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The South African National Defence Force, 1994 -2009: a historical perspective

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The South African National Defence Force, 1994-2009: a historical perspective

The writer describes the transformation of the South African Army (i.e. the army functioning during apartheid) in South African National Defence Force. The above process was forced by a great “historical turn” of the Republic of South Africa, when the ruling white elite decided to disassemble the race segregation system and allow the black majority to exercise power. The process of re-designing the army and police forces was one of the most risky ones as it assumed the creation of a formation composed of veterans who still several months ago were deadly enemies. The new army was created from the personnel of a ‘white’ army of the Republic of South Africa, a formation of armed quasi-sovereign bantustans, units of African National Congress, Azanian People’s Liberation Army (a formation of a Pan-African Congress) and the self-defence forces of KwaZulu-Natal. Despite many problems, which sometimes were very serious, such as an abrupt decrease in discipline of the army, the growth of crimes committed by soldiers (the most tragic ones were the murders of white officers and non-commissioned officers by black soldiers) and a drastic deterioration of the technical and tactical training, it seems that the new “national” army of the Republic of South Africa has left the most difficult changes behind entering a road of reconstructing the combat capacity.

1. Introduction

The Constitution of the new democratic Republic of South Africa (RSA) was adopted on 8 May 1996. Chapter 11 of the Constitution deals with the country’s security services and makes provision for “a single defence force” which, according to Section 200(1), “must be structured and managed as a disciplined military force”. Section 200(2) then states: “The primary object of the defence force is to defend and protect the Republic, its territorial integrity and its people in accordance with the Constitution and the principles of international law regulating the use of force.” Furthermore: “The President as head of the national executive is Commander-in-Chief of the defence force, and must appoint the Military Command of the defence force” (Section 202(1)), and: “A civilian secretariat for defence must be established by national legislation to function under the direction of the Cabinet member responsible for defence” (Section 204)¹.

¹ *The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996 (s.l., s.a.)*, pp. 112-114. See also the Defence Act (Act 42 of 2002), which further stipulates the Department of Defence’s mandate.

By the time this Constitution was adopted, the new RSA was already just over two years old, having come into being after the country's first-ever truly democratic elections at the end of April 1994, when the African National Congress came to power, and Mr Nelson Mandela became the first black president of the country. As from Wednesday 27 April 1994, i.e. election day, the South African Defence Force (SADF) was known as the South African National Defence Force (SANDF). Thus, while the new government was still finding its feet in the wake of the April 1994 election, the country already had a new-look defence force that could, in accordance with the Constitution, safeguard the fledgling democracy, albeit that in practice there were still many teething problems.

Against this background, and proceeding from the assumption that any country undeniably needs a well-trained, well-equipped and disciplined defence force, it is the purpose of this article to provide a review of the history of the SANDF in the first 15 years of its existence (i.e. 27 April 1994 to 27 April 2009), and to critically analyse developments in the SANDF during those years. Much emphasis will be placed on the SANDF's equipment. The track record of the SANDF in the course of the past 15 years will also be evaluated, and some of the questions that will be addressed include the following: What did integration, affirmative action and transformation in general entail for the SANDF? How does the SANDF's order of battle in 2009 compare with the 1994 order of battle (i.e., how strong was the SANDF in 1994 and what is its strength today)? What problems/challenges did the SANDF face in the course of the past 15 years? To what extent have these challenges been met? Reference will be made, *inter alia*, to the controversial arms deal, the impact that HIV/AIDS has had on the SANDF, rationalisation, problems with regard to discipline, and the SANDF's role in peacekeeping operations. What follows is merely a brief review of these aspects, as well as related issues, and will hopefully stimulate debate².

2. Transformation

"Transformation" has become a buzzword in the "new" post-1994 RSA, while in reality transformation/change lies at the root of, and characterises most if not all historical developments. The history of the old SADF and its predecessor, the Union Defence Forces (UDF), was also characterised by transformation. The UDF, established in 1912, had still been in its infancy when the Great (First World) War broke out in 1914, but was quickly transformed into a formidable fighting machine that successfully suppressed the rebellion

² This study overlaps to some extent with, but also builds on two articles written by the author on the first decade of the SANDF. See A Wessels, "Die Suid-Afrikaanse Nasionale Weermag, 1994-2004", published in two parts in the *Journal for Contemporary History* 29(3), December 2004, pp. 168-183 and 30(1), June 2005, pp. 103-118. As in the case of the previous articles, all the sources used in writing the article are freely available, including several editions of *The military balance*, the *South African defence industry directory, 2004-2005* (Centurion, s.a.), the annual reports of the South African Department of Defence, the SANDF's official webpage, <www.mil.za>, as well as other webpages such as <www.saaiforce.co.za>, <www.navy.mil.za> and <navy.org.za>.

of a (small) portion of the Afrikaner population in South Africa,³ and then saw action in German South West Africa (today Namibia), German East Africa (today Tanzania), the Middle East and on the Western Front in France and Belgium⁴. After the war, the UDF – like most other Allied forces – was scaled down drastically, to such an extent that when the Second World War broke out in 1939, it had to be built up again – an objective that was successfully achieved within a short space of time⁵. In Abyssinia (today Ethiopia), North Africa, Italy, in the air, and at sea, the UDF made a substantial contribution towards the Allied war effort⁶.

After the cessation of hostilities in 1945, the UDF was – once again – scaled down drastically. In 1948 the National Party (NP) came to power, implemented its racially-based policy of separate development (apartheid), and subjected the country's civil service, including the armed forces, to Afrikanerisation (Afrikaner-focused affirmative action). As part of the Western World's efforts to stem the spreading of Communism, South Africa sent an air force contingent to take part in the war in Korea (1950-1953)⁷, and in the course of the 1950s and 1960s built up its defence force⁸, transforming it into a small but effective conventional force. However, when South African security forces were confronted by South West African People's Organization (SWAPO) insurgents in the north of South West Africa/Namibia in 1966, the SADF was, to a large extent, neither equipped nor trained to fight an antiguerrilla war. But the SADF soon adapted to the new challenge, and in the course of

³ See, for example, Union of South Africa, *Report on the outbreak of the rebellion and policy of the government with regard to its suppression* (UG10-'15, Pretoria, 1915); Union of South Africa, *Report of the select committee on the rebellion* (SC1-'15, Cape Town, 1915); GD Scholtz, *Die rebellie 1914-15* (Johannesburg, 1942).

⁴ For the UDF's role in World War I, see, for example, TR Ungleich, *The defence of German South-West Africa during World War I* (M.A., University of Miami, 1974); JJ Collyer, *The campaign in German South West Africa 1914-1915* (Pretoria, 1937); G Lange, *Urgent imperial service: South African forces in German South West Africa 1914-1915* (Johannesburg, 1991); JA Brown, *They fought for King and Kaiser: South Africans in German East Africa 1916* (Johannesburg, 1991); JJ Collyer, *The South Africans with General Smuts in German East Africa 1916* (Pretoria, 1939); KA Digby, *Pyramids and poppies (the First SA Infantry Brigade in Libya, France and Flanders 1915-1919)* (Johannesburg, 1993); J Buchan, *The South African forces in France* (Nelson, 1920).

⁵ See, for example, A Wessels, „Die opbou van die Unie-Verdedigingsmagte in die tydperk September 1939 tot September 1941”, *Journal for Contemporary History* 19(3), December 1994, pp. 1-22.

⁶ For the UDF's role in World War II, see, for example, N Orpen, *East African and Abyssinian campaigns* (Cape Town, 1968); N Orpen, *War in the desert* (Cape Town, s.a.); N Orpen, *Victory in Italy* (Cape Town, 1975); J Kros, *War in Italy: with the South Africans from Taranto to the Alps* (Rivonia, 1992); JA Brown, *A gathering of eagles: the campaigns of the South African Air Force in Italian East Africa June 1940-November 1941, with an introduction 1912-1939* (Cape Town, 1970); JA Brown, *Eagles strike: the campaigns of the South African Air Force in Egypt, Cyrenaica, Libya, Tunisia, Tripolitania and Madagascar 1941-1943* (Cape Town, 1974); HJ Martin and ND Orpen, *Eagles victorious: the South African forces over the Mediterranean and Europe, in Italy, the Balkans and the Aegean, and from Gibraltar and West Africa* (Cape Town, 1977); CJ Harris, *War at sea: South African maritime operations during World War II* (Rivonia, 1991); LCF Turner et al., *War in the southern oceans 1939-1945* (Cape Town, 1961).

⁷ See, for example, DM Moore and P Bagshawe, *South Africa's Flying Cheetahs in Korea* (Rivonia, 1991); W Brent, „Flying Cheetahs”: *Korea 1950-1953* (Nelspruit, s.a.).

⁸ For the expansion of the SADF and the acquisition of new armoured vehicles, aircraft, helicopters, warships and also (at the beginning of the 1970s) submarines, see, for example, H-R Heitman, *South African arms and armour: a concise guide to armaments of the South African Army, Navy and Air Force* (Cape Town, 1988), p. 42 et seq.; H Potgieter and W Steenkamp, *Aircraft of the South African Air Force* (Morningside, 1995), pp. 34, 36, 44-45, 52-53, 64-65, 70-71, 90-91, 96-97, 102-103, 112-113, 118-119, 124-125, 132-133; A du Toit, *South Africa's fighting ships past and present* (Rivonia, 1992), pp. 206-239, 267-277.

the next 20 years was transformed into a highly effective counterinsurgency (COIN) force, while at the same time improving its conventional fighting abilities. In the course of the Namibian War of Independence (1966-1989), the SADF's COIN and conventional capacities were tested to the utmost, especially when the COIN struggle spilled over into Angola and became interwoven with the civil war that broke out there, after that Portuguese territory had gained independence in 1975⁹. So, the history of the SADF, and of its predecessor (the UDF), is characterised by transformation.

When a negotiated settlement enabled South Africa to withdraw from Angola and South West Africa, and the latter territory at long last became independent – as Namibia – in 1990, the battle-trained, large and highly effective SADF was transformed into a smaller peace-time defence force. This military transformation process coincided with the dramatic political changes that took place in the RSA from 1990 to 1994, which were set in motion by State President FW de Klerk's watershed speech in Parliament on 2 February 1990. These changes led to the unbanning of the ANC and several other organisations, the freeing of Mr Nelson Mandela and other political prisoners, and the start of negotiations between erstwhile political enemies, which eventually culminated in the RSA's first truly democratic elections in April 1994¹⁰.

By the time the new SANDF was established on 27 April 1994, its strength and order of battle had been reduced in certain areas from that of the old SADF in 1989, i.e., at the end of the war "up north". For example, in 1994 the South African (SA) Army had approximately 47 000 soldiers, compared to the about 77 000 soldiers in 1989, although in 1989 there were 17 400 permanent force members (including 5 400 black and coloured soldiers), whereas there were 18 000 in 1994 (including 4 000 black and coloured soldiers) – the big difference being that in 1994 there were only 29 000 white national servicemen, compared to the 58 500 who were in service in 1989. From 1989 to 1994, there was no reduction in the number of tanks (250), or Ratel infantry fighting vehicles (1 500), while there was an increase in the number of armoured cars (from 1 200 to 1 300), armoured personnel carriers (from 1 500 to some 1 660), guns/howitzers (from 155 to 200) and multiple rocket-launchers (120 to 180). The SA Air Force (SAAF)'s personnel decreased from 11 000 to 10 000 in the years 1989 to 1994, and the total number of aircraft and helicopters dropped from 798 (24 types) to 623 (26 types), owing to the fact that, although a number of light aircraft and helicopters had been taken over from the former so-called independent TBVC countries (Transkei, Bophuthatswana, Venda and Ciskei), including ten BK-117 helicopters, all of the Air Force's Buccaneer, Canberra, Albatross, Skymaster, C-160, Bosbok and Kudu aircraft, as well as

⁹ For more on the Namibian War of Independence, see, for example, W Steenkamp, *South Africa's Border War, 1966-1989* (Johannesburg, 1989); FJ du T Spies, *Operasie Savanna: Angola 1975-1976* (Pretoria, 1989); D Herbstein and J Evenson, *The devils are among us: the war for Namibia* (London, 1989); J Geldenhuys, *At the front: a general's account of South Africa's Border War* (Johannesburg, 2009); D Lord, *From fledgling to eagle: the South African Air Force during the Border War* (Johannesburg, 2008); P Stiff, *The covert war: Koevoet operations, Namibia, 1979-1989* (Alberton, 2004); P Stiff, *Nine days of war* (Alberton, 1991); as well as two special editions of the *Journal for Contemporary History*, namely 31(3), December 2006 and 34(1), February 2009, which deal exclusively with that conflict.

¹⁰ For more on the political events of 1990-1994, see, for example, W Beinart, *Twentieth-century South Africa* (Cape Town, 1994), pp. 250-260; H Giliomee and B Mbenga (eds), *New history of South Africa* (Cape Town, 2007), pp. 396-408; TRH Davenport and C Saunders, *South Africa: a modern history* (5th edition, London, 2000), pp. 559-580.

the Wasp and Super Frelon helicopters, had been withdrawn from service. The SA Navy (SAN)'s personnel strength had been further reduced from 6 500 to 4 500, but its number of "major" warships remained the same, at 24 hulls (three submarines, nine strike craft, four mine-hunters, four minesweepers, two combat support ships, one hydrographic survey ship and one torpedo recovery/diving support ship) – bearing in mind, however, that in 1985 no fewer than 13 "major" ships had been withdrawn from service, including the Navy's last frigate. The Medical Service had 8 000 members in 1989 and 6 000 in 1994. So, all in all, the SADF had 103 000 active members in 1989 (including 64 000 national servicemen), plus 425 000 reserves (including 140 000 commando members), while in 1994 the SANDF had 67 500 active members (including 35 400 national servicemen), plus 360 000 reserves (including 140 000 commando members)¹¹.

The new SANDF was comprised of the old SADF, plus the defence forces of the TBVC countries, the military wings of the ANC and the Pan-Africanist Congress (PAC) – respectively uMkhonto weSizwe (MK) and the Azanian People's Liberation Army (APLA) – as well as certain KwaZulu-Natal Self-protection Forces. The amalgamation of no fewer than eight defence forces/organisations into one integrated new defence force was no small feat, especially in the light of the fact that some of the forces (in particular the SADF and MK) had for many years been locked in an armed struggle¹². However, on 27 April 1994, the SANDF was only an integrated force on paper, and it would take several years before the integration process was successfully completed. There were vast differences between the training and military culture of, for example, the SADF and TBVC defence forces on the one hand, and MK and APLA on the other hand. The fact that the integration process was conducted relatively smoothly can, to a large extent, be ascribed to the role played by the British Military Advisory and Training Team (BMATT)¹³.

Ideally, integration should follow rationalisation, and not the other way round; but with the formation of the SANDF, this was not possible, and the integration of so many armed forces and the concomitant transformation and affirmative action, meant that the Defence Force soon had more persons occupying the rank of general (brigadier general and higher in the Army and SAAF, and rear admiral [junior grade] and higher in the SAN) than ever before. Several years after its establishment, the inflation of ranks in the SANDF was still continuing; for example, in 2001 there were 193 officers in general posts and in 2003 there were 206 – i.e., one general for every 291 defence force members (compared to one general for 2 428 personnel in the military forces of the United States of America). In 2002, the halving of the number of posts for generals would have saved the defence force R1 billion.

¹¹ *The military balance 1989-1990* (London, 1989), pp. 139-140; *The military balance 1993-1994* (London, 1993), pp. 217-219; Heitman, pp. 41-89; Potgieter and Steenkamp, p. 36 *et seq.*; H Potgieter *et al.*, *More than game: a salute to the South African Air Force* (Morningside, 1995), p. 18 *et seq.*; R Sharpe (ed.), *Jane's fighting ships 1989-90* (London, 1989), pp. 474-477; R Sharpe (ed.), *Jane's fighting ships 1993-94* (London, 1993), pp. 614-617.

¹² See, for example, P Frankel, *Soldiers in a storm: the armed forces in South Africa's democratic transition* (Boulder, 2000), *passim*; R Williams, "Integration or absorption? The creation of the South African National Defence Force, 1993 to 1999", *African Security Review* 11(2), 2002, pp. 17-25.

¹³ See, for example, R Brownlee and I Liebenberg, „Reflections on the integration of the military in South Africa”, *African Security Review* 4(2), 1995, pp. 26-31; "Problems of guerrilla integration process", *South Africa Report* 16(8), 27 February 1998, p. 4; "Integration: 1 year later", *Salut* 2(6), June 1995, pp. 35, 37-48; *Volksblad*, 18 December 2002, p. 7.

Today (2009) there are 218 generals in the SANDF; i.e. one general for every 282 SANDF members¹⁴. Ideally only those officers who genuinely deserve it should be promoted to the rank of general, and such posts should not be created artificially merely to increase so-called “representativity” (i.e., to get the “racial balance” right). Just like all other government sectors, the SANDF is supposed to consist of 64,68% black, 24,35% white, 10,22% coloured and 0,75% Asian members. By March 2003, this composition had more or less been attained, with approximately 64% of SANDF personnel being black, 25% white, 10% coloured and 1% Asian¹⁵. By mid-2005 there were 63% blacks, 23% whites, 13% coloureds and 1% Asians in the SANDF¹⁶.

Ideally, too, the ideologically-tainted term “affirmative action” should be replaced by the more realistic concept of “corrective action” (Afrikaans: “regstellende aksie”), which, in the positive sense of the term, implies that genuine mistakes of the past must be corrected, without making new mistakes in the process. It is also not a process that should be allowed to continue *ad infinitum*. As early as the end of 1999, a previous Minister of Defence, Mr Mosiuoa Lekota, stated that although the SANDF needed to become representative of the South African population as a whole as soon as possible, this could not occur at the expense of white officers, whose expertise had been built up over many years¹⁷. Interestingly enough, MK’s Military Veterans’ Organisation supported Lekota when he added that MK and APLA freedom fighters first needed to acquire the necessary experience before they could be appointed to senior positions¹⁸. On the whole, the SANDF has, in the course of the past 15 years, succeeded in attaining a high level of representativity, without undermining the morale of white personnel too much, or causing too many disciplinary problems. The extent to which the combat readiness of the defence force has been undermined is a moot point. Ideally, transformation should never undermine efficiency; but since 1994 transformation in the SANDF has, unfortunately, indeed undermined efficiency – at least to some extent and in certain areas. From 2001 to 2009, no fewer than 298 pilots and 1 684 technicians resigned from the SAAF. In 2008, there were apparently only 20 fighter pilots left. By November 2009, only 52 out of 122 engineer posts in die SAAF were filled, 763 out of 1 630 technical posts, and 237 out of 369 pilot posts. But in an effort to ensure that the “correct” racial quotas are maintained, interested white candidates are not always accepted for training as pilots, etc.¹⁹ By 2009, it was also clear that the SA Army could no longer fulfil

¹⁴ *The Citizen*, 10 July 2002, p. 1; *Saturday Star*, 16 August 2003, p. 2; “Too many generals in national defence force”, *Southern Africa Report* 21(48), 28 November 2003, pp. 6-7; J Kane-Berman (ed.-in-chief), *South Africa Survey 2002/2003* (Johannesburg, 2003), p. 456; *Volksblad*, 17 November 2003, p. 1 and 23 October 2009, p. 2; CH Bennett, “Bureaucracy and state savings: rank inflation continues”, *African Armed Forces Journal*, July 1998, pp. 8-10.

¹⁵ Kane-Berman (editor-in-chief), p. 456; *South African Department of Defence 2002/3: annual report (s.l., s.a.)*, pp. 23, 52.

¹⁶ *Rapport*, 18 September 2005, p. 13.

¹⁷ *Die Volksblad*, 18 December 1999, p. 7.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 20 December 1999, p. 1 and 21 December 1999, p. 2.

¹⁹ *The Mercury*, 14 September 2009, p. 3; *Volksblad*, 21 August 2009, p. 7, 25 August 2009, p. 8 and 12 September 2009, p. 11; *Business Day*, 27 November 2009, p. 3. Statistics can vary, depending on the day on which a headcount is made.

its operational responsibilities; for example, it could (barely) deploy four of its 11 infantry battalions and only a small portion of its equipment was operational²⁰.

Thus, there were (and still are) a variety of problems to be addressed. For many years the SANDF suffered from “old-age syndrome”. Many of the soldiers from the non-statutory forces that were integrated into the new SANDF were, relatively speaking, fairly old; for example, in 2003, the average age of the lowest ranks was 32, compared to 22 years in most other defence forces. By 2004, only 8% of all SANDF members in the lowest ranks were in the ideal age group of 18-24 years²¹. Since then the rank-age profile of the SANDF has apparently improved by some 40%²².

Ideologically-tainted affirmative action holds within it the germ of racism. Equal and just racial representativity also does not necessarily imply equal and just ethnic representativity, which can cause friction within a particular racial group in a multiracial and multi-ethnic/cultural country such as the RSA²³. In the course of the past 15 years, the SANDF has, on the whole, managed to deal with racial and ethnic diversity in a positive way as part of its transformation process. The diverse groups of officers, soldiers and sailors who were integrated into the new SANDF often had different views with regard to matters such as discipline, however; and from time to time concerns were raised with regard to ill-discipline²⁴. There were instances of officers who cheated during exams or in the writing of assignments²⁵, and of marks that were “adjusted” to enable affirmative action appointees to pass a particular exam or course²⁶. When standards are compromised, there may be dire consequences for the maintenance and deployment of sophisticated weapons systems. To what extent the possible lowering of standards is the cause of accidents, is disputable. Negative perceptions are created when accidents do occur²⁷.

A country’s defence force is to a large extent a microcosm and reflection of the society at large, and in the light of the fact that crime is (unfortunately) a serious problem in the RSA, it is not surprising (albeit still unacceptable) that crime also occurs in the SANDF. Theft also took place in the old SADF, but it has increased since 1994; for example, in May 1998 people with right-wing political views stole a truck, 93 rifles, as well as a number of mortars and machine-guns from 44 Parachute Brigade in Bloemfontein, and on 1 June

²⁰ *Volksblad*, 20 October 2009, p. 4.

²¹ Kane-Berman (editor-in-chief), p. 461; *Financial Mail*, 24 October 2003, p. 29.

²² *South African Yearbook 2008/09* (Pretoria, s.a.), p. 426.

²³ See, for example, A Masondo, „Racism: a problem to be solved”, *Salut* 4(3), March 1997, pp. 28-29; MB Khanyile, “The ethnic factor in the SA National Defence Force: recruitment strategies revisited”, *Politeia* 16(1), 1997, pp. 78-96.

²⁴ See, for example, E Klopper, „Disciplined soldiers are required”, *Salut* 7(12), December 2000, p. 28; JJ Jacobs, “The consequences of poor discipline” (2 parts), *South African Soldier* 8(6), October 2001, pp. 28-29 and 8(7), November 2001, pp. 28-30.

²⁵ See, for example, *Beeld*, 12 January 2000, p. 5, 17 January 2000, p. 6 and 5 April 2000, p. 10; *Die Volksblad*, 18 January 2000, p. 5; *Pretoria News*, 21 June 2000, p. 2; *Sunday Times*, 23 June 2002, p. 1; *The Citizen*, 24 June 2002, p. 30; *Sunday Argus*, 20 July 2008, p. 25.

²⁶ See, for example, *Volksblad*, 9 January 2002, p. 4.

²⁷ See, for example, the death of nine soldiers (and 15 injured) when an anti-aircraft gun went awry during an exercise at Lohatla on 12 October 2007. *The Independent on Saturday*, 13 October 2007, p. 1 and 26 January 2008, p. 1; *Rapport*, 16 March 2008, p. 15; *Volksblad*, 13 October 2007, pp. 1-2,6, 8,11,15 October 2007, pp. 1-2, 18 October 2007, p. 4; *The Mercury*, 15 October 2007, p. 3 and 17 October 2007, p. 4.

1998, 8 000 rifles and at least 120 000 rounds of small-arms ammunition were stolen when a truck was hijacked between the De Brug training terrain and Ladybrand²⁸. The fact that stolen small arms and ammunition are often used in armed robberies is a cause for grave concern. In April 2000 it was reported that in the course of the previous seven months, military equipment and stores to the value of approximately R7 million had been stolen at several bases, including guns, pistols and even an FT5-rocket²⁹. It is a cause for great concern that so many members of the SANDF are accused of serious crimes; for example, 891 crimes were allegedly committed by SANDF personnel from April to September 2005, and 3 377 unfinalised cases of crime were carried over from 2004 to 2005³⁰.

The most serious acts of criminality concerned the shooting of white officers and others by black members of the Defence Force, fortunately restricted to four tragic incidents: a black lieutenant had shot and killed six white uniform personnel (also wounding five others, of whom one later died) as well as a white female civilian Defence Force member at 1 SA Infantry Battalion, Bloemfontein, before being shot and killed (16 September 1999); a black lieutenant killed his white company commander at 7 Infantry Battalion, Phalaborwa (10 July 2000); a black sailor killed a white sublieutenant on board a minesweeper in the Simon's Town Naval Base, and then shot and fatally wounded himself (19 September 2000), and a black corporal shot his white commanding officer at Group 27, Kroonstad on 29 May 2007. The officer died of his wounds in 1 Military Hospital, Pretoria, on 31 May 2007³¹. There were also shooting incidents involving SANDF personnel deployed on peace-keeping missions, for example in Burundi on 20 February 2002 (one killed, two wounded), 17 November 2004 (one killed) and 20 May 2005 (three killed, four wounded)³².

These unfortunate incidents could at worst have derailed the transformation process, or at least caused serious tensions in the SANDF; but it is to the credit of the commanding officers and ordinary members of the Defence Force that the day-to-day running of the Force was not affected and that the incidents were seen for what they were: isolated incidents, sometimes with racial undertones, committed by individuals with particular problems. In the meantime, the positive transformation of the SANDF continued unabatedly, with more

²⁸ *Die Volksblad*, 3 June 1998, pp. 1-2 and 4 June 1998, p. 9; *The Star*, 1 June 1998, p. 5, 3 June 1998, p. 3 and 4 June 1998, pp. 1, 3; *The Cape Times*, 2 June 1998, p. 5 and 3 June 1998, p. 3; *Sowetan*, 2 June 1998, p. 10, 3 June 1998, p. 2 and 4 June 1998, p. 3; *The Citizen*, 4 June 1998, p. 1 and 11 June 1998, p. 1; *Business Day*, 4 June 1998, p. 1; *City Press*, 7 June 1998, p. 2; *The Sunday Independent*, 7 June 1998, p. 5; *Mail & Guardian*, 5-11 June 1998, p. 2; *The Star & SA Times* (London), 20 May 1998, p. 1.

²⁹ *The Mercury*, 5 April 2000, p. 3; *Die Volksblad*, 8 April 2000, p. 7.

³⁰ *The Star*, 31 January 2007, p. 1.

³¹ *Die Volksblad*, 17 September 1999, pp. 1-3, 18 September 1999, pp. 1, 3-4, 6, 8 May 2000, p. 9, 19 September 2000, p. 1, 20 September 2000, p. 2 and 16 September 2009, pp. 1, 3-5; *Rapport*, 26 September 1999, p. 8; *Beeld*, 9 May 2000, p. 8, 11 July 2000, p. 1, 17 October 2000, p. 7 and 10 November 2000, p. 7; *The Star*, 10 May 2000, p. 6 and 20 September 2000, p. 3; *Sunday Times*, 24 September 2000, p. 7; *Business Day*, 12 July 2000, p. 7 and 13 July 2000, p. 2; *Sowetan*, 12 July 2000, p. 3; *Business Day*, 19 May 2000, p. 2; *The Citizen*, 13 July 2000, p. 3, 20 September 2000, p. 3 and 22 September 2000, p. 3; "Interim report: ministerial commission of inquiry. Is discipline at the root of the problem?", *African Armed Forces Journal*, November 2000, p. 19; "Ministerial inquiry submits its interim report", *Salut* 7 (11), November 2000, pp. 5-6; *Beeld*, 30 May 2007, p. 1; *Rapport*, 3 June 2007, p. 4.

³² *The Citizen*, 22 February 2002, p. 1 and 20 November 2004; *Beeld*, 19 November 2004, p. 4; *Saturday Weekend Argus*, 21 May 2005, p. 1; *The Independent on Saturday*, 21 May 2005, p. 1.

women choosing military careers and pursuing them with success³³; and in 2003, new colours/flags and new rank and other insignia replaced those that had been inherited from the old SADF³⁴. In October 1995, Lt Mondi Gxoyiya became the first black South African who qualified as a pilot in the SAAF³⁵. Earlier, on 14 December 1994, Cdr Yegan Moodley became the first “non-white” South African to take command of a warship – the strike craft SAS *Jan Smuts*³⁶. On 30 July 2003, Lt Cdr Bubele (“Bravo”) Kitié Mhlana, a former member of MK, became the first black person to take command of a “major” SAN warship, when he took over the command of the minesweeper SAS *Kapa*, and on 22 February 2007, now a captain, he became the first black person to command a SAN frigate, namely SAS *Isandlwana*³⁷. Gradually new faces also changed the complexion of the posts of commanders-in-chief: on 1 December 1997 Lt Gen. Davidson Masuku was appointed Surgeon General in the place of Lt Gen. Niel Knobel. He was succeeded, in turn, by Lt Gen. Jurinus Janse van Rensburg in 2000, followed by Lt Gen. Veynand Ramlakan in 2005. From 1 July 1998, Lt Gen. Gilbert Ramano was the Chief of the SA Army in the place of Lt Gen. Reg Otto; and he was succeeded, in turn, by Lt Gen. Solly Shoke on 1 August 2004. Today (2009), the SAAF still has a white commanding officer, namely Lt Gen. Carlo Gagiano, who replaced Lt Gen. Roelf Beukes on 1 March 2005. (The latter had replaced Lt Gen. Willem Hechter on 1 March 2000.) The SAN also had two white commanding officers post-1994, namely Vice-Adm. Robert Simpson-Anderson (who played an enormously important role in keeping the SAN afloat and functioning, while at the same time leading the other arms of the Defence Force in more than one respect, as far as transformation was concerned), followed by Vice-Adm. Johan Retief on 31 October 2000. The latter was succeeded by the very capable Vice-Adm. Refiloe Mudimu as Chief of the SAN on 1 March 2005³⁸.

George Meiring became Chief of the SA Army in 1990, Chief of the SADF in 1993 and of the new SANDF in 1994. He played a crucial part in ensuring that the SADF/SANDF would play a stabilising role in the era of peaceful political transition, that his fellow senior officers would support the new political dispensation, and consequently that they would also be loyal military servants of the new ANC-led government. Indeed, he transformed the old SADF into a “new-look” SANDF. On 1 June 1998, Gen. Meiring was succeeded

³³ See, for example, L Heineken, „Securing South Africa’s future: putting women in the frontline”, *Strategic Review for Southern Africa* 22(2), 2000, pp. 76-102; *The Star*, 26 June 2007, p. 3.

³⁴ See, for example, JJ Jacobs, „New rank insignia for our National Defence Force”, *SA Soldier* 9(8), August 2002, pp. 21-28; L Engelbrecht, „SA Air Force to change stripes as part of transformation”, *African Armed Forces Journal*, May 2001, p. 26; C van Wijk, „The new SANDF rank insignia: a missed opportunity for creating a common identity”, *African Security Review* 12(3), 2003, pp. 105-108.

³⁵ *Sunday Tribune*, 29 October 1995, p. 8.

³⁶ *The Star*, 14 December 1994, p. 10; *The Argus*, 17 August 1995, p. 10.

³⁷ *Navy News* 26(2), 2007, p. 20; *Volksblad*, 31 July 2003, p. 18; *South African Soldier* 19(10), October 2003, p. 23; *Citizen*, 23 February 2007, p. 2; *Pretoria News*, 23 February 2007, p. 13; *Cape Argus*, 23 February 2007, p. 5; *The Star*, 8 March 2007, p. 14; *Weekend Post*, 5 May 2007, p. 4.

³⁸ *Die Volksblad*, 12 March 1997, p. 2 and 7 April 1998, p. 1; *Pretoria News*, 15 July 1998, p. 3; *The Star*, 15 July 1998, p. 5; *Sowetan*, 16 July 1998, p. 6; *Business Day*, 28 May 1998, p. 5 and 15 July 1998, p. 2; *The Daily News*, 15 July 1998, p. 5 and 15 March 2005, p. 17; *The Citizen*, 27 June 1998, p. 3; *Beeld*, 27 June 1998, p. 8 and 25 June 2004, p. 9; *Cape Argus*, 25 June 1998, p. 6; *The Mercury*, 12 March 1997, p. 2 and 25 June 2004, p. 3; *Navy News* 19(6), 2000, pp. 2, 20-28; “News archive: 2000”, <<http://www.saairforce.co.za/newsOO.htm>>, 12 August 2004.

as Chief of the SANDF by Gen. Siphwe Nyanda, formerly MK's Chief of Staff and subsequently the SANDF's Chief of Staff as from June 1994 – and the first black South African to attain the rank of a full general³⁹. On 31 May 2005, Gen. Godfrey Ngwenya succeeded Nyanda as Chief of the SANDF⁴⁰.

In the meantime, since 1994, the SANDF has also undergone structural transformation, which included the disbandment of the old territorial Army commands and of the commando units, the establishment of an Army Office, Air Force Office and Navy Office in the place of the Army, Air Force and Navy headquarters, and the restoration of civilian control over the SANDF, with a Secretary of Defence becoming the administrative head of the Department of Defence, while the Chief of the SANDF commands the armed forces as such⁴¹. But transformation is seldom, if ever, complete; and as the RSA and its Defence Force are confronted by new challenges, other changes will most probably be implemented.

3. A new order of battle

In the years 1994 to 2009, it was not only the structure and complexion of the SANDF that changed to a large extent, but also its size and equipment. On 27 April 1994, the SA Army had (as has already been indicated in Section 2, *supra*) approximately 47 000 soldiers (including 12 000 white and 4 000 black and coloured male permanent force soldiers, 2 000 women and 29 000 white national servicemen), while on 27 April 2009 there were approximately 37 000 soldiers; the majority of them black. The Army's number of tanks was reduced from 250 to 167 (including 133 in store) during the years 1994 to 2009, while the number of armoured cars was reduced from 1 300 to 176 (including 94 in store), the number of infantry fighting vehicles from 1 500 to about 1 200 (including 666 in store), the number of armoured personnel carriers from 1 660 to 810, the number of artillery pieces from 370 to 190 (including 182 in store), the number of multiple rocket-launchers from 180 to 51 (including 30 in store), and the number of anti-aircraft guns from, apparently, as many as 600 to 76⁴².

Interestingly, the SAAF's personnel strength increased somewhat from 10 000 (almost all white, including 3 000 national servicemen and 400 women) in 1994 to some 10 600 of all races in 2009. However, whereas in 1994 the SAAF still had 69 first-rate combat aircraft, plus 190 training jets that were also combat-capable, the 2009 SAAF inventory included only 33 combat-capable training jets (plus 17 Gripen first-rate combat jets on order). In 1994 the SAAF had 85 transport aircraft, compared to 47 in 2009; 130 basic training aircraft (53 in 2009); 12 other aircraft (none in 2009); and 137 helicopters, compared to only 83 in 2009. So, while the SAAF had a total of 623 aircraft and helicopters of 26 types in 1994, it

³⁹ *The Star*, 30 April 1998, p. 1; *The Mercury*, 30 April 1998, p. 1; *Die Volksblad*, 7 April 1998, pp. 1-2 and 20 April 1998, p. 9; *The Star & SA Times* (London), 6 May 1998, pp. 4, 9; "Meiring's departure from Defence Force paves the way for transformation", *Southern Africa Report* 16(14), 10 April 1998, pp. 1-3.

⁴⁰ *The Star*, 14 April 2005, p. 3; *Business Day*, 14 April 2005, p. 1; *Citizen*, 31 May 2005, p. 8.

⁴¹ „Suid-Afrikaanse Nasionale Weermag”, *Bylae tot Beeld*, 27 April 1999, pp. 3, 8; *Beeld*, 22 April 2004, p. 18.

⁴² *The military balance 1993-1994*, pp. 217-218; *The military balance 2009* (London, 2009), p. 319; Heitman, pp. 41-144.

only had 216 of 19 types in 2009⁴³. Today (2009), the SAN has about 6 000 personnel of all races, compared to 4 500 (including a number of coloured and Asian, but no black sailors; 300 women and 900 national servicemen) in 1994. The new-look 2009 Navy has three new submarines, four new frigates, two gun-boats (ex-strike craft), three mine-hunters, one combat support ship and one hydrographic survey ship (for a total of 14 major hulls with a total hull-load displacement of approximately 37 000 tons), compared to a 24-hull navy (of some 47 000 tons) comprising three old submarines, nine strike craft, four mine-hunters, four minesweepers, two combat support ships, one hydrographic survey ship and one torpedo recovery/diving support ship in 1994⁴⁴. The Medical Service had 6 000 white members in 1994 (including 1 500 women and 2 500 national servicemen), while today the South African Medical Health Service has approximately 8 000 members of all races. So, in total, the SANDF today has some 61 600 active members, plus about 12 000 civilians (6 500 in the Army, 2 000 in the SAAF, 2 000 in the SAN and 1 500 in the Military Health Service), but only 15 000 reserves (Army 12 300, SAAF 800, SAN 900, Military Health Service 1 000), while on the eve of the 1994 elections the old SADF had 67 500 active members (including 35 400 white national servicemen, 4 200 women, 4 000 black and coloured soldiers, and a number of coloured and Asian sailors), plus 360 000 citizen force reserves (including 140 000 commando members)⁴⁵.

How and why did these changes with regard to personnel composition and reductions, as well as with regard to equipment, come about? The reasons for the changes, relating to the composition and complexity of the armed forces, have already been pointed out in the previous section, in the discussion concerning the integration and transformation of the Defence Force, and the concomitant affirmative action. The fact of the matter is that in the course of the past 15 years, the SANDF has been scaled down both in terms of personnel and equipment⁴⁶. On the one hand, this can partly be attributed to the amount of money allocated for defence in the budget; for example, in 1988 about 4,7% of the RSA's gross national product (GNP) was spent on defence, as against 4,1% in 1990, 2,7% in 1992, 1,6% in 1996, 1,5% in 2005 and a mere 1,3% in 2009. (Internationally, the average defence budget comprises approximately 2,6% of the GNP⁴⁷.) But on the other hand, the downsizing is also linked to the procurement of new and modern weapon systems. On 19 November 1998, it was announced that, on the previous day, cabinet had approved the procurement of three submarines and four frigates for the SAN, as well as 28 Gripen jets, 24 Hawk jet trainers, 30 light utility helicopters, and in due course also four antisubmarine warfare

⁴³ *The military balance 1993-1994*, pp. 218-219; *The military balance 2009*, p. 320; Heitman, pp. 145-178; Potgieter and Steenkamp, p. 36 *et seq.*; Potgieter *et al.*, p. 18 *et seq.*

⁴⁴ *The military balance 1993-1994*, p. 218; *The military balance 2009*, pp. 319-320; Heitman, pp. 179-189; Sharpe (ed.), *Jane's fighting ships 1993-94*, pp. 614-617; S Saunders (ed.), *Jane's fighting ships 2009-2010* (Coulson, 2009), pp. 733-739.

⁴⁵ *The military balance 1993-1994*, pp. 217-218; *The military balance 2009*, pp. 319-320.

⁴⁶ See in general, for example, LB van Staden, „Rationalisation in the SANDF: the next challenge”, *African Security Review* 6(2), 1997, pp. 37-44; R Ferreira, „Rationalization: an ambivalent process in the South African Army”, *Journal for Contemporary History* 28(2), September 2003, pp. 124-152; „Former guerrillas will go in SANDF down-sizing”, *Southern Africa Report* 17(24), 18 June 1999, pp. 6-7.

⁴⁷ Kane-Berman (editor-in-chief), p. 460; *Sunday Times*, 21 July 1996, p. 3 and 13 June 2004, p. 17; *Volksblad*, 25 August 2009, p. 8; *Race relations survey 1994/5* (Johannesburg, 1995), p. 154. Depending on the particular method of calculation used to determine the GDP, the percentages may differ.

(ASW) helicopters (to be deployed on board the new frigates) for the SAAF. This envisaged procurement comprised an expensive but necessary lifebuoy in an effort to save the SAN and the SAAF from ruin. The initial pricetag of the arms deal amounted to R30 billion⁴⁸, but since then the cost has escalated. Unfortunately the arms deal was also steeped in controversy, partially because of the high costs involved, but also because of allegations with regard to corruption in the procurement process⁴⁹. Whether the corruption charges will ever be openly cleared up is an open question.

With the arms package focusing on re-equipping the SAN and SAAF, the SA Army had to make do with their existing equipment, until the procurement of new land warfare systems, which is scheduled to occur during the 2010s. This equipment will include up to 264 new Patria Badger infantry fighting vehicles (to replace some of the Ratels)⁵⁰. The country's landward forces will have to become more mobile and flexible, which makes the renewal of the SA Army's mechanised and motorised forces imperative. With the acquisition of all 26 Swedish Saab/BAe Gripen jets (including nine trainers), 24 British BAe Hawk advanced training jets, 30 Italian Agusta A-109 light utility helicopters and four British Agusta-Westland Super Lynx 300 ASW helicopters, the strength of the SAAF will increase, relatively speaking (after all, as from 2 April 2008, when the last 14 Cheetah jets were withdrawn from service, it had no frontline ground-attack or interceptor aircraft); but in terms of numbers, the SAAF will still be much weaker than in 1994 or before that. The SAAF is also in need of new large and medium-sized transport aircraft. When SANDF personnel and equipment are deployed on peacekeeping missions, the Defence Force mostly has to rely on private companies to ferry the troops and equipment to their destinations, because the SAAF does not have a sufficient number of transport aircraft – or aircraft that are large enough – to carry out the work. Consequently, it was decided to acquire eight new Airbus A400Ms, but unfortunately the delivery of these aircraft was delayed, owing, *inter alia*, to problems with the new engines. Since October 2009 the deal was plunged into controversy because of escalating costs, and on 5 November 2009 the South African government decided to cancel the order⁵¹. In the meantime, as has already been indicated in the previous section, the SAAF is struggling to retain qualified personnel. It must also ensure that standards with regard to training are not compromised in any way, *inter alia* because the sophisticated new aircraft and helicopters that have been, or will be acquired, require great skill with regard to maintenance and employment⁵².

⁴⁸ *Beeld*, 19 November 1998, p. 1; *Die Volksblad*, 19 November 1998, p. 1. The number of Gripen jets was later reduced from 28 to 26. *Armcor's annual report 2007* (Pretoria, 2007), p. 15. The assistance provided by Mr Bertus Celliers of Armcor with regard to verifying this information, is gratefully acknowledged.

⁴⁹ See, for example, A Feinstein, *After the party: a personal and political journey inside the ANC* (Johannesburg, 2007); T Crawford-Browne, *Eye on the money: one man's crusade against corruption* (Cape Town, 2007); P Holden, *The arms deal in your pocket* (Johannesburg, 2008).

⁵⁰ *The Star*, 18 May 2007, p. 1; *Daily Dispatch*, 18 May 2007, p. 11; *Saturday Star*, 11 August 2007, p. 6.

⁵¹ See, for example, *Financial Mail*, 26 October 2007, p. 26; *Beeld*, 6 November 2008, p. 3; *Defense News*, 22 June 2009, pp. 1, 8; *Volksblad*, 15 October 2009, p. 8, 16 October 2009, p. 2 and 20 October 2009, p. 4; *Business Day*, 6 November 2009, p. 1; *Sowetan*, 6 November 2009, p. 4.

⁵² On 12 May 2009 one of the new A-109 helicopters crashed, killing all three on board – the first loss of one of the new helicopters. *Volksblad*, 13 May 2009, p. 2 and 14 May 2009, p. 4; *The Mercury*, 13 May 2009, p. 1.

As from the mid-1980s already, the SAN had been reduced to a small-ship navy that concentrated on the defence of the RSA's harbours and coastal waters. It played a small but significant role in the SADF's war effort during the war in Namibia and Angola⁵³, and emerged from the apartheid era as the least tainted of all the arms of the SADF. However, by 1994, its submarines and most of its ships were old and difficult to maintain. From 20 March 1998 onwards its strike craft were gradually withdrawn from service. The last four "Ton" class minesweepers were withdrawn from service during 1999-2001 and replaced by second-hand German Type 351 minesweepers, of which six were bought in 2000. However, only two were ever commissioned, and these were withdrawn from service after a short while⁵⁴. The Navy's only torpedo recovery/diving support ship was withdrawn from service on 5 June 2003⁵⁵. From the time that the last "Daphné" class submarine had been withdrawn from service (28 November 2003) until the first new submarine was commissioned (3 November 2005), the SAN – for the first time in more than 30 years – had no submarine capability. On 30 July 2004 the combat support ship SAS *Outeniqua* was withdrawn from service after only 11 years in the SAN, partly because personnel were needed to crew the new frigates⁵⁶. In the meantime, the Naval Base in Durban was scaled down to a Naval Station, and a new Naval Station was commissioned in Port Elizabeth on 2 June 2006⁵⁷.

Although the SAN still has three ships that were designed and built as mine-hunters, the Navy no longer uses them for mine-countermeasures (MCM) work. With the commissioning of four new Meko A-200 frigates (2006-2007) and three new "209" Class (Type 1400MOD) submarines (2005-2008), the Navy's strength has increased, although it now has fewer hulls in commission than in 1994. Fifteen small 10-metre boats have been ordered for the Navy's Maritime Reaction Squadron⁵⁸. The Navy has also indicated that it intends to acquire an amphibious helicopter-carrying assault ship (LHD) which will enable it to support the Army and Air Force in peacekeeping operations, as well as six multimission offshore patrol boats (to replace the remaining gun-boats and mine-hunters), which will also be able to deploy autonomous underwater vehicles (AUVs) for mine-clearance work⁵⁹. Ideally, the SAN should have ten such patrol ships, four dedicated MCM ships, as well as two LHDs (or one LHD, for example of the French "Mistral" class, and one smaller LPD, for example of the Dutch "Johan de Witt" class).

⁵³ A Wessels, „The South African Navy during the years of conflict in Southern Africa, 1966-1989”, *Journal for Contemporary History* 31(3), December 2006, pp. 283-303.

⁵⁴ *Cape Argus*, 9 March 1998, p. 7; *Navy News* 20(2), 2001, pp. 14-19; S Saunders (ed.), *Jane's fighting ships 2003-2004* (London, 2003), p. 645.

⁵⁵ *Navy News* 22(4), 2003, p. 21.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.* 23(1), 2004, pp. 14-18 and 23(2), 2004, p. 2; *Sunday Argus*, 1 August 2004, p. 4.

⁵⁷ *The Herald*, 5 June 2006, p. 5.

⁵⁸ *The Citizen*, 2 December 2008, p. 16.

⁵⁹ See, for example, *The Star*, 5 September 2008, p. 19; *Pretoria News*, 3 March 2009, p. 4.

4. The SANDF and the international community

The dawn of a new political era in the history of South Africa in 1994 normalised the country's foreign relations and opened up new possibilities for the SANDF. On 25 May 1994 the mandatory United Nations (UN) arms embargo, imposed on 4 November 1977, was lifted⁶⁰, which meant that the SANDF could henceforth once again openly buy equipment overseas. For the first time since the mid-1970s, Defence Force personnel could openly attend courses abroad. In addition, since 1994, many foreign officers (especially from Africa) have attended courses presented by the SANDF. Foreign defence forces also utilise South African training areas from time to time (especially the South African Army Combat Training Centre [formerly known as the South African Army Battle School] at Lohatla), and mutual visits by senior defence force personnel occur on a regular basis⁶¹.

The SAN in particular plays a very important diplomatic role, and in general one could argue that of the SANDF's four arms, the Navy has been the most successful since 1994. In the period 1994 to 2009, the Navy's ships were sent on flag-showing cruises to other countries on at least 48 occasions (in contrast to the boycott years during 1977 to 1989, when only six such visits took place), renewing military/naval ties with many Western countries and forging new ties with countries in Africa and the Middle and Far East⁶². Since the acquisition of the new frigates, the SAN also – for the first time since 1985 – has fairly large combat ships that can be used as “grey diplomats”. For example, an extended visit was made by SAS *Spioenkop* to Singapore, the Republic of China, Malaysia, India and Mauritius from 16 September to 6 December 2008⁶³. In addition, whereas only ten flag-showing visits to RSA ports by foreign warships took place in the years 1977 to 1989, 296 such visits were made between 1994 and 2009⁶⁴.

Since 1994, another important role for the SANDF has come to the fore, namely participation in peacekeeping operations. The end of the Cold War has not resulted in peace on earth, and many conflicts have since taken place, or are still continuing, especially in Africa⁶⁵. Against the background of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) and the ideal of an African Renaissance, it is clear why the African Union (AU) is adamant that African countries should solve the continent's problems, *inter alia* through AU- or UN-led peacekeeping operations and also through the establishment of an African stand-

⁶⁰ *Beeld*, 25 May 1994, p. 13.

⁶¹ See, for example, *The Star*, 1 July 1997, p. 5; *Die Burger*, 3 July 1997, p. 7; *Beeld*, 3 July 1997, p. 2, 27 April 1999, p. 6 and 31 October 2003, p. 16; *The Citizen*, 30 August 2002, p. 1; *Volksblad*, 19 July 2003, p. 3; *Pretoria News*, 19 July 2003, p. 2.

⁶² See, for example, A Wessels, „Onwaarskynlike ambassadeurs: vlagvertoonvaarte deur Suid-Afrikaanse oorlogsskepe, 1922-2002”, *Journal for Contemporary History* 27(3), December 2003, pp. 66-78; *The Mercury*, 27 September 2006, p. 6; *Navy News* 27(4), 2008, pp. 28-31 and 27(6), 2008, pp. 20, 28.

⁶³ *Navy News* 28(1), 2009, pp. 16-20.

⁶⁴ See, for example, A Wessels, „Buitelandse vlagvertoonbesoeke aan Suid-Afrikaanse hawens (2): die periode van fluktuerende internasionale betrekkinge, 1961-1994” and „Buitelandse vlagvertoonbesoeke aan Suid-Afrikaanse hawens (3): die eerste dekade van die nuwe RSA, 1994-2004”, *Journal for Contemporary History* 31(2), September 2006, pp. 95-97 and 32(1), June 2007, pp. 223-242; many articles in *Navy News* 23(3), 2004-28(2), 2009. These figures do not include visits by USA prepositioning ships.

⁶⁵ See the loose map with tables and statistics in *The military balance 2009*.

by (or rapid deployment/reaction) force⁶⁶. Since its establishment in 1994, the SANDF has prepared for participation in peacekeeping operations, *inter alia* by taking part in peacekeeping exercises such as Exercise Blue Hungwe (Zimbabwe, 1997)⁶⁷ and Exercise Blue Crane (South Africa, 1999)⁶⁸. Since 1994, the SANDF has taken part in peacekeeping and peace-support operations in, for example, Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Sudan, Ethiopia and Eritrea. Whereas in the year 2000, initially only one SANDF member was deployed in peacekeeping operations, no fewer than 2 828 were deployed in 2009⁶⁹. The most controversial SANDF peacekeeping (or rather cross-border) operation was its involvement (together with the Botswana Defence Force) in Lesotho, 1998-2000⁷⁰.

The deployment of SANDF personnel is not without problems. Not all Defence Force members are willing to serve abroad⁷¹, and the high HIV/AIDS infection rate amongst its personnel tends to hamper deployment. HIV/AIDS not only tarnishes the image of the SANDF – it also hampers its effectiveness. For many years, key role players were in a state of denial with regard to the disease⁷². By 2004 the official infection rate for members of the SANDF was placed at 23%, but independent researchers estimated it to be as high as 40%. It was also alleged that as many as 400 000 working days are lost annually in the SANDF, owing to the pandemic⁷³.

In the light of the fact that a small country like Austria, with a small defence force, has made an enormous contribution towards UN peacekeeping operations since 1960⁷⁴, it can only be hoped that the SANDF will in future be in a position to expand its role in this regard, without ever compromising the defence of the RSA – albeit that if there were more peace and prosperity in the rest of Africa, South Africa would probably have fewer illegal

⁶⁶ See, for example, M Malan, „The African standby force: progress and prospects”, *African Security Review* 12(3), 2003, pp. 71-81; A Wessels, „n Snelontplooiingsmag vir Afrika: enkele historiese perspektiewe”, *Journal for Contemporary History* 28(1), June 2003, pp. 1-15; E Harsch, „Africa builds its own peace forces”, *Africa Recovery* 17(3), October 2003, pp. 1, 14-20; M Denning, „A prayer for Marie: creating an effective standby force”, *Parameters* 34(4), Winter 2004-05, pp. 102-117; P Steyn, „South Africa and peace support operations: limitations, options and challenges”, *African Security Review* 7(1), 1998, pp. 26-36.

⁶⁷ *Die Volksblad*, 9 April 1997, p. 7.

⁶⁸ T Neethling, „Exercise Blue Crane: forward with peacekeeping in Southern Africa?”, *ISSUP Bulletin* 5, July 1999, pp. 1-11; *The Mercury*, 14 April 1999, p. 7 and 23 April 1999, p. 1; *The Daily News*, 14 April 1999, p. 1; *Salut* 6(6), June 1999, pp. 18-21; *Navy News* 18(4), 1999, pp. 10-15.

⁶⁹ *The military balance 2000-2001* (London, 2000), p. 283; *The military balance 2009*, p. 320.

⁷⁰ See, for example, JS Kotze, „Some unresolved military ethical dilemmas at the turn of the century: an introspective look at South Africa’s recent military history”, *Journal for Contemporary History* 27(3), December 2003, pp. 178-181; *Cape Times*, 23 September 1998, pp. 1, 3-4; *The Mercury*, 23 September 1998, pp. 1-2 and 24 September 1998, pp. 1-2; *Salut* 5(11), November 1998, pp. 26-29.

⁷¹ L Engelbrecht, „South African Defence Minister Lekota reads the riot act”, *African Armed Forces Journal*, July 2003, pp. 16-17.

⁷² See, for example, L Grundlingh, „Government responses to HIV/AIDS in South Africa as reported in the media, 1983-1994”, *South African Historical Journal* 45, November 2001, pp. 124-153.

⁷³ See, for example, L Heinecken, „Facing a merciless enemy: HIV/AIDS and the South African armed forces”, *Armed Forces & Society* 29(2), 2003, pp. 281-300; E van der Ryst *et al.*, „HIV/AIDS-related knowledge, attitudes and practices among South African military recruits”, *South African Medical Journal* 91(7), July 2001, pp. 587-591; M Fleshman, „AIDS prevention in the ranks: UN targets peacekeepers, combatants in war against the disease”, *Africa Recovery* 15(1-2), June 2001, pp. 16-18.

⁷⁴ See, for example, EA Schmidl, *Im Dienste des Friedens: die österreichische Teilnahme an Friedensoperationen seit 1960/In the service of peace: Austrian participation in peace operations since 1960* (Graz, 2001).

immigrants. If the RSA is to retain its position as a regional power, and as the strongest military force south of the Sahara and a country that can also play a meaningful role internationally, the country will indeed have to expand its peacekeeping role. With the increase in terrorism, along with the fact that many African countries are suffering from bad governance and all the concomitant socio-economic problems, and with increasing global economic competition, instability on the African continent could lead to foreign intervention and the seizure of mineral resources. By deploying its defence force on peacekeeping missions, the South African government can play a role in developing Africa's potential, while at the same time assisting the SANDF in keeping its personnel focused, motivated and ready. This would also enhance the RSA's international standing. It is therefore imperative that the SAN should also deploy one or more of its warships in antipiracy patrols off the coast of Somalia.

5. Concluding perspectives

After the end of the Namibian War of Independence (and of the Cold War), and in the wake of the political transformation that took place in South Africa in the early 1990s, the question arose as to what lay ahead for the SANDF. But the new amalgamated Defence Force did not suffer from an identity crisis: the new Constitution reaffirmed the main purpose of the force (see the introduction, *supra*); under Pres. Mandela there was a groundswell of optimism in the country; there were potential peacekeeping operations to prepare for; and the hearts and minds of the public (of all races) needed to be won over. And the new-look SANDF succeeded to a large extent in achieving these things. Now, 15 years along the line – with the colours of the Rainbow Nation unfortunately somewhat faded, owing to many social as well as politically-related problems – the SANDF is to a large extent still on track, despite that questions have been asked with regard to just how battle-ready the force really is⁷⁵.

Since 1994, the SANDF has been able to shed its apartheid past. Today, most South Africans of all races can indeed identify with their Defence Force. A new military culture and ethos has been created; for example, the Defence Force has moved from a predominantly white (and more specifically Afrikaner-dominated) organisational culture, to a largely black-dominated organisational culture. One of the consequences of this transformation, however, is that fewer and fewer whites are joining the armed forces. Of course, the “guns versus butter” debate continues in certain quarters of society, but to demand a choice between “guns” and “butter” from any government is wrong: the government should balance its financial priorities in such a way that there will be financial resources both for the military *and* for the purpose of providing for the needs of the population. After all, a small but well-trained, well-equipped and truly professional defence force should not be regarded as a liability (or at best a necessary evil), but rather as a non-negotiable insurance policy. Moreover, the question is not: Who will attack the RSA? – but rather: How can the government use its defence force in a positive way, not only to safeguard the territorial integrity of the country, but also as an instrument of peaceful foreign policy? Thus, a threat-independent

⁷⁵ See, for example, *Volksblad*, 15 July 2009, p. 6 and 17 July 2009, p. 10.

strategy should be devised, so that the Defence Force can assist the state to attain its goals, including the projection of a positive image to the rest of the world.

In section 2, *supra*, reference has been made to instances of ill-discipline in the SANDF, including theft, shootings and irregularities with regard to examinations and assignments. For a number of years, it has therefore been evident that there is an element of poor discipline in the Defence Force. Not long after its 15th anniversary, the SANDF suffered its most visible lack of discipline (amongst a certain proportion of its members) when – in defiance of a court order – approximately 3 000 SANDF members took part in a protest near the Union Buildings in Pretoria on 26 August 2009, demanding higher salaries and better working conditions. When the protest turned violent, the police had to intervene and SANDF personnel were taken into custody. The new Minister of Defence and of Military Veterans in the cabinet of newly-elected Pres. Jacob Zuma, Ms Lindiwe Sisulu, acted swiftly, and ordered the immediate dismissal of some 1 300 SANDF members who had been identified as having taken part in the violent protest, but this was halted by a court decision. These events brought under scrutiny the question as to whether defence force members should be allowed to join a union, and showed that there was indeed ill-discipline in the country's defence force. In addition, they created negative perceptions of the SANDF and tarnished its image both nationally and internationally⁷⁶. It is clear that all was – and is – not well in the SANDF; and solutions must be found, as a matter of great urgency, for the problem of ill-discipline and related challenges.

The transformation process from the old SADF to the new SANDF, as well as transformation in the Defence Force as from 1994, followed in the wake of the transformation processes that have characterised South Africa's armed forces since 1912, with – to some extent – parallels in the defence forces of many other countries; though the relatively smooth integration of former enemy forces into a single amalgamated force is quite unique.⁷⁷ The transformed SANDF has won the support of most South Africans of all races, and is playing an important role in peacekeeping operations (although more should be done in this regard); but it has probably lost prestige in the world at large. When all the new weapons systems that have been acquired since 2005 have been fully phased in, the punching power and status of the SANDF will be enhanced; and – hopefully sooner rather than later – a new generation of (mostly black) professional officers will lead the Defence Force to a new level of readiness. But competency, not colour, should be the Defence Force's recruiting yardstick;

⁷⁶ *Sowetan*, 27 August 2009, p. 4; *The Citizen*, 27 August 2009, p. 3 and 28 August 2009, p. 3; *The Star*, 9 September 2009, p. 3 and 11 September 2009, p. 7; *Sunday Independent*, 30 August 2009, p. 2; *Volksblad*, 27 August 2009, pp. 1-2 and 9 September 2009, p. 2; *Business Day*, 10 September 2009, p. 3; *The Mercury*, 27 August 2009, p. 1, 28 August 2009, p. 2, 1 September 2009, p. 2, 2 September 2009, p. 4, 3 September 2009, p. 4, 7 September 2009, pp. 2, 7, 9 September 2009, p. 1 and 10 September 2009, p. 4. On 16 December 2009 it was announced that members of the SANDF were to receive salary increases. *The Mercury*, 18 December 2009, p. 9.

⁷⁷ See in general, for example, G Kynoch, „The ‚transformation‘ of the South African military”, *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 34(3), 1996, pp. 441-457; F Uys, „The SANDF transformation process”, *African Security Review* 6(1), 1997, pp. 58-63; L Heineken, „The challenges of transformation: SANDF officers' attitudes towards integration, affirmative action, women in combat and language usage”, *Scientiae Militaria* 28(2), 1998, pp. 220-235; J Cilliers (ed.), *Continuity in change: the SA Army in transition* (Pretoria, 1998), *passim*; J Winkates, „The transformation of the South African National Defence Force”, *Armed Forces & Society* 26(3), 2000, pp. 451-472; J Pretorius, „Redefining defence in the post-apartheid security imaginary: the politics of meaning-fixing”, *Journal for Contemporary History* 33(2), September 2008, pp. 35-56.

and consequently, when it comes to manpower and composition, the SANDF should always strive to achieve military, strategic and professional goals, rather than focusing on politically motivated, quota-driven racial goals. In the meantime, everything possible must be done to retain qualified personnel. This means, *inter alia*, that positive career opportunities must be created for *all* Defence Force members. More young white people must also be recruited to ensure that the future SANDF will indeed be representative of the RSA's population as a whole.

Several other matters also need to be addressed. The SANDF's physical facilities have deteriorated, but upgrading has started, or will commence in the future. The extent to which there was, and still is, an anti-intellectual institutional culture in the SANDF, is a moot point; but the fact of the matter is that military education and training, including academic work in the Defence Force, is of great importance. Indeed, "military education, training and development played a major role in bringing the pre-1994 belligerent forces in South Africa together and blending them into a single coherent beaurocratised defence force"⁷⁸. Military discipline must be rigorously applied and criminal elements in the SANDF must be rooted out. The commandos or a comparable volunteer system should be reinstated, and steps should be taken, in general, to ensure that all SANDF members will be proud bearers of the Defence Force uniforms, and also of the Force's traditions and customs – which go back all the way to the formation of the earliest military units in the country, and later the UDF, and the SADF and the other military organisations that were amalgamated to form the new SANDF in 1994. A sense of history must be cultivated, so that all will realise that amidst the changes that transformation has brought about, there was, is, and must be continuity.

Since 1994 the new government has not been indifferent with regard to defence matters, but in the light of the fact that, in the wake of the apartheid era, so many matters needed urgent attention (and concomitant funding), defence was not always accorded high priority. Nonetheless, the defence of the country was the subject of in-depth debate and analysis⁷⁹, and the 1998 decision to buy several new weapons systems for the SAAF and SAN was a positive result of this process. The cost of the arms deal is high, and it is unfortunate that the whole matter has been tainted by allegations with regard to corruption; but all this does not change the fact that the SANDF is in need of modernisation. As a matter of fact, if the acquisition of 26 Gripen and 24 Hawk jets, 30 light helicopters, four ASW helicopters, three submarines and four frigates (acquired between 2005 and 2012) is compared with the acquisition of at least 39 Mirage IIIs, 16 Buccaneers, nine Canberras, approximately 75 Impala MkIs, nine Albatrosses, 81 Alouette IIIs, 20 Pumas, 16 Super Frelons, ten Wasps, seven C-130s, nine C-160s, 45 Cessna 185s and four Mercurius in the years 1963-1970⁸⁰,

⁷⁸ A Esterhuysen, „Education for professionalism: a new military for a new South Africa”, *Scientia Militaria: South African Journal of Military Studies* 34(2), 2006, p. 21. See also, in general, the rest of this important article – *ibid.*, pp. 21-43.

⁷⁹ See, for example, *Defence in a democracy: draft white paper on national defence for the Republic of South Africa, 21 June 1995 (s.l., s.a.)*; *Defence in a democracy: South African white paper on defence as approved by parliament, May 1996 + South African review as approved by parliament, April 1998 (Pretoria, s.a.)*.

⁸⁰ W Brent (compiler), *African air forces* (Nelspruit, 1999), pp. 145-179. By 1974, 151 Impala MkIs, 20 Albatrosses and 16 Wasps had been delivered to the SAAF. By 1975, 69 Pumas had been delivered. Many other aircraft were also acquired in the course of the 1970s.

and three frigates, eight minesweepers and three patrol boats in the years 1957-1964⁸¹, it becomes clear that the 1998-2012 arms package is actually not very large.

In any case, the new weapons do not replace the aircraft, helicopters and ships that were in the 1994 SADF inventory on a one-to-one basis. Thus, the SANDF is in a weaker position, relatively speaking, than its predecessors, albeit that the SANDF still remains the strongest defence force in sub-Saharan Africa (and next to Egypt, the strongest force in Africa); and the new weapons will enable it to provide for the RSA's most basic defence needs. But the SANDF is still a small defence force compared to those of, for example, Egypt, Brazil, India and Red China – and many others⁸². Ideally, the SANDF should have in its inventory, *inter alia*, 150 modern tanks, 500 armoured cars, 1 000 infantry fighting vehicles, 48 Gripens, 48 Hawks, 50 light helicopters, four submarines, five frigates, ten Super Lynx ASW helicopters, ten multirole offshore patrol ships, four dedicated MCM ships, two combat support ships, two LHDs, 20 medium transport planes (to replace the remaining 11 C-47TPs), four in-flight refuelling jet aircraft, six maritime patrol aircraft, as well as about 30 light utility planes; that is, over and above the guns/howitzers, armoured personnel carriers, basic training aircraft, Rooivalk and Oryx helicopters, and other weapons systems that it already has. However, even the most optimistic (and idealistic) military analyst and enthusiast will know that this wish list is unaffordable and consequently unattainable, although it should still be regarded as the ideal. After all, in the 1980s the SADF was a very strong force and one of only a few battle-proven defence forces of the Cold War era. Today, the RSA is still a regional power of note, with the strongest African defence force south of the Sahara, which should be able to deploy troops via air and/or sea to hot spots on the African continent – an activity that demands a light mobile approach with regard to defence matters. A factor that should also realistically be considered, is the possibility of placing all government-controlled ships (for example the Antarctic supply ship, environmental and fisheries patrol ships, as well as research ships) under the control of the Navy. Naturally, the necessary additional funds would have to be provided to the Navy for the maintenance and deployment of these ships.

From this brief historical review of developments in the SANDF during the years 1994 to 2009, it should be clear that although the RSA's Defence Force – like the country itself – still faces several challenges, the SANDF has actually acquitted itself remarkably well. In general, the leadership, state of training and education, morale and deployability of the SANDF have been good. It has also served the RSA and all its people according to the requirements as set out in the country's Constitution, and is hopefully still more or less in a position to continue to fulfil its constitutional mandate, i.e., to defend and protect the RSA. It has won the support of the vast majority of South Africa's population, and has played a significant role in unifying the country. At the same time, it has contributed (for example in terms of participation in peacekeeping operations) towards the realisation of the ideal of the African Renaissance, while the Navy, in particular, has played a major role in the country's diplomatic initiatives. So, all things considered, the SANDF has, relatively speaking, been a success story in the years 1994 to 2009; and the foundation has been laid for more success in the years to come. The extent to which this potential success will be

⁸¹ Du Toit, pp. 206-239.

⁸² For the order of battle of other defence forces, see *The military balance 2009, passim*.

realised will depend, on the one hand, on the professionalism of all SANDF members, but also, on the other hand, on the way in which the politicians deal with the SANDF from now on – both in terms of assignments and the amount of money allocated for the purposes of defence. There should also be more open debate with regard to defence matters in the country; and hopefully a new and comprehensive defence review will be produced as soon as possible.

Siła Systemu Obrony Narodowej w RPA w latach 1994-2009: perspektywa historyczna Streszczenie

Autor opisuje transformację Sił Zbrojnych Afryki Południowej (czyli armii funkcjonującej w okresie apartheidu w Narodowe Siły Zbrojne Afryki Południowej. Proces powyższy został wymuszony wielkim „historycznym zakrętem”, na jakim znalazła się Republika Południowej Afryki, gdy sprawująca władzę biała elita zdecydowała się na demontaż systemu segregacji rasowej i dopuszczenie do sprawowania rządów czarnej większości. Proces przebudowy armii oraz sił policyjnych był jednym z najbardziej politycznie ryzykownych, gdyż zakładał stworzenie formacji, w skład których wchodziłi kombatanci będący jeszcze kilkanaście miesięcy wcześniej śmiertelnymi wrogami. Nową armię tworzono bowiem z personelu „białej” armii RPA, formacji zbrojnych quasi – niepodległych bantustanów (Transkei, Bophuthatswana, Venda i Ciskei), oddziałów Afrykańskiego Kongresu Narodowego (uMkhonto we-Sizwe – włócznie narodu), Ludowej Armii Wyzwolenia Azanian (formacja Kongresu Panafrykańskiego) oraz sił samoobrony KwaZulu-Natal. Mimo wielu problemów, nierzadko bardzo poważnych, takich jak skokowe obniżenie dyscypliny w armii, zwiększenie ilości przestępstw popełnianych przez żołnierzy (najtragiczniejszym tego przejawem były zabójstwa białych oficerów i podoficerów przez czarnych żołnierzy), drastyczny spadek poziomu wyszkolenia technicznego i taktycznego, wydaje się, że nowa „narodowa” armia RPA, przebrnęła już przez kres najtrudniejszych zmian i weszła na drogę odbudowy możliwości bojowych.