

SANDF is now a broken entity unable to fulfil its core constitutional mandate

By Kobus Marais MP – DA Shadow Minister of Defence

Chairperson, never have I been so concerned about the state of our Defence Force and its defence capabilities. How did we end up in this unfortunate position?

The Russian invasion of Ukraine is a stark reminder of our vulnerabilities and state of our defence readiness, should our territory be invaded similarly. It's just too serious not to consider the consequences.

Under the current budget, the state of our Defence Force, its capabilities, priorities and strategies are at an increasing risk. The 2015 Defence Review never received any significant support and commitment from Cabinet and National Treasury to achieve its objectives and the five milestones. It is an indictment that milestone 1 (Arrest the Decline) is still not achieved – a lack of political will and intervention being significant reasons.

Due to government's economic failures, is the 2% of GDP benchmark to fund the 2015 DR unaffordable? The 2022/23 budget allocation of 0.67% of GDP is bad value for money due to poor and inadequate intervention and initiatives by government, with failures that will haunt us for years to come.

The following are reflections of the sad state of our prime mission equipment:

From the infamous Arms Deal only the following are still serviceable:

- One of three frigates with the one serviceable vessel limping along the Mozambican coast last week due to non-maintenance and unavailability of the spare parts. The past weekend it was still stuck in Pemba;
- Zero of three submarines;
- Zero of 26 Gripen fighter aircraft;
- Three of 24 Hawk aircraft used to train fighter pilots;
- Zero of the four Lynx maritime helicopters;
- Three of the 30 Augusta helicopters.

From the rest, the following:

- Two of the 35 PC7 Pilatus aircraft used to train SAAF pilots;
- Four of the 11 strategic Rooivalk attack helicopters, of which three are in the DRC;
- 17 of the 39 strategic Oryx helicopters, of which five are in the DRC, with the rest thinly distributed all over SA;
- One of the six C130 cargo aircraft, essential for transport of troops, logistical equipment, and training of paratroops and SFs;
- One 85 year old Dakota unable to do the maritime patrol and reconnaissance; and
- Many of the army's vehicles and equipment are in states of unserviceability.

This is an embarrassing state of affairs, which exposes us to bad actors, on land, in air and at sea.

What contributed to this:

The Cost of Employees

The Department will spend no less than 69% of the approved budget on COE, which represents R3 billion overspend.

This trend is unsustainable, and will deplete our capabilities, if not addressed.

Despite a 30% cut in Reserve Force man-days, authorizations of unfunded employment will result in a sharp increase in the actual costs for reserve force members, with cost of employees way more than 70%.

Unfunded Operations

The President must reconsider authorizing unfunded or partially funded operations. We do not object to the operations, but to not providing additional ring-fenced project funding. If not, SANDF must apply the principle of "Stealing from Peter to pay Paul" to meet their budgeted obligations.

Project Thusano/Cuba love affair

Under the questionable Project Thusano agreements with Cuba for technical, professional and vocational services, payments of R1.4 billion were made by December 2021.

Under the guise of Thusano, SANDF irregularly and illegally procured the Cuban drug Interferon at a total cost of \$20 million.

The Auditor-General indicated that all the expenditure under Operation Thusano have been irregular and wasteful, with no procurement procedures followed or deviations obtained, in contravention of various laws and regulations.

From this alone, Project Thusano must be terminated immediately. We cannot afford the obligation of R1.2 billion payable to Cuba until 2024.

It seems when SANDF complained that it did not have money for essential expenses, its leaders easily secured money to pay their Cuban masters. South Africans were abused to ensure Cuba prospers. Clearly, the loyalty of the leaders lie first with their Cuban comrades and not with our country when money is bleeding, our children are starving, and unemployment and hopelessness reign supreme.

The DA will not stand for this. Should the Minister and the Secretary of Defence fail to act against the culprits in terms of their legislative responsibilities and the AG's recommendations, we will lay criminal charges.

Neglecting preserved prime mission equipment

The preservation and storage of vehicles and prime mission equipment, for immediate and rapid employment, have been neglected and compromised. The contracts for the maintenance and repairs of the 60 to 70 environmentally controlled warehouses in the Army, have not been renewed.

The cost effective maintenance of the systems regulate the humidity, temperature, dust- and airtightness of the storage facilities to assure that the vehicles, equipment, electronics and munitions are kept dust,

rust and corrosion free, ready for its rapid employment. Our Gripens and Hawks have fallen victim due to these failures.

It must be reinstated to prevent decay of our PME as well as time-consuming and costly maintenance prior to employment.

Project Hoefyster

The project to replace the aging Ratel IFV with the new Badger has become an embarrassing disaster, and an example of the consequences of weak political leadership, State capture, cadre deployment and inefficient management. The DoD spent R7 billion on an unaffordable project, with currently 15 vehicles in stages of completion, and a stock of components to assemble many more.

Confusion on its future remains, with Minister Modise's response to a question indicating its imminent termination, contrary to Minister Gordhan's believe. Hoefyster still has the need and potential for the replacement vehicle, but not with the current scope and lack of political commitment.

Minister, iets moet baie vinnig en daardwerklik gedoen word om ons weermag te red. Die uurglas het amper uitgeloopt. Ons het vreeslose maar ingeligte en oordeelkundige politieke leierskap nodig.

Ek deel graag voorstelle wat verandering kan bring.

- Redesign, restructure and reposition a smaller SANDF in compliance with its Constitutional mandates and approved budget;
- Re-prioritized strategies and expenditure to achieve especially critical Capex;
- The 2022/23 budget of R49 billion (0.67% of GDP) is about R15 billion short to support this, and should be increased over the MTEF to 1% of GDP;
- Budgeted priorities should include:
 - COE not more than 55% with staff not more than 60 000;
 - Landward Defence: 38%;
 - Air Defence: 16%;
 - Maritime Defence: 15%;
 - Force Employment: 10%;

To achieve these objectives, among others:

- Terminate Project Thusano;
- Transfer the three Military Hospitals to the Department of Health with guaranteed services to beneficiaries;
- Liquidate unserviceable, obsolete and underutilized assets, and ring-fence the revenue for Capex projects;
- Multi-year Capex program for replacements, acquisitions and upgrades regarding:
 - Rooivalk and Oryx helicopters with MKII versions;
 - C130BZ with the J or A400 versions;
 - Multipurpose maritime reconnaissance aircraft;
 - Reintroduce to service the three Frigates and three Submarines;
 - New OPVs and additional IPVs;

- Cyber, satellite and UAV technologies as force multipliers;
- Reconsider Project Hoefyster with fewer Badgers in combination with Ratel upgrades;
- Drive rejuvenation as a high priority;
- Rationalize and integrate the structures and activities of Armscor and Denel, to serve the needs of SANDF in a cost effective and efficient way.

SANDF has become a broken entity unable to fulfil its core constitutional mandate and purpose.

Minister, you and the Secretary of Defence do not have the luxury of time to repeatedly reinvent the wheel, and request postponements for actions.

Both the SADI and the DA are ready to play a meaningful role to save and rebuild the Defence Force. The question is whether you are prepared to accept our offers?