

Defence in a democracy: The South African Defence Review and the redefinition of the parameters of the national defence debate

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Introduction

The institution of the South African White Paper on defence and the Defence Review process in March 1996 and its completion in 1998 marked a decisive break with the manner in which South African defence policy had been traditionally managed.¹ Discussions on defence policy increasingly moved from the realm of the secret and the technocratic into an ever-expanding sphere of popular and open discussion. The reasons behind this shift were various and had as much to do with the changed political environment as it did with the determination of the South African Defence Ministry to ensure that a comprehensive audit of South African defence needs was conducted in the forthcoming decade.

The Defence Review was significant for a number of inter-related reasons. Firstly, and most importantly, it represented a strengthening of the country's democratic civil-military relations by instituting new, and hitherto unexplored, partnerships between the political, civil and military elites. The Defence Review was a consultative process that incorporated into the defence debate a range of actors hitherto excluded from the defence decision-making process. In this sense it heralded the creation of a new culture within the Department of Defence that sought to incorporate a diversity of opinion and critiques on national defence matters rather than formulating policy based on 'expert' opinions alone.

Secondly, it sought to redefine the key assumptions of South African defence policy in a manner intelligible to effective defence management and good governance. In this sense it drew strongly on the principles and normative recommendations of the South African White Paper on Defence published in 1995. Thirdly, it sought to accomplish, and ultimately provided, the framework upon which the very real equipment and human resource needs of the South African armed forces could be based. The government's initiation of the ambitious tendering process for the re-equipping of the South African National Defence Force (SANDF) in late 1997 was a direct product of both Parliament and Cabinet's approval of the Defence Review force design.

Yet, for all its historic significance the Defence Review process was still flawed in many respects—and it is to these shortcomings that future South African defence policy reviews will have to address themselves. The major limitation, the implications of which are discussed in this article, was the Defence

Review's emphasis on the primary function of defence (defined below) as the *raison d'être* for the existence of both the defence function and stable civil-military relations. Sheer political, budgetary, practical and historical realities will require a revision of this central principle in South African defence planning in future. It is also argued that it is important for defence planners in both South Africa and other developing countries to disenthral themselves of many of the Western concepts and defence assumptions that underpin their strategic and doctrinal thinking. Failure to do so will result in the design of armed forces that are unaffordable and inappropriate to the defence needs of the country concerned. This article addresses these issues in further detail below and considers them against a backdrop of the dramatic changes that have occurred in both the management and content of the South African defence debate since the initiation of the negotiation process in 1990.²

The Defence White Paper and the Defence Review process

The Defence White Paper: Establishing the normative framework

1994 was a year characterized by the election of a new government, the initial restructuring of the executive levels of the state and the formulation of the new government's policy positions. Defence was no exception to this process and both the new Minister and his Ministry embarked on the formulation of a Defence White Paper in June 1995. South Africa had seen very few Defence White Papers in its history (the last significant White Paper being the 1977 Defence White Paper which outlined the then 'Total Strategy' doctrine) and all of them had been conducted in a closed environment. The 1995 Defence White Paper process was to be substantially different in two regards – its content and its inclusivity.

The content of the Defence White Paper was different from that of a 'traditional' Defence White Paper in two major respects. Firstly, rather than adopting as its departure point an appraisal of the strategic environment within which South African defence found itself situated, it adopted, as a first principle almost, the importance of ensuring robust and stable civil-military relations in a democracy. As such it was a strongly normative document, which sought to details those principles and values upon which defence in a democracy should be established. These included:

The principles upon which sound civil-military relations should be established, the management of defence in a democracy, the importance of transforming the representivity of the armed forces, the cul-

tural transformation of the armed forces, and the armed forces and international law.³

Secondly, the White Paper gave scant guidance as to the size and shape of the future armed forces and called on the institution of a Defence Review process to accomplish this objective. With regard to force planning guidelines, the Defence White Paper predicated force design on the primacy of the primary function:

The size, design, structure and budget of the SANDF will therefore be determined mainly by its primary function. However, provision will have to be made for the special requirements of internal deployment and international peace support operations.⁴

This emphasis on the primary function of the armed forces (preservation of territorial integrity and sovereignty) was to constitute the major force design principle in the subsequent Defence Review and the Department of Defence's Transformation process.⁵

The Defence White Paper was a considerably more inclusive process than previous White Papers and was characterized, possibly more so than any other White Paper to date, by a high level of interaction and consultation between the Ministry of Defence and parliament's new and powerful Joint Standing Committee on Defence (JSCD). The JSCD actively participated in each and every step of the White Paper formulation and the final product, tabled in parliament in May 1996, was endorsed by all political parties represented in parliament (thereby bestowing on the final product a high level of political legitimacy). The Defence Review process initiated in July 1995 proved to be even more of an inclusive process than had been the case with the Defence White Paper.

The Defence Review process: Defence management as a consensual process

In July 1995 the Minister of Defence established a Defence Review Working Group in response to the suggestions contained in the then draft Defence White Paper. Initially the Working Group consisted only of members of the Department of Defence drawn from the National Defence Force, the Defence Secretariat and the Ministry of Defence. The aim of the Working Group was to provide plans for the institution of a comprehensive Defence Review which would examine the implications of the Defence White Paper for the shape, size, posture, doctrine and equipment of the National Defence Force. In essence the Defence Review took, as its point of departure, existing government policy and the Defence White Paper as being the aims of defence, and attempted to outline strategies and resources which would be committed to

defence in order for it to accomplish this aim. It sought to provide a planning framework within which the defence function could be conceptualized within the medium to long term. As such it took precedence over other management cycles operating within the Department of Defence. The process, it was emphasised, should be conducted in a transparent and accountable manner and should include a wide range of actors from the state, political society and civil society at both a national and regional level.

In February 1997 the Ministry of Defence expanded the Working Group to include, in addition to Department of Defence actors, parliamentarians from the JSCD, representatives from the academic community, certain defence-related non-governmental organizations (NGOs), a representative from the country's defence industry and a representative from the country's national Part Time Force Council. In an attempt to garner as wide a degree of legitimacy for the Defence Review as possible, the Defence Review Workgroup had embarked on a wide-ranging consultation process with political society, civil society and the state. Represented on the Workgroup were members of the Joint Standing Committee on Defence, members of the SANDF and the Defence Secretariat, members of the defence industry, academics and NGOs. The specialized workgroups which were established to investigate specific issues reflected this diversity drawing on a wide range of interest groups and NGOs from civil society. A series of Defence Review workshops were held in all South Africa's nine provinces at which local business, local NGOs, local government and politicians and members of the public attended as well as three large National Consultative Conferences held in Cape Town between 1996 and 1997.

The consultative approach to the Defence Review received much critical acclaim from those individuals who participated in the process—ranging from pacifist groupings through to ex-servicemen's leagues—as well as from parliament, the media and international commentators. The breadth and depth of consultation exceeded any similar policy process in South African defence planning history and remained possibly the most consultative process on defence policy ever attempted by a modern democracy.

The content of the Defence Review was essentially divided into two components. The First Report would outline the posture, functions and force design options for the defence force on the future. The Second outlined the human resource requirements, part-time forces requirements, acquisition processes, land and environment issues and legal considerations that affected the management of South African defence.

The key premises regarding the SANDF's desired operational and human resource capabilities as outlined in the Defence Review were the following:

- That the defence posture of the country should be primarily defensive (strategically defensive and operationally offensive) and that this should be reflected in strategy, doctrine and tactics. This marked a significant shift, in

theory at least, away from the previous regime's doctrine of 'offensive defence'. Budgetary realities, however, had effectively forced South Africa's defence posture into a defensive mode – the creation of a defensive posture by default in effect.

- The primary function of the national defence function would be to protect the country's sovereignty and territorial integrity and that budgetary allocations should reflect this prioritization.
- That a Core Force capability be maintained whereby the SANDF would have the ability to deal with a range of contingencies in the short to medium term and the ability to expand to appropriate levels in the medium-to-long term should the threat scenario change significantly (the latter presupposing accurate intelligence of course).
- That the SANDF would be responsible for executing a range of additional secondary functions if so ordered into service and provided the requisite finances were made available. These functions were identified as being regional security co-operation, international peace support operations, co-operation with the South African Police Services in the maintenance and restoration of law and order, and a variety of non-military tasks (maritime protection, air space and traffic control, disaster relief, maintenance of essential services, search and rescue, VIP air transport, Antarctic transport support, hydrographic services, medical services, and government communication security services).
- The SANDF had to be a balanced force – in terms of capabilities rather than balance between the budgets and force levels of the Arms of Service – in order to allow itself the ability to meet and cater for a wide range of contingencies.
- A variety of transformational human resource programmes needed be instituted within the SANDF to ensure that the armed forces were capable of responding to the challenges of the new millennium. These included Equal Opportunity and Affirmative Action programmes, Civic Education Programmes, demobilization strategies, and programmes designed to enhance the role of the part time forces in the defence human resource equation.

The focus on the primary function was reflected in the final force design which both parliament and cabinet approved. Initially four force design options were proposed (see Appendix A). The basic differences between these options are outlined below:

- *Option One.* This option was the recommended option of both the Department of Defence and the Joint Standing Committee on Defence and was the option finally approved by the South African Cabinet. It argued for the maintenance of a minimum growth core which could meet a wide range

of contingencies (bar invasions by major powers). It also argued for the maintenance of force levels (part time and full time) in the region of 101 000 personnel and for the provision of a variety of conventional weaponry to accomplish these objectives although it acknowledged that certain gaps would remain—lowering of air defence capabilities, restricted maritime capabilities, limited landward capabilities etc. This option reflected a bias towards traditional defence contingencies but acknowledged that certain secondary functions, involvement of the South African Army in the interior for instance, would continue to remain a defence role in the foreseeable future.

- *Option Two.* This reflected the ‘ideal’ vision of the Department of Defence and, as such, was dubbed the ‘Department of Defence Long-Term Vision Force Design’. This option was predicated, virtually in its entirety, on a traditional account of defence roles and contingencies and reflected the influence of Western cultural concepts on the defence planners within the Department of Defence. It catered for conventional contingencies (excluding invasions by major powers) but scaled down on the involvement of the SANDF in support of the South African Police Services within the interior. It argued for force levels in the region of 135 000 personnel (part time and full time) and for the procurement of conventional equipment slightly more extensive and more expensive than that recommended in Option 1.
- *Option Three.* Option 3 was strongly resisted by defence planners during the Defence Review process. It was introduced into the debate by members of a civil society strategic think-tank who had been co-opted onto the Defence Review Working Group by the Minister of Defence. It was retained as an option because it was felt that it realistically reflected the likely roles and tasks that the Defence Force was currently executing and was likely to execute in future. This option advocated a shift from conventional to non-conventional operational concepts in its force design logic and argued strongly for a consideration of secondary functions in the force design and budgetary process. As such it reduced the Army’s conventional capabilities, replacing them with increased counter-insurgency and landward peace operations capabilities, limited the navy’s conventional capabilities through the removal of corvettes and submarines, and placed a greater emphasis on the air force’s transport capabilities.
- *Option Four.* Initially there was some reluctance to consider Option 4 premised, as it was, on theories of Non-Offensive Defence, which had been introduced into the defence debate during the post-1994 period. It was premised on the same level of defence as option 1 but did this within the framework of a defensive posture. Accordingly it enhanced the role of territorial protection (landward rear defence), air defence capabilities (fighter and radar capabilities for instance), helicopter support to landward was

increased and naval capabilities were also heightened (with a greater emphasis on inshore patrol capabilities). Its adherence to traditional defensive operational concepts limited its broader utility to participate in other secondary functions.

Option 1 was finally approved by Cabinet although acknowledgement was made of the 'ideal' vision enshrined in Option 2. A second report detailing the force structure required for the Department of Defence of the future Head Office organization and support structures), the acquisition process and land and environment considerations was also tabled and approved by both parliament and Cabinet in May 1998 and the Defence Review was finally tabled in parliament as a composite document on the 22 May 1998.

Option 1 with its emphasis on the primary function was to have a major influence on the procurement package which the South African government approved in 1998 (although other considerations such as industrial participation influenced the final decision in a tangential manner). Based on the approval of the Defence Review by both Cabinet and Parliament in May 1998, the South African Cabinet announced its intention to proceed with major weapons purchases as outlined in the force design option as approved by the Defence Review.

The proposed acquisition package covered purchases of mainly conventional weaponry totalling at the time some 30 billion South African Rands (5 billion US dollars) in value. These included the purchase of Meko Class Corvettes (Germany) to revitalize the blue water capabilities of the South African Navy, submarines (Germany) to replacing the aging Daphne class submarines (France), Gripen fighters (UK/Sweden) to replace the South African Cheetah C fighters (the latter being a South African upgrade of the Mirage F1 fighters), Augusta light utility helicopters (Italy) to replace the Alouette helicopters (France) in service in the South African Air Force, Westmoreland maritime helicopters (UK) for the Corvette platforms, and Hawk 100 (UK) to replace the ageing Aeromachi Impala trainers (Italy).

The package, although approved by both Parliament and Cabinet, came under criticism on the basis of its seeming extravagance in a country afflicted by vast disparities in wealth. It also came under criticism from certain former and serving military officers who maintained that some of the items (fighter aircraft and submarines) were ill-suited to the types of roles and tasks which the country could be expected to play in the African continent and were inappropriate for the type of external threat that South Africa, should she face one, would need to repel in future (low level irregular and militia type incursions).

Yet, notwithstanding the consultative nature of the Defence Review process and the wide acclaim it received from government, parliament and civil society alike, the major tension which existed within the Defence Review was the

extent to which a developing country such as South Africa could afford to predicate both its force design and its budget on the primary function.

How primary is the primary function?

Perhaps the key organizing principle of both the South African Defence White Paper and the South African Defence Review was its commitment to designing the armed forces for their primary function—preservation of sovereignty and territorial integrity. This remains the key *raison d'être* for the existence, maintenance and funding of the armed forces in South African defence policy and planning.

The rationale behind this emphasis on the primary function was basically threefold. Firstly, it was stated that the ultimate, and primary, responsibility of the state is that of the security of its citizens against external attack—best expressed in its role in ensuring the protection of the territorial integrity and sovereignty of the country. Secondly, it was argued and had been extensively argued during the negotiation process between 1990–1994, that the armed forces should confine themselves to their primary function and desist from involving themselves in various secondary functions on an ongoing basis precisely because this had led to their politicization and the incremental usurpation of the authority of elected civilian government by the armed forces.

Thirdly the focus of South African defence planners on the primary function was a product of a number of inter-related cultural and ideological factors—primarily the influence of Western defence concepts on South African defence thinking. This influence of this thinking (aptly referred to below as 'doctrinal mannerism') was, and still is, extensive and was a product of the strong ascriptive affinities that exist between many armed forces of the developing world and the intellectual discourses of the former (mainly Western) colonisers.

Whilst these arguments possessed a certain validity, it has become increasingly clear that the centrality afforded the primary function for both South African defence planners and the planners of many of the more advanced developing countries will need to be revisited in future. A critique of these assumptions within the South African context is mounted below.

The primary function as guarantor of stable civil-military relations: Absolute principle or context-bound guideline?

One of the most frequently cited, and most compelling, arguments advocating the restriction of the armed forces to their primary function is that of their role in ensuring the maintenance of healthy civil-military relations (and this was one of the key arguments during the South African negotiation process). It argues against the extensive utilization of the armed forces in those tasks relating to either military aid to the civil power (tasks relating to the maintenance of internal stability via the combatting of insurrection, preventing secession, and supporting the police services) or military aid to the civil community (reconstruction and development tasks) and proffers a number of reasons in this regard.

Firstly, and most importantly, it politicizes the armed forces, either overtly or insidiously, by facilitating their entry into the realm of both government and civil administration. Secondly, as a result of this process, it leads to a politicization of the corporate identity of the armed forces and results in the development of a mentality, which seeks to confront and challenge government, rather than remain subordinate to its dictates. Thirdly, it undermines the legitimacy of the armed forces. Fourthly, it leads to the militarisation of society and, fifthly, it negatively affects the combat readiness of the armed forces.

There are powerful and disturbing examples of how the involvement of the armed forces in non-primary roles have resulted in the development of a praetorian identity and the subsequent translation of this identity into various forms of military influence over and/or intervention in the political process (Argentina, Chile, Brazil, Nigeria, Ghana, South Korea, Thailand, Pakistan, Greece, Spain and others). Although the influence of the military did not always translate itself into the classical coup d'état, it often did result in a high level of military influence within and over the decision making process within civilian government. The deployment of the SADF in a variety of internal roles during the 1980s undoubtedly contributed to both its politicization and the extension of its influence within the executive nodes of the state ensemble (most vividly demonstrated by its role and influence within the State Security Council and the National Security Management System).

However, there are also compelling examples of countries that have extensively used their armed forces in these secondary functions and have not witnessed an assault on the principle of civil supremacy. China uses its armed forces in a wide range of reconstruction and development tasks and yet the armed forces remain totally subordinate to the authority and direction of the Chinese Communist Party. Israel has used its own armed forces in both internal development tasks and internal stability roles (the latter with questionable impartiality) and yet the principle of civil supremacy remains inviolable in that country.

Senegal utilizes its armed forces almost exclusively in secondary functions (internal development tasks and peace support operations) and, despite this deployment, its armed forces are non-partisan in nature and subordinate to elected government. Closer to home, the deployment of the SANDF in a police supportive role during the post-1994 period (in numbers larger than those deployed at the height of the State of Emergency between 1984–1986) has witnessed neither its further politicization nor its attempts to undermine the authority of democratic government. How is one to make sense out of the seeming contradiction between the politicization of the armed forces once deployed in this role, and the fact that both the civil authorities and armed forces can co-exist quite easily with the deployment of the armed forces in this role?

The answer, in essence, lies in the fact that there is no necessary link between the deployment of the armed forces in secondary roles and their eventual politicization. To maintain this would be to engage in an exercise of formal logic to the detriment of reality. However, there is a strong contingent link between the deployment of armed forces in these roles and their subsequent relationship with the civilian authorities. These relationships are determined not by abstract principles, but by the amalgam of factors that inhere within a society at a given moment. Critical factors in this regard include the legitimacy and authority of elected government, the resilience of civil society and its influence over the formal decision-making process in government, levels of economic development in the country concerned, the composition of the armed forces, and the corporate identity of the armed forces themselves.

The prospects of the armed forces challenging the civilian authorities within the present context of civil-military relations is highly remote. Parliament's undisputed authority, the powers of civilian government and the limited size of the SANDF render the prospects of undue interference in the political process improbable. Furthermore, notwithstanding the pronouncements of the White Paper, there are cogent reasons for insisting that the armed forces continue to remain involved in secondary functions in the short-to-medium term (and possibly increase their involvement in this sphere in the future) and some of these reasons are outlined below.

Whilst it is prudent to carefully monitor the involvement of the armed forces in these roles (and the White Paper on Defence provides a series of proposed mechanisms towards this end), political leaders and defence planners should be mindful of the consequences of a premature withdrawal of the armed forces from an internal stability role for instance. The very nature of civil-military relations which the emphasis on the primary function seeks to protect, could be irredeemably undermined if wide-spread crime and internal challenges to the constitutional order should spiral out of control.

An emphasis on the paramountcy of the primary function should be a context-determined variable and not an absolute principle. The emphasis on the

primary function by ANC negotiators during the 1990–1994 period reflected a fundamental concern at the time—the fear of the armed forces using their considerable influence to intervene in the political process. This was a valid concern within that particular historical context. Uneven civil-military relations, a politicized military, insecurity and uncertainty with regard to the future were real factors at the time. The rapidly changing nature of civil-military relations during the last three years—nowhere more evident than in the ongoing shift of power from the executive to the legislature—has heralded a new set of priorities and realities with regard to South African civil-military relations. With sufficient oversight and control, armed forces can and should be used more extensively in tasks that provide support to the Civil Power. This argument is contentious and is analysed in greater detail below.

Maintaining the purity of the brotherhood: Armed forces and secondary functions

Almost all modern armed forces of the developed world, particularly during the post-Second World War period, have maintained that the primary role of a Defence Force is to protect the territorial integrity and sovereignty of the nation. This remains its central *raison d'être*, its right to existence. Yet, is this an accurate reflection of what armed forces have been used for in the past, and the roles in which they are likely to be deployed in the future?

It is contended in this paper that this is neither an accurate reflection of what modern armies, with few exceptions, have busied themselves with in the 20th century, nor of the roles which the South African armed forces have been expected to execute since their establishment in 1912. Let us consider this in more historical detail:

- Modern armed forces (and for the purposes of this paper it is assumed that the SANDF falls into this category) have rarely been used in the primary role. The following observation amplifies this point:
- Firstly ... the 'traditional' view of what armed forces are for is actually a rather modern one: a product primarily of this century. The British Army, for example, was always on active service between 1815 and 1914 but usually in remote areas of the world deployed in penny-packets in a quasi-gendarmerie role. Secondly, even in the age of alleged Total War, modern armies have spent little time actually engaged in heavy metal fisticuffs. Indeed, since 1945 the tasks for which western armies have actually been employed have been taken almost entirely from the list given above.⁶

The 'list' referred to in the quote includes the role of the armed forces as the guarantor of the civil power against internal enemies, peace operations,

patrolling of frontiers to protect vital interests (fisheries, prevention of smuggling etc), regional security exercises and disaster relief.

The South African armed forces in the 20th century have never been used, historically, to repel external armed aggression against the country by a hostile power. They have been used, positively and negatively, in a variety of secondary roles ranging from support to the police services to the support of Allied commitments beyond the country's borders.⁷

Notwithstanding the crucial responsibility of the state to guarantee the security of its citizens, much of the justification for the retention of the armed forces for utilization in their primary role concentrates on a narrow definition of the role which 'threat' plays in modern, interstate relations (such threats always being seen as that of a conventional, external aggressor). What is rather required is a 'paradigm shift' that allows for the creation of new concepts and theories which are capable of explaining the role and functions of armed forces in an increasingly complex, and post-modern, world.

What emerges from an appraisal of the above is essentially twofold:

- The importance of revisiting the role of secondary functions in determining both defence planning assumptions and force design.
- The need to re-examine the concept of 'threat' within the African defence planning process.

The role of the South African armed forces in the secondary function arena

It has been precisely in the 'non-traditional' military arenas, the secondary functions, that African armed forces have historically been deployed and that the present SANDF finds itself deployed. Eight major secondary function 'task clusters' can be isolated in this regard:

- Support to the Police Services in the maintenance of law and order. This typically includes SANDF support to the SAPS in routine crime prevention (roadblocks, cordons, house-to-house searches etc).
- Countering internal threats to the constitutional order. This includes the maintenance of armed capabilities (conventional, semi-conventional and militia) required to prevent secession or armed revolt by internal political groupings against the duly elected democratic government (these tasks could arguably be grouped under the primary function, however).
- Border Protection. The responsibility for border protection in many countries remains the preserve of either the police or a specially constituted Border Guard designed solely for this purpose. The SA Army presently retains responsibility for this function and will assume full responsibility for this function in the future subject to the necessary legal and constitutional amendments.

- Participation in Peace Support Operations. Although South African participation in this arena has been limited thus far, increased involvement is likely – both in terms of South Africa's possible membership of the Security Council and its emerging leadership role on the African continent.
- Maritime Protection. The SA Navy plays an ongoing role in fisheries protection and has recently been requested to extend this assistance to neighbouring countries such as Mozambique and Namibia.
- Support to Socio-Economic Development programmes. RDP-type support already exists in the form of the SANDF's support to the Service Corps, and its involvement in a variety of socio-economic projects in the health and literacy fields. Frequent requests are made to the Department of Defence to render assistance in road construction, water provision, and educational assistance.
- Disaster Relief and Humanitarian Assistance. The SANDF remains involved in this arena on an ad-hoc basis depending on the frequency of requests made for assistance and determined by both its existing capabilities and the availability of forces in this regard.
- In Support of Foreign Policy. Although any external military deployment by the SANDF is supportive of foreign policy initiatives, certain activities – 'flying-the-flag' or utilizing armed capabilities in support of specific diplomatic initiatives (the use of the Outeniqua in support of the Zairois peace talks) – may require the specific allocation of armed force for this purpose.

Two observations can be made in light of the above if one contrasts the actual use of the South African armed forces, both historically and currently, and the manner in which current South African defence doctrine justifies the retention and design of our armed forces. The first is the extent to which the notion of a classic modernist Defence Force, configured to protect the country against an external conventional threat, continues to enjoy a disproportionate influence in the minds of the Defence Force planners and strategists. This appears to be the twin product of the dominance of certain concepts and categories in the minds of South African defence strategists, and the historical influence of Western (largely 20th century) concepts on defence thinking (an influence that was also noted in the civil-military relations debate). Secondly, the preceding examples illustrate the extent to which this South African armed forces have been involved, both historically and currently, in the execution of a variety of secondary functions on a continuous and regular basis. What are the implications of this for the theoreticization of a more appropriate South African defence architecture?

The nature of the ‘threat’ in Africa

In order to critically re-examine the utility of the term ‘threat’ in an African environment, it would be a moot point to examine the nature of conflict in the late 20th century in general and the forms it assumes in Sub-Saharan Africa in particular. Conflict within this scenario translates itself mostly, and with very few exceptions, into intra-state conflict either between opposing political or civil groups, or between the central government and secessionist or guerilla movements (classic conventional conflicts have been few—bar the North African Campaign during the Second World War and the semi-conventional battles between the South Africans and Angolans during the 1980s). The origin of these conflicts, almost without exception, have their origins in a variety of environmental, demographic, economic, political and developmental factors—factors which, notwithstanding the role of military force in peace support operations, demand socio-economic and not military strategies and responses.

When conflict does translate itself into inter-state conflict two phenomenon are immediately apparent:

- Firstly, the incidence of such inter-state conflict occurs primarily at the level of implicit and explicit support by neighbouring countries for dissident movements operating in these neighbouring countries. Inter-state conflict defined as conventional war between two sovereign states has rarely occurred. Even the ongoing crisis within the Democratic Republic of the Congo bears testimony to this observation. Uganda and Rwanda support the rebels and rarely come into contact with DRC troops. Zimbabwe, Angola and Namibia supported the Kabila government and rarely came into contact with Ugandan and Rwandan troops.
- When such conflict does occur, rarely does it assume the form of conventional, high technology inter-state rivalry. The recent involvement of Rwanda, Uganda and Angola in the fighting that led to the liberation of Zaire for instance was confined to material support for the indigenous Zairois guerilla and militia forces supplemented, occasionally, by low-level light infantry and special forces from the neighbouring country when required. Angola’s invasion of Congo-Brazzaville during 1997 was conducted mainly with light, highly mobile infantry and artillery forces. A similar argument can be made regarding the force capabilities utilized by Tanzania in its invasion of Uganda.

The determination of roles, missions and tasks, and the planning and design of force structures for the armed forces in these contingencies is, thus, a very different conceptual and practical exercise to planning for classic threats in the European sense of the word. If forces were to be designed for the likely types of external threats mentioned above, then it is questionable whether high-tech

and advanced conventional forces would be appropriate. Given the low force-to-space ratio that characterizes much of the African continent and the dispersed nature of fighting, it would seem preferable to rely on larger, light infantry contingents supported by special forces and appropriate air and maritime capabilities.

Rephrasing the question: What are defence forces for?

The answer to the strategic and intellectual challenges outlined above lies not in a reformulation of answers, but in a reconstruction of the questions that underpin much of the logic and methodology of defence thinking. Rather than positing an external (invariably conventionally armed aggressor) as being the justification (and answer) for the question 'What are Armed Forces used against?', it would be more appropriate to rephrase the question to read 'What are Armed Forces for?'. The answer to this question is less complex than it seems and a suggestion is made in this regard.

It would be more appropriate, it is argued here, to define Armed Forces as those policy instruments (be they landward, maritime or airborne) which are placed at the disposal of the state to manage those crises of sufficient magnitude which other state departments, either collectively or individually, are not equipped to manage. They do this because of their unique features—their ability to project force, their superior organizational abilities, and their ability, if required, to judiciously manage the instruments of state violence. The nature of those tasks which the state may expect the armed forces to execute will be determined by the short-to medium term environment within which a country is placed specific on the basis of continually changing political, developmental and budgetary realities.

Notwithstanding the belief of most defence planners in the aphorism of 'We design and budget for the primary function and we execute the secondary functions with the collateral utility derived from our primary force design', a real tension does appear to be developing between this perspective and the emerging realities of the secondary function arena. This tension is reflected at two levels. Firstly it is partially reflected in growing political and public pressure calling for the increased deployment of armed forces in their secondary roles – particularly when it concerns political and financial motivations for maintaining defence expenditure at its present levels.

Secondly, the South African armed forces cannot, and with growing pressure to participate in the secondary function arena will be less likely to, execute secondary functions on the basis of collateral utility. The SANDF has neither the budget, the equipment (in terms of inventory size and capabilities), nor the personnel to do so. A much more realistic assessment of the role which the secondary function plays in determining force design, equipment pur-

chase and training requirements needs to be made. This is already a process with which many modern armed forces are underway – the influence of Canada's and Denmark's participation in peace support operations on their respective force designs, and the role of the UK's foreign policy requirements in determining the size and capabilities of British armed forces for instance. Some suggestions with regard to a more precise 'balancing' of primary and secondary functions in South African force planning are outlined below.

Designing for changing realities: Mission redefinition and its influence on doctrine and force design.

It seems likely that the South African armed forces of the future will be increasingly configured around non-traditional roles and secondary functions, and that these roles will encompass, in addition to the 'primary function', regional security, peace operations, a variety of internal stability tasks, protection of the civil power against unconstitutional action, border protection, and maritime protection. The following policy challenges will have to be anticipated in the forthcoming decade if this force design is to be consistent with political, fiscal and practical realities:

- Although forces will be maintained for preservation of territorial integrity and sovereignty, these will probably tend towards cheaper, lighter and less technology-intensive forces with a strong emphasis on reservist and part-time components. Certainly a more detailed appreciation needs to be made of the extent to which under-explored doctrines such as civilian-based defence and guerilla tactics (the Unconventional Brigades proposed by the Army Sub-Workgroup during the Joint Military Co-ordinating Council process for instance) could be configured with existing area defence capabilities to provide cheaper and more wide-spread defensive 'cover' than is presently the case (a cover that would be more consistent with the country's 'primarily defensive' posture than is presently the case).
- A greater recognition needs to be afforded to the secondary functions within the context of defence policy and planning. Two important factors need to be considered in this regard:
 - This does not entail an abrogation of the responsibility of the state to provide for the preservation of territorial integrity and the protection of sovereignty. It simply entails executing this in as cost effective a manner as possible and in such a way that the state does not lose the ability to execute the other tasks which the armed forces will be called on to perform in the short, medium and long-term.
 - A prioritization of those secondary functions for which it will be necessary to budget and design. For financial and practical reasons it is clear-

ly impossible to budget and design for all those secondary functions listed in the 'task clusters' referred to above. However, it is clear that certain 'task clusters' will have a direct impact on defence budgeting and force design configuration. These will include such activities as peace support operations, border security, support to the SAPS in the maintenance of law and order, and maritime protection.

Certain 'task clusters' should not be designed for, however, and should either be avoided or only executed if the armed forces have the short-term capacity to do so. These include those 'task clusters' such as support to the RDP, designing for specific foreign policy initiatives, disaster relief and humanitarian assistance. Allowing a developing country, and a country oriented towards the judicious use of its scarce resources, designing its armed forces solely for its primary function, appears to be a luxury that few developing countries can afford.

In conclusion a more appropriate force design option for the current South African National Defence Force is one which maintains a deterrence capability predicated on a mixture of conventional and non-conventional capabilities with a greater reliance on the guerilla traditions which South Africans, both boer and black alike, have used with great efficacy throughout the country's history. To accomplish the secondary functions it would see an increased emphasis on landward territorial forces, air transport capabilities, combat helicopter capabilities and certain blue water capabilities. It would, for financial reasons, envisage a diminished role for air fighter, submarine and armour capabilities.

Conclusion

The Defence Review was undoubtedly a historic process in the history of South African civil-military relations. It opened the terrain of the hitherto closed defence debate to a wide range of actors from political society, civil society and the state. It bestowed a high level of legitimacy on the Department of Defence and provided the first reliable computation of defence needs and requirements for many decades. It has the potential to be replicated by the countries of the region—a phenomenon that will greatly enhance the process of demilitarization, disarmament and confidence-building within Southern Africa—although much will depend on their preparedness to countenance the levels of transparency and open debate which characterized the Defence Review. Yet, as argued in this paper, a crucial tension lies at the heart of South African defence planning and this concerns the extent to which defence planners are realistically designing armed forces for the existing and likely challenges which they may face in future.

A rigorous and critical re-appraisal of the roles, tasks, doctrinal and strategic assumptions, and equipment acquisitions of the armed forces of developing countries is required if they are to remain affordable, appropriate to the defence needs of the country concerned and adequate in terms of their technical capabilities. Already the country has embarked on a major re-equipment process which will, by its very nature, circumscribe the types of tasks which the defence force will be able to execute in future. In a very real sense South African defence planners will have to disenthral themselves of many of the assumptions upon which they operate (a process that is already occurring implicitly within the Department of Defence). The following observation is pertinent in this regard:

As long as imported theories and cultural movements remain divorced from the opposition of forces which are the only means of lending specific importance and historical density to the signs produced in Latin American cultures, they act as little more than orthopaedic aides within the contexts of those cultures. Characteristically, this kind of production exhausts itself in mere formal repetitions or 'doctrinal mannerism'.⁸

It is precisely this 'doctrinal mannerism' which developing countries can ill-afford to emulate.

Endnotes

1. Defence in a Democracy, *South African White Paper on Defence 1996* and the *South African Defence Review 1998*, 1 Military Printing Regiment, Pretoria, South Africa, 1998.
2. 1990 is significant in the sense that it was the year that President F W De Klerk unbanned the liberation movements and initiated the process of multi-party negotiations which led, in 1994, to the adoption of a new Constitution and the convening of democratic elections.
3. *South African White Paper on Defence*, op cit, 1998.
4. *South African White Paper on Defence*, op cit, page 16.
5. The Transformation Process referred to here was instituted in all government departments by the new South African government in 1995. It sought to ensure that the size, roles and functions of government departments were consistent with government's fiscal constraints, policy imperatives and delivery goals.
6. D Chuter, What are Armies For, in *Brasseys Defence Yearbook: 1996*, Brasseys, UK, 1996, p 419.
7. Typical examples of this in the South African context have included the following:
 - external wars of conquest: the invasion of German West Africa in 1915.

- in support of allied commitments: the Union Defence Force's participation in the First World War and the Second World War.
 - in support of UN-brokered agreements: the Korean War in 1953, support to Mozambique in 1994, and support to Angola in 1995.
 - various pre-emptive raids by the former SADF on the Front Line States in retaliation for their support of the liberation movements from the late 1970s onwards to the late 1980s.
 - internal stability deployment in support of the police: the crushing of the 1915 Rebellion, the 1922 white mineworkers strike, the 1946 African mineworkers strike, support to the police during the declaration of the 1961 State of Emergency, the crushing of the Pogo resistance in the Eastern Cape in 1963, support to the police in the 1976 riots, and deployment in support of the SAPS from 1984 to the present.
 - in support of socio-economic programmes as testified to by its involvement in the National Management System from 1984–1989, in both its National Security and its National Welfare components, and its present support for the RDP, most notable in the activities of the Service Corps.
 - the colonization and occupation of a neighbouring country as evidenced in the occupation of Namibia from 1915–1989.
 - its ongoing role in border protection—a task that was originally assumed from the SAPS in the early 1970s and one that continues to the present day.
8. N Richard, Postmodernism and Periphery, in T Docherty (ed), *Postmodernism: A Reader*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1994, p 465.