

## Meet the SANDF

Very few countries do not maintain armed forces. Most, Iceland among them, depend on a strong ally – in this case the US through NATO. Nearly all, including Guatemala, maintain strong paramilitary forces to in order to be able to help civil authorities maintain order if required, or conduct counterinsurgency and border patrol tasks – and put up at least token resistance, to satisfy honour and the requirements of international law, in case of invasion.

### What is the SANDF?

The SANDF is South Africa's Constitutional military. The 1993 and 1996 Constitutions grant it the exclusive right to bear the nation's arms.

#### **Establishment, structuring and conduct of security services**

199. (1) The security services of the Republic consist of a single defence force, a single police service and any intelligence services established in terms of the Constitution.

(2) The defence force is the only lawful military force in the Republic.

(3) Other than the security services established in terms of the Constitution, armed organisations or services may be established only in terms of national legislation.

Table 1.1: Extract from the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, Act 108 of 1996

Actually, the SANDF is a collective noun for its four constituent services. Here, as anywhere nomenclature is important. There is an incorrect tendency to describe the SA Army, SA Air Force, SA Navy and the SA Military Health Service as “Arms of the Service.” This phrase is the result of a poor translation of the Afrikaans *weermagsdele*, or defence force components. The Afrikaans term is elegant. The translation is not, nor is it the internationally accepted term – or the expression used in the Defence Act. The SANDF is not a service but a defence force made up of four services. Unlike a service the SANDF has no uniform, no rank insignia and no permanent members. Everyone, from the Chief of the SANDF down belongs to one of the services. Those employed at SANDF headquarters or at its agencies are on detached duty from their parent services.

*South African National Defence Force*

**Composition of South African National Defence Force**

**11.** The South African National Defence Force established by section 224(1) of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1993 (Act No. 200 of 1993), continues to exist and consists of the -

(a) Regular Force, the members of which serve full -time until -

- (i) reaching their age of retirement;
- (ii) expiry of their contracted term of service; or
- (iii) otherwise discharged from the Defence Force in accordance with the law; and

(b) Reserve Force, the members of *which* serve on a part-time basis for such periods as they have been contracted for, unless their service is terminated in accordance with the law.

**Services of Defence Force, and structural components**

12. (1) The Defence Force consists of the following Services:

- (a) The South African Army;
- (b) the South African Air Force;
- (c) the South African Navy; and
- (d) the South African Military Health Service.

(2) Despite subsection (1), the-

- (a) Minister may establish a structural component consisting of members of-
  - (i) any of the Services; and
  - (ii) either the Regular Force or the Reserve Force or both; and

(b) Chief of the Defence Force may establish such temporary task force, group, element or unit as may be required for military exercises or operations, and may for that purpose establish such number of temporary headquarters as may be required.

Table 1.2: Extract from the Defence Act, Act 42 of 2002. Notice the language of s12(1). It speaks of Services (with capital “S”), not that abomination of a concept “Arms of the Service”. The SANDF is NOT a Service, but a force. The SA Army, SA Air Force, SA Navy and SA Military Health Service are not arms of some larger service but are Services themselves.

**When was the SANDF formed and who were its first constituents?**

The SA National Defence Force was born with the all-race democratic dispensation at midnight on April 27, 1994. Like the constitution and flag that also came into effect and use that day, the SANDF was conceived in compromise. From that sunrise onwards, it included rivals from seven former enemies. New beginnings do not mean the end of old antagonisms. The tensions that resulted boiled over from time-to-time in the next decade and simmers still.

The new SANDF broadly consisted of former statutory and non-statutory forces (NSF). The initial NSF were the armed wings of the African National Congress (uMkhonto we Sizwe – MK) and Pan Africanist Congress of Azania (Azanian People’s Liberation Army – Apla). Later the Inkatha Freedom Party’s KwaZulu-Natal Self Protection Units, a militia, demanded integration – and were duly accommodated. ANC self protection force militiamen were also integrated, but were counted as members of MK. The former statutory forces comprised the South African Defence Force, and the former “homeland armies”, the Bophuthatswana, Venda, Transkei and Ciskei defence forces. Arguably, the SANDF quickly also included an eighth group, recruits who joined the SANDF proper – without having served in one of the sectarian militaries or militias

### **What is the difference between the SANDF, the military and the army?**

Until the advent of the aircraft, the term “the military” referred to the army only. Governments at the time spoke of their military and naval forces. These generally reported to separate ministries, usually called the “War Department” and the “Navy Department” in the case of the US, or the “War Ministry” and “Admiralty” in the case of Britain. The establishment of air forces changed the dynamic in two ways. The term “military” came to mean more than just the army, and the general reluctance to form yet another ministry to oversee the air force accelerated the trend towards the establishment of integrated ministries of defence and super-service structures called by the euphemism “defence force.”

The SANDF is therefore South Africa’s military. The Army is one of its constituent services. The terms “military” and “army” are no longer interchangeable, although the nomenclature “SANDF”, “military” and “armed forces” are.

### **Is the SANDF the result of “integration” or “absorption”?**

This chestnut will be a conversation topic for many years. The former SA Defence Force (SADF) had the whip hand in the process for it was the only military with a national footprint. It also controlled the bases, provided the bulk of staff and instructors for integration and presented itself as the only “regular”, “professional” military among the seven integrating groups. Its position was further strengthened by the fact that the TBVC militaries were shaped in the SADF’s image. Also counting against the NSF was a natural “inferiority complex” about their previously irregular status as guerrillas and the fact that South Africans in general were ill-travelled and even more ill-equipped to compare militaries with each other. The SADF was the only military most former statutory force personnel knew and the first one most NSF were exposed to in any great detail. From there it was an easy leap to conclude that this was the model to follow.

In the early years, it was quite the sport in ex-SADF circles to denigrate the experience and course qualifications of non-SADF intees, particularly those who had attended abbreviated courses in the former Warsaw Pact. There is a general trend to discount the

professionalism of the East Bloc armed forces. Yet they had inherited the Prussian mantle and the works of Carl von Clausewitz through the works of Karl Marx's partner, Friedrich Engels. To this body of work the Chinese added Sun Tzu. Since both the Russians and the Chinese have always taken defence seriously, one discounts socialist military art and science at one's peril. In addition, some TDF and Apla cadres received training in India between 1990 and 1994, where they were exposed to that country's non inconsiderable military culture.

In the first few years after 1994, it appeared the SADF had absorbed its rivals. And perhaps it did. "Professional" is a difficult term to pin down in the military context. Whatever its definition, the SADF was never as professional or competent as supposed. Eleven years on, the SADF's varnish has faded and the SANDF's leadership has now travelled sufficiently wide and deployed forces sufficiently often to form their own conclusions on the subject. This was illustrated by current Army chief LTG Solly Shoke's frank address at last year's army festival: "Nowhere else in the world have I come across an army such as ours - and I have been on many tours of different armies throughout the world," he said, not meaning to be complimentary. "If you're not prepared to follow orders, then pack up and go home." Shoke added he would not tolerate insubordination, a refusal to carry out orders or ill-discipline. The dressing-down came after the killing of a South African soldier by a colleague in Burundi the week before. "The time has come to run this organisation like it is meant to be - a military one... We are here to render a service and if people are going to under-perform then they will be dealt with severely as there is no place for dead wood."

### **What is the "defence establishment"?**

The defence establishment is the SANDF, its civilian overseers, the defence-related industry and other nongovernmental organisations and lobbyists active in the field.