



# **Completing the Defence Transformation Process:**

## **The Transformation of the South African Reserve Force System**

*Rocklyn Williams, Head, Programme on Security Sector Transformation, Institute for Security Studies*

*Occasional Paper No 54A - December 2001*

---

### **BACKGROUND**

The tradition of procuring and maintaining reserve military forces is virtually as old as the history of soldiering itself. The institution of large armies officered and manned by regular forces alone has been, throughout history, more of the exception rather than the rule. Almost all major armies, be it the Romans, the Mongols or the Zulus, were overwhelmingly reliant on the ability to muster, at short notice, large groups of people who, either voluntarily or through conscription, rendered military service in support of the sovereign.

The institution of the modern nation-state in Europe from the 17th century onwards and the corresponding development of concepts relating to elected and sovereign civil authority, civic duty and the compulsion to render military service in defence of the nation (“the nation-in-arms”) saw the development of large reserve forces (RFs) which could, if so required, be mustered in defence of the nation. Military service of this nature also legitimized the state’s authority to act decisively – and on occasion violently – through the incorporation of the citizenry into matters of national defence.

During the Cold War, RFs played a critical role in the deterrent strategies of rival military blocs constituting, in some cases, up to 75% of an alliances’ military capacity. Notwithstanding the end of the Cold War and the concomitant institutional restructuring, doctrinal revision and re-prioritization of defence roles and tasks which have accompanied this process, RFs continue to play a prominent role in the defence efforts of countries throughout the world (not least of which has been in the peace-keeping arena where in some cases the Scandinavian countries, for example, constitute the overwhelming bulk of forces deployed in these roles).

South Africa too has possessed, in different forms and at different stages of its history, diverse military traditions within which the RF culture has featured prominently. This is reflected most vividly in the RF traditions of the colonial volunteer regiments and the Zulu, Basotho, Bapedi, Griqua, Khoi, Xhosa and Boer armies. During the course of the 20th century South Africa’s RFs have played a critical and major role in fighting South Africa’s wars – the First World War and the Second World War for example.

More recently RFs have been at the forefront of South Africa’s various conflicts. The bulk of personnel deployed by the former South African Defence Force (SADF) in both the Namibian and Angolan conflicts from the late 1960s onwards were conscripts in the form of national servicemen and Citizen Force personnel. South Africa’s area defence system, based on the Boer Commando tradition and developed as a result of the SADF’s exposure to the counter-insurgency doctrines developed from the 1950s onwards, was largely reservist in composition.

Umkhonto We Sizwe (MK) and the Azanian People's Liberation Army (APLA) contained a strong reservist ethos as reflected in the political concepts of the post-1960 period, for example ("a people's army", "every cadre a soldier every soldier a cadre" and the "revolutionary armed people"). During the early 1990s these guerilla traditions were to institutionalize themselves concretely via the creation of self defence units throughout the country.

The utility and importance of RFs to South Africa's national defence efforts continues unabated today. Conventional RFs constitute the bedrock of the country's conventional military capabilities and the territorial forces play a critical role in supporting the police in the maintenance of law and order.

The ongoing importance of the RF has been acknowledged from diverse quarters including the former president, the current and previous ministers of defence, the current and previous chiefs of the defence force and the defence parliamentary committees. It is in this context that the current transformational challenges facing the South African RF system assume an over-riding importance.

The aim of this paper is essentially two-fold. First, it strives to examine the transformational challenges that are likely to confront the South African RFs in future. It strives to do this at two levels. At one level, it attempts to situate the transformation of the RF within the overall transformational challenges being faced by the defence community in general. At another level, it seeks to examine those internal institutional challenges, which confront the transformation of the RF in particular.

Second, it seeks to explore the extent to which the creation of RFs within sub-Saharan Africa in general can contribute to the consolidation of stable civil-military relations and the institution of more cost-effective methods of defence expenditure. It maintains that the utility of RFs on the African continent remains vastly under-explored at present and advocates certain approaches where this utility can be more effectively harnessed in future.

## **THE NATURE OF A DEFINITION**

The term "reserve force" as used in this paper refers to the preparation, provision and employment of the South African National Defence Force's (SANDF's) current reserve force military capability as reflected in its present organization, staffing and operational responsibilities. South Africa's some 278 RF units form an indispensable component of the South African Army, South African Air Force, South African Navy and South African Medical Health Services (SAMHS) providing both "teeth" (combat and combat support) and "tail" (administrative and non-operational) capabilities within all arms of service.

RFs are organized into two main clusters, namely the conventional forces which can operate anywhere and account for the bulk of the SANDF's conventional capabilities, and the commandos/ territorial forces which fulfil the role of a militia in particular area-bound localities. The current RF capability resides largely in the South African Army, which accounts for 85% of the RF strength.

These forces are organized into various conventional force units and a national network of territorial force commandos. The conventional force units provide the backbone of the SANDF's conventional deterrent capabilities, while the commandos provide the bulk of the SANDF's rear area defence capabilities. At present there are 183 territorial force units (all infantry) and 48 conventional force RF units comprising 7 artillery, 5 anti-aircraft, 28 infantry and 8 armour units respectively.

The South African Air Force RF complement consists of 11 volunteer air squadrons responsible for communication and reconnaissance flights and specialist persons who can be used if so required (pilots and technical musterings, for example). The South African Navy's RF capabilities are organized into seven different units, which can be used in virtually all areas of the South African Navy's operations.

The SAMHS, similarly, organizes its RF personnel into medical battalion groups, of which there are three, which can be, and are, deployed with the conventional forces and specialist pools (doctors, psychologists, etc.) whose individual services can be called on if so required.

## **RESERVE FORCES IN THE POST-COLD WAR ERA: ANACHRONISTIC LEGACY OR FUTURE DEFENCE ASSET?**

### **The ongoing utility of reserves forces**

RFs featured prominently in both the defence strategies and force structures of many developed and developing countries during the Cold War period. The prospects of large-scale conventional warfare, the fear (whether real or perceived) of territorial invasions from military adversaries, and the sheer deterrence value of large force levels contributed to the maintenance of substantial RF establishments.

The demise of the Cold War heralded a partial reduction in the size of military establishments throughout the world and precipitated transformation processes, which sought to revisit the strategic and doctrinal underpinnings of Cold War defence thinking. One would have assumed that, within this scenario, the utility of RFs would also have diminished as governments sought to create smaller, more mobile and more cost-effective military forces with which to deal with the defence challenges of the post-Cold War period.

In reality, however, while the post-Cold War era has witnessed a revision of RF policy in most countries possessing significant RF establishments, it has also seen a positive re-appraisal of the role RFs can play in an increasingly post-modern world. While there are certain limitations in maintaining RF systems – and these limitations need to be honestly addressed – the utility in developing and maintaining RFs far outweighs their disadvantages. The pros and cons of RF systems therefore need to be dispassionately assessed in light of the current international environment.

This paper acknowledges that RFs are not homogeneous entities in either an organizational or cultural sense. A bifurcation exists between conventional RF units (consisting largely of specialized units, conventional units and specialist personnel), which are not necessarily area-bound in terms of their deployment responsibilities, and territorial RF units which are area-bound and which tend, in the main, to be militia-type organizations.

Cultural differences are often strongly pronounced within and between RF formations. In the South African situation, the bulk of the SANDF's traditions tend to reside within the RF units in general and the conventional force units in particular. A strong regimental tradition, based on accumulated history and battle experience, pertains within the conventional forces, while the territorial forces tend to be more reflective of the local traditions and cultural peculiarities of the areas from which they are drawn.

### **Reserve forces as civic anchors**

The advantages of RFs are basically three-fold – political, economic and military. Politically, RFs can contribute to the development and maintenance of stable civil-military relations. They can do this in both an explicit and an implicit sense.

The creation of RF systems has long been utilized as *an explicit political strategy* whereby the authority of the regular standing army could be checked. This was borne largely out of historical experience where a deep-seated mistrust of regular armies – in some cases not entirely warranted – existed among the leadership cadre of newly established governments. This mistrust was predicated, in the main, on the role which armed forces had played in the history of the country concerned and, more often than not, the social composition of the armed forces themselves.

In post-revolutionary Russia the continued dominance of the Red Army by officers from the Tsarist armed forces – itself a pragmatic necessity given the scope and intensity of the Civil War – saw the development of the People's Militia and the Commissar system as an antidote to the perceived reactionary role which the armed forces, or parts thereof, could potentially

play in the Soviet Union's national politics.

Similar sentiments prevailed in both the People's Republic of China and the United States of America (USA) where the creation of a militia was seen as the guarantor of the security of the revolution, in the case of the former, and the mechanism whereby the people could counter any military abuse of power from either external or internal adversaries, in the case of the latter.

The creation of people's militias in countries such as post-independence Mozambique and Angola was an attempt to share the national defense burden among all the people, thereby preventing the development of a praetorian culture within the armed forces. In Tanzania it was a deliberate strategy to provide an intentional counter-balance to the power of the standing army (a sentiment deeply rooted in the traumatic events of the mutiny of the Tanganyika African Rifles in 1964).

It is significant to note that of the military coup d'états that have occurred during the 20th century, very few have been mounted by armies possessing large and active conscript or reserve force communities (with the possible exception of the Argentinean, Chilean, Greek and Turkish coups from the 1960s onwards). Reliance on RFs certainly moderates the corporate culture of the armed forces, renders it more sensitive to civic sensibilities, and deprives it of the element of surprise, which is a critical ingredient in the execution of a coup d'état.

*The maintenance of RFs also contributes to the development of stable civil-military relations in a myriad of implicit ways.* Well-managed and appropriately utilized RFs can cement an enduring relationship between civilian communities and the armed forces at a very practical grassroots level.

Indeed, it is useful to conceptualize civil-military relations as possessing both a national character (the relationship between the various arms of government) as well as a local relationship (the relationship between local governments, civil society and local civilian communities).

Typical RF-local community interfaces, whereby local civil-military relations can be strengthened, include the involvement of the RF in crime prevention, assistance in disaster relief, emergency and humanitarian assistance, and limited civic action projects. Owing to their proximity to the community, RFs – whether conventionally or territorially organized – tend to provide the armed forces with a human “face”; a quality that the regular forces, given their geographical dispersion and their confinement to barracks, tend to lack. Territorially organized RFs, however, do possess the potential to become socially disruptive unless effectively commanded and controlled. The strength of RFs, their community-bound nature and the strong civic element that characterizes their corporate culture, can also prove a weakness in situations where inadequate command and control, high levels of local politicization and strong ethnic differences exist.

Their dispersion within the local population, the weaker forms of command and control under which they operate (an inevitable feature of non-permanent military personnel), and their local character can, during periods of political turmoil and social conflict, render RF members susceptible to political manipulation and ethnic division.

The recent experience of Yugoslavia illustrates the extent to which locally based militias can become constituted as power bases for different political, regional and ethnic interests. The disintegration of the Yugoslavian armed forces had much to do with the fragmentation of their RFs along ethnic and regional fault lines.

Recent experiences in South Africa have also indicated the extent to which RFs can be misused against the local population (elements at Wakkerstroom and Potgietersrus being a case in point). Clearly, these are more than isolated incidents and have prompted the country's national counter-intelligence agencies to investigate allegations of right-wing penetration of a minority of commando units (all of which have been based in rural areas and

most of which have been located in the North West, Mpumalanga and Northern provinces of the former Transvaal).

There exists no easy solution to the challenge of ensuring effective civil-military relations between RFs and the local community. Certainly, the existence of a robust civic culture at a local government level – strongly predicated on its perceived legitimacy in the eyes of the community – can delegitimize any unconstitutional and illegal activities by the RF at a local level. Equally important is the maintenance of effective and credible command and control systems over locally-based RF units – a factor that impelled the new SANDF to insist, in 1994, that commando units remain under the control of the South African Army and not be transferred to the command structures of the South African Police.

### **Reserve forces as economic force multipliers**

Effectively managed RFs can provide a country with exceedingly cost-effective forces, which militate against the need to maintain large and expensive standing armies. This is undoubtedly the key reason why most armed forces throughout the world continue to rely on their reserve capabilities as the primary form of personnel provision in the eventuality of war or national crises of a similar magnitude.

The economic utility of RFs can be measured against a number of indicators. The first of these is the simple fact that the costs of maintaining a functioning RF unit can be done at a fraction of the cost required to maintain a similar regular force unit. The second is the fact that RF units possess the ability to attract multi-skilled, and often highly qualified, members without the personnel retention costs required to maintain such persons in the regular forces.

RFs can prove to be economically beneficial in a broader strategic sense. A survey conducted by the World Bank in 1998 revealed that the ability of government to provide for effective security within a country – and the ability of the security forces to realize such conditions of security – constituted the prime concern of investors when considering investing in developing countries. Well-resourced, effectively managed, legitimate and disciplined RFs can contribute greatly to the creation of a local climate within which investment, development and economic growth can occur.

Studies of RF systems (USA, United Kingdom and South Africa) have also revealed that the involvement of RF members in RF activities can have indirect “spin-off” benefits for employers. Included in these benefits are improved leadership, management and organizational skills as well as increased levels of confidence and assertiveness.

Prolonged absences of RF members from their places of employment can, however, impact negatively upon the economic performance of certain businesses. While larger corporate ventures can more easily absorb the economic costs of absent RF employees, medium and small businesses are more frequently than not unable to afford the opportunity costs and financial losses that result from the RF commitments of their employees.

Efforts that can be undertaken to address employer concerns regarding the absence of their members from the workplace include the strengthening of dialogue between employers and RF structures, improved remuneration for RF members and a general recognition of the macro-strategic advantages of maintaining capable and efficient RF structures (their role in the combating of crime being an obvious example in this respect).

### **Reserve forces as military force multipliers**

RFs possess a definite military utility – a phenomenon that has been testified to by the repeated use of RFs by governments in a variety of operational arenas throughout the centuries. RFs, both in South Africa and internationally, have been used for a wide variety of roles and tasks. Although they have mainly been used for purposes of territorial defence during the 20th century they have, both in previous centuries and in the 20th century, been used for both primary and secondary functions.

Tasks within which RFs have been used to considerable military effect include the following:

- The traditional role of territorial defence. Most typically as home guard units, components of echeloned defence systems and national key point personnel (the experience of most Allied and Axis forces in the Second World War provides possibly the most compelling example of this tradition).
- In defence of the sovereignty of a country from internal attack. In circumstances where the constitutional authority of the state appears to be under attack from internal forces, RFs can, and have, been used to supplement the police and the regular forces in countering these activities.
- In support of expeditionary wars. For example, the role of British reserve units during the Boer War and the central role played by the former SADF's Citizen Force units in Namibia and Angola between 1967 and 1989.
- In support of the police. Armed forces have periodically been called upon to assist the police in a public order capacity, in the maintenance of law and order, the restoration of law and order (where the latter task becomes impossible for the police to handle on their own) and, more recently, in a variety of specialized police supportive roles (prevention of arms smuggling, drug smuggling, piracy at sea, etc.).
- Disaster relief and humanitarian assistance. RFs are particularly effective when these events occur at a local, regional or national level given their knowledge of the terrain and the community and the ease with which they can be mobilized. They can, however, also be used for disaster relief and humanitarian assistance beyond the borders of a country.
- Peace missions. RFs are increasingly being used in the peace missions arena. Indeed it is the preference of Scandinavian countries, for example, to use RFs in this role and RFs consequently constitute the bulk of their RF commitments to peace missions. RF personnel often possess the maturity and the range of life and professional skills which peace mission deployments are increasingly demanding, although difficulties are encountered in deploying RF personnel away from their places of work for too protracted a period.

It is important not to overstate the military utility of RF structures. Regular forces possess many advantages that most RF units, for a variety of reasons, do not possess. It is important, nevertheless, to determine the strengths of RF units and to maximize this potential within the defence policy, military strategy, force design and order of battle of the defence force under study.

The advantages accruing to the maintenance of standing, regular force units derive from their levels of combat readiness and availability for deployment. Unlike RFs, regular forces can be mobilized at short notice, in general they tend to be better trained than many RF units, they normally possess younger, more able-bodied members than those found in RF units, and they benefit from a tighter system of command and control than is found within RF systems.

The military advantages of maintaining RF systems derive from their utility as rear area defence formations where their knowledge of local terrain, their self-sufficiency potential, and the existence of more tightly-knit community networks renders them effective in a variety of different roles. These roles include the protection of strategic installations within their tactical area of operation, the use of such forces in a light infantry and guerilla role as defensive forces against an aggressor, and the advantages of using locally deployed personnel in both reconnaissance and tactical intelligence capacities.

## **BACKGROUND TO THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE SOUTH AFRICAN DEPARTMENT OF DEFENCE**

Any approach to the transformation of South Africa's RF units has to situate this process within the context of South Africa's recent defence transformation process, for it is the values, principles and processes which underpinned this process that will impact decisively on the transformation of the RF establishment.

During the 1990–1994 period it was abundantly clear that the transformation of South African security forces would constitute a key challenge for the incoming government. The establishment of the Sub-Councils of Defence, Intelligence and Policing (constituting three of the six sub-councils of the Transitional Executive Authority) reflected this reality. Particular concern was expressed about the future size, shape, role and functions of the different South

African armed forces (the SADF, MK, APLA and the TVBC [Transkei, Venda, Bophuthatswana and Ciskei] armies) given the real and perceived political roles they had played in the past.

Concerns regarding the future activities of the armed forces ranged from their intervention in the political process to their implosion and disintegration under the combined strains of transformation and further politicization. Particular concern was expressed about the future role of the SADF in the transition process. As the largest, and undeniably the most influential of the different armed forces (in personnel, budgetary and strategic terms), it possessed the greatest capacity to adversely affect the political process.

Many of the concerns over the future role of the SADF emanated from its real praetorian tendencies (the emergence of the Civil Co-operation Bureau, the considerable penetration of all aspects of South African life by the defence intelligence community, the prominent role assumed by the SADF in the executive administration of the state between 1978 and 1990, and the growth of a counter-insurgency culture within the South African Army) and the implicit threats made by both National Party politicians and SADF military leaders that they were prepared to use the SADF as an instrument of last resort to guarantee stability should the negotiation process falter.

From 1992 onwards military leaders within MK were partially reassured that if the permanent force component of the SADF did intervene in the political process, then they could at least rely on the neutrality of large sections of the country's RFs within such a scenario. This was largely due to advice which MK received from its own security advisors<sup>1</sup> and the contacts established between the MK High Command and the Citizen Force National Council from 1992 onwards.<sup>2</sup> The immediate transformational challenges which the new government identified after its assumption of power, therefore, were to stabilize civil-military relations (most vividly exemplified by the creation of the Ministry of Defence and the various parliamentary defense committees) and to ensure the orderly integration of the disparate South African armed forces into a loyal and cohesive national defence force.

These were challenges whose complexity and immensity were to consume the energies of the new Ministry of Defence for most of the latter part of the 20th century. There were, however, a range of additional challenges for the new Ministry of Defence, now under the stewardship of the former Commander of MK, Joe Modise, and the former Commander of MK Intelligence, Ronnie Kasrils. These included the demobilization of tens of thousands of former soldiers, the procurement of new equipment for the defence force, the alignment of defence policy, strategy and doctrine with the policy objectives of the new government, the institution of a comprehensive equal opportunity programme within the Department of Defence (DoD), the restructuring of the DoD into a more cost-effective structure, the training of SANDF personnel for new roles and tasks (peace missions being the most prominent in this regard), and the integration and restructuring of the RFs of the SANDF.

Obviously not all of these transformational challenges could be dealt with coterminously and, in many cases, some of the challenges although identified were left to a later date to be dealt with. The restructuring of the RFs was precisely one of those issues which the Ministry of Defence felt it could only address once the major transformational initiatives had been addressed, namely the creation of a Ministry of Defence, the integration of the regular forces, and the restructuring of all levels of the DoD.

The Ministry of Defence did, however, acknowledge the importance of the RFs in two seminal policy and strategic documents – the Defence Review (which significantly contained a chapter devoted to the RFs) completed in 1998, and the Joint Military Co-ordinating Council (JMCC) strategy completed in 1994, which contained a similar chapter indicating the role of the RF in the future defence strategy and force design of the SANDF (and proving the policy basis upon which subsequent RF policy reviews were conducted).

Indeed, the four major transformational challenges, which the DoD will have to address in the forthcoming decade will, in all likelihood, centre around the following imperatives:

- Management of the ongoing demobilization process (it is envisaged that force levels within the regular force component will have to be reduced from the present 80 000 to 65 000).
- The achievement of a more realistic balance between the priority afforded the primary and secondary functions in future defence policy, planning, programming and budgeting cycles (this is being addressed in the ongoing review of the Defence Review of 1998).
- Balancing roles and tasks which increasingly expect the SANDF to execute against the medium-term budgetary allocation which it presently receives.
- Restructuring the RFs in such a manner that their operational readiness is maintained (and possibly even enhanced) and that their legitimacy in the eyes of the community is strengthened.

## **THE SANDF REGULAR FORCE INTEGRATION PROCESS : 1993–2000**

The process of transforming the RFs will be similar in many respects to the process that accompanied the integration process, which lasted from 1993 with the initiation of the JMCC process and culminating with the last integration intake in 1999. For these reasons a brief outline of this integration process is necessary in order to contextualize the impending RF integration and transformation process.

Despite the fact that South Africa's negotiated settlement had been under discussion since early 1990, it was not until November 1993 that the armed forces of the two major political actors, the South African Government and the African National Congress (ANC), became involved in direct and structured negotiations. The reasons for the "lag" between the pace of the political and military talks were, for both the ANC and the South African Government, largely identical. First, both parties saw the retention of their armed forces as a form of a "security fallback" – a psychological and symbolic asset necessary to appease their often skeptical constituents. Second, the retention of their respective armed capabilities was seen, in very pragmatic terms, as a physical guarantee that could be utilized, should the negotiation process falter.

The establishment of the Transitional Executive Council in late 1993 with its seven sub-councils – three of which had a broad security mandate in the form of the sub-councils on Defence, Intelligence and Law and Order – made the question of whether an integration process would take place an inevitability. The role of the Sub-Council on Defence was essentially political-strategic by nature. It was primarily responsible for maintaining oversight over the armed forces during the pre-election phase and for initiating the planning required to create a new, integrated, national defence force.

The planing and staff responsibility for the management of the pre-integration planning process was delegated to a body known as the JMCC, which fell under the authority of the Sub-Council on Defence. Although the JMCC did not possess the attributes of a formal command structure, it was to become responsible for the management of a strategic planning process whereby detailed plans for the creation of the new defence force were laid. The JMCC had two chairpersons who took the chair in rotation (the Chief of the SADF, General George Meiring, and the MK Chief of Staff, Sipiwe Nyanda).

To facilitate the planning process the JMCC established a range of working groups depending on either the functional area being addressed (personnel, intelligence, operations, logistics, finances and non-cardinal issues) or the arm of service under consideration (Army, Air Force, Navy and Medical Service). Representatives on these committees were drawn from both the statutory forces (the SADF and the TVBC armies) and from the non-statutory forces (MK and, at a later date during 1994, APLA) but, in reality, it was both the SADF and MK who either co-chaired these committees and/or dominated their proceedings.

The SADF's mandate regarding its participation in the JMCC was to try to keep the structures, doctrines, training culture and organizational culture as intact as possible throughout the integration process. This was achieved for a number of interrelated reasons. First, the SADF's influence over the process was most manifest in its virtual monopoly of the formal staff skills and strategic management concepts, its keen sense of bureaucratic politics,



and its familiarity with the practical, conceptual, strategic and doctrinal issues underpinning both the planning and the force design process.

Second, the SADF possessed the organizational, planning and budgetary capabilities, which allowed it to prepare, in considerable detail, its various position papers well before its discussion with the formal structures of the JMCC. Invariably SADF positions came to dominate most of the proceedings of the JMCC.

Although MK's influence over the process was significantly enhanced by the political leverage possessed by the ANC on the national political stage – a leverage that allowed it to exact key political compromises on the ranking and placement of non-statutory force (NSF) officers – the management and oversight of the integration process during the post-election period and the participation of the British armed forces as neutral arbitrators overseeing the entire process, its ability to impact more decisively upon the process was problematized by a range of organizational and historical problems.

It is not surprising that the force design of the new SANDF was largely based on that of the former SADF and that the strategies, doctrines and procedures remained unaltered (prompting one senior SADF officer at the time to comment that “the SADF got more than 80% of what it wanted out of the JMCC process”). The immanent integration process was to be based, therefore, on SADF structures and SADF rules and regulations – a phenomenon that was to greatly undermine the capacity of non-SADF forces to influence the integration process in the initial integration period.

With the initiation of the integration process on 27 April 1994, the integration process relied on SADF structures and practices – thereby creating the conditions for what was effectively to become the “absorption” of most NSF and TVBC personnel into the structures of the “new” SANDF (although this absorption process was uneven within and between the various levels of the organization). Partially, this was a product of historical necessity and partially a product of vastly disparate force levels – the SADF bought some 90 000 personnel to the integration process, MK envisaged a contribution of some 22 000 personnel, the TVBC armies 11 000 members and APLA some 6000 soldiers.

Between April and June 1994, nine non-SADF generals (three lieutenant generals and six major generals) were appointed to a number of General Staff positions within the SANDF. None of these, with the exception of the Chief of SANDF Staff, were appointments to critical portfolios and the de facto power within the SANDF continued to reside in former SADF officers.

Thereafter, hundreds of senior MK officers were ranked by the organization in preparation for their appearance before placement boards. The ranks of former guerilla commanders were determined by MK and APLA on the basis of six interrelated criteria: command experience; operational experience; seniority; educational qualifications; military training and military qualifications; and length of service within the organization.

Ranks were determined by the force from which the members originated, were confirmed or amended by a placement board co-chaired by MK and SADF chairs, including members of the other constituent forces and overseen by a British officer from the British Military Assistance Training Team (BMATT). Once persons were confirmed in their rank they were required to complete certain courses in order to qualify for possible promotion.

Although this process initially dealt with NSF personnel, former SADF personnel were also subject to this process from 1997 onwards and many had to complete the requisite course in order to “course-qualify” them for future promotion. Candidates were given two chances to pass the course – failure thereafter resulted in the severance of their service contracts. All members of the new SANDF were also required to complete various courses on civic education and transformational management in order to prepare them for the organizational challenges of the future.

By late 1998 substantially more MK and APLA officers were represented in the SANDF than

had been the case in 1994 – especially in light of the fact that only 12 000 of the originally anticipated 28 000 members remained within the organization. The uniformed component of the SANDF consisted of 39 077 former SADF personnel (53%), 11 727 former MK personnel (16%), 9580 new SANDF personnel (13%), 6453 TVBC personnel (9%) and 4901 APLA personnel (7%). The civilian component of the SANDF, for its part, consisted of 17 976 former SADF personnel (91%), 11 MK personnel (0.06%), 790 TVBC personnel (4%) and one APLA representative (0.01%).

Of the total of 41 generals within the SANDF (1 April 1998) seven were former MK and APLA generals. Of the 4493 senior officers (major to brigadier general) 548 were former MK and APLA officers. Of the 6046 junior officers (second lieutenant to captain) 998 were former MK and APLA officers. And of the 62 625 non-commissioned officers and other ranks some 15 076 were MK and APLA personnel.

A similar integration process has been initiated within the SANDF RFs and some 400 plus MK and APLA personnel have been nominated with ranks for placement within the RF system. It is believed that the integration process within the RFs should proceed incrementally with MK and APLA officers being ranked initially, thereby providing the command and staff cadre with which to manage the subsequent phases of the process.

## **DEFENCE TRANSFORMATION: KEY ISSUES, CONCEPTS, PRINCIPLES AND CRITICAL ASSUMPTIONS**

If the RFs are to be transformed it is important to clarify the content and parameters of transformational processes. Some general observations are made below.

### **The different elements of transformation**

Transformation is a wide-ranging concept that encompasses a variety of interrelated fields. Transformation processes, if thoroughly pursued, impact upon virtually all aspects of an organization's existence and, as such, require astute management if the success of such processes is to be ensured. For transformation processes to be successful it is essential that three mission success factors be acknowledged during the management of the process itself:

- The importance of providing decisive and strategic leadership over the process itself.
- The importance of ensuring that high levels of legitimacy (“buy-in”) accrue to the process.
- The importance of determining the scope of the transformation processes itself – organizational culture, traditions, leadership styles, racial and gender composition, etc.

In essence, four major transformation “clusters” can be determined within the management of any transformation process (be this public sector, private sector or civil society) and these are particularly relevant to the transformation of the RFs:

- Cultural transformation. This entails the transformation of the culture of the RFs, the leadership, management and administrative ethos of the RFs, the value system and the traditions upon which the RFs are predicated.
- Human transformation. This entails the transformation of the composition of the RFs with regard to its racial, ethnic, regional and gender composition and its human resource practices. This component of the transformation process must be consistent with the DoD's broader policies.
- Political transformation. This process strives to ensure that the conduct and character of the RFs conforms to the political features of the democracy within which they are located – acknowledgement of the principle of civil supremacy, institution of appropriate mechanisms of oversight and control, adherence to the principles and practices of accountability and transparency, etc.
- Organizational transformation. This constitutes a more technocratic process within which the RFs will be right-sized, its management practices and its diverse organizational processes made more cost-effective, and its ability to provide services that are rendered more efficient in accordance with the broader principles which have governed the transformation of the DoD to date.

During the process of managing transformation processes it is critical to ensure that the key areas of intervention are managed in such a manner that these interventions are strategically coherent and practically based. The restructuring of the RFs will be inextricably determined

by the specific context within which such initiatives occur. Although one can formulate a general strategy for the transformation of the RFs, their institutional peculiarities and their local character will demand an approach that is flexible and context-derived.

## **KEY CRITERIA UNDERPINNING THE RESTRUCTURING OF RESERVE FORCES**

### **Criteria governing the transformation of the SANDF reserve forces**

Transformation should never be mounted for its own sake but is always inseparably part of broader political and developmental objectives. This requires that a broad set of criteria govern the process of RF transformation to ensure the optimal development of the RF for future generations:

- Given the fact that the RFs are a national defence asset, both civilian and military personnel members of the national defence community should be involved in and informed of the transformation process – Parliament, the executive, the private sector, the RFs and the DoD.
- Transformation should, somewhat self-evidently, provide for the cost-effective management of the RFs. Transformation costs money and adequate resources should be availed to the RFs to enable them to both transform and to optimally deliver their various military tasks and duties.
- Transformational initiatives could also benefit from the adoption of a flexible strategic and methodological approach to defence restructuring. This will ensure that organizations are created not on the basis of an ad-hoc response to security crises or on the basis of vested institutional and bureaucratic interests. Rather, it will ensure that the structures of the armed forces logically reflect the ability of the armed forces to provide the services for which they are constitutional entrusted. As such, any restructuring of the RFs must be consistent with major DoD policy pronouncements (the Defence Review in particular), the transformation process within the SANDF (and the South African Army in particular) and the Military Strategic Appreciation.
- Critically, transformation should not adversely affect the operational readiness and the institutional capabilities of the RF. While some initial dissonance will ripple out into the RF (an inevitable and even creative consequence of the uncertainty inherent in any transformation process), the success of the transformation process will be measured by the extent to which it maximizes the ability of the institution to deliver its services in a professional manner.
- Restructuring should provide for the optimal development of human resources during the transformation process. The successful management of the long-term consequences of the transformation of the RF is critically dependant on the policy coherence, competencies, management abilities and transformational leadership qualities within the DoD in general and the RF in particular.
- South Africa will continue to face the requirement to deploy military forces in “non-traditional” roles in the medium- to long-term future – law and order, disaster relief and peace missions, for example. These tasks, based on the current assessments of the country’s strategic environment contained in the Defence Review and the Military Strategic Appreciation, will require the maintenance of defence capabilities such as police supportive roles (routine crime prevention and criminal investigations, maintenance of law and order and, when so required, restoration of law and order), combating internal threats to the constitutional order, cross-border threats (raids and infiltration which, in violation of international law, threaten a country’s territorial integrity and sovereignty), peacekeeping roles, and military aid to the civil community (MACC) tasks (disaster relief, humanitarian assistance, etc.).

All these tasks are arenas within which the current SANDF is heavily dependent on the RFs for their execution (police supportive tasks and local disaster assistance, for example) or are areas within which the RFs can play a more robust role than they currently do (peace missions and external MACC tasks, for example).

One of the key criteria that should underpin the restructuring process is therefore the optimal utilization of the RF in a wide variety of tasks as are militarily and practically possible.

All of these criteria demand the creation of RFs that are consistent with real and not speculative national priorities and with the institution of appropriate budgetary targets to enable the RFs to execute these tasks.

## STRATEGIC CONSIDERATIONS REGARDING THE RESTRUCTURING OF THE SOUTH AFRICAN RESERVE FORCE SYSTEM

The current initiatives aimed at restructuring the RF must ensure that such restructuring is consistent with efforts to improve both its operational efficacy and its national legitimacy in the eyes of the population.

### Integration or transformation of the reserve forces?

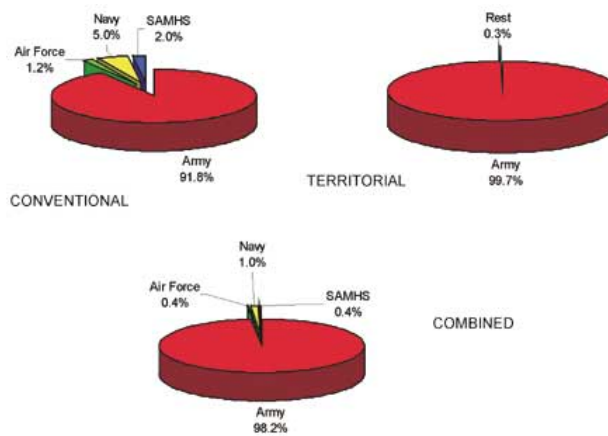
Clearly one of the key challenges facing the organization of the RFs is the transformation of both the colour and the character of these units. Recent figures released by the DoD indicate that racial and gender representation is uneven at present and will need to be rectified in line with the DoD's equal opportunity programme. The table (below) and the graphics indicate the extent of this imbalance.

### Reserve Force Per Rank - All Services and Divisions Excluding retired regular force general officers who are on strength of the Reserves

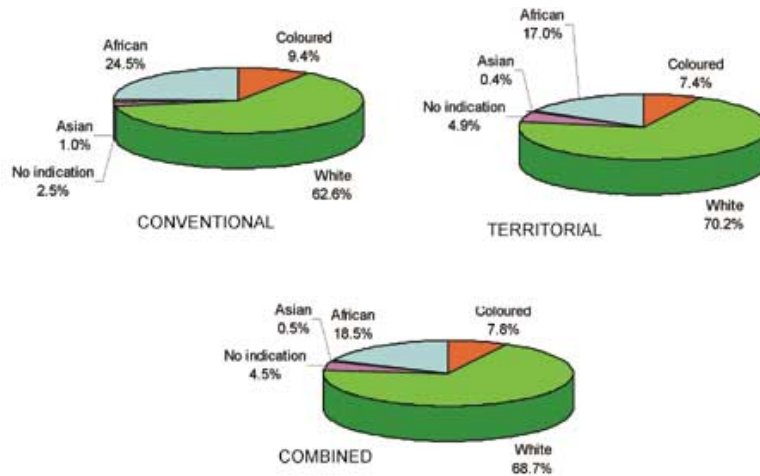
Rank	Territorial						Conventional						
	African	Asian	Coloured	Unknown	White	Total	African	Asian	Coloured	Unknown	White	Total	Total
Lt Gen	0	0	0	0	0	0*	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Maj Gen	0	0	0	0	0	0*	0	0	0	0	1	1	1
Brig Gen	0	0	0	0	0	0*	0	0	0	0	10	10	10
Col	0	0	0	0	0	0*	7	0	1	2	231	241	257
Lt Col	1	0	3	9	217	230	6	1	0	6	440	453	683
Major	8	0	4	25	769	806	11	3	7	7	569	597	1403
Capt	9	0	4	23	1046	1082	18	6	8	11	656	699	1781
Lt	15	0	14	26	2501	2556	11	0	8	16	817	852	3408
2/Lt	7	0	8	32	761	808	6	1	4	5	210	226	1034
CPLN	4	0	0	2	113	119	12	1	2	8	92	115	234
WO1	8	0	9	6	335	358	2	2	23	7	528	562	920
WO2	13	1	17	8	410	449	4	4	33	8	456	505	954
S/Sgt	29	2	19	21	721	792	16	19	45	8	527	615	1407
Sgt	70	5	90	52	2703	2920	43	27	51	21	930	1072	3992
Cpl	272	12	241	87	4795	5407	151	55	105	29	1120	1460	6867
L/Cpl	697	8	354	64	3158	4281	298	42	169	29	820	1358	5639
Pte	15 669	243	5028	2620	29 261	52 821	4451	34	1356	230	2592	8663	61 484
Total	16 802	271	5791	2975	46 790	72 629	5036	195	1812	387	9999	17 429	90 074

\*Accurate figures for these ranks are not available

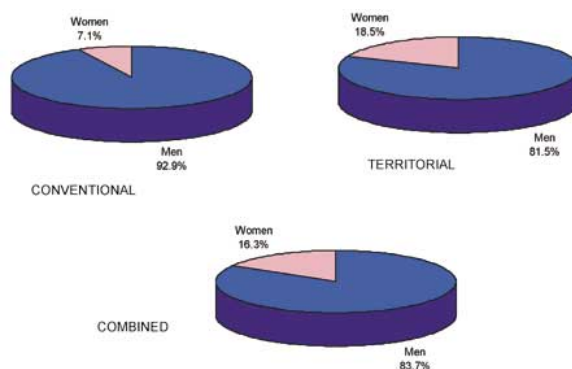
## Composition of the Reserves by Service



## Composition of the Reserves by Race



## Composition of the Reserves by Gender



Of the present force levels within the RF, 68.7% are white, 18.5% are black, 7.8% are coloured and 0.5% are Asian South Africans. Of the 72 645 active territorial force members some 16 802 are black, 271 Asian and 5791 are coloured. Most of these personnel are located in the private to corporal ranks with little representation at the junior officer levels and no representation beyond the Lt Col levels. The overwhelming majority of senior officers

continue to be white South Africans.

Of the 17429 active conventional force members, 5036 are black, 195 are Asian and 1812 are coloured South Africans. There is little representation at the junior or senior officer levels and no representation beyond the level of colonel. In terms of gender, a similar imbalance is revealed. Women constitute 16.3% of the total RF strength, 18.5 % of the territorial force strength and 7.1% of the conventional force strength.

The transformation of the RFs will accordingly entail a two-fold strategic process. The first is to ensure that the RFs are transformed in such a manner that their organization reflects the following priorities:

- The racial, ethnic, regional and gender peculiarities of South Africa at present.
- An appropriate representation of former forces of origin within their leadership and command structures (SADF, TVBC armies and MK and APLA personnel).
- Their organizational capabilities reflect the operational responsibilities assigned to them.
- Their institutional culture reflects the diverse military traditions of both the former forces of origin and the diverse military traditions prevalent within South Africa at present.
- The allocation of sufficient resources with which to both transform them and render the required operational services demanded of them by the constitution.

The second process, currently under way in its embryonic stages, must attempt to ensure that former NSF personnel (MK and APLA) and prominent and capable members of previously disadvantaged communities are ranked, placed and integrated within the various levels of the RF hierarchy. Given the fact that the current existing leadership of the RF (former white SADF officers within the RF) and the potential RF leadership (MK and APLA) is aging, the RF must strive to ensure that two conditions are met:

- New and younger officers must be identified and motivated to join the RF in order to ensure an age distribution more consistent with the requirements of a modern fighting force. Ideally, for operational purposes, a captain should be no older than 30, a colonel no older than 40, and a general no older than 50 years of age.
- The age-distribution among the non-commissioned officer and other ranks needs to be rectified. The average age of an infanteer in both the regular force and the RF resides currently in the region of 32 to 33 years of age. An infantryman should, for eminently practical operational reasons, be no older than 22 to 25 years of age. In essence the transformation of the RFs will require a two-fold transformation and integration process.

#### Reserve Force regiments and units

Army	SA Artillery	7	
	Anti Aircraft	5	
	Infantry	28	
	Armour	8	
	Territorial	183	231
Engineers			4
Signals			5
Personnel Services			1
Ordnance			6
Technical Service			6
Military Police			3
Intelligence			1
SA Navy			7

SAAF			11
SAMHS			3
Total			278

### **Expanding the scope of the reserve force's operational commitments: resource and strategic issues**

The RFs of the SANDF are currently responsible for the execution of a substantial amount of the country's military operational commitments. They provide the bulk of SANDF support to the South African Police Service (SAPS) and they provide the bedrock upon which the country's conventional military deterrence capability rest. Obviously, the ability of the RF to perform these functions is critically enhanced (or limited) by the availability of resources and it is to this issue that both strategic and operational questions relating to the deployment of the RF needs to be ultimately addressed.

South Africa's conventional capabilities have, throughout the 20th century, resided in its reserve component. The history the country's reserve conventional capabilities has followed a similar pattern. During periods of peace these capabilities have been woefully neglected in budgetary, personnel and equipment terms. With the outbreak of hostilities (World Wars One and Two, the "Border War" from the early 1970s onwards and the Angolan invasion in 1975) personnel, both volunteers and conscripts, have been present in large numbers but the Ministry of Defence has desperately had to cobble together sufficient resources with which to execute these operations.

Invariably prolonged periods of conflict have witnessed the development of impressive conventional capabilities matched by equally impressive domestic armaments manufacturing capabilities (the Second World War and the Border Wars constituting prime examples in this regard). Cessation of hostilities has, however, witnessed a rapid downsizing and a general neglect of the RFs in favour of the regular forces. This is by no means an unusual phenomenon in post-war countries and reflects the, if not sometimes mistaken, priorities of a peacetime government.

Although South Africa continues to require conventional capabilities, the current state of the conventional forces appears to be following a similar pattern to that referred to above. Resource constraints have limited the ability of conventional force units to retain new recruits – although these volunteer in abundance – and simple considerations such as man-days, availability of uniforms, subsistence and travel allowances have resulted in innumerable citizen force units either losing or having to turn away prospective recruits.

The conventional capabilities of the SANDF need to be practically retained (beyond the supportive pronouncements of current defence policy) for two sets of interrelated reasons. The first is undoubtedly the responsibility that government bears for the preservation of territorial integrity and sovereignty.

Now while it is true to say that the "primary function/secondary function" is not as appropriate for most armed forces internationally as it used to be during the Cold War period, the old adage much reviled by anti-militarists, that the world is an inherently unpredictable arena, remains as true today as it did during the pre-Cold War period.

Notwithstanding the fact that the nature of war has changed somewhat during the last decade – as evidenced by a shift from mass mobilized, armour and infantry heavy forces towards lighter, more mobile conventional and semi-conventional capabilities – countries still require conventional and semi-conventional capabilities to repel incursions in to sovereign territory. A greater emphasis will be placed on rotary-wing capabilities, light infantry, special forces and reconnaissance capacities, electronic warfare and signal intelligence capabilities and air transport capabilities within these divergent scenarios.

Given the low force-to-space ratio characteristic of both South Africa and the African continent, and the economic restraints which prohibit governments from maintaining large

regular forces to accomplish the above, the role of RFs will continue to be crucial in this regard. Indeed, it is interesting to note how the border protection responsibilities assigned to the current SANDF have shifted from the previous SADF's tradition of utilizing mainly RF personnel (all be they conscripts) to the current utilization of regular force personnel alone.

It is equally interesting to note the extent to which regular force personnel are represented in the command and staff echelons of the SANDF's current brigade structures. Historically these have been a RF domain with little senior regular force representation in the hierarchy – another tradition that appears to have been eroded in recent years.

The second reason for maintaining conventional capabilities relates to the current demand being placed on functioning governments to participate in a variety of peace missions. For South Africa such participation is seen as being critical given its political, economic and military prominence on the African continent and, perhaps more importantly, its status as the de facto leader of the New African Initiative/Millennium Recovery Plan initiative. Whether such participation relates to peacekeeping, peace-enforcement or even preventive diplomacy, participation will require the commitment of conventional military capabilities to such missions.

Currently, the DoD maintains that it cannot field more than a battalion-minus complement for such operations (approximately 480 personnel). It cites valid reasons for these constraints including the current downsizing process under way within the DoD, the commitment of SANDF personnel to police supportive and border protection responsibilities, and the need to complete the transformation process still currently under way within the DoD.

Largely absent from such strategic considerations, however, is the utilization of RF personnel in such roles. Considerably cheaper, with a significantly expanded skills base than those possessed by regular force personnel, and often more mature and experienced than younger regular force personnel, RF members can play an invaluable role in the peace missions scenario. It is significant to note that the bulk of personnel deployed by Scandinavian armed forces are indeed RF personnel. Factors cited include cost-effectiveness, possession of the types of civilian skills increasingly required for effective participation in peace missions scenarios, and the general maturity of RF personnel.

As stated in previous sections of this paper, RFs play a vital role in the provision of ongoing SANDF support to the SAPS. Two immediate challenges emerge if one is to consider the ongoing tasking of the RF for this role. *The first is whether the SANDF should remain deployed in this capacity in the medium- to long-term.*

In essence, the deployment of military personnel in a police supportive role is not an ideal utilization of military capabilities. Although the armed forces have, historically, been deployed in this manner, such deployment can carry with it certain political, institutional and psychological risks. Armed forces do possess certain capabilities that are more appropriate to certain aspects of the internal policing function – the restoration of law and order in such cases where that law and order has irrevocably broken down (unconstitutional challenges to government, secession, localized uprisings, etc.).

Ideally the police should possess the capacity and/or develop the capacity to execute the other aspects of the internal policing function – maintenance of law and order and standard crime prevention, for example. This would “free” the SANDF from its current internal responsibilities and allow it to concentrate on those tasks more generic to its function – deterrence, maritime protection, border protection and participation in peace missions, for example. The sad reality, however, is that the nature of crime has changed so profoundly, and the current capacity of the police is so limited, that it is highly unlikely that the SANDF, and the commandos, will to be withdrawn from this role in the medium- to long-term.

The second challenge relates to the institutional location of the commando system. The commandos need to be retained under SANDF command for the indefinite future. Although arguments have been proffered suggesting that the commandos could resort either under the police or under the command of a “third force” (a gendarmerie or a border guard, for example), political and practical realities demand that they remain a component of the



SANDF.

In addition to their secondary role of supporting the SAPS, the commandos are intended to play an important role in ensuring rear area protection in the eventuality of an invasion of full-scale war. The current regular forces do not have the capacity to do this, beyond a limited deterrent role, and the commandos will continue to be a critical force structure element in this regard.

Politically it would be prudent to maintain these structures within the command and control system of the SANDF. Unless tightly controlled, militia forces can be constituted as power bases for local and regional interests – as the activities of some commando members in the Northern Province and Mpumalanga have illustrated.

### **Creating a representative military culture**

Without broader political and civic legitimacy, the capacity of any RF system to deliver its operational commitments will be severely limited. This is particularly applicable within the South African environment where the creation and use of military forces has been the subject of centuries-old political contestation and contention.

South Africa possesses an extremely rich and diverse military history ranging from the original wars of resistance waged by the Khoi against the Portuguese and Dutch settlers, to the plethora of conflicts that characterized both the 19th and 20th centuries. At present the South African RFs embody many of these traditions, although these are drawn primarily from the former English and Boer military traditions of the country (most vividly manifested in the traditions of the commandos and the “traditional” citizen force regiments).

It will be vital to include those military traditions, which have hitherto been ignored, into the cultural discourse of the RFs. Three options present themselves in this regard. The first is to create “new” regiments, which better embody the traditions of MK and APLA than is currently the case – a Chris Hani Regiment or a Tambo Battalion, for example. This could be potentially problematic in the sense that it would ghettoize military traditions within the RF along racial lines and, consequently, introduce an unnecessary level of divisiveness within the structures and activities of the RFs.

The second is to maintain the current status quo and hope that, over time and incrementally, the present RF system will gradually transform itself into something more representative and culturally inclusive than is currently the case. In reality, however, this is not an option and will severely bedevil plans to transform the RF into a nationally inclusive organization.

The third, possibly most pragmatic, approach is to ensure that excluded military traditions are actively incorporated within the corporate cultures of the present RF units, that these traditions co-exist alongside those traditions already embodied within these units and that a “fusion” of military traditions is maintained in such a manner that a military inclusiveness and legitimacy is accomplished.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Far from diminishing in utility, the potential role of RFs appears to be strategically necessary in the forthcoming decades. The regular forces of the SANDF clearly do not have the manpower to accomplish the plethora of tasks being expected of South Africa in terms of its continental and domestic obligations. This much is reflected in most of South Africa’s national defense policy, although the coupling of resources to these policy objectives is woefully inadequate at present.

To ensure the effective transformation and utilization of the RF, the following conditions need to apply:

- An independent budget “line item” for the RF needs to be established. In reality this would not constitute more than three to five per cent of the entire defence budget and would be more than sufficient to ensure the maintenance, personnel and operational requirement of the RF on an annual basis. This line item will need to be voted for by

Parliament and could either be administered as a separate budget within the SANDF (a preferable option if the “one force” concept is to be maintained) or as a separate budget within the Defence Secretariat.

- A transformation plan for the restructuring of the entire RFs – organizationally, financially and culturally – needs to be effected between the major role-players in the RF system (the Parliamentary Defence Committees, the Ministry of Defence, the DoD, the Reserve Force National Council and major role players from the private sector).
- The expanded utilization of the RFs in the peace missions arena needs to be considered and requires the resources with which this will be effected. The force multiplication effect of this deployment will greatly enhance South Africa’s operational ability to contribute to the diverse initiatives of the New African Initiative.
- An expanded recruiting drive with appropriate resources is required to transform the demographic compositions of the RF officer and non-commissioned officer cadre as well as ensuring that young and able volunteers are recruited into and retained within the system. The RF is aging at present and the scope of existing and anticipated operational tasks demands a younger recruit basis.

Current defence policy dictates a prominent role for the country’s RFs. Financial allocations have, however, not reflected these policy intentions. South Africa is one of the few African countries that possess a long and viable RF tradition (Tanzania and Egypt are the others). This tradition should not be maintained for its own sake or for reasons of mere sentimentality, but should be predicated on the civic, economic and military utility that RFs can bring to the national defence table. To forego this tradition on the basis of short-term financial considerations is to squander a considerable national asset.

## NOTES

1. The ANC’s defence think-tank, The Military Research Group, had advised the ANC that for a complex of political, historical and cultural reasons it was highly unlikely that the bulk of the SADF’s personnel – then residing in the SADF’s conventional citizen force capabilities – would support such an initiative. Concern was expressed, correctly as later attempts by the right wing demonstrated, that elements within the commandos, and even commando units in their entirety, could possibly support a right-wing secession bid.
2. The Citizen Force National Council, later renamed the part-time Force National Council and the Reserve Force National Council, was established in 1992 to ensure that the interests of the country’s RFs (both conventional and territorial units) were adequately represented during the transition process. The history of RF units during the 20th century had been one of institutional neglect and, as attempts by the National Party during the post-1948 period demonstrated, political interference.

## ABOUT THIS PAPER

The utility and importance of reserve forces (RFs) to South Africa’s national defence efforts continue unabated today. Conventional RFs constitute the bedrock of the country’s conventional military capabilities and the territorial forces play a critical role in supporting the police in the maintenance of law and order. This paper examines the transformational challenges that are likely to confront the South African RFs in future. It does this by situating the transformation of the RF within the overall transformational challenges facing the defence community in general, and examines the internal institutional challenges, which confront the transformation of the RF in particular. The paper also explores the extent to which the creation of RFs within sub-Saharan Africa in general can contribute to the consolidation of stable civil-military relations and the institution of more cost-effective methods of defence expenditure. It maintains that the utility of RFs on the African continent remains vastly under-explored and advocates certain approaches where this utility can be more effectively harnessed in future.