

The South African Defence Review: a contrarian perspective

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Through an initiative of the Minister for Defence and Military Veterans, South Africa embarked on a [Defence Review](#) in 2011. The Defence Review Committee held its inaugural meeting on 14 July 2011 during which the Minister outlined the Committee's Mandate and Terms of Reference. The Mandate of the Committee was, above all, to independently articulate 'a defence policy that is supportive of the Government's priorities and strategic intent'.¹

In early 2012, the Committee issued its Consultative Draft report for wider public engagement and comment. Even though the Committee was mandated to assess 'the Defence contribution to South Africa's international agenda and the promotion of regional and continental peace and stability' the Review seemed to revert to a classical and orthodox reading of the national defence requirements for states, with a predominant focus on national domestic security.

This article will adopt a contrarian perspective towards the Review and argue that a threat assessment based on insecurity trends in the region, and across the continent, over the next five years would suggest that South Africa needs to articulate and adopt a more pronounced Pan-African Defence and Security Posture (PDSP).

The threat assessment and the merits of a national defence posture

For South Africa to adopt a national defence posture there would need to be a threat assessment of the potential for cross-border invasion from neighbouring countries or from potential coastal incursions. However, the likelihood of invasions from Swaziland, Lesotho, Namibia, Zimbabwe or Mozambique are

statistically very small. South Africa's military preponderance and dominance is a structural deterrent to any potential campaigns by its neighbours to invade the country, at least in the short to medium-term. On this basis it is evident that the Review's adoption of a National Posture is to uphold classical military orthodoxy in a situation that does not merit it. This military orthodoxy is predicated on a conceptual framework that compels nation-states to 'defend' themselves from potential foreign enemies, imagined or real.

Security trends in Southern Africa and Africa: 2013 to 2017

While South Africa has remained a beacon of relative order and stability since its transition to freedom in 1994, it is vital that the country not rest on its laurels and assume that this period of uninterrupted tranquility will continue indefinitely. Security trends in the Southern Africa region as well as in other parts of Africa for the next five years, suggest that with a majority of countries struggling to make the transition from war-affected or authoritarian regimes to plural democratic societies, disorder and instability will remain a recurring feature and that this will impact directly upon South Africa. If incidences of continued internal dissension and repression by governments persist in the short to medium-term then, over the next five years, South Africa will primarily be dealing with the fall-out from regional insecurity.

South Africa is not an island unto itself: thus the effects and collateral damage generated by regional insecurity will begin to affect the internal security of South Africa. This is already evident in the number of refugees who have sought

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sanctuary in South Africa - from as far as Somalia, South Sudan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), to as close as Zimbabwe. The internal security of South Africa is inextricably linked to the security of the region and, on a wider basis, to the stability of other countries across the African continent. This realization should inform the policy-makers and decision-makers who define South Africa's defence posture.

The trends in continental and regional insecurity suggests that the defence posture proposed in this Review may not provide the new thinking and guidance required to prepare South African military personnel for the tasks that they will be called upon to undertake in the near future. The Consultative Draft of the Committee makes reference to adopting a South African Defence Posture predicated on 'a layered approach to defence and security by acting in partnership with others whenever it is practicable'.² However, given the emerging trends this might need to be taken a step further in terms of promoting regional and continental inter-operability and joint responses to security threats.

As a member of the United Nations, South Africa has signed up to the doctrine of a Responsibility to Protect (R2P). This doctrine was elaborated in the Outcome Document that was issued and adopted following the UN General Assembly meeting in 2005. This doctrine stipulates that UN member states have a responsibility to prevent, react and rebuild. The 'responsibility to react' provision stipulates the need to respond 'to situations, using where necessary coercive measures like...military intervention'.³

South Africa is also a dominant actor within the African Union and a contributing author of the Constitutive Act of the Union, of 2000, which document effectively enshrined a responsibility to protect. The AU Peace and Security Council, of which South Africa is currently a member, was established in 2004 through the Protocol Relating to the Peace and Security Council of 2002. It is mandated to authorize and legitimize the AU's intervention in internal crisis situations.⁴ The Defence Review should have drawn upon this existing AU mandate to adopt a much more Pan-

African Defence and Security Posture.

The 2011 Libyan crisis exposed the AU's limited ability to proactively intervene and implement its self-ascribed mandate and responsibility to protect. Such interventions in future crisis situations in Africa will only be possible if the AU's constituent member states transcend their over-emphasis on national defence posture and make the transition to articulating and internalizing a Pan-African Defence and Security Posture.

In 1998, South Africa was drawn into intervening in Lesotho to stabilize a crisis situation that could potentially have escalated further. The important point is that situations similar to the one that unfolded in Lesotho may replicate themselves in the near future: regional structures and governments thus need to proactively prepare if they are to respond effectively and in a collaborative manner in a particular crisis. This requires a different mindset and posture in terms of military readiness and intervention capability.

Ultimately, informed by a Pan-African Defence and Security Posture, South Africa and its fellow neighbouring states, together with regional and continental organisations, should adopt an approach to collective security premised on enhancing Pan-African Joint Operations, especially when it relates to preventing the escalation of crises in their respective regional neighbourhoods.

Pan-African inter-operability and training

At the core of a SA Defence Review should be a commitment to support the strengthening and operationalisation of a rapid response capability at a regional and continental level. A Pan-African Defence and Security Posture, has to be geared towards enhancing Pan-African inter-operability, based on regional and continental consultation with fellow African countries. Such a military solidarity posture will require the effective operationalisation of transnational political decision-making to ensure rapid intervention and sustained peace enforcement and peacekeeping across the continent.

The AU is in the process of operationalising the

African Standby Force (ASF) composed of brigades drawn from the Regional Economic Communities (RECs) and Regional Mechanisms (RMs) that are the building blocks of the African Peace and Security Architecture. SADC BRIG is the brigade and arm of the ASF composed of member states of the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC). This architecture to operationalise a Pan-African Defence and Security Posture is already in the making.

Adopting a Pan-African Defence and Security Posture would require an extensive programme of training to ensure inter-operability between national defence forces that currently operate in virtual exclusion from each other across the African continent. Although SADC BRIG has undertaken extensive training and joint exercises the force is not yet fully operational to the extent that it could be deployed to manage crises across the region or elsewhere in Africa. A Pan-African Defence and Security Posture would require a regional and continental approach to training which would make centres such as the SADC Regional Peacekeeping Training Centre (RPTC) in Harare, Zimbabwe, key facilities for ensuring the effective implementation of a collective security systems in Africa.

The Preventive Dimension of a Pan-African Posture

A Pan-African Defence and Security Posture would require national governments to think 'outside the box' and to challenge their own prejudices and reluctance to pool sovereignty as well as forging genuine defence links with neighbouring countries. A key feature of a Pan-African Defence and Security Posture would be the cooperation between states to ensure that security sector reform proactively works towards promoting democratic oversight and management of the security sector. The mismanagement of the security sector and its instrumentalisation to promote the self-interests of undemocratic leaders is one of the main reasons why the African continent is fraught with violence and conflict.

The SA Defence Review could also have placed a

more pronounced emphasis on the importance of a Pan-African approach to security sector reform as a means to reduce the incidence of violent conflict. National defence establishments need to work in tandem with think tanks and non-governmental organisations that have expertise on the nexus between political transition and security sector reform. This would also contribute towards raising the profile, ethos and understanding of the SA Defence establishment to the wider public.

Conclusion

A SA Defence Review that operationalises a Pan-African Defence and Security Posture and a proactive crisis prevention stance is required to lay the foundations for situating and implementing the responsibility to protect African citizens in the region and across the continent. Therefore, Pan-African collective security rather than national domestic security should be the underlying theme throughout the SA Defence Review.

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1. South African Department of Defence, *South African Defence Review 2012*, Draft Document for Public Engagement, 12 April 2012, p.34.
2. South African Department of Defence, *South African Defence Review 2012*, Draft Document for Public Engagement, 12 April 2012, p.123.
3. International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty, *The Responsibility to Protect*, Report of the ICISS, 2001, p.xi
4. African Union, *Protocol Relating to the Establishment of the Peace and Security Council of the African Union*, Addis Ababa: African Union, 2002.