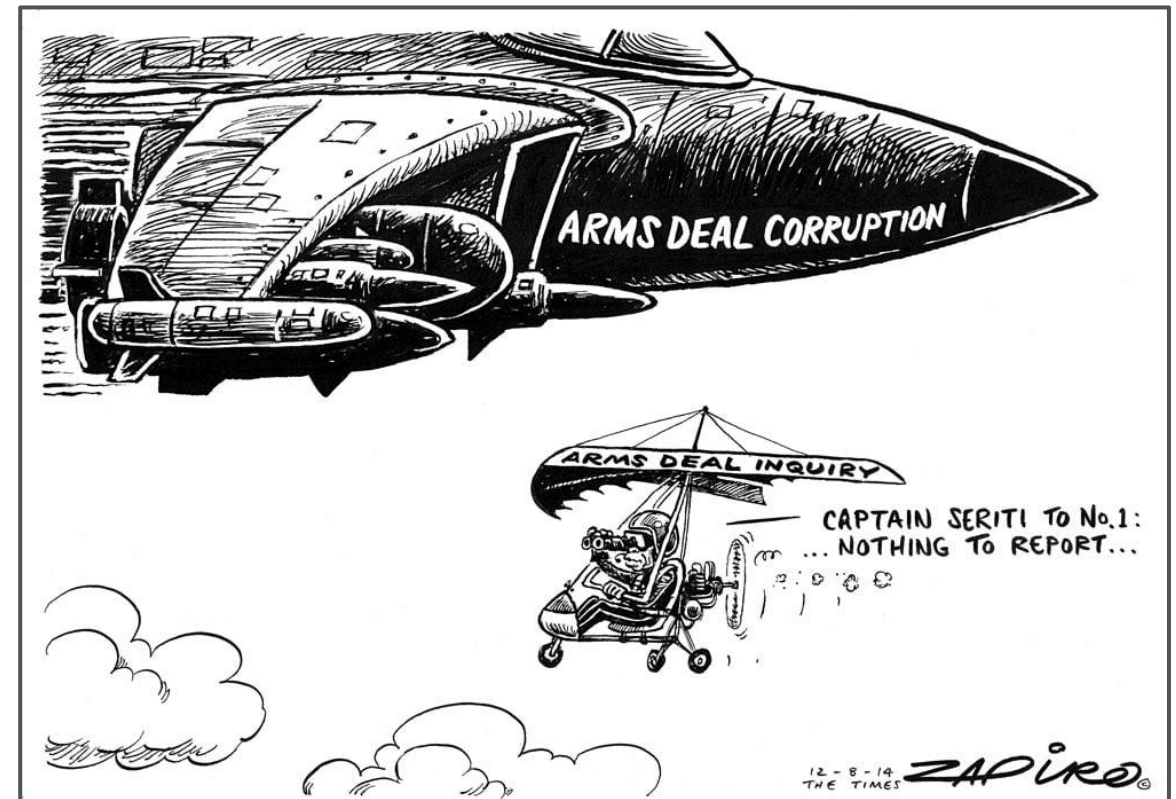


Looking back: Pitfalls in post-94 defence oversight

PCDMV Round Table:
Political oversight of armed forces
18 September 2024, Parliament

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Source: Mail & Guardian, 12 August 2014,

<https://mg.co.za/cartoons/2014-08-12-arms-deal-commission-and-corruption/>

Purpose and outline

Aim: To provide an overview of defence oversight in South Africa since 1994

Outline

- Civilian control and defence oversight
- The Clausewitzian trinity
- Political direction
- Political effectiveness of militaries
- Vision for the SANDF
- SANDF culture and mindset
- Defence oversight since 1994
- Challenging the military
- Conclusions

Civilian control and defence oversight

Civil-military relations: an interdependent relationship between government, society and the military, to ensure military power is used for **clear political purposes** in accordance with the Constitution

Political **oversight** is at the heart of civil-military relations in a democracy

Effective civilian control is dependent on honest and **critical debate** about military affairs

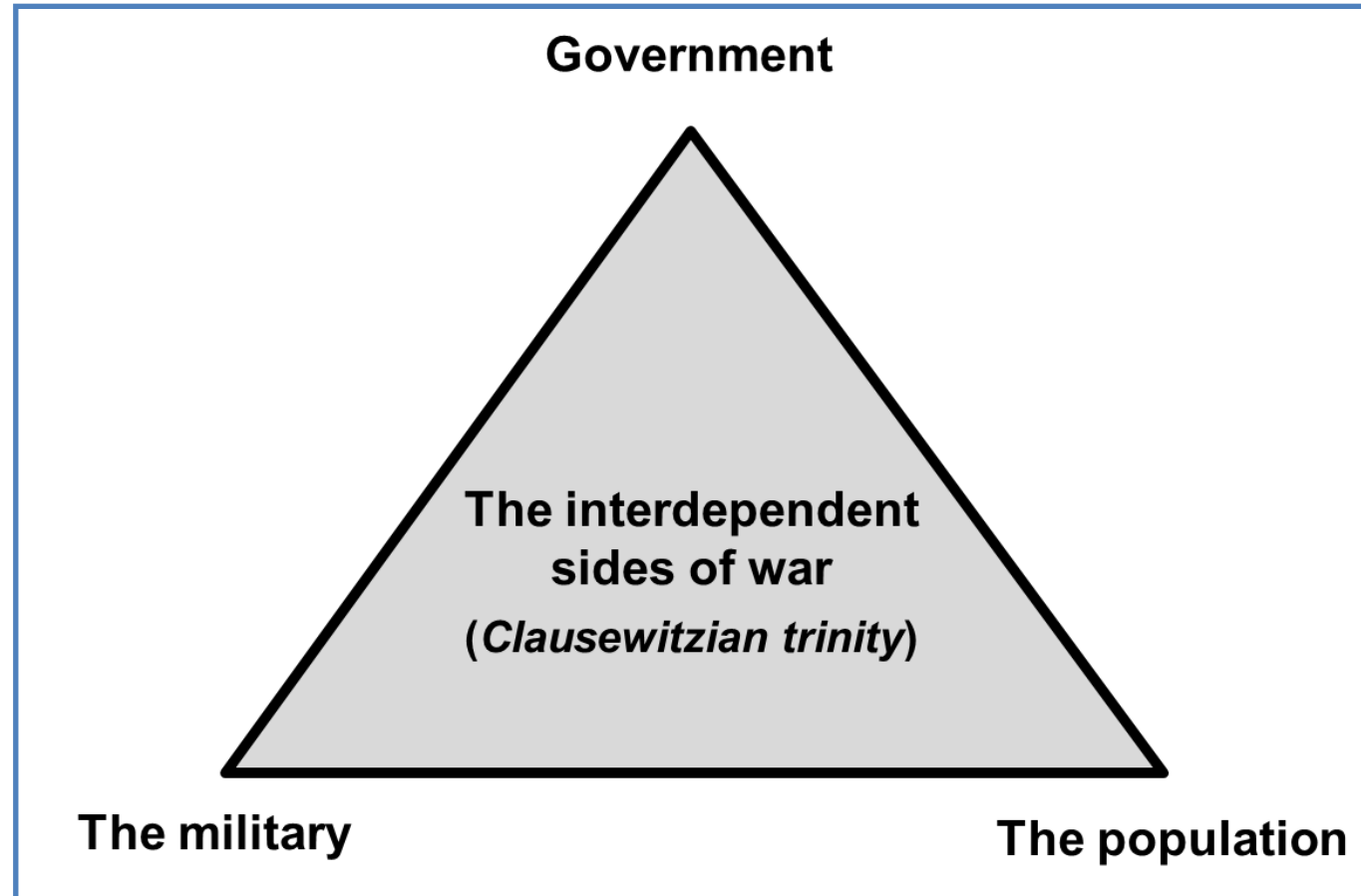
Defence knowledge is a key success-factor for proper parliamentary defence oversight, to **penetrate inner-working of the military** and press the military to address problems

Without credible political & civilian defence **expertise and oversight**, militaries operate in isolation and **resist attempts to change** their culture, routines, or dominance over defence planning

Tapping the **corporate memory** of defence organisations

Involving society and the media in debate is essential to curb militarism & unjust use of the military

The three interdependent sides of war: The Clausewitzian trinity



Source: Illustration derived from the literature of Clausewitz, K. Von. On War. Transl OJ Matthijs Jolles. New York: The Modern Library, 1943, 8, 18

Political direction

Politics as purpose, context and bureaucracy

Military change cannot occur without political direction, tough decisions and interventions

Bureaucracies/militaries do not change themselves; politicians must apply deliberate & consistent pressure

Political effectiveness of military forces

Without political effectiveness, all other types of effectiveness are endangered

Specific questions underpinning the political effectiveness of military organisations:

1. To what extent can military organisations assure themselves a **regular share of the national budget** sufficient to meet their basic needs?
2. To what extent do military organisations have **access to the industrial and technological resources** necessary to produce the equipment needed?
3. To what extent do military organisations have access to **manpower** in the required **quantity and quality**?

International Best Practice

Military budget =
30-35% personnel budget + 30-35% capital budget + 35-40% ops budget

Vision: What the SANDF is for?

Mindset of avoiding everything the **apartheid military** was

No vision for how an **affordable SANDF should look** ito supporting foreign policy, fulfilling its constitutional mandate, force design and capability trade-offs

From **policy to budget, strategy and structure**: no affordable SANDF military strategy and structure since democratisation

Incremental efforts (no tough decisions) to reduce the deficit on the HR budget – still no up-or-out personnel system; irregular expenditure

SANDF culture and mindset



Tunnel-vision: Conventional focus with force design, equipment & ETD

Service chiefs **holding onto** all main equipment/conventional capabilities paradigm, but serviceability extremely low

Culture of distrust within the SANDF: people are not trusted - thus over-reliance on bureaucratic processes to prevent irregularities, which creates disabling red-tape to perform core functions such as procurement for operations

Defence oversight: 1994-1999 (First Parliament)

Establishment of civilian control over the management of DOD institutions

No acquisitions before consulting parliamentary defence committees

No tolerance for absence of top SANDF leaders at PCD/JSCD meetings

Created a culture of bipartisanship on issues of defence – in the interest of SA and all citizens

Broad & critical consultation & involvement of MPs, society, academia and military on policy issues

Lack of defence knowledge in JSCD inhibited members to examine SANDF presentations and submissions on technical military issues; introduction to defence planning tools

Political direction for successful transformation agenda on personnel issues, trumping the Executive authority

MPs interfering in the running of the SANDF and execution of policy

Detailed scrutiny of DOD submissions and draft defence policy (i.e. '96 White Paper & '98 Defence Review)

Tough engagements with generals to direct reforms in the SANDF

Defence oversight, 1999-2004 (Second Parliament)



Arms deal (1999 SDPs) pushed through Cabinet without consulting Parliament

Full exposure of arms deal corruption prevented by removing key MPs from positions (e.g. SCOPA)

Erosion of bipartisanship, transparency and accountability

No political direction for alternative defence policy paradigm since Mbeki era

Centralisation of foreign and security policy decisions in the Presidency (e.g. Mbeki close to certain generals)

Circumvention of Parliament with approval of SANDF deployments (e.g. Burundi)

Defence Update 2004: no progress beyond the human security paradigm; no affordable or viable strategy

Oversight pitfalls, 2004-2009 (Third Parliament)



Defence policy consensus-building lost

Inability to manage tension between primary & secondary roles into focus & affordability

Over-ambitious foreign policy and conventional paradigm – postponed tough SANDF trade-offs

Unrealistic **mandate-driven** policies and strategies

Lekota neglected the defence portfolio for party work

Committees received **better information** on SANDF from 2004, yet the focus on and **attention to defence policy matters decreased** as parliamentary oversight function became eroded

Oversight, 2009-2014 (Fourth Parliament)

Neo-patrimonial culture of Zuma presidency eroded military professionalism & effectiveness

Sisulu refusal to report on **SANDF state of readiness**; DOD and ANC MPs followed suit

Hiding behind not “compromising **national security**” to delay briefing Parliament and PCD on the **state of the SANDF**

2009 strike in the SANDF and the **2013 Battle of Bangui** in the CAR – did not receive any attention in the form of debate in the Houses of Parliament.

Inertia of the JSCD, as well as a decline in PCD activities in the Fourth Parliament.

Chief SANDF and Service Chiefs absent for a year (2010)

Governing party study group meetings with members of Executive and the military leadership before defence committee meetings to caucus, blurred lines between the **party, state**, the legislature, the Executive, and the military

Oversight pitfalls since 2014

Unnecessary securitising of issues in SA, and “a culture of secrecy within the state, the unjustified use of force, many instances of police brutality, the passage of laws that militate against a democratic ethos, and a weakening of parliamentary oversight structures” (Sandy Africa, 2015).

Isolated militarism in South Africa; and disregard for Parliament & transparency,

Defence Review 2015: no affordability-test nor public hearings; less engagement between defence officials and MPs

SANDF’s denial of a civil-military gap (yet open tension with Treasury & Defence Secretariat)

SANDF adversarial view of media and civil society

SANDF blaming Treasury for affordability problems instead of making internal trade-offs

No political direction to create political space for difficult trade-offs (e.g. stopping irregular expenditure and rejuvenating the SANDF)

Continuous civil-military & oversight pitfalls

Generals (old and new guard) **misconception about who directs defence** (Minister vs CINC)

Ministers shielding generals from scrutiny in Parliament, especially on spending resources

Insufficient level of **transparency** from the DOD to oversight

PCD allowing the DOD to ignore questions at committee meetings

Reluctance of the **PCD to hold the Minister accountable**

Undermining of the RSA's objective civil-military relations model and Constitution, which **steered Parliament away from the use of its power to amend the national or defence budget**

Challenging the military

Gray argues, “politicians need to be prepared to **challenge soldiers** when they prove **unwilling to adjust** to new circumstances” (Gray, 2016: 8).

Political leaders must prevent military mismanagement by having “**bruising discussions**” with generals about both the details and overall significance of their **assumptions, arguments, and actions** in implementing policy, which may include “querying, prodding, suggesting, arbitrating, and on rare occasions ordering their professional subordinates” (Cohen, 2002:173).

Need for more **military-minded politicians**, especially in relatively young democracies, where inertia to deal with the specifics of military affairs stalls parliamentary oversight and the continuation of deep democratic defence reforms.

Conclusions

The SANDF/DOD **conventional paradigm** is outdated

A new defence paradigm is only possible through **open debate and civil-military interaction**

Political direction and intervention needed to **align defence** (structures, personnel & equipment) with **budget realities**

Further reading

PhD study by Evert Jordaan:

South African defence policy-making, 1994–2015,

<https://scholar.sun.ac.za/items/522b46ee-9e46-45a1-ba58-aad88f2eb995>

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