

The South African defence force is more democratic than ever before. It is weaker than ever before. This tension emerged at a recent conference on democracy and the military.

RONEL SCHEFFER was there.

# Forceful views



Picture: SOUTHLIGHT

**C**IVIL-MILITARY relations are shaping up positively in a new, democratic South Africa in spite of signs of uncertainty about the implications of integration and change in the South African National Defence Force (SANDF).

On the positive side, the SANDF has thrown its weight behind a new structure said to significantly extend civilian control over the military. This must be a final signal that right-wing elements in the force do not intend challenging the democratic government, speculation to the contrary before the election notwithstanding.

The down side is scepticism that a restructured – and apparently weakened –

defence force has the capacity to guarantee security and stability during the transition. However, top defence figures were at pains to reassure delegates to a recent Idasa conference in Cape Town that the military would rise to whatever challenge the new democratic order produced.

The one-day conference looked at the relationship between parliament, democracy and the military and attracted senior military personnel, ministry of defence officials led by Deputy Minister Ronnie Kasrils, parliamentarians involved in defence matters, foreign diplomats and organisations engaged in defence policy issues.

A progress report from the SANDF revealed unqualified support for a model of civil-

military co-operation, the so-called "balance option", which has already been accepted by the government and is being implemented. The model was born out of a long process in which the full spectrum of civilian, government and military interests were represented, beginning with the formation of the Joint Military Co-ordinating Council by the Transitional Executive Council's Sub-Council on Defence.

A major structural shift involves the defence secretariat. Previously part of the defence force, this has become a civilian structure headed by a defence secretary. Another important change is the creation of a parliamentary joint standing committee on defence, with wide-ranging powers of oversight,

investigation and recommendation to strengthen military accountability to the elected government.

According to SANDF chief director of communication Major-General GN Opperman, who spoke on behalf of defence force chief Georg Meiring, the advantage of the "balance option" is that it conforms fully to the principle of civilian control of the military. It provides transparency and separation of powers, making civilians responsible for the politics of defence policy, programmes and budgets, while the military retains professional responsibility.

Disadvantages, in Opperman's view, are bureaucratic complexity and the possibility of conflicting roles, duplication of functions and activities, and a critical mass larger than the status quo.

Opperman emphasised that the separation and hierarchy of authority between civilian and military leaders in a democracy did not imply that the armed forces were merely a neutral and passive instrument for implementing executive decisions.

Senior officers would invariably attempt to advance their institutional interests in competition with other groups, and would naturally seek to contribute to the formulation of defence policy on the basis of their professional expertise.

It was therefore misleading, he argued, to portray the quest for stable civil-military co-operation simply in terms of maintaining civilian control over the armed services. The challenge was to ensure that the services participated in the development of defence policy without undermining or usurping the authority of the civilian decision makers.

Opperman said tensions between military and civilian leadership in

emerging democracies often resulted from a lack of expert skills and knowledge within the relevant civilian bodies. Lack of experience in ministries of defence and parliamentary defence committees gave rise to frustration within the armed forces and inhibited effective management of defence. This could also create space for soldiers to engage in politics.

He made a number of recommendations for avoiding these problems in South Africa, including programmes on democracy and civil-military co-operation for SANDF personnel; training in military planning and analytical budgeting skills for members of the joint standing committee on defence and ministry of defence staff; and structuring the relationship between military high command and civilian defence bodies to ensure regular and dynamic interaction and co-operation.

Former defence force chief and Freedom Front leader Constand Viljoen told conference delegates that it was wrong to imply that defence management and policy had not previously been under civilian control in South Africa. He described the creation of a civilian defence secretariat as "an over-reaction based on emotion" which would cause tension and undermine the position of the chief of the defence force.

However, Viljoen said the appointment of Lieutenant-General Pierre Steyn as Secretary for Defence would "make a wrong thing work at the beginning".

Laurie Nathan of the Centre for Conflict Resolution argued that the

page 18

## Training a force of good citizens

DASA is making a bid to implement a long-term citizenship education and value orientation programme in the defence force as a contribution to the process of making the force "constitution friendly". The bid is supported by the Military Research Group and the Institute for Defence Policy, both of which have been deeply involved in defence policy activities in recent years.

The programme will involve reshaping the value system of the defence force to bring it into line with democratic principles.

Citizenship education in the defence force is seen as essential in the short-term in order to promote a general sense of stability and legitimacy, according to Geoff Brown of Idasa's Training Centre for Democracy, who is co-ordinating the bid.

An enduring democracy would require the development of new values and attitudes within state institutions, particularly the defence force with the enormous power at its disposal. Effective citizenship education – involving experiential learning, lectures, debate and reflection – should be directed at all levels of the force. The curriculum would include democratic theory, the role of a defence force in a democracy and international law.

Idasa has proposed that an organisation like itself should either conduct the programme throughout the defence force or train the staff of a permanent citizenship education unit within the force.

The issue of value education was also raised at Idasa's recent conference on civil-military relations by Paul-Bolko Mertz, an inde-

pendent defence and security consultant.

Mertz said the image of a soldier in a democratic society was exemplified by his service for the common good and the protection of the human dignity.

He said emerging democratic societies like South Africa needed a politically educated military consisting of responsible citizens who acknowledged the political consequences of the military action they took.

He warned that questions around changing the present defence force culture would not be settled overnight and that leadership development and civic education would be a long process that would grow with the emerging democratic state. The integration process of former political adversaries and military enemies put great pressure on every member to act with tolerance, to cultivate friendship and mutual understanding and to practise professionalism that emphasised ethical and moral norms more than technical standards.

As regards obedience and discipline, Mertz said modern democratic constitutions and international law limited the enforcement of authority which meant that soldiers had to obey legal orders but could disobey illegal orders.

"Any order which demands from the soldier to commit a crime – killing of unarmed civilians, harassment, rape, plunder, torture of prisoners, refusing to render medical assistance – are illegal and are to be refused both on moral and legal grounds," he said.

Mertz argued that these limits on "unconditional obedience" did not reduce combat efficiency; rather it was unconditional obedience that destroyed the initiative, creativity and mutual confidence which formed the basis of good military leadership. ■



Mertz

important democratic practice to be able to sack your local MP at nomination time if he or she has not performed during the previous period of office. Political parties have started to address this by allocating MPs to specific areas of the country to do "constituency" work. They have successfully claimed R3 000 an MP a month to cover this work. These funds will be paid directly into the account of the MPs' political parties and should be used to cover the cost of setting up and running constituency offices, holding report-back meetings and generally staying in touch with the electorate.

A common criticism of MPs is that they get paid simply for sitting (and sometimes sleeping) through session after session of parliament. All legislatures do, in fact, end up with their fair share of free-loaders but in the main this should not be allowed to happen. Most MPs are allocated to a number of committees (and a resultant number of sub-committees) and other duties. The parliamentary day can begin early in the morning with a series of meetings and end sometimes after seven in

the evening when parliament adjourns for the day.

The problem of accountability and assessment of performance which, to continue the analogy with the private sector, requires systems of appraisal and time-keeping will need to be reviewed and adapted to encourage voter confidence in public representatives. Much of this is the responsibility of the political parties concerned, but parliament as an institution can also establish checks and balances and has started to address this question by instituting a form of clock-in system for MPs. (One sometimes wonders where an MP has been when he or she wanders into the assembly for the first time three or four hours after the session has begun.)

This article has focused on the remuneration of ordinary MPs and not the packages of the cabinet, chairpersons of committees, whips and the like. There has been considerable criticism both from within and from outside parliament about the size of the packages allocated to these categories, especially to the cabinet.

What has happened is exactly what the

Melamet Committee wanted to avoid. Its intention of devising an open and fair remuneration system with similar rules and regulations covering taxation to those in the private sector was achieved – but then it was lost in uninformed argument in the press and elsewhere.

It was fascinating to learn that when a number of non-Cape Town based parliamentary media correspondents recently started adding up the value of their salary packages they soon realised these were not very different to those paid to MPs.

Current legislation before parliament is likely to affect the overall package, with a review of the basic salary and two allowances taking place. A draft bill provides for a commission of non-parliamentarians to make recommendations on remuneration packages, thereby ensuring that MPs do not decide on their own salaries. ■

*Allan Taylor is Policy Co-ordinator in the Registrar's office at the University of the Western Cape.*

## Forceful views

♦ from page 8

approach used to arrive at the "balance option" of civil-military co-operation should also be used for further policy development. Ad hoc responses to complex defence issues should be avoided at all costs.

Deputy Defence Minister Ronnie Kasrils emphasised that members of the military were not servants of the government of the day but of the Constitution. If the forces were called upon to defend the Constitution in South Africa today, they would be defending democracy.

Responding to comments about problems around the integration of former Apla, Umkhonto we Sizwe and homeland defence force personnel into the SANDF, Kasrils said the force was more democratic now than ever before. It was essential that the integration process worked, but this would require the co-operation of all parties.

"There are tensions. We are not sweeping them under the carpet but we are trying collectively to solve them," he said.

The problem, according to defence standing committee chairperson Tony Yengeni and PAC member of parliament Richard Sizani, was that erstwhile cadres of the liberation movements were being absorbed rather than integrated into the defence force. The process

was taking place entirely on the terms and standards of the defence force, which was also imposing its organisational culture on new members.

Jakkie Cilliers of the Institute for Defence Policy countered that the integration process was imperfect because it was the result of a political deal.

"It is not cost-effective because it is a political deal – but it had to be carried out. There is great scope for criticism but it had to be done."

Opperman urged delegates to have regard for the difficult conditions on the ground and said mechanisms were being created to deal with problems. The legitimacy issue would not be settled until the process was complete, he said.

However, Cilliers painted a bleak picture of defence force capacity in his paper on prospects for stability. He said that he, personally, was "not lulled" by reports that good progress was being made in consolidating the security forces. Indeed, he went so far as to say that a crisis appeared to be in the offing.

"South Africa may be well on its way towards a single, integrated socio-economic policy in the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) but there is no sign of

a concomitant national security plan, without which the RDP will certainly fail," he warned. "Security and development go hand in hand."

Cilliers drew a picture of a discredited and demoralised police force in the throes of a massive transition and without a credible public order force, and of a defence force required to support the police but suffering itself from all the trauma of transition and a decreasing ability to rely on call-ups to augment its full-time strength.

The critical issue, according to Cilliers, was the recently announced moratorium on prosecution of part-time members of the Citizen Force who failed to respond to call-up papers. This effectively deprived the army of a large portion of its mobilisable operational strength at a time of possible instability.

However, Kasrils made it clear that he did not share Cilliers' alarm. He said the defence ministry was committed to maintaining voluntary part-time forces in one form or another and that the matter was still under consideration.

Opperman conceded that the challenges in relation to SANDF capacity were daunting. However, he said the will of the defence force to rise to these challenges should not be underestimated.

He echoed Kasrils's declaration that the retention of part-time forces was under consideration but warned that further cuts to the defence budget would have "dramatic if not catastrophic" consequences for the effectiveness of the SANDF. ■