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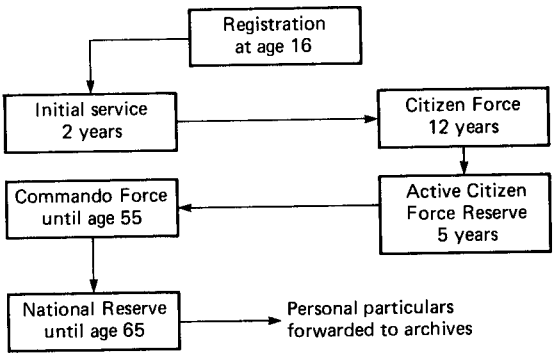
The South African Defence Force: the institutional and historical framework

The social and political behaviour of every military is always to some extent ascribable to statute – to the hard and readily identifiable prescriptions of laws, conventions, administrative codes and constitutions. Hence it is always possible to infer some first-order understanding of the nature of particular civil–military systems from juridic statements, bearing in mind that the ability of law to shape society varies from case to case, according to historical and cultural experience. In this regard, the role of the South African Defence Force in the South African system is directly, if imperfectly, defined by the tasks assigned to it under the Defence Act of 1912 as subsequently amended on a variety of occasions. According to the 1957 version of the original 1912 Act, the tasks of the Defence Force (or any part thereof) are basically fourfold. They involve defending the Republic from foreign attack, preventing and suppressing terrorism and other forms of internal disorder, acting to preserve life, health, property and the maintenance of essential services in general and, in the last analysis, undertaking 'such police duties as may be prescribed' at any time by the civil authorities. At the same time the behaviour of any military institution (or set of institutions) is also a reflection of its organizational characteristics, of the particular structures and forms of the military as a functioning social entity and the fashion in which these have developed. This means that it is simply not enough to look at the Defence Act in order to understand the link between the military and civil sectors of South African society, the less so as the SADF has developed into a highly complex and internally differentiated bureaucratic organization with the intrinsic capacity to act beyond the tasks and formal roles as described by statute. The Defence Act may well have been a reasonably perfect instrument for analysing the South African military at an earlier stage in its development – possibly in 1912 when the decision was taken to forge the regiments, militias and volunteer units of the Cape, Transvaal and Natal into a single unified military force. But today, seventy years later, when the SADF is a highly

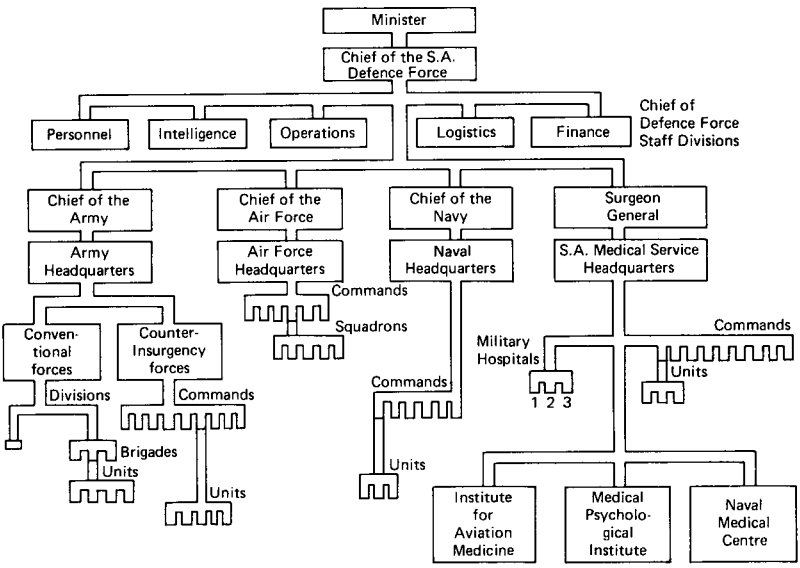
professional and internally diversified institution not comparable with the five regiments of the South African Mounted Rifles originally constituting the first Union Defence Force, the Defence Act is grossly inadequate in providing cues as to what the Defence Force does, within itself, and in wider South African society.

Any analysis of the SADF must begin with a description of its basic institutional characteristics or, more specifically, with the recognition that we are dealing with a highly developed set of social institutions subdivided into many specialized components as a result of the process of modernization and environmental adaption. At the beginning of the seventies the SADF consisted of roughly 133 Permanent Force organizations, 225 Citizen Force and 218 Commando organizations, interlocked with one another through formal affiliations and surrounded by an uncountable array of support organizations at the boundaries of civil–military society. The manpower feeding the formal network is of two basic types: professional career-oriented soldiers constituting the relatively small Permanent Force core of the South African military establishment, and, concentrically surrounding the essential core in ever-wider circles, part-time manpower in the form of national service conscripts, members of the Citizen Force (national servicemen who have completed their initial military training but who are obliged to render periodic service to the Defence Force for a number of subsequent years), Active Citizen Force Reserve members, Commando members and, in the outermost ring, white males between the ages of 55 and 65 included in the ranks of the National Reserve (see Fig. 1). Both permanent and part-time manpower is channelled into the Defence Force through the four major service arms – the Army, Air Force, Navy and Medical Service – each of which is a distinct



1 Citizen Force career path
Source: 'Your Guide to National Service' (Pretoria: South African Defence Force, 1 Military Printing Unit, 1982) p. 11

component of the local military establishment headed by its own Chief (the Surgeon-General in the case of the Medical Service), who is in turn responsible to the civilian Minister of Defence acting through the supreme military authority of the Chief of the Defence Force, previously known as the Commandant-General. The Chief of the South African Defence Force (currently General Constand Viljoen) is the chief military executive officer responsible for the implementation of ministerial policy regarding the command, control, organization, discipline and efficiency of the SADF, and in this capacity he is Chairman of the Defence Command Council (DCC), the highest command body and apex of the 'Defence Family' composed of the combat forces and their support services, the staff divisions at Defence Force Headquarters in Pretoria and the Armaments Corporation (Armscor) (see Fig. 2). The DCC, designated the Supreme Command until 1972, also includes the commanders of the combat forces (the respective Chiefs of the Army, Air Force and Navy), the Surgeon-General (since the recent elevation of the Medical Service to the status of a fourth full service arm), the Quartermaster-General (head of the Logistics Staff Division), and the Chief-of-Staff, Operations, formerly known as the Chief of Defence Staff, charged with issuing operational directives to the Chief of Defence Force Staff Divisions, coordinating strategy and



2 Organizational structure of the South African Defence Force
Source: 'Your Guide to National Service' (Pretoria: South African Defence Force, 1 Military Printing Unit, 1982) p. 4

mobilization-planning. Decision-making within this supreme military body is based on the principle of corporate leadership subject to ministerial approval, and is supported and assisted by three subsidiary bodies who provide the informational input for DCC deliberations. These are the Defence Staff Council (DSC), chaired by the Chief of the Defence Force and including his five Chiefs-of-Staff, the Chaplain-General and the Director-General of Resources; the Defence Planning Committee (DPC), chaired by the Chief of the Defence Force and including the Chiefs of the Army, Air Force and Navy, the Chiefs-of-Staff for Operations, Logistics and Finance, the Chairman and Senior General Manager of Armscor; and, thirdly, the Defence Advisory Council (DAC) consisting of the Chief of the Defence Force, the Minister of Defence, the President of the Armaments Board and a number of civilians invited to participate in the workings of the body on the basis of ministerial approval. Each of these three subsidiary organizations are assigned specific tasks. The DSC, as its title suggests, is concerned with the internal management of the Defence Force and the coordination of its staff activities. The DPC, established in 1976 to 'ensure the full participation of all members of the Defence Force in the planning process',[1] oversees the procurement of armaments, the annual defence budget and the planning activity of the SADF in accord with military policy formulated in the Defence Command Council. In this sense, both the DPC and DSC are important mechanisms for the implementation and translation of DCC decisions into applied and operational defence force programmes. The DAC, created in 1973 as a three-way system of communication between the military, the civilian government and the private sector is, in its turn, an important contact point between civil and military society. Consisting of influential industrialists and financiers, top technocrats and members of the local scientific community who are either consulted or coopted into the workings of the Council by means of ministerial invitation, the DAC has emerged as the primary institution for the exchange of opinions between the elites of government, the state security apparatus and the representatives of capital.

Despite periodic shortages in public funds for defence purposes, much of the organizational history of the SADF is a history of reorganization.[2] During various periods in South African history, particularly prior to World War II during the Depression years, military development was seriously restricted by competing non-military claims on the national economy. Many of these tensions are still echoed today, most notably in the competition between the military establishment and the private sector for the body and soul of skilled white manpower. Yet the Union Defence Force was formed with a number of organizational lacunae which sub-

sequently needed to be remedied if the military was to be welded into a relevant and effective fighting force. The Defence Act of 1912, for example, gave rise to a very primitive staff organization composed of a handful of officers with widely allotted tasks. Thus, until 1917 when the rigours of World War I exposed its insufficiencies as a system of command and control, the Union Defence Force was effectively headed at any one time by no less than three loosely related officers (a Commandant-General of the Active Citizen Force, the Inspector-General of the Permanent Force and the Commandant of Cadets) responsible to the Minister of Defence, advised by a Defence Council consisting of four experienced ex-military officials. In the period since World War II internal reorganization has taken on a new momentum as South Africa's internal and international security situation has declined, as the nature of warfare has changed in the nuclear era and as the SADF has come to employ increasingly more sophisticated military technologies in its function of upholding the state. These combined pressures have fuelled an unprecedented era of reconstruction and development in the annals of the South African military. Some of the resulting organizational changes have represented attempts to improve, clarify and consolidate the statutory foundations of the Defence Force in substantive operational terms: hence the frequent amendments to the original Defence Act of 1912. Some of the numerous changes are essentially formal and technical, for example the rapid and often confusing turnover of officer designations, others – the decision in 1957 to change the term 'Union Defence Force' to 'South African Defence Force', the subsequent elimination of 'foreign' decorations, medals and regimental titles – are more directly linked to the consolidation of Afrikaner national power. Yet many of the series of institutional adaptions, particularly those initiated since the beginning of the sixties, are clearly concerned with the more weighty task of transforming the SADF from a historically loose and creaky organization into a highly rationalized device for the preservation of white state power.

The tenure of P.W. Botha as Minister of Defence was perhaps the most significant and energetic among the various efforts to convert Defence Force structures into a tightly programmed specialist organization with clear lines of command, specified procedures for the delegation of internal authority, and articulated distinctions between administrative and executive functions. In 1966, for example, many of the routine administrative and logistical tasks of the Chief of the Defence Force (then still known as the Commandant-General) were transferred to a new system of offices composed of the Directorates-General for Personnel, Administration, Management Systems and the Quartermaster-General acting under the coordinating authority of a so-called Chief of Defence Force Administra-

tion (previously the Adjutant-General). By delegating his daily responsibility for general administration, efficiency studies, quartermaster matters and the like to this new institutional creation, the Chief of the Defence Force was subsequently freed to concentrate exclusively on his command and combat functions. In 1975 the Directorates-General for Administration and Management Systems were disbanded and most of their functions transferred to the Comptroller of the South African Military Finance Service. During 1974 the tendency towards rationalization and the separation of executive and administrative roles was extended a step further with the establishment of a fully articulated Chief-of-Staff system based on five specialist divisions, each headed by a Chief-of-Staff with the rank of lieutenant-general, directly responsible to the Chief of the Defence Force in the case of Headquarters staff sections and to the respective Chiefs of the combat services in the case of Army, Navy and Air Force staff sections. Three of these five staff divisions are today partially concerned with activities previously performed by the defunct Secretariat of Defence, one of the first victims of the rationalizing movement of the mid-sixties. Since 1966 most of the Secretariat's administrative work has been vested in the Operations Staff Division whose head, the Chief-of-Staff, Operations (once the Inspector-General), is responsible for executing the daily top-level administration of the Defence Force, for top-level operational, strategic and logistical planning, and for coordinating the work of the five specialist staff divisions.[3] With the militarization of the civilian Secretariat its role in the realm of materials management has been appropriated by the second of the new specialist staff divisions, the Logistics Staff Division, headed by the Quartermaster-General, formerly the Chief of Logistics Services.[4] Since the introduction of a system of logistics management in the SADF during 1974 this particular division is concerned with a variety of tasks including the acquisition, storage, movement, maintenance, distribution, recovery and disposal of military equipment and supplies; with the movement and quartering of personnel; with the regulation of works services; the disposal of fixed property; and the codification of procedures for the treatment of material in accord with the requirements and priorities initiated in the Operations Staff Division. Finance, one of the main tasks of the redundant Secretariat, is now handled by the Finance Staff Section (once the Military Finance Service) headed by the Comptroller.[5] In 1978 the nine directorates of this division, the accounting office of the Defence Force, also provided a variety of management, computational, language and documentation facilities and services for military use. The present staff system of the Defence Force contains two final important elements, the Personnel Staff Division headed by a Chief-of-Staff previously designated the Chief of Defence Force Administration, and the Intelligence Staff

Division. The latter has a relatively short history as a specific and independent division of the Defence Force: it was only after South Africa's withdrawal from the Commonwealth that the military terminated its reliance on British intelligence sources to establish a Directorate of Military Intelligence (DMI) in 1961.[6] Throughout the sixties, however, the functioning of the new body was constantly confused as a result of competition from civil security organizations, particularly the Bureau for State Security, and as its lines of authority were shifted between the Chief of the Defence Force and his supporting staff. Greater clarity in the role of military intelligence emerged with the implementation of the proposals of the Potgieter Commission (established to investigate state security organization) in 1972. Today it is the task of the Intelligence Staff Division to collect, collate, evaluate, compare and interpret information in support of the formation of force-level, strategic and operational policies. DMI operations, as well as those of its ancillaries in the Division (DTI, counter-intelligence, and AMI, the Military Information Service established in 1972), have doubtless been assisted by the recent demise of their civilian competitors in the ranks of the intelligence community. The Personnel Staff Division, as its title suggests, is concerned, *inter alia*, with the recruitment and selection of uniformed and civilian military personnel; with administering conditions of service; seeing to the physical and spiritual welfare of Defence Force members; allocating and controlling manpower resources; promulgating Defence Force orders; compiling, amending and drafting regulations; and operating archives and military museums.[7] In addition to their multiple internal tasks, some of the various directorates and subsections of this division are involved in activities beyond Defence Force boundaries, most notably in liaising between the SADF and public bodies and private organizations in the civil sector. As such, the Personnel Division is an important contact point between the Chief of Defence Force Staff system and a number of military-oriented elements in wider civil society. This includes not only organizations and groups which perform supportive functions for the military establishment – state school cadet corps and welfare institutions along the lines of the Southern Cross Fund (see below p. 98) – but organizations whose activities complement the functional subdivisions in the military's personnel section. Hence the manpower directorate of the Personnel Staff Division becomes a focal point for interaction between the military and the private sector on human resources issues. The seemingly mundane Personnel Division is also important as an instrument of military socialization. Since it is concerned with paramilitary training (through its cadet directorate) and for the 'spiritual welfare' of recruits, it is a vital link in the process of disseminating the organizational values of the Defence Force

within its own institutional realm and beyond that to a wider civil audience.

Each of the four service arms of the Defence Force is headed by its own Chief (the Surgeon-General in the case of the Medical Service), each with the rank of lieutenant–general. The Chief of the Army, who, in the past, has variously been designated the Army Chief-of-Staff, the Director-General of Land Forces and the Chief of General Staff, heads the largest of the service arms.[8] His functions include commanding, training and administering the Army in accord with power delegated by the Chief of the Defence Force; planning and executing internal security schemes within the framework of DCC policy; seeing to the combat-readiness of the Army and to its provisioning, storage and control of specialized equipment. Since 1978 the South African Army is itself divided into two divisions of seven brigades, cross-cut by the standard functional division between infantry, artillery, engineers, signals, technical services and armour. Each of these corps is in turn subdivided into specialized components: thus the Infantry consists of Mechanized Infantry, Motorized Infantry, Paratroops, Mounted Infantry (on horses or motorcycles), Dog-Handlers and Trainers, and the elite Reconnaissance Commandos. While rationalization policies have tended to concentrate institutional power in bodies directly attached to Defence Force Headquarters in Pretoria – since 1977 even the Navy Headquarters has been based in the land-locked city – Defence Force strategy regarding internal organization has also been dominated by the traditional belief that primary threats to state security emanate as much from internal as external sources beyond South Africa's boundaries. Defence Force planners are actually very sensitive to the security risk posed by the local black majority population. This marks a continuation of many of the feelings and perceptions surrounding the initial creation of the Defence Force shortly after the establishment of the Union. In 1912 the concern with internal control was expressed by provisions in the Defence Act making for the creation of a citizen army or popular militia whose white members would be divided into fifteen military districts covering the total surface area of the country. With the deterioration of South Africa's internal security situation since the early sixties this initial emphasis on counter-insurgency waged by rapidly deployed white manpower on a nationwide basis has been invigorated, with the result that today the Army is as much an internally-oriented counter-insurgency force as it is an outward-oriented instrument for conducting conventional warfare in support of the territorial sovereignty of the state. The organizational mechanism for the internal role is the age-old system of military districts, known as commands since 1933, and now reduced from fifteen to nine. Today all Permanent and Citizen Force

units as well as Commandos fall under the head of each command for training, housing, administrative and disciplinary purposes. This officer, normally a brigadier, is specifically responsible for preventing insurgency in his designated area and initiating counter-insurgency operations under the ultimate authority of Army Headquarters in Pretoria. As the supreme local representative of the Chief of the Army, the head of each command is additionally charged with managing Commando matters in his decentralized area of control, organizing civil defence and rendering aid to the police and local authorities short of formal mobilization during periods of civil disaster.

The conventional and unconventional capacities of the Army in protecting the state against its external and internal enemies are augmented by the South African Air Force – one of the most professional and effective air forces on the African continent – by the Navy, whose work it is to protect South Africa's 1,500 mile coastline and 300,000 square mile zone of economic exploitation, and, to a lesser extent, by the South African Medical Service, the fourth and last of the service arms recently elevated to comparable status with the Army, Air Force and Navy. Very little needs to be said about these military subunits in the light of the fairly extensive literature surrounding their activities.[9] The Air Force, as is well known, is important as an element in landward defence, supporting the combat mobility of the Army and providing air support for its operations, as well as being of importance in its own right. Much of the success enjoyed by the Army in recent Angolan operations – in Sceptic, Protea, Daisy and Super – is directly attributable to the mobility of deployment afforded South African ground-based troops by Air Force helicopters involved in cross-border operations. The Navy, while small in size, is again one of the most powerful forces of its type on the continent. Armed with a lethal mixture of locally manufactured and imported modernized equipment, including eight fast patrol craft armed with French Exocet and Israeli Gabriel missiles, it monitors the entire South Atlantic and Indian coastlines directly adjacent to South Africa and is responsible – as numerous South African politicians frequently point out – for the basic defence of the Cape sea route. As the nature of the threat to the South African state has shifted landward the Navy has also given birth to its own Marine Corps, presently active in the border areas of Namibia.

As befits a highly complex network of specialized organizations, the manpower needs of the military are served by a highly differentiated collection of feeder organizations involved in the production of skilled manpower. General training in Army staff duties, intelligence work, field security and techniques of warfare is provided by the South African Army College at Voortrekkerhoogte.[10] The work of this institution, established

originally as the South African Military School at Bloemfontein in 1912, is supplemented by the special corps schools – the Artillery School at Potchefstroom, the Artillery Air Defence School at Youngsfield, the Infantry School at Oudschoorn, the Armoured Corps School at Bloemfontein and the Corps of Engineers and Signals Schools respectively. Since its establishment in 1949 the Army Gymnasium at Heidelberg (originally at Pretoria) is concerned with the training of junior commissioned and non-commissioned officers in the Citizen Force, while the relatively new Army Battle School offers advanced training in conventional warfare to Permanent Force personnel. The work of this latter institution is complemented by that of the Danie Theron Combat School in Kimberley with its emphasis on Commando-conducted counter-insurgency operations. The Air Force College and Air Force Gymnasium at Voortrekkerhoogte are the main channels for skilled personnel entering the Permanent or Citizen Force Air Force, with both offering officer training in staff duties and administration as well as instruction in hard warfare. Since the establishment of the first Air Force Flying School at Swartkop in 1932, the activities of the College and Gymnasium have been supplemented by a number of regional flying schools including those at Dunnottar and Langebaan (both of which offer instructor training on various types of aircraft) and the Flying School at Pietersburg (responsible for advanced jet flying training and pilot attack instructor training). There is also an Air Navigation School at Ysterplaat and an Air Defence School at Waterkloof concerned with the basic training of controllers and radio operators. Skilled naval personnel are in turn the products of either the South African Naval College at Gordons Bay, the Naval School at Saldanha Bay, the more specialized Gunnery, Anti-Submarine, Communications and Diving Schools (all at Simonstown), or the Radar School in Durban. Commissioned and non-commissioned officers in the Medical Service are normally graduates of the South African Medical Service Training Centre established in the old Army Gymnasium headquarters in Pretoria.

The entire intricate system is topped by two elite institutions offering inter-service training, namely the Military Academy at Saldanha Bay and the South African Defence College established in 1973 in Pretoria. Since its creation as a branch of the Military College in 1950, the Academy has been concerned with joint officer formative training for all future Permanent Force officers by way of a Bachelor of Military Science degree offered under the auspices of the University of Stellenbosch (prior to the establishment of the Academy at Saldanha in 1956, the University of Pretoria). Many, but by no means all, of the current generation of South African military leaders – including General Magnus Malan, ex-Chief of the Defence Force and now Minister of Defence, General Viljoen, the current