

# This emergency budget will speed up the further deterioration of the SANDF

By Kobus Marais MP – DA Shadow Minister of Defence

Chairperson,

The Department of Defence (DoD) and its defence capability has been deteriorating over many years, surely as a result of sharp declining budget allocations. But mainly because of poor management and prioritization of the expenses and focus by both the Executive, including the Ministry and the Presidency, and the defence management, including the SecDef, CSANDF and its senior management. I have raised the need for urgent and decisive interventions, and while the Defence Minister has acknowledged the need to review the mandate and focus, it does not seem there is an appetite for this from both the Minister and the DoD.

There are so many dedicated and excellent soldiers who will give their life to South Africa, however often they seem to have been left on their own. We honour them and express our sincere appreciation to them and their families, especially those who have been deployed to help and contain the Covid-19 pandemic.

It was such a disappointment to experience the irresponsible utterances and ill-discipline by the senior officials like the Minister, CSANDF, COS, and CJOPS when they justified and supported man-handling and abuse of civilians in their neighbourhoods by a few soldiers during the last 4 months in supposedly support of SAPS to fight the Covid-19 pandemic.

It, therefore, came as no surprise that some soldiers followed this example, clearly as they believe they will be protected by the senior management. This was best illustrated by the Collins Khosa case where the CSANDF allowed an investigation and outcome at the speed of light, which then resulted in the embarrassing different interpretations by the SANDF and the Minister on the status of the case. The case was poorly handled and conducted by the CSANDF. It ignored thorough investigation of all the facts and exonerated the soldiers in an embarrassing way that is perceived to be a cover-up. In the process, the Military Ombud's investigation into the case was undermined and the *audi alteram partem* rule was totally ignored.

Our soldiers have been sent into urban areas without adequate and specialized training to operate in an urban environment. Soldiers should not be sent into our streets and abuse the civil liberties of our citizens, who are not our enemy. Their exposure to the Covid-19 virus was not properly foreseen and as a result, a number of soldiers got infected and did not receive speedy attention.

The defence budget was already in a desperate situation with expected R3 billion overrun mainly as a result of human resource costs which is now more than 60% of the budget compared to 40% prescribed by National Treasury and the 2015 Defence Review. The emergency budget will exacerbate this predicament where firstly the DoD requested R4,5 billion additional funds, secondly treasury approved

an additional R4,1 billion, and thirdly of which only R2,88 billion will be new funding. In reality, the DoD will experience an additional shortfall of R1,6 billion which must be added to the original R3 billion.

Keeping in mind the additional budget request and allocation is only for the deployment until 26 June. With the extended deployment costs of R1,5 billion until the end of September 2020, and the expected further extended deployment towards the end of the year, this shortfall predicament will become a catastrophe and an international embarrassment very soon. With the further reliance on the reserve force to not only fight the pandemic but to assure compliance with our other strategic operations, especially Ops Corona and Mistral, we must expect much bigger trouble and budget shortfalls on our doorstep.

Our soldiers should primarily be utilized and employed to protect our land-, sea, and air borders, and not to fight with civilians in our neighbourhoods.

Our land borders with Zimbabwe, Mozambique, and Lesotho should be a much bigger priority where we urgently require the deployment of more properly resourced coys to prevent the unwanted and illegal cross border movement of people and goods.

We are facing the challenges of a destabilizing SADC region by the ISIS cells in Cabo Delgado in northern Mozambique, and while many acknowledge the threat, nobody wants to discuss this threat. There seems to be contradicting responses by the Minister to the defence portfolio committee, Minister Jackson Mtembu and Minister Naledi Pandor. Despite promises of closed session meetings on this subject nothing has materialized.

The SANDF's role in Ops Notlela must be scaled down to not fight civilians in the streets, but to provide service with cordoning off specific areas, assisting the SAPS with roadblocks, and humanitarian relief by especially the SAMHS and the engineering formations.

This emergency budget will not be money well spent and will speed up the further deterioration of our once proud SANDF.

The Minister and the Commander-in-Chief (CIC) must act urgently to save the SANDF and comply with the constitutional prescriptions to protect our nation.