued to rise as information indicates that as of 30 September 2003, 1,414 SANDF members were

serving as UN 'blue helmets' in the DRC, while about 1,600 SANDF members were deployed to Burundi.⁶⁵

In August 2003, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) officially requested the South African government to send troops to war-ravaged Liberia. The initial South African response suggested that the government was cautious not to overextend the capabilities of the SANDF as the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, Aziz Pahad, stated that "[i]t's not just a question of finances. We also have to consider whether we have the capacity to send more troops on such missions and whether we are not stretching ourselves too much."⁶⁶ Yet, shortly afterwards the government indicated that the SANDF would indeed contribute to the Liberian peace process – albeit in a limited capacity.

This, then, coincides with the government's stance that South Africa, as a member of the UN, has to assist the world body in its peacekeeping task. Also, in the words of General Nyanda: "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."⁶⁷ In this regard, it needs to be noted that a figure of close to 4,000 South Africans deployed as (UN and non-UN) peacekeepers brought South Africa close to the forefront of international troop-contributing nations for peace support endeavours.

Yet, it should be clear that the SANDF does not have an unlimited capacity – given the current financial constraints within the South African budgetary framework. In fact, some defence analysts argue that the SANDF would be able to handle its immediate commitments for some time, but that it would not be able to sustain those deployments for any length of time or take on any other extended large-scale missions. It has even been suggested that South Africa's leadership is letting "its enthusiasm outrun its military capacity".⁶⁸ This said, it is argued that there is a general international view that a developing country at peace can reasonably spend some 2 per cent of its GDP on defence – and that the current defence budget in South Africa is simply insufficient to meet additional or more extended peacekeeping responsibilities. This point has also been raised by Defence Minister Mosiuoa Lekota, who stated 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".⁶⁹ In fact, Lekota stated that he would like to see defence spending increased in stages from the current figure of about 1,6 per cent of GDP to about 2 per cent. 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 1997], while our budget, as anticipated in the same review, has not been met".⁷⁰

In terms of practical demands, Heitman asserts that South Africa should be capable of sustaining the deployment of at least a small brigade (about 4,000 troops) or two battalion

groups (about 3,000 troops) for an extended period, and still have the ability to respond effectively to a sudden but short-term crisis.⁷¹ Taking a regional-military perspective, South Africa is Africa's biggest and most industrialised economy and its strength should lie in providing capabilities that the poorer and less industrialised countries cannot afford or cannot support: airborne forces, inter-theatre airlift and sealift, combat helicopters, fighters capable of independent operation, patrol aircraft, and warships able to patrol for extended periods. South Africa is virtually the only country south of the Sahara that is able to sustain an effective capability in those categories.⁷²

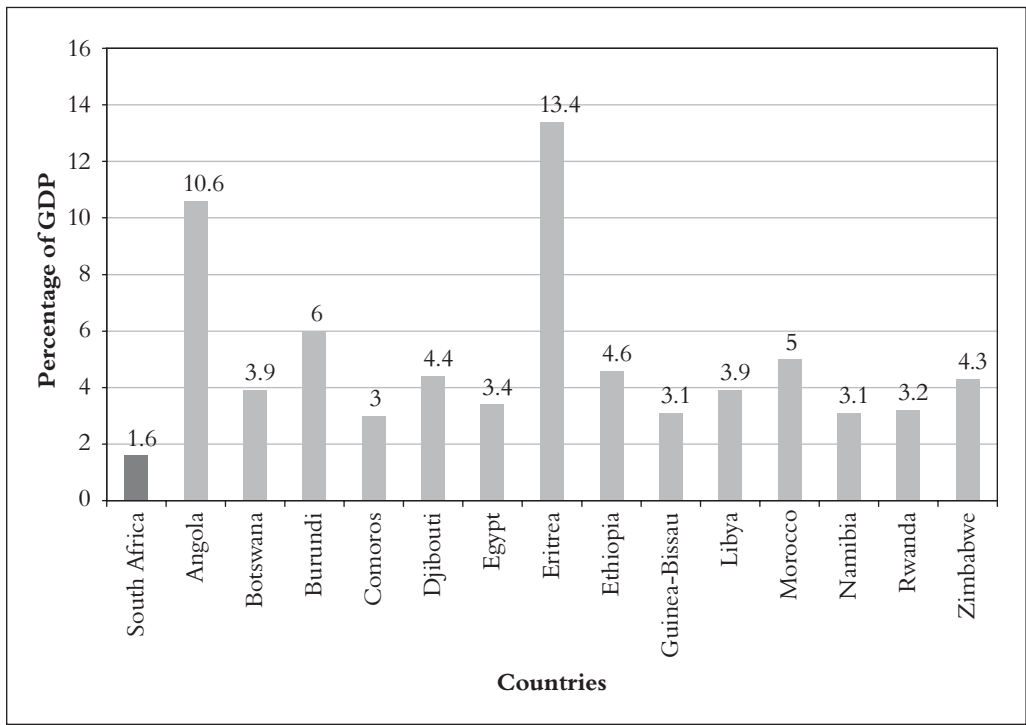
Against this background it is interesting to view and appreciate South Africa's military potency in international context by comparing some relevant indicators. The following section expands on this with a view to clarifying whether excessive military spending or a militaristic ethos currently prevails in South Africa.

South Africa's defence spending in comparative international and regional context

Although one may argue that South Africa should not be concerned with the relative military strengths of its neighbours and other African states, but should rather focus on its own financial situation, domestic budgetary needs and national interests, it is nonetheless illuminating to compare South Africa in the contemporary African context as regards GDP, population figures, and total (active) members of the armed forces.

Table 3: African armed forces compared

Country	GDP ⁷³	Population ⁷⁴	Armed forces ⁷⁵ ('000)
Egypt	US\$75.1 million	68.7 million	400–450
Eritrea	US\$0.9 billion	4.4 million	200–250
Algeria	US\$84.6 million	32.3 million	100–150
Angola	US\$20.1 million	13.9 million	100–150
Ethiopia	US\$8.0 million	69.9 million	150–200
Morocco	US\$50.0 million	30.5 million	150–200
Sudan	US\$19.5 million	34.3 million	100–125
Libya	US\$29.1 million	5.6 million	75–100
Nigeria	US\$72.1 million	139.8 million	75–100
Burundi	US\$0.6 million	7.3 million	50–75
DRC	US\$6.5 million	54.7 million	50–75
Rwanda	US\$1.8 million	8.4 million	50–75
South Africa	US\$212.7 million	45.5 million	50–75
Uganda	US\$6.8 million	25.9 million	50–75
Tunisia	US\$28.1 million	10.0 million	35–50

Figure 1: Percentage of GDP spending on defence

Note, for instance, South Africa's relative position in 2002–2004 compared to African states with armed forces of 35,000 and above in Table 3.

Although the table does not take into account types of capabilities that are maintained, nor the threat perception and regional conflict potential of any state, it is evident that a substantial number of African states have fairly sizeable forces – many of them much larger than that of South Africa. South Africa's figures are even commendable if it is taken into consideration that South Africa is the only African state that ranks among the world's 50 top nations as regards GDP, while the size of its defence force is less than that of a significant number of other African states – all of which have considerably smaller economies. In fact, whereas South Africa is indicated as spending more or less 1.6 per cent of its GDP on defence in recent years, almost half of all African states were spending more than 2 per cent of their GDP on defence. Indeed, various states were spending more than 3 per cent of their GDP on defence in 2004 – a figure that is fairly high in any terms (see Figure 1).⁷⁶

Comparatively speaking, South Africa's defence spending seems to be fairly conservative in relation to the international average of roughly 2 per cent of the gross world product in general,⁷⁷ and specifically in comparison with sub-Saharan Africa in general (2.6 per cent); the Middle East and North Africa (7.2 per cent); Central and Southeast Asia (2.6 per cent); East Asia and Australasia (2.1 per cent); and NATO (2.6 per cent).⁷⁸

Appraisal and conclusion

Military power cannot solve all problems of insecurity and there is no requirement for South Africa to have a large, modern armed force or to spend on defence at relatively high levels. Therefore, the government should be commended for a 'minimalist approach' by, for instance, not having added the replacement of South Africa's present inventory of main battle tanks to the arms procurement package announced in 1998.⁷⁹ Also important is that the intended weapons purchase programme has been the result of a drawn-out consultative process in which considerable emphasis has been placed on favourable terms, facilitated by soft loans, with long-term repayments, at low interest rates and backed by credit guarantees. In addition, investment in the local industrial sector was also considered. It is also encouraging to note that there has been some healthy understanding in recent years of two fundamental issues concerning military spending:

- Concern for human security and for meeting the socio-economic needs of South Africans; and
- That military force should be used only as a last resort.⁸⁰

Yet, anti-militaristic groupings maintain that few inter-state conflicts were recorded in the past years. Also, with a global decrease in the commitment of GNP for defence purposes, there has been a strong urge for demilitarisation in South Africa and much hope that the government would focus more on human development than on the military. For many such people, spending on the military implies that the 'peace dividend' has not been realised. From their point of view, human security is less about procuring arms and building military strengths, and more about strengthening the social fabric of societies and improving their systems of governance by means of poverty alleviation and human development programmes. For anti-militarists

... the new leaders rapidly latched on to the importance of a military and issues such as the peace dividend and defence conversion took a back seat ... Despite the restructuring and transformation of the military in South Africa, defence conversion, though important, remains a neglected issue. Its true potential has not been embraced ... since 1998, the hope of defence conversion driven by the government seems to be fading especially in the light of the R43 billion rearmament package that was announced by the government.⁸¹

In governmental circles on the other hand, spokespersons were always swift to point out that in 1989, defence spending was 4.5 per cent of the GDP and that it dropped to 1.4 per cent in 1999. These reductions, according to anti-militaristic groups, have enabled government to shift substantial resources to socio-economic upliftment, providing an

“impressive peace dividend”.⁸² From the government’s viewpoint, however, in the words of former Deputy Defence Minister Ronnie Kasrils, it was never a “guns or butter – houses or corvettes” issue, but rather “guns, butter, peace and security”.⁸³

Be that as it may, a commentator once argued that spending on arms would always look idiotic when the only arithmetic applied is the kind that says that for the price of one corvette the South African government could build, say, 20 schools. Furthermore, it could be argued that, irrespective of the low frequency of inter-state wars in the current global order, the impact of external military aggression is so severe that defence against such aggression should remain a primary objective for a country such as South Africa. The fact that the defence budget for 2001/02 has been set at R15.8 billion,⁸⁴ just over R18 billion for 2002/03,⁸⁵ 20.5 billion for 2003/04,⁸⁶ and R22.5 billion for 2005/06⁸⁷ – way below 2 per cent of GDP – is a clear indication of the government’s spending priorities and bears testimony to the point that belt-tightening rather than spending on the military has been and still is the current government strategy or outlook.

At the same time, it should be reiterated that the past years have seen the re-emergence of the military instrument in South Africa’s foreign policy. Specifically, whereas the post-1994 policy was characterised by a notable near-absence of the military instrument in South Africa’s foreign policy, the use of military means has become more salient, most notably in the field of peace support.⁸⁸ This trend produces a foreign policy dilemma concerning the conciliation of international and foreign policy demands placed on the SANDF on the one hand, and the capacity for meeting these demands on the other.

This said, far more than deterrence and a fighting capability are at stake. A considerable number of African states have been and are still gripped in ongoing conflicts, the blowback of which has seriously impacted on West, Central and Southern Africa. South Africa’s requirements for military equipment are not only set by a threat and task assessment, but are also concerned with the pursuit of its national interests in respect of regional security. Thus if the government believes that it is in the national interest to play a significant role in UN peace missions⁸⁹ and that the SANDF has to actively assist in multinational peacekeeping operations on the African continent and even further afield, it seems sensible to equip the military appropriately. If not, this could leave South Africa not being able to shoulder its responsibility in the region and even exposed to serious instability to the north of the country and the negative spillover effects thereof. It could leave South Africa with inadequate means to help enforce decency in a future genocide on the continent but also leave the SANDF without the force necessary to defend its legitimate interests against those who hold them in contempt. It could rightly be asserted that peace is a precondition for economic development. Moreover, in the words of Heitman, “South Africa is a developing country and is at peace. But Africa is not at peace and South Africa cannot afford to stand by and watch it deteriorate. 2% of

GDP would be a small price to pay for investing in long-term stability and the economic growth that only stability can make possible.”⁹⁰

In the final analysis, the question remains: What price is South Africa prepared to pay for its security in a potentially unstable neighbourhood and global community? In view of the foregoing and given that the current defence budget amounts to way less than 2 per cent of GDP, it could be argued that if South Africans should compare what they are paying for the military, they would actually discover that they are paying far less than most other nations.

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