



**SUBMISSION ON THE STATUS OF THE SOUTH
AFRICAN NATIONAL DEFENCE FORCE'S RESERVES**

**TO THE PORTFOLIO COMMITTEE ON DEFENCE OF THE
SOUTH AFRICAN NATIONAL ASSEMBLY**

BY THE INSTITUTE FOR SECURITY STUDIES

10 MARCH 2005

Note of Appreciation

The Institute for Security Studies wishes to use this opportunity to congratulate the Department of Defence and the South African National Defence Force for the sterling work that they have done in the interest of peace and security in Africa. The Institute also wishes to thank the Portfolio Committee on Defence for this opportunity to contribute to the defence debate in South Africa.

SUBMISSION ON THE STATUS OF THE SOUTH AFRICAN NATIONAL DEFENCE FORCE'S RESERVES TO THE PORTFOLIO COMMITTEE ON DEFENCE BY THE INSTITUTE FOR SECURITY STUDIES¹

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

During the period 1994 to 1998 South Africa developed a comprehensive defence policy framework through transparent and consultative processes that led to the promulgation of the White Paper on Defence in May 1996 and Defence Review in April 1998. One of the provisions of this policy was that the "SANDF will comprise a relatively small Regular Force and a sufficiently large Part-Time Force"². The part-time component would in turn consist of the conventional units (citizen force) and territorial units (commandos). The logic for this policy decision was based on two considerations. The first was to align the force design and structure of the SANDF with the 'primarily defensive orientation and posture' called for in the Constitution and the White Paper and the second to ensure affordable yet responsive defence within financial constraints.

An issue that was not fully investigated and addressed in the period of developing the White Paper on Defence and the Defence Review, was the feasibility of a reserve system in a country characterised by mixed first and third world socio-economic realities. In conditions of high unemployment, a reserve system will be used as a means for primary employment whilst in a highly advanced economy, employers will be reluctant to allow employees to spend significant periods of time away from work. These factors require deeper investigation.

Currently, the territorial units (Commandos) are being phased out and all indications are that the conventional units of the SANDF Reserve Force are poorly staffed, equipped and trained³. This submission expresses concern at the condition of the Conventional Reserves but also addresses the issue of the Territorial Reserves as was done in a previous submission to the Committee by the Institute⁴.

¹ This submission was prepared by Len Le Roux, Head of the Defence Sector Programme at the Institute for Security Studies. (Contact details: <len@iss.org.za>)

² White Paper on Defence 1996, Chapter 4, p 17

³ See DOD Annual Report 2003-2004 pages 37, 69, 71, 118 and 119

⁴ ISS Submission on the Defence Review, 4 October 2004

In the final instance, this submission by the ISS recommends:

- A comprehensive policy review to get clarity on the role and functions of the Reserves (both conventional and territorial) in the SANDF;
- A comprehensive study into the feasibility of a reserve system for the SANDF and the associated implications and required legislative provisions.
- That, in the short term, the issue of the neglect of the Conventional Reserves be given priority attention and that current policy towards the Reserves be adequately funded; and
- A revision of the Cabinet decision to phase out the Territorial Reserves and that the closing down be suspended until a comprehensive review of defence policy has been done.

INTRODUCTION

1. During the period 1994 to 1998 South Africa developed a comprehensive defence policy framework through transparent and consultative processes that led to the promulgation of the White Paper on Defence in May 1996 and Defence Review in April 1998. These documents established the national defence posture, defined the functions and tasks as well as the required force design of the SANDF and described the overall structure of the Department of Defence (DOD). They have subsequently served as the foundation for the further development of defence legislation (including a new Defence Act), policy and doctrine and have been the primary frame of reference for the initiation of the much-debated strategic defence acquisition projects.

2. The White Paper and Defence Review argued that South Africa could significantly reduce defence spending and concentrate on the establishment of a small (core) conventional regular force and a large part-time force, which could be mobilised when required¹. It was anticipated that the SANDF would progressively withdraw from the internal policing function and that a force of about 1 000 soldiers, with air, maritime and medical support units, would be sufficient for the country's international and regional peace support obligations.

3. These planning assumptions, combined with budgetary restrictions, led to the approved establishment of a defence force of some 55 000 uniformed regular soldiers focussed on the maintenance of a core conventional capability. This figure includes the Army, Air Force, Navy and Military Health Service and is also inclusive of all uniformed support and headquarters personnel. The total strength of the DOD, civilians included, was set at 70 000. The regular force was to be backed by a sufficiently large part-time component to ensure expansion capability when required.

4. A number of these planning assumptions have proved to be in need of revision (see previous submission by the ISS to the Committee dated 4 October 2004). Essentially the role of the SANDF in peacekeeping in Africa is much greater than anticipated, the developments around the Common Africa Peace and Security Policy and the African Standby Force are creating new demands and financial and other realities have placed the SANDF under pressure to execute policy to the full.

5. Currently the Territorial Reserves are being phased out and indications are that the Conventional Reserve is poorly staffed, equipped and trained.² Seen in the light of the changes in the external and internal environment, that question some of the assumptions on which current policy is based, the current situation constitutes a significant deviation between policy and practice and leaves a gap in the force design and structure of the SANDF.

RESERVE FORCES

6. Reserves are an important component of any defence force. In fact the 'maintenance of sufficient reserves' has been used as a fundamental 'principle of war' for centuries. Reserves allow for the maintenance of a relatively small, and thus affordable regular force during times of peace and stability and the rapid expansion of such a regular force in times of crisis and conflict. Limiting the size of the regular force also acts as an important confidence and security building measure.

THE CONVENTIONAL RESERVE

Primary role of the SANDF

7. According to the South African Constitution (Act 108 of 1996), "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".³ In the previous submission to the Portfolio Committee on Defence by the ISS⁴ it was argued that the primary function of the SANDF was very narrowly defined in the White Paper on Defence as 'defence against external military aggression'. This definition strongly influenced the force design of the SANDF and has led to an over-emphasis on conventional capabilities and a lack of provision for the important functions that the SANDF is executing in peace support operations in Africa and will be required to execute in support of the collective defence and security mechanisms on the Continent.

8. It was therefore submitted that the primary function of the SANDF should be redefined as "to act as an instrument for Government in conflict prevention and conflict intervention" and would then by implication include the following tasks:

- The provision of credibility to government's diplomatic initiatives;
- The provision of capabilities for peace support operations;
- The provision of capabilities for military diplomacy and contributing to collective defence in Africa in line with the Common African Defence and Security Policy; and
- The provision of military deterrence through credible operational capabilities.

South African defence posture

9. The force design and structure of the SANDF was also heavily premised on the new 'primary defensive' defence posture adopted in the Constitution and the

White Paper. This posture includes certain elements of the concepts of non-offensive defence (NOD), also known as confidence building defence. This is well described in the Defence Review, Chapter 2, paragraph 20. Paragraph 20.6 emphasises the need for “great reliance” on the Part Time Component (Reserves) as a fundamental principle of confidence building defence. It is submitted that this posture is still valid today and in fact that more could be done to entrench the principles of confidence building defence in the SANDF force design and structure. In the previous submission, referred to earlier, it was recommended that consideration be given to include studies on non-offensive defence in the current review process.⁵

10. It is however submitted that the practical feasibility of a large reserve system in a country characterised by mixed first and third world socio-economic realities was not fully investigated and addressed in the period of developing the White Paper on Defence and the Defence Review. In conditions of high unemployment, a reserve system could easily be used as a means for primary employment and this could adversely affect the quality of the system. On the other hand, in a highly advanced economy, employers will be reluctant to allow employees to spend significant periods of time away from work, which could reduce the availability of candidates for the Reserve Force. These factors could prove to be contrary to the ideals of a confidence building defence posture and need to be studied in more depth.

Current international trends

11. Nearly every edition of Defence News of the last months has contained articles on a re-think on the force design of modern defence forces. The trend is nearly universally for smaller, highly mobile expeditionary forces backed by territorial forces for homeland defence⁶. This allows for rapid reaction for conflict prevention and intervention ‘away from home’ (see paragraph 6 above) whilst maintaining the capacity to defend the homeland against conventional and unconventional threats. The focus is on rapid reaction regular forces backed by reserves for ensuring sustainability and ‘homeland defence’.

12. It is submitted that this concept is equally valid for South Africa. In fact, given the leading role that South Africa should play and is playing on the Continent, this concept has particular relevance. Despite this, the feasibility of reliance on reserves for the long-term sustainment of and support to peace support operations, for a country such as South Africa, still needs to be proven. This requires dedicated studies and research.

The current state of the SANDF Conventional Reserve

13. The part-time component of the SANDF has been severely neglected and is today nearly non-existent. The Conventional Reserve has not been trained at an operational level for some years and no new blood is flowing into the system. It

has few fully trained troops, has a grossly over-age leadership corps and has not participated in large-scale field training exercises in many years. There is, however, still a core around which an effective or more efficient reserve force could be rebuilt, but as things stand now, there is no viable reserve force to back up the regular force.

14. The situation of the Conventional Reserve is well described in the DOD Annual Report 2003-2004. The report states, "The combat readiness of the Mechanised, Motorised, and Light Infantry has been adversely affected by the understaffing of Army Conventional Reserve Units".⁷ In Appendix A the report states that, "The state of the Reserve Force as a whole is still a matter of concern as the Conventional Reserve, despite the interventions occasioned by Project PHOENIX, is still not a combat ready and deployable force".⁸ The reasons proffered are " the limited funds available continue to be the main inhibiting factor in the execution of plans developed by Project PHOENIX to address the critical issues. These are chiefly the lack of trained personnel to the Reserves and the limited training opportunities available".⁹ These statements by the DOD are self-explanatory and need no elaboration.

Conclusion regarding the Conventional Reserve

15. The factors discussed above argue for the maintenance of a 'sufficiently large' Conventional Reserve. In summary the motivation for this statement is:

- It is a logical outflow of South Africa's strategic defence posture based on the principles of confidence building defence.
- It is in line with modern trends of creating smaller, rapid reaction, regular forces for conflict prevention and conflict intervention whilst allowing for longer-term support to such operations as well as for homeland defence in times of crisis or conflict.
- It creates collective responsibility between the SANDF and the population for the defence and protection of South Africa.
- It is probably the only affordable option for South Africa.

16. Despite this, the feasibility of the creation and maintenance of a large reserve, that will be able and available to support the 'small' regular force in expeditionary operations, still needs dedicated investigation.

THE TERRITORIAL RESERVE

The role and functions of the Territorial Reserve

17. The existence of a territorial reserve (such as the Commandos) is one of the most crucial elements in the concept of a defence force built on the principles of confidence building defence. Confidence building defence, or non-offensive defence, argues for the concept of the 'spider in the web' where the web is supplied by the territorial reserves and the spider is the mobile conventional force (both regular and part-time). The web gives the spider early warning through intelligence, provides a first line of defence, provides protection in the rear areas and gives the spider wide spread logistical support. The present and emerging threats to South Africa and the region come more from the areas of terrorism, warlordism, rebel groups, piracy and other forms of organised crime. Territorial Reserves provide essential early warning and quick reaction to such threats.

18. The Territorial Reserve also has many collateral utilities in times of peace. They provide an extended network for supporting the police in the maintenance of law and order and are the mainstay of the SANDF for reacting to emergencies and disasters as well as in the maintenance of essential services during such emergencies. In this regard, the Territorial Reserve has many common features with a Gendarmerie, which performs policing functions in peacetime and military functions in times of war and conflict.

The current state of the SANDF Territorial Reserve

19. The situation regarding the Territorial Reserve is well known. They are being phased out and can currently not be considered to be a force that would have any utility for future homeland defence and support to the conventional forces. This leaves a strategic gap in the design of the SANDF. It also poses the question as to who will take over the roles that the commandos have played as the first line of reaction in cases of emergencies and disasters as well as in the maintenance of essential services during such emergencies. In the final instance, the jury is still out on the question of the ability of the SAPS to take over all the roles in which the Commandos have supported them for many years. Currently there is no clear indication as to how this will be done and the ISS expresses its concern about the lack of information and consultation in this regard.

Conclusion regarding the Territorial Reserve

20. The reason proffered by the MOD/DOD for the phasing out of the Territorial Reserve is based only on the work done by them in their (one) secondary function in support of the SAPS in the maintenance of law and order. This is argued by the MOD/DOD to be 'unconstitutional' as only the SAPS have power

of investigation and arrest. This is incorrect as the SANDF (and therefore the reserve) has always acted '**in support of the police**' in accordance with the stated functions of the SANDF in the Constitution. The Constitution, through Schedule 6; Transitional Arrangements; Section 24 (1) provides for the retention of Section 227 (1) of the Interim Constitution Act No. 200 of 1993 which provides that "*The Defence Force may be employed;*

- a. *for service in the defence of the Republic, for the protection of its sovereignty and territorial integrity;*
- b. *for service in compliance with the international obligations of the Republic with regard to international bodies and other states;*
- c. *for service in the preservation of life, health or property;*
- d. ***for service in the provision or maintenance of essential services;***
- e. ***for service in upholding of law and order in the Republic in co-operation with the South African Police Service under circumstances set out in law where the Police Service is unable to maintain law and order on its own; and***
- f. *for service in support of any department of state for the purpose of socio-economic upliftment".¹⁰*

21. It has also been stated by the MOD/DOD that the Conventional Reserve or the Regular Force will take over the role of the Commandos during emergencies and disasters as well as in the maintenance of essential services during such emergencies. This assurance is contested on the logic that the Territorial Reserves are area bound, capable of responding at the drop of a hat, have local knowledge and a local network whilst the Regular Force and the Conventional Reserve operate from a few localised centres, need to be mobilised and transported, have no local knowledge and have no network or infrastructure in the areas to which they may be deployed. Given the present state of the Conventional Reserve, their collateral utility is seriously questioned.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

22. Current approved defence policy as contained in the Constitution, the White Paper on Defence and the Defence Review is the product of a comprehensive defence policy framework developed through transparent and consultative processes. There seems to be a current tendency for ignoring promulgated policy, ad hoc decision-making, and a reversion away from consultation and participation. This is manifested in the poor state of the Conventional Reserve and the executive decision to close down the Territorial Reserves. Both these developments have a significant impact on current defence policy and leave

considerable strategic gaps in the force design and structure of the SANDF. This can only be corrected by ensuring that all executive decisions on defence are taken within a comprehensive and approved policy framework.

23. Although this submission strongly supports the concepts on which the present force design are premised, notably those of confidence building defence and affordability, it also submits that insufficient research has to date been done on the feasibility of the creation and maintenance of a large reserve, that will be able and available to support the 'small' regular force in expeditionary operations.

24. This submission on 'The Status of the South African National Defence Force's Reserves' therefore recommends:

- A comprehensive policy review to get clarity on the role and functions of the Reserves (both conventional and territorial) in the SANDF;
- A comprehensive study into the feasibility of a reserve system for the SANDF and the associated implications and required legislative provisions.
- That, in the short term, the issue of the neglect of the Conventional Reserves be given priority attention and that current policy towards the Reserves be adequately funded; and
- A revision of the Cabinet decision to phase out the Territorial Reserves and that the closing down be suspended until a comprehensive review of defence policy has been done.

¹ White Paper on Defence 1996, Chapter 4, p 17

² See DOD Annual Report 2003-2004 pages 37, 69, 71, 118 and 119

³ Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996, Act No. 108 of 1996, Chapter 11, Section 200 (2)

⁴ ISS Submission on the Defence Review, 4 October 2004, p 6 and 13

⁵ ISS Submission on the Defence Review, 4 October 2004, p 14

⁶ Defense News (www.defensenews.com), Denmark – 10 September 2004, Nordic countries – 10 September 2004, Sweden – 13 September 2004, Canadian Army – 20 September 2004, USA – 27 September 2004 and Denmark – 6 December 2004

⁷ DOD Annual Report 2003-2004, p 71

⁸ DOD Annual Report 2003-2004, p 118

⁹ Ibid

¹⁰ Interim Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1993, Act No. 200 of 1993, Chapter 14, Section 227 (1)