



# SCIENTIA MILITARIA

*South African Journal of Military Studies*

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Bullying in the Military: Implications and Remedies

*Bulelani Tsewu*

Navigating Human Capital Challenges: Understanding the Decline in White Members of the South African Navy

*Asiel E. Kubu and Strinivasan S. Pillay*

Private Military Force as Strategy to Counter a Hybrid Threat Posture:  
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Boko Haram: At the Intersection of Regional Security Complexes, Islamism and Gender Dynamics

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# *Scientia Militaria*

## South African Journal of Military Studies

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**Scientia Militaria**

*South African Journal of Military Studies*

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# Scientia Militaria

## *South African Journal of Military Studies*

### Editorial

In the ever-evolving global security landscape, persistent conflicts and humanitarian crises continue to challenge leadership at every level, whether in roles of governance or in command. As we reach the mid-year mark, the protracted Russo–Ukrainian War, the ongoing Gaza conflict, and escalating security issues across Africa – from the Sahel to the southeastern coast – underscore the complexities of the global security landscape. This editorial, although somewhat unconventional in its approach, reflects on the intricate nature of leadership within these contexts, a theme specifically chosen in recognition of Evert P Kleynhans’s exemplary contribution to *Scientia Militaria* from 2021 to 2024. Building on the threads from the previous editorial (*Scientia Militaria* Vol. 52 No. 2 [2024]) on contemporary wars, conflicts, and security-related matters, this editorial honours Kleynhans by exploring these contemporary affairs through the lens of leadership as a critical determinant in the conduct and consequences of war, security, and peace.

A prime illustration of the role leaders should play and their need to adapt when faced with prolonged conflict and geopolitical uncertainty is the Russo–Ukrainian War, now in its fourth year. The United States (US) and the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) member states have been supporting Ukraine since the February 2022 invasion. Since Donald Trump won the US presidential election in November 2024, and the contentious bilateral meeting with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy in the Oval Office three months later, the continuation of Western support has, however, been debated by journalists as well as diplomatic and security experts. Leadership change in the White House, however, has not discouraged Zelenskyy from continuing to seek international support, even paying a visit to the Union Buildings in Pretoria in April 2025. The question is to what extent Ukraine can sustain a war of attrition with Russia, even with continued international support. This includes whether Ukraine can sustain a steady supply of military reinforcements to maintain its military strength due to manpower losses, especially with intensified Russian drone attacks. The situation is exacerbated by the pool of potential recruits – mainly limited to men – for combat service in forward areas due to military views on gender. For instance, by May 2025, Ukraine still had only one female pilot flying combat helicopter missions.<sup>1</sup> Since the conflict erupted, Zelenskyy has emerged as a symbol of adaptive leadership. He might thus decide to challenge the traditional military culture for the sake of the survival of his country.

In the Middle East, the Gaza War between Israel and Hamas-led Palestinian militant groups – triggered by the 7 October 2023 attack on Israel, which prompted a massive military offensive in response – is also continuing, despite the January 2025 pause to facilitate the release of Israeli hostages and Palestinian prisoners. The war has intensified tensions across the region, and created a large-scale humanitarian crisis in the Gaza Strip. From Yemen, Iran-backed Houthi rebels have continued with attacks on international shipping

and missile strikes on Israel, while the United States responded with air strikes in Houthi-controlled areas. Most recently, a young couple working for the Israeli Embassy had been killed outside a Jewish museum in Washington, D.C. by a man shouting, 'free, free Palestine'.<sup>2</sup> These incidents illustrate that the conflict in Gaza has not escalated on its own; rather, the politics surrounding it have contributed to the continued spread of violence.

On the global stage, the membership status of Palestine as a "non-member observer state" at the United Nations remains unchanged since the United States, a permanent member of the Security Council, vetoed the 12-member majority supporting the Algerian proposed resolution for Palestine to gain full membership status in April of last year.<sup>3</sup> In the interim, individual states have offered their own views on the conflict. In March 2025, South Africa issued an official media statement condemning Israel for refusing to allow aid into Gaza, and the ongoing Israeli military operations in the West Bank. Earlier this month, at the Arab League Summit, the UN Secretary-General, António Guterres, reiterated the need for a two-state solution. Guterres appears to remain steadfast in his resolve to pressure both sides to reconcile their military goals with humanitarian accountability, while Israel plans to reoccupy Gaza. At the same time, Western pressure on Israel is mounting due to the humanitarian situation in Gaza and the West Bank, with the United Kingdom suspending trade talks with Israel in late May 2025. Ethically inclined leadership styles, such as those of Guterres and his predecessors, often criticised by Security Council members as performative, have rarely contributed to lasting peace. Whether this is an exception, only time will tell.

In Africa, leadership faces regional security challenges. The Sahel remains the most lethal theatre of militant Islamist violence on the continent. More concerning are hostilities shifting southward and westward, with mounting pressure on neighbouring coastal West African states. In comparison, Somalia has seen an increased Turkish presence of personnel and Akinci drones to boost the Security and Sector Development Plan in Somalia. Turkey made this decision, while the African Union Support and Stabilisation Mission in Somalia (AUSSOM) continues to struggle to get off the ground due to a lack of funds. Further south on the continent, the security situation in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo has deteriorated quickly since the beginning of this year. By March, the Extraordinary Summit of the Heads of State and Government of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) terminated the mandate of its mission to the Southern African Development Community Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo (SAMIDRC). This decision sparked a variety of accusations from critics.

For South Africa, the decision to withdraw rested on a situation reminiscent of more than a decade ago, when 13 South African National Defence Force (SANDF) troops were killed during the Battle of Bangui in the Central African Republic. As a result, South African civil-military relations came into the limelight, particularly the extent of parliamentary defence oversight and political will to hold Cabinet members and SANDF leaders accountable for what had transpired. The recent death of 14 SANDF soldiers, who formed part of the SAMIDRC deployment fighting the Mouvement du 23 Mars rebels – commonly referred to as M23 – around Goma, triggered a similar situation. The phased withdrawal of SANDF troops and equipment from the region is already underway, with

additional funds allocated for the revised 2025–2026 budget to support the operation, amidst conflicting reports on the progress of the withdrawal. Despite public support for the decision, political opponents have not been silent. In response, the South African Joint Standing Committee on Defence emphasised that the decision to withdraw the military was merely to adopt a more strategic approach, utilising alternative diplomatic avenues to achieve peace and stability in the central African nation. The diplomatic labelling of the SAMIDRC withdrawal from the Democratic Republic of Congo as a “success” inhibits open debate and public accountability regarding the political, strategic, and logistical blunders made in terms of this mission.

Much of these developments have been overshadowed by ongoing diplomatic tensions that have exacerbated over recent months. South African news outlets and media platforms are instead focused on reframing bilateral economic trade relations, increasing investments for mutual benefit, and forging collaboration in technological exchanges between South Africa and the United States. These issues formed the foundation for President Cyril Ramaphosa’s working visit to Washington at the invitation of President Trump in May 2025. Ramaphosa’s measured response demonstrated diplomatic leadership under provocation, which is probably only the first part of a much lengthier narrative in development. Journalists, biographers, academics, and a host of others will observe and study these events and, more significantly, how these leaders responded to the challenges. The result of their actions, as well as inactions – intended and accidental – will determine their legacies and how history will remember them.

Finally, attention is directed inward to the scholarly domain, or more specifically, this journal, to reflect on the stewardship of the most recent editor-in-chief, Evert Kleynhans, after his term had ended in December 2024. Like most former editors, Kleynhans is a member of the Faculty of Military Science (FMS) at Stellenbosch University. What sets him apart from his predecessors is that he completed his studies – both undergraduate and postgraduate – through the faculty, followed by his employment as an early-career academic in the Department of Military History in 2019. His ambitious determination and hard work led to Kleynhans’s promotion to associate professor in a short five-year period from his official entrance into academia.

A year after his appointment in the FMS, he was presented with an opportunity to join the *Scientia Militaria* editorial team which, at the time, consisted of Thomas Mandrup, the editor, and Evert Jordaan, then secretary. From January 2021, with Mandrup’s term ending, Kleynhans transitioned from co-editor to editor. In September, Kleynhans created the new position of book reviews editor. Anri Delpont had the opportunity to be the first to serve in this role. Two years later, in mid-2023, the editorial team underwent further changes as Delpont transitioned to the position of co-editor; Jordaan, to that of book reviews editor; while Jeanne-Pierre Sherman was welcomed as the new secretary.

Under Kleynhans’s leadership, the journal underwent transformative rebranding, expanded its digital presence, and utilised the end-to-end scholarly publishing platform (Open Journal Systems), in addition to ensuring the consistent and timely biannual publication of the journal, in addition to several special issues. These combined efforts have led to the inclusion of *Scientia Militaria* in the prestigious SciELO SA journal collection since

June 2022, following a recommendation by the Academy of Science of South Africa (ASSAf). The ASSAf report states, ‘[*Scientia Militaria*] is comparable with other leading international journals. It makes an important contribution to the discipline from South Africa and Africa.’<sup>4</sup> Kleynhans’s final act as editor-in-chief was the appointment of a new editorial advisory board for the 2025–2027 term in keeping with the commitment of the journal to academic excellence, international collaboration, representativity, and multidisciplinary research in security, defence, and military affairs. The composition of the board also reflects extensive depth and experience in research achievements, ensuring a wealth of expertise to guide the future of the journal. At the end of his term, Kleynhans was granted an award for his meritorious service to the journal.

As the incoming editorial team for the 2025–2027 term, we face the daunting task of maintaining and building upon the reputation of *Scientia Militaria* as an academic platform for the expression of excellence and integrity, as established by its previous editors.

In keeping with the leadership theme confirmed in this editorial and reflective of Kleynhans’s area of study, a select number of recent book publications on historical leaders – ranging from former South African Prime Ministers and Presidents to Defence Ministers – are reviewed in this issue. As always, the journal is grateful to our book reviewers, Timothy J Stapleton, Kongko Louis Makau, Bhaso Ndzendze, John Siko, and Anna la Grange, for their time and for sharing their thoughts on these publications. This issue also boasts a broad range of original works from a diverse selection of authors operating in both the military and the academic environment, adding to our understanding of contemporary as well as past military and security affairs.

The first article in this issue was written by Kyle J Bester, a registered research psychologist and senior lecturer in psychology at the University of South Africa. He discusses how the landscape of cyberspace is growing at an incredibly rapid pace, and how it has penetrated deeply into every aspect of society. To address this issue, Bester employed a unique approach, focusing on cyber-hygiene practices among senior South African military officers – a largely understudied subject within the South African armed forces domain. To achieve his research objective, Bester adopted a qualitative method and conducted ten semi-structured interviews. The study was guided by securitisation theory, which emphasises that the military plays a key role in orchestrating a “security move”. The aim of Bester’s study was to explore how military officers in particular conceptualise cyber hygiene, and how cybersecurity behaviour is practised in the context of the SANDF, as an important site where senior military officers undergo educational training.

The article by Bulelani Tsewu, a military law practitioner in the SANDF and graduate from the University of South Africa, discusses how, despite it not being part of the profile of a soldier to bully other soldiers, the nature of the military and its status as a social institution make soldiers vulnerable to the events of bullying. Such vulnerability comes about because of the structural inequalities – especially hierarchical relationships – that characterise military service. It bears emphasising that soldiers operate in a unique and robust environment with a rigid and uncompromising hierarchical rank structure with specified roles and career fields. Soldiers however do not forfeit basic human rights,



and should therefore be protected from treatment that degrades their sense of self-worth. The study on which Tsewu's article reports, examined the possible influence of bullying in the SANDF, while also considering legal remedies available to victims of bullying.

In their article, Asiel E Kubu, retired Vice Admiral, former SANDF Chief of Human Resources, and doctoral graduate, and Strinivasan S Pillay, Head of the Department of Public Management and Economics at Durban University of Technology, discuss the concept of human capital as defined by Groth and Hebb. According to the latter's definition, the effectiveness of an organisation depends on the quality and effectiveness of its employees. In line with the SANDF Human Resource Strategy of 2010, the South African Navy pursued recruitment interventions favouring the appointment of black personnel in order to address inequalities of the past in terms of demographics. This led to fewer white youth being inducted, resulting in a predominantly black South African Navy. To investigate this challenge, Kubu and Pillay adopted a mixed-method research approach (i.e. both qualitative and quantitative). The qualitative research comprised a literature review on human capital, the transformation process in the SANDF, the demographics of the country, and interviews with serving white recruits in the South African Navy. Furthermore, a questionnaire survey (the quantitative research part) targeting white youth was administered in Gauteng, a province in South Africa, to obtain data.

In his article, Jonathan Leach, a private military practitioner and Stellenbosch University graduate, considers the varied and intricate security challenges confronting the international community in an era of hybrid warfare. This modern form of conflict blurs the lines between war and peace, creating legal "grey zones" where traditional military forces struggle to operate effectively. As a result, countries face a troubling gap between their policy goals and the capabilities of their armed forces, compounded by political and legal restrictions that limit aggressive responses. Leach argues that this vulnerability demands a sophisticated, complex, and politically charged strategic response to counter a hybrid threat posture – one that effectively links policy ends to the ways and means of achieving those ends. Leach then proposes a conceptual framework for private military force to counter a hybrid threat posture.

In the article by Hussein Solomon, a senior professor at the Centre for Gender and Africa Studies at the University of the Free State, he discusses why Boko Haram remains a relentless threat more than two decades since its emergence in 2002. Despite concerted efforts by Nigeria, neighbouring countries, and the international community, this extremist group continues to sow death, destruction, and displacement across the region, expanding its reach with alarming resilience. Solomon pinpoints three critical oversights behind the failure to curb this menace. First, Boko Haram must be seen as part of a broader regional security complex, not just a Nigerian problem. Second, the Islamist ideology of the group has been underestimated, leading to misinformed policies doomed to fail. Third, an overlooked link between misogyny and extremism has further undermined counter-terrorism efforts. Through this analysis, Solomon offers a provocative rethinking of Boko Haram's enduring power, urging a more nuanced approach to dismantle its grip on the region.

In the final article, Gavin EC Heath, from the School of Education at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, delves into the history of the Second World War, focusing on the journey of a party of three Allied prisoners of war (two New Zealanders and one South African), who escaped from the Prigione di Guerra (PG) 78/1 camp at Acquafredda near Rocca Morice. In his article, Heath discusses the environmental conditions they faced on their epic journey to British lines near Campobasso. In particular, the bioclimatological factor is discussed, along with other factors, such as river depth, animal presence, and terrain. The literature review Heath employed comprised memoirs by escaped prisoners of war, popular histories, and recent studies by South African scholars. He employed a mixed-methods approach and obtained meteorological data from the Italian Meteorological Service.

*Scientia Militaria* is proud to offer this diverse array of rigorously researched articles that span contemporary challenges and historical perspectives. The contents are enriched by thoughtful book reviews that look into the lives and legacies of influential historical leaders, weaving together a multifaceted narrative that bridges past and present leadership paradigms. We warmly invite scholars, practitioners, and readers from across the globe to engage with these illuminating works. Your participation – whether through readership, appraisal, or submission – strengthens our collective pursuit of understanding and innovation in military and security scholarship.

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## The Editors

Anri Delpoit  & Evert Jordaan 

## Endnotes

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- <sup>4</sup> Academy of Science of South Africa, *Annual Report 2022/2023*, 2023, 59. <[https://www.assaf.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/ASSAf-Annual-Report\\_2022-23\\_Final.pdf](https://www.assaf.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/ASSAf-Annual-Report_2022-23_Final.pdf)> [Accessed on 20 May 2025].

# SCIENTIA MILITARIA

*South African Journal of Military Studies*



# Cyber Hygiene: The Case of the SANDF

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## Abstract

The landscape of cyberspace is growing at an incredibly fast pace, and it has penetrated deep into every aspect of society. In order to address this issue, the current study took a unique approach of focusing on cyber-hygiene practices among senior South African military officers, which is a largely understudied subject in the South African armed forces domain. The study was guided by the securitisation theory, which emphasises that the military plays a key role in orchestrating a “security move”. The South African National Defence College was selected as the site of importance where senior military officers undergo educational training. The military is considered a unique population, and is therefore often overlooked. The aim of the study was to explore how military officers in particular conceptualise cyber hygiene and how cybersecurity behaviour is practised in the context of the South African National Defence Force. The study utilised a qualitative approach, and conducted ten semi-structured interviews. It was found that cybersecurity awareness was key in the formation of cyber hygiene and locating potential cyber threats. These factors play a role in the development of security behaviour that is able to identify vulnerabilities in the system and within their own behaviour. Cultivating cybersecurity in the organisation was found to be challenged by knowledge and experience relating to cyberspace usage. The study also found that senior military officers practise cyber hygiene by taking appropriate security procedures to protect themselves and the organisation; however, organisational challenges prevent the full application of this practice.

**Keywords:** Cyber Hygiene, Information Security, Cybersecurity Awareness, South Africa, Behaviour, Security Practices

## Introduction

Bester suggests that cyber threats are pervasive in society and have the potential to affect various sectors, such as the finance, defence, transport, and maritime sectors, as well as critical infrastructure.<sup>2</sup> In addition, the surge in cyber threats locally and internationally is a consequence of the expanding nature of cyberspace and the move towards a digitally connected society.<sup>3,4</sup> In a connected society, users increasingly use the Internet to undertake their daily activities, which might be intensifying due to remote working conditions where access to the Internet is emphasised.<sup>5</sup> Adding to this, since the inception of the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been a transition towards online or remote working conditions. This may not necessarily be true for the military context, where South African National Defence Force (SANDF) members were domestically deployed to maintain order during

the pandemic. Remote working conditions did not apply to all military members during the period 2020–2022.<sup>6</sup> The COVID-19 pandemic saw an increase in cyber threats in the South African context. This is largely due to infective security behaviours employed by users when working remotely and having limited cybersecurity awareness. Several significant factors affect the cybersecurity landscape in South Africa. These include limited investment in cybersecurity measures, slow progress in developing regulations and laws related to cybersecurity, and a general lack of awareness regarding cyber threats and security protocols.<sup>7</sup> Additionally, the widespread use of digital devices has contributed to the complexity of the cyber threat landscape in South Africa.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, the country has been identified as a prime target for cyber attackers, which makes it even especially susceptible to security breaches.<sup>9</sup> Taking the above into consideration, from a securitisation theory (ST) perspective, cyber threats pose a significant concern for nation-states. This necessitates responses that may include prolonged emergency measures or swift actions. When discussing cyber hygiene, a term often used interchangeably with cybersecurity awareness, the emphasis is however on individual behaviours that prioritise security. The focus of ST in this study was therefore, on individual measures rather than on a broad state-centred perspective.

From a large societal perspective, South Africa has experienced increased ransomware and phishing attacks.<sup>10</sup> The increase in cyberattacks points towards the overall cybersecurity maturity of the nation-state, and highlights the deprioritisation of defence spending in favour of social demands.<sup>11</sup> In addition, the maturation of cyber capabilities also comes into question since the SANDF was suspected of being the victim of a data breach in 2023.<sup>12</sup> From a perspective where the military member is the focus, it is unclear how SANDF members were affected by the surge of ransomware attacks and suspected data breaches in 2023, since recent research on cybersecurity on South African military officers only points out aspects related to:

- Cybersecurity awareness;
- Knowledge of specific threats in an organisational context; and
- Security behaviour in cyberspace.<sup>13,14,15</sup>

This article reflects the research findings of the study conducted by Bester on cybersecurity awareness among South African military officers.<sup>16</sup>

## What is Cyber Hygiene?

In terms of cybersecurity behaviour, the researcher used the lens of cyber hygiene to highlight the increasing threat faced by users who are experiencing online security threats. The exploration of cyber hygiene among military officers has not been engaged with in the South African context, although aspects related to awareness and training have been extensively examined.<sup>17,18,19</sup> The term “cyber hygiene” has not been used frequently in the South African context, and contributes to Bester’s argument that cybersecurity research that emphasises the human element, is emerging.<sup>20</sup> The definition of cyber hygiene lends itself to ‘a set of practices aiming to protect from negative impact to the assets from cyber

security related risks'.<sup>21</sup> This definition fails to consider the essential component of the human element, whereby risk and threats are thwarted by applying security behaviour and following security procedures to mitigate potential attacks. The research on which this article is based focused on the individual level of cyber hygiene by referring to the security practices and behaviour of military officers in the SANDF. It is argued that engagement with cyber-hygiene practices may enhance the cyber resiliency of potential targets, thereby reducing the vulnerability towards cybercrime.<sup>22</sup> In this instance, the exploration of behavioural practices associated with cyber hygiene may therefore contribute to this emerging concept in the South African armed forces context.

The idea of hygiene practices refers to cleansing one's hands. In a similar fashion, cyber hygiene refers to the conscious effort to ensure the system well-being of the user online.<sup>23</sup> Advancing the description on cyber hygiene, one needs to highlight the idea of digital well-being and practical steps to ensure online safety. Cyber hygiene is the practical steps that users take to advance their online security and safeguard their system health, which may come in the form of computers or devices.<sup>24</sup> In addition, when referring to the concept of cyber hygiene, the element of adaptability must be present, as a security-oriented approach needs to be considered by users to avoid potential threats. A security-oriented approach is essential for individuals to cultivate a proactive mind-set aimed at identifying and mitigating potential threats. It demands that users in organisations consistently adhere to best practices, monitor for threats, and maintain a strong awareness of risks as they navigate the Internet.<sup>25</sup> To achieve cyber hygiene within an organisation, the following practices must be applied:

- Ensure that adequate training is provided to all members of the organisation to identify and report suspected threats;
- All organisational devices need to receive updated software;
- Ensure that there is strong system access management and that multi-factor authentication is applied; and
- The organisation should invest in systems that enable clear access to the network infrastructure of the organisation.<sup>26</sup>

The dynamics between cybersecurity awareness and cyber hygiene can be linked in two ways:

- In order to practise cyber hygiene, there needs to be a concerted effort to apply guidelines and best practices;<sup>27</sup> and
- The human element executes security behaviour by applying knowledge at the network, individual, and device levels.<sup>28</sup>

McMahon argues that the human element is an important facet in the cybersecurity chain.<sup>29</sup> The connection between cyber hygiene and cybersecurity awareness is based on the practice of implementing security measures. Individual cyber hygiene requires training and education on cybersecurity. This is true, as most cyberattacks occur due to a lack of user awareness.<sup>30</sup> The practice of cyber hygiene results in safe internet browsing by users, and improves cyber health.<sup>31</sup> In this case, "cyber health" refers to the notion of mechanisms to protect a user's online security and data through a series of procedures.<sup>32</sup>

# Cybersecurity Awareness

The researcher raised the question from a philosophical perspective: ‘The chicken or the egg?’ This question underpins the process that, in order to practise cyber hygiene (cybersecurity practices), there must be some level of awareness and knowledge of threats. Cybersecurity is fundamentally influenced by the convergence of outcome of laws, best practices and individual security behaviour. It is therefore necessary to shift the focus to cybersecurity awareness as the basis of cyber hygiene. The researcher considers the human element as an important component in the cybersecurity chain. For this article, the researcher used Bester’s proposed definition as a reference point:

Cybersecurity is a flexible security process through which individuals are constantly interacting with a technical environment in the social context. Cybersecurity is also the immersive process through which the human factor utilises security software tools in tandem with education, training, guidelines, technical knowledge, and best practices such as awareness training, technical skills, and risk assessment. Cybersecurity also requires the notion of applying knowledge to risk perception and precautionary behaviour, while being fully aware of vulnerabilities in both the physical and cyberspace domain.<sup>33</sup>

Bester’s definition highlights the essence of human behaviour within the cybersecurity chain and the multitude of activities users need to undertake when confronted with ensuring security in an online space.<sup>34</sup> The definition raises the idea of considerable cybersecurity practices and the application of security mechanisms. The definition however, attempts to incorporate too many elements that may not necessarily be contextually applicable to everyday functioning. This contextual limitation is dependent on two aspects, namely time and space. In terms of time, users often do not have the luxury to acquire advanced knowledge and skills to enhance their own cybersecurity awareness. The same may apply to organisations that are experiencing budgetary constraints, and are thus unable to offer cybersecurity training and education for all members.<sup>35</sup> In terms of space, the researcher is of the opinion that each context demands a tailored response and risk management plan to mitigate cyber threats and attacks. Moreover, the exchange of information in the armed forces context is contingent upon the functionality of technological systems. This functionality may, however, be subject to certain contextual impediments, such as financial limitations.<sup>36</sup>

Dagada asserts that the increasing number of cyberattacks in South Africa is a serious concern that demands immediate action.<sup>37</sup> The recognition of these threats has prompted the South African government to develop legislation and frameworks to address these contemporary threats and safeguard the nation against potential harm. The National Cybersecurity Policy Framework was introduced in 2015 to provide a comprehensive view of key stakeholders responsible for mitigating cyberattacks and threats.<sup>38</sup> The classification of threats in terms of complexity is not linked explicitly to the measures of action, however, but rather to the allocation of duties and responsibilities among the South African security cluster. Furthermore, ensuring protection against cyber threats is considered a top priority for the SANDF. To maintain and ensure the best possible



form of defence, the SANDF has the responsibility of co-ordinating, implementing, and taking accountability for all cyber-defence issues.<sup>39,40</sup> Adding to the importance of the SANDF, militaries across the globe are increasingly becoming reliant on information technology (IT), and the risks have become more severe as cyber threats and attacks are increasing. The SANDF approach to reducing threats and taking a more offensive stance on maintaining cybersecurity is to advance its cyber command.<sup>41</sup> While this is an important factor in advancing capacity, it may not necessarily address the issue of awareness and consideration of cyber hygiene by the SANDF. Furthermore, the role of cyber hygiene cannot be underplayed in organisational contexts, such as the SANDF, where information can be critical to operations. It has been found that the implementation of basic cyber-hygiene practices and the sharing of best practices can result in averting up to 90 per cent of cyberattacks.<sup>42</sup> The implementation of online security behaviour and information-sharing practices in organisational contexts may therefore contribute to the mitigation strategies of addressing cyber threats and protecting both individual and organisational data from being compromised. In the current digital landscape, the human component remains a crucial factor in ensuring robust cybersecurity measures. As individuals move between the digital and physical worlds, their actions can significantly affect the security of digital systems. Humans are however susceptible to committing security-related errors and can become vulnerable to various threats that can compromise the security of these systems.<sup>43</sup> It is important to note that many users may lack the required awareness of the nature and diversity of cybersecurity threats. Educating and training individuals on the various types of threats in this domain are therefore critical in reducing the risk of security breaches and safeguarding digital systems against harm.<sup>44</sup> Such measures should include continuous awareness programmes and training sessions to raise the level of understanding among users and to promote best practices in cybersecurity.<sup>45</sup> By doing so, businesses and organisations can create a culture of cybersecurity that is essential for protecting sensitive data and ensuring the continuity of operations.

## **The Effect of Cyber Threats on the SANDF**

The emergence of cyber threats and cyberattacks has had a significant effect on the economic and social sectors of South Africa. The increasing reliance on information and communications technology (ICT) has rendered civil society and the armed forces vulnerable to cyber threats.<sup>46,47</sup> As a result, the role of the military in safeguarding national interests has become increasingly crucial.<sup>48</sup> The SANDF however faces a significant challenge in mitigating the risks associated with cyber threats. The Department of Defence confirms that, while the threat of cyberattacks is on the rise, the tools available to the SANDF are outdated.<sup>49</sup> Furthermore, the SANDF faces resource constraints due to insufficient funding, as noted in a report by the former Minister of Defence.<sup>50</sup> This lack of resources may impede the ability of the SANDF to integrate ICT capabilities fully and to enhance technology for mitigating cyberspace threats. Dlamini and Modise argue that organisations that embrace ICT capabilities tend to operate more efficiently than those that avoid technological incorporation.<sup>51</sup> Embracing ICT capabilities however also requires accepting the notion of security in this domain. In addition, the increasing rate of cyber threats and cyberattacks has emerged as a significant concern for the economic and social sectors of South Africa, resulting in questions being posed regarding the current state of

national security and the way the security cluster is advancing cybersecurity efforts from a multi-disciplinary and collaborative perspective.

## Vulnerability of Force Members

The security of software and hardware used in personal computer devices at home is a growing concern due to the increasing incidence of cyberattacks. This is compounded by the scrutiny under which SANDF senior officers have come due to the practice of sharing information on unofficial social media networks.<sup>52</sup> Martin highlights that the organisation is cognisant of the use of social media and that its organisational data might be vulnerable to other militaries and non-state actors in terms of obtaining intelligence.<sup>53</sup> The notion of maturity also comes into question when relating the idea to mobile device use. It has been identified that the younger generation of military members are more inclined to use social media on their mobile devices than senior military members.<sup>54</sup> This dynamic of use is confirmed by Bester, who asserts that maturity levels have an influence on how social media are used and how information is shared among different age groups.<sup>55</sup> It was identified that senior military officers are more apprehensive to share information than junior military members. Department of Defence spokesperson, Sipiwe Dlamini, noted in 2023 that unauthorised access to and sharing of classified organisational information are prohibited and that there are guiding principles and policies to guide members' functioning.<sup>56</sup> Bester and Arendse argue that limited information on the risk of threat information in the organisation is conveyed to military members.<sup>57</sup> This adds to military members' cyber-hygiene vulnerability and overall cybersecurity awareness of possible threats and security protocols.<sup>58</sup> It is however noted that, while the dissemination of policies and directives is not equally received throughout the organisation, directives geared towards the processes and procedures on information and communications systems of security in the Department of Defence exist.<sup>59</sup> Singh *et al.* suggest that all users must have some sense of accountability when applying best practices when navigating the Internet.<sup>60</sup> A lack of information on these best practices may also lead to the ineffective application of cyber hygiene in organisational contexts. The onus is therefore not only on organisational management to enforce guidelines and best practices but also on personal accountability.<sup>61</sup> In addition, it has been shown that employees will exhibit better cyber-hygiene behaviour in organisations that have invested significantly in cybersecurity measures.

Ncubukezi and Mwansa indicate that effective and clear communication strategies and policies should be the priority of all organisations.<sup>62</sup> The effective practice of these strategies has however not been executed comprehensively in the SANDF, as Bailie notes that the organisation has experienced substantial challenges related to internal and external communication.<sup>63</sup> Ncubukezi and Mwansa draw attention to several factors that may cause poor cyber hygiene in organisational contexts:

- Limited cybersecurity awareness of threats and safety precautions;
- Cybersecurity policies and guidelines that are ineffective in addressing emerging threats; and

- Limited knowledge of the technical component of cybersecurity.<sup>64</sup>

The authors indicate that there must be a connection between the technical features of cybersecurity and behavioural elements. When making the link to SANDF members, Bester draws parallels, and suggests that cybersecurity should be flexible and approached from a multi-disciplinary perspective where there is a blend of technical and human factors.<sup>65</sup>

Organisations that experience budgetary constraints may find it challenging to acquire new technological tools for their personnel to use. Sharing information quickly is however crucial in the digital age, and limiting technology in organisations may hinder the psychological need to share information rapidly. In an organisation, such as the SANDF, sharing information digitally might be critical for operations and instructions to be executed rapidly.<sup>66</sup>

As noted, the rise of cyber threats may result in significant security challenges at the individual level, but may also pose security challenges to organisations, multiple sectors, and national security.<sup>67</sup> The significant increase in cyber threats has led to the SANDF being more resolute in enhancing its cyber resilience and digital capacity.<sup>68</sup> Bester and Arendse assert that the SANDF acknowledges the importance of cyber threats and attacks and the vulnerability of its members.<sup>69</sup> It is thus necessary to explore online security practices and behaviour from a multi-disciplinary perspective.<sup>70</sup> This multi-disciplinary view is echoed in cybersecurity awareness research that highlights technological advancement, psychosocial factors, and the development of cybersecurity awareness and education.

## **The Link Between Cyber Hygiene and Cybersecurity Awareness**

Hygiene encompasses the conscientious practice of upholding bodily cleanliness to support both mental and physical well-being.<sup>71</sup> This brief reiteration of hygiene can be linked to cyber hygiene, which highlights the efforts made by users to ensure online safety through appropriate mechanisms that ensure system health and online security. The implementation of efficient cyber-hygiene practices among users has been identified as an important factor in addressing cyber threats and risks.<sup>72</sup> This also points towards the facets of knowledge and routine practice of security protocols. Van't Wout refers to the idea that cybersecurity training should be provided on a regular basis in order to build knowledgeable security personnel that can manage risks effectively.<sup>73</sup> Bester adds that a one-size-fits-all approach cannot be the only solution for an organisation the size of the SANDF, as specific needs must be addressed.<sup>74</sup> Furthermore, cyber threats are unique in their own right and may affect strategic parts of cyber well-being and functioning.<sup>i</sup> Bester therefore recommends that threats need to be mitigated by using uniquely tailored training programmes and behavioural mechanisms that are well positioned to deal with

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<sup>i</sup> The researcher refers to “cyber well-being” as a term that encompasses both the technical and the psychological well-being of the user functioning in cyberspace and making use of it.

the technical features and psychological attributes that seek to exploit user vulnerability.<sup>75</sup>

Cyber hygiene is a concept that needs more attention in the organisational context as it aligns with the development of cybersecurity awareness. Introducing cyber hygiene to personnel in organisational contexts may enable the efficient behaviour of managing risks.<sup>76</sup> In organisational contexts, the practice of cyber hygiene is recommended to be the responsibility of every employee. Therefore, the successful practice of cyber hygiene implies that responsibility for maintaining security behaviour rests not only with the organisation, but also with the individual.

## Securitisation Theory

Securitisation theory originates from the fields of international relations and political science. There is, however, an ongoing debate about the necessity of expanding this theory to encompass aspects related to human and climate security. The foundation of securitisation theory in the context of cyber hygiene is based on the idea that security is a performative act, where language plays a crucial role in influencing the execution of authority. While securitisation theory is primarily utilised to illustrate conceptualisations of security within the political landscape, the current study applied the theory to examine how cyber-hygiene practices among military officers are shaped by the perceived importance of and threats posed by cyber threats and attacks. Philipsen argues that, to engage in security, one must also articulate matters of security, in other words, one should implement security practices, such as maintaining strong password management or ensuring the use of secure networks. Individuals must therefore be aware of and participate in a discourse about security.<sup>77</sup> Such discourse functions as a speech act that communicates the nature and extent of the threat. Bester however points out that, even if the speech act is initiated, it does not necessarily indicate a complete awareness or understanding of the threat involved.<sup>78</sup>

## Method

The study on which this article is based, adopted an interpretivist approach, mainly to explore cyber hygiene within the SANDF context. A cross-sectional design was utilised as the research was not focused on the long-term impact of cyber hygiene practices and behavioural implications, but on the short-term impact. Moreover, participants were recruited using a non-probability sampling method. Homogenous purposive sampling, a non-probability method, was used as the technique to obtain information from the participants.<sup>79</sup>

## Connection to the Larger Study

The current study formed part of a larger study that focused on cybersecurity awareness among the South African armed forces. The larger study comprised two methodological phases. Phase 1 focused on the qualitative exploration of cybersecurity awareness by targeting participant perceptions and views. Phase 2 consisted of a quantitative investigation that employed the Cybersecurity Orientation Questionnaire.<sup>80</sup> The larger study made use of a sequential design, which is a phased approach typically used in mixed-methods studies.<sup>81</sup> The current study explored the findings of Phase 1 of the larger study by providing a detailed account of three dominant themes related to cyber-hygiene practices in the SANDF, namely:

- Theme 1: Training and knowledge development of cybersecurity awareness;
- Theme 2: Lack of trust in organisational devices and services; and
- Theme 3: Practical experience with cyber-hygiene practices

## Research Aims and Objectives

The current study explored cyber-hygiene practices among South African military officers. The focus on cyber hygiene emphasises the role of cybersecurity awareness in the SANDF context, and contributes to the existing narrative that the human element is central to the formation of online security behaviour. In recent times, cybersecurity research in the South African context has received much attention in terms of elements related to awareness, security management, and training.<sup>82</sup> Bester however asserts that more research needs to be conducted on cybersecurity awareness behaviour within the SANDF.<sup>83</sup> While there might be limited research on cybersecurity awareness in the SANDF, a wealth of research in this regard exists outside the SANDF context. In the context of the SANDF, limited research exists that focused on cyber hygiene and cybersecurity awareness. For this reason, it was necessary to explore the following dimensions:

- Information-sharing culture;
- Security orientation;
- Cybersecurity posture; and
- Cybersecurity practices.<sup>84</sup>

These four dimensions were developed to emphasise the importance of the human element within the cybersecurity process. Consequently, the purpose of the study was to explore the cyber-hygiene behavioural practices of a South African military sample. This was the first time that research has been conducted on the cyber-hygiene behavioural practices in a military context, and it is trusted that it will promote further research into refining the measurement of cybersecurity awareness within the military context.

The research question for this study was whether South African military officers practise cyber hygiene in the organisational context. The aims of the study were to explore the cyber hygiene of South Africa military members, and to explore how cyber-hygiene practices are conducted by military members.

## Participants

The researcher enlisted participants from the South African National Defence College (SANDC), a distinguished military institution that provides comprehensive education, training, and development programmes.<sup>85</sup> The study deliberately omitted age and gender as criteria for selecting participants, as these factors were deemed irrelevant in terms of the research aims. Despite his best attempts, the researcher could only enlist ten senior military officers, as other potential participants were unavailable owing to academic commitments.

## Data Collection

The participants completed semi-structured interviews about their perceptions of cybersecurity awareness and online security behaviour executed within the organisation. Semi-structured face-to-face interviews were conducted during January 2020 and lasted between 35 and 50 minutes each.

## Data-Collection Tool

The study employed an interview guide encompassing four dimensions pertinent to cybersecurity awareness, namely:

- Information-sharing culture;
- Security orientation;
- Cybersecurity posture; and
- Cybersecurity practices.

While the primary purpose of the interview guide was not to concentrate on cyber-hygiene practices, the analysis phase of the broader study highlighted the significance of security behaviours and practices in understanding cybersecurity awareness. Furthermore, it is essential to recognise that behaviour and security practices are integral to comprehending the concept of cyber hygiene. Consequently, the positionality of this study justified the need to investigate this emerging topic further.

Participant number	Gender	Location	Rank	Race	Arm of service
P1	Male	Western Cape	General	Coloured	Air Force
P2	Female	Gauteng	Colonel	White	Air Force
P3	Male	Gauteng	Colonel	White	SA Army
P4	Female	Gauteng	Colonel	Indian	SA Army
P5	Male	Gauteng	Colonel	White	SAMHS*
P6	Male	Limpopo	Captain	Black	SA Navy
P7	Female	Gauteng	Colonel	Black	SAMHS
P8	Female	Gauteng	Colonel	White	Air Force
P9	Male	Gauteng	Colonel	Black	SA Army
P10	Male	Gauteng	Colonel	Coloured	SA Army

\*South African Military Health Service (SAMHS)

*Table 1: Participant Profile*

## Ethical Considerations

Upholding ethical considerations throughout the study was important. The study was conducted in alignment with established ethical best practices to ensure the integrity of the study and the protection of the participants' rights. All ten senior military officers provided written informed consent to participate in the interview process. All ethical standards were rigorously maintained throughout the duration of the interviews and the research. The information presented during the semi-structured interviews was of a sensitive nature; the researcher therefore utilised participant numbering to ensure anonymity. In addition, access to the data was restricted to the principal researcher. Safeguarding of data in this study was important, as it not only focused on military knowledge, but also on the confidential information of military officers. Given the sensitive context of cybersecurity within the SANDF, the researcher exercised caution to avoid inducing anxiety among the participants regarding the subject matter. When posed with challenging questions, the participants were afforded the opportunity to reflect to ensure their composure and to allow them the flexibility to respond in a manner that aligned with their comfort level.<sup>86</sup> The researcher adopted a non-judgemental approach, and established rapport in order for the participants to provide rich and detailed information.<sup>87</sup> Ethical clearance for this study was secured from Stellenbosch University, South Africa. The data supporting the findings of this study can be requested directly from the corresponding researcher; however, please note that the data are not publicly available because of confidentiality restrictions.

## Data Analysis

The study used a qualitative content analysis approach to identify patterns in the themes derived from the data source.<sup>88</sup> This method helped in recognising commonalities and the frequency of occurrence of these patterns. Qualitative inquiry is believed to provide a deep understanding of events and phenomena in the social world.<sup>89</sup> In the context of

the SANDF, exploring cyber hygiene necessitated a method that allowed participants to share their experiences, which the researcher could then analyse.<sup>90</sup> Additionally, since the study aimed to investigate the cyber-hygiene practices of South African military officers, a qualitative approach was appropriate for this research. Qualitative content analysis involves systematic and transparent procedures for processing data and substantiating trustworthy interpretations in the social science domain.<sup>91</sup> The study followed an eight-step process:

- Preparing the data after the interview data had been collected;
- Defining the unit of analysis, expressed in a singular theme or paragraph;
- Developing categories and a coding scheme;
- Testing the coding scheme through the text from the obtained narratives;
- Coding the text;
- Evaluating the code consistency by checking and rechecking for duplication and irregularities;
- Drawing inferences from the coded data; and
- Highlighting the findings and methodology used in the research process.

Three main themes emerged from the content analysis. The first theme focused on the crucial development of training and knowledge in the field of cybersecurity awareness, which highlighted the need for continuous learning and skill development to combat evolving security threats. The second theme pertained to the prevailing lack of trust in emerging technology, which underscored the challenges and mistrust surrounding the adoption of new technological innovations and their potential cybersecurity implications. The third theme emphasised the practical implications of executing security behaviour that contributes to cyber hygiene in the organisation. The theme titles and descriptions are presented in Table 2.

Theme	Description
Theme 1: Training and knowledge development of cybersecurity awareness	This theme focused on the notion that training and development processes are important for the advancement of cybersecurity awareness.
Theme 2: Lack of trust in organisational devices and services	This theme focused on the trust that military members have in the ability of the organisation to implement its policies and directives. The notion of trust also included the military officers' ease and confidence using digital devices, such as laptops and stationary computers at their respective units.
Theme 3: Practical experience with cyber-hygiene practices	This theme addressed how exposure to security behaviour and knowledge may assist with cyber-hygiene practices.

*Table 2: Themes*



## Results

This section discusses the three themes derived from the interviews conducted with military members.

### *Theme 1: Training and Knowledge Development of Cybersecurity Awareness*

The interviewed senior military officers agreed that cybersecurity training and education were crucial for advancing security in their organisational context, and they highlighted the importance of teaching and learning within the military context. Training and knowledge production regarding cyber threats and security behaviour are essential in the advancement of cyber-hygiene practices and ensuring that rational decisions are made when encountering threats.<sup>92</sup> These findings echo the need for training as eight out of ten participants indicated that, at the time, training was required to advance their security behaviour and daily practices in the workplace. Two participants indicated some training on cyber threats at the time and highlighted that it was largely the responsibility of the military member to seek external training on cybersecurity. Eight participants emphasised the importance of staying up to date with the latest cybersecurity trends to ensure that they were prepared for potential threats. The participants also suggested that regular information sessions would help to force members to adopt better security behaviour and remain vigilant in their daily data-sharing tasks. Although the senior military officers were aware of potential threats, they acknowledged that not all members of the organisation received critical information on potential attacks. They therefore recommended that cybersecurity and risk information training should be available to all levels of the organisation, without any exclusionary factors. Relating this to cyber hygiene, training on cybersecurity is key in raising the awareness levels of personnel in organisational contexts and reducing the notion of risk. Howell *et al.* however argue that training and providing threat information may not necessarily improve security behaviour or advance cyber-hygiene practices; instead, it may only improve decision-making on how to mitigate threats and address previous or existing security behaviour.<sup>93</sup> Some participants also indicated that, at the time of the research, there was some level of awareness of cyber threats and they revealed that, while very limited training on information security and overall cybersecurity behaviour was provided to all members of the organisation, the acquisition of knowledge could be performed in a private capacity. This could indicate the willingness and resourceful nature of force members to educate themselves and to be contextually aware of threats that may have an influence on their personal and organisational data. In this regard, some participants mentioned the following (please note that all quotations are reproduced verbatim and unedited):

If someone was really aware of the dangers of cyber threats and attacks they would take the proper measures and log out, because what will happen when someone imports something through your Internet account or email address, then it spreads at work and on our computers and when they investigate the issue, then you are the source without you being aware. (P3)

Cybersecurity training should be intervention-based where training is offered on a monthly basis so that we're able to adapt to technology that is moving quickly. (P2)

All military members should be trained in the Department of Defence, and information should not only belong to specific group of people such as specialists or Defence Intelligence. The organisation must empower people so that we can go beyond the current measures put in place to solve our challenges with cybersecurity. (P3)

The above excerpts indicate that training on cyber hygiene should be a continuous exercise. Organisations that offer regular cybersecurity training from a technical and behavioural standpoint may benefit from an employee base that is aware of threats and that may exhibit practical cyber-hygiene traits. Van't Wout indicates that routine cybersecurity awareness training is an effective approach to increasing the digital security of an organisation.<sup>94</sup> Bester recommends that routine cybersecurity awareness training is beneficial for practising cyber hygiene among employees in organisations.<sup>95</sup> The participants' narratives suggested that regular cybersecurity training is required to reduce the threat to organisations and members of organisations.

## *Theme 2: Lack of Trust in Organisational Devices and Services*

This theme focused on the digital trust that participants should have in cyberspace, and the technology required to access this space. Six of the ten participants considered there to be mistrust regarding the use of organisational devices, such as laptops, as well as the implementation of policies related to the use of these devices. Four of the ten participants considered there to be trust among military members; however, it was noted that senior management should discipline those who violate procedures. The element of digital trust in Theme 2 was an important factor for the participants, as this trait allowed for peace of mind when gaining access to devices and navigating the Internet and organisational networks. The implementation of effective cyber-hygiene practices empowers employees to navigate the Internet and organisational systems with confidence.<sup>96</sup> Furthermore, fostering digital trust within organisations is likely to enhance employees' cyber-hygiene practices, thereby contributing to a secure operating environment.<sup>97</sup> This theme also raised another important aspect, which was that the participants did not trust the technological devices supplied by the organisation to access cyberspace without the risk of malware being present. The participants shared the opinion that trust was an important factor in achieving effective communication in the organisation. Expanding on the point made by the participants, it is noted that effective, transparent communication strategies form a good foundation to establish trusting relationships, especially since cybersecurity requires collaboration among stakeholders. The narratives of the military officers in this regard were as follows:

I would personally make cybersecurity more visible in the organisation. There are military members who violate certain security procedures, and this is usually kept quiet. I believe the organisation should expose those that are violating trust and existing security measures. (P2)

I must admit, there is an absence of clear communication in the Department of Defence. There are certain systems in place, but these have been adjusted as times goes on, you understand. Unfortunately, I am not aware whether we have an official network that will allow us to engage in rapid information sharing of threats. (P2)

[A]t this stage, if you look at Lotus Notes, we are looking at meetings, performance plans, and that sort of stuff. I don't think the network is secure enough, and I don't think any secret or top-secret information should be shared on this platform; it should be in a central place where you look at the information and go away. (P8)

[W]e not actually securing the information in the organisation, so if I lose my laptop in the organisation, I lose everything. I do have a password, but that's about it. (P5)

These narratives show that, at the time of the research, there was a level of mistrust among military officers concerning the network security and the devices provided to military members. The narratives provided insight into the complex relationship that participating military officers had with the resources supplied by the SANDF at the time. The precautions implemented to address security challenges related to theft were also raised, where Participant 5 (P5) indicated that setting a password is sufficient to secure a device that is subject to theft. This raises the argument that physical security needs to be taken as seriously as the enforcement of online security behaviour in the workplace. This particular stance on a lack of trust may extend to Participant 3's view, which was that, at the time, the organisation did not trust its employees with the official allocated laptop devices and therefore applied strict security policies to monitor this. The awareness related to the existing network security also came into question, where Participants 2 and 8 remarked that they were neither aware of its existence, nor were they confident in the capability of its implementation. The researcher argues that existing security procedures come in the form of best practices and guidelines. Moreover, existing procedures detailing the security steps in cybersecurity should also be made more accessible for military members in the organisation, as pointed out by Participant 5. Participant 2 indicated that there were gaps in the communication strategies to deploy risk information on cyber threats.

### *Theme 3: Practical Experience with Cyber-Hygiene Practices*

Nine out of ten participants indicated that they actively engaged in setting new passwords and storing their data in secure locations. Enhancing cyber-hygiene practices may facilitate a cost-effective way to address cybersecurity in the workplace as the focus is on an individual level.<sup>98</sup> Practising cybersecurity awareness and information security has been shown to depend on individual factors related to age and gender.<sup>99</sup> These factors as variables are both considered to be present when security behaviour is practised in organisational and personal contexts. This also shows that there is a limited gap between the two contexts and the practice of security behaviour.<sup>100</sup> Moreover, it was evident from the narratives that the practical experience of cyber hygiene was not dependent on years of experience in

the organisation or the period in which an individual is exposed to the Internet. Instead, the narratives alluded to the knowledge and experience gained by observing the security protocols executed in the organisation. In this discussion, information-sharing activities play an important role in the formation of perceptions of cyber-hygiene practices. The narratives showed a lack of guidance when interpreting cyber threats, as well as when exercising cybersecurity behaviour. The theme showed that the participants practised cyber hygiene by regularly changing their passwords and securing organisational data by refraining from storing sensitive information on their personal memory sticks or flash drives, and avoiding connecting to public Wi-Fi access points. The narratives indicated that certain steps were taken by military officers in the SANDF to ensure cyber hygiene; however, not all practices were ideal. Skorenkyy *et al.* suggest that technical training is required to enhance the expertise of employees in organisations.<sup>101</sup> These training programmes however often fail to include policy and regulatory frameworks. Based on the participants' narratives, it was evident that, when storing information, the boundaries are not always transparent. This may lead to misunderstandings, and may also affect the execution of behaviour. Excerpts from the participants' narratives are presented below.

Ever since the computer generation in terms of putting documentation on the hard drive, it becomes [...] a risk because you are sometimes requested to work at home. Although sometimes it's easier said than done and this is where [...] you sometimes blur the line when saving official information on your personal hard drive. And sometime vice versa as sometimes you are not in possession of your Defence hard drive, and sometimes you transfer that information to a personal hard drive, which could be problematic. (P1)

Yes, I have a MacBook and I store all my work information on my personal device. And then I save all work-related information on a flash disk which I received from Air Force HQ [headquarters]. Tomorrow I will bring it back to work and then work in such a way again. (P2)

I don't secure my passwords regularly. I'm not so fussy about it. For example, right now we know it's supposed to happen, but there's not much going into it. (P7)

Government information should not really be stored on a personal flash drive and they can store it on a hard drive, but it must be controlled. (P6)

I would say one way to limit breaches to systems and computers and stuff is to make sure you are in your office working and not leaving your work on the database. You need to avoid leaving your information on memory sticks that should not be done what I think. (P5)

[A]s an officer you should know what is right or wrong. And to be ethical, to save your official information on your personal hard drive is not right. But [...] sometimes you are forced to do things that are not supposed to be done in that manner. (P1)

I don't believe military members are aware of how they should behave in cyberspace and how they should treat information. For example, the in thing as of late is, when you get a signal, you take a photo and send it to your colleague via WhatsApp, though WhatsApp is encrypted. (P9)

Participant 9's narrative showed that procedures concerning the information shared in terms of cybersecurity were unclear. In addition, Participant 9 noted that secure information-sharing practices were limited and that sensitive information was shared on social communication platforms, such as WhatsApp. Participant 1's words showed that behaviour was adapted based on risk. The researcher concluded that behaviour is influenced by risk perception, which entails that users adapt their security behaviour based on how much risk they are willing to take. This risk was also demonstrated in Participant 2's words. The narratives indicated that the participants were able to implement some cyber-hygiene practices in the organisation by changing passwords on their personal and organisational devices, refraining from storing sensitive data on flash drives, and making use of a controlled and secure space to store organisational data.

## Discussion

The participants reported experiencing various challenges in acquiring cybersecurity awareness training, in their personal and in their professional capacity. This resulted in feelings of frustration with the senior management of the organisation. According to Van't Wout, training should be tailored and customised to the needs of the organisation.<sup>102</sup> Bester advances this idea by pointing out that cybersecurity training should not only be reserved for those with technical abilities and those in specialised roles; instead, it must form part of a structured training programme that is accessible to all members of an organisation.<sup>103</sup> Ncubekezi and Mwansa argue that all employees (management included) should be involved in establishing cyber hygiene.<sup>104</sup>

The impact of the digital culture has been substantial in promoting the incorporation of technology into professional roles. Culture plays a vital role in organisational settings and signifies the readiness of an organisation to embrace a digital culture that is marked by cybersecurity awareness and compliance with established best practices and guidelines.<sup>105</sup> Trevors and Wallen highlight the importance of organisations establishing a well-defined framework and action plan to manage cyber threats and potential incidents effectively.<sup>106</sup> Their findings revealed that the organisation acknowledges the significance of cyberattacks to national and individual security. Tabrizi *et al.* argue that, while organisations embrace digital transformation, the efforts of these attempts may not necessarily yield effective outcomes.<sup>107</sup> Mvubu and Naudé attribute the lack of digital transformation in organisational contexts to risk taking, innovation, and collaborative efforts.<sup>108</sup> The current findings indicated indicate that some senior military officers are applying cyber-hygiene practices in the organisation; however, the underlying feeling was that there is a growing digital culture that demands attention. It is worth noting that organisational culture plays a significant role in the acceptance of digital technologies.<sup>109</sup> In the case of the SANDF, increasing budgetary constraints may however complicate the advancement of a digital

culture. This may also affect the overall securitisation process where security moves may not occur fully. A reflection of these budgetary constraints can be found in the Department of Defence Annual Report 2023–2024.<sup>110</sup>

Theme 2 showed that the majority of the participants had mistrust in the use of organisationally sanctioned devices for performing their day-to-day tasks. Access to devices (laptops and computers) that were safe within the organisation was revealed to be problematic. The findings showed that most members did not trust the devices in their respective units. Instead, they relied on their own laptops and mobile devices to conduct their duties. This shows that, at the time, there was mistrust among participating military members of their allocated organisational devices. The bring-your-own-device (BYOD) scenario in the workplace signifies a level of risk, but may also be an indication of the limited execution of policy that dictates the use of personal devices in organisational settings, such as the SANDF.<sup>111</sup> Moreover, from a contextual standpoint, it can be argued that budgetary limitations may neither consistently enable the facilitation of comprehensive training throughout the entire organisation nor ensure the accessibility of devices equipped with sophisticated security software essential for enhancing cybersecurity. When examining the potential impact of financial limitations on the cyber-defence capabilities of the SANDF, it is important to emphasise four strategic objectives, namely:

- The development of capabilities;
- The implementation of awareness initiatives on cybersecurity;
- The facilitation of research and training; and
- Co-ordination and engagement with national and international stakeholders.<sup>112</sup>

Consequently, budgetary constraints could hinder the successful implementation of these strategic goals, particularly in the domain of training, which is essential for fostering awareness and understanding of cybersecurity.<sup>113</sup>

The Department of Defence Instruction DODI/CMI/00008/2001 refers to the auditing of personal and organisational devices in order to safeguard against threats and attacks.<sup>114</sup> Although the directive exists, the participants noted that, at the time of the research, there was a lack of seriousness among members in the organisation regarding the use of personal devices and the storage of sensitive organisational information on unsanctioned devices. Akter *et al.* argue that cyber threats and attacks are becoming increasingly prominent in society and are targeting employees in organisational contexts. Akter *et al.* suggest that employees with limited cybersecurity awareness and knowledge may be susceptible to threats.<sup>115</sup> Practical skills and knowledge are therefore recommended for enhanced capacity to mitigate potential cyber threats. The participants showed an acceptable level of awareness of potential cyber threats; however, some participants were not able to recognise that their own behaviour increased their vulnerability to potential attacks, and might act as a gateway for organisational data to be at risk. The human factor is therefore not only the weakest link, but also the most significant component in the cybersecurity chain.

Theme 3 revealed that some participants had been exposed to online security practices that assisted with their cyber hygiene in the organisation; however, their exposure to

cyber-hygiene practices was not as a result of age or gender. There is therefore a need for self-development and staying secure in a digital environment. Additionally, participants who practised cyber hygiene recognised that cyber threats require attention and must be addressed through behavioural strategies. This acknowledgment of the threat aligns with existing literature on securitisation theory, which states that recognising a threat is essential for implementing any emergency measures.<sup>116</sup> Moreover, the Department of Defence Instruction DODI/CMI/00008/2001 indicates online security practices must be adhered to, as the storage of restricted information on officially registered organisational storage devices as well as on laptops must be approved by the designated ICT specialist at the unit level.<sup>117</sup> This was however not the case for all participants, as some indicated that there was limited exposure to training on cybersecurity awareness and policies that deal with online security in the organisation. The level of experience gained when practising cyber-hygiene may also point to the idea that age and gender differences might be predictors of security behaviour.<sup>118</sup> Humaidi and Shahrom argue that work experience might be considered a strong predictor of security practices, such as connecting to open-source Wi-Fi access points.<sup>119</sup> The current findings showed that the majority of the participants did not connect to open-source Wi-Fi, and applied security behaviour in their personal and professional contexts. Moreover, in terms of experience, the participants also did not have high expectations of how cybersecurity was executed in the organisation at the time. The participants' perception of this limited execution was therefore based on their experience with unclear guidelines and directives, as well as a lack of seriousness in considering cybersecurity as an outcome. In addition, effective cyber hygiene demands acknowledgement by senior management in organisational contexts and, in the case of the SANDF, the findings showed that threat acknowledgement has not fully occurred, which means that, from a theoretical view, the securitisation of cyber threats has not yet reached a point where emergency measures are introduced.

## Limitations and Recommendations

The current study was limited to a specific subset of participants due to limitations in accessing and recruiting military officers to participate in the study. As a result, the findings of this study may not be broadly applicable to the entire SANDF. The findings revealed that senior officers were aware of the current directives in the SANDF related to cybersecurity or information security; however, abiding by the directives was not considered important. To enhance the development of a more cohesive policy in the SANDF, it is recommended that future contributions should be more explicit and incentive-based. This method could potentially promote adherence to policies and persuade military personnel to view policy and directives as advantageous. The findings also underscored that awareness of specific threats could influence the implementation of online security measures. Better alignment between the directives of the organisation and the level of awareness required from military members at the unit level is therefore required.

In the context of bolstering cybersecurity protocols within military ranks, it is imperative to explore the adoption of gamification as a methodological approach to training programmes. This approach focuses on raising awareness of information security threats

and the vulnerabilities that arise from human behaviour. Gamification is especially suitable for employees who prefer a more relaxed and engaging way to undergo cybersecurity training. Additionally, integrating the Cybersecurity Orientation Questionnaire developed by Bester<sup>120</sup> with the 16 Personal Factor Questionnaire could help to measure how different personality types might be susceptible to various cyber threats and how users should approach risk in the SANDF. This recommendation is crucial because psychological practitioners in the SANDF conduct assessments for selection purposes. Improving psychological measurements could therefore contribute to the overall goal of understanding and focusing on human psychology within the cybersecurity domain.

## Conclusion

This article focused on the cyber-hygiene practices employed by military members in their everyday functioning within the organisational context. The findings showed that some military members practised cyber hygiene by engaging in safe data practices and storing sensitive information, although there were a few military members that indicated that, at the time, data-safety practices were challenging to adhere to since organisational demands superseded these indicated security practices. Additionally, the majority of the military members highlighted that additional training and clear guidelines should be implemented to avoid a mismatch between security practices and expectations. Furthermore, the lack of confidence in the technical capability of the organisation was hampering the advancement of a digital culture in the organisation framed around security and technological integration. The ability to practise cyber hygiene shows that military members feel more secure about their organisational and personal data when using their own devices, rather than the allocated organisational devices.

The insights produced by this study offer a humanistic view on the cyber-hygiene practices employed by senior South African military officers. This study may act as a starting point to view the human element as one of the strong links in the cybersecurity chain. Practising cyber hygiene is by no means a once-off procedure, but requires investment through resources and leadership to convey the importance of mitigating malware infections and data corruption as well as data loss. Ultimately, the promotion of cyber hygiene in organisational contexts may lead to a healthy cyber environment, which in turn may advance the security behaviour of users and their understanding and awareness of cybersecurity.

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## Endnotes

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# Bullying in the Military: Implications and Remedies

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## Abstract

While it is not part of the profile of a soldier to bully other soldiers, the nature of the military and its status as a social institution make soldiers vulnerable to the events of bullying. Such vulnerability comes about because of the structural inequalities – especially hierarchical relationships – that characterise military service. It bears emphasising that soldiers operate in a unique and robust environment with a rigid and uncompromising hierarchical rank structure with specified roles and career fields. Soldiers however do not forfeit basic human rights, and should therefore be protected from treatment that degrades their sense of self-worth. The study on which this article reports, examined the possible impact of bullying in the South African National Defence Force, while also considering legal remedies available to victims of bullying. To this end, a review of relevant literature and discussions with some soldiers and defence civilians who were located in various bases throughout the Republic of South Africa were undertaken. It was concluded that bullying exists in the South African National Defence Force, and if left unchecked, may hamper morale, military discipline, and the operational effectiveness of the defence force.

**Keywords:** Bullying, Human Dignity, Fair Labour Practices, Ill Treatment, Military Discipline

## Introduction

South Africa is a democratic country that is founded on, inter alia, the advancement of human dignity and the rule of law.<sup>2</sup> Importantly, the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, (1996) stipulates that the South African National Defence Force (SANDF) is the only lawful military force in the country,<sup>3</sup> and it is to be disciplined.<sup>4</sup> SANDF members (soldiers, sailors, and airmen) are citizens in uniform, and are fully entitled to enjoy the rights in the Bill of Rights.<sup>5</sup> Section 2(g) of the Defence Act (No. 42 of 2002) enjoins the SANDF to respect the fundamental rights of all persons. Bullying however exists in the SANDF, and it affects several fundamental rights.<sup>6</sup> The focus in the current article was on the rights to dignity,<sup>7</sup> fair labour practices,<sup>8</sup> and not to be subjected to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment,<sup>9</sup> since these rights are the most affected by bullying in the SANDF.

The primary aim of the research was to evaluate the concept of bullying in the military, especially with regard to its possible effect on the victims and operational readiness of the defence force.

The article commences by distinguishing between bullying and the enhancement of military discipline with due regard to the uniqueness of the military. It concludes by discussing legal remedies available to victims of bullying in the SANDF. Accordingly, remedies, such as the grievance procedure and the military justice system, are considered in this article.

## **The Essence of Bullying in the Military**

The concept of “bullying in the workplace” has been part of academic research for many decades, but there is no uniform definition of what it really entails.<sup>10</sup> It is sometimes defined to consist of persistent and offensive conduct by a person toward another, which is designed to lower, inter alia, the self-esteem of the victim.<sup>11</sup> There are many ways in which bullying in the workplace can occur, ranging from verbal abuse to threats pertaining to employment security, denial of promotion, isolation from colleagues, and degradation.<sup>12</sup> Extreme forms of bullying include serious violation of a victim’s mental and bodily integrity as a result of sexual harassment or rape committed over a prolonged period.<sup>13</sup> Importantly, a once-off incident of ill treatment does not constitute bullying, since the duration and intensity of the offending conduct are important in the determination whether a certain behavioural pattern constitutes bullying.

Bullying affects all sectors of society, including the military. This is unsurprising considering that the military environment consists of soldiers and civilians; therefore, soldiers and civilians could both be victims or perpetrators of bullying, regardless of rank or status.<sup>14</sup> The test to determine whether a particular conduct constitutes workplace bullying is objective. The question must be whether a reasonable person – who is not hypersensitive – would find that the behaviour complained about amounts to bullying in the workplace.<sup>15</sup> The rationale behind this approach is that the modern workplace is generally characterised by stress and interpersonal conflicts. Accordingly, the impugned conduct is to be judged not in accordance with the standard of angels, but of human beings with reasonable sensibilities.<sup>16</sup>

Sight must not be lost that a military environment has a distinct culture from the civilian society. Accordingly, the question whether a conduct amounts to bullying in the military should be judged in accordance with what is expected of a reasonable soldier. Soldiers live and operate in a subculture of their own, and must adhere to rules and etiquettes allowed in the military.<sup>17</sup> A consideration whether conduct amounts to bullying in the military should therefore not overlook the realities of military life and military discipline.



# Drawing the Line between Bullying and Military Discipline

The main purpose of military organisations is to fight and win wars, in other words, the end game is combat.<sup>18</sup> Accordingly, in times of peace, the SANDF must prepare for war and give effect to the policies of the government.<sup>19</sup> This is to be expected considering that section 200(2) of the Constitution outlines that the primary objective of the SANDF is to protect the territorial integrity of South Africa and the liberties of its people. The SANDF must therefore be managed and structured as a disciplined military force.<sup>20</sup>

Military discipline is defined as ‘an attitude of respect for authority ... which leads to a willingness to obey an order no matter how unpleasant the task to be performed’.<sup>21</sup> The SANDF cannot fulfil its constitutional obligations without military discipline. Accordingly, the SANDF, like any other professional armed force, relies on a hierarchical chain of command to enhance military discipline. The chain of command, and with it rank superiority, is entrenched in virtually all spheres of military life, for example job descriptions, facilities and privileges.<sup>22</sup> Axiomatically, the military is a robust environment, and as a result, a soldier might deem it necessary to be more tolerant of abusive behaviour from other soldiers than civilians would be in similar circumstances. This is because soldiers undergo rigid and rigorous training that is designed to strengthen their adaptability to dynamic and stressful situations.<sup>23</sup> Based on this, soldiers are better conditioned than civilians to endure stressful situations.<sup>24</sup>

Moreover, the use of vulgar language is common in the military, and it is sometimes justified based on the exigencies of military service. The reality is that some soldiers in South Africa and elsewhere ordinarily use vulgar, insulting, and abusive language to get things done in their areas of responsibility. Whilst such conduct is not entirely acceptable, it can be understandable in the context of the military. The test that should be applied is thus whether the impugned behaviour is the kind that a reasonable soldier in similar circumstances would also find objectionable.

Fairness should be the central theme in which the relationships in the SANDF should be managed. A possibility however exists that soldiers, especially those in leadership positions could use their ranks as tools to bully other members of the military community. Research shows that recruits are more likely to be subjected to episodes of bullying than experienced soldiers.<sup>25</sup>

## The Impact of Bullying in the Military

A soldier should be as free as possible from bullying by the chain of command, i.e. the command and accountability chain, running from the commander-in-chief to the rank and file, who must inherently be responsible for maintaining the morale, good order and operational effectiveness of the defence force.<sup>26</sup> The trust between soldiers is fundamental to camaraderie, *esprit de corps* and military discipline. Without that trust and confidence,

the SANDF would find it difficult to operate effectively and efficiently. In other words, if soldiers bully each other, how can we trust them to protect the lives of the citizenry when the need arises. A soldier needs to be able to trust fellow comrades-in-arms with their lives and, if they cannot do so, they will have to watch their backs whilst fighting an enemy.<sup>27</sup>

Military bullies, however, undermine the norms and values of a healthy SANDF. Bullying thus affects victims and society at large due to its influence on the operational effectiveness of the SANDF. Kalamdien and Lawrence observe as follows in this regard:

The prevalence and extent of bullying in the military could contribute to an unhealthy defence force. This directly threatens the operational effectiveness of the organisation. An unhealthy military force translates into an ineffective military force. The experience of bullying by military personnel could negatively affect their work and particularly their attitude to work. This also implies an unhealthy military community as military families also present secondary victims of workplace bullying.<sup>28</sup>

Bullying can have devastating consequences for the victim's physical, emotional, and financial well-being. Accordingly, victims of bullying sometimes have two extreme options available to them, either to remain and endure acts of bullying or to resign from the SANDF. In *S v Nel*,<sup>29</sup> the accused, a recruit, was convicted in the Court of a Military Judge for absence without leave and desertion. The accused was a victim of bullying perpetrated by his superior, a flight sergeant, who vowed to grind the accused until he left the military. The accused testified that he did not complain by reason that he perceived the instructors to be a close-knit family – that they were bound to side with the flight sergeant in the event of a complaint. As a result, he chose to resign from the SANDF rather than continue enduring the abuse.<sup>30</sup> The accused, however, left the SANDF before permission could be granted for his resignation; therefore, absenting himself without leave, and ultimately deserting from the military. The trial court sentenced him to discharge with ignominy from the SANDF.<sup>31</sup> On automatic review, the Court of Military Appeals (CMA) stated that the harassment by the accused's flight sergeant was unacceptable, and that it was a major contributing factor that led to the commission of desertion. The CMA confirmed the findings but found that the imposed sentence was shockingly harsh. As a result, the CMA set aside the punishment by the trial court, and replaced it with discharge from the SANDF.<sup>32</sup>

Electing to resign from the SANDF might however not be an ideal solution in all instances, considering the South African socio-economic climate, where the unemployment rate is notoriously high. The concern with tendering resignation is that work is scarce in South Africa, and anyone who is employed in a government post should cherish their fortunate position.<sup>33</sup> Accordingly, the fear of starvation that may come about because of losing one's job may propel a soldier to endure bullying rather than to resign from the SANDF.

Bullying is clearly antithetical to the pledge that a soldier is required to protect his or her comrades-in-arms even at the risk of his or her own life.<sup>34</sup> One would think that persons who have accepted the occupational hazards of the military, including death in the battlefield, would be protected from the episodes of bullying. To this end, the SANDF

has a moral responsibility to protect its members from harm. After all, SANDF members deserve that much for their sacrifice. Essentially, a soldier is entitled to expect unwavering protection from South Africa in return for his or her service.

The SANDF should therefore ensure that soldiers operate in a bullying-free training and work environment if the defence force is to transform itself into a credible institution that adheres to the values that are espoused in the Constitution regarding the society it seeks to serve. After all, the image of the SANDF, as well as its role as the defender of the Constitution and the rights enshrined therein would be undermined in the eyes of the public by bullying in the defence force. Clearly, a military bully is a cancer that ravages the defence force from within. The actions of a bully do not enhance efficiency, discipline, and morale. Based on this, bullying should be nipped in the bud, wherever it germinates in the SANDF.

## Constitutional Principles Affected by Bullying in the Military

The executive, legislature, and judiciary must respect, protect and promote the fundamental rights of everyone, including soldiers.<sup>35</sup> This injunction also applies horizontally among individuals.<sup>36</sup> In other words, no one should infringe on the rights of others, since the right to swing one's fist ends where the nose of the other begins.<sup>37</sup> Of all the rights in the Bill of Rights, the rights to dignity, fair labour practices, and the right not to be subjected to cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment are the rights that are limited the most by bullying in the military. Section 10 of the Constitution stipulates that everyone has the right to have his or her dignity respected and protected.

The right to dignity is characterised as a fundamental right that informs the interpretation of possibly all other constitutional principles.<sup>38</sup> As a result, the violation of the right to dignity may also infringe other rights in the Bill of Rights. Human dignity is not respected or protected but infringed by conduct that denigrates the dignity and worth of individuals.<sup>39</sup> The Constitutional Court in *Khumalo v Holomisa* stated as follows:

The value of human dignity in our Constitution is not only concerned with an individual's sense of self-worth, but constitutes an affirmation of the worth of human beings in our society. It includes the intrinsic worth of human beings shared by all people as well as the individual reputation of each person built upon his or her own individual achievements. The value of human dignity in our Constitution therefore values both the personal sense of self-worth as well as the public's estimation of the worth or value of an individual.<sup>40</sup>

Closely intertwined with the right to dignity is the right not to be treated in a cruel, inhuman or degrading manner as enshrined in section 12(1)(e) of the Constitution. The Constitutional Court in *S v Williams and Others* expressed that "cruel" refers to 'causing agony without pity', "inhuman" means 'destitute of pity or brutal' and "degrading" means

‘lowering the character or worth, intellectual or moral debasement’.<sup>41</sup> It may be difficult to differentiate between the concepts “cruel”, “inhuman” and “degrading”.<sup>42</sup> The right is, however, infringed if a person is subjected to treatment that contains any one of these concepts. Certain acts of bullying could be degrading but may not qualify as cruel or inhuman treatment in the proper sense. For example, aspects, such as promotion, have salary implications, since a soldier’s salary is linked to rank, and that could affect a soldier’s ability to afford basic goods necessary for subsistence.<sup>43</sup> Moreover, military rank promotion brings about honour and prestige in a society where one’s rank and status are reflected on his or her uniform. The unjust denial of promotion by a military bully may therefore amount to cruel and inhuman treatment. While being ridiculed or insulted may continuously be embarrassing or humiliating, therefore degrading, it may not, however render that treatment cruel or inhuman in all instances.

The reality, however, is that human dignity is infringed whether bullying is manifested in a cruel, inhuman, or degrading manner. The Constitution puts a very high value on the right to human dignity and the right not to be treated in a cruel, inhuman or degrading way; therefore, a very convincing justification would have to be provided for violating these rights.<sup>44</sup> This is to be expected considering that these rights are part of those that are non-derogable, as they continue to apply even during a state of emergency that is due to, *inter alia*, wars and natural disasters.<sup>45</sup> The rights are also protected in various international law instruments that South Africa signed and ratified including –

- The African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights (1981);<sup>46</sup>
- The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966);<sup>47</sup> and
- The United Nations Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (1984).<sup>48</sup>

In ratifying these treaties and conventions, South Africa committed to treat the citizenry in a manner that respects everyone’s inalienable right to human dignity, and undertook to prohibit torture, cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment.

The right to dignity and the right not to be treated in a cruel, inhuman or degrading manner apply to all persons regardless of their status and standing in the society.<sup>49</sup> After all, public policy requires that persons should be treated with respect, and that bullying of any type should not be tolerated.<sup>50</sup> The aversion against bullying is clearly one of the most important manifestations of the right to dignity and the right not to be subjected to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment. It bears emphasising that bullying in any environment is unacceptable, and this ‘is doubly so in a strict environment such as the military where respect for members ... is jealously guarded by the legislation, courts and members themselves’.<sup>51</sup>

Section 23(1) of the Constitution provides that everyone has the right to fair labour practices. The Constitution however does not define what ‘fair labour practices’ entails.<sup>52</sup> The concept ‘fair labour practice’ is enigmatic, and there is little agreement about what it really means. This is perhaps why it is ‘neither necessary nor desirable to define this concept’, as it cannot be defined with precision.<sup>53</sup> The decision whether a conduct amounts to a fair labour practice requires, to some degree, the exercise of a value judgment based

on the circumstances prevailing in a particular case.<sup>54</sup> Such decision may also include considering circumstances that are not inherent in the worker–employer relationships, including societal interests and the economy.<sup>55</sup> Fairness is, however, not a one-way street where only the worker is entitled to fair labour practices. The reality is that fairness in the context of fair labour practices entails that the interests of the employer should also not be ignored in the decision.<sup>56</sup> In *National Education Health & Allied Workers Union v University of Cape Town and Others*, the Constitutional Court stated as follows in this regard:

[T]he focus of section 23(1) is, broadly speaking, the relationship between the worker and the employer and the continuation of that relationship on terms that are fair to both. In giving content to that right, it is important to bear in mind the tension between the interests of the workers and the interests of the employers which is inherent in labour relations. Care must therefore be taken to accommodate, where possible, these interests so as to arrive at the balance required by the concept of fair labour practices.<sup>57</sup>

Military bullies can affect the work performance, mental tranquillity, and overall commitment of the victim to the SANDF.<sup>58</sup> In *S v Thomas*,<sup>59</sup> the CMA pointed out that one of the victims resigned from the SANDF due to the negative influence that the actions of the accused had on her emotional well-being. Moreover, bullying has been identified as the driving force behind certain instances of absences without leave.<sup>60</sup> In other words, a victim may prefer to be absent without leave to avoid a toxic work environment. Such absenteeism is likely to put strain on other soldiers who would, in addition to their own duties, be expected to fill the void left by the absent soldier.<sup>61</sup> The increased workload could hamper the unit from fulfilling its constitutional obligations effectively. Bullying, therefore, does not promote or advance the interests of victims, and such behaviour is destructive to the interests of the military community.

Furthermore, the Code of Conduct with which SANDF members agree to comply contains principles that are designed to harmonise relationships between SANDF members.<sup>62</sup> Accordingly, the Code of Conduct informs our soldiers about behaviour that is acceptable and that which is undesirable. For example, all soldiers commit to treat subordinates fairly, to respect superiors, and not to abuse one's authority.<sup>63</sup> The principles as laid down seek to foster a culture of fair labour practices. This culture would, however, be compromised if bullying behaviour is allowed in the SANDF.

In 1995, Parliament enacted the Labour Relations Act (No. 66 of 1995) to give effect to the purpose of section 23 of the Constitution.<sup>64</sup> The right to fair labour practices applies on workers and employers only, as it does not include persons who are not in an employment relationship.<sup>65</sup> The Labour Relations Act however does not apply to soldiers.<sup>66</sup> In *South African National Defence Force Union v Minister of Defence and Another*,<sup>67</sup> the Constitutional Court recognised that soldiers are not employed but enlisted, although their relationship with the SANDF – as well as their service benefits – mirrors the employment relationships of persons who are employed.

In seeking to find an answer to the question whether soldiers are workers, the Constitutional Court found guidance from international law instruments, such as the Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organise Convention (1948) and Convention on the Right to Organise and Collective Bargaining (1949) that South Africa ratified. There, the term “worker” is defined to include soldiers.<sup>68</sup> The Constitutional Court concluded that soldiers are workers as contemplated in section 23 of the Constitution.<sup>69</sup> As workers, soldiers are guaranteed the right to just and favourable working conditions, without any discrimination. Soldiers too have the right to just and favourable remuneration that is supplemented, if necessary, by other means of social protection.<sup>70</sup>

On 20 August 1999, the government promulgated the General Regulations for the South African National Defence Force and Reserve, to regulate labour relations of soldiers in a manner that passes constitutional muster.<sup>71</sup> With that promulgation, the government sought to prohibit unfair labour practices, in other words, any unfair act or omission that arises between the defence force and its members involving unfair discrimination or unfair denial of service benefits.<sup>72</sup> It would therefore amount to unfair labour practice if military bullies stifle promotion prospects of deserving soldiers.

The right to fair labour practices is closely connected to the rights to dignity and not to be punished or treated in a cruel, inhuman or degrading manner; therefore, is very important in an open and democratic society.<sup>73</sup> In *Minister of Home Affairs v Watchenuka*, the Supreme Court of Appeal stated as follows in this regard:

The freedom to engage in productive work – even where that is not required in order to survive – is indeed an important component of human dignity ... for mankind is pre-eminently a social species with an instinct for meaningful association. Self-esteem and the sense of self-worth – the fulfilment of what it is to be human – is most often bound up with being accepted as socially useful.<sup>74</sup>

Similarly, in *Affordable Medicines Trust and Others v Minister of Health and Another* the Constitutional Court eloquently stated that work is part of a person’s dignity, and is constitutive of his or her own dignity, as such ‘work and the human personality as a whole’ are related.<sup>75</sup> In *City of Johannesburg v Rand*, the court stated, ‘[the] right to work is one of the most precious liberties that an individual possesses ... To work means to eat and consequently to live.’<sup>76</sup> The right to dignity, the right to fair labour practices, and the right not to be treated in a cruel, inhuman or degrading manner are intrinsic to the kind of society based on freedom, human dignity, and equality as contemplated by the Constitution. There can be no denial that the concept of bullying limits the essence of these rights.

The limitation of a fundamental right must be reasonable and justifiable taking into consideration, inter alia, the nature of the right and the nature and extent of the limitation.<sup>77</sup> The unique nature of the military should however be considered in determining whether the violation of a constitutional right is reasonable and justifiable. This is to be expected considering that section 50 of the Defence Act provides for the limitation of soldiers’ rights based on the exigencies of military service.

Military bullies justify their conduct based on the enhancement of military discipline.<sup>78</sup> Their attitude to such a constitutionally objectionable behaviour is however unacceptable in a democratic society sensitive to acts of oppression and indignity. These bullies also fail to consider the concept of *ubuntu*. The philosophy behind *ubuntu* is that the dignity of another person is as valuable as one's own, understanding that one's own dignity is diminished when another person is degraded or humiliated.<sup>79</sup> After all, human beings derive their humanity from the humanity of others. A person shows *ubuntu* if he or she shows respect, care and concern for other persons.<sup>80</sup> Military bullies lack these attributes, therefore are bereft of *ubuntu*. *Ubuntu* is clearly not in harmony with treatment that dehumanises or degrades the self-worth of another person – and bullying assails typically the dignity and self-esteem of a victim beyond constitutionally permissible boundaries. Based on this, there is no reasonable justification for bullying in the SANDF.

## Legal Remedies to Curb Bullying in the SANDF

Parliament enacted certain legislation that can serve to provide soldiers with a range of remedies to address incidences of bullying in the military environment.<sup>81</sup> The available remedies include the internal mechanism known as the grievance procedure and, if necessary, victims can rely on external mechanisms to hold military bullies accountable, for example the Office of the Military Ombud and the South African justice system.

### *Exhausting Internal Remedies: The Grievance System*

Section 61 of the Defence Act provides that a soldier or civilian who works in the SANDF may lodge a grievance regarding concerns about conditions of service.<sup>82</sup> A grievance is defined to include a written expression of dissatisfaction by a soldier or civilian about promotion and service benefits but excludes dissatisfaction relating to matters pending before a court, forum, or tribunal.<sup>83</sup> The list is not exhaustive; therefore, a victim of bullying in the SANDF can lodge a grievance. On 14 October 2016, the Minister of Defence and Military Veterans promulgated the Individual Grievance Regulations to regulate the grievance process in the SANDF.<sup>84</sup> Importantly, regulation 3 asserts that the aggrieved person should address a grievance through his or her chain of command.

Utilising the chain of command to address disputes in the military is crucial as it gives opportunity to the hierarchy to deal with matters pertaining to the welfare of persons under their command. To this end, the chain of command may be appropriate to resolve grievances, as most of the issues generally complained about fall within the skills, expertise, and experience of the hierarchy. The grievance process thus gives effect to what is recognised in our law, namely that internal remedies must first be exhausted before a person can resort to external mechanisms.<sup>85</sup>

The grievance process is a five-tiered process.<sup>86</sup> Accordingly, an aggrieved person should lodge a grievance with his or her Unit Officer Commanding within 90 days after the occurrence of the conduct complained about.<sup>87</sup> The Unit Officer Commanding has 20 days to respond to the grievance.<sup>88</sup> If the Officer Commanding fails to resolve the grievance, it must be referred to the Formation Officer Commanding.<sup>89</sup> The Formation Officer

Commanding has ten days to resolve the grievance, failing which, the grievance should be referred to the Chief of a Service or Division who must cause that grievance to be finalised.<sup>90</sup>

The Chiefs of the Arms of Service or Division generally establish grievance committees to investigate and finalise grievances.<sup>91</sup> The aggrieved person may however refer the grievance to the Department of Defence Grievance Board.<sup>92</sup> If the grievance is not resolved within 30 days, recommendations must be forwarded to the Secretary of Defence or the Chief of the SANDF (CSANDF) who must make a decision within ten days from the date of recommendations.<sup>93</sup> Once the Secretary of Defence or the CSANDF has made a decision, the grievance is considered finalised, and the aggrieved person has no more internal remedy.<sup>94</sup> Essentially, barring any requests for extension to the secretariat of the Grievance Board (that may be granted or denied), a grievance should be concluded within 90 days. The grievance process should therefore be a swift and expeditious way to resolve disputes in the SANDF. The entire process is however notorious for long outstanding delays regarding the finalisation of grievances. In the past, instead of the prescribed 90 days, some grievances took more than four years to be finalised.<sup>95</sup> It bears emphasising that it is an offence punishable by imprisonment (not exceeding five years) to stifle the redress of a grievance.<sup>96</sup>

The inability of the chain of command to resolve grievances timeously delegitimises the grievance process. Such delays may discourage victims from reporting bullying. Long outstanding grievances are likely to prolong agony and stress, especially since most military bullies and victims are based at the same unit. The lack of urgency in resolving grievances by the chain of command should however not be construed as if the grievance system can never work. More can be done in this regard; therefore, the speed at which grievances are addressed should be improved if the grievance system is to have credibility as the internal mechanism to resolve disputes in the SANDF.

### *Military Ombud*

Once the grievance is finalised, the aggrieved person can raise his or her continued dissatisfaction with the Office of Military Ombud (OMO). The OMO is established in terms of the Military Ombud Act (No. 4 of 2012),<sup>97</sup> and its object is to investigate and ensure that complaints are addressed in a fair, swift, and economical manner.<sup>98</sup> The OMO is a creature of statute. Its mandate is limited to complaints that are lodged in writing regarding the conditions of service of a soldier or former soldier, or complaints from any person regarding the conduct of a soldier allegedly committed while exercising an official duty.<sup>99</sup> The OMO however does not have jurisdiction to hear complaints relating to court matters or complaints that undermine the chain of command.<sup>100</sup>

The head of the OMO is the Military Ombud, who is appointed by the President of the Republic of South Africa for a non-renewable period of seven years.<sup>101</sup> A person appointed as Military Ombud must have legal knowledge, including adequate understanding of the Constitution, and must have experience of not less than ten years in military and public administration.<sup>102</sup> The main function of the Military Ombud is to assess, analyse, and provide recommendations regarding complaints that are lodged with the OMO fairly,



expeditiously and without fear, favour, or prejudice.<sup>103</sup> Accordingly, the Military Ombud has powers to uphold or dismiss the complaint.<sup>104</sup> The Military Ombud must, if the complaint is upheld, however recommend the appropriate relief to the Minister.<sup>105</sup>

There is legal certainty that recommendations of the Military Ombud are not binding on the Minister.<sup>106</sup> In other words, the Minister is not obliged to implement such recommendations.<sup>107</sup> Accordingly, a recommendation of the Military Ombud is just some evidence that could be considered by the Minister, along with other information. This is unsurprising considering that the SANDF is regulated in terms of the Defence Act, which establishes the Military Command consisting of the CSANDF and certain heads of Services and Divisions.<sup>108</sup> The Military Command is established by the President of the Republic of South Africa, who is the Commander-in-Chief of the military, and therefore sits at the head of the chain of command.<sup>109</sup> The Minister of Defence and the Military Ombud are not members of the Military Command; therefore, they do not form part of the chain of command.<sup>110</sup> In *Lambede v Minister of Defence and Military Veterans and Others*, the High Court stated as follows in this regard:

There can be no room for the office of the MO [Military Ombud] as an alternative chain of command, as this would compromise the constitutional imperative for military discipline or would undermine political control of the State over the SANDF, its only relevant function to be that of performing a support function in the governance of, in the military command over the SANDF.<sup>111</sup>

The OMO was clearly established to exercise oversight over the SANDF regarding aspects such as accountability, transparency, and respect for the rule of law and basic human rights.<sup>112</sup> One would think that an entity that is supposed to play an oversight role in the military should have binding remedial actions. This is even more so considering that complaints that are ordinarily lodged with the OMO predominantly relate to harassment and abusive behaviour by superiors. Such complaints therefore implicate the rights in the Bill of Rights to a certain extent. The reality is that the OMO as presently operating is not entirely effective, because it lacks powers to protect soldiers adequately from military bullies. The OMO is therefore deservedly characterised as a toothless tiger.<sup>113</sup> Lodging complaints with the OMO about bullying in the SANDF is consequently likely to amount to an exercise in futility.

### *The Role of Military Police, Adjutants and Officers Commanding*

The Defence Act authorises the CSANDF to appoint a soldier to serve as a military police official.<sup>114</sup> Military police officials have similar powers as members of the South African Police Service. Accordingly, they are empowered to prevent, combat, and investigate offences.<sup>115</sup> There are also officers commanding who generally task adjutants to investigate offences that are allegedly committed by unit personnel, including interviewing and taking of statements from possible witnesses. This is to be expected considering that officers commanding are accountable for the discipline and welfare of men and women under their command. Accordingly, complaints about bullying in the SANDF may be opened at the military police detachment or lodged with the adjutant of the unit.

The assigned military police official or adjutant would investigate the matter. Once the investigation is concluded, the docket is submitted to the assigned military prosecution counsel for decision whether to prefer charges or to decline to prosecute. If the decision is to charge, and all the pre-trial procedures are completed, the prosecution counsel will then frame a charge sheet, and the matter will be enrolled for trial before the military courts.

In a democratic dispensation, such as ours, the defence force is obliged to take appropriate action against military bullies. Experience shows however that there have been instances where the military police, unit adjutants, and officers commanding failed or delayed to investigate complaints regarding bullying.<sup>116</sup> This inaction by some officials is prevalent, especially if the complaint is against a soldier who is higher up in the chain of command.<sup>117</sup> This is not to impugn the integrity of military police officials, adjutants and officers commanding, of whom many execute their functions impartially, fearlessly, and vigorously, regardless of their proximity to military bullies. It must however be accepted that some officials fail to investigate bullying complaints due to factors, such as their own friendship with a military bully or the friendship of their commanders with such bully. The SANDF would suffer from legitimacy and credibility crises, if structures that are established to protect victims of bullying, are themselves lawbreakers. After all, confidence in the administration of military justice is not enhanced but undermined when military bullies are shielded from having their day in court. A designated official who fails to investigate complaints about bullying behaviour therefore neglects his or her duties.

### *The Military Justice System*

Granted, there is no crime known as “bullying” in South Africa. Bullying behaviour, which may include verbal insults and riotous or unseemly behaviour, may however be tried as an offence. In other words, a military bully can be prosecuted for violating various laws if his or her conduct is in compliance with the definitional elements of an offence. For example, section 105(1) of the Defence Act provides for the imposition of imprisonment for five years on a soldier or civilian who denigrates, humiliates, or shows aversion to any other person based on the listed grounds, including race and gender. According to the Military Discipline Code, a military bully can be charged for offences including ill-treating a subordinate,<sup>118</sup> scandalous behaviour unbecoming the character of an officer,<sup>119</sup> and for causing actual or potential prejudice to good order and military discipline.<sup>120</sup>

One would be hard-pressed to insinuate that there are insufficient statutory provisions in the defence legislation to punish military bullies. Accordingly, section 6 of the Military Discipline Supplementary Measures Act (No. 16 of 1999) establishes the military court system consisting of the Court of Military Appeals (CMA), Court of a Senior Military Judge, Court of a Military Judge, and the commanding officer’s disciplinary hearing to try soldiers for common-law crimes, as well as offences that are contained in the defence legislation and other relevant legislation. For example, *S v Fourie*<sup>121</sup> dealt with a flight sergeant, an instructor, who was convicted in the Court of a Senior Military Judge of ill-treating two female recruits as well as six counts of unseemly behaviour. The accused had been charged for subjecting two female recruits to egregious forms of bullying. He continuously hurled insults, and humiliated, degraded and sexually assaulted one of the

recruits. The court sentenced him to dismissal from the SANDF, which was an invalid sentence, since it is only officers who may be sentenced to that punishment. In other words, warrant officers, non-commissioned officers and privates cannot be sentenced to dismissal from the SANDF. On automatic review, the CMA confirmed the convictions, but found that the sentence of the trial court was invalid; therefore, justified interference. The CMA observed the following:

Just as in the case of the first complainant, the accused shouted and screamed at the second complainant during training. He bullied her and humiliated her in the presence of other trainees. This happened to the extent that the accused completely undermined the complainant's confidence and self-esteem ... After the accused's constant bullying of her and hurling abuse at her, the second complainant was terrified ... and became completely submissive. This resulted in the accused forcing himself onto the complainant when he had sexual intercourse with her. After having intercourse, he ejaculated on her. This incident, the first of four such incidents, took place in the duty room. Before the first incident, the complainant was a virgin.<sup>122</sup>

The CMA pointed out that the accused abused his authority. Through his conduct, the victims endured emotional, physical and psychological trauma for his own gratification and sadistic pleasure. Essentially, he subjected the victims to a terrifying, cruel and degrading treatment, something which they did not expect when they joined the SANDF. Accordingly, the punishment imposed by the trial court was not only invalid, but it was also totally disproportionate to the gravity of the offence. The CMA concluded by setting aside the trial court's punishment, and substituted it with imprisonment for three years and discharge with ignominy from the SANDF.<sup>123</sup>

The current author has trouble fathoming the reasons why less serious charges were preferred considering that the facts indicated that the accused could have been charged for rape. I say this because the impact caused by rape on the victim is much greater than sexual violation, although at the heart of this abhorrent crime is the exertion of authority manifested in a sexual manner.<sup>124</sup> Historically, the death sentence was an available sentencing option that courts could impose on rapists.<sup>125</sup> Since the abolition of the death sentence in 1995, following the decision in *S v Makwanyane and Another*,<sup>126</sup> Parliament enacted the Criminal Law Amendment Act (No. 105 of 1997) to provide for the prescribed minimum sentences that the High Courts or regional courts must impose on a specified category of offenders who committed the prescribed offences, for example murder and rape.<sup>127</sup> Accordingly, the prescribed punishment that must be imposed for two or more counts of rape is life imprisonment,<sup>128</sup> unless there are substantial and compelling circumstances, which warrant the imposition of a lesser punishment.<sup>129</sup>

The military courts however lack jurisdiction to try soldiers for rape allegedly committed in South Africa. Such matters are prosecuted by the National Prosecuting Authority (NPA).<sup>130</sup> The prosecutor in *S v Fourie* indicated that such referral was indeed done, but the NPA declined to prosecute. The reason for declining to prosecute however remains

a mystery, as it was not revealed. In hindsight, the accused could have been charged for multiple counts of rape; thus, triggering the imposition of life imprisonment. The fact that the accused received imprisonment for three years for his heinous crimes resulted in miscarriage of justice. This averment is not designed to scandalise the CMA. The reality is that the CMA imposed the maximum sentence allowed in terms of the Military Discipline Code for the said offences.<sup>131</sup>

Furthermore, in *S v Thomas*,<sup>132</sup> the accused, a chief petty officer and a gunnery instructor, was convicted in the Court of a Military Judge of conduct that prejudiced good order and military discipline, and on twelve counts of ill-treating or assaulting recruits. The recruits testified that the accused would hit some of them with a “troop moering tool”, which could have been a broken broomstick, a branch from a tree, a rifle sling or a belt. The accused would call the recruit to the podium in front of the class, and would hit the victim three times on the buttocks, while other recruits were required to shout the words “troop moering tool” each time a hit was administered. Moreover, the accused referred to females as “hoere” or “jentoos”, meaning prostitutes, and he addressed the male recruits as “trille” or “piele” meaning penis.<sup>133</sup> Moreover, he touched the breasts of some female recruits and/or pressed his body against their buttocks. The trial court sentenced him to discharge with ignominy from the SANDF. On automatic review, the CMA pointed out that the accused clearly abused his authority as an instructor, and his lack of remorse indicated that he was not a candidate for rehabilitation. The CMA concluded by confirming the convictions and found no reason to interfere with the punishment meted out by the trial court.<sup>134</sup>

What is clear is that the two cases – *S v Fourie* and *S v Thomas* – are alike to a certain extent. Both cases relate to extreme incidences of bullying that occurred in the training environment, although in different training units. It is therefore not far-fetched to deduce that recruits are vulnerable to episodes of bullying. This is despite the fact that the majority of instructors treat recruits with care and respect.<sup>135</sup>

It bears repeating that bullying can also be directed at a soldier who does not form part of the training unit. For example, in *S v Sompani*,<sup>136</sup> the accused, a female with a rank of lieutenant colonel, was convicted in the Court of a Senior Military Judge for ill-treating her subordinate and conducting herself towards the subordinate in an unseemly manner to the prejudice of good order and military discipline. The complainant, a corporal, testified that the accused bullied and victimised her at various occasions over a six-month period. In this period, the accused denied the corporal lunch breaks and bathroom breaks, and gave her instructions unrelated to her job description, for example, to carry the accused’s handbag while she would have been busy shopping.

The trial court sentenced the accused to reduction to the lower rank of major. In other words, she kept her job but lost the authority she had (the previous higher rank), and her salary was reduced to reflect her lower rank. The accused appealed the convictions and the sentence.<sup>137</sup> She however did not comply with the prescribed timeframe for lodging an appeal, since she had to do so within six months from the date of conviction and sentence. Notwithstanding, the CMA proceeded to consider the matter anyway relying on its review

competency.<sup>138</sup> On review, the CMA was satisfied regarding the guilt of the accused on many of the charges, and only refused to confirm her guilt on a single count of attempting to convince the complainant to have a sexual relationship with another person.<sup>139</sup> The CMA remarked that the accused failed in her role as an officer – whose responsibility it is to display care and respect for subordinates, and to be exemplary in character. The CMA proceeded with confirming the trial court's punishment.

It is undeniable that there have been very few trials connected to bullying in the SANDF. This suggests that bullying is not prevalent considering that the SANDF is comprised of more than 80 000 personnel. Anecdotal evidence however reveals that bullying is prevalent in the SANDF, even though not all instances are reported.<sup>140</sup>

### *Civil Remedies*

Section 34 of the Constitution guarantees everyone access to courts, which includes the right to have any dispute resolved by the application of law decided in a fair public hearing by an independent and impartial court, forum, or tribunal. In *Erasmus v Minister of Defence*,<sup>141</sup> the High Court however pointed out that the intervention of civil courts in the processes of the SANDF should generally be limited to instances when there is a violation of a fundamental right. The High Court observed as follows in this regard:

It is possible that if relief is granted, the floodgates might be opened and each and every disgruntled soldier may in future elect to run off to our civil courts in order to obtain relief from what they regard as oppressive or unfair conduct by superiors. This may lead to preposterous results and an infringement of military discipline and the concomitant command structure of the military. Soldiers may later on be complaining about having to sleep in sleeping bags in the veld during cold, frosty Free State nights, or lack of sufficient food rations during military operations, or lack of sleep due to training requirements, to mention a few examples.<sup>142</sup>

Notwithstanding, a soldier has a right, as already indicated, to be protected by government. The corollary is that a soldier is entitled to claim for damages based on the vicarious liability of the SANDF for the conduct of a military bully. Vicarious liability is a common law principle, which allows blame to be put on an employer for the harm caused by such employee in the scope of his or her employment.<sup>143</sup>

The SANDF can only act through the instrumentality of soldiers and other officials forming part of it. Based on this, the conduct of a soldier can be imputed on the SANDF, as if it is the SANDF's own acts. The SANDF could thus be held liable for damages if the connection between a military bully's conduct is sufficiently intertwined with his or her role in the SANDF. This may happen although the SANDF did not or could not have sanctioned the conduct complained about. A soldier can however not hold government accountable if bullied by another in their private capacity without there being a sufficient link between the conduct complained about and their role in the military.

Civil remedies that may flow from bullying in the SANDF can also be pursued by a person who has since ceased to be a soldier based on the principle of constructive dismissal. Constructive dismissal arises in circumstances where the employee terminates the contract of employment due to continued working conditions that the employer or another employee must have made unbearable. The onus rests on a former employee to show on a preponderance of probabilities that, but for the employer's or another employee's conduct towards him or her, the resignation would not have occurred.<sup>144</sup> Put differently, although an employee may have resigned, it would actually have been the conduct of an employer that triggered it, such that the resignation should be characterised as a dismissal.<sup>145</sup> The inquiry should therefore be whether the employer had without reasonable and proper cause conducted him- or herself in a manner calculated to destroy or seriously damage the relationship of confidence and trust with the employee.

The test to determine whether an employer's conduct amounts to constructive dismissal is objective, and the question in such cases is whether its effect, judged reasonably and sensibly, is such that no employee could have been expected to put up with it.<sup>146</sup> In *Murray v Minister of Defence*,<sup>147</sup> the Supreme Court of Appeal dealt with a former officer who had attained the rank of commander but had resigned due to ill treatment he received at the hands of the hierarchy in the South African Navy. The plaintiff articulated his sense of grievance in the following terms:

I have been subjected to a board of inquiry, a procrastinated investigation carried out arbitrarily and with ignorance of my rights, as well as two courts martial. After all these events, I have a clean disciplinary record as an employee of the SANDF. However, I have been removed from my post and placed in a position where ... I have been literally without a desk and have not received a single responsibility, task or function commensurate with my rank, experience, skills and expertise. I have been deprived of any prospect of aspiring to higher goals, of achieving any promotion or of furthering my career in the SA navy ... For this I have not received any reasonable explanation.<sup>148</sup>

The Supreme Court of Appeal pointed out that the plaintiff endured hardship and truly miserable times in the navy, as he was shunned and sidelined and was subjected to an atmosphere of marginalisation.<sup>149</sup> The cumulative impact of the conduct of the SA Navy judged as a whole was such that no reasonable soldier could have been expected to put up with it.<sup>150</sup> The plaintiff was therefore justified to resign from the SANDF.<sup>151</sup>

## Conclusion

It was shown in this article that bullying exists in the SANDF, and it is mostly perpetrated by soldiers who use their positions of authority to disregard the dignity, peace and mental tranquillity of another person systemically. The article commenced with drawing a line between bullying and the enhancement of military discipline. There it was found that, military discipline is not enhanced but undermined by bullying behaviour in the defence

force. It is further determined that bullying in the military has adverse implications for victims and may hamper the operational efficiency of the SANDF. The article further showed that bullying behaviour offends various fundamental rights, and there is no reasonable justification for it.

The article concluded by considering remedies available to victims of bullying in the SANDF and found that perpetrators could be prosecuted for a range of offences, and could also be held liable for civil damages. Moreover, the SANDF could be held vicariously liable for damages resulting from acts of bullying that are perpetrated by soldiers in their scope of military service. Aspects, such as delays in finalising grievances and the fact that the OMO lacks binding remedial powers, could however render these remedies futile, especially with regard to addressing bullying behaviour. Nevertheless, the conclusion is unavoidable that there is no place for bullying in the SANDF.

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## Endnotes

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- <sup>1</sup> Bulelani Tsewu, LLB, LLM, LLD (UNISA) is a military law practitioner in the South African National Defence Force.
- <sup>2</sup> See section 1 of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1996).
- <sup>3</sup> Section 199(2) of the Constitution.
- <sup>4</sup> Section 200(1) of the Constitution.
- <sup>5</sup> See *Minister of Defence v Potsane; Legal Soldier (Pty) Ltd and Others v Minister of Defence* 2002 (1) SA 1 (CC) at para 36. From henceforth, a reference to a soldier includes a seaman or an airman.
- <sup>6</sup> See *S v Fourie* CMA 210/2001; *S v Thomas* CMA 41/2014; *S v Mkhize* CMA 49/2017; *S v Sompani* CMA 27/2022.
- <sup>7</sup> Section 10 of the Constitution.
- <sup>8</sup> Section 23(1) of the Constitution.
- <sup>9</sup> Section 12(1)(e) of the Constitution.
- <sup>10</sup> K Calitz, 'Bullying in the Workplace: The Plight of South African Employees', *Potchefstroom Electronic Law Journal*, 25, (2022), 3.
- <sup>11</sup> See *Standard Bank of South Africa v Makuleni* [2021] ZALCJHB 309 at para 69.
- <sup>12</sup> *Standard Bank of South Africa v Makuleni* [2021] ZALCJHB 309 at para 69.
- <sup>13</sup> See *S v Fourie* CMA 210/2001; *S v Thomas* CMA 41/2014.
- <sup>14</sup> D Kalamdien & A Lawrence, 'A Proposed Typology of the Military Bully', *Scientia Militaria*, 45, 1 (2017), 128.
- <sup>15</sup> *Standard Bank of South Africa v Makuleni* [2021] ZALCJHB 309 at para 69.
- <sup>16</sup> See *Visser v Amalgamated Roofing Technologies t/a Barlow World* (2006) 27 ILJ 1567 (CCMA) at 1569.
- <sup>17</sup> *Minister of Defence v Potsane; Legal Soldier (Pty) Ltd v Minister of Defence* 2002 (1) SA 1 (CC) at para 31.
- <sup>18</sup> See *R v G  n  reux* [1992] 1 SCR 259 at 326.
- <sup>19</sup> *Minister of Defence v Potsane; Legal Soldier (Pty) Ltd v Minister of Defence* 2002 (1) SA 1 (CC) at para 38. See also JB Fay, 'Canadian Military Criminal Law: An Examination of Military Justice', *Chitty's Law Journal*, 23 (1975), 120–138.
- <sup>20</sup> Section 200(1) of the Constitution.
- <sup>21</sup> Fay, 'Canadian Military Criminal Law', 123.
- <sup>22</sup> See *S v Cilliers* CMA 87/2019.
- <sup>23</sup> See M Sohail & G Ahmad, 'Resilience, Psychological Well-being, and Emotional Regulation: A Comparative Study of Military Personnel vs. Civilian Population', *Pakistan Journal of Psychological Research*, 36, 1 (2021), 38.
- <sup>24</sup> Sohail & Ahmad, 'Resilience, Psychological Well-being, and Emotional Regulation', 39.
- <sup>25</sup> See *S v Fourie* CMA 210/2001; *S v Thomas* CMA 41/2014; *S v Nel* CMA 54/2000; *S v Mkhize* CMA 49/2017; *Machard v Minister of Defence and Military Veterans and Others* [2025] ZAWCHC 135.
- <sup>26</sup> For more on the chain of command, see *Dauids v Minister of Defence and Military Veterans and Others* [2023] ZAGPPHC 160 at para 20.



- 27 See *S v Lentswe* CMA 3/2014.
- 28 Kalamdien & Lawrence, ‘A Proposed Typology of the Military Bully’, 138.
- 29 CMA 54/2000.
- 30 *S v Nel* CMA 54/2000.
- 31 *S v Nel* CMA 54/2000.
- 32 Discharge with ignominy from the SANDF may be defined as a dishonourable way of expelling warrant officers, non-commissioned officers and privates. It is executed on parade under the atmosphere of humiliation, and it is generally imposed on soldiers who tainted the image of the SANDF by committing serious offences, for example, sexual assault and theft. See, in general, *S v Gqotholo* CMA 50/2010; *S v Shongwe* CMA 8/2017 at para 35.
- 33 See *S v Mrwadi* CMA 6/2014.
- 34 This solemn pledge is recited often in the SANDF, see K Gina, ‘A Soldier’s Oath, Till Heaven Calls’, *AD Astra Magazine*, 1, 1 (2025), 14.
- 35 Section 7(2) of the Constitution.
- 36 See section 8(2) of the Constitution.
- 37 See Z Chafee, ‘Freedom of Speech in War Time’, *Harvard Law Review*, 32, 8 (1919), 957.
- 38 See *Dawood v Minister of Home Affairs*; *Shalabi v Minister of Home Affairs*; *Thomas v Minister of Home Affairs* 2000 (3) SA 936 (CC) at para 35.
- 39 See *Khumalo v Holomisa* 2002 (5) SA 401 (CC). See also R Steinmann, ‘The Core Meaning of Human Dignity’, *Potchefstroom Electronic Law Journal*, 19 (2016), 14.
- 40 *Khumalo v Holomisa* 2002 (5) SA 401 (CC) at para 27.
- 41 *S v Williams Others* 1995 (2) SACR 251 (CC) at para 24.
- 42 See *S v Dodo* 2001 (3) SA 382 (CC) at para 35.
- 43 See *S v Goodall* CMA 15/2022 at para 13.
- 44 *S v Williams Others* 1995 (2) SACR 251 (CC) at paras 76-77.
- 45 On the list of non-derogable rights, see in general section 37 of the Constitution.
- 46 The African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights being the Organisation of African Unity Document CAB/LEG/67/3 rev. 5 (adopted by the Organisation of African Unity on 27 June 1981). On 9 July 1996, South Africa ratified the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights.
- 47 The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights being the General Assembly Resolution 2200 A (XXI) (adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on 16 December 1966). South Africa ratified the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights on 10 March 1999.
- 48 United Nations Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman and Degrading Treatment and Punishment being General Assembly resolution 39/46 (adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on 10 December 1984). South Africa ratified the United Nations Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment on 10 December 1998.
- 49 See *S v Williams Others* 1995 (2) SACR 251 (CC) at paras 28 and 77.
- 50 The Labour Court in *Kylie v Commission for Conciliation, Mediation and Arbitration and Others* 2008 (29) ILJ 1918 (LC) at para 22 stated that “[p]ublic policy is informed by the Constitution and since the Constitution has ordained that everyone has the right to fair labour practices, this right ‘sets the paradigm of public policy’”.

51 *S v Bloem* CMA 64/2019.

52 See *Association of Mineworkers and Construction Union and Others v Royal Bafokeng Platinum Limited and Others* [2020] ZACC 1 at paras 51 and 166.

53 *Association of Mineworkers and Construction Union and Others v Royal Bafokeng Platinum Limited and Others* [2020] ZACC 1 at para 51.

54 *National Education Health & Allied Workers Union v University of Cape Town and Others* 2003 (2) BCLR 154 (CC) at para 33.

55 *Association of Mineworkers and Construction Union and Others v Royal Bafokeng Platinum Limited and Others* [2020] ZACC 1 at para 53.

56 See *National Education Health & Allied Workers Union v University of Cape Town and Others* 2003 (2) BCLR 154 (CC) at paras 38 and 40.

57 *National Education Health & Allied Workers Union v University of Cape Town and Others* 2003 (2) BCLR 154 (CC) at para 40.

58 See *S v Fourie* CMA 210/2001; *S v Nel* CMA 54/2000; *S v Thomas* CMA 41/2014; *S v Gwazela* CMA 84/2019.

59 CMA 41/2014.

60 See *S v Nel* CMA 54/2000.

61 For more on the impact of absence without leave, see *S v Seobi* CMA 48/2014.

62 See PC Bester & AG du Plessis, 'When Military Leaders Differ from Their Political Leaders: Overcoming Leadership', in D Lindsay & D Woycheshin (eds), *Overcoming Leadership Challenges: International Perspectives* (Canadian Defence Academy Press, 2015), 215.

63 See *S v Kwakwa* CMA 27/2014; *S v Gwazela* CMA 84/2019 at para 26; *S v Cilliers* CMA 87/2019.

64 Section 1(a) of the Labour Relations Act.

65 See *Kylie v Commission for Conciliation, Mediation and Arbitration and Others* 2008 (29) ILJ 1918 (LC) at para 54.

66 Section 2 of the Labour Relations Act.

67 1999 (4) SA 469 (CC) at paras 24 and 30.

68 *South African National Defence Force Union v Minister of Defence and Another* 1999 (4) SA 469 (CC) at para 26.

69 See *South African National Defence Force Union v Minister of Defence and Another* 1999 (4) SA 469 (CC) at para 30.

70 See article 23 of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights being General Assembly Resolution 217 A U.N. Doc A/810 (Proclaimed by the United Nations General Assembly on 10 December 1948).

71 See Republic of South Africa, 'Amendment to the General Regulations for the South African National Defence Force and Reserve', Government Notice No. R988, *Government Gazette*, 20376, 410 (20 August 1999).

72 Regulation 3 (a) of the General Regulations.

73 See *Minister of Home Affairs v Watchenuka* 2004 (4) SA 326 (SCA) at para 27; *Affordable Medicines Trust and Others v Minister of Health and Another* 2006 (3) SA 247 (CC) at para 59; *City of Johannesburg v Rand* 2007 (1) SA 78 (W) at para 64.

74 *Minister of Home Affairs v Watchenuka* 2004 (4) SA 326 (SCA) at para 27.

75 *Affordable Medicines Trust and Others v Minister of Health and Another* 2006 (3) SA 247 (CC) at para 59.

- 76 *City of Johannesburg v Rand* 2007 (1) SA 78 (W) at para 64.
- 77 See section 36(1) of the Constitution.
- 78 See *S v Fourie* CMA 210/2001; *S v Thomas* CMA 41/2014.
- 79 See *S v Makwanyane and Another* 1995 (3) SA 391 (CC) at para 225.
- 80 *S v Makwanyane and Another* 1995 (3) SA 391 (CC) at para 263.
- 81 See, for example, the Defence Act (No. 42 of 2002), Military Discipline Supplementary Measures Act (No. 16 of 1999), Military Discipline Code, Military Ombud Act (No. 4 of 2012).
- 82 See *Erasmus v Minister of Defence and Others* [2017] 4 All SA 434 (FB) at para 28.
- 83 Section 1 of the Defence Act.
- 84 Department of Defence, 'Defence Act, 2002: Individual Grievances Regulations', Government Notice No. R. 1263, *Government Gazette*, 40347, 606 (14 October 2016).
- 85 See regulation 17 of the Individual Grievance Regulations. See also M Nel, S Els & VE Sibiya, *Applied Military Justice for Practitioners* (Cape Town: Juta, 2024), 511.
- 86 Regulation 3 of the Individual Grievance Regulations.
- 87 Regulation 6 of the Individual Grievance Regulations.
- 88 Regulation 5(a) of the Individual Grievance Regulations.
- 89 Regulation 5(b) of the Individual Grievance Regulations.
- 90 Regulation 5(c) of the Individual Grievance Regulations.
- 91 See regulation 14(1) of the Individual Grievance Regulations.
- 92 See Regulation 5(d) of the Individual Grievance Regulations.
- 93 Regulation 5(d) of the Individual Grievance Regulations.
- 94 Regulation 5(e) of the Individual Grievance Regulations.
- 95 See *Dauids v Minister of Defence and Military Veterans and Others* [2023] ZAGPPHC 160 at para 42.
- 96 Section 104(17) of the Defence Act.
- 97 Section 2(1) of the Military Ombud Act (No. 4 of 2012).
- 98 Section 3 of the Military Ombud Act.
- 99 Section 4 of the Military Ombud Act. See also Nel *et al.*, *Applied Military Justice for Practitioners*, 538.
- 100 See section 7 of the Military Ombud Act.
- 101 Section 5(1) of the Military Ombud Act.
- 102 Section 5(2) of the Military Ombud Act.
- 103 Section 6(4) of the Military Ombud Act.
- 104 Section 6(7)(a) of the Military Ombud Act.
- 105 Section 6(7)(b) of the Military Ombud Act.
- 106 See *Dauids v Minister of Defence and Military Veterans and Others* [2023] ZAGPPHC 160 at para 8; *Lambede v Minister of Defence and Military Veterans and Others* [2021] ZAGPPHC 858 at para 35.
- 107 E Heydenrych, 'Re-evaluating Oversight of South African Defence Procurement: Can Combined Assurance Help Extract Full Accountability from the Department of Defence?', *Scientia Militaria*, 52, 2 (2024), 35.

108 See section 4 of the Defence Act as amended by section 4A of the Defence Amendment Act  
(No. 22 of 2010).

109 Section 202(1) of the Constitution.

110 See *Lambede v Minister of Defence and Military Veterans and Others* [2021] ZAGPPHC  
858 at para 34; *Mashabane v Minister of Defence and Military Veterans and Others* [2023]  
ZAGPPHC 2270 at para 10.

111 *Lambede v Minister of Defence and Military Veterans and Others* [2021] ZAGPPHC 858 at  
para 34.

112 See *Mokheseng v Minister of Defence and Military Veterans and Others* [2022] ZAGPPHC  
919 at para 22. See also M Montesh & B Mmusinyane, ‘An Analysis of the Gaps in the Newly  
Established South African Military Ombud’, *Scientia Militaria*, 41, 1 (2013), 92.

113 Montesh & Mmusinyane, ‘An Analysis of the Gaps’, 98.

114 Section 30(1) of the Defence Act.

115 Section 31(1) of the Defence Act.

116 This is the author’s personal experience as a military prosecution counsel wherein soldiers  
and defence civilians who were allegedly victims of bullying routinely sought advice on how  
to expedite complaints that the military police officials or adjutants failed to investigate.

117 This information was gathered from informal discussions with some soldiers who were based  
at various units in Cape Town and Simon’s Town.

118 Section 16.

119 Section 32.

120 Section 46.

121 CMA 210/2001.

122 *S v Fourie* CMA 210/2001.

123 *S v Fourie* CMA 210/2001.

124 See *S v Chapman* 1997 (3) SA 341 (SCA) at paras 3–4.

125 See section 277(1) of the Criminal Procedure Act (No. 51 of 1977), before it was amended.  
1995 (3) SA 391 (CC).

126

127 See section 51(2) of the Criminal Law Amendment Act.

128 Part 1 of Schedule 2 of the Criminal Law Amendment Act.

129 Section 51(3)(a) of the Criminal Law Amendment Act.

130 Section 3(3) of the Military Discipline Supplementary Measures Act.

131 See section 92 of the Military Discipline Code.

132 CMA 41/2014.

133 The derogatory and offensive language used by the accused are presented here in their original  
form to accurately reflect the context and behavior under study. The author does not endorse  
or condone this language.

134 *S v Thomas* CMA 41/2014.

135 The information was gained from informal discussions the current author had with several  
soldiers who were located in different units throughout South Africa.

136 CMA 27/2022.

137 See section 8 of the Military Discipline Supplementary Measures Act and rule 72(1) of the  
Military Discipline Supplementary Measures Act.

See section 8 of the Military Discipline Supplementary Measures Act.

In contravention of section 10(1)(a) of the Sexual Offences Act (No. 23 of 1957).

This perception is gathered from informal discussions with non-commissioned officers, privates and defence civilians who function under the auspices of the Defence Legal Services Division.

[2017] 4 All SA 434 (FB) at para 43.

*Erasmus v Minister of Defence* [2017] 4 All SA 434 (FB) at para 48.

*Murray v Minister of Defence* 2009 (3) SA 130 (SCA) at para 8.

*Murray v Minister of Defence* 2009 (3) SA 130 (SCA) at para 12.

*Murray v Minister of Defence* 2009 (3) SA 130 (SCA) at para 7.

*Murray v Minister of Defence* 2009 (3) SA 130 (SCA) at para 12.

2009 (3) SA 130 (SCA).

*Murray v Minister of Defence* 2009 (3) SA 130 (SCA) at para 3.

*Murray v Minister of Defence* 2009 (3) SA 130 (SCA) at para 43.

*Murray v Minister of Defence* 2009 (3) SA 130 (SCA) at para 66.



*Murray v Minister of Defence* 2009 (3) SA 130 (SCA) at para 68.

# SCIENTIA MILITARIA

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# Navigating Human Capital Challenges: Understanding the Decline in White Members of the South African Navy

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## Abstract

The concept “human capital” refers to ‘the accumulation of competencies, knowledge and skills needed to perform a task’ as defined by John C Groth and Gregory M Hebb.<sup>2</sup> This implies that, to a degree, the effectiveness of an organisation depends on the quality and effectiveness of its employees. The Republic of South Africa is a sovereign democratic state founded on the values of human dignity, the achievement of equality, and the advancement of human rights.<sup>3</sup> As part of the public sector, the Department of Defence is expected to transform in order to ensure inclusiveness of all race groups. The objective of the South African National Defence Force Human Resource Strategy 2010 is to ensure compliance with the overall government intent of transformation. This strategy aims to establish an ‘efficient, effective and economical human resource composition of the right quality and quantity’ for the Department of Defence.<sup>4</sup>

In line with the South African National Defence Force Human Resource Strategy 2010, the South African Navy pursued recruitment interventions favouring the appointment of black personnel in order to address inequalities of the past in terms of demographics. This led to fewer white youth being inducted, resulting in a predominantly black South African Navy. To investigate this challenge, the current study adopted mixed research approach (qualitative and quantitative). The qualitative research comprised a literature review on human capital, the transformation process in the South African National Defence Force, the demographics of the country, and interviews with serving white recruits in the South African Navy. Furthermore, a questionnaire survey (quantitative research) targeting white youth was administered in Gauteng, a province in South Africa, to obtain data.

**Keywords:** Legislation, Constitution, Human Capital, Transformation, Representativity, Department of Defence, South African National Defence Force, South African Navy.

## Introduction

On its inception to power in 1994, the then Government of National Unity (GNU) inherited a society marked by social and economic inequalities, as well as serious racial, political, and social divisions. In pursuing national reconciliation, reconstruction and development, the public service was expected to play a role as the executive arm of the

state. Consequently, the public service needed to transform into a ‘coherent, representative, competent and democratic instrument for implementing government policies and meeting the needs of all South Africans’ as in line with section 195(1)<sup>5</sup> of the Constitution, to fulfil this role effectively.<sup>6</sup>

Chapter 10 of the Defence Review (1998) guides the recruitment and appointment process in the Department of Defence (DoD). The Defence Review states people are a valuable resource. The Defence Review reaffirms the DoD position on upholding a non-racial, non-partisan, non-sexist, and non-discriminatory institutional culture.<sup>7</sup> The South African National Defence Force (SANDF) consists of seven former forces (statutory and non-statutory) as part of the integration process in 1994. These forces were Umkhonto weSizwe (African National Congress), Azanian People’s Liberation Army, the defence forces of the four former homelands (Bophuthatswana, Transkei, Ciskei and Venda), and the South African Defence Force.

The South African Navy (SAN), as part of the DoD, having benefited the least from this process in terms of manpower, implemented a recruitment strategy in order to ensure representativeness of all race groups within the organisation. Prior to the democratisation of the Republic of South Africa (hereafter “the Republic”), the SAN consisted predominantly of white people, as black people were debarred from joining the organisation. The recruitment strategy after 1994 resulted in a continuous annual decline in the number of white personnel. The reported intakes of 2015–2020 confirmed this trend, highlighting the ongoing decline in the number of white youth joining the SAN.

## Research Problem

According to Groth and Hebb, ‘Human capital is the original and purest form of equity’ significantly influencing future prospects and outcomes.<sup>8</sup> The White Paper on Human Resource Management in the Public Service of 1997 addresses human resource management (HRM) in its entirety, and provides guidelines on various aspects of human capital, including provisioning, utilisation, training, and termination of service. The White Paper also establishes a comprehensive framework for change in line with the Constitutional imperatives on representativity in the public service, making the DoD no exception.<sup>9</sup>

The Defence Review requires the SANDF to be broadly representative of the population that it serves.<sup>10</sup> To achieve this goal, the DoD has to pursue improved marketing, selection, and appointment processes for all its service systems. This should occur within the context of achieving the appropriate quality, quantity, and representativity of human capital necessary for practising excellence and accountability.<sup>11</sup> In terms of training and development, the DoD adopted the Republic of South Africa Human Resource Development Strategy 2010 to 2030 as its grand strategy. This strategy refers to ‘formal and explicit activities that will enhance the ability of all individuals to reach their full potential’.<sup>12</sup>



The SANDF Human Resource Strategy 2010 aims to ensure the availability of the right number and quality of personnel in the right roles and at the right time.<sup>13</sup> The strategy emphasises efficiency and effectiveness, viewing people as the most important and strategic asset of the DoD. The strategy also provides direction for managing human capital in the DoD over the medium to long term, advocating an HR philosophy that ensures a representative, well-disciplined, motivated and satisfied workforce.<sup>14</sup> Despite the strategies mentioned above, the SAN has faced a decline in white personnel since 1994 due to normal attrition. This challenge is compounded by a consistent decrease in the number of white youth inducted into the SAN since then.

## Research Aim and Approach

The current study intended to establish the reasons for the decline in white personnel, particularly white youth, in the SAN. Without a strategic approach to recruiting white youth, the problem is likely to worsen. To establish the reasons for this decline, a mixed research approach (qualitative and quantitative) was followed in the study. The qualitative research comprised a literature review on human capital and transformation within the SANDF, as well as demographic representation since 1994. Additionally, interviews were conducted with new recruits who were part of the Military Skills Development System (MSDS) of the SAN in 2020.

Pertaining to the quantitative aspect, the study analysed various intakes of the SAN since 2015, focusing on white youth and their attrition after induction. A questionnaire survey targeting white youth in Grades 10 to 12 was administered at various high schools in Gauteng (City of Tshwane Metropolis) during the second and third quarters of 2019.

## Research Questions

According to Cameron and Stone, ‘with the professionalisation of human resource’, there is a requirement for a uniform code of ethics outside colour lines.<sup>15</sup> The authors further state, ‘ethics is the branch of philosophy concerned with intent, means and consequences of moral behaviour’.<sup>16</sup> Strategy in organisations is about ends, ways, and means; therefore, advocating an HR philosophy that ensures a well-disciplined, motivated, and increasingly satisfied workforce. ‘Ethics is a study of judgement, right or wrong.’<sup>17</sup> Similarly, Gildenhuys states, ‘[e]thics is a moral science, an exposition of what is good or bad and what is right and wrong’.<sup>18</sup> This definition is aligned with that of the two authors mentioned above in this paragraph.<sup>19</sup>

Taking into consideration what Cameron and Stone say about a need for a uniform code of ethics outside colour lines, the SAN promulgated Naval Order No. 4 of 2001 to ensure directing the recruitment processes within its organisation. This order prioritises recruitment, appointment, and retention of all race groups according to the demographic representation of society.<sup>20</sup> It is imperative to mention that, despite the guidelines given for appointment using approved DoD numerical targets, the SAN prescribed their own

targets as African people at 60 per cent, white people at 23 per cent, coloured people at 15 per cent, and Asian people at 2 per cent.<sup>21</sup> The above naval order was supplemented by Naval Order No. 6 of 2002, providing guidelines regarding selection and development of candidates for entry in the MSDS programme.<sup>22</sup> Taking into consideration the ongoing decline in the number of white people in the SAN – despite the above approved numerical targets – the primary research question that was investigated was:

Does the SAN have an effective and sound human capital strategy to attract competent white youth in sufficient numbers for enlistment after democratisation?

The following secondary research questions were addressed in the study:

- Do school curricula assist youth in making informed career choices after matric?
- Are white youth familiar with the DoD?
- Are white youth interested in joining the SANDF?
- Could the transformation process in the SAN be a factor contributing to the decline in the number of white youth in the SAN?
- Are white youth aware of the career opportunities available in the SAN?
- Is the SAN doing enough to attract suitable white youth to join the organisation?

These research questions were critical in order to establish the rationale behind the declining numbers of white youth. The questionnaire survey administered to Grade 10 to 12 white youth aimed to address the secondary questions. High schools serve as feeders to the MSDS, and the early identification of potential and competent recruits for the SAN in these grades is critical.

## Research Objectives

The SAN is required to recruit members in alignment with the race and gender guidelines reflective of the society it serves. Representativity is a constitutional imperative mandating equal employment opportunities for all race groups. Attracting sufficient numbers of white youth for entry remains a challenge however. The primary objective of the current study was therefore to determine whether the HR strategy of the SAN supports the recruitment of competent white youth in sufficient numbers for enlistment.

## Literature Review on the Concept Human Capital

People are a very important resource in any organisation; respect is vital to motivate them to serve with distinction and pride. Without human beings, no organisation could survive, as technology alone cannot replace the contribution of people.

There are a number of definitions of the concept “human capital”. For instance, Becker defines it as the ‘knowledge, information, ideas, skills, and health of individuals’.<sup>23</sup> According to Smith and Cronje, workers are motivated when they think they are making a positive contribution to the organisation.<sup>24</sup> Similarly, Shaw *et al.* found that human losses

(for example, turnover rates) negatively affect organisational performance; however, this effect is moderated when HR investments, such as training, pay, benefits, and justice mechanisms are high.<sup>25</sup>

Dess and Picken argue, that human capital is about people, their performance and their potential in the workspace. The authors also define the concept “human capital” as the capabilities, knowledge and skills of individuals that ensure organisational success and efficiency.<sup>26</sup> Similarly, Bontis *et al.* emphasise that human capital is about ‘the combined intelligence, skills and expertise that gives the organisation its distinctive character’.<sup>27</sup>

The South African Constitution prohibits discrimination, enshrines fundamental rights, and emphasises openness and accountability. Chapter 2, section 9 prescribes equality and equal employment opportunities for all, prohibiting any form of unfair discrimination.<sup>28</sup> To uphold the principles of the Constitution, the Department of Public Service and Administration, which oversees public sector policy, approved and promulgated the White Paper on the Transformation of the Public Service. Chapter 10 of White Paper on the Transformation of the Public Service (1995) confirms, representation is foundational to a non-racist, non-sexist democratic society.<sup>29</sup>

Section 15 of the Employment Equity Act (No. 55 of 1998) states, that affirmative action is a way of making the workplace more representative and fairer ensuring that qualified people from designated groups have equal opportunities in the workplace.<sup>30</sup> It is through this intervention that employers are expected and mandated to create action plans to correct historical imbalances in the public sector.

Chapter 5 of the White Paper on Human Resource Management in the Public Service provides a comprehensive policy framework for HRM in the public service.<sup>31</sup> This policy document discusses various career management concepts that recognise the value of individuals in the public service. It is the opinion of the current authors that all reputable employers must offer career pathways that support growth within the organisation. This chapter of the White Paper on Human Resource Management in the Public Service emphasises that the employee supervisor is responsible for familiarising him or her with the employee’s career aspirations.<sup>32</sup> It is the opinion of the current authors that a career development path must be developed for all employees to ensure that their skills are enhanced for own personal and professional growth. Without an effective and sound career management process, organisations cannot retain their workforce. It is, therefore, clear that human capital is critical for the survival of any organisation.

The DoD consists of civilian and uniform members, both having a unique role to play. Civilian members are predominately in a supporting role but exercise oversight of the SANDF. They are governed through various policies, in particular those from the Department of Public Service and Administration, the White Paper on Human Resource Management in the Public Service being one of them. Chapter 3 of the White Paper on Human Resource Management in the Public Service discusses the devolution, increased delegation, and institutional mechanisms in the work environment. It states, ‘[h]uman resources will, to the greatest extent possible, be managed by those closest to the point of delivery’.<sup>33</sup>

Chapter 6 of the White Paper on National Defence of 1996 underscores the need for a representative SANDF. The overarching goal is to establish an institution that is professional, efficient, effective, and broadly representative.<sup>34</sup> The Minister of Defence and Military Veterans is responsible for overseeing the implementation of these initiatives within the DoD. Both the Defence Review and the White Paper on National Defence (1996) ensure compliance with the Constitution regarding representativity within the SANDF. The SAN, as part of the SANDF and the public service, is expected to uphold this salient constitutional requirement.

## **Legislative and Policy Framework on Human Capital in the Department of Defence**

All organisations depend on labour to attain their output, and people are, therefore, regarded as the most important asset in the DoD. Outputs in the DoD – and in the SANDF in particular – depend on the contributions of each individual as well as the collective efforts of the organisation. The effective retention of defence personnel requires a comprehensive day-to-day personnel maintenance system that affirms conditions of service and benefits. The SANDF Human Resource Strategy 2010 provides direction for the management of human capital over the medium to long term, aiming to establish an efficient, effective, and economically viable HR composition of the right quantity and quality, in the right place, and at the right time.<sup>35</sup>

Chapter 6 of the White Paper on National Defence (1996) clearly articulates how the recruitment process in the SANDF should be managed. It states that the SANDF will be an all-volunteer force comprising a relatively small regular force that is supported by a sufficiently large part-time force.<sup>36</sup> The continuous attrition of highly trained and experienced personnel could compromise the operational readiness of the SANDF. Since 1994, the DoD has made significant strides to improve representativity in its human capital. Recruitment, appointments, and career management are executed in compliance with regulatory criteria set forth in the SANDF Human Resource Strategy 2010.<sup>37</sup>

The recruitment and selection criteria in the SANDF are based on competencies and academic qualifications specified in the Personnel Management Code (PMC). The PMC also addresses the career management process of SANDF members, and prescribes the responsibilities of the members and the organisation, thereby aligning career planning, development, and utilisation of each serving member.<sup>38</sup>

The SA HR “philosophy” reiterates the requirements to execute HRM in such a manner as to contribute to a well-disciplined, motivated, and happy force.<sup>39</sup> The philosophy therefore focuses on building HR capacity to ensure that the organisation can deliver on its ordered commitment, vision, and mission. The HR component is thus required to be professional, motivated, productive, effective, equitable, and affordable.<sup>40</sup> In achieving this, the MSDS programme was developed to provide the SAN with the right calibre of human capital to achieve its end-state in terms of its prescribed vision and mission. This programme was implemented in January 2004, and has since proved effective in appointing the correct

calibre of personnel in the Regular Force and in the Reserve Force.

Despite the legislative and policy framework governing representativity within the public service and the DoD, white representation in the SAN remains a challenge. The continuous reduction of white representation could potentially undermine the transformation outcomes the SAN has achieved since 1994.

## **South African Navy Mandate**

The Constitution of the Republic mandates the Defence Force with the protection and defence of the country, its sovereignty, territorial integrity, national interest, and people.<sup>41</sup> In exercising its constitutional responsibility as part of the SANDF, the SAN must provide a balanced, combat-ready and supported maritime defence capability for the defence and protection of the Republic.<sup>42</sup> The primary objective of the SAN is to provide a credible maritime deterrent force. The SAN is also expected to provide suitable platforms – in the form of ships and submarines – to the sanctioned peacekeeping operations and disaster relief missions of the United Nations (UN) and the African Union (AU). Its other responsibility is to assist the police against piracy operations and maritime threats.<sup>43</sup> These roles are essential for ensuring that the maritime space and resources of the country are protected at all times.

Based on the above mandate of the SAN, it is the opinion of the current authors that the failure of a state to recognise the importance of the sea could diminish its capacity as a regional power, relinquishing its responsibility to protect its maritime resources. By exercising sea power, the state can safeguard the will of the people and prevent the expropriation of their maritime resources. Budget constraints are recognised as a serious impediment, affecting not only the acquisition, repair, and maintenance of prime mission equipment, but also the compensation of personnel. Without adequate funding, the SAN cannot fulfil its core mission and achieve its primary objective, namely service in the defence of the Republic, for the protection of its sovereignty and territorial integrity.

In addition to budgetary constraints, the SAN must deal with two other human capital challenges, namely representativity and transformation. After more than three decades of transformation efforts, the SAN continues to face racial and skill imbalances, with fewer white youth choosing to join this arm of service than before.<sup>44</sup> Failure to address this decline could tarnish the image of the SAN and threaten the constitutional imperative to achieve representativity.

## **Research Design and Methodology**

A research design is a plan that provides a framework for collecting information from respondents, outlining the various steps involved in the study. This is where the problems and objectives of a study are targeted for the sole purpose of structuring the research.<sup>45</sup> Qualitative research method serves as an umbrella term for a variety of methods and techniques that could not be qualified to research conclusions about the problem

investigated.<sup>46</sup> Denzin and Lincoln define qualitative research method as ‘a situated activity that locates the observer in the world’, where the researchers are ‘attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them’ in a natural setting.<sup>47</sup> This definition makes much sense, according to the authors of the current study. Qualitative analysis is a set of activities that is used after information has been collected. The qualitative research method ‘applies from the very start and continues throughout data collection process, as well as after it is completed.’<sup>48</sup>

Quantitative research methods ‘were borrowed by social science from natural sciences such as physics and chemistry, originate from the natural sciences such as physics and chemistry.’<sup>49</sup> A quantitative research method analyses the problem by operating numerical data that can be transformed into usable statistics.<sup>50</sup> This research method quantifies attitudes, opinions, behaviours and other undefined variable from other larger sample of the population.<sup>51</sup> In quantitative research, one uses theory deductively, and places it toward the beginning of the plan for the study.<sup>52</sup>

In the current study, a mixed research approach was adopted, integrating both quantitative and qualitative methods. Interviews and a survey questionnaire were used for data collection. It is vital to confirm that, during both the qualitative and the quantitative research, no person was forced to participate in the research process. All respondents participated voluntarily, including those already serving in the SAN.

With the professionalisation of human resources, the SAN recognised a need for a uniform code of ethics beyond colour lines as depicted in the Naval Order (No. 6) that guides appointments within the MSDS in terms of race and gender.<sup>53</sup> As discussed under a previous heading (see Research Questions), ‘ethics is the branch of philosophy concerned with intent, means, and the consequences of moral behaviour’.<sup>54</sup> It is also ‘a moral science, an exposition of what is good or bad and what is right or wrong’.<sup>55</sup>

In the current study, interviews (as qualitative method) with MSDS members, and a questionnaire survey involving high school learners (as quantitative method) were administered. Participation was voluntary, with approval obtained from the Gauteng Department of Education and also from the Defence Intelligence Division of the DoD. The research process, as described in the next subsection, was used to establish the reasons for the decline in white representation in the SAN.

## Structured Questionnaire

Quantitative research is about gathering and analysing data. It is a means of ‘testing objective theories by examining the relationship among variables or a comparison among groups.’<sup>56</sup> For the quantitative aspect of the study, a survey questionnaire was administered to Grade 10 to 12 learners. During the survey administered at schools, an assumption was made that it would be insensitive to exclude other race groups; all learners were therefore allowed to participate in the survey, despite the fact that white youth were the targeted population. The respondents totalled 1 509 learners from 29 schools. Only after completion of the questionnaire survey, race groups that were not targeted were eliminated; therefore,

a total of 720 white learners formed the sample. The results of white youth in Gauteng (specifically those residing in the City of Tshwane metropolitan area) were therefore analysed. The problem statement related to the decline in the number of white people in the SAN and over-representation of other race groups during intakes.

### *Interviews with MSDS Members*

Qualitative research is a means ‘for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem.’<sup>57</sup> In the qualitative phase, white members of the MSDS population were interviewed. Interviews were conducted between 30 April 2020 and 08 May 2020 with serving MSDS members within the training establishments and units of the SAN in the Western Cape. These units were SAS SIMONSBURG (Simon’s Town), SAS SALDANHA (Saldanha Bay), and the SA Naval College (Gordon’s Bay). Interviewees, who had been part of intakes between 2015 and 2020, confirmed the reduced intake of white personnel.

## **Findings**

It was evident from the study that most white youth – especially those in high school – have a limited understanding of the transformation process in the public service and the DoD. The survey questionnaire administered to Grade 10 to 12 learners in Gauteng indicated that the decline in the number of white youth in the SAN was not due to transformation. Interviews conducted by the Chief Human Resource of the SANDF with the MSDS however revealed something different. These members indicated that the transformation process in the SAN contributed to the declining figures of white personnel.

Further associated with the transformation process, MSDS members’ flagged issues regarding the Performance Management Development System, which assesses individuals against set performance targets. These members viewed the tool as discriminatory, as only black personnel receive performance incentives. Another concern was the dominance of African languages during training, which some felt marginalised white personnel. The MSDS members also indicated that the transformation process affected their career progression. MSDS members appreciated the level of training, discipline, exposure to different cultures, and friendships forged during the training period. Notwithstanding their numbers – as compared to other race groups – these members stated that the recruitment process in the SAN is transparent, as career opportunities are broadly advertised in the printed media. Based on the data collected from the MSDS, the following findings were made:<sup>58</sup>

- Concerted recruitment drives targeting white youth at various high schools and within their respective communities have not been prioritised in the SAN;
- Sound and proper career guidance at schools has not been given the requisite attention, which affects the ability of the youth to make informed career decisions;
- The SAN has not prioritised programmes on diversity during induction week, and this led to the marginalisation of white members;

- Career managers in the SAN have not sufficiently guided white applicants about career choices after attestation and induction; and
- There is a lack of transparency regarding career management decisions, promotions and the provision of compulsory and discretionary benefits in the SAN.

Before 1994, most uniformed members in the SAN were white people with the number of males exceeding the number of females because of the then recruitment and selection process. It is also important to mention that, before 1994, white females also experienced discrimination, and when they were allowed to join the SAN, they could only be enlisted in the support musterings. This means that white males were the most privileged members at the time.

Only after 1994, did the SAN experience a gradual increase in the number of black youth joining the organisation, even in specialised occupations (combat, technical, and engineering disciplines) that were previously reserved for white males. At the start of integration, it was impossible to fast-track previously disadvantaged communities due to their lack of qualifications and experiences into senior positions and critical musterings to alter the balance materially. The transformation efforts were therefore aggressively pursued to ensure that the previously marginalised were afforded equal opportunities to be considered for careers in the SAN.

Table 1 depicts the gradual increase of black personnel and the corresponding decrease in white members, highlighting progress by the SAN in achieving representativity. In analysing the numbers, cognisance must be taken of the fact that, during the integration process, the SAN was the least preferred arm of service within the SANDF, compared to the South African Army, the South African Air Force, and the South African Military Health Service. This implies that a high percentage of black recruits in the SAN joined as a result of the post-1994 recruitment and selection interventions.

Year	African		White		Coloured		Asian	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
1994	283	0	2 414	225	1 384	49	580	12
1999	1 037	155	1 790	214	1 447	146	572	39
2004	1 668	402	1 293	226	1 278	181	458	37
2009	2 213	848	927	198	1 155	274	297	27
2014	2 838	1 235	939	218	1 188	336	282	26
2019	2 923	1 312	699	174	1 010	318	257	29
2020	2 988	1 403	632	164	962	336	238	35

*Table 1: Representativity in the SAN since 1994<sup>59</sup>*



The integration of statutory and non-statutory forces in the SANDF started in 1994, and the SAN was part of the process. During the initial period of integration, the composition of personnel in terms of race within the SAN was as follows: 2 308 black people and 2 639 white personnel (total 4 947), excluding the civilian component. White personnel were, therefore, the majority constituting 53,34 per cent of the SAN. By 2020, the composition of the SAN (uniformed and civilian members) was 6 758, with white personnel accounting for only 796 or 11,77 per cent of the SAN.

Table 2 reflects an exodus of white personnel from the SAN, especially from senior to top management structures due to compulsory age requirements. Other white people – especially junior ranks – used severance packages to exit the SAN. Without an effective feeder system (such as the MSDS) for white youth, the demographics of the Republic, as reflected in the latest census would not have been achieved.<sup>60</sup>

Exit reason	1994–2000	2001–2005	2006–2010	2011–2015	2016–2019
Contract expiry	94	116	104	70	40
Deceased	81	23	19	31	13
Inter-departmental transfer	11	10	98	4	0
Discharge	19	18	21	15	1
Employer initiated package	0	105	0	0	0
Medical discharge	141	33	24	4	5
Mobility exit mechanism	0	0	170	33	27
Other	1	0	0	0	0
Resignation	1 517	539	437	154	115
Retirement	226	97	105	156	174
Retrenchment	7	0	0	0	0
Voluntary severance package	750	15	0	0	0
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>2 847</b>	<b>956</b>	<b>978</b>	<b>467</b>	<b>375</b>

*Table 2: White attrition from 1994 to 2019<sup>61</sup>*

It is apparent from Table 2 that most white personnel exited the SAN during the period of integration when the transformation processes were central to this particular arm of service. Resignation and voluntary severance were the common mechanisms used by white personnel to exit the SAN as highlighted in red above (Table 2). The red highlighting also reflects the period when the biggest number of white personnel exited the SAN. White

youth must, however, be recruited annually in sufficient numbers to ensure a representative SAN. The current researchers analysed intakes since 2015 to establish whether the SAN is doing enough to recruit and retain MSDS members inducted into the service.

## SAN Intakes: 2015–2020

The SAN serves the common good of the entire population in the Republic, and is duty-bound by the Constitution to ensure that it reflects the demographic diversity of the nation in its services. The current statistics during intakes – as depicted below – is of grave concern, as segments of the population are either unaware of the responsibility of National Defence within a racially diverse and multicultural society, or are just not interested to be part of the DoD. Before any conclusion could be made in terms of this assumption it was important to assess various intakes in the SAN to establish the reasons for the declining numbers of white youth being recruited

Selection and appointment in the SAN follow a rigorous, thorough, and comprehensive process that is subjected to a strict auditable checklist. The SAN Human Resources Plan (FY 2019–2020) outlines the recruitment process for the short to medium term. According to this plan, the MSDS will continue serving as the feeder system to address attrition in the Regular Force and the Reserve Force.<sup>62</sup> It is important to mention that Grade 12 learners who are found suitable undergo additional screening to identify those who qualify to study at various academic institutions and colleges. Training evolutions in the SAN are both academic and functional; therefore, additional screening for studying at various colleges and universities is critical.

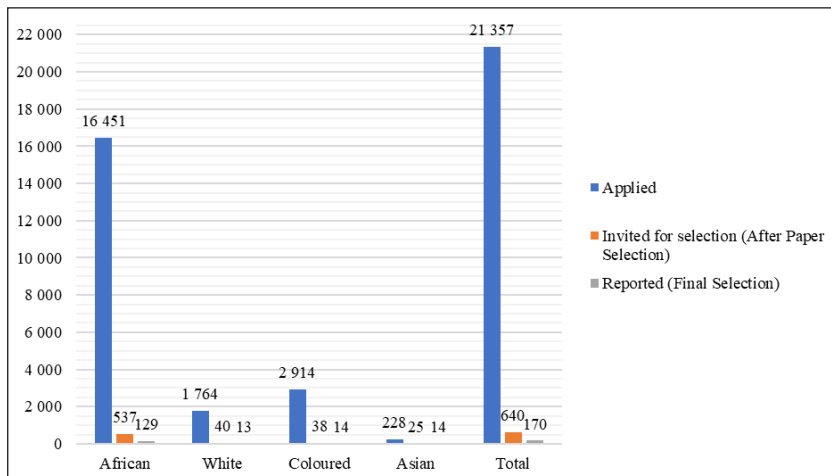


Figure 1: The Selection Process: 2018 SAN Intake<sup>63</sup>

Figure 1 provided an overview of the selection process, with approximately 21 357 applicants expressing interest in the SAN, 640 were invited for selection. In 2018, approximately 1 764 applicants (8,25 per cent) were white youth, while African applicants constituted 16 451 (77,02 per cent), coloured people 2 914 (13,64 per cent), and Asian people 228 (1,06 per cent). Taking into consideration that 170 MSDS reported, 13 white youth indicated in Figure 1 totalled 7,64 per cent of the intake in 2018.

Figure 2 reflects the 22 010 confirmed candidates who submitted application forms at SAN recruiting offices or satellites for the January 2019 intake. Regarding racial distribution, Figure 2 indicates that approximately 1 885 white people (or 8,56 per cent of the applicants), 16 056 African people (72,94 per cent), 3 850 coloured people (17,49 per cent), and 219 Asian people (0,99 per cent) showed interest. For the 2019 MSDS intake, which totalled 221, 14 white applicants (6,33 per cent) reported for training that year.

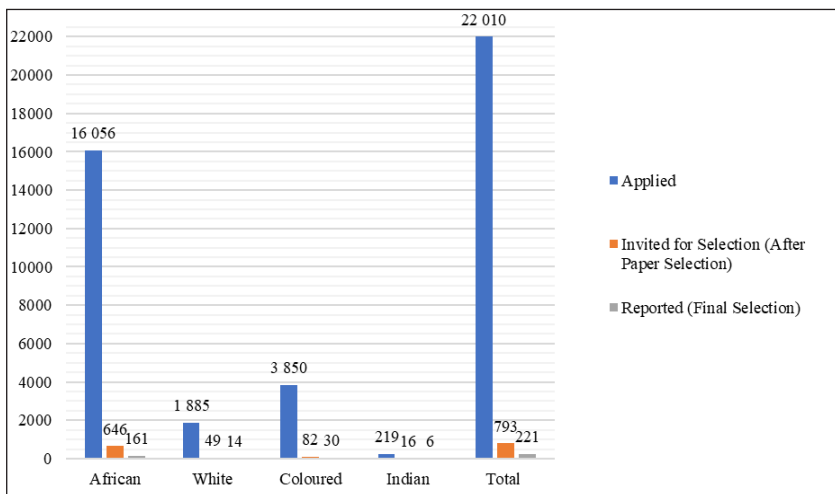
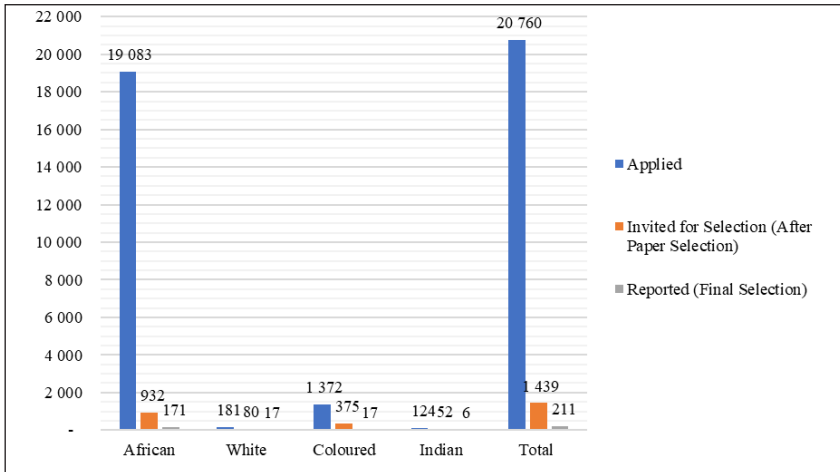


Figure 2: The Selection Process: 2019 SAN Intake<sup>64</sup>

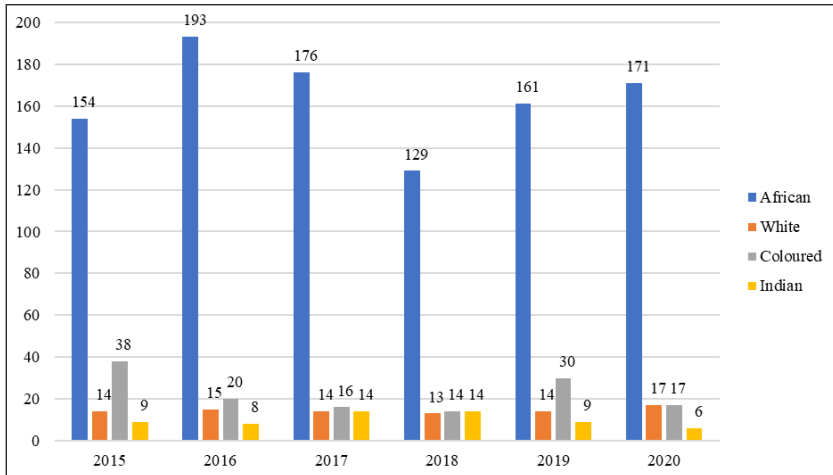
In terms of the 2020 intake (see Figure 3), 20 760 applicants expressed interest, with 1 439 called up for interviews. Due to the limited number of posts available, only 211 were recommended and eventually reported for basic military training. Of the 20 760 applications received, 181 were white applicants (0,87 per cent of the applicants) of whom a total of 17 were appointed and reported for training. When looking specifically at the number of successful candidates (211), white youth made up 8,05 per cent of the 2020 intake.



*Figure 3: The Selection Process: 2020 SAN Intake<sup>65</sup>*

Figures 1, 2 and 3 indicate a relatively consistent trend regarding percentages of applicants from each race group seeking enlistment in the SAN. The average percentage of white applicants remained at approximately 7 per cent, aligning with the population estimates from the latest census.<sup>66</sup> This correlation suggests a close alignment between the application rates (of the white population) and their representation in the SAN intake.

Figure 4 provides an overview of the intake of MSDS members at SAS SALDANHA over a six-year period. SAS SALDANHA is a training establishment for non-commissioned officers (NCOs) in the SAN. Figure 4 reflects MSDS members who completed the entire selection process and were deemed competent for training in the SAN between 2018 and 2020. A total of 1 266 members reported for training over this period, of whom 984 (77,72 per cent) were African people, 87 (6,87 per cent) were white people, 135 (10,66 per cent) were coloured people, and 60 (4,73 per cent) were Asian people.



*Figure 4: MSDS Intake 2015–2020 (SAS SALDANHA)<sup>67</sup>*

Patriotism and a sense of security are vital for any country. It is therefore in the interest of SAN to ensure that its enlisted members reflect the demographic diversity of the Republic. Any segment of society that is not integrated into the security layers could pose a potential security threat to the stability of the state. Allowing the numbers of white personnel recruited and retained in the SAN to decline without long-term intervention or strategies contradicts the intentions of the SAN. The SAN must maintain an affordable human capital base across all race groups in accurate proportions to lend legitimacy and credibility to the organisation.

## Conclusion

The study on which this article is based, aimed to establish the reasons for the declining numbers of white personnel, particularly youth, in the SAN. The main objective of the study was to determine the factors causing this decline, and to identify potential gaps in the recruitment processes of the SAN for white youth. This is important in order to ensure the SAN remains representative of the white race in the future.

The data collected from the respondents and the literature review indicated that the existing recruitment strategy is insufficient to attract and retain competent white youth. Despite the promulgations of the SANDF Human Resource Strategy 2010, the SAN has yet to revise its strategies to address human capital challenges regarding the recruitment of competent white youth. The 2015–2020 intakes demonstrated a reduction in the number of white youth joining the SAN.

Furthermore, the study found that the SAN has yet to prioritise diversity programmes during the induction of MSDS members to guard against the marginalisation of the white minority. The lack of transparency in career management decisions, promotions, and benefits provision appears to contribute to frustration among white personnel. The SAN must note that, despite the number of white recruits being inducted, failure to develop a sound and effective strategy to retain them will affect sustainability in the short to medium term. The following secondary research objectives were also addressed:

- The study established that the school curriculum does not cover potential career paths, including future employment opportunities in the SAN;
- It was also found that high school learners have limited information about the SANDF and its roles, functions, and responsibilities;
- From the answers provided in terms of transformation, it was clear that white youth, particularly high school learners, have little understanding of the transformation process in the public service and the DoD. The transformation process undertaken in the SAN is, therefore, not the reason why white youth lack interest in joining the SAN;
- The study found that white youth are uncertain about career choices upon completion of Grade 12; and
- It was further found that there is a lack of focused recruitment efforts targeting white youth.

In linking the findings to the literature review, Chapter 2, section 9 of the Constitution of the Republic, prescribes that all persons are entitled to equality and equal employment opportunities. The current study, however, found limited evidence that the SAN prioritises the induction of white youth into the service. The DoD set numerical targets for appointment of race groups using the Defence Review and the White Paper on National Defence (1996) as guidelines. For white people, a quota of 24,35 per cent was prescribed by the DoD; however, the SAN approved 23 per cent according to the naval orders cited above.<sup>68</sup> The current representation of white people in the Republic has reduced to approximately 7,3 per cent, rendering the set target unfeasible.<sup>69</sup>

In terms of the outcome of the study, the demographics of the Republic must be utilised as an instrument or criterion to guide recruitment by race and gender on the part of the SAN, aligning with current estimates of white people comprising approximately 7,3 per cent of the South African population.<sup>70</sup> The study found that a concerted recruitment drive targeting white youth at various high schools and within their communities has not been prioritised in the SAN calendar. Failure to have an effective human capital strategy for recruiting white youth could further reduce their representation in the SAN. The recruitment and appointment process must, therefore, be revisited, and during appointments, quotas must be aligned with the demographic composition of the Republic.

The current study used a combination of quantitative and qualitative research approaches. Interviews were utilised as a qualitative approach to help identify possible reasons for the decline in white personnel, and a questionnaire survey, as the quantitative approach, assisted in identifying the gaps in the recruiting process in the SAN. This ensured that the study addressed all issues related to the research aim, objectives, and questions.

The study further established that the current recruitment strategy does not assist in inducting a sufficient number of white youth in the SAN. Comments by MSDS members suggested that the transformation process may significantly contribute to the declining figures of white youth in the SAN. For the SAN to deploy its maritime resources successfully, it is essential to have a workforce that reflects the demographic diversity of the country. This alignment would also ensure international and regional legitimacy and recognition. Taking into consideration the observations and findings of the study, the following recommendations are made:

- The SAN should develop and implement a comprehensive, coherent, and effective career management model across all race groups to help curb the steady exodus of white personnel;
- Equitable treatment during induction week should be ensured, and this should be enforced in all training and career management interventions in the SAN;
- The SAN should utilise the demographics of the Republic to guide the selection and appointment of the youth by race and gender;
- The marginalisation of white personnel should be addressed in the first week by incorporating education and training on transformation into the SAN curriculum for all MSDS members;
- Targeted recruitment interventions should be implemented at high schools to increase the number of white learners enlisted in the SAN; and
- The SAN should devise demographic representativity, and acknowledge that the numerical targets approved by the DoD and the SAN respectively are no longer realistic.

In conclusion, the study was undertaken with the sole purpose of establishing the reasons for the declining number of white personnel, in particular the youth, in the SAN. Analysis of the 2015–2020 intakes indicated that there has been a steady decline in the number of white youth, with retention also presenting a challenge.

A limitation to the study was that it relied on SAN MSDS members who volunteered to participate in the structured interviews. The interviews were used to establish whether the targeted group had knowledge of SAN career opportunities before their enlistment. The opinion of the group regarding the transformation process in the SAN was the focus of the research. As serving members, they might have been exposed to the transformation process in the organisation in some capacity and, therefore, their opinions might have been influenced by their experiences.

For future research, it would be beneficial to examine the entire succession planning for white people in the SAN. The current study focused on recruitment, and not on succession planning. Further, the specific reasons for the exit of white personnel were not investigated. It would be important to understand the reasons why white youth may be leaving the organisation, rather than to rely on assumptions.

## Endnotes

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# Private Military Force as Strategy to Counter a Hybrid Threat Posture: A Conceptual Framework

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## Abstract

The international community is currently facing a diffuse, shifting, and controversial set of security challenges. On the one hand, hybrid warfare creates both conceptual and strategic challenges to a state, as conventional military forces are simply not designed to operate in a legal “grey zone”. As a result, certain ways and means, which are essential for the successful prosecution of an armed conflict, must be forfeited.

On the other hand, there are significant self-restricting political and legal partitions inherent in the modern strategic landscape, as the international community does not want an easy recourse to war. By having to remain below these political and legal thresholds, a disconnect is however created between the policy ends of a state and the strategic effect of its armed forces.

The combined effect of these challenges suggests that there is no suitable policy for dealing with hybrid threats, making the international community particularly vulnerable to exploitation. What is clear is that a more sophisticated, complex, and politically charged strategic response is required to counter a hybrid threat posture – one that effectively links policy ends to the ways and means of achieving those ends.

Throughout history many different entities – besides statutory militaries – have fought wars: families, ethnic groups, business enterprises, and private military forces. Today, by virtue of the extensive expertise embedded within the private military industry, private military forces strategically influence both the process and the outcome of conflicts. The objective of the subsequent research<sup>i</sup> was therefore to suggest a conceptual framework for private military force to counter a hybrid threat posture.

The collective findings of this follow-up research suggest that, if private military force is theoretically coherent; is underpinned by a realistic political dimension; is tailored to a creative and non-linear concept of operations; and is adequately equipped and supported by a state, then the concept of private military force as strategy to counter a hybrid threat posture is a compelling notion.

**Keywords:** Strategy, Military, Defence, Hybrid Warfare, Private Military Force

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<sup>i</sup> Please note that “subsequent research” or “follow-up research” refers to research done after the primary research. This follow-up research provided additional information, which is reflected in this article.

# Introduction

Two kinds of conceptual and strategic understandings of conflict underpin policy.<sup>2</sup> On the one hand, there is a tendency to impose a stereotypical version of war, drawn from the experiences of industrialised warfare over the last two centuries.<sup>3</sup> On the other hand, where policymakers recognise the shortcomings of the Clausewitzian concept of war, there is a tendency to treat conflict as unconventional or irregular.<sup>4</sup> Security analysts, defence scholars, and policy practitioners alike agree however that the binary understanding of modern warfare lags behind current developments and experiences on the battlefield.<sup>5</sup>

Chinese analysts use the terms “unrestricted warfare” and “three warfares”; Russian officials use the term “political warfare”, while Western defence scholars use the terms “new wars”, “asymmetric warfare”, or “fourth-generation war” to describe modern warfare.<sup>6</sup> Although the term “hybrid war” has been criticised for being so broad that it has limited analytical value, it does however provide adequate grounds for understanding the complexities and challenges of modern warfare.<sup>7</sup>

When applied to states, the single critical expansion of the hybrid warfare concept involves the use of strategic ambiguity.<sup>8</sup> Strategic ambiguity is defined as ‘hostile actions that are difficult for a state to identify, attribute, or publicly define as coercive uses of force’.<sup>9</sup> Strategic ambiguity falls below the legal threshold of war, and delegitimises the ability of a state to respond through conventional military force.<sup>10</sup> Reichborn-Kjennerud *et al.* explain that hybrid conflicts occur in situations that are neither war nor peace, where adversaries employ “measures short of war” to extend the reach of their policies.<sup>11</sup>

Monaghan explains that conventional military forces are simply not designed to operate in a legal grey zone.<sup>12</sup> Employing statutory military force to conduct operations in scenarios that are neither war nor peace carries the risk of international condemnation, escalation, and a conventional military response.<sup>13</sup> If tailored correctly, a hybrid warfare strategy can therefore target its adversaries and make consequential gains toward its strategic objectives without provoking a conventional military response.<sup>14</sup>

The international community has committed itself to abide by so-called “international law”, which places formal constraints on the institution of war, and is closely intertwined with its stated values, beliefs, and norms.<sup>15</sup> Deviation from such “international law” is viewed as treacherous, immoral or illegal by those who tend to conceptualise war from a traditional Clausewitzian perspective.<sup>16</sup> The international community could undoubtedly remove its self-imposed partitions, or at least adjust them to the extent that they are less restricting; however, this is becoming increasingly unlikely, as said community discourages the use of state-centric force to resolve international disputes.<sup>17</sup> By having to remain below these political and legal thresholds, a disconnect is however created between the policy ends of a state and the strategic effect of its armed forces.<sup>18</sup>

Regular statutory armies are very much connected to the basic political and social institutions in international relations, namely the nation-state.<sup>19</sup> Consequently, the monopolisation of the use of armed force has become a dominant feature of the Westphalian state.<sup>20</sup>

Throughout history, however, many different entities – besides statutory militaries – have fought wars: families, ethnic groups, business enterprises, and private military forces (PMFs).<sup>21</sup> Furthermore, PMFs have frequently played crucial roles in conflicts – from the disrupting of Axis plans at critical times during World War II to successful private military interventions in Angola, Iraq and, more recently, in Ukraine.<sup>22</sup> Please note, the current research<sup>ii</sup> associated PMFs with the existence of private military companies (PMCs).<sup>23</sup>

From the beginning of the Cold War (in 1947), the development of the private military industry constituted a path from ad hoc contracting to highly specialised corporate entities.<sup>24</sup> Today, the privatisation of military tasks has grown into a dynamic commercial sector, where PMCs form part of a complex security network that combines public and private stakeholders into entities not limited to a national setting.<sup>25</sup> Today, by virtue of the extensive expertise embedded within the private military industry, PMCs strategically affect both the process and outcome of conflicts.<sup>26</sup>

The employment of PMCs by a state however also reveals key strategic risks, particularly as the idea of a state relying on PMCs for its international security requirements is contrary to the concept of modern statehood.<sup>27</sup> Furthermore, supporting a state does not necessarily mean supporting the principles of sovereignty and self-determination.<sup>28</sup> The result is that there are opposing viewpoints between legal commentators, defence scholars, and policy practitioners alike who see the existence and activity of PMCs as a threat to national sovereignty on the one hand, and those who view the existence of PMCs as a ‘fait accompli’ on the other.<sup>29</sup>

A literature review pointed to the following: firstly, hybrid warfare creates both conceptual and strategic challenges for a state, as conventional military forces are simply not designed to operate in a legal grey zone.<sup>30</sup> As a result, certain ways and means that are essential for the successful prosecution of an armed conflict must be forfeited.<sup>31</sup> Secondly, there are significant self-restricting political and legal partitions inherent in the modern strategic landscape, as the international community discourages the use of statutory military force to resolve international disputes.<sup>32</sup> As a result, a disconnect is created between the policy ends of a state and the strategic effect of its armed forces.<sup>33</sup>

The combined effect of these challenges suggests that there is no suitable policy for dealing with hybrid threats, making the international community vulnerable to exploitation.<sup>34</sup> It is clear that a more sophisticated, complex, and politically charged strategic response is required to counter a hybrid threat posture effectively – one that links the political ends of a state to the ways and means of achieving those ends.<sup>35</sup> Today, however, by virtue of the extensive expertise embedded within the private military industry, PMFs strategically influence both the process and the outcome of conflicts.<sup>36</sup> The primary aim of the follow-up research was therefore to suggest a conceptual framework for PMF to counter a hybrid threat posture.

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<sup>ii</sup> In this article, “current research” refers to the primary research done for the work as referenced here.

Defence scholars are familiar with Col. Lykke's equation where strategy = ends + ways + means.<sup>37</sup> **Strategy** is the approach under consideration; **ends** are the objectives of a given strategy; **ways** are concerned with the various methods to achieve the ends; and **means** refers to the resources required to execute the ways.<sup>38</sup> Consequently, exploring the secondary objectives of the follow-up research correlate with the four elements of Lykke's equation where:

- Strategy  $\hat{=}$  to creating a theoretical foundation;
- Ends  $\hat{=}$  to establishing the political dimension;
- Ways  $\hat{=}$  to designing a concept of operations; and
- Means  $\hat{=}$  to calculating adequate resources.

The current research acknowledged that there are significant moral and ethical concerns regarding the employment of PMFs.<sup>39</sup> Moreover, there are noteworthy implications concerning public accountability and democratic control over the use of privately owned and armed force.<sup>40</sup> These issues were however not debated in the current research; rather, the focus was on the strategic value of PMFs and the way they contribute to the right of a state to self-defence.<sup>41</sup> Furthermore, it is the conviction of this author that, if a state employs PMF as strategy to counter a hybrid threat posture, the PMF act according to and within the parameters of such states laws.

## “Strategy”: Creating a Theoretical Foundation

The first element in Lykke's equation is “strategy”: the approach under consideration, which, according to the follow-up research, corresponds to creating a theoretical foundation. In Gray's book *Strategy Bridge*, Aaron is quoted as saying, ‘strategic thought draws its inspiration at each moment of history from the problems which events themselves pose’.<sup>42</sup> In the same work, Brodie is quoted as saying that strategic theory is ‘for action ... a practical tool for achieving objectives efficiently’.<sup>43</sup> Creating a theoretical foundation for PMF to counter a hybrid threat posture is therefore essential. The current research created a theoretical foundation by asking three important yet basic questions:<sup>44</sup>

- Is private military force a concept of strategy?
- How does private military force augment a state against a hybrid threat posture?
- What are the guidelines for employing private military forces against a hybrid threat posture?

This section briefly explains how the current research addressed the three questions listed above.

### *Private Military Force as a Concept of Strategy*

Esterhuysen and Louw explain that on the one hand, strategy by design is an attempt to achieve strategic effect and outcomes through deliberate planning.<sup>45</sup> On the other hand, strategy by implication is where tactical outcomes drive strategy.<sup>46</sup> This tends to open up a debate about the disconnect between tactics and strategy.<sup>47</sup> Along similar lines, Gray

argues that it is essential to differentiate correctly between strategic concepts.<sup>48</sup> The misrepresentation of strategic concepts implies that there is little chance of recognising the relationship between military tactics and achieving strategic and political effect.<sup>49</sup> It is therefore important to determine whether PMF is a concept of strategy if policymakers want to achieve strategic and political effect from its employment.

Private military companies are characterised as being structured according to corporate principles, with clear executive hierarchies, boards of directors, and independent professional management.<sup>50</sup> They require financial reporting and licensing, and a substantial regulatory framework governs their behaviour.<sup>51</sup> Essentially, PMCs are business organisations, competing and surviving in the global marketplace for private military force, and, although at times national security policy informs their contracts, most remain autonomous from government.<sup>52</sup>

Furthermore, Gray argues that the function of strategic theory is to ‘distil the essence and meaning of a subject ... and to aid in understanding how and why the subject under examination works’.<sup>53</sup> Gray continues to explain that the general theory of strategy is designed to help educate military and political leaders by assisting them in understanding strategic thought and the meaning of military action.<sup>54</sup> A principal value of strategic theory is therefore its purpose of distinguishing between tactics and strategy.<sup>55</sup>

The current research answered the question whether PMF is a concept of strategy by showing that the nature and characteristics of PMFs correlate with the fundamental concepts of the general theory of strategy.<sup>56</sup>

### *Private Military Force Augmenting a State against a Hybrid Threat Posture*

The current research found that hybrid warfare creates both conceptual and strategic challenges to a state, as conventional military forces are simply not designed to operate in a legal grey zone.<sup>57</sup> Consequently, certain ways and means that are essential for the successful prosecution of an armed conflict must be forfeited.<sup>58</sup> Additionally, there are significant self-restricting political and legal partitions inherent in the modern strategic landscape, as the international community seeks to prevent war to solve complex challenges.<sup>59</sup> As a result, a disconnect is created between the policy ends of a state and the strategic effect of its armed forces.<sup>60</sup> Most modern states however possess well-equipped, technologically advanced, and highly developed armed forces with which to counter threats to national security.<sup>61</sup> It is therefore important to understand how PMF augments a state against a hybrid threat posture.

A key characteristic of hybrid warfare is that it blends the lethality of conventional warfare with irregular warfare, crime, and the fanatical and protracted fervour of terrorism – simultaneously.<sup>62</sup> A hybrid warfare strategy strikes at the seam of conventional and irregular warfare, targeting perceived red-line thresholds of its opponents and operating below them.<sup>63</sup> Typically, the international community avoids intervening in a conflict unless it detects a breach in legal protocols.<sup>64</sup> If tailored correctly, a hybrid warfare strategy

can target its opponents and make consequential gains toward its strategic objectives without provoking a conventional military response.<sup>65</sup>

Gray explains that numerous influences (from within the modern strategic landscape) affect the design and development of strategic plans.<sup>66</sup> In order to explain the political and legal influences originating from within the modern strategic landscape, the current research analysed the political, economic, ideological, strategic-historical and military dimensions.<sup>67</sup> A key partition inherent in the modern strategic landscape is the political dimension, which is characterised by near-term thinking and risk aversion.<sup>68</sup> This has resulted in an increasing difficulty for the strategist to balance opposing political interests in light of a singular, all-embracing conceptual framework that benefits the consumer-citizen, political agencies, and national security policy as a whole.<sup>69</sup>

The current research answered the question about how PMF augments a state against a hybrid threat posture by demonstrating that the nature and characteristics of PMF overcomes the conceptual and strategic challenges of a hybrid threat posture as well as the political and legal partitions inherent in the modern strategic landscape.<sup>70</sup>

### *Guidelines for Employing Private Military Force against a Hybrid Threat Posture*

Gray reminds us that employing military force remains risky, as in any international confrontation, the commitment to military combat may lead to escalation and unintended confrontation – even if the relevant action is tactically and operationally successful.<sup>71</sup> To put it simply, before assigning missions to PMFs, it is essential to understand the internal and external constraints governing these forces.<sup>72</sup>

To determine guidelines for employing PMF against a hybrid threat posture, the current research conducted three case studies on PMFs countering irregular and unconventional threats.<sup>73</sup> The case studies were grouped into three broad models:

- The African example of Executive Outcomes, covered its operations in Angola and Sierra Leone between 1990 and 1997;
- The United States (US) example of Blackwater, covered its operations in Iraq between 2003 and 2010; and
- The Russian model of the Wagner Group, covered its operations in Libya and beyond between 2010 and 2020.<sup>74</sup>

Consequently, by investigating and comparing the operations of the three PMFs countering irregular and unconventional threats, the current research derived guidelines on how PMFs achieve tactical, operational, and strategic-level success against a hybrid threat posture.<sup>75</sup>

To conclude this section, by elaborating on how to answer the three important yet basic questions, the current research created a theoretical foundation for PMF to counter a hybrid threat posture.<sup>76</sup> The next section discusses the establishment of the political dimension.



## “Ends”: Establishing the Political Dimension

The second element in Lykke’s equation is “ends”: the objectives of a given strategy, which, according to the follow-up research, correspond to establishing the political dimension. Evans explains that, if the politics of a counterinsurgency campaign are misconceived, then the strategy drawn from those politics is almost certain to be flawed.<sup>77</sup> Moreover, Millet and Murray argue, ‘in any type of war, no amount of operational virtuosity can redeem fundamental flaws in political judgement ... that any political-strategic error will lead to strategic deterioration, and ultimately, to political defeat’.<sup>78</sup> It is therefore essential to establish a realistic political dimension for PMF to counter a hybrid threat posture.

According to this author, establishing the political dimension is achieved by analysing several strategic decision-making steps, which link the political ends sought to the private military mission objectives required to achieve those ends. The strategic decision-making steps range from abstract and broad decisions concerning long-term national security objectives, to narrow and tangible decisions concerning private military mission objectives.<sup>79</sup>

Please note, this author acknowledges that the involvement of the private military role player is not applicable to all phases of the strategic decision-making process. As PMCs are essentially business organisations competing in the market for private military force, they may however need to demonstrate to policymakers how their services contribute to the desired political end-state.<sup>80</sup>

### *Setting the National Security Objective*

According to Drew and Snow, the first step in the strategic decision-making process is to set the national security objective.<sup>81</sup> If the objective is ill defined, inconsistent, or not supported by some degree of national consensus, then the task of the strategist becomes exceedingly difficult.<sup>82</sup> Furthermore, Liddell Hart explains that it is essential to be clear about the distinction between political and military objectives.<sup>83</sup> The two are different but not separate.<sup>84</sup> Nations do not wage war for the sake of war, but for the pursuance of policy, where the military objective is the means to a political end.<sup>85</sup> The military objective is therefore governed by the political objective.<sup>86</sup>

The author suggests when setting the national security objective of a state, it is important to understand that the hostile and aggressive behaviour of an adversarial state is the product of its politics, which produces its policy and provides its strategy with direction and purpose. Given that political intentions initiate all military behaviour, it is suggested that the national security objective of a state – when facing a hybrid threat posture – should include changing the policy of the adversarial state.

### *Determining the Nature of the Threat*

Evans maintains, ‘[T]he acid test of strategy is to know and understand your enemy.’<sup>87</sup> Additionally, Clausewitz’s famous dictum states:

[T]he first ... act of judgment which the statesman and commander have to make is to establish the kind of war on which they are embarking; neither mistaking it for nor trying to turn it into something alien to its nature.<sup>88</sup>

Consequently, the current author suggests that the next step in the strategic decision-making process is to determine the nature of the threat facing the state.

Hoffman describes a hybrid threat as ‘any adversary that simultaneously and adaptively employs a fused mix of conventional weapons, irregular tactics, terrorism and criminal behaviour in the battlespace to obtain their political objectives’.<sup>89</sup> The application of the many forms of warfare, simultaneously, characterises hybrid warfare strategies and distinguishes it from the classic understanding of conventional or unconventional warfare.<sup>90</sup> Furthermore, Putter *et al.* explain that, in hybrid warfare, plausible deniability is a strategy where an actor denies involvement in its actions as they are covert or ambiguous.<sup>91</sup> In the form of plausible deniability, strategic ambiguity avoids responsibility through the use of non-state military force.<sup>92</sup>

The current author suggests that, if it is difficult for a state to identify, attribute, or publicly define coercive uses of force originating from an adversarial state, then it is likely being targeted by a hybrid warfare strategy.

### *Selecting the Instrument of Power*

Drew and Snow explain that, after the national security objective has been set (and the nature of the threat defined), it is necessary to decide which instrument of power is best suited to serve the national interest.<sup>93</sup> It may be worth remembering that, during the Cold War, the US organised itself to wage war by a variety of mechanisms, collectively referred to as ‘political warfare’.<sup>94</sup> The term was coined by former US diplomat, George F Kennan, and describes the employment of all the means at a nation’s command – short of war – to achieve its national security objectives.<sup>95</sup> Kennan describes political warfare as the logical application of Clausewitz’s doctrine in a time of peace, and suggests methods both overt and covert to achieve the national security objective of a state.<sup>96</sup>

Galeotti explains the method of conflict, as described by Kennan, has recently been reframed as ‘Gerasimov’s doctrine’.<sup>97</sup> Gen. Gerasimov, Chief of the Russian General Staff, argues that the role of non-military means to achieve political and strategic goals has increased, and in many cases, exceeds the conventional use of military force; that the emphasis on armed conflict has shifted towards non-militarised methods.<sup>98</sup> Conventional military force should then only be used during the final phase of the conflict.<sup>99</sup> Moreover, Hoffman maintains that force planners should abandon the dichotomous choice between conventional and unconventional war.<sup>100</sup> He suggests that the choice is no longer between preparing for long-term stability operations or high-intensity conflict, but is rather a matter of considering alternate joint force postures.<sup>101</sup>

Furthermore, from the current research it was clear that PMFs overcame the conceptual and strategic challenges of a hybrid threat scenario, as well as the political and legal

partitions inherent in the modern strategic landscape.<sup>102</sup> Consequently the current author suggests employing PMF to counter a hybrid threat posture. PMF is however not an instrument of statecraft in itself; rather, it is a distinct means at the disposal of a state.<sup>103</sup> Additionally, military outsourcing should be administered solely through a government agency with experience in managing military-type force.<sup>104</sup>

Current US military doctrine recognises seven categories of state power: diplomatic, informational, military, economic, finance, intelligence, and law enforcement (abbreviated as the acronym DIMEFIL).<sup>105</sup> The intelligence instrument, however, plays an important role in advancing a state's national security and foreign policy objectives abroad.<sup>106</sup> The current author therefore recommends selecting the intelligence instrument to achieve the national security objective of a state against a hybrid threat posture – supported by PMF.

Please note, hybrid threats are a broad, complex, and multifaceted national security issue.<sup>107</sup> Consequently, the current research assumed that all the instruments and agents of a state will be brought to bear against a hybrid threat posture, and that strategic success will be determined largely to the extent to which this base can be mobilised and applied to achieve the national security objective of a state.<sup>108</sup>

### *Assigning the Mission*

Drew and Snow explain that the definition of grand strategy includes the development of all the instruments of a state, as well as the application and coordination of these instruments in pursuit of policy objectives.<sup>109</sup> It is essential to understand that, without clear, coordinated direction, the instruments of power can work against each other.<sup>110</sup> To prevent this, the grand strategic process assigns missions to the instruments of a state.<sup>111</sup>

Clausewitz argues, 'the object of war is to impose our will on the enemy, to do which we use the maximum means of force available with the aim of rendering him powerless'.<sup>112</sup> Unconventional warfare, however, is the antithesis of the maximum use of military force.<sup>113</sup> In Baker and Jordaan's work, *Contemporary Counterinsurgency*, Gossman explains that an essential characteristic of unconventional warfare implies that 'combat operations are directed in such a manner as to win over the support of the local population – rather than to defeat the occupying or government forces in combat'.<sup>114</sup> Additionally, Galula suggests, 'the character of unconventional warfare ... is 80% political and 20% military'.<sup>115</sup>

Furthermore, the current research determined that PMF had limits; that before assigning missions to PMFs, it is essential to understand the internal and external constraints governing these forces.<sup>116</sup> The author therefore suggests that, when allocating the mission to the intelligence instrument, it should be limited to the broad spectrum of unconventional warfare and the interrelated fields of covert or clandestine warfare operations.

### *Allocating Mission Objectives*

After the national security objective has been set, the nature of the threat determined, the instrument of power selected, and the mission assigned, the strategic decision-making process allocates mission objectives to the selected instrument of power.<sup>117</sup> Mission

objectives are goals which if accomplished, will achieve the mission assigned by the grand strategic process.<sup>118</sup> Col. Eickmeier however argues that the centre piece of military planning is accurately identifying an adversary's centre of gravity (COG).<sup>119</sup>

Clausewitz introduced the concept of a COG, which he defined as 'the hub of all power and movement, on which everything depends'.<sup>120</sup> A COG is not necessarily a target on the ground, but rather a source of strength, the destruction of which will have the most effect on achieving the national security objective of a state.<sup>121</sup> According to literature there are several approaches to identifying the COG of an adversary, including the 'strategic framework analysis';<sup>122</sup> Warden's 'five ring model';<sup>123</sup> and the 'critical factor analysis'.<sup>124</sup>

Waller suggests however, that conventional models may not apply to identifying the COG of non-state hybrid actors.<sup>125</sup> It is important to note however, that according to the current research, national security threats characterised by hybridity are contextualised within the makeup and organisation of a state.<sup>126</sup> Furthermore, in Scholtz's article, *The Namibian Border War*, Van der Waal is quoted as saying:

[R]evolutionary war differs from conventional war as its COG is not found in the destruction of the opposing armed forces, or the occupation of territory; but rather, in the hijacking of the socio-political system of the state to gain control over the population.<sup>127</sup>

According to the current author, identifying the COG of a national security threat characteristic by hybridity should therefore be contextualised within the socio-political system of the adversarial state. Consequently, the author argues that when allocating mission objectives to the intelligence instrument (i.e. PMF), they should include identifying and disabling the COG of the adversarial state.

To conclude this section, by discussing several strategic decision-making steps linking political ends sought to the private military mission objectives required to achieve those ends, a realistic political dimension is established. The next section deals with designing a concept of operations for PMF to counter a hybrid threat posture.

## **“Ways”: Designing a Concept of Operations**

The third element in Lykke's equation is “ways”: the various methods required to achieve ends, which, according to the follow-up research, corresponds to designing a concept of operations. A concept of operations focuses on the actions required to achieve the desired political end state.<sup>128</sup> “Actions”, or a “concept of operations”, describes how military force will be employed to achieve the mission objectives assigned by grand strategy.<sup>129</sup> Designing a concept of operations is therefore essential for PMF to counter a hybrid threat posture. This section suggests how to design a concept of operations by examining several fundamental principles of military theory, doctrine and tactics.

Clausewitz characterised the essence of war as a situation ‘clouded by fog, disrupted by friction and controlled by chance ... which occur through countless minor incidents

combining to lower the level of performance so that one falls short of the intended goal'.<sup>130</sup> Furthermore, planning is defined as 'a process which sets goals, develops strategies, and outlines tasks and schedules for the attainment of desired objectives'.<sup>131</sup> It needs to be appreciated that designing a concept of operations should include joint planning sessions between the private military role player and the state.

Although Meiser acknowledges the value of the "ends + ways + means" formula, he argues that it has become a crutch undermining creative and effective strategic thinking, as strategy is not clear-cut and therefore not susceptible to a mathematical equation.<sup>132</sup> Furthermore, Lt Gen. McMaster termed Lykke's equation 'dangerous', as most strategic problems in the world are not bullet-sizeable.<sup>133</sup> To be clear, designing a concept of operations should include applying creative and non-linear thought processes.

Strategy can be thought of as having many interconnecting dimensions, which profoundly affect strategic performance.<sup>134</sup> Howard identified four dimensions of strategy, which Gray further developed into seventeen.<sup>135,136</sup> According to Gray, the dimensions that contribute most to the making and execution of strategy are the social, cultural, technological, logistical, operational, geographical, and temporal dimensions.<sup>137</sup> The core issue at hand is that designing a concept of operations should take into account the complex interactions between the dimensions of strategy.

Propaganda is defined as the systematic mistreatment of the truth, and serves an essential purpose during war: to direct public sympathies toward some groups and away from others.<sup>138</sup> Furthermore, Mao Zedong is quoted by Scholtz as saying, 'guerrilla warfare will fail if the sympathy, cooperation and assistance of the people cannot be gained'.<sup>139</sup> Moreover, in the same article, Vietnamese General Giap is quoted as saying, 'political activities are more important than military activities and fighting less important than propaganda'.<sup>140</sup> In terms of war, the battle for public opinion is as important as the employment of military force.<sup>141</sup> Consequently, designing a concept of operations should include applying the concept of war propaganda.

French General and theoretician Andre Beaufre is credited with expanding the concept of strategy beyond the purely military realm into what he termed 'total strategy'.<sup>142</sup> Beaufre recognised the criticality of non-military elements of power, and that strategy was neither exclusively a wartime activity nor restricted to planning against an enemy.<sup>143</sup> Moreover, Drew and Snow explain that it is almost impossible to consider using the military instrument in isolation to resolve an international dispute. Political, diplomatic, and economic pressures are as decisive in resolving a conflict as the military instrument.<sup>144</sup> To be clear, designing a concept of operations should include allocating tasks to all the instruments and agents of a state.

According to D'Amura, 'deception is an inseparable part of the concept of operations ... which manipulates the enemy's perception of the battlefield'.<sup>145</sup> Additionally, Sun Tzu writes, 'deception is most successful when it reinforces the enemy's predisposed tendencies or obsessions'.<sup>146</sup> To be effective, though, deception must take place over each phase of the operation and should be fully embraced by all participating parties.<sup>147</sup>

It needs to be appreciated that designing a concept of operations should include applying the tactic of deception.

Sun Tzu argues, ‘to subdue the enemy without fighting is the acme of skill’.<sup>148</sup> Tzu has become the intellectual father of a school of warfare that advocates winning by psychologically dislocating an opponent.<sup>149</sup> An adversary who is shocked, distracted, and ends up in a state of imbalance will lose the initiative.<sup>150</sup> Moreover, in his indirect approach to military strategy, Liddell Hart emphasises movement, flexibility, and surprise.<sup>151</sup> He suggests that, in most military campaigns, dislocation of the enemy’s psychological and physical balance is a prelude to victory.<sup>152</sup> Consequently, designing a concept of operations should include applying the tactic of surprise.

Private military companies are fundamentally business organisations trading in the global marketplace for private military force.<sup>153</sup> PMCs are considered independent legal entities bound to their employees by official contracts.<sup>154</sup> They are driven by corporate profit, and are willing to undertake military-type risks while remaining autonomous from the government.<sup>155</sup> The issue at hand is that designing a concept of operations should include assigning tasks to the basic business functions of a PMC, such as finance and accounting, human resource management, procurement and logistics, and administration.<sup>156</sup>

To conclude this section, by elaborating on several fundamental principles of military theory, doctrine and tactics, the author suggests how to design a concept of operations for PMF to counter a hybrid threat posture. The next section discusses calculating resource requirements.

## **“Means”: Calculating Adequate Resources**

The fourth element in Lykke’s equation is “means”: the resources required to execute ways, which, according to the follow-up research, corresponds to calculating adequate resources. General Eisenhower explains, ‘battles, campaigns, and even wars have been won or lost because of logistics’.<sup>157</sup> Moreover, Gray argues that adequate resources are an essential part of strategy and critical for the attainment of the strategic objective.<sup>158</sup> Any strategy attempted without sufficient resources will flounder at the operational, and tactical levels of war.<sup>159</sup> Calculating adequate resources for PMF to counter a hybrid threat posture is therefore essential. The author therefore suggests how to calculate adequate resources by elaborating on some of the foundational principles of military logistics.

Jomini originally defined military logistics as ‘comprising the means and arrangements which work out the plans of strategy and tactics’.<sup>160</sup> Furthermore, according to the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) handbook, military logistics is defined as ‘the science of planning and carrying out the movement and maintenance of forces’.<sup>161</sup> Additionally, Van Fenema and Van Kampen describe military logistics as the link between the strategic-level instruments of national power on the one hand, and their expression at the operational, and tactical level of war on the other.<sup>162</sup>

The above definitions demonstrate that, for a state, the objective of military logistics is to enable and maintain a condition of readiness for war (fighting power).<sup>163</sup> The fighting power of a state is, however, more than the availability of means; there must also be a commitment to deploy those means if and when required.<sup>164</sup> The alignment between capacity and capability, if properly developed, becomes fighting power.<sup>165</sup> It needs to be appreciated that calculating adequate resources should align private military capacity and capability.

It is important to understand that military logistics is related to various core functions, which can be broadly divided into three groups:

- Firstly, **production** logistics, which is closely connected to the industrial domain, and includes the planning, design and procurement of material and equipment.<sup>166</sup>
- Secondly, **service** logistics, which bridges the gap between production and the user, and is closely related to the functions of procuring, receiving, and storing of material and equipment required for supporting military forces.<sup>167</sup>
- Thirdly, **operational** logistics, which includes distributing material and equipment, the construction of life support facilities, and supplying transport.<sup>168</sup>
- To be clear, calculating adequate resources should include incorporating the above core functions of logistics.

The US deployment in Iraq and Afghanistan required the projection of combat power over an ‘expeditionary distance’, which is broadly defined as ‘any distance over which extended and robust logistical replenishment must occur to sustain combat operations’.<sup>169</sup> In other words, expeditionary logistics is required when military forces operate at some distance from their national support base.<sup>170</sup> Furthermore, Prebilič argues that logistical effectiveness and distance are inversely proportional, with effectiveness reducing as distance increases.<sup>171</sup> The fundamental issue at hand is that calculating adequate resources should make provision for effective expeditionary logistics.

The operational effectiveness of military forces further depends on a high standard of repair and maintenance of equipment.<sup>172</sup> “Repair” refers to implementing measures to restore equipment to a serviceable condition in the shortest possible time.<sup>173</sup> “Maintenance of equipment” implies taking all possible actions to maintain equipment in an operational condition, which naturally depends on a high standard of preventive maintenance.<sup>174</sup> Additionally, the design of equipment must take into consideration the functions of repair and maintenance.<sup>175</sup> Consequently, calculating adequate resources should take into consideration the design, repair and maintenance of equipment.

Fulloon explains that supporting a PMC generally includes a wide range of life support services, such as:

- Construction of installations and facilities;
- Power generation and water treatment services;
- Firefighting and food preparation services; and
- Demining and explosive ordnance disposal (EOD) services.<sup>176</sup>

Of particular importance is ensuring that the petroleum supply chain responds to the operational requirements of the mission.<sup>177</sup> It needs to be appreciated that calculating adequate resources may require close cooperation with civil companies specialising in providing life support services.

In Barlow's book *Human Intelligence*, the author explains, 'intelligence is the fuel that drives any realistic and sustainable strategy ... that it is the lifeblood of any military campaign or operational design'.<sup>178</sup> At the strategic level, intelligence is a pre-requisite for effective political and military liaison activities.<sup>179</sup> At the operational level 'military intelligence advises, assists and guides military commanders'.<sup>180</sup> At the tactical level military intelligence 'is aimed at giving own forces an advantage over the enemy'.<sup>181</sup> To be clear, calculating adequate resources should include delivering intelligence '[to] the right people, at the right time and with the right security'.<sup>182</sup>

In Gray's book *Modern Strategy*, the author argues, 'although resource planning provides for the massing of military force on the battlefield, it also provides for the development of contingency plans and measures'.<sup>183</sup> Contingency planning lays out the various measures that must be taken by an organisation to reduce the risk of the adversary threatening the strategic, operational, and tactical plans for the campaign.<sup>184</sup> Contingency planning likewise provides for a medical system to treat and evacuate sick or injured and wounded personnel.<sup>185</sup> The core issue at hand is that calculating adequate resources should include an integrated contingency plan.

Gray argues, 'no matter the character of a conflict – be it a total war for survival or a contest for limited stakes – almost every campaign is shaped in its course and outcome by the financial dimension'.<sup>186</sup> Furthermore, financial planning is the ability to forecast the financial resources required to pursue a campaign to a successful conclusion.<sup>187</sup> The anticipated financial demand serves to alert defence planners of any potential shortfall which could impede achieving the strategic objective.<sup>188</sup> It needs to be appreciated that calculating adequate resources should include detailed financial planning.

To conclude this section, by elaborating on some of the foundational principles of military logistics, the author suggests how to calculate adequate resources for PMF to counter a hybrid threat posture.

## Conclusion

The primary aim of the follow-up research was to suggest a conceptual framework for PMF to counter a hybrid threat posture. The collective findings of this research suggest that, if private military force is theoretically coherent; is underpinned by a realistic political dimension; is tailored to a creative and non-linear concept of operations; and is adequately equipped and supported by a state, then the concept of private military force as strategy to counter a hybrid threat posture is a compelling notion.



Clausewitz reminds us:

[T]he first, the supreme, the most far-reaching act of judgment which the statesman and commander have to make is to establish the kind of war on which they are embarking; neither mistaking it for nor trying to turn it into something alien to its nature.<sup>189</sup>

Yet, war can take on many forms, and different forms of warfare require varied types of forces, equipment, doctrine, and training. The question that remains is important and basic: Are policymakers willing to empower private military forces to think and act strategically in the grey zone between peace – and the costly, risky, and indefinite commitment of war?

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## Endnotes

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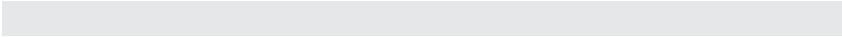
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# Boko Haram: At the Intersection of Regional Security Complexes, Islamism and Gender Dynamics

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## Abstract

Boko Haram has been in existence since 2002. In its more than two decades, it has been the scourge of the region bringing death, destruction and displacement to vast swathes of Nigeria and neighbouring states. Despite strenuous efforts on the part of the Nigerian state, neighbouring countries and the international community, the carnage and breadth of human suffering have grown in intensity as Boko Haram and its offshoots have continued to extend their tentacles into new territories. Despite intense rivalries between Boko Haram and its Islamist rivals, and counter-terrorism efforts, the extremist challenge posed has escalated. Why is this so? Three factors contributed to this failure. First, the research on which this article is based, found that the phenomenon of Boko Haram needs to be understood beyond the borders of Nigeria – as part of a dynamic regional security complex. Second, because analysts under-played the importance of Islamist ideology, the nature of the beast was misunderstood. Policy measures undertaken, based on this misdiagnosis, were then bound to fail. Third, counter-terrorism efforts have also failed due to an important omission – failing to see the relationship between misogyny and extremism.

**Keywords:** Boko Haram, Extremism, Islamism, Misogyny, Muhamad Yusuf, Nigeria, Sahel, Women

## Introduction

The Global Terrorism Index for 2024 is emphatic that terrorism has shifted away from the Middle East towards the Sahel region of sub-Saharan Africa. In fact, the Sahel accounts for almost half of all terrorism-related deaths globally.<sup>2</sup> The unfolding tragedy in the Sahel is reflected in the inability of the Nigerian authorities, neighbouring states, the regional bloc and the international community to end the threat posed by Boko Haram for over two decades. In June 2011, then Nigerian President Goodluck Jonathan established a Special Military Task Force consisting of the army, navy, air force, police, and the Department of State Security in an effort to defeat Boko Haram insurgents. Despite this mobilisation of 30 000 security personnel, Boko Haram continued to thrive.<sup>3</sup> Four years later, Chad and Niger jointly launched a military offensive. Following the retaking of 30 towns and villages from Boko Haram in 2015, citizens were informed that Boko Haram

was confronting imminent defeat.<sup>4</sup> Victory, however, proved elusive. As for the regional bloc – the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) – they have been adept at issuing condemnatory declarations and statements against Boko Haram, but never had the counter-insurgency capacity to follow through.<sup>5</sup>

The international community fared little better despite the investment of billions of dollars in terms of the provision of weapons, training, and the establishment of forward operating sites (FOS) and military operating bases (MOBs). Boko Haram was established in 2002. This was the same year in which the United States (US) established the Pan Sahel Initiative (PSI), which involved stabilising Chad, Niger and Mauritania. Three years later, the PSI morphed into the Trans-Sahara Counter-Terrorism Initiative (TSCTI), which now included Algeria, Morocco, Nigeria, Senegal and Tunisia. The United States also funded various iterations of multinational military exercises, such as the Flintlock exercise, designed to enhance operability amongst the region's armed forces.<sup>6</sup> Still, Boko Haram continued to bedevil counter-terrorism efforts.

Why was this so? Unlike traditional counter-terrorism analyses with its focus on counter-insurgency,<sup>7</sup> the purpose of this article is to emphasise three aspects contributing to the strength and longevity of extremist movements, especially Boko Haram, in the Sahel. These are regional security complexes, the Islamist ideology, and the relationship between misogyny and terrorism. The research on which this article is based, adopted a qualitative method of analysis. Content analysis and the comparative method were employed to examine the evolution and trajectory of Boko Haram.

## On Regional Security Complexes

What constitutes the geographic terrain called the Sahel? For some, it stretches from Senegal in the West, running parallel with the Sahara, to Sudan and Eritrea on the Red Sea.<sup>8</sup> What is interesting about this definition of the Sahel is that it excludes Nigeria, which is the West African behemoth. With a population of 237 million and an area size of 923 768 square kilometres, Nigeria also happens to share borders with so-called Sahelian countries, such as Chad and Niger.<sup>9</sup> Any attempt therefore to understand terrorism in this battle-scarred region while excluding Nigeria is bound to fail.

Moreover, the Sahel – stretching from the Atlantic Sea coast in the west to the coast of the Red Sea in the east – is too wide an area to provide any meaning or context to our attempt to understand terrorism in Nigeria or the broader region. For myself, the Sahel region constitutes the entire north-west Africa on account of the strong historic, cultural, political, religious and economic ties across the region. Moreover, there exists in north-west Africa – the Sahel – an integrated regional conflict system where sources of insecurity are intertwined and mutually reinforcing.<sup>10</sup> After all, Boko Haram operates across the countries of the region with its members spread across Cameroon, Chad, Niger, Nigeria, and Mali. In similar vein, the collapse of the Gaddafi regime in Libya directly precipitated the crisis and rise of terrorism in Mali in 2012 when Malian Tuaregs in the Libyan armed forces together with weapons from Libyan arsenals made their way back

to Mali.<sup>11</sup> Moreover, as early as 2009, Boko Haram started purchasing weapons from Chad, Cameroon, and Niger.<sup>12</sup>

By 2015, the growing interconnections between Islamist groups were laid bare when evidence emerged that groups of 100 Boko Haram fighters at a time were receiving military training at camps in Gao, Mali, which were run by the Movement of Oneness and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO). MUJAO broke away from Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) in order to prosecute the Islamist cause solely in the Sahel/West Africa region. The training received could account for the growing sophistication of Boko Haram attacks from bows and arrows, machetes and Molotov cocktails to suicide car bombings and improvised explosive devices. Worse still, through AQIM and its parent body, Al Qaeda, Boko Haram fighters went on to receive training in Afghanistan, Lebanon, Pakistan, Iraq, Mauritania, and Algeria.<sup>13</sup> Its regional and indeed international connections allow Boko Haram to return to the battlefield after withdrawing when faced with an advancing Nigerian military or those from neighbouring states. Faced with a large counter-terrorism force, Boko Haram often retreats into neighbouring states, secures arms and finances through illicit means from there, receives training, and is able to secure recruits in these territories to replenish their ranks. The consequences of this are seen most graphically and tragically on the ground. In the Nigerian state of Borno alone, 1.8 million residents have been exposed to the violence unleashed by Boko Haram. Meanwhile, Boko Haram violence has also engulfed citizens of Cameroon, Chad, and Niger.<sup>14</sup>

Exacerbating the regional security complex are cross-cutting issues, such as climate change. The Sahel region is warming 1.5 times faster than the global average, as the desert acts as an amplifier of the heat. This adds to the arid nature of the region, intensifying food insecurity and causing conflict between herding, farming, and fishing communities as the quest for water and arable land intensifies. Groups, such as Boko Haram, fuel these communal tensions and exploit popular alienation due to the inability of regional governments to assist local communities.<sup>15</sup> Another aspect of regionalisation of security lies in the fact that ethnic groups and their social organisations or polities were violently suppressed by the colonial state, and the newly independent states that border the region do not correspond to the delineation of restive tribes in the region. Two cases illustrate the point – the Tuaregs and the Kanuri. The Tuaregs reside in several Sahelian states: Algeria, Burkina Faso, Libya, Mali, and Niger. Fiercely independent, these Tuaregs have sought to create their own homeland called Azawad since the nineteenth century. Moreover, for centuries they have violently resisted those who have tried to subjugate them – whether it was the French in the nineteenth century or the respective governments of Mali and Niger during the 1990–1995 and 2007–2009 rebellions.<sup>16</sup> In their quest to overthrow the yokes of a state they do not recognise, Tuareg groups have often forged common bonds with Islamists in the region, including Al Qaeda in the AQIM, Ansar Dine (Defenders of the Faith), the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS) or the MUJAO. Like the Tuaregs, the Kanuri<sup>i</sup> do not recognise the authority of their own state. They had a thriving empire,

<sup>i</sup> The Kanuri want their own precolonial state and seek to unite all their ethnic kin across the different countries. Radical Islamist ideology is weaponised to achieve this purpose. Their purpose is therefore the precolonial state, and radical Islamic ideology is the means to achieve it.

and they seek to restore this pre-colonial empire, which spanned Nigeria, Chad, and Niger.<sup>17</sup> Like the Tuaregs, the Kanuri have made common cause with Islamists. Indeed, the top leadership of Boko Haram resides in Kanuri and Borno State where Boko Haram is most active while the Kanuri are most numerous. Moreover, Boko Haram recruits from its ethnic kin in Chad and Niger.

This regional security complex was again highlighted in July 2024 when Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger broke away from ECOWAS to form their rival confederation – the Alliance of Sahel States. The immediate consequences of this were felt with these states ceasing cooperation with Abuja in the fight against Boko Haram in the Lake Chad Basin by the Multinational Joint Task Force, which has been in existence since 2015. In these circumstances, Boko Haram and other Islamist groups have thrived in the area of the Basin.<sup>18</sup> The importance of emphasising that Boko Haram is not merely Nigerian receives added impetus if one considers the notion of an ummah – the global body of Muslim believers which recognises no borders. Boko Haram's recruits span the entire region.

## Policy Implications

Regional security complexes are difficult to untangle and respond to. As explained above, a Nigerian offensive on the insurgents might well merely exacerbate the challenge of insurgency over the border. Co-ordination is key, and co-operation amongst the border states is vital. No one state can respond to climate change, irredentism (the desire of one state to annex the territory of another), or terrorism in the region. At the precise moment when Islamist groups are merging and co-ordinating (despite the rivalry), the regional body is moribund and indeed risks disintegration with the establishment of the Alliance of Sahel States. Even within states, there is little co-ordination between the different facets of the security establishment. Then there are the perennial coups in the region – nine in the last three years in West Africa with major divides between the political establishment and the military.<sup>19</sup> Moreover, going forward, the spill-over effect of the Russian–Ukrainian conflict is already having its impact on the Sahel region with the Alliance of Sahel States growing closer to the Russian Federation whilst the pro-West ECOWAS seems to be unable to arrive at some sort of co-existence with the likes of Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger. All this undermines the imperative for a common regional strategy to defeat terrorism in the Sahel.

## On Islamism

In 2018, the late Prof. Jim Hentz and I edited a volume entitled *Understanding Boko Haram: Terrorism and Insurgency in Africa*, which brought together a number of African, European, and US scholars attempting to understand the phenomenon of Boko Haram.<sup>20</sup> Over the 300 pages of the book, authors wrestled with issues of ethnicity and economic deprivation coupled with poor governance to explain the rise of Boko Haram. Only one chapter in this volume focused on the religious ideological component accounting for the rise of Boko Haram. In retrospect, we were wrong to give so little attention to the

religious fundamentalist drive, which catapulted Boko Haram from an obscure rural cult into the regional menace it is today. It is this religious fundamentalism, which provides a common identity amongst all those recruited within its ranks. It provides them with the basis to regionalise amongst other like-minded religious ideologues across borders, and allows them to forge ties with other regional and international extremists.

To be clear, when referring to religious fundamentalism we do not refer to Muslims, the vast majority of whom go about practicing their faith peacefully. Rather, it is a reference to “Islamism”. Islamism is a twentieth-century totalitarian ideology that seeks to mould Islamic religious tradition to serve narrow political ends of domination. Khaled Abou El Fadl refers to this as a “puritanical” tradition within Islam noted for its ‘fanatical reductionism and narrow-minded literalism’.<sup>21</sup> All Islamists reject secularism and a liberal polity. In the West, however, there exists a spectrum with Islamists seeking evolutionary change, which could take the form of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood. This brotherhood is involved in both the political realm as well as socially in the form of various educational institutions and charitable foundations to the violent extremists as represented by the likes of Al Qaeda, Islamic State or Al Shabaab and Boko Haram. As this section will illustrate, it is this radical Islamist ideology, which lies at the origins of Boko Haram and drives it. Consequently, policymakers will need to reflect on policy implications of Islamist ideology.

If the Sahel is the new frontier of global jihad, then Nigeria lies at its epicentre with Boko Haram at its bleeding heart. Jama’atu Ahlus Sunnah Lidda’ Awati Wal Jihad (Group of People of Sunnah for Dawah and Jihad) was established in 2002 by Muhamad Yusuf. Yusuf, a well-known preacher and proselytiser opened an Islamic complex with a mosque in Maiduguri where he preached a Salafist brand of Islam and rejected secularism. Across Africa, Islamist movements have expanded in areas where the state is absent, not responsive enough to ordinary people, or indeed behaving malevolently – including abusing citizens and stealing from national coffers. In this environment, the distorted Western-style government represented by Abuja comes to represent the secular government, which Yusuf and his followers found so appalling.

Yusuf began to create an alternative state in Maiduguri. A shura (consultative) council was established which represented a legislative council enacting various policy measures. A religious police was established to enforce shari’a (Islamic law) – fashioned on what Yusuf witnessed in Saudi Arabia during his stint there, and an elementary welfare system was created. Microfinance loans were handed out to locals to begin their own businesses, and employment opportunities were generated by allowing locals to engage in farming on land, which was part of the complex. In the process, surplus food was handed out to the poor, which resulted in more recruits to the cause. Members were encouraged to marry each other, and money for the weddings was provided by Yusuf.<sup>22</sup> In these circumstances, it is understandable that the poor members of society gravitated towards Yusuf and the movement. Yusuf was not only attracting adherents to his interpretation of the Islamic faith from Maiduguri, but also from other parts of Nigeria, Chad, and Niger. One count had it that its membership stood at 280 000 at the time of his death.<sup>23</sup> Yusuf and 1 000 of his followers were eventually killed by security forces in July 2009 following a series of

violent confrontations between Boko Haram and the police. There are no recent estimates of how many fighters Boko Haram had at the time of the current research. Being a terrorist organisation and operating in cells, this is difficult to ascertain

Yusuf's extra-judicial killing by police in 2009 whilst in custody sparked an increased violent trajectory for the Islamist movement under his successor Abubakar Shekhau. Under Shekau's leadership, the group was referred to as Boko Haram<sup>24</sup> on account of their penchant to target schools.<sup>ii</sup> In one night in March 2012, for instance, 12 public schools were set alight in Maiduguri as Boko Haram expressed their revulsion of Western-style schooling.<sup>25</sup> In 2011, as a result of leadership and doctrinal differences, a split occurred within Boko Haram, with Abu Musab al-Barnawi establishing Ansaru. Five years later, in 2016, another Boko Haram splinter became part of the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP).<sup>26</sup> Boko Haram continued its killing spree, with the violence growing increasingly indiscriminate. On 12 January 2025, 40 farmers in Borno state were viciously murdered by Boko Haram fighters whilst in the fields.<sup>27</sup>

Any terrorist organisation however needs financial resources to pay recruits, pay informants, secure weapons and transportation, and so forth. Access to finance, therefore, is the veritable oxygen for any terrorist organisation. Boko Haram, its offshoots and many of the other terror groups operating in the Sahel, secure funds by the smuggling of contraband, taxing hapless citizens and increasing narco-trafficking. This is not, of course, a West African or even Sahelian terrorist phenomenon but a global one. Think here of the Lebanese Hezbollah, which is involved in intellectual property crimes, the diamond trade, cigarette smuggling, and narco-trafficking.<sup>28</sup> As a consequence of this "oxygen", Boko Haram has expanded its area of operations from north-east Nigeria into Chad, Niger, and northern Cameroon. This, of course, constitutes another aspect of the regional security complex and conflict system in existence in north-west Africa, as alluded to earlier. Boko Haram violence has resulted in over a quarter of a million people being displaced, 350 000 killed directly by the violence, and a further 314 000 who had died indirectly as a result of the Boko Haram activities.<sup>29</sup>

## Policy Implications

This brief overview raised a question that has grave implications for policymakers attempting to contain or eradicate the insurgency engulfing Nigeria and neighbouring states, namely is Boko Haram largely the result of local conditions?

There is certainly some truth in this proposition. Historical precedents to Boko Haram go all the way back to 1802–1804 when religious teacher and ethnic Fulani herder, Uthman dan Fodio, declared his jihad to purify Islam. In the process, he established the Sokoto Caliphate, which exists to this day. More recent precedents to Boko Haram's goal of a shari'a-compliant state could be seen in the Maitatsine uprisings in Kano in 1982, in

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<sup>ii</sup> The original meaning of "Boko Haram" was "Western education is forbidden". This is one of the reasons why they targeted schools, but there were also other reasons, as explained in the section dealing with extremism and misogyny and endnote 24.

Kaduna, Bulumkutu and Yola in 1984, and 1985 in Bauchi. All these uprisings represent an effort to impose a religious ideology on a secular Nigerian state in much the same way that Boko Haram is attempting to force Abuja to accept shari'a law across all 36 states of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. Between 1999 and 2008, no fewer than 28 religious conflicts were reported between Muslims and Christians. To exacerbate matters, religious identity is further reinforced by ethnic and regional divisions that serve to shatter the nation-state project.<sup>30</sup>

Should one accept this view – that Boko Haram is the outcome of local settings and histories beyond counter-insurgency – the issue is a more inclusive state. Such state would seek to engage in a common national identity project, and would further seek through better governance to create a more responsive state, one that will attempt to ameliorate the living conditions of ordinary citizens. Indeed, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) is of the opinion that good governance is key in ending the scourge of extremism.<sup>31</sup>

While there is much truth in this, it is however also the case that Boko Haram has interacted with global Islamist extremism from its inception. The mosque complex that Muhammad Yusuf established was named after Ibn Taymiyyah, the fourteenth-century theologian who is regarded as the spiritual godfather of today's extremists. At its origins, Boko Haram was thus ideologically connected to others, professing a more militant version of Islam in the Middle East. This, too, is unique in that, with the exception of the approximately 10 million Nigerian Muslims who are Shi'a, the overwhelming majority of Nigerian Muslims practise Sufi Islam – a more inward-looking Islam trying to be better Muslims through their respective brotherhoods or tariqas.<sup>32</sup> In the case of Nigeria, these were the Qadiriyya and Tijaniyyah brotherhoods. Boko Haram, meanwhile, is avowedly opposed to Sufism, regarding them as apostates. In that sense, Boko Haram's own Islamist ideology is one that most Muslims find alien – one that is imported from the simmering cauldron of the Middle East. This influence of extremist Islamism is evident as one of the first structures Yusuf created was the religious police fashioned on similar organisations in both Sunni Saudi Arabia and Shi'a Iran. The alien nature of Boko Haram's form of Islam was not lost on local Muslims who initially labelled them the 'Nigerian Taliban'.<sup>33</sup>

At its very origins, Boko Haram's ideology lent itself towards violence. Whilst some have argued that Yusuf's successor – Shekhau – took the organisation on a more violent trajectory, there is abundant evidence that this violence lay at its very origins. Just a year after their founding, in 2003, Boko Haram was attacking security forces in Nigeria.<sup>34</sup>

This ideological affinity between Boko Haram and other Islamist movements as well as their proclivity to adopt violence has resulted in dangers of potential collaboration between these groups. Former US AFRICOM (United States Africa Command) commander, General Carter Ham, warned about a 'clearly stated intent by Boko Haram and by Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb to coordinate and synchronise their efforts'.<sup>35</sup> Mohamed Yusuf was also accused of receiving funding from Al Qaeda, while key figures in Boko Haram were understood to have met with Al Qaeda in the AQIM leadership in Niger.<sup>36</sup> Boko Haram has also claimed that it has sent its members for military training to Afghanistan,

Lebanon, Pakistan, Iraq, Mauritania, Algeria, Somalia, and Yemen while conducting training with MUJAO in northern Mali. Boko Haram's spokesman, on the return of some of their trainees from Somalia, went on to state:

We want to make it known that our jihadists have arrived in Nigeria from Somalia where they received real training on warfare from those who made that country ungovernable ... This time round, our attacks will be fiercer and wider than they ever have been.<sup>37</sup>

He was not wrong. The training received at the foreign camps accounted for the growing sophistication of Boko Haram attacks. From suicide bombings to synchronised assaults – such as witnessed in Mumbai in November 2008 – Boko Haram's newly trained fighters spread terror across the region through an increased lethality. The quality of the explosives used also demonstrated Boko Haram's increasing sophistication. Increasingly, powerful explosives such as pentaerythritol tetranitrate (PETN) and triacetone triperoxide (TAPT) were used in shaped charges designed to magnify the impact of the blast.<sup>38</sup> With the death of Shekau and his replacement by Bakura Doro in 2021, Boko Haram's tactics changed further with emphasis on the preservation of the lives of fighters. Consequently, there were no impulsive charges and the like, but the emphasis was rather on ambushes, targeted assassinations and so forth. By 2024, Boko Haram was set to move from a rural insurgency to target cities as well.<sup>39</sup>

The external influence over Boko Haram was also evident in the changing choice of targets. On 26 June 2011, the headquarters of the UN in the Nigerian capital Abuja was targeted. Until then, Boko Haram largely focused its attacks on Nigerian government officials, police stations, and the like. This change of targeting may well have reflected Boko Haram going global in much the same way that Al Shabaab had. It could also reflect the influence that these external groups were having over Boko Haram. In 2006, AQIM similarly attacked the UN offices in Algiers.<sup>40</sup> Fast forward to 2022, and following Ansaru's reaffirmation of its pledge of allegiance to Al Qaeda, AQIM once again militarily supported Ansaru's campaigns in Nigeria. With the support of AQIM and forging alliances with local bandits and interestingly enough securing weapons from Boko Haram, Ansaru's military campaign gained momentum throughout 2022 and 2023 and now de facto controls large swathes of territory in Kaduna, Katsina, and Zamfara states.

Boko Haram, meanwhile, has been strengthening its ties with Al Qaeda in the Lake Chad Basin area and deeper into neighbouring states.<sup>41</sup> Its regional expansion has not only been aided by Al Qaeda but also by its rapidly increasing war chest through extortion of local communities. Those who did not or could not pay, such as hapless rice farmers in Borno State throughout 2024, were summarily executed. With its expansion, Boko Haram has been emphasising its grievances against the Nigerian state less, and more its global Islamist identity.<sup>42</sup> ISWAP, the other Boko Haram off-shoot, is meanwhile engaging in greater collaboration with other Islamic State franchises, notably ISGS. This synergy between the two kindred organisations was seen throughout 2022 to 2024 in countries such as Mali, Burkina Faso, Benin, Togo and Niger. Interestingly, what cements this collaboration is the international Islamist takfiri<sup>43</sup> doctrine, which both organisations share.<sup>44</sup>



The regionalisation and internationalisation of Boko Haram and its franchises hold significant policy implications. This makes the conflict hard to resolve. In keeping with regional security complexes, the regional dimensions of the conflict means that Nigerian policymakers cannot hope to resolve the challenge of Boko Haram without –

- Neutralising Boko Haram camps in the region outside the Nigerian border;
- The smuggling of contraband across borders;
- The financial support and weapons Boko Haram receives from regional Islamist franchises; and
- The support Boko Haram receives from international Islamic parent bodies, such as Al Qaeda and the Islamic State.

Whilst a political ideological disposition makes it hard to find compromise between conflicting parties, religious ideological positions are notoriously difficult to deal with since fundamentalists conflate their own position with that of God. A dogmatic and doctrinaire position makes any possible negotiation as mooted by some, impossible to achieve.

The second issue confronting policymakers relates to how one can defeat Boko Haram when they operate like a social welfare organisation thereby ensuring the loyalty of locals and constant recruitment into the organisation. Yusuf, we observed, provided food and jobs for the poor and money for young men to get married.<sup>45</sup> Ansaru is following this tradition, and has been providing food and cash to residents as well as fertilisers, pesticides and other agricultural products to farmers. Whilst the Nigerian government has lost the minds and hearts of locals, given its dereliction of its duty to its citizens, thereby tearing up any social contract between political rulers and those being governed, it is clear that Ansaru has taken the time and effort to build a sustained presence in the region and has developed a rapport with locals. To be sure, there is also intimidation of residents living in areas controlled by Ansaru. They are forbidden from participating in any secular political party activities and anything that may be construed as the promotion of democracy. Ansaru regards democracy – like secular education – as antithetical to Islamic precepts of governance. Even this compares favourably with Nigerian security forces engaging in dragnet arrests, extracting confessions through torture, sexual violence, and stealing from locals.<sup>46</sup>

The social welfare activities where Boko Haram and its offshoots are engaged, are in keeping with their efforts to create an Islamic caliphate.<sup>47</sup> By engaging in such welfare activities, peoples' loyalties shift from the state to these Islamist militants. Here, Abuja is particularly vulnerable on account of its uncaring attitude towards its citizens and its endemic corruption. Consider the fact that, despite its vast oil wealth, Nigeria occupies the low end of the latest Human Development Index coming in at an appalling 161. Life expectancy in Nigeria is a mere 53,6 years, and the expected years of schooling is a paltry 10,5 years.<sup>48</sup> According to Nigerian governments statistics, 63 per cent of Nigerians may be classified as multidimensionally poor – with the majority of these in north of the country where the majority of Muslims reside providing a regional and religious dimension to poverty. These are also the areas, of course, where the Islamists operate.<sup>49</sup>

Of course, what the Nigerian militants are doing is not unique. Hillel Fritsch refers to Hamas as a ‘social welfare government’ given its propensity to assist Gazans with food, health care, educational facilities (with the support of the United Nations) and assistance for weddings and the like.<sup>50</sup> In retrospect, this is hardly surprising, since this is how the Muslim Brotherhood<sup>51</sup> operates. In doing so, Hamas – as an off-shoot of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood in Gaza – has managed to secure, retain and expand its support in countries, such as Egypt, where the Muslim Brotherhood operates. In Lebanon, Hezbollah meanwhile provides subsidised or free medication to the elderly and the poor. Hezbollah has also started a new grocery chain, called “Al Nour Supermarkets”, which provide low-cost food products to the populace. Given the financial crisis and meltdown of the economy, which has seen the value of the Lebanese pound decline precipitously, this is generally welcomed by struggling Lebanese.<sup>52</sup> Boko Haram’s tactics<sup>iii</sup> therefore fit into the playbook of other Islamist groupings globally.

At the heart of social contract theory – from the times of Protagoras through Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, Jean Jacques Rousseau and to John Rawls in the contemporary era – lies the truth that people agree to be a part of a polity and willingly surrender their sovereignty in exchange for certain goods from the state, whether physical protection or social welfare.<sup>53</sup> The Nigerian state, however, exists as a predatory and oppressive one where wealth is extracted for the benefit of a tiny political elite.<sup>54</sup> In such a context, the state can make little to no progress winning hearts and minds of citizens. In this context, Boko Haram and its offshoots will continue to gain ground as citizens transfer their allegiance from Abuja to these militants who will continue to develop proto-states and expand these at the expense of the state.

The implications of the growing engagement between Boko Haram and its offshoots with criminality need greater attention from policymakers. Given the abundant profits to be made from criminal enterprises in the region, these Islamist groups have started clashing each other. ISWAP, the Boko Haram offshoot, initially took the offensive against Boko Haram following the death of its leader Abubakar Shekhau in 2021. Under its new leader, Bakura Doro, Boko Haram however regrouped and transformed their military arm from one focusing on an urban terror campaign to engaging in rural guerrilla warfare. Unlike ISWAP, which has been focusing on having a relationship with citizens and attempting to govern them in exchange for taxes and preventing their militants from engaging in raping and pillaging, Boko Haram fighters are known for their brutality, their extortion of local residents, and their stealing and sexual violence (more on this in the next section). The fear, which their behaviour has instilled among residents and their rivals, resulted in their launching multiple offensives, which has resulted in their being in control of the Lake Chad Basin, the Sambisa Forest and the Mendera Mountains.<sup>55</sup> From here, of course, they can further their expansion into Cameroon, Chad, and Niger. Unlike ISWAP, Boko Haram – under Doro – does not even seem to want to attempt to govern or provide an alternative to the secular Nigerian state. Terror now exists for the sake of terror with

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<sup>iii</sup> Boko Haram’s tactics of donating food, providing rudimentary governance of the regions they control (brutal as it may be), providing cash to young men to marry, and teaching them skill sets therefore fit into the playbook of other Islamist groupings globally.

the murderous takfiri ideology at its core. This ideology casts even practising Muslims out of the Islamic fold if they do not subscribe to the radical Islamist ideology described earlier. This means that they can be targeted to be killed.

## The relationship between misogyny and extremism

For far too long, the issue of gender and its relationship to terrorism has been ignored by mainstream scholarship on terrorism. Recent research, however, is increasingly drawing on the relationship between misogyny and terrorism. By misogyny, I mean the ‘belief in man’s innate role in the protection of women and in the rightness of women’s subordination’.<sup>56</sup> In 2024, the British Home Secretary, Yvette Cooper, cogently drew the connection between violent misogyny and Islamist and far-right extremism.<sup>57</sup> On this basis, the British government now treats extreme misogyny as a form of extremism. Utilising datasets from the Pew Research Centre<sup>58</sup> as well as the United Nations Development Programme’s 2023 Gender Social Norms Index,<sup>59</sup> the great Austrian political scientist, Prof. Arno Tausch, concludes that gender social norms are the decisive factors leading to the support of terrorist activities.<sup>60</sup> Why is this so? Practically all religions hold conservative positions about women with similar roles they must fulfil. In the Bible, for instance, Genesis 1:28 speaks about going forth and multiplying. Islamists, however, are more prone towards patriarchy and misogyny than other faiths for reasons outlined below.<sup>61</sup>

It was in the Ancient Near East, the birthplace of all three Abrahamic faiths, where patriarchy developed between 3100 BC and 600 BC. Speaking about this period, Gerda Lerner writes, ‘Men learned to institute dominance and hierarchy over other people by their earlier practice of dominance over the women of their own group.’<sup>62</sup> This is important since it makes clear the intrinsic connection between authoritarianism generally and the subjugation of women. Patriarchy thus remains entrenched today across the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region<sup>iv</sup> reinforced by faith, culture, and a closed political and economic system. Only 24 per cent of women in the MENA region are employed, compared to 77 per cent of their male counterparts who are employed. Of Algerians and Egyptians, 80 per cent believe that men are better political leaders than women.<sup>63</sup> Whilst the European Reformation provided the impetus for the emancipation of women in Christendom, there have been no similar reforms of the Islamic faith – despite valiant efforts to this end.<sup>64</sup> Consequently, as these statistics convey, the status of women lags far behind that of men.

As in the MENA region, patriarchy is deeply entrenched at all levels in Nigeria with authority invested in men who serve as custodians of their cultures. These custodians also serve to enforce compliance with certain cultural and social norms. Sanctions are then applied to those who perceive to transgress these norms. Commenting on this, Adejuwon Soyinka states:

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<sup>iv</sup> The following countries are normally included in MENA: Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates, Palestine, and Yemen.

[Patriarchy and misogyny in Nigeria is seen] in the denigration of the female gender, social, cultural and political subjugation of females, exclusion of the female gender from public office, sexual exploitation and aggression against females; and denial of female rights and agency. These forms of patriarchy create inequality between the gender groups and result in unequal access to rights and privileges.<sup>65</sup>

Whilst this is true of all Nigeria, it is worth noting that patriarchy and misogyny are more intense in the largely Muslim north than in the overwhelming Christian south, which happens to be economically more developed and more liberal than Muslim north.<sup>66</sup> With the enactment of shari'a law in 12 of 19 northern states in Nigeria, and the ideological shift from Sufi Islam to extremist Islam, the position of women in northern Nigeria has further deteriorated. With the most restrictive form of shari'a law adopted in these northern states, women have been transformed into second-class citizens with their civic participation, socio-economic empowerment, property rights and inheritance all severely restricted.<sup>67</sup>

It is in this bubbling cauldron that one needs to understand Boko Haram's own misogyny. Boko Haram, from its very origins, systematically exploited women and committed acts of sexual violence under the guise of religiously sanctioned marriages – often repeated “marriages”. Abubaker Shekau justified the “marriage” of girls between 9 and 12 on religious grounds arguing that Aisha, the wife of the prophet, was this age when she married.<sup>68</sup> The early age of marriage of young girls was also the main reason for Boko Haram systemically kidnapping young girls from school. According to Shekau, the attendance of school was a violation of their Islamic role as women, being wives and mothers.<sup>69</sup>

This systematic rape – for that is what it is – serves the purpose of rewarding its own members for their loyalty, and can be a useful recruitment tactic for young men as well as to spread fear amongst local communities. Through repeated rape and gang rape, Boko Haram fighters deliberately tried to impregnate women. This was justified on Islamic grounds through a distorted and self-serving interpretation of a hadith,<sup>70</sup> which states, ‘every infant is born with a natural predisposition of accepting Islam, but parents can socialize their infants to accept other religions’. The deliberate impregnation of women then serves to increase the ranks of the faithful and would also increase the ranks of Boko Haram. Boko Haram's misogyny first came to the international attention in 2014 when they captured 276 girls from a rural high school in Chibok.<sup>71</sup> In truth, and in keeping with their name, whilst attempting to keep all children away from Western (secular) schooling, Boko Haram specifically targeted girls from attending school for the reason outlined above.<sup>72</sup>

The capture of the Chibok girls as well as the capture of 101 young girls from a school in Dapchi, in Yobe State, also served another strategic purpose. In the former case, they used the Chibok girls and the publicity surrounding their capture as hostages with the Nigerian government demanding the release of senior Boko Haram commanders in custody. In the latter case, they used the girls to secure a handsome ransom for their release thereby augmenting their war chests.<sup>73</sup> Beyond the pain, suffering and trauma with which these girls were confronted, this violence was strategic in nature. Mia Bloom and Hilary Matfess

eloquently argue, ‘Violence against women and girls is often intended to humiliate their families and communities, wherein women and girls are “bearers of honour” and men are shamed for failing to protect “their” women.’<sup>74</sup> The same logic is at play in the Middle East.

Despite Boko Haram’s inclination to have women confined to the domestic realm, this has not prevented them from using females as suicide bombers. Al Chukwuma Okoli argues that the use of female suicide bombers is useful for two interrelated reasons.<sup>75</sup> First, state security surveillance is generally less suspicious of women than of men. Female suicide bombers can therefore easily evade surveillance and detonate their deadly cargo. Second, the utilisation of women as suicide bombers means that the militants can conserve their male recruits for combat on other fronts. Girls as young as 7 years of age have been used by Boko Haram as suicide bombers.<sup>76</sup> They had no idea that they had explosives, designed to kill them and those in their immediate vicinity, being strapped to them.

The misogyny displayed by Boko Haram is no different from that displayed by other Islamists in Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, Mali, Somalia or Syria.<sup>77</sup> In Afghanistan, the return of the Taliban has seen girls being prevented from receiving an education. This is very much in keeping with Boko Haram’s own actions in Nigeria. Islamic State, meanwhile, has earned global notoriety for their forced conversion and sexual enslavement of Yazidi women.<sup>78</sup> Perhaps the most egregious and recent example of this type of Islamist misogyny occurred during the Hamas attack on Israel on 7 October 2023.

On 7 October 2023, Hamas launched a surprise attack on Israel in which 1 200 people were killed and 3 300 wounded. In addition, hundreds of hostages were taken. What has not been discussed about this attack is the systemic and deliberate sexual violence Hamas unleashed. Sheryl Sandberg’s recent documentary, *Screams Before Silence*, finally highlighted this matter with eyewitness and first responder accounts, telling how 364 people were brutally killed at the Nova rave party on 7 October. Repeated rapes took place as well as the genital mutilations and disfigurement of women’s bodies.<sup>79</sup> Unlike Chibok survivors, most of these rape victims were killed, and will never be able to testify what they had experienced. Others, because of the shame associated, may not come forward. One witness provided a chilling account of how four Hamas men surrounded a woman at the Nova event.<sup>80</sup> They stripped her and proceeded to take turns raping her. After this, they stabbed her and raped her again. Once again, this brings home the importance of understanding Boko Haram within the wider context of other extremist Islamist movements and to view them first and foremost through the prism of their own radical fundamentalism ideology.

## Policy Implications

Despite the fact that misogyny has been weaponised into the arsenal of Islamist terrorist groups everywhere, the reality is that scholars researching terrorism have left it to those in gender studies to focus on these aspects – largely from the perspective of trauma. Meanwhile, policymakers have not incorporated the issue of gender into their broader counter-terrorism policy.<sup>81</sup> This is unforgivable. As Rosemary DiCarlo, UN Under-

Secretary General stated, “Just as misogyny is at the heart of so many terrorist groups’ strategies, so must women be at the centre of our responses.”<sup>82</sup>

There is, however, an urgent need to go beyond seeing women as merely victims of terrorism, and to look to them as a fundamental bulwark to Islamist militancy. This emerged from interviews conducted by the Institute for Inclusive Security in 30 countries – from the MENA countries to South Asia. They found that women were the first to become aware of the rise in violent extremism in their communities and the first to resist its spread. Explaining the reason for this, Sia Jyoti opines that these women were well aware that they were often the first victims of fundamentalism and knew it entailed the curtailment of their rights as well as the increase of domestic violence at home. Women could also make the connection between gender-based violence (GBV) and armed conflict.<sup>83</sup>

Other research reinforces this connection between GBV and Islamist extremism. In 2012, whilst studying at Manchester College, unassuming Salman Abedi punched a female student on the head. His reason: her skirt was too short. Five years later, Abedi detonated a bomb in a crowded Manchester Arena killing 22 concertgoers and injuring a thousand others. At this stage, Abedi was an Islamic State member. Then there was the case of Omar Mateen. In 2016, he killed 49 people and wounded 53 others at the Pulse Nightclub in Orlando, Florida. Before he became an Islamic State terrorist, Mateen constantly abused his own wife. These cases are not an aberration. A 2022 study from the Combatting Terrorism Centre at West Point Military Academy demonstrated that 36 per cent of all Islamic State members with a criminal history had previously been arrested for GBV.<sup>84</sup>

It is precisely for this reason that policymakers need to go beyond viewing gender narrowly from a counter-terrorism lens and to have a whole-of-society approach. Aneela Salman powerfully writes, ‘females’ actual advancement and equality in education, employment and political representation are more effective in reducing terrorism’<sup>85</sup>

## Conclusion

Boko Haram and its offshoots demonstrate all the characteristics of a religious cult – a manipulative and authoritarian leadership, a communal and totalitarian organisation coupled with aggressive proselytising and systemic programmes of indoctrination reinforce a belief system that ostensibly has the answers to all life questions. Religious texts are perverted to support the aims and objectives of the organisation and/or its leader. Moreover, the Boko Haram and Islamists ideologies are misogynistic and violent.

Nigerians and the Sahel region have suffered under their orgy of violence for 22 years. The Nigerian state has proved itself to be unable to ameliorate, if not eliminate, the threat posed by the militants. Whilst the threat is regional in scope and needs to be confronted both within the borders of Nigeria as well as in neighbouring states, the region itself is unstable as witnessed in the number of coups in West Africa. In addition, the desperate needed support from the international community is simply not forthcoming. The Ukraine–Russian War, the ongoing crisis in the Middle East, as well as a potential conflict between

the United States and China is distracting attention away from the Sahel despite it being the epicentre of global terrorism. Moreover, the region is currently witnessing waning Western influence as Western forces depart, and others, notably Russia, gain strategic footholds in this area.

All however is not lost if the United States working with strategic partners in the region and European allies remain engaged. This engagement however needs to move beyond arming of militaries and supporting governments, which violate good governance. Doing so will merely reinforce the Islamist narrative of a corrupt and evil government being supported by the Great Satan. Here is what can be done:

- The counter-insurgency campaign can be undertaken more effectively, specifically in areas such as the Sambisa Forest and the Mendera Mountains where forces need to be concentrated. Importantly, civilian casualties need to be kept to a minimum and government services need to move rapidly into an area to take over the social welfare element, which Islamists provide to communities.
- We have witnessed how Boko Haram used Islamic texts to justify their actions. More moderate Islam needs to be promoted but it is important to ensure that this moderate Islam should not be co-opted by the authorities, or it will lose all legitimacy.
- The intelligence community needs to focus on breaking the umbilical cord binding local terror franchises with international Islamists, such as Al Qaeda and the Islamic State. This umbilical cord entails financial flows, arms trafficking, and military training.
- The growing collaboration between Islamist insurgents and criminal networks also needs to be disrupted by the intelligence community.
- Issues of gender need to be taken into account as part of a broader counter-terrorism approach – not only viewing women as victims but also recognising their agency in combatting extremism.

This war against Boko Haram and its offshoots and affiliates can still be won.

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## Endnotes

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# How Environmental Factors Affected Escaped Allied Prisoners of War in the Abruzzo and Molise Regions, Italy, 1943

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## Abstract

The current study centred on the journey of a party of three Allied prisoners of war (two New Zealanders and one South African), who escaped from the Prigione di Guerra (PG)78/1 camp (henceforth referred to as PG78/1) at Acquafredda near Roccamorice. In this article, the researcher discusses the environmental conditions they faced on their epic journey to British lines near Campobasso. In particular, the bioclimatological factor was examined, as well as other factors, such as river depth, animal presence, and terrain. The literature review employed for the current study comprised memoirs by escaped prisoners of war, popular histories, and recent studies by South African scholars. A mixed-method methodology was adopted, as meteorological data were obtained from the Italian Meteorological Service (Agenzia ItaliaMeteo, henceforth referred to as “ItaliaMeteo”), from enquiries made to a number of organisations, and during a fieldtrip conducted in the Abruzzo and Molise areas of Italy. The meteorological data provided were excellent; indeed, the study stands by these data. River depth and wildlife were not judged to be major impediments. Enquiries to organisations yielded excellent information, and the fieldtrip provided outstanding context and understanding. It was concluded that the escapees were very fortunate with the timing of the Italian surrender in terms of weather extremes as well as the fact that the local people, the Abruzzesi, went out of their way – at great risk to themselves – to assist the escapees.

**Keywords:** Prisoners of War, Italy, Second World War, Bioclimatology, Environmental Factors, Maiella

## Introduction

On the eve of the Italian armistice in early September 1943, the prisoners of war (POWs) interned at Acquafredda (PG78/1), when instructed by their Italian captors to march to the main camp at Sulmona (PG78), instead rebelled, and made a run for it into the mountains. One of those POWs was the author’s father, Private George Edward Heath. His war record states that he was a POW from 20 June 1942 until 19 October 1943.<sup>2</sup> Heath then escaped together with two New Zealanders (their identities are unknown, and it is not known where exactly they were captured). In the letter, Heath wrote to the Award Publications Ltd in Surrey (applying for the unofficial Prisoner of War Medal),

he stated that he was in the Sulmona subsidiary camp, which was occupied mainly by Australians. In the application form, he writes, 'Escaped from St Margerita October 1943. Met patrol Green Howards at Termoli.'<sup>3</sup> In reality, he escaped from Acquafredda, the only subsidiary camp to the Sulmona one,<sup>4</sup> and met the Green Howards upriver from Termoli, at a place called Petrella Tifernina.<sup>5</sup> The camp at Acquafredda is described in this way by a correspondent on WW2Talk, 'Campo PG 78/1, Acquafredda [*sic.*], was a work camp 2,000 feet up in the hills north east of Sulmona. It was administered from Campo PG 78 at Sulmona.'<sup>6</sup> It appears from the discussion that the camp had 250 New Zealand, 50 South African, and several United Kingdom (UK) prisoners.<sup>7</sup> A number of photographs still exist, published by the National Library of New Zealand: one shows the hutments, and another, the main gate, of PG78/1 by one HR Dixon.<sup>8</sup> These photographs show the dry summer conditions, the beautiful hills around, the threadbare clothes of the POWs, and the double barbed wire fencing around the camp. Mason describes the inmates of the camp as being in a highly favourable location from which to escape, as the camp was isolated from enemy patrols and presence, at the foot of a major mountain range, and had routes to safety southwards.<sup>9</sup>

While in PG78/1, Heath's group knew that the Allies had landed in the south of Italy and that was where they had to go. While journeying south, the group connected with the Italian partisans (Heath once described to his sons a partisan action in which he took part).<sup>10</sup> Gordon Duncan, another New Zealand escapee (not connected with Heath's group), describes a partisan action at Palombaro in early October 1943, 'where a band of Italian patriots had set upon and killed a truck-load of German soldiers'.<sup>11</sup> This action would have heightened the enemy presence in the area, especially with regard to taking action against escaping POWs and their helpers. Escaping was an extremely dangerous business: the Sangro River Cemetery 'contains the graves of a number of escaped prisoners of war who died while trying to reach the Allied lines'.<sup>12</sup>

The approximate route the group took from 11 September (after the Italian armistice and capitulation on 8 September 1943) until 19 October 1943, as ascertained from map analysis, is as follows: Acquafredda outside Roccamorice, Passo Lanciano, Pennapiedimonte, Sangro River, Cantagufu, Civitella Raimondo, Gessopalena, Terranova, Pennadomo, Montazzoli, Padule, Trigno River, Trivento, il Casone, Biferno River and Petrella Tifernina (see Map 1).<sup>13</sup> This translates to a 75 km straight-line distance (30 cm\*2.5 km). Mason writes that New Zealand POWs crossed the Maiella range, to reach Pennapiedimonte and Guardagrele at its base.<sup>14</sup> Finally, on 19 October 1943, Heath's group reached freedom.<sup>15</sup> For the New Zealanders in Duncan's group who reached Petrella (Tifernina) approximately four days before Heath's group, the route was from Acquafredda to Capolegrotte, to below Palombaro, to Rocca Scalegna, to Bomba, to above Villa Santa Maria, to above Castiglione, to above Salcito, to below Trivento, and to Petrella.<sup>16</sup> It is highly probable that this was the route followed by Heath's party too, as this was the route that had proved to be successful and fit to be repeated. As the regimental historian of a British Army regiment<sup>17</sup> explains, 'During this period a number of allied prisoners-of-war made their way into the Green Howards lines, as many as seventeen during the course of one night'.<sup>18</sup> Holland maps the advance of the British XIII Corps (to which the Green Howards would have been attached) across the Biferno between 14 and 27 October 1943.<sup>19</sup> Mason writes

about significant numbers (50) of New Zealanders from PG78/1 reaching Allied units along the Termoli–Campobasso road in the Biferno valley.<sup>20</sup>

As far as is known, no study has yet addressed the environmental conditions the POWs faced. Many studies and books deal with the military hazards (for example minefields and other defensive hazards, enemy troops, random artillery shelling) en route to Allied lines but environmental issues are referred to only tangentially.<sup>21</sup> The current study was the first that sought to address the environmental conditions from start to finish.

## Literature Review

Regarding the historical context of the influence of bioclimatology on escape and evasion in the North African desert (where Heath and his New Zealand fellow escapees had served and where they had been captured), Horn<sup>22</sup> relates the immediate experiences of the South Africans after the Tobruk surrender, including the extreme privation they experienced and also some escape attempts in an environment that would kill one if one became lost and ran out of especially water. According to Horn:<sup>23</sup>

On average, the Tobruk POWs spent five months in North African camps, but this was a long time to live on rumour, hard biscuits and bully beef, and a few POWs decided to escape and take their chances in the desert. Most POWs believed escape would be too dangerous because they did not have sufficient water or food and they were not sure of the local population's loyalties. Failed escapes were also a big deterrent.

Moreover, Kleynhans and Gordon<sup>24</sup> write about South African evaders and escapers in the Western Desert of North Africa. While environmental factors were generally tangential to the almost reckless adventure of group escapes, in one case, a South African soldier walked out of a POW camp 'under the cover of a dust-storm'.<sup>25</sup> As to be expected in a desert environment, the main challenges were food and water. Kleynhans and Gordon say, 'many South African servicemen chose to set out with insufficient food and water ... and therefore suffered huge privations during their bids for freedom due to the harsh desert climate and terrain'.<sup>26</sup>

The collapse of the Italian fascist regime in July–September 1943 led to the release of thousands of Allied (chiefly British Commonwealth) POWs into the Italian countryside. This has been well documented by authors such as Bosworth, Carver, Deakin, Gooch, Krige, Saunders, Schou and Holland.<sup>27</sup> For example, Holland and Duncan write about New Zealand POWs in the mountains outside Pretoro, to the west of Acquafredda, during the last week of September 1943.<sup>28</sup> Scherman<sup>29</sup> considers the matter from a 2<sup>nd</sup> South African Infantry Division perspective, and writes,

[W]hen it became known by the prisoners inside Campo No. 78 (Sulmona) that the Germans were planning to move them all northwards into the Third Reich, many of the division's officers decided to try and escape ... this sudden desire to escape to prisoner fear. Fear that

Germany might continue to resist for years to come or would by some diplomatic manoeuvre with Russia, bring about a peace not so disadvantageous to them.<sup>i</sup> Additionally, the prisoners believed that the war would ultimately move into Germany itself, ... nobody wanted to be a prisoner in Germany when it became the main battlefield of the war.

Foot and Langley however write that MI9, the British escape organisation, had issued an order for POWs 'to stay put, to await release; not to attempt to break out of camp, or to assist the Anglo-American air forces in their attacks on the enemy's communications'.<sup>30</sup> This is corroborated by Krige,<sup>31</sup> and by Chutter who was imprisoned at PG21 (Chieti), about 22 km northeast from Acquafredda, who writes, 'Definite orders were received from the War Office that all P.O.W.s were to stay put in their camps and await the arrival of British Staff officers.'<sup>32</sup> Chutter, along with his fellow captives (mainly UK and US officers) waited, only to be picked up by German paratroops on 21 September 1943.<sup>33</sup> Mason,<sup>34</sup> in the official New Zealand history of the POWs from that country, writes that the reason for the order was administrative, as POWs in congregated places would be easier to evacuate.

POWs had to cross extremely difficult terrain,<sup>35</sup> such as a major mountain range, the Maiella, and four river valleys (i.e. the Sangro, Verde, Sinello and Tremiti), and a variety of environmental conditions to reach Allied lines along the Biferno River, which flows into the sea near Termoli.<sup>36</sup> Among these factors would have been bioclimatological challenges, such as altitude, human energy budget, and cold effects, inadequate clothing, weather and other hazards.<sup>37</sup> The POWs were dressed in threadbare clothing after more than 15 months of captivity (in the case of Heath), and now had to navigate extremely difficult terrain under a variety of meteorological factors (September and October are autumn months in the northern hemisphere).<sup>38</sup> They also had to navigate the enemy's Gustav, Barbara and Volturno defensive lines<sup>ii</sup> safely.<sup>39</sup>

While the highest point (Monte Amaro) in the Maiella reaches 2 793 metres above sea level (masl)<sup>iii</sup> and can, in no way, be compared to Himalayan peaks, malnourished and inadequately clad escaped POWs would have battled (and did) on those slopes and peaks.<sup>40</sup> The lack of clothing (and food) is mentioned by Foot and Langley as a very serious obstacle to escaping:

Most prisoners of war were simply caught napping by the Italian armistice and change of sides. Those who had not devoted much, if any, thought to escape had neither food nor clothes available with which to sustain themselves on a walk towards the Allied lines, which turned out to be stuck hundreds of miles away.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>i</sup> Erratum. Scherman means "a peace not so advantageous to them".

<sup>ii</sup> From the Gustav line, the escape route followed the Sangro River, the Barbara line, the Trigno River, the Volturno line, and the Biferno River. Navigating defended lines would have increased the environmental hazards present, for example the time spent in the open.

<sup>iii</sup> In the context of mountains and geography, masl stands for meters above sea level.



Chutter, writing about the PG21 POWs, states, ‘clothing seriously inadequate for the rigours of the icy Apennine winds of winter’.<sup>42</sup> Carver recounts a story about a British POW who encountered ice on the mountains and lost his footing:

[B]y late November they had reached the rear of the German defences of the GUSTAV line north of the Sangro, by which time the higher mountains were covered with snow and it was no longer possible to live off the country.<sup>43</sup>

Much to the surprise of the POWs, the local Italian people assisted them with the provision of food and shelter, as well as guiding them safely through the enemy lines.<sup>44</sup> The independence of the local peasants regarding government authorities headquartered in the plains and cities of Italy has been documented by historians, such as Armiero.<sup>45</sup> In part, this independence, as has been shown, was extended to anyone on the run or evading the authorities; hence, the support to the POWs. Other environmental hazards would have included wolves and bears,<sup>46</sup> although Duncan makes no mention of them.<sup>47</sup> According to Van Gils *et al.*, bears concentrate in beech forests and the southernmost part of the Maiella National Park (MNP) in autumn.<sup>48</sup> As these writers explain, ‘Our climate-only SDMs [species distribution models] predicted bear presence in areas with relatively low snowfall and temperate temperatures’, and ‘Bears were predicted in autumn and winter by beech forest, in spring by meadows and in summer by a variety of vegetation categories’.<sup>49</sup> The other major mammal, the wolf, is described by Di Francesco *et al.* who write, ‘Based on the last studies, the MNP wolf population is estimated at 90 to 100 animals distributed in 10–11 packs, showing a high population density’.<sup>50</sup> The wolves seemed to be concentrated in the north and centre of the park.<sup>51</sup> Holland writes about sheepdogs fighting off wolves in 1943, and Haines lists boars and lynxes among those animals sighted (the former quite frequently and the latter very rarely seen).<sup>52</sup> Krige tells of an Italian soldier who died crossing the Morrone during a winter in the early 1950s, after being attacked by a wolf.<sup>53</sup>

The area through which the POWs moved has a history of environmental protection, including a ban on the hunting of bears (the Marsican bear) in a neighbouring national park (the Abruzzo National Park).<sup>54</sup> Later, in 1991, the MNP was proclaimed. Topography and powerful winds have been covered by Whitehead,<sup>55</sup> and general meteorological conditions by Haines.<sup>56</sup> Liberatoscioli *et al.* detail in depth the multitude of peaks and rivers of the range massif, plus present-day tourist facilities.<sup>57</sup>

Barron describes at length how the range is perceived by local inhabitants, and uses no fewer than 11 different adjectives to describe the range.<sup>58</sup> He writes

For as far as it can be seen, the Majella exerts a strong influence on the Abruzzesi surrounding it – at once protectively welcoming and also ominously threatening them. With good reason they can be commonly heard to exclaim: ‘Managgia alla Majella!’ (Damn the Majella!) – for the mountain, like a deity, is simultaneously capable of phenomenal beauty and severe destruction.<sup>59</sup>

Krige's first impressions of the Maiella were essentially the same, 'I looked up at the Maiella ... its massive bulk, clear of clouds, loomed over us, black and menacing.'<sup>60</sup> The same writer also refers to the history of the area regarding people seeking sanctuary, 'from military or police persecution, the Majella retains an aura of shelter'.<sup>61</sup>

The famous South African writer, Uys Krige, tells how he escaped from the main camp in Sulmona but skirted the Monte Maiella massif by heading to Campo di Giove and then skirting the slopes of Monte Amara [*sic.*].<sup>62</sup> For him, the lack of water was a major environmental factor during his escape from PG78 just on the outskirts of Sulmona, 'Water is the only thing that matters now.'<sup>63</sup> He recounts passing through bottlenecks in the mountains, crossing rivers, and passing through forests and olive groves:

We had come out of the forest on to long grassy levels dotted with clumps of bushes and single trees. In front of us lay the white ribbon of road. Slowly it curled up against the mountainside, disappearing into a gap between the two summits. It led through the gap into a valley near Gamberale.<sup>64</sup>

Near Salcito, on the eastern bank of the Trigno, Krige met Canadian troops.<sup>65</sup>

## Results

Table 1 covers the meteorological data (minimum and maximum temperatures, and precipitation) for the dates – 8 September until 19 October 1943 – during which Heath's group was underway.

### *Meteorological data*

September 1943				October 1943			
Date	Min. temp. (°C)	Max. temp. (°C)	Precipitation in mm	Date	Min. temp. (°C)	Max. temp. (°C)	Precipitation in mm
8	12,4	24,7		1	12,2	21,6	
9	15,9	26,7		2	11,8	18,7	9,0
10	16,9	27,8		3	11,9	19,8	18,0
11	18,2	29,1		4	12,8	18,2	5,0
12	18,4	28,9		5	11,2	19,0	
13	19,4	31,8		6	11,8	18,8	
14	20,9	32,2		7	12,9	16,2	
15	22,3	32,7		8	12,0	17,6	16,0
16	20,9	32,3		9	13,2	19,2	0,4
17	21,0	32,8		10	12,1	19,3	
18	20,8	29,0		11	12,9	16,2	
19	17,4	27,8		12	9,8	14,1	4,6
20	17,3	27,0		13	7,8	10,3	1,2
21	15,8	25,8		14	5,3	12,2	

September 1943				October 1943			
Date	Min. temp. (°C)	Max. temp. (°C)	Precipitation in mm	Date	Min. temp. (°C)	Max. temp. (°C)	Precipitation in mm
22	17,8	29,0		15	6,1	13,6	
23	19,8	28,6		16	7,2	15,8	
24	19,2	29,8		17	10,2	16,6	9,4
25	19,0	27,6		18	12,6	16,8	
26	16,5	24,4	3,4	19	11,9	19,0iv	
27	14,2	21,6	1,4				
28	14,0	19,0	17,3				
29	11,2	18,4	12,0				
30	11,3	20,3					

*Table 1: Observations of daily temperatures and daily precipitation of Agnone, Trigno Basin, Molise, 806 masl<sup>66</sup>*

The “Indian Summer” conditions of Agnone, situated at 806 masl, lasted from 8 September 1943 until 26 September 1943 when the first rains fell. The maximum temperature on 26 September 1943 fell by 3,2°C (from 27,6°C the day before) with the minimum falling by 2,5°C (from 19,0°C the day before). Another significant date was 28 September 1943 when heavy rain (17,3 mm) fell, with the maximum temperature dipping below 20°C for the first time that month. Rainfall in September 1943 equated to 34,1 mm, an average of 1,55 mm per day during the time the group was escaping. The period 12–16 October 1943 marked a particularly cold spell when the minimum temperature on 12 October 1943 dipped below 10°C for the first time in September and October 1943 (the decidedly chilly minimum temperatures during this period hovered between 5,3°C and 9,8°C). The maximum temperature during the cold spell hovered between 15,8°C on 16 October and 10,3°C on 13 October 1943, a particularly cold day. Continual rain occurred from 26 until 29 September (a four-day spell) and from 2–4 October (a three-day spell), 8–9 October, and 12–13 October 1943. Heavy rain (18,0 mm and 16,0 mm) fell on 3 and 8 October 1943. Rainfall between 1 and 19 October 1943 equated to 63,6 mm, an average of 3,34 mm per day for the duration of the escape.

Another environmental hazard to be overcome on the journey was river depth. Table 2 illustrates the depth of the rivers to be crossed on the journey.

Approximate date	Nearest town	River	Fording depth in metres
12 September 1943	Pennapiedimonte	Avella	No data
20 September 1943	Cantagufò	Verde	No data
25 September 1943	Casoli	Aventino	‘the river was fairly shallow’ <sup>67</sup>
7 October 1943	Roccascalegna	Rio Secco	‘small creek to cross in the valley floor’ <sup>68</sup>

<sup>iv</sup> Some of the last columns are empty, because the data only covers the dates of the escape.

Approximate date	Nearest town	River	Fording depth in metres
8 October 1943	Pennadomo	Sangro	‘not along the river itself, which was wide, gravelly and not particularly deep even when the water levels were high and in full flow’ <sup>69</sup>
14 October 1943	Padule	Trigno	‘We took off our boots and walked through, the icy cold water never reaching above our knees.’ <sup>70</sup>  ‘The river bed was wide here but the water was shallow’ <sup>71</sup>
18 October 1943	S. Anna	Biferno	‘We followed a course across the dam’ <sup>72</sup>

*Table 2: Fording depth of rivers*<sup>73</sup>

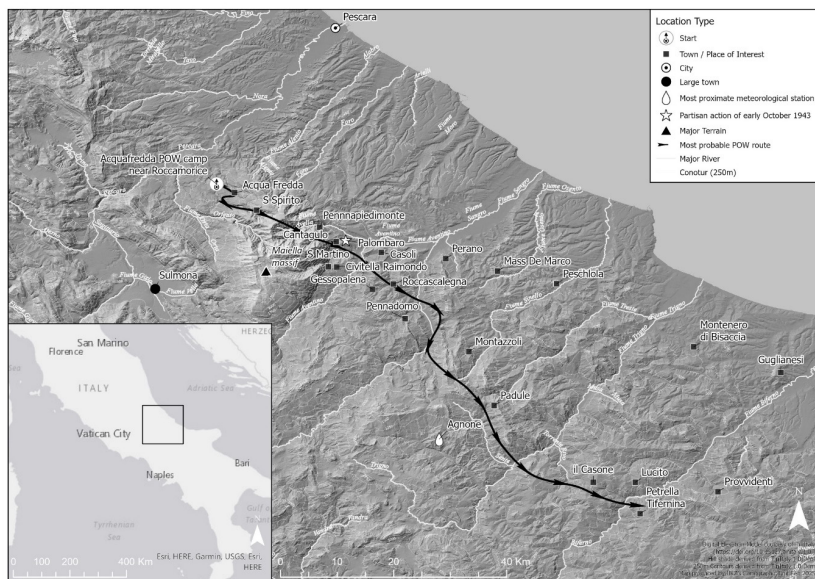
A further environmental hazard was the presence of potentially dangerous animals encountered on the route. Table 3 gives an analysis of animal presence according to the season (autumn) during which Heath’s group was underway.

Season	Species and references	Sighting and/or encounter en route
Autumn	Marsican bear <sup>74</sup>	Possible
Autumn	Apennine wolf <sup>75</sup>	Possible
Autumn	Abruzzo sheepdog <sup>76</sup>	Quite likely or definite <sup>77</sup>
Autumn	Eurasian lynx <sup>78</sup>	Very slight
Autumn	Boar <sup>79</sup>	Very probable

*Table 3: Analysis of seasonal animal distribution*<sup>80</sup>

The current author was fortunate enough to visit Italy from 31 August to 16 September 2024. During this period, he was based at Sulmona and was actively assisted by members of the Club Alpino Italiano. In particular, the members of this club took him to the subsidiary POW camp at Acquafredda on 4 September 2024, and on 3 and 7 September 2024, to the main POW camp at Fonte d’Amore. On 11 September 2024, two club members took him to the town in Molise (Petrella Tifernina) where the POW party reached the Allied lines. On the way back to Sulmona, the group visited the Maiella Brigade memorial and the town of Palombaro, as well as Fara San Martino where they walked up part of a gorge, which is one of the access routes into the Maiella. The author also visited Campo di Giove on 6 September 2024, which provided valuable contextual information. He stayed there from 13–15 September 2024. All these visits provided rich contacts and information, which assisted the research on which this article is based.

Map 1 gives the most likely route Heath's group took from the POW camp (PG78/1) in Abruzzo to the town where the group reached Allied lines (Petrella Tifernina in Molise).



*Map 1: Terrain and relevant locations of the journey*<sup>81</sup>

## Discussion

The POWs who escaped from PG78/1 effectively disobeyed an order to stay put.<sup>82</sup> This order centred on the general military welfare of the POWs and concern about the implications should a large number of troops escape. The order did not appear to be grounded on any fear of the consequences of the approaching weather in late autumn in mountainous terrain.<sup>83</sup> Mason writes that the camp leader took the initiative to apply pressure on the Italian authorities to let the men go free.<sup>84</sup> The men were subsequently instructed to escape in small groups into the mountains. It is extremely fortuitous that the armistice and subsequent escape occurred during probably the best weather spell possible, i.e. after the extreme heat of summer and before the rains of late October and the snows of November 1943 onwards.<sup>85</sup> During the author's recent fieldtrip, snow fell on the highest peaks of the Maiella outside Campo di Giove during the night of 14 September 2024. If this had occurred during the passage of the POWs over the Maiella in 1943, the outcome of the journey could have been very different. Duncan describes the weather at the start of the escape as 'fine and looked like remaining so for a while'.<sup>86</sup> Mason writes that the weather was so good that it caused no difficulty for the escapees to sleep in the open.<sup>87</sup> In an entry dated 30 November 1943, Holland writes about the 'immense peaks of the

Maiella mountains and the 8,000-foot Monte Amaro, snow-capped'.<sup>88</sup> It would thus have been completely impossible to have crossed the Maiella between mid-November 1943 and mid-spring 1944, due to the distribution and depth of the snow.<sup>89</sup> Leigh explains the difficulties experienced by South African POWs trying to cross snow-covered mountains north of Sulmona (the Gran Sasso d'Italia).<sup>90</sup> A member of the Club Alpino Italiano informed the author during the recent fieldtrip that, at Acquafredda, snow reached 2,0 m in the depths of winter. Haines writes, 'in the winter snow down to 500m is common, so paths will be obliterated and rocks icy, and there are fewer daylight hours. Avalanches also occur'.<sup>91</sup> Schou recounts being completely snowed in in a cave near Scanno on 31 December 1943:

I realized what had happened: during a heavy storm at night, the wind had driven a lot of snow into the cave. We were trapped at the far end of the cave by four metres of snow, and if we did not get out quickly we would suffocate.<sup>92</sup>

In his account of the battle of (southern) Italy in 1943, Holland writes that, on 28 September 1943 it 'began to pour with rain' in the Campania region, and he further notes, 'heavy winds' also occurred that day.<sup>93</sup> This corroborates the ItaliaMeteo data.<sup>94</sup> Duncan additionally comments that, by the end of September and before the Maiella had been crossed, 'the first rains had come and we realized that we could not see through a winter in such a way'.<sup>95</sup> Uys Krige writes, 'In the camp we had had a wonderful summer, with no rain. Now it rained almost continually ... The mountains would be quite impassable, ... their gulleys torrents, and on those bare peaks we would perish of exposure'.<sup>96</sup> Indeed, further on his journey, he writes about 'slithering about in the dark through acres of mud and slush and icy cold water'.<sup>97</sup> Holland recounts an American soldier near the Volturno River writing, '[it] rained some' on 2 October 1943 and 'rained again' on 4 October 1943, commenting also on the mud.<sup>98</sup> This corresponds to the data supplied by the erstwhile Ministero dei Lavori Pubblici: Servizio Idrografico (Ministry of Public Works: Hydrographic Service) or the modern-day ItaliaMeteo (Italian Meteorology and Climatology Agency) (1953) (see Table 1).<sup>99</sup> On the evening of 3 October 1943, two Italian soldiers on the run reached Ripalimosani, north of Campobasso, and 'the rain was driving into them and they were soaked'.<sup>100</sup> This driving rain would have meant a wind-chill effect, which in turn would have further affected the human energy budget of the escapees.<sup>101</sup> It is reported that 18 mm of rain fell at Agnone that day.<sup>102</sup> Paralleling this, the above group of Allied POWs had been captured in the North African desert and had not been issued with wet-weather clothing;<sup>103</sup> hence, they would have been very vulnerable to bioclimatological effects.<sup>104</sup> As Barry explains, soaked clothing very quickly loses insulation properties even to less than one third of its normal insulation.<sup>105</sup> Shelter would have been needed immediately, and some kind of warmth activated (a fire, if possible), as the minimum temperature was below 12°C.<sup>106</sup> Krige tells how, on the journey traversing the Morrone mountain range (adjunct to the Maiella, and above 1 800 masl), he and his fellow escapees could not sit for too long as a freezing sensation would soon be felt.<sup>107</sup> Further on, ascending the Maiella after Campo di Giove, Krige was so cold that he likened himself to 'a block of ice in an impersonal arctic world'.<sup>108</sup> Another meteorological hazard, mist, affected Duncan's party on their crossing of the upper Maiella on or around 5 October

1943.<sup>109</sup> This hazard, which limited visibility to a few metres, was also experienced by Krige's party.<sup>110</sup> Duncan further comments on 'the light drizzle' on or around 6 October 1943, and the bitter cold near Villa Santa Maria during the night of 8–9 October 1943.<sup>111</sup> Encountering the Molise range before Castiglione on or around 10 October 1943, Duncan remarks on the 'biting wind and swirling mist clouds, damp and clammy'.<sup>112</sup> Duncan also mentions the cold on the hillside. At around this date and approaching Campo di Giove, Krige tells of a 'bitterly cold night'.<sup>113</sup> Holland writes, with respect to the Americans on the Volturno (to the west of Campobasso), 'with all the rain, General Clark now planned to assault all along the Volturno on the night of Tuesday, 12 and Wednesday, 13 October, when, if the forecasters were right, there would be a pause in the rain'.<sup>114</sup> In Agnone, it also rained on those days but lightly (4,6 mm and 1,2 mm respectively).<sup>115</sup> Krige's party also had to pass closer to and above Agnone. Bitter cold during the night of 13–14 October 1943 is remarked upon by Duncan.<sup>116</sup> To corroborate this, weather data show the temperature dipped to 5,3°C on the morning of 14 October 1943.<sup>117</sup>

On 19 October 1943, the group reached Petrella Tifernina (see Map 1) and Allied lines. With respect to the jottings of an Indian Army officer north of Foggia, Holland writes, 'the good weather continued'.<sup>118</sup> There followed five rain-free days, including and preceding 19 October 2023.<sup>119</sup>

Another bioclimatological factor would have been the effect of altitude and therefore air pressure and oxygen intake. The escapees would have needed to cross the *altipiano* (high plain) to safety. This is at a median altitude of around 2 400 masl.<sup>120</sup> Barry explains that, at 3 000 masl, there is 30% less air pressure than at sea level.<sup>121</sup> There would definitely have been a bioclimatological effect on the malnourished escapees ascending from about 660 masl to over 2 500 masl in their bid for freedom. Another meteorological factor that would have either impeded or helped the progress of the group was thunderstorms. Scherman writes about a thunderstorm on 28 September 1943 near Foggia, which helped a high-ranking officer and his batman get through the enemy lines.<sup>122</sup> Leigh also writes about this incident.<sup>123</sup> Thunderstorms affect visibility to a marked degree. This would have aided evasion of even quite well-defended lines. Kleynhans and Gordon write about a dust-storm that also reduced visibility and enabled the escape of a serviceman in North Africa.<sup>124</sup>

Heath's party was extremely fortunate to cross the major rivers before the heavy rains came (Map 1). Krige discusses this, referencing a guide who explained that, as the winter rains had not yet commenced, the rivers could be waded across, instead of swum across.<sup>125</sup> Holland tells how, during the Allied advance from the south of Italy, the rivers became raging and impassable torrents following heavy rains. For example, Holland recounts how 'on 16 November, when patrols had been due to begin, the Sangro had been too high and fast-flowing to cross'.<sup>126</sup>

What is not known is the precise distribution and numbers of bears and wolves along the route in the autumn of 1943. Wolves would likely have been encountered in the area around Passo San Leonardo (north of Campo di Giove).<sup>127</sup> Bears might have been encountered by the group in beech forests along the route, especially south-east of Sulmona and towards

Gamberale.<sup>128</sup> Another potentially dangerous mammal, the sheepdog, would have been found along the route too.<sup>129</sup> Krige, who encountered a sheepdog on his journey, also comments on this. Holland writes that the Abruzzo sheepdogs still engaged in conflict with wolves in 1943, and presumably still do.<sup>130</sup> Boars would have also been encountered within the park boundaries, especially within forests (the author saw a boar in a beech forest from the bus on the road from Sulmona to Campo di Giove on 6 September 2024). The Eurasian lynx would very likely not have been spotted.<sup>131</sup> It is, however, known that the POW groups were with the partisans and other Italians for a large part of their journey, and these men would have had a better idea of environmental hazards than the non-nationals.<sup>132</sup> Bears, wolves, boars and sheepdogs, while present, would generally not have interfered with POWs who were actively avoiding confrontation and being as quiet as possible. Krige however wrote about the threat of wolves when the snow came, 'And the snow, too, would bring the wolves.'<sup>133</sup> He also recounts the danger of sheepdogs, and mentions how the Italian guide told him and his fellow POWs to stay close, 'Then the dogs will see me first, recognize me as a friend and not bite you. For I tell you they are fierce, *molto feroci* [very ferocious].'<sup>134</sup>

The escaped POWs were extremely lucky in terms of the effects of bioclimatology and the timing of the Italian surrender. The highest ground was traversed in mid-September 1943, before the rains and snow came.<sup>135</sup> As mentioned before, an earlier than expected snowfall would have scuppered their plans and made passage almost impossible. The first rains arrived at the end of September and early October, by which time the group was on lower ground and reasonably close to human habitation all along the route. Certainly, during the periods 2–4 October and 8–9 October, when heavy rain fell, the POWs would have needed shelter.<sup>136</sup> The period 12–16 October 1943, when the minimum temperature dropped to below 10°C, would have also necessitated shelter at night.<sup>137</sup>

Other environmental factors that played a role in the escape played a minor to marginal role. POWs would have felt the effects of altitude-related air pressure while crossing the *altipiano* above 2 400 masl, but not at a level to hinder their progress seriously.<sup>138</sup> The depth of rivers was not a factor before the serious November rains started; hence, the rivers were not impassable obstacles to the men.

The terrain across which the men moved was very rough and hence arduous. As Krige writes, 'We soon struck across very broken country, going straight down a steep hill in order to cross yet another tributary of the Trigno. We slithered down one donga.'<sup>139</sup> Before that point on his journey, he remembers being so attuned to walking that he 'found myself falling asleep while sitting bolt upright'.<sup>140</sup> Scherman writes about a pair (who slipped through enemy lines under cover of a thunderstorm) who had covered, mainly nocturnally, approximately 250 km in primarily mountainous terrain, and which took '17 gruelling days'.<sup>141</sup> Another factor that has to be pointed out is the proximity of PG78/1 to the Maiella range (part of the Apennines), which would have aided concealment and evasion. As Scherman points out, 'proximity to Italy's famous Apennine Mountains, which provided cover and concealment due to their inaccessibility and many hiding areas, also proved decisive in many escapes'.<sup>142</sup>



Numerous and potentially life-saving mitigation measures were taken by the POWs and their Italian helpers to ameliorate the environmental factors. POW deaths due to exposure are not discussed in POW histories, except for Schou who recounts a near-death experience from a combination of weather factors and pneumonia. If an Italian family had not taken pity on him, he most surely would have died.<sup>143</sup> The most important form of mitigation was seeking help from civilians along the way. These people fed, clothed and, most importantly, sheltered the POWs en route through difficult areas.<sup>144</sup> Duncan in particular describes how the local people offered shelter, food, clothing and shoes to POWs. They even offered to dry the wet clothing of the escapees, which is critically important in avoiding hypothermia, especially when wind chill is a factor.<sup>145</sup> Mason also comments that some men's laundry was done by the local inhabitants.<sup>146</sup> Access to food and water was thus not generally an issue. This can be contrasted to the experiences of South African soldiers in the Western Desert;<sup>147</sup> however, this changed when the snow started.

## Conclusion

The current study essentially drew from the meteorological data provided by ItaliaMeteo. The precision of the data enables one to ascertain the weather all along the route and envisage the measures the escaping men took to cope with the weather. Besides the weather data, memoirs by Allied soldiers, especially Duncan and Krige, provided much needed and valuable background information. Holland also yielded highly relevant data. Krige, a noted South African author, in particular writes about the environment – especially the weather and its effects – to be negotiated and experienced with accuracy and foresight. River depths and animal presence were not rated as significant obstacles to be overcome. These two factors however would have been markedly different had their journey been later in the year, when the snow started falling. The study found how a small party of battle-tested and determined young men coped with arduous and varied environmental conditions, and a hostile enemy presence, to reach the Allied lines safely. The men took every advantage of terrain to conceal themselves and to evade the enemy. Moreover, escaped POWs sometimes took advantage of weather events, such as thunderstorms, to cross enemy lines. The men were highly fortunate with the timing of the Italian surrender, namely after the heat of summer and before the winter snow. The environmental factors besetting the group were mitigated, not least by the local Italian people, the Abruzzesi, without whom the journey of this particular group and that of other groups would not have succeeded.

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## Endnotes

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- <sup>1</sup> Born and raised in Cape Town, South Africa, Dr Gavin Heath graduated from the University of Cape Town with a Bachelor of Arts in 1989, a Higher Diploma in Education in 1990, and a Master of City and Regional Planning in 2000. Dr Heath taught English and Geography in South Africa and the United Kingdom in the 1990s. He started lecturing at the former University of Natal in 2002; in 2021, he was awarded his Doctorate of Philosophy (in Education) by Rhodes University, Makhanda. Dr Heath is married to Bronwen, who shares his love for the outdoors.
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- 106 Ministero dei Lavori Pubblici.
- 107 Krige, *The Way Out*, 121.
- 108 Krige, *The Way Out*, 181.
- 109 Duncan, 'Account of Escape from Camp Concentramento'.
- 110 Krige, *The Way Out*.
- 111 Holland, *The Savage Storm*, 272.
- 112 Duncan, 'Account of Escape from Camp Concentramento', 13.
- 113 Krige, *The Way Out*, 148.
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- 116 Krige, *The Way Out*; Duncan, 'Account of Escape from Camp Concentramento'  
 117 Ministero dei Lavori Pubblici.  
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 119 Ministero dei Lavori Pubblici.  
 120 Club Alpino Italiano (Sezione di Chieti), *Gruppo della Majella*; Whitehead, 'Ecology of the  
 121 Altipiano of Monte Maiella, Italy'.  
 122 Barry, *Mountain Weather and Climate*.  
 123 Scherman, *The Wartime Experiences*, 289.  
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 128 Di Francesco *et al.*, 'Detection of Selected Pathogens'.  
 129 Van Gils *et al.*, 'Where the Bears Roam'.  
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 133 Duncan, 'Account of Escape from Camp Concentramento'.  
 134 Krige, *The Way Out*, 111.  
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 136 Club Alpino Italiano.  
 137 Ministero dei Lavori Pubblici; Holland, *The Savage Storm*.  
 138 Ministero dei Lavori Pubblici; Duncan, 'Account of Escape from Camp Concentramento'.  
 139 Whitehead, 'Ecology of the Altipiano of Monte Maiella'.  
 140 Krige, *The Way Out*, 243.  
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 142 Scherman, *The Wartime Experiences*, 289.  
 143 Scherman, *The Wartime Experiences*, 287.  
 144 Schou, *Mountains of Freedom*.  
 145 Duncan, 'Account of Escape from Camp Concentramento'; Schou, *Mountains of Freedom*;  
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 148 Kleynhans & Gordon, 'Springbok Escapers and Evaders'.

## *Book Reviews*

### **General Jan Smuts and His First World War in Africa, 1914–1917**

*David Brock Katz*

### **Botha, Smuts and the Great War**

*Antonio Garcia and  
Ian van der Waag*

and

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Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball  
2023, 306 pages  
ISBN 978-1-77619-270-0

Warwick: Helion & Company  
2023, 311 pages  
ISBN 9-78-19151137-7-1

The two books reviewed here represent detailed biographies of top South African political and military leaders of the First World War (1914–1918). Katz's treatment of Jan Smuts sustains a clear argument throughout the text. Previous historians have underestimated Smuts's military experience, portraying him as an amateur general, and unfairly denigrating his accomplishments in the war especially during the German East Africa campaign. The case is convincing in many ways, especially regarding Smuts's wartime qualifications. While some previous historians described Smuts's role in the South African War (1899–1902) as leading a Boer commando of a few hundred men, Katz shows that Smuts planned the rudimentary Boer republican war strategy as attorney general of the Transvaal, learnt highly mobile Boer warfare under the mentorship of accomplished leader Koos de la Ray, and eventually led several thousand fighters during an incursion into the Cape. Subsequently, in 1914 and as deputy prime minister and cabinet minister in the Union government, Smuts played the leading role in planning the initial South African invasion of German South West Africa (GSWA, now called Namibia) involving simultaneous landings at the Atlantic ports of the territory and overland columns pushing up from the South African border in the south. Although this operation was delayed by the ultimately failed Boer rebellion – during which his staff work supported Prime Minister Louis Botha's campaign in the field – Smuts eventually took command of a sizable South African contingent in southern GSWA when the invasion was renewed in 1915, supporting the main invasion force under Botha to the north. In the context of the Boer republics and early Union, which provided no formal advanced military command training, Smuts had led brigade-sized forces and planned and administratively supported higher-level military operations. As such, he arguably had just as much – or probably more – relevant experience and expertise as many British generals.

Katz makes several other related and interesting points about the GSWA campaign. He explains that the reduction of coastal landings in Smuts's original plan led to the South African defeat at the Battle of Sandfontein in September 1914 rather than other factors.

Furthermore, the much larger-scale renewed invasion of GSWA in 1915, which relied heavily on mounted infantry, contributed to the dominance of Boer commando culture in the embryonic Union Defence Force (UDF), which had initially been developing along British lines.

Katz devotes much of the second half of the book to Smuts's command of British imperial forces, including thousands of newly arrived South African troops in the German East Africa (GEA) campaign – ultimately the longest campaign of the entire war – during 1916. *Botha, Smuts and the Great War* shows that negative portrayals of Smuts's performance in this theatre began early with a memoir by Richard Meinertzhagen who had served as a British intelligence officer in GEA and a biography by inter-war era British writer and iconoclast HC Armstrong. According to Katz, more recent 'British historians' (p. 252) Hew Strachan and Ross Anderson continued unwarranted criticisms of Smuts's leadership in East Africa, which were then repeated by other writers in works of synthesis. Katz identifies several instances when these 'British historians' left out important passages of primary source documents and even made minor changes to a quotation to make Smuts look bad. For Katz, the GEA campaign became the scene of a clash between two very different ways of war: the British approach of directive command and frontal attack, and the Boer method of flexible command and sweeping manoeuvres meant to render enemy positions untenable without incurring many casualties. For example, as Katz describes, while the British mounted a failed frontal attack on German positions around Salaita Hill on the GEA–Kenya border just before the arrival of Smuts, the South African commander eventually outflanked the position causing the Germans to withdraw southward into their colony. According to Katz, Smuts's distinctly South African approach enabled British imperial forces invading from Kenya assisted by Belgian and Rhodesian contingents entering from other directions to occupy most of GEA by the start of 1917 when he departed for Britain to participate in the Imperial War Conference.

Nevertheless, Katz does not provide entirely sufficient counters to the principal criticisms of Smuts's campaign in GEA. These criticisms include that sweeping movements facilitated the German strategy of endless withdrawals that bogged down Entente (Allied) forces and led to a drawn-out war resulting in mass starvation of civilians, and that he neglected logistics and particularly medical support in a region where tropical disease ravaged his mostly white South African troops who were particularly vulnerable. Katz's claim that the Germans would not have stood and fought a pitched battle is reasonable but speculative, and the idea that Smuts bore less responsibility for the health disaster than subordinate officers because he 'led from the front' (p. 160) is unconvincing.

Focused on operational history, *General Jan Smuts and His First World War in Africa* uses technical military terms, such as 'interior and exterior lines' (p. 64), and 'trading space for time' (p. 70) in a way that helps the reader understand the GSWA and GEA campaigns better. Overall, though, Katz never discusses or reviews the broad concept of a way of war that is central to his argument and presents an oversimplified portrayal of the British approach, including the debunked Chateau Generals myth<sup>1</sup> and casts allegedly incompetent British generals and seemingly dishonest British writers and historians in the dramatic role of persecuting a South African hero. Interestingly, South African historian,



Bill Nasson, has voiced some of the same criticisms of Smuts as Katz's 'British historians' but is highlighted here as posing important questions for would-be biographers. This well-written and engaging military biography acknowledges some failings in Smuts, such as his ignoring signs of an imminent Boer uprising in 1914, but occasionally borders on hagiography or an almost idolised version of Smuts.

The book by Antonio Garcia and Ian van der Waag examines the close relationship between Prime Minister Louis Botha and his right-hand man, Smuts, during the First World War. As the authors point out, it is difficult to disentangle the activities of the two leaders during this era. One of the main points of the book is that the combined leadership of Botha and Smuts transformed South Africa during the First World War, setting many of the international and domestic policies of the new country. As the authors emphasise, Botha and Smuts complemented each other well as the former was a big farmer with a warm smile, full of emotion and charisma, appealing to rural Boers, while the latter was physically small, highly intelligent, formally educated at Cambridge but perceived as arrogant. Starting the book with contemporary calls for the removal of statues of Botha and Smuts from public spaces in South Africa and Britain, the authors clearly present their subjects as flawed men or 'men of their time' (p. 135) who failed to address the political aspirations of the South African black majority ushering in racist policies, such as the Natives Land Act of 1913, that entrenched white minority rule. That said, most of *Botha, Smuts and the Great War* deals with white politics in the early years of the Union – and particularly the context of the First World War where Boers who had been defeated by Britain a dozen or so years earlier were now called upon to support the empire. There is a great deal of discussion of the wartime Union elections, which saw Botha and Smuts of the South African Party who wanted to fight for Britain to gain additional territory in the region, struggle to retain political power given opposition from the new Afrikaner (Boer) National Party favouring neutrality and greater independence. Richly peppered with quotations from letters between Botha and Smuts, as well as correspondence with their respective wives and friends, Garcia and Van der Waag show how the two leaders collaborated to overcome the Boer rebellion and conquer GSWA, and then how they maintained long-distance communication once Smuts went off to East Africa and then Britain where he became an important trouble-shooter for the wartime government. The sections on Smuts in Britain, and Smuts and Botha at Versailles where their warning not to punish Germany too harshly was ignored are particularly fascinating. Compared to Katz's book, *Botha, Smuts and the Great War* is less about military strategy and tactics although these are not absent, and more about the interaction between war and politics. The work ends with Botha's death in 1919 and Smuts inheriting a 'poisoned chalice' (p. 267) as the second South African prime minister who lacked his predecessor's charm and connections that would have been useful in engaging the bitterly divided white electorate thus pointing to a troubled future.

*Botha, Smuts and the Great War* is based on meticulous and detailed archival research, much of which is original, but there are places, such as the section on the South African Native Labour Contingent where the extensive primary source citations seem superfluous repeating what existing scholarly works already cover. Some readers may find this highly specialised work frustrating, as it mentions many now little-known white South African

and British politicians and personalities of the period without much explanation. While the book mentions some black South African leaders, such as Sol Plaatje, it is surprising that Walter Rubusana – the only black elected legislator of the era serving in the Cape provincial legislature from 1910 to 1914, and who played a considerable role in the rise of African nationalist politics – is ignored. Seeing the First World War as an opportunity for black South Africans to earn political rights, Rubusana wrote to Botha in 1914 offering to recruit a 5 000-strong front-line military corps but was turned down given white fears over arming the subject majority.<sup>2</sup>

Criticism aside, both books cover some of the same ground but do so in different ways and make important contributions to South African First World War history updating a considerable although aging historiography on Botha and Smuts. Anyone interested in the First World War in Africa, and particularly the role of these prominent South African leaders, should read *General Jan Smuts and His First World War in Africa* as well as *Botha, Smuts and the Great War*.

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## Endnotes

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- <sup>1</sup> F Davies & G Maddocks, *Bloody Red Tabs: General Officer Casualties of the Great War 1914-1918* (Barnsley: Pen and Sword, 2014).
- <sup>2</sup> B Nasson, 'War Opinion in South Africa, 1914', *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 23, 2 (1995), 256; T Winegard, *Indigenous Peoples of the British Dominions and the First World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 76–77.

# SCIENTIA MILITARIA

*South African Journal of Military Studies*



## Book Review

# Prisoners of Jan Smuts: Italian Prisoners of War in South Africa in WWII

Karen Horn

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Johannesburg & Cape Town: Jonathan Ball Publishers  
2024, 278 pages  
ISBN 978-1-7761-9284-7

*Prisoners of Jan Smuts: Italian Prisoners of War in South Africa in WWII* is the product of almost ten years of dedicated research by the knowledgeable and well-established South African historian, Karen Horn. The large audience at the book launch in May 2024 at the Dante Alighieri Society in Houghton reflected the ongoing fascination with the history of the hundreds of thousands of Italian prisoners of war (POWs) detained in South Africa during the Second World War. By utilising a myriad of sources, ranging from interviews and unpublished memoirs to correspondence and formal military reports, Horn finally sheds some light on this exciting topic.

Within the broader historiography, Second World War POW experiences are an exciting research area with abundant fertile ground for future studies.<sup>1</sup> *Prisoners of Jan Smuts* adds yet another layer to this body of knowledge. Horn's interest in POWs was already visible in her first book, *In Enemy Hands: South African POWs in WWII* (2015), which tells the stories of South African soldiers in captivity in Germany and Italy during the Second World War.<sup>2</sup> While South African men endured captivity in Europe, many Europeans, specifically Italians, were shipped to South Africa, where they faced similar encounters in the POW camps throughout the country. With this in mind, Horn started researching the stories of survival and endurance of these Italian men.<sup>3</sup>

One of the many praiseworthy elements of *Prisoners of Jan Smuts* is that it manages to tell the narrative of thousands of contemporaries by focusing closely on the experiences of five individuals. Just like her previous book, the strength of *Prisoners of Jan Smuts* lies in the fact that Horn focuses on individual stories rather than on collective narratives. By doing so, she provides the reader with a glimpse into several elements of Second World War Italian prisoner experiences in South Africa without generalisations and sweeping statements. As readers become engulfed in the personal stories of Giovanni Palermo, Pietro Scottu, Luigi Pederzoli, Paolo Ricci and Raffaello Cei, they also learn about several important historical considerations. Included among these considerations are how the Geneva Convention of 1929 informed the authorities on the treatment of POWs; how the guards and the camp personnel experienced the war years; various escape attempts; opportunities to better education; challenges with co-existing among radicalised fellow prisoners; and the way many of these Italians found love and formed lasting relationships in the country holding them captive.

All sixteen chapters of *Prisoners of Jan Smuts* are based on primary documents, and cover diverse topics.

The first chapter introduces the reader to the five main characters of the book. After that, Chapters 2 to 5 relay the stories of the early years of captivity in South Africa, including the struggles of the first camp commandant of the Zonderwater POW camp. Chapters 6 and 7 portray the prisoner experiences after the South African government started paying close attention to the requirements laid out in the 1929 Geneva Convention and how this improved the overall condition within the camps. Chapters 8, 9 and 10 will be especially interesting for the reader who is especially interested in the big political picture, as these chapters cover everything from pro-fascist threats within the Union of South Africa and the fall of Mussolini to the Italian Armistice in 1943.

The remaining six chapters give insight into more personal elements of the Italian POW experience, including romantic relationships with South Africans, business ventures, as well as some hopes and anxieties related to returning to Italy after the end of the war.

Horn's dedication to using less-known primary sources, including acquiring professional assistance to translate numerous unpublished memoirs from Italian to English, ensures that the book adds a novel contribution to the existing literature. With the publication of *Prisoners of Jan Smuts*, several nuanced experiences and historical considerations finally receive some deserved attention. One example is that she does not overemphasise the experiences of those detained in Zonderwater by showing that Italian POWs spent time in several other camps, as well as on farms and working sites. Up to this point, these considerations were merely placed in the shadow of Zonderwater, which looms large within the broad history of the Italian POW experiences in South Africa.<sup>4</sup> A further example is how the book investigates Colonel Dawid de Wet and Colonel Hendrik Prinsloo, the two camp commandants of Zonderwater. Scholars have directed their attention almost entirely to Prinsloo's time as commandant for many years.<sup>5</sup> By providing some information on his predecessor, De Wet, *Prisoners of Jan Smuts* offers new and exciting insights into the topic.

The book, *Prisoners of Jan Smuts*, holds considerable value for relatives, relations and descendants of those who were detained in South Africa during the Second World War. Many of the attendees at the book launch relayed stories about their relatives and how captivity in South Africa affected them. To be sure, many of the descendants and relatives of these men are currently living in South Africa, but many more are in Italy. It thus stands to reason that *Prisoners of Jan Smuts* should not only be translated into Italian but also made available in Italy. Doing so will ensure that this exciting piece of history reaches even more audiences interested in the Italian experiences in South Africa during the Second World War.

Within the broader historiography, *Prisoners of Jan Smuts* contributes to a better understanding of how the Geneva Convention was understood and applied by the South African Union Defence Force (UDF). As Horn maintains, the history of the Italian POWs in South Africa 'is as much about the Italians as it is about the camp guards, the welfare officers, and the larger UDF hierarchy'.<sup>6</sup> Within South African historiography, *Prisoners of*

*Jan Smuts* thus provides valuable insights into this one aspect of the South African home front during the Second World War. In a more international context, the book contributes valuable insights into some of the challenges faced by the administration of large POW camps while attempting to adhere to the regulations of the Geneva Convention. *Prisoners of Jan Smuts* is a well-written publication and a testament to Horn's dedicated research. The book is highly recommended for scholars, history students, and the public.

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## Endnotes

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- <sup>1</sup> Some prominent examples include C Rollings, *Prisoner of War: Voices From Behind the Wire in the Second World War* (Reading: Random House, 2011); J Pattinson, L Noakes & W Ugolini, 'Incarcerated Masculinities: Male POWs and the Second World War', *Journal of War & Culture Studies*, 7, 3 (2014), 179–190; C Lloyd, 'Enduring Captivity: French POW Narratives of World War II', *Journal of War & Culture Studies*, 6, 1 (2013), 24–39; K Gregory, *The German World War Two Prisoner and His Experience in the United States* (MA Thesis, California State University, Dominguez Hills, 2001); and K Horn, *In Enemy Hands: South Africa's POWs in World War II* (Cape Town: Jonathan Ball, 2015).
- <sup>2</sup> K Horn, *In Enemy Hands: South Africa's POWs in World War II* (Cape Town: Jonathan Ball, 2015).
- <sup>3</sup> K Horn, *Prisoners of Jan Smuts: Italian Prisoners of War in South Africa in WWII* (Cape Town: Jonathan Ball), ix–xiii.
- <sup>4</sup> C Kruger, 'The Zonderwater Italian Prisoners of War 1941–1947: Fifty Years Down the Line', *South African Journal of Cultural History*, 10, 2 (1996), 88–104; D Somma, 'Music as Discipline, Solidarity and Nostalgia in the Zonderwater Prisoner of War Camp of South Africa', *SAMUS: South African Music Studies*, 30, 1 (2010), 71–85; A Delport, 'Changing Attitudes of South Africans Towards Italy and its People During the Second World War, 1939 to 1945', *Historia*, 58, 1 (2013), 167–190.
- <sup>5</sup> Horn has already published some research on De Wet's time as camp commandant. See K Horn, "'Only the Rags We Had On ...': Zonderwater Italian Prisoner-of-war Camp, 1941–1942", *Journal of African Military History*, 6, 2 (2022), 81–106. Most other studies on Zonderwater focused purely on Prinsloo's period. See, for instance, Kruger, 'The Zonderwater Italian Prisoners of War', 88–104.
- <sup>6</sup> Horn, *Prisoners of Jan Smuts*, 232.



## *Book Review*

# **Smuts and Mandela: The Men Who Made South Africa**

*Roger Southall*

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Auckland Park: Jacana  
2024, 410 pages  
ISBN 9781-4-3143-5449

Rarely does a nation have two founding fathers from different times and vastly different political traditions. It thus says a great deal about South Africa and its evolution that its two most famous patriarchs should be Jan Smuts (1870–1950) and Nelson Mandela (1918–2013), and that the latter figure made his career and a global reputation by dismantling a political system that was the logical end of the political order, decisions, and indecisions, of the earlier man. Yet, little work has been done to compare the two, and with that their contexts and legacies – until now.

*Smuts and Mandela: The Men Who Made South Africa* by political scientist and sociologist Roger Southall seeks to close this gap, and does so in a big way. The book consists of fourteen chapters, and is divided into four parts, each examining an aspect of the lives and legacies of the two figures. Importantly, Southall is convinced that the two great men do not only contrast but also have some important similarities or overlaps. He thus looks at their roles as freedom fighters, founders of “new nations”, nation builders, and global statesmen.

Comparisons in politics are complex, and require a sophisticated method. It does not help that the country in question has had multiple foundational moments. For indeed *when* was South Africa? The foundations of the country pre-existed 1910, and since that date, there have been at least four new constitutions establishing republics and matters incidental thereto, namely in 1961, 1983, 1993, and 1996. Alongside these you could throw in 1926 (the Balfour Declaration which revised the status of the Dominions), 1931 (the passing of the Westminster Statute and formalisation of sovereignty), and 1948 (the legislative consolidation of the apartheid state). Still, these merely tinkered with the basic questions set by 1910, and ultimately resolved in 1994. Smuts and Mandela, having played disproportionate roles that even the staunchest opponent of the “great man theory” of history cannot deny, deserve comparison.

The task of comparing these two South African figures, attractive as it is, is however not an easy one. It is replete with many methodological and philosophical challenges, a fact not lost on Southall. Indeed, inasmuch as there may seem to be scope for comparison of the two big founding moments of South Africa, noted biographer Richard Steyn has made the case – implicitly if not explicitly – that the ideal comparisons would be that of

Jan Smuts and Thabo Mbeki, and that of Louis Botha and Nelson Mandela.<sup>1</sup> The former pair reflected the technocratic and hands-on practitioners of statecraft, whereas the latter exhibited the more symbolic, charismatic, warm and generous type of leadership that was administratively more laid-back, if not uninterested.

Southall, however, convincingly makes the case for the Smuts–Mandela comparison. It was their ideas and personalities that won the day at the two founding moments of South Africa, when the country reached its final form physically (1908–1910) and constitutionally (1994–1996). There were some parallels, although also some major differences, in their formative years and the breadth of their conception of who is South African (that is, who deserves freedom). Proceeding from the freedom fighter to global statesman arc, weaves the narratives, and presents a circular flow to demonstrate how far the world had moved in the twentieth century: the two men began their political careers fighting for their versions of freedom, and in the end occupied larger-than-life reputations on the world stage. In those few decades – which must however have felt long for those who lived through them – much had changed in terms of the international definition of freedom and who ought to have it. Smuts attained a global role on the back of building institutions and defending high ideals abroad while presiding over racialised oppression at home. Mandela’s reputation, in turn, was won by completing what Smuts never did – or never dared to – by overturning a race-based caste system and, to the surprise of the country and the world, embracing those who had oppressed the black population.<sup>2</sup> He led with ‘magnanimity’, to use one of Smuts’ most admired phrases in the political arena.<sup>3</sup>

Southall’s work is historically detailed. Each part opens with a short introduction briefly laying out the conceptual debates in the relevant literature before delving into the historical subjects.

Much of the material itself will however be familiar to engaged readers of South African political history. The book does not present new historical material, and the author readily admits to this,<sup>4</sup> but what he does present, is a new interpretation of the available material drawn from other works. According to the author, the main argument of the book is that ‘what Smuts did during his political career had a profound influence on what Mandela set out to do and what he did in a later political era’.<sup>5</sup> To some, this may border on the tautological. Of course, an earlier period had an influence on the later tasks facing a leader in a later period. Nevertheless, Southall is able to go into some detail about the specifics to put together interesting arguments, most notably in his analysis of the physical (territorial and demographic) inheritance that Smuts left for Mandela. For, almost to the line, the structure of South Africa today resembles that of the original Union, excluding South West Africa/Namibia, which was always an occupied appendage rather than part of the country. Any attempt to tinker with the map of South Africa was later vehemently opposed by the liberation movement. The idea of the homelands never took hold (with Mandela himself breaking from his cousins, the apartheid collaborating Kaiser and George Matanzima who ruled the “Transkei Republic”). Southall also persuasively points to the constitutional architecture of the country. Smuts advocated for a unitary constitution, with only soft federalist features. It was precisely this that was wired into the 1996 constitution.

Southall evaluates the different levels and sources of power enjoyed by the two figures as freedom fighters and as leaders of their precarious new nations. While Smuts could draw on the state military, whose forging he personally oversaw as minister of defence, Mandela could mainly draw on moral persuasion. Indeed, it is fascinating to contemplate that while Smuts led from the front in battle – from the 1899–1902 conflict to the internal rebellions and the two world wars – Mandela, although he received military training, never personally fired a shot. Once in power, they went on to have different relationships with organised labour; Smuts oppositional and violent, Mandela cordial and aligned.

What do the two careers tell us about the future of South Africa as a project? For one, Southall argues that the 1910 founding was equally confident that it would last forever – that it represented “the end of history” – in much the same way some have viewed the triumph of democracy over racially exclusive rule. In this line of thinking, *Smuts and Mandela* risks falling into the now all-too-familiar category of works, which anticipate an imminent fall of South Africa:

In retrospect, we can credit Smuts with forging a new country that survives still today. Yet we now view his achievement as fatally undermined by its racial exclusivity. With the wisdom of history, we now say it was always destined to fail. Nevertheless, it is important to understand how it shaped the present and how, in all its essentials, it was to last over eighty years. Today, our present conceit is to assume that Mandela’s democracy, because it was founded upon a basis of racial equality and political inclusivity, will endure. But Smuts might smile at such sophistry and riposte that in 1910 the founders of his South Africa were similarly optimistic.<sup>6</sup>

As a political scientist and sociologist, Southall could have pursued this argument further, or not moot it at all. His last point must also be challenged. Sabotage, including self-sabotage, against the Union was readily apparent in the 1910s, if not 1910 itself. Almost from the onset, JBM Hertzog and his followers broke rank, forming the National Party in 1912, while the government of Louis Botha (by then in his triple capacity as prime minister, minister of agriculture, and minister of native affairs) and Smuts also worsened relations with the black population by enacting the 1913 Natives Land Act. The following year saw the Maritz Rebellion, a civil war that took hundreds of lives, simultaneously symbolising and deepening divisions in white politics. There have yet to be forces that can genuinely be said to be undermining the democratic state that emerged in 1994. Certainly, if there are, they have not done so with as much vigour.

It must also be said that *Smuts and Mandela* tends to neglect the works of some key scholars, particularly on Mandela. For example, in his round-up of books and edited volumes on which it has drawn – and which he bills ‘valuable interpretations of Mandela’s life and how we may understand it’ – Southall omits to even comment on the likes of Xolela Mangcu’s *The Meaning of Mandela*<sup>7</sup> (consisting of chapters by Wole Soyinka, Henry Louis Gates Jr and Cornel West, and prefaced by Mandela’s close friend and political ally Archbishop Desmond Tutu), and Busani Ngcaweni and Sabelo Ndlovu-Gatsheni’s *Nelson*

*R. Mandela: Decolonial Ethics of Liberation and Servant Leadership*,<sup>8</sup> while at the same time enlisting the criticism of Mandela for supposedly being insufficiently ‘decolonial’ as one of his motivations for writing the book now.

For a large part of the text, there is almost no interaction between the two subject figures, leading to the book reading as if it were two separate works that have been stapled, rather even than stitched, together. These early parts serve as material that will later provide the basis for the more interactive comparative analysis in Chapter 14. A more seamless approach might have been for the author to establish the common variable – i.e. South Africa itself and what he means by it – and then to consider and assess various aspects of how the actions of the two men and their colleagues contributed to the making of South Africa.

In the end, *Smuts and Mandela* develops along two key genres of comparison: of the lives and careers of Smuts and Mandela (from freedom fighters to global statesmen), including what motivated them and the methods they used, and of their contributions to the making of South Africa (holding together the terrain and helping shape the present-day constitution). The reader can expect to navigate these two streams, which finally merge in the final chapter, which deals with ‘Smuts, Mandela and the Making of South Africa’.

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## Endnotes

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- <sup>1</sup> R Steyn, *Jan Smuts: Unafraid of Greatness* (Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball, 2015), 51.
- <sup>2</sup> R Southall, *Smuts and Mandela: The Men Who Made South Africa* (Auckland Park: Jacana, 2024), 342.
- <sup>3</sup> Steyn, *Jan Smuts*, 47.
- <sup>4</sup> Southall, *Smuts and Mandela*, 17.
- <sup>5</sup> Southall, *Smuts and Mandela*, 18.
- <sup>6</sup> Southall, *Smuts and Mandela*, 83.
- <sup>7</sup> X Mangcu, *The Meaning of Mandela* (Cape Town: HSRC Press, 2006).
- <sup>8</sup> B Ngcaweni & SJ Ndlovu-Gatsheni (eds.), *Nelson R. Mandela: Decolonial Ethics of Liberation and Servant Leadership* (Trenton: Africa World Press, 2018).

# SCIENTIA MILITARIA

*South African Journal of Military Studies*



## Book Review

# Comrade and Commander: The Life and Times of Joe Modise

*Ronnie Kasrils and Fidelis Hove (eds.)*

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2024, 382 pages  
ISBN 978-1-4314-3451-0

*Comrade and Commander: The Life and Times of Joe Modise* comprises a collection of anecdotes about Joe Modise by some of his closest friends and colleagues. The book is a thorough attempt to shed light on the former Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK) leader and defence minister, not only in terms of his professional accomplishments, but also in terms of what he was like as a parent, friend, partner, and colleague. A main objective of the book was to provide his daughters, who were still relatively young when Modise died in 2001, a ‘more rounded and accurate’<sup>1</sup> picture of him, particularly given ‘negative’<sup>2</sup> portrayals in the media.

It must be emphasised up front that this is not a critical biography; the commentary is provided by those who knew and – in most instances – clearly loved Modise. This is particularly the case for the first two thirds of the book, which cover Modise’s early life through to the end of the armed struggle in 1990. As a history of the armed struggle and the operations of the African National Congress (ANC) in exile, the stories – recounted by such ANC luminaries as Ronnie Kasrils (easily the largest individual contributor to the book), Pallo Jordan, Essop Pahad, and Jackie Sedibe (eventually Modise’s wife) – are remarkably illuminating, and add a great deal to the historical record.

That said, Modise himself comes off as somewhat sphinx-like to even those who knew him as a friend and a comrade. There are several stories that humanise him, such as the account of Modise watching Tom & Jerry cartoons with his children showing he was clearly a man who loved his family and was loved deeply by them in return. Most descriptions by his ANC colleagues – “tough but fair”, “respected”, “disciplined”, and so on – however come off as broad and banal. The reader therefore does not walk away with a great feeling of what Modise was really like on an interpersonal level. That is hard to do; not everyone lends themselves to expository rhetoric about their character from friends and family, and several contributors make the point that Modise was a quiet man who was hard to get to know. One does, however, walk away feeling there is a richness to Modise’s character that does not necessarily shine through.

The first part of the book also tends to gloss over some of the less pleasant facets of Modise’s character related to his professional responsibilities. While ANC decision-making was ostensibly collective, Modise was a man who had operational command of

MK for 25 years, with the power to order (or at least influence) the execution of perceived traitors, not to mention abuses at ANC camps in Tanzania and Angola. Jordan, always more forthcoming than his colleagues, notes that, during the internecine struggles in the 1970s and 1980s, Modise ‘unfortunately seemed to surrender to the dominant paranoid mood of the security department’.<sup>3</sup> It is worth asking why Modise was unwilling or unable to avoid this. MK operative, Ribbon Mosholi, is even more direct in recounting that ‘Some said he was brutal’.<sup>4</sup> Raising these views is not a denigration of Modise or a criticism of his actions, but rather assistance to help the reader understand the problems and moral dilemmas he would have faced on a daily basis. More such views would have been welcomed.

The last third of the book, covering the transition and Modise’s tenure as defence minister under Mandela, provides some of the best insights into Modise’s character and decision-making, primarily because of the shift in narrators. At this point, we are introduced to characters such as Major General Ian Deetlefs, a veteran Citizen Force officer who worked closely with Modise on the creation of the South African National Defence Force (SANDF) Reserves (of which he became the first chief in 1997); Brigadier General Roelf Beukes, his chief of staff; and Lieutenant General Pierre Steyn, who served as Secretary for Defence. They provide up-close insights on how Modise was able to manage, by way of carrot-and-stick, the drastic transformation of the South African military during his tenure. This comprised the inclusion of former combatants, the establishment of the civil Defence Secretariat, promotion of women officers, and creation of the Service Corps. One tends to forget today the radical changes Modise undertook during his five years, and having interviewees without a vested interest in protecting Modise’s legacy (although all were clearly fond of him individually) recount them, provides the book with added value.

Of course, one topic looms large over Modise’s ministerial tenure, namely the Strategic Defence Package (“Arms Deal”) – approved in 1998 – that saw the purchase of billions of dollars’ worth of aircraft, corvettes, and submarines. Modise’s role in the approval has long been the subject of accusations that he benefited personally from the deal. This latter point is one that multiple interviewees strongly deny, noting that Modise and his family lived in relatively modest circumstances. Those defences are well established. Steyn’s words should therefore not be taken lightly:

I experienced the interference of the Minister of Defence in the arms acquisition process first-hand. His manipulation of recommendations was often inconsistent with statutory prescripts for major equipment acquisitions ... Mr Modise engaged the military top management with an air of heavyhanded authority. This became evident in his decisions to prefer certain major acquisitions in contrast to the recommendations made by the chiefs of the armed services.<sup>5</sup>

Steyn and others are quick to point out that the decisions regarding procurement were the prerogative of the President and Cabinet, not those of Modise alone. His words alone however raise questions about how Modise may have shaped the process alongside his disgraced advisor, Chippy Shaik, something a more critical biography may yet bring to life.



Ultimately, assessing a book such as *Comrade and Commander* raises an interesting philosophical question: do the memories of friends and loved ones paint a truly comprehensive picture of any person? The people who love you may know and understand your flaws and weaknesses, but they may also be loath to air them to the wider world. In a nutshell, this paradox reflects the greatest weakness of the book, namely that, in seeking to protect Modise's legacy, his loved ones' stories deprived him of nuance and depth. These stories however also remind the reader of the important role Modise played in the armed struggle as well as in shaping the modern South African military.

All things considered, *Comrade and Commander: The Life and Times of Joe Modise* is a valuable read for anyone interested in the struggle, both from the standpoint of military operations and day-to-day functions of the ANC in exile, as well as the transition period. I trust that it is not the last book on Joe Modise; he deserves a closer, more critical look. The introduction of *Comrade and Commander* notes that MK veteran, Nat Serache, is working on a proper biography of Modise, which will be well received as another valuable contribution to South African history.

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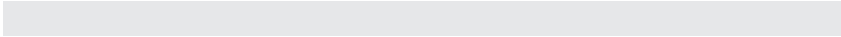
**John Siko** 

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## Endnotes

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- <sup>1</sup> R Kasrils & F Hove (eds.), *Comrade and Commander: The Life and Times of Joe Modise* (Auckland Park: Jacana, 2024), xxix.
- <sup>2</sup> Kasrils & Hove (eds.), *Comrade and Commander*, 189.
- <sup>3</sup> Kasrils & Hove (eds.), *Comrade and Commander*, 149.
- <sup>4</sup> Kasrils & Hove (eds.), *Comrade and Commander*, 118.
- <sup>5</sup> Kasrils & Hove (eds.), *Comrade and Commander*, 252.



## Book Review

# Guilty and Proud – An MK Soldier’s Memoir of Exile, Prison and Freedom

Marion Sparg

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Cape Town: Tafelberg  
2024, 287 pages  
ISBN 978-0-624-09469-2

‘Sparg case: leg irons are removed’<sup>1</sup> so read the bold headline of *The Star* newspaper dated Saturday, 30 August 1986 when Marion Sparg appeared before the court charged with treason, after her legal counsel argued for removing the shackles. Sparg first appeared before the court on 15 August 1986 when she was formally charged with treason, as the *Citizen* reported ‘Sparg was accused of treason’.<sup>2</sup> These headlines introduced Marion Monica Sparg, not only to South Africa but to the world, as a white woman, African National Congress (ANC) member, and Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK) soldier – whom the state labelled as a “terrorist” for planting bombs at three police stations.

In her memoir, *Guilty and Proud – An MK Soldier’s Memoir of Exile, Prison and Freedom*, Sparg narrates her life journey as a white female South African who was initially oblivious of the racial oppression blacks suffered under the white minority apartheid regime. The memoir focuses chronologically on three phases of her journey, which are respectively reflected in the sub-title of the memoir of *Exile, Prison and Freedom*: exile (1981–1986), prison (1986–1991), and freedom (1991–2024).

The book commences with the genesis of her political awakening in 1977, which also reveals the significant role played by Black Consciousness Movement politics in South Africa in the 1970s. Sparg’s political awakening was consolidated by her short stint as a journalist, and culminated during the 1981 anti-republican celebrations with her involvement in the petrol bombing of the Progressive Federal Party (PFP) offices.

This political awakening forced Sparg towards an unplanned journey into exile in 1981, to become an MK soldier, marking the first phase of her book title. Her experiences in Angola as a trainee and her deployment in the ANC headquarters, at the Department of Information and Publicity (DIP) section, exposed her to ANC politics, and she became imbued in its ideology. This phase was concluded by the decision to deploy her to the home front via Lesotho.

Sparg explains how she navigated the underground operational theatre on her own and how she succeeded in lying low for two months. During her stay in South Africa, her missions led her to place limpet mines at three police stations: Cambridge (East London on 19 February 1986), John Vorster Square (Johannesburg on 4 March 1986) and one that

did not detonate at Hillbrow police station (also 4 March 1986). In the opening chapter and in Chapter Fourteen, Sparg relates how she casually walked into the John Vorster Square and Hillbrow police stations for reconnaissance, and how her race made it easy to enter John Vorster Square on 4 March with limpet mines in her handbag. The black police officer manning the gate wanted to search her bag, but was stopped by a white police officer telling him not to search a white woman. She was arrested on 7 March 1986.

With her arrest, she faced interrogation by the dreaded security branch. Her arrest marked the second phase of her journey (prison 1986-1991) in the title of her book. She then planned to use her trial as a political trial to tell the world that the ANC was not a violent organisation. Her case was heard in the Rand Supreme Court. It started on 3 November 1986, and was presided over by Judge JP van der Walt. When she told her legal team of her intention to plead guilty, considering the gravity of the charge of treason, they were not pleased. She had taken this decision long before her arrest, as she states, 'I had already decided that if I was arrested, I was going to admit to my actions and explain why I had chosen, as a white South African, to join the ANC and MK.'<sup>3</sup> With this decision, Sparg wanted to make it a political trial by taking advantage of the coverage her trial received. She wanted to justify her reasons for fighting against apartheid as a white woman but also to prove that the ANC was non-racial, that it was not a terrorist organisation, and that the apartheid state was the one killing people both inside and outside the country. In the end, her legal team appreciated her stance. Her guilty plea helped to whittle down the witnesses from 141 to only six, saving her family the trouble of testifying against her.

As expected, Sparg was found guilty, and sentenced to 25 years imprisonment escaping both a life sentence and death sentence for a serious crime of treason. She served only five and half years at Pretoria Central as prisoner no. 1062/86, the same prison where Steve Biko died at the hands of police in detention on 12 September 1977.

In prison, Sparg met other white women who were serving sentences for political reasons, such as Barbara Hogan, Trish Hanekom, Jansie Lourens, and Ruth Gerhard. To make the best out of her prison stay, she registered for a BA Honours degree in Political Studies at the University of South Africa (Unisa), after she was denied registering for journalism. Among the letters she received, was a poem from Annemarie Hendrickz, which contained the words 'Guilty and proud',<sup>4</sup> which Sparg used when she pleaded guilty to the charges; and this became the title of her memoir.

The third phase of *Guilty and Proud* encompasses Sparg's release from prison as part of the negotiation process to release political prisoners, and the end of apartheid. She was released in April 1991 as part of the political arrangement to release political prisoners for the political transition of the country. This phase of the book gives the reader a glimpse of the negotiation process to end apartheid, and Sparg's role in shaping a post-apartheid South Africa, which comprises the essence of this book. The publicity of her arrest and trial as MK guerrilla was so far-reaching that Nelson Mandela visited her in prison – one of his priorities immediately after his release in 1990. His visit gave her hope that she would also be released. On her release, she became involved in political work for the ANC. After her short stay in Johannesburg, she flew back to East London, and she was

surprised to receive a hero's welcome when she landed. Moving around East London, she was surprised that the previous white conservative town embraced her, with a few hostile individuals remaining. Some white people were also politically active in the ANC, serving in the ANC executive committee for the Border region, and as staff in the regional offices. Sparg was also surprised that, when the parliamentary list for the region and province in preparation for the 1994 elections was submitted, there were a higher number of white names than names of black people.

In 1991, at the 48<sup>th</sup> ANC National Conference, Sparg was elected to the National Executive Committee (NEC) of the party. Working in the office of the secretary-general, she was always part of Nelson Mandela's entourage during negotiations as part of the Convention for a Democratic South Africa (CODESA). Another prominent event of her life after her imprisonment was the 28 March 1994 Inkatha Freedom Party march to Shell House. The march happened when she was in Cape Town on organisational matters. When she returned to the office the following day, one member of staff showed her a bullet hole directly behind her chair, which suggested that the bullet came from a sniper, and she was a possible target. Her assumption of a sniper was strengthened during the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) hearing from the evidence given by Andrew Leask, which also claimed that the Goldstone Commission of Inquiry Regarding the Prevention of Public Violence and Intimidation in 1991 was warned about the plot to assassinate top ANC leaders.

Sparg concludes the book with a reflection on her role in MK, and whether her life for the struggle for liberation was worth the sacrifice. To this question, Sparg answered with a resounding yes, and added that she is proud to have contributed towards the fight against apartheid and the creation of a non-racial South Africa. She is proud to have contributed 'towards giving South Africa the greatest gift of all – a more human face'.<sup>5</sup> She however acknowledges the shortcomings of the ANC as the ruling party for having disappointed to deliver on its promises and singles out 'the wasted nine years under Jacob Zuma'.<sup>6</sup>

To those who had an influence in her life as leaders and mentors, she has dedicated some chapters in the memoir. These are Chapter Eight for Jack Simmons, Joe Slovo (Chapter Nine), Nelson Mandela (Chapter Twenty-five) and Chris Hani (Chapter Twenty-six). In the case of others, such as Thabo Mbeki, she has incorporated her encounters with them and their influence in her life in other parts of the book.

*Guilty and Proud – An MK Soldier's Memoir of Exile, Prison and Freedom* is not just a memoir, but also a history and record of some of the MK operations in the 1980s. Most of the individuals Sparg mentions in the memoir, are not just names, as she provides a background of each individual and their role and contribution, locating each name in the struggle for liberation. All these make Marion Sparg's book a good read and a vital addition to the historiography of the struggle for liberation in South Africa.

Importantly, *Guilty and Proud – An MK Soldier's Memoir of Exile, Prison and Freedom* sheds light on why some white men and women consciously decided to forego the privileges of the apartheid system and become involved in the armed struggle. On this,

Judge JP van der Walt stated, 'If a black South African were in your position his or her acts could be understood, although not excused.'<sup>7</sup> The important message that Sparg conveys, is to fight injustice done to a fellow human being. *Guilty and Proud* is a worthy read for anti-apartheid enthusiasts and autobiography readers and a milestone contribution to enrich the historiography covering the 30 years of the liberation struggle in South Africa.

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## Endnotes

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- <sup>1</sup> I Molzen, 'Sparg Case: Leg Irons are Removed', *The Star*, 30 August 1986.
- <sup>2</sup> S Lieberum, 'Sparg Accused of Treason', *The Citizen*, 16 August 1986.
- <sup>3</sup> M Sparg, *Guilty and Proud: An MK Soldier's Memoir of Exile, Prison and Freedom* (Cape Town: Tafelberg, 2024), 145.
- <sup>4</sup> Sparg, *Guilty and Proud*, 194.
- <sup>5</sup> Sparg, *Guilty and Proud*, 257.
- <sup>6</sup> Sparg, *Guilty and Proud*, 257.
- <sup>7</sup> Sparg, *Guilty and Proud*, 189.

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## NOTES TO CONTRIBUTORS, REVIEWERS AND READERS

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