

THE SOUTH AFRICAN ARMED FORCES AND THEIR LINK WITH THE UNITED KINGDOM AND THE COMMONWEALTH OF NATIONS, 1910–1961

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The Point of Departure: The Military Transfer Concept¹

A cursory examination of the literature now available on the South African Defence Force would suggest that such literature contains an embarrassment of riches. A more careful scrutiny, however, suggests that, in terms of nominal measurement, it can be grouped into fairly discrete categories covering the first (1880–1881) and second (1899–1902) Anglo-Boer Wars, World Wars I and II, the Korean conflict, and the growth of the South African Defence Force as a natural complement to the world isolation engendered by the pursuit of the policy of apartheid. The last category is more appropriately considered as part of the civil-military and foreign policy history of the Republic of South Africa because of the severance of the Commonwealth tie in 1961 and the declaration of the arms embargo against the Republic in 1963.²

Because of its ostracism by much of the world, the South African policy is regarded as *sui generis* and a glaring reminder of the potency of white power in the deep south of the African continent. Far too often, perhaps because its policies are repugnant to so many, South Africa ends up as a terminal case study, and the literature on South Africa has a strangely configurative appearance. Such an approach is typical of the pre-World War II era of political science.³ There is thus a patently obvious need to analyze South African defence data within a framework which will permit temporal and spatial comparison with other military institutions.

In order to focus on the legacy of the imperial-Commonwealth connection for South African defence policy, it is instructive to consider the Anglo-South African link from five selected perspectives which can be subsumed under the heading of the military transfer concept. Before enumerating these five categories, it should be stressed that the concept of institutional transfer has been used by historians, such as William B. Hamilton⁴ and Richard A. Preston,⁵ and by political scientists, such as David E. Apter.⁶ An especially helpful utilization

of the concept as applied to the post-World War II French and British military decolonization in Africa appears in the work of Chester A. Crocker, a work which does devote some attention to South Africa.⁷ Crocker's study is commendable because

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2. As provided for in operative paragraph 3 of United Nations Security Council Resolution 181 (1963) of 7 August 1963 and operative paragraph 5 of United Nations Security Council Resolution 182 (1963) of 4 December 1963.
3. See the classic critique in R.C. Macridis: *The Study of Comparative Government* (New York, 1955), pp 1–22. S.P. Huntington's pioneering work, *The Soldier and the State: The Theory and Politics of Civil-Military Relations* (Cambridge; 1957) does consider military forces other than the American ones and can properly be regarded as a work which is comparative in methodology and which illustrates the impact of British, French, and German military systems on the growth and development of the United States armed forces.
4. W.B. Hamilton, 'The Transfer of Power in Historical Perspective,' in W.B. Hamilton, K. Robinson, and C.D.W. Goodwin (eds.): *A Decade of the Commonwealth, 1955–1964* (Durham, N.C., 1966), pp 25–41.
5. R.A. Preston, 'The Transfer of British Military Institutions to Canada in the Nineteenth Century,' in W.B. Hamilton (ed.): *The Transfer of Institutions* (Durham, N.C.; 1964), pp 81–107.
6. D.E. Apter: *Ghana in Transition*. (Revised ed New York, 1963), p 9 and footnote 3 on p 9.
7. C.A. Crocker: *The Military Transfer of Power in Africa: A Comparative Study of Change in the British and French Systems of Order* (Washington, D.C. The Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies, unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, 1969), pp 9, 13, 17, 38, 42, 48, 50, 57, 66, 109–112, 114, 116–117, 127, 130, 132–134, 137–138, 140, 142, 161–165, 170, 178, 202, 213–216, 219–220, 222–227, 262, 302–303, 307, 312, 315, 317–318, 323, 329–335, 357–359, and 421–422.

it is comparative, rather than configurative, in terms of British and French postwar defence policies in Africa and because his formulation of the concept of military transfer⁸ is sufficiently broad to encompass the South African experience.

The five perspectives in this particular study of Anglo-South African defence links during the half century in which the Union of South Africa existed have been selected in order to build on Crocker's excellent work and in order to allow students of comparative defence policy to analyze the South African experience in such a way that South Africa may be considered an African state (albeit under minority rule) and as a Commonwealth state. Such approaches would permit one to draw comparisons between the Union and African states formerly under British sovereignty, such as Ghana or Kenya, and those old and new members of the Commonwealth outside of the African continent, such as Australia and India.⁹ Thus, one could have a solid basis for intra-African and intra-Commonwealth comparative military studies, and the crucial linchpin would be the Anglo-South African connection.

Consequently, the first perspective concerns the nature of the South African reliance upon British military institutions and personnel. Such a perspective is based on the assumption of technological dependence upon the metropole and draws attention to the transfer of professional skills, attitudes, equipment, personnel, and plans from the more sophisticated centre to the periphery of the empire-Commonwealth. It does not, however, assume that the recipient of such aid is a military non-entity or a *tabula rasa*. In the South African case, one must take into account indigenous military traditions, particularly the Afrikaner ones. One of the most striking examples of Afrikaner prowess is the fact that quite a number of Western military observers and attachés were involved in the 1899–1902 Anglo-Boer War and their reports are now being translated and published in an official South African military journal.¹⁰ The British public and their armed forces were sometimes chagrined at the quality of at least some elements of the British defence establishment in that particular war, which was followed by an attempt to improve its organization, leadership, and martial skills.¹¹

The second perspective concerns South African defence cooperation within the empire-Commonwealth. This particular perspective does assume that the Union defence forces have the requisite capabilities to undertake military tasks on behalf of the imperial government in London or to participate

in combined manoeuvres or military campaigns. In other words, the part is assumed to be able to contribute something of worth to the whole. In this sense, there is reciprocity involved in the transfer of military skills and resources, especially as the technological gap between the centre and the periphery of the empire-Commonwealth begins to close. It is well illustrated by Jan C. Smuts' membership in the British Imperial War Cabinet in the First World War and his elevation to the rank of Field Marshal in the Second World War.¹²

Imperial and Commonwealth defence cooperation, particularly in wartime does raise issues of political consent, and General Smuts had been dubbed a handyman of empire by his political foes in Afrikanerdom.¹³ Such an epithet suggests a third perspective in the military transfer concept, namely, the external mission of the South African military forces. The Union of South Africa has had a long history of divisiveness within its white body politic about just where its armed forces should be engaged and how the military instrument can best be used to protect and advance South African

8. He develops his model in *Ibid.*, pp 13–26, which includes a lucid diagramme on p 18. The basic themes spelled out in the above pages, in the abstract of the dissertation, and in the table of contents are the strategic redeployment by the metropolitan power, the utilization of African manpower, localization, Africanisation, the definition of post-colonial defence roles, and military development in the former dependency. These categories are broad enough to include South Africa, and other researchers have dealt with the topic of the utilization of non-whites in the South African defence establishment.
9. A companion study would be S.P. Cohen: *The Indian Army: Its Contribution to the Development of a Nation* (Los Angeles, 1971).
10. C. de Jongh and J. Ploeger: 'Verslae van Neutrale Militêre Waarnemers tydens die Anglo-Boereoorlog,' *Militaria* vol 4, no 1, 1973, pp 1–34 and vol 4, no 2 1973, pp 1–12; C. de Jongh: 'Verslae van Neutrale Militêre Waarnemers tydens die Anglo-Boereoorlog,' *Militaria*, vol 5, no 1, 1975, pp 46–56 and vol 5, no 2, 1975, pp 54–65; C. de Jongh and E. Foxcroft, 'Reports of Neutral Military Observers during the Anglo-Boer War,' *Militaria*, vol 5, no 3, 1975, pp 1–21 and vol 5, no 4 1975, pp 49–61; and C. de Jongh, 'Reports of Neutral Military Observers on the Anglo-Boer War, 1899–1902,' *Militaria*, vol 6, no 1, 1976, pp 52–56.
11. Consult B. Bond: *The Victorian Army and the Staff College, 1854–1914* (London, 1972), pp 181–211 and G. Harries-Jenkins: *The Army in Victorian Society* (London, 1977), pp 2–3.
12. Perhaps more functionally, Jan C. Smuts served as Prime Minister, Foreign Minister, Defence Minister, and Commander-in-Chief in the Second World War, thus aggregating a huge amount of power not unlike his British counterpart, Winston Churchill. See W.K. Hancock: *Smuts*. 2 vols (Cambridge, 1962 and 1968), vol 2, p 350.
13. This phrase was one used by *Die Burger*, the leading Cape Town Afrikaans-language newspaper, according to T. Dunbar Moodie: *The Rise of Afrikanerdom: Power, Apartheid, and the Afrikaner Civil Religion*. (Los Angeles, 1975), p 16. Unfortunately, Moodie does not give the date of the relevant issue of *Die Burger*.

national interests. Questions such as these are, in practice, inextricably bound up with the conduct of foreign affairs.

The fourth perspective which is analytically separate, is the internal mission of the South African armed forces. Both the external mission and the internal mission are at the civilian-military interface and have a marked impact upon the conduct of foreign and domestic affairs, especially in terms of budgetary allocations and manpower needs. In addition, there is the nettlesome question of boundary maintenance between the armed and the police forces, a topic which is of considerable import to students of military intervention.¹⁴

Finally, one can investigate the topic of military transfer from the perspective of nation and institution building in the recipient state, in this case, the Union of South Africa. This perspective assumes that the development of the military institution in South Africa does have an impact upon the political development (or even decay) of the nation. To what extent does it involve a redistributive process, does its growth facilitate or impede the rapprochement between Afrikaans-speaking and English-speaking whites, and does it enable the nation to enhance its national bargaining position relative to other Commonwealth members? There is also the added question of whether the Union could be considered (by 1961, when it left the Commonwealth) what Harold D. Lasswell has termed a 'garrison state'?¹⁵

Following a brief discussion of each of the five perspectives, it would be fitting to conclude with some tentative remarks on the state of the literature bearing on the topic of the imperial-Commonwealth legacy. Such tentative conclusions will concern areas that need more thorough investigation and data and areas that appear to hold considerable promise for the comparative study of defence policies particularly within the Commonwealth of Nations.

Reliance upon British Institutions and Personnel

Bearing in mind the fact that the basic corpus of legislation for the South African military establishment, the 1912 Defence Act, was placed on the statute books a decade after the termination of the second Anglo-Boer War and only two years after the formation of the Union of South Africa, it is not surprising that the British did maintain troops in the Union in imperial garrisons, such as in Natal Province.¹⁶ Moreover, in the early years

of the Union, British officers were seconded to South Africa, although the number seemed to be quite small, and the most senior of the British officers in the Union, General Aston, was involved in the establishment of officer education for both English-speaking and Afrikaans-speaking (or more exactly, Dutch-speaking at that time) aspirants.¹⁷

Drawing upon the literature concerned with Commonwealth African armies,¹⁸ one would expect to find that at least some South Africans would have attended the prestigious Royal Military Academy at Sandhurst, as was the case for white Rhodesians,¹⁹ but the readily available data suggests that this did not happen very frequently. The writer has so far not found any evidence that Sandhurst was relied upon by the Union Defence Force to train its junior officers. This topic requires further investigation.²⁰ At the upper echelon of the officer corps, it is known that South Africans did

14. See C.E. Welch, Jr. and A.K. Smith: *Military Role and Rule: Perspectives on Civil Military Relations* (North Scituate, Mass., 1974), pp 10 and 68–69 and E.A. Nordlinger: *Soldiers in Politics: Military Coups and Governments* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1977), pp 54–55.
15. See S.P. Huntington: *op cit.*, pp 346–350, 360, 391, and 461 and M. Janowitz: *The Professional Soldier: A Social and Political Portrait* (Glencoe, 111, 1960), p 440. Such comparative analysis could also involve the study of J.H. Clotfelter, Jr., namely, *The Garrison State and the American Military: Public Attitudes and Expectations* (Chapel Hill, N.C., University of North Carolina, unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, 1969).
16. In 1906, six years before the passage of the Defence Act, there were 20 370 Imperial troops stationed in South Africa. Great Britain. Parliament. House of Commons. *Debates*, 4th series, vol 153; 1906, cols 655–657 as cited in E.M. Teagarden: *The Haldane Army Reforms 1905–1912* (Cleveland: Western Reserve University, unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, 1962), p 49 and footnote 9 on p 49. South Africa acquired the rights to Imperial installations in the Union shortly after the end of the First World War, according to E.A. Walker: 'South Africa and the Empire,' in E.A. Walker (ed): *The Cambridge History of the British Empire. Volume 8: South Africa, Rhodesia and the High Commission Territories* (Cambridge, 1963), p 787.
17. See Great Britain. *Imperial Conference, 1911: Papers Laid before the Imperial Conference: Naval and Military Defence*. Cd 5764–2 (London: H.M.S.O., 1911), p 17 (Appendix A) as collated in Great Britain. Parliament. House of Commons, *Parliamentary Papers, 1911 vol 54 and R.H. Beadon, 'South African Defence: A Resumé of the South Africa Defence Act of 1912,' Journal of the Royal United Service Institution* (London), vol 57, no 421 (March, 1913), p 349.
18. See especially C.A. Crocker: *op cit.*, pp 198, 270, 272–273, 276, 280, 393–394, 396, 398, 400–404, and 409.
19. *Ibid.*, pp 281 and 407–408.
20. Both British and South African sources would need to be checked so that only those South Africans who attended Sandhurst (or similar institutions in the United Kingdom) and were commissioned in the Union Defence Force, rather than in British units, would be counted. For an example of a South African who attended Sandhurst, served with the British forces and retired in his land of birth, see 'Major Darrell D. Hall: The New Chairman, *Military History Journal* (Johannesburg), vol 4, no 2, December, 1977, p 74. A solid point of departure is F.J. Jacobs 'Die Suid-Afrikaanse Leërkollege', *Militaria*, vol 4, no 1 (1973), pp 63–70.

attend the Army, Air Force, and Imperial Defence Colleges in the United Kingdom, but the numbers of such South African officers and the frequency with which these officers were sent to British staff colleges needs to be thoroughly investigated.²¹

British institutions and personnel figured much more prominently in the naval sector. Although General Smuts noted the influence of Swiss military organization upon the drafting of the 1912 Defence Act,²² the Royal Navy was the pre-eminent model for the embryo South African Navy. Indeed, the naval forces of South Africa were considered to be an adjunct of the Royal Navy and to be incorporated in the Royal Navy in wartime. The disciplinary codes under which the South African naval personnel operated were in fact those currently in force in the Royal Navy.²³ The extreme dependency of the Union Defence Force upon the men and ships of the Royal Navy was graphically illustrated by the German South West Africa campaign in the early years of World War I, an operation which had amphibious components in addition to land transportation.²⁴ The Union Government did initially provide for a subvention to the Royal Navy as a *quid pro quo* for its protective services, but this subvention was ended in the early 1920's.²⁵ The South Africans contend that their navy began in 1922, a point of national pride.²⁶ But even as late as 1930, the commander of the South African naval forces was a British officer on loan from the Royal Navy.²⁷

The South African Defence Force depended heavily on the metropole for armaments and indeed had no arsenals and defence industries. Moreover, it counted on aircraft from the British to inaugurate its fledgling air force. The reasons for this dependence were rather obvious because the Union was slowly transforming itself from a pastoral, agricultural economy into an industrial and mining one.²⁸ Only much later in its history can one meaningfully write about any sort of military-industrial complex in South Africa.²⁹

Cooperation with the Empire-Commonwealth

Within two years after the passage of the 1912 Defence Act, the Union Government under Prime Minister Botha found itself at war with the enemies of the British King, a traumatizing experience for those Afrikaners who remembered the two wars against the United Kingdom. A parallel situation would have arisen had Americans become part of an Anglo-American wartime coalition in about 1826, following the Revolutionary War and the War of 1812. The Botha Government, as a result of his Government's willingness to cooperate with the

Empire in the German South West African Campaign, found itself faced with a domestic insurgency launched by the more ardent Anglophobes in Afrikanerdom. The insurgency was defeated,³⁰ but the issue of South African neutrality in Empire-Commonwealth was remained throughout most of the Union period of South African history. One respected scholar of South African politics has argued that the defeat of the Smuts Government in 1948 by the National Party (and its coalition partner, the Afrikaner Party) was not simply the attractiveness of apartheid doctrine to the white electorate but the decision not to remain neutral in World War II.³¹

Without going into detailed campaign histories,³² the South African units acquitted themselves well in various theatres in the African continent and in Europe in World War I. Their contribution to the Empire defence effort was primarily in land, rather than naval or air, forces. However, General Smuts, who saw active combat in German East Africa

21. See F.H. Theron, 'The Union Defence Forces of South Africa,' *The Journal of the Royal United Service Institution*, vol 75, no 500 (November, 1930), p 754. Limited South African data may be found in 'Officers Who Took Course at Camberley since Union, Returns,' Annexures to Votes and Proceedings No 828 of 1925 as cited in South Africa. Parliament. House of Assembly, *Index to the Manuscript Annexures and Printed Papers of the House of Assembly Including Select Committee Reports and Bills and Also to Principal Motions and Resolutions and Commission Reports, 1910-1961* (n.p.: author, 1963), p 82.
22. South Africa, Parliament, House of Assembly, *Debates*, 1912, cols 624 and 630 (23 February 1912).
23. *Ibid.*, col 629 (23 February 1912, speech of Defence Minister Jan C. Smuts) and Theron, 'The Union Defence Forces...', p 747.
24. H.F. Nel: 'Die Rol van die Seemag in Duits Suidwes-Afrika, 1914-15,' *Militaria*, vol 7, no 2 1977, pp 56-69.
25. See the debate concerning that contribution in South Africa. Parliament. House of Assembly, *Debates*, 1912, cols 1407-1432 (26 March 1912), 1459 (28 March 1912), and 1754-1755 (11 April 1912) and also E.A. Walker, 'South Africa and the Empire,' p 787 regarding the termination of the subvention.
26. J.C. Goosen (compiler): *South Africa's Navy: The First Fifty Years* (Cape Town 1973), p 15.
27. F.H. Theron: *op cit.*, p 750.
28. *Ibid.*
29. The subject is explored more fully in D.R. Lowin, *Causes and Aspects of the Growth of the South African Defence Force and the Military Industrial Complex, 1960 to 1977* (York, England: University of York, unpublished M.A. thesis, 1977).
30. For a brief overview of the situation, consult S.B. Spies: 'The Outbreak of the First World War and the Botha Government,' *South African Historical Journal* (Bloemfontein), no 1 (November, 1969), pp 47-57.
31. N.M. Stultz: *Afrikaner Politics in South Africa, 1934-1948* (Berkeley, 1974), especially p 157.
32. Such histories are enumerated by J.A.I. Agar-Hamilton: 'The Union of South Africa War Histories,' in Robin Higham (ed.): *Official Histories: Essays and Bibliographies from around the World* (Manhattan, 1970), pp 443-449 and N.D. Orpen, 'Resources in the Dominions: Part 1: British Military History in South Africa,' in R. Higham (ed.): *A Guide to the Sources of British Military History* (Berkeley 1971), pp 321-329.

against a superb German commander, took an interest in military aviation and has been regarded as one of the founding figures of the Royal Air Force and as an air strategist of some note.³³

As a result of an agreement reached between Winston Churchill and General Smuts in 1921, the Royal Navy secured the use of the valuable Simonstown base near Cape Town, and the Union Defence Force assumed the responsibility for the security of the base.³⁴ Given the long primacy of the Royal Navy and the small South African naval establishment, which received marked budgetary cuts during the depression years, there seemed to be little latitude for co-operation between the Royal Navy and its Union counterpart.³⁵

With the onset of the Second World War, the arena of naval co-operation was widened, with the principal pattern being the secondment of South African naval officers and seamen to the Royal Navy.³⁶ The Royal Navy did furnish several vessels to the Union naval force, which it operated with its own men and officers, and the South Atlantic and Indian Oceans were a lively combat theatre, particularly for German submarines, during the Second World War.³⁷ Although the Union did not officially develop a Marine Corps until after the onset of the Korean War, South African officers were attached to the Royal Marines during the Second World War.³⁸

Although the Union Defence Force did contain an air element³⁹ and South Africa participated in a Commonwealth scheme for pilot training,⁴⁰ a number of South Africans entered the Royal Air Force and participated in the Battle of Britain.⁴¹ Indeed, South Africans have accorded a place of honour to their air aces in World War II, such as *Sailor* Malan who later became active in a veterans' group concerned about the political position of the Coloureds after the National Party assumed power in 1948.⁴²

Aside from those South Africans who volunteered to join British units as such (in a manner similar to American fighter pilots who formed the so-called Eagle Squadron of the Royal Air Force in World War II or the Lafayette Escadrille in World War I), the vexing question for the South African military establishment was the operational definition of the South African war zone. Whether a South African serviceman was obligated to serve his tour of duty beyond the land or sea borders of the Union was an extremely contentious issue in both World Wars and further strained ethnic relations within the white body politic.⁴³

Following its participation in the Second World War, the range and intensity of South African co-operation with the metropole and the Commonwealth declined, particularly as the nature of the membership in the postwar Commonwealth changed and the process of British decolonization began to accelerate in Asia and Africa.⁴⁴ South African air power was brought to bear in the Berlin blockade and once again in the Korean conflicts,⁴⁵ but these two campaigns were not principally Commonwealth endeavours. Neither ground nor naval forces were committed in either campaign or operation, but Anglo-South African naval bonds were strengthened in 1955 by the so-called Simonstown agreement which provided a fillip for the de-

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33. W.K. Hancock, *Smuts*, vol 1, pp 438–442 and R. Higham: *The Military Intellectuals in Britain, 1918–1939* (New Brunswick, N.J. 1966), pp 132, 149–151, and 195.
34. N. Mansergh: *Survey of British Commonwealth Affairs: Problems of External Policy, 1931–1939* (London, 1952), p 238. The matter is examined in greater depth in C.J.R. Dugard: 'The Simonstown Agreement: South Africa, Britain and the United Nations,' *The South African Law Journal* (Cape Town), vol 85, part 2 (May 1968), especially pp 142–145.
35. J.C. Goosen: *op cit.*, pp 16–19;
36. *Ibid.*, pp 208–215 (Appendix 2) and W.M. Bisset: 'New Light on South Africa's Naval Heritage,' *Militaria* vol 7, no 4, 1977, pp 38–44.
37. J.C. Goosen: *op cit.*, pp 46–47 and 91–110.
38. D. Fourie: 'The South African Corps of Marines,' *Military History Journal*, vol 1, no 1, December 1967 pp 32–33 and 35 and 'Editor's Letter Box,' *Military History Journal*, vol 2, no 3, June 1972, p 108.
39. See J. Ploeger: 'Belangrike Getuienis oor die Suid-Afrikaanse Lugmag,' *Military History Journal*, vol 1, no 5, December 1969, pp 1–3 and S. du Preez, 'Vliegopleidingskool Langebaanweg,' *Militaria*, vol 5, no 4, 1975, pp 1–15.
40. According to W.C.B. Turnstall: *The Commonwealth and Regional Defence*. Commonwealth Papers No. 6 (London, 1959), p 10.
41. D.P. Tidy: 'South Africans of Seventy Four,' *Military History Journal*, vol 1, no 1 December 1967, pp 8–9 and D.P. Tidy: 'South Africans in the Battle of Britain,' *Military History Journal*, vol 1, no 7 December 1970, p 37.
42. See the series of articles by D.P. Tidy usually entitled 'South African Air Aces of World War II' in *Military History Journal*, vol 1, no 2, June 1968, pp 30 and 32; vol 1, no 3, December 1968, pp 11–18; vol 1, no 4 June 1969, pp 19–22 and 30; vol 1, no 5, December 1969, pp 5–6 and 37; vol 1 no 6, June 1970, pp 7–13 and 40; vol 1, no 7, December 1970, pp 24–26; vol 2, no 2 December 1971, pp 57–59; vol 2, no 6, December 1973, pp 198–203; and vol 3 no 6 December 1976, pp 191–193 and 202.
43. This matter is very carefully examined in K.W. Grundy: *Defense Legislation and Communal Politics: The Evolution of a White South African Nation As Reflected in the Controversy over the Assignment of Armed Forces Abroad, 1912–1976*. Papers in International Studies, Africa Series No. 33 (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Center for International Studies, 1978).
44. For a succinct analysis of Anglo-South African defence cooperation in the latter days of the Union, see D. Goldenhuys: 'The South African National Party and the British Government (1939–1961),' *Politikon* (Pretoria), vol 5, no 1, June 1978, particularly pp 56–60.
45. For details, consult 'Partners in Combat,' *Backgrounder* (Washington, D.C., No 7 July of 1978, pp 4–8.

velopment of South African naval capability because of British arms transfers and sales.⁴⁶ In addition, there was desultory consultation between the two governments regarding African continental defence issues, but nothing very concrete in the way of bilateral or multilateral agreements seemed to emerge from these African-based conferences.⁴⁷

The External Mission of the Union Defence Force

One distinguished student of British military policy has analyzed post-World War II British defence policy in terms of 'the defence of the realm.'⁴⁸ In the South African case, the same phrase would be apposite, but it would need an operational definition. What was the South African realm the Union Defence Force was supposed to protect? Did it have fixed, inelastic borders and to whom did it belong? Answers to these, and related, questions were crucial and were hardly an exercise in military pettifoggery. The answers one gave to such questions had a significant bearing on the force levels, morale, and equipment needed for the Union Defence Force. Difficulties would be encountered, as the British discovered after World War II,⁴⁹ if there were a discrepancy between the human and non-human resources, on the one hand, and the mission the Union Defence Force was expected to accomplish, on the other hand. The more ambitious the mission, the more the Union Defence Force needed in terms of logistical and transport infrastructure, arms, support units, headquarters staff, and trained soldiers, sailors, and airmen. The mission, moreover, would have a bearing on the level of readiness needed for certain types of units in terms of mobilization plans.

As noted earlier, the South African Navy became essentially a phantom organization during the depression, but an attempt was made by Defence Minister Pirow to improve the sad state of the Union Defence Force, a project he began in 1934.⁵⁰ One of the more controversial Ministers of Defence, who served in General Hertzog's Cabinet, Pirow has been regarded as a Germanophile and one who took a rather narrow view of his mandate as Defence Minister.⁵¹ Following the declaration of war on Germany in early September, 1939, the Cabinet was reshuffled and Pirow's portfolio was taken by General Smuts, who had held that portfolio earlier from 1910 until 1920. Smuts' biographer has recorded the General's displeasure with the way in which Pirow oversaw the gradual rearmament of the Union during his tenure as Defence Minister.⁵²

Yet, under General Botha's, Smuts', and Hertzog's

premiership from 1924 to 1939, the Prime Minister traditionally held the foreign affairs portfolio, a practice ended only in 1954, when J.G. Strijdom became Prime Minister and Eric H. Louw assumed the title of Minister of External Affairs. Some pioneering research on the South African Cabinet and Parliament has shown that the defence portfolio ranked slightly below the foreign affairs one and neither portfolio was among the top three in the South African cabinet.⁵³ Moreover, notwithstanding the British practice of retaining their military titles,⁵⁴ very few South African Members of Parliament or Senators have been professional military officers before their election to Parliament. Indeed, the backbenchers in Parliament, rather than the middle or top leadership in the chamber, were more likely to have been retired military officers.⁵⁵

These findings, which need to be studied in conjunction with other Commonwealth legislatures and cabinets, would seem to suggest that the South African Defence Ministry was not an *imperium in imperio* and could well have been the poor relative of the more prestigious Office of the Prime Minister and/or Minister of External Affairs. Hence, the Union Defence Force could have had a role not unlike the one the French devised for their

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46. The text of the agreement is published in Great Britain, Ministry of Defence, *Exchanges of Letters on Defence Matters between the Governments of the United Kingdom and the Union of South Africa, June 1955*. Cmd 9520 (London: H.M.S.O., 1955) as collated in Great Britain. Parliament. House of Commons, *Parliamentary Papers, 1955–1956*, vol. 45.
 47. These conferences are discussed in W.C.B. Tunstall: *op cit.*, pp 47–48 and in S.C. Nolutshungu: *South Africa in Africa: A Study in Ideology and Foreign Policy* (Manchester, 1975), pp 65–72 and 299.
 48. R.N. Rosencrance: *Defense of the Realm: British Strategy in the Nuclear Epoch* (New York: 1968).
 49. W. Goldstein: *The Dilemma of British Defense: The Imbalance between Commitments and Resources*. The Social Science Program of the Merston Center for Education in National Security, the Ohio State University, Pamphlet Series no 3 (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1966).
 50. J. van Wyk: 'Die Unieverdedigingsmagte op die Voor-aand van die Tweede Wêreldoorlog (1934–1939)', *Militaria*, vol 6, no 4, 1976, pp 24–32 and D. Cowie, 'Union of South Africa,' *The Journal of the Royal United Service Institution*, vol 84, no 534, May 1939, pp 262–268.
 51. See R.H. Young: *Die Omstrede Rol van Oswald Pirow as Minister van Verdediging (1933–1939)* (Cape Town: University of Cape Town, unpublished B.A. (Hons.) thesis, 1975).
 52. W.K. Hancock: *Smuts*, vol. 2, p 332.
 53. N.M. Stultz: *Who Goes to Parliament?* Occasional Paper No. 19 (Grahamstown: Rhodes University Institute of Social and Economic Research, 1975), p 77 (table V–13).
 54. J. Sabine: 'Civil-Military Relations,' in John Baylis (ed.): *British Defence Policy in a Changing World* (London, Ltd., 1977), p 240 and footnote 29 on p 251.
 55. Furthermore, such persons were found more often in the united, rather than the National Party. See N.M. Stultz, *Who Goes to Parliament?* pp 25, 30 (table 111–3), 46 (table IV–4), 65, and 90 (table VI–5).

armed forces, the great mute force.⁵⁶ Whether such a doctrine was developed for the Union Defence Force, and, if so, whether it was carefully observed, is a topic worthy of comparative investigation. Where *la grande muette* would go beyond the confines of the Union, what it would do once it got there, and in cooperation with whom (if anybody) appeared to be questions of *haute politique* best left to the Prime Minister in consultation with himself as Minister of External Affairs.

Perhaps the widest defence perimeter, with all that that implied for the external mission of the Union Defence Force, was drawn by General Smuts himself. Well known for his desire to extend the Union's political influence beyond the Zambezi in the wake of the First World War and the heyday of white settlement in Central and Eastern Africa,⁵⁷ his visions of a type of manifest destiny were readily transmuted into defence arcs. Speaking on a motion dealing with the conduct of World War II before the Senate in Cape Town, the Prime Minister said that

Hon. Senators who like myself have travelled about this Continent and know its geographical features will admit that our own borders are singularly indefensible. The line of the Limpopo (River) cannot be held.

Our northern boundary cannot be held. If you want to defend this country you will have to proceed a great distance beyond it, and the question then arises how far beyond it. Those who know this continent know that the proper line of defence is in the highlands of Kenya and once you have lost that line, you have lost your best positions.

*Present forms of warfare make it necessary for us, if we mean to defend ourselves, to defend ourselves far to the north, far beyond our borders.*⁵⁸

Even though it did take in a huge chunk of the continent, Prime Minister Smuts's excursion into geopolitics was still considerably smaller than that of his British mentors or his (non-Vichy) French allies, who had global responsibilities. Whatever else the external mission of the Union Defence Force has been, it certainly was not one of a South African Foreign Legion poised to go anywhere at any time. It is doubtful whether the Union Defence Force could ever be regarded as an example of Professor Morris Janowitz's constabulary concept, which seems more appropriate for metropolitan or technologically advanced nations.⁵⁹

The Internal Mission of the Union Defence Force

The nature of the internal mission of the Union Defence Force was; in the final analysis, a police force of the last resort once the frontier had been secured before the formation of the Union following the Second Anglo-Boer War. Much of pre-twentieth century South African history consists of skirmishes between Afrikaner mounted units (commandos) or British regiments stationed in the Cape or Natal Province, on the one hand, and Africans, on the other. Frontier wars were the expected concomitant of expanding white settlement in the southern part of the continent.

Stemming from these conflicts between the African and the Briton or Afrikaner, a principle developed among the whites that Africans should not be in a position, by virtue of military training and the possession of modern arms,⁶⁰ to challenge effectively the asymmetrical balance of power between Africans and whites. Such a principle was operative in the American West in the last century, and the United States' Army made the West secure for the white settlers. The late Leo Marquard's observation that South Africa was an empire of its own, with the whites constituting the metropole and the Africans, Asians, and Coloureds the colony,⁶¹ is applicable to the United States in the nineteenth century with reference to the American Indians. The parallel is only a rough one because of the different ratios involving the number of whites and the American Indians, on the one hand, and the South African non-whites, on the other hand, and the practice of migratory labour in South Africa, which did not characterize the American Indians. The United States Army points with pride to what is called 'civic action' work among the Indians in the nineteenth century, not to mention the work it also

56. See the discussion of the *grande muette* model of civil-military relations in C.E. Welch and E.K. Smith: *op cit.*, pp 208–212.

57. One of the best documented and most recent studies dealing with this topic, which builds on some of the finest antecedent works, is M. Chanock: *Britain, Rhodesia and South Africa, 1900–45: The Unconsummated Union* (Totowa, N.J., 1977).

58. South Africa. Parliament. Senate, *Debates*, 1940–1941, cols 13–14 (12 September 1940).

59. M. Janowitz: *op cit.*, pp 418–430.

60. For the military perspective, see W.L. Speight: 'Gun-Running in South Africa,' *The Journal of the Royal United Service Institution*, vol 79, no 516, November 1934, pp 765–768 as well as Mr Legum's reply to Commodore R. Harrison's question in Colin Legum, 'South Africa,' *The Journal of the Royal United Service Institution*, vol 102, no 607, August 1957, especially pp 315–316.

61. Marquard: *South Africa's Colonial Policy ...* (Johannesburg, 1957).

undertook in the governance of Eskimos in Alaska for a short while in that century.⁶²

Drawing upon the United States' experience, it would be logical to inquire whether the Union Defence Force was involved in comparable work in the African reservations. There seems to be little evidence to suggest that the Union Defence Force in its half century of existence engaged in such activities, presumably leaving the governance of Africans to the civil authorities. Moreover, in the application of violence, the South African Police were more accustomed to dealing with African unrest in the post-1910 era. However, the Union Defence Force was involved in several instances of quelling domestic insurrection among striking whites in the Witwatersrand⁶³ and in co-operating with Police units in containing potential African insurgency.⁶⁴

In addition to the maintenance of law and order in the Union, the armed forces did engage in typical engineering and exploring duties common to peacetime military units. The Navy was engaged in charting South African coastal waters,⁶⁵ while one Army unit known as the Special Service Battalion was developed during the depression as a means to effect employment of impoverished young South Africans, particularly Afrikaners.⁶⁶ This battalion was, to some extent, comparable to the American Civilian Conservation Corps which operated during the depression and which was managed with the assistance of the United States Army. During those times when it was not engaged in full-scale combat, as in both World Wars and the Korean War (which involved only the Air Force), or in acting as a support unit for the Police Force in quelling labour and/or African unrest, the Union Defence Force presumably spent its time in traditional military activities, such as parades, manoeuvres, instruction, sports, and the other rituals associated with garrison life. Whether the Union Defence Force had any internal missions that were unique, aside from maintaining the structure of white power, remains to be seen.

The Union Defence Force in Nation and Institution Building

With the onset of decolonization by the major Western powers in the decades following the termination of World War II, it has become increasingly important to examine whether and how the establishment of a post-independence military instrument has facilitated the process of growth by undertaking such tasks as inculcating loyalty to the nation, leaders, and symbols, teaching

literacy and basic hygiene to its recruits, building roads, maintaining communication channels, and so forth. Although structurally geared for its ultimate mission of combat, the armed forces in fledgling states may be schools for political socialization, ethnic arithmetic (mixing the so-called martial groups with those noted for other arts), inculcating new attitudes regarding frugality, national honour, and a willingness to put the welfare of the military unit above that of oneself. Whether such a litany of virtues is actually operative in the new nations is the key question, and the rash of army *coups d'état* that has taken place in the last decade suggests that military institutions and political decay are not necessarily antithetical.

Turning to the Union Defence Force, what observations might one make about its contribution to the building of the nation known as the Union of South Africa and to the military capabilities of that nation? Has the South African experience with British decolonization in the military sphere been similar to that of other African states now under majority rule? Or ought South Africa to be relegated to the *sui generis* category?⁶⁷

There are several approaches one can take in order to make some tentative assessments about the contribution the Union Defence Force has made in the field of nation building. First, as South African scholars point out, the Union was, to a large extent, the result of the labours of senior Afrikaner officers who had faced the British on the field of battle; it was 'the age of the generals,'⁶⁸ namely Botha, Hertzog, and Smuts. Yet

62. H.F. Walterhouse: *A Time To Build: Military Civic Action: Medium for Economic Development and Social Reform*. University of South Carolina Institute of International Studies, Studies in International Affairs No. 4 (Columbia, S.C., 1954), p 59.

63. On the 1914 Rand strike, see J. Ploeger, 'Hoofstukke uit de Voor- en Vroeë Geskiedenis van die SAW, *Militaria*, vol 1, no. 3, 1969, particularly pp 64–87. On the 1922 Rand strike, consult J. Ploeger, 'Op Brandwag: Drie Eeue Militêre Geskiedenis van Suid-Afrika,' *Militaria*, vol 1, no 4, 1969, especially pp 28–29 and N. Heard: *1922: The Revolt on the Rand* (Johannesburg, 1966).

64. See, for example, T. Lodge: 'The Cape Town Troubles, March–April, 1960,' *Journal of Southern African Studies*, vol 4, no 2 (April, 1978), p 236.

65. J.C. Goosen: *op cit.*, pp 29–35.

66. See W. Otto, 'Die Spesiale Diensbataljon (1933–1939),' in W. Otto (et al): *Die Spesiale Diensbataljon (1933–1973)*. Publikasie No 2 (Pretoria: Sentrale Dokumentasiediens, S.A.W., 1973), pp 82–83.

67. H.F. Walterhouse: *op cit.*, pp 60–64.

68. H.W. van der Merwe (et al): *White South African Elites: A Study of Incumbents of Top Positions in the Republic of South Africa* (Cape Town, 1974), p 115 and D.W. Krüger, *The Age of the Generals: A Short Political History of the Union of South Africa, 1910–1948* (Johannesburg, 1961).

none of the three generals was a career military officer or a graduate of an accredited military academy. Two of the three took to the field in World War I to conduct operations against the Germans in South West Africa and East Africa, and one of the three held the portfolio of defence for almost two decades, albeit at different times. Moreover, two of the three Defence Ministers who served in successive Hertzog cabinets held a military title (Mentz and Creswell). Indeed, of all those six men who held the defence portfolio, 1910–1961, only two (Pirow and Erasmus) had not seen active duty at some time in their life; those two were advocates (lawyers) by profession.⁶⁹

It seems plausible to believe that the Union Defence Force at least had access to the Minister of Defence because of shared military experiences, but whether access could be equated with influence was another question. Professor Stultz's findings⁷⁰ would suggest, though, that the Defence Minister *qua* Defence Minister was not necessarily the gatekeeper to the councils of the greatest power in the Union. Yet this Minister of Defence appeared to have had enough influence to prevent an estrangement between the Union Defence Force and the civilian polity. Civilian control, in brief, did not seem to have been a problem for the South African Government. The tradition of Cincinnatus was the dominant one in Afrikaner culture and this meshed easily with the Swiss participatory tradition which was so attractive to the drafters of the 1912 Defence Act. Both such traditions in and of themselves seem highly conducive to nation building, and both traditions are geared toward ground, rather than air and sea, warfare.

The British tradition complemented the Afrikaner one by adding the naval dimension which might be viewed as one of the ironies of South African history because the British consistently wanted to deny the Afrikaner trekkers an outlet to the ocean. It seems reasonable to surmise that the notions of *noblesse oblige*, class consciousness, public school virtues, and stress on amateurism in the Victorian Army officer corps⁷¹ were inmiscible with regard to the Union Defence Force. If indeed such is found to be correct, then one might expect to find that the British influence was far greater in the naval establishment than in the ground units. Perhaps the air force would be the most evenly balanced of the three services in terms of national derivation.

During World Wars I and II, the South Africans were able to furnish a credible fighting force which performed with commendable skill and gallantry,

but yet the use of the military instrument on behalf of the imperial power against a nation which sympathized with the Afrikaners in 1899–1902 was a risky venture from the standpoint of intra-white harmony in the Union. Professor Grundy's monograph⁷² shows quite clearly the centrifugal political forces unleashed by employing the Union Defence Force in combat beyond the borders of the Union. Given the emotional baggage associated with the 1899–1902 war, on the one hand, and the persistent call of the Afrikaner nation and secular religion,⁷³ on the other hand, the Union Defence Force seemed to have had only a small role to play in the nation building process. There were, in effect, two processes occurring simultaneously: the creation of an Afrikaner nation restricted to members of the chosen people and the creation of a larger nation consisting of those members of both language groups who viewed each other as neighbours and potential friends. So long as the imperial power did not intrude on the difficult work of building coalitions between the more moderate elements of both ethnic groups by putting the UDF to the test of battle involving the metropole, one could expect that the Union Defence Force could be a very useful vehicle of nation building. One wonders just how high a political cost African Armies would have to pay were they to join in coalition warfare with their former metropolises. The role of the Union Defence Force in South African nation building is one that needs greater study, but within a comparative framework. Perhaps the question can be more effectively analyzed by disaggregating the Union Defence Force and looking at the different combat arms and support units. The Special Service Battalion, noted earlier, could very well be the most functional military organization from the standpoint of forging national unity.

The Point of Return: A Tentative Appraisal

This preliminary inquiry has centred about the concept of military transfer, a concept which was examined from five particular perspectives. In the course of the inquiry it was assumed that the transaction flows were not unidirectional and that the emerging South African military system re-

69. Data concerning the various Cabinet positions, 1910–1961 were obtained from *State of South Africa: Economic, Financial and Statistical Year-Book for the Republic of South Africa, 1969* (Johannesburg), pp 44–48.

70. See notes 53 and 55 above.

71. These are some of the themes that emerge in Harries-Jenkins: *The Army in Victorian Society*, chapters 2–7.

72. See note 43 above.

73. Consult T.D. Moodie: *op cit.*, chapters 1 and 5–11 for a fuller exposition of the potency of Afrikaner nationalism.

presented a synthesis of both British and Afrikaner models and traditions. It is possible that the process of transfer is more complicated and that it could well have involved more than the two governments and their respective armed forces. For example, it is conceivable that the South Africans emulated more than just one model and that, like Black Africans to the north of them, they tried to maximize the number of military donors, thus reducing the dependence on one single donor. Such shopping on the international market is predicated on the grant of independence, so that South Africa has had roughly a three decade lead (counting from the date of the Statute of Westminster of 1931) on its fellow states in Anglophone Africa. Consequently, it would be important to scrutinize the various postings of South African military attachés as an indicator of possible traffic flows in doctrine, equipment, education, and planning. The Swiss connection in the 1912 Defence Act suggests that the Afrikaners may have learned more from the neutral foreign observers in the 1899–1902 war than one would have originally surmised. Indeed, the Afrikaners were able to attract volunteers from many nations to aid them in their Second War of Independence (as they term it).

Following the same line of reasoning, it is possible that the transfer process was mediated by a fellow Commonwealth member, such as Australia, for example, or even Rhodesia (which was not a full-fledged member of the Commonwealth although it enjoyed some of the club benefits). Here again the nature of the possible communications network needs to be scrutinized.

A third strategy of inquiry would be to examine the three principal branches of the Union Defence Force to determine which had the highest and which the lowest local content, to use the idiom of automobile manufacturers in present day South Africa. What data are readily accessible would suggest that the Navy would have the highest British (or Commonwealth) content, while the ground forces would be a blend of both Afrikaner commando and British regimental traditions and models. Presumably, the Air Force would tilt more toward the British than the Afrikaner mold, if only for reason of industrial production and plant facilities. A subsidiary question would concern the research and development aspect of technology transfers to the Union

Defence Force. South African weapons and engineering costs would depend to some extent on what development work the UDF was able to do on its own. One nation's capabilities may well represent the other nation's vulnerabilities.

In the fourth place, not enough is known about the origins, training, assignments, overseas travel and posting of the elite of the Union Defence Force officer corps. Such a study could be based on the methodology utilized by Professor Janowitz in his classical work, *The Professional Soldier* (1960). Presumably if the British or Commonwealth connection is valued, those with such credentials could logically be expected to reach the inner elite of the officer corps. One might also ascertain whether in the Union officer corps there was an Old Boy network resembling the British network.

A fifth area for further investigation concerns the type of work undertaken by Professor Huntington and Professor Stultz. The area of civil-military relations and the allied defence decision-making processes at both executive and legislative levels constitute new research frontiers for those interested in comparative defence studies. Were British models of civilian control part of the Westminster heritage or were the models taken from the nineteenth century Transvaal or Orange Free State? Are the findings of scholars such as Professor William P. Snyder, an acknowledged expert on the conduct of British defence policy in the post-World War II era, applicable to South Africa?⁷⁴ For those who are conversant with the literature on decision-making, why is so little written on the roles of the various South African Defence Ministers, who seem to be more neglected by the students of South African affairs than their opposite numbers in the Ministry of External Affairs? There is a growing body of literature on South African foreign policy and diplomatic history, for example, by such scholars as Professor Amry Vandenbosch⁷⁵ Professor J.E. Spence⁷⁶, Professor James Barber,⁷⁷ and Professor Sam C. Nolutshungu.⁷⁸

74. W.P. Snyder: *The Politics of British Defense Policy, 1945–1962* (Columbus, 1964).

75. A. Vandenbosch, *South Africa and the World: The Foreign Policy of Apartheid* (Lexington, 1970).

76. J.E. Spence: 'South Africa and the Modern World,' in M. Wilson and L. Thompson (eds.): *The Oxford History of South Africa*. 2 vols. (New York, 1969 and 1971), vol. 2, pp 477–527.

77. J. Barber, *South Africa's Foreign Policy, 1945–1970* (London, 1973).

78. See note 47 above.

Admittedly, research on defence establishments is difficult, particularly on the contemporary period. However, by reaching as far back as 1910 for data, one can engage in worthwhile and creative research. What appears to be needed is an awareness that comparative defence studies can build on a solid theoretical base and can equally profit from

the concept of military institutional transfer. In the 1970's, the South Africans themselves appear to have taken a deep interest in their own military history and have devoted public and private resources in search of their own material roots. What appears to be lacking, however, is a clear focus for such a search.