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THE TRANSFORMATION OF MILITARY INTELLIGENCE AND
SPECIAL FORCES: TOWARDS AN ACCOUNTABLE AND
TRANSPARENT MILITARY CULTURE.

INTRODUCTION

All armed forces require both a Military Intelligence and a Special Forces/Special Operations function - regardless of whether the defence posture of a country is of an offensive or defensive nature. This reality is taken as a self-evident proposition in this paper. However . considerable disagreement may exist over the scope and scale of these structures - particularly in the South African situation. It is towards a resolution of this problem that any future strategy must address itself.

This paper works within three broad orbits. It proposes. firstly. that any assessment of the transformation of both Military Intelligence and Special Forces is flawed unless we consider the "ideal" role which these functions should play in any Defence Force (although this is always subject to the peculiarities of the country and the conflict in question). Secondly. it maintains that it is vital to take into consideration these forces as they exist at present (primarily, although not exclusively. within the SADF). thirdly, it proposes a transformatory "model" of how both MI and the Special Forces can be reconstituted under an Interim government.

Encouragingly. a degree of consensus appears to be emerging around certain key areas of the current security debate principles of civilian control. the non-partisan nature of the armed forces. accountability of the armed forces, the legitimacy of the armed forces etc. However, virtually no other factor within the present military and security debate remains as problematic as that of the Military Intelligence/Special Forces phenomenon. Unless this issue is satisfactorily resolved. its capacity to delegitimize a future Defence Force will be considerable.

1. A QUESTION OF DEFINITION: WHAT DO WE MEAN BY
MILITARY INTELLIGENCE AND THE SPECIAL FORCES?

In this paper I am going to take the liberty of expanding the meaning of both Military Intelligence and Special Forces as generally used by both the SADF and security establishment experts. I will also focus largely on the SADF's Military Intelligence and Special Forces functions (although the TVBC armies and MK also possess numerically smaller military intelligence and Special Forces functions).

Special Forces, as used by the SADF today, only refers to the activities of the 4 Reconnaissance Regiments (currently undergoing process of rationalization). The mission of these regiments is , in their own words, "to inflict the maximum disruption on the enemy of the state by means of special actions". To accomplish this goal they are equipped to undertake long-range penetration of hostile countries with the intention of acquiring strategic intelligence on enemy dispositions.

I want to expand this definition of Special Forces to include such units as 32 Battalion and 31 Battalion. Although theoretically these are light infantry units. their training; deployment patterns; selection process; operational performance; and, indeed, their vastly expanded reconnaissance functions effectively constitute them as Special Forces -type elite units.

For the purposes of clarity and convenience, I would also like to group a number of defence intelligence functions under the cover of Military Intelligence. "Military Intelligence", as colloquially used within the SADF today, refers either to Chief of Staff Intelligence (the co-ordinating body for Intelligence requirements within the SADF) or the Chief Directorate Military Intelligence (the strategic intelligence component of Chief of Staff Intelligence). When using the word MI I will be referring to all intelligence functions within the present SADF namely Chief of Staff Intelligence as well as the tactical intelligence directorates (Army Intelligence; Air Force Intelligence; Naval Intelligence; Medical Intelligence. and the signals/ electronic intelligence functions resorting beneath them).

2. THE IDEAL "MODEL" FOR A MILITARY INTELLIGENCE AND A SPECIAL FORCES FUNCTION.

2.1 The "ideal" role of a Military Intelligence function.

Speaking about ideal "models" is a highly theoretical exercise. It does equip us, however, with those principles and doctrines which should ideally underpin a particular force structure. It also provides us with a large degree of clarity as to what the roles and missions of a particular structure ought to be. It is this lack of clarity that is sadly lacking in the present debate surrounding the roles and mission of the present MI/Special Forces axis. The ideal Military Intelligence requirements of a particular Defence force should always be balanced against a number of variables. These include:

it The balance of power within the broader intelligence community itself.

it The intelligence responsibilities shared amongst the other members of the intelligence community (civilian and police intelligence for instance). Have these been adequately and coherently defined? 15

i there a clear understanding of each agency's responsibilities? Is there adequate co-ordination and oversight over these structures?

l: The missions of the armed forces within a particular country. If the armed forces are confined to an external brief, then both their strategic and tactical intelligence functions will be "outward looking". The armed forces should not possess internal intelligence brief unless in such scenarios as natural calamities.

t The degree of autonomy possessed by the MI function of particular Defence Force. A high level of autonomy may allow the MI structure in question to redefine and exceed their traditional intelligence brief. A constitutionally defined level of autonomy and

a high degree of legislative oversight. will reign in the corporate ambitions of any intelligence agency.

s The geo.-strategic peculiarities of both the country itself and those of its regional neighbours.

Bearing in mind these factors. it is possible to venture the following axioms regarding the "ideal" role of Military Intelligence:

)k That the primary scope of Military Intelligence remain of a tactical nature and that this tactical intelligence function reflect the "traditional" brief of the armed forces - the preservation of the territorial integrity of the country. In essence this tactical intelligence function will concern itself with external military configurations counting the tanks and the airplanes of neighbouring countries for example-Threat analysis specific and overall.

e That the armed forces be withdrawn from an internal policing or police-supportive role and that the responsibility for this particular sphere of tactical intelligence be devolved either onto the intelligence functions of either the police, civilian intelligence or a national peace-keeping force.

t That the armed forces do possess the need for a defined strategic intelligence function but that this be limited to the acquisition of information on long-term military intentions of adversaries or potential military adversaries. Strategic intelligence should remain the prerogative of a civilian intelligence agency. Civilian agency has overall responsibility

for interpret and analysis.

it That a national civilian intelligence agency and not Military Intelligence . remain responsible for the ultimate co-ordination. analysis and distribution of the strategic intelligence brief.
it That as much insight and transparency be afforded into the activities of Military Intelligence as is practically possible.

2.2 The "model" of Special Forces preferred by the ANC

As with Military Intelligence functions. the role of an "ideal" Special Forces function remains influenced by the threat analysis; the doctrine undermining a particular Defence Force: the existence of other rapid deployment units within both the Defence Force and other components of the security establishment: and the geo.-strategic peculiarities of the country in question.

Generally speaking. it is possible to venture the following axioms regarding the preferred role of Special Forces:

it That the Primary task of a Special Force is to be able to know in advance about strategic intelligence within enemy immediate and far areas in order to prepare and organise itself adequately.

t That the secondary task of a Special Forces function be the disruption of the enemy's logistical. communications and administrative infrastructure during a period of conflict.

t That all Special Forces operations be subject to both Cabinet and Ministerial approval and oversight.

ii That all Special Forces personnel be bound by the same Code of Conduct as other military personnel

3k That Special Forces operations be governed by the stipulations of the Geneva Convention and those aspects of international law to which the state is a signatory.

a': That no member of the Special Forces be used in an internal urban counter-insurgency role.

There is nothing particularly contentious about the preceding "ideal" models of both a Military Intelligence and Special Forces function. However the application and development of these functions within the present SADF has resulted in distortions and deviations that barely resemble the traditional roles of both MI and Special Forces elsewhere. This is considered below.

3. MILITARY INTELLIGENCE AND SPECIAL FORCES AT PRESENT:

THE LEGACY OF "TOTAL STRATEGY"?

3.1 The changing fortunes of Military Intelligence

I argue in this section that the functions of the SADF's present Military Intelligence function have been distorted by five primary factors which I consider below.

21) MI and Township Deployment

The extensive involvement of the SADF in police supportive. internal urban counter-insurgency duties since 1984 resulted in an expansion of its intelligence brief which it had hitherto not possessed. The deployment of Army personnel in the townships provided Army Intelligence with a tactical intelligence focus which was reflected in a wide range of its activities. Amongst these activities were the following:

t The monitoring and infiltration of a wide range of organizations such as the Black Sash. the South African Council of Churches. trade unions. students and the End Conscription Campaign among others.
it The provision of covert funds to those organizations perceived of as being sympathetic to the state. the SADF and the National Party.

)k The monitoring of civilian individuals who constituted no military "threat" to the state.

What is at question in these examples is the very involvement of MI internally against South Africans. The function of internal security, it is felt. is more rightfully the terrain of either the police. a national peace-keeping force or both. Similarly. internal intelligence tasks of a tactical nature more rightfully resort under a police intelligence function.

b) Confused briefs and lack of effective co-ordination

The extensive powers which MI enjoyed in the post 1978 period in particular. can be partially attributed to the symbiotic relationship it enjoyed with the person of PW Botha. However. much of its incremental growth in influence can also be attributed to an inadequate definition of its scope of responsibilities in relationship to the other components of the intelligence "family" and its exceedingly broad responsibilities as a result of its involvement in both the Angolan and the Namibian conflicts. A number of contributory factors can be mentioned in this regard:

it The haste with which :1 Directorate of Military Intelligence was constituted in 1960 .

t A failure to determine which intelligence tasks resorted under either MI or the Special Branch/NIS.
And lack of co-ordination.

:k The extensive involvement of the SADF in two major wars in the sub-continent - conventional war in Angola and counter-insurgency war in Namibia. The scope of these conflicts both distorted the role of Military Intelligence and resulted in increased responsibilities being placed on the shoulders of Special Forces (making the latter the de facto "operational arm" of MI)

:k The extent to which "Total Strategy" also expanded the role of the armed forces in particular and MI specifically. Virtually no arena of social life was exempt from its scrutiny - be it economic, political, social or psychological.

It is significant to note that despite endless efforts at securing some form of inter-agency co-ordination, these were ultimately unsuccessful - the agreement reached between MI and the SB in June 1966 over areas of responsibility: the 1963 Project Committee; the State Security committee between 1963 - 1965; the State Security Advisory board between 1966 - 1967 : the Potgieter Report; the institution of the State Security Council in 1972; the symposium on Strategy in 1976 ; the Van Dalens committee in 1977. and the Simonstown Accord of 1981.

c) The politicisation of MI intelligence tasks

Failure to specify the precise responsibilities of Military Intelligence, and the expanded influence which has been afforded them in the last 15 years, has resulted in the politicisation of a range of key Military Intelligence tasks. These have included:

e The politicization of Counter-Intelligence responsibilities. Traditional counter-intelligence should be responsible for the

protection of "own" information from compromise or disclosure. The deployment of covert units against certain targets as the experience of Directorate of Covert collation.

t The involvement of MI in a "Psychological Warfare" campaign - referred to as "Command Communications" or "Communication Operations" facilitated the identification of MI with a partisan. party-political project. There existed nothing to distinguish the manuals of "Komops" with the general political principles of the National Party.

KThe involvement of Army Intelligence in the execution of state policy at grassroots level was most vividly demonstrated by its activities in the Mini-JMCs (particularly their Joint Intelligence and Joint Security Committees). This phenomenon invariably militarizes those functions of government that should remain civilian. A recent example in this regard is that of the Win Heart and Minds (WHAM) program being initiated in the Group 45 HQ area in Pietersburg.

Targeting the ANC as the "enemy" specifically, Army Intelligence is using 1 17 Battalion and 1 18 Battalion to "Win the Hearts and minds" of the population in an "anti-democratic strategy"

2': The activities of the Directorate Covert Collection. far from constituting a standard countet-intelligence operation. were deliberately targeted against the ANC and the democratic movement.

The politicization of key functions within the armed forces has deleterious consequences for the restructuring of the armed forces during a period of

transition. Not only is intense resistance to change often generated from within these quarters. but the task of returning MI to a more traditional brief is also made infinitely more complex. '

(1) Lack of legal and legislative oversight

The absence of effective legal and legislative oversight and transparency into the activities-of MI has saddled us with many of the problems we face at present. Included in these problems are:

t The utilization of tax-payers money for unauthorized projects.

it The use of the Military Intelligence structures to invade the privacy of others.

at The deployment of MI personnel in contentious operations - support for UNITA and MNR operations. and the fielding of the CCB for instance.

Clearly, a democratic government cannot permit a similar abuse of powers occurring either within MI in particular or the intelligence community in general. A range of effective control and oversight measures must be

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considered for a future intelligence community.

3.2 Special Forces and the enemy within

In a declared state of war, the fielding of Special Forces/ Special Operations personnel is eminently practical. It can equip one with valuable intelligence on the enemy's intentions. whilst also proving capable of disrupting his military capabilities. However. such deployment must take place within the provisions of national and international law and with due cognisance to the various stipulations of the Geneva Convention.

South Africa was never in a declared state of war with the subcontinent. Yet it continued to field Special Forces personnel in a variety of tasks - many of which can barely be construed as constituting the traditional task of Special

Forces operations. The disruption of the economies of the Frontline States. the tens of thousands of civilians who died as a result of MI/Special Forces-supported banditry, and the civilians who died in the frequent Special Forces raids into the Frontline states. hardly constitute legitimate military targets in this regard.

Perhaps most disturbing was the growing perception in the post- 1984 period with official approval - that Special Forces merited an internal deployment role as well. The deployment of the CCB , and the alleged deployment of Special Forces personnel in township violence in the post - 1990 period are prime examples of an increasingly dangerous Special Forces function.

The composition of the Special Forces Division and both 32 and 31 Battalion bears vivid testimony of the extent to which SADF Special Forces lacked any moral legitimacy. Composed of foreigners from the regions and abroad who have defended colonial rules.

It was these factors that combined to create a specific Special Forces culture - a culture that blended a peculiar admixture of elite unit pride and lack of accountability. It is surely self-evident to any professional soldier that a culture of this nature has no place in a future Defence Force!

4. MILITARY INTELLIGENCE AND SPECIAL FORCES IN

TRANSITION: A LESSON IN PRAGMATISM

I stated at the beginning of this paper that all armed forces require both a Military Intelligence and Special Forces/Special Operations function of some form or other . I attempted to sketch a few very general principles which could underpin an "ideal" model of these functions and illustrated the extent to which the SADF's present Military Intelligence and Special Forces components had deviated from that model. I will now outline a further series of general proposals as to how these structures can be transformed in the forthcoming decade.

Prior to any attempt at restructuring either Military Intelligence or the Special Forces we need to ask ourselves three salient questions. Firstly. what type of

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defence posture are we considering in the future (and, indeed, what type of defence posture will emerge from the present security debate)? Secondly, what type of Defence Force are we considering in the forthcoming years? Thirdly, what would the role within that Defence force be for both military Intelligence and Special Forces and elite unit formations? Without venturing any final statements on the process of defence restructuring, I would like to point to the following observations. Firstly, "suffice it to say that what is likely, although not necessarily pre-determined, that a future defence posture will tend to adopt a more defensive posture than it has in the past. In other words, there will be a revision of the present strategy of "Offensive Defence" or "Pre-emptive Defence". Secondly, the adoption of a largely defensive posture will impact on a variety of factors which have resulted in the present SADF and its structure. All these will be subject of discussions involving SADF and others.

4.1 WHITHER MILITARY INTELLIGENCE IN THE ABSENCE OF A THREAT?

It is clear from my preceding comments that future Military Intelligence requires major reconsiderations. It can afford neither the political profile, scope of its work, or duplication of structures that it possesses at present. The future restructuring of Military Intelligence must, therefore, take cognisance of three realities - strategic, structural and ethical.

a) Strategic considerations in the restructuring of MI

The balance of power internally and externally militates against the retention of a MI function in its present form and at its present force levels. Three factors confirm this observation:

t The tendency within the Southern African region (and, one assumes, the continent) will increasingly incline towards regional military co-operation at all levels- training, manoeuvres and intelligence sharing. Such a scenario will make it difficult to justify the retention of an offensive military

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intelligence function towards the region at peace with SA.

It must be adequate and efficient .

t: It is generally agreed. and is also desirable.

that the SADF is phased out of its present

internal urban counter - insurgency role.

These responsibilities will be devolved

onto either the police (for community

policing tasks) or a national _-,

peacekeeping force (for internal disturbance

tasks). This will eliminate MI's justification

for an internal intelligence role.

l: The absence of an international threat

scenario will create even more favourable

conditions for all of us.

Within this scenario of reduced conflict. it would be appropriate to redefine

the roles and responsibilities not only of MI but also those of the other

components of the intelligence community. This makes not only military but

also economic sense.

b) Structural considerations in the restructuring of MI

The present MI community possesses a vast, and one would venture a

bloated. bureaucratic structure. Its size is disproportionate both to its present

responsibilities and to the size of the other staff structures. The

rationalization of MI structures could. therefore. consider the following:

t't The institution of a technical Committee to

examine the restructuring of the Military

Intelligence function. Such a Commission

could advise either the TEC Sub Council

on Defence or a post election Ministry of

Defence (or both).

:k The question of Chief of Staff or ./

duplication of seven staff functions should

be visited. (Each of the four services

already possesses a duplication of the 7
Staff functions represented at the Chief of Staff level)
From henceforth tactical intelligence can resort under
its appropriate service. whilst strategic intelligence
can be handled by Directorate under the
Chief of the Defence force portfolio.

t Concrete consideration should be given to
the restructuring and rationalization of
certain Military Intelligence functions. Chief
Directorate Communications Operations
and Command Operations can possibly be
handled by civic action component for
external use only. This matter needs discussion
at specialised levels.

The intelligence personnel of the TVBC armies , MK and APLA should also
be identified in this process and concrete preparations made for their
integration into a future Defence Force. This is best effected once some
system of joint control has been instituted over the armed forces during the
pre-election scenario. Flaming should start now.

(2) Ethical considerations in the restructuring of MI

The ethical underpinnings of a future intelligence culture remain important
both for the transparency which they will provide the citizenry into the
activities of the intelligence community. and to the extent that they will rectify
the suspicions of the past with regard to military intelligence operations.

Measures that can be proposed include the following:

t't The institution of a Code of Conduct for
all intelligence officers of the intelligence
community.

it A way be found to deal with the past
without making this effort a stumbling block
to build a future and reconciliation . We must
avoid to be slave of the past. to be
boggled down by the past. Our aim is
basically that the past is useful as it lays the

basis for a solid future.

l The institution of a moral and ethical modular component in the professional training of all officers. This could be included as a compulsory component in all Staff and Corps training curricula.
 tk The initiation of a debate on the "ethics of intelligence". The absence of this debate within the present MI community, and the largely technocratic orientation of the present intelligence services, makes this all the more imperative.

It should be stated that the restructuring of the Military Intelligence function should proceed in as pragmatic a manner as possible (and this is strategy that should also be applied to the restructuring of the Special Forces function). Intelligence personnel possess skills generally not shared by ordinary soldiers, sailors and airmen. They are accustomed to operating in a covert and clandestine manner. they manage or have access to reasonably well-organized networks of operatives, and they more often than not have access to military hardware and materiel. Recent events have illustrated the danger of displacing these members from within the armed forces onto the extra-parliamentary terrain where they can, and are currently in the process, of utilizing their considerable skills in the pursuit of specific party-political goals.

4.2 RESTRUCTURING SPECIAL FORCES: DIFFERENT TACTICS FOR DIFFERENT UNITS.

The restructuring of Special Forces is a more complex process than that underlying the restructuring of the Military Intelligence function. A number of factors must be appreciated when attempting to restructure the Special Forces axis: /

a Special Forces units are more heterogeneous than

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Military Intelligence structures. They admit to different operational experiences. regimental traditions and unit histories. t Special forces units contain a high percentage of foreigners within their ranks (regardless of whether these members have been "naturalized" in the last few years). A blanket policy cannot be pursued with regard to all Special Forces units. Individual units require different strategies in the process of restructuring and/or re-deployment.

i: The restructuring of the Special Forces requires a tactical flexibility that prevents the alienation of a group of soldiers who are . potentially, highly volatile.

SF The wide skills base possessed by Special Forces operators must be taken into consideration when reconsidering alternative deployment for former Special Forces members within other sectors of the armed forces.

In light of the above it is proposed that the following strategy be adopted towards the restructuring of the Special Forces function:

it That a technical committee be appointed by either the TEC Sub Council on Defence or a post-election Interim Government of National Unity to study the issues and take the necessary decisions. Bilateral and or multilateral discussions should not be delayed.

it That the FIRST PHASE of restructuring include a detailed personnel audit of all Special Forces personnel within the SADF and the TVBC

armies. and of all Special Operations personnel within APLA and MK (this can take place co-terminously with the phased integration process as agreed to at the current bilaterals).

t That the SECOND PHASE of

restructuring occur after the elections and include the following:

a) The investigation of retention, deployment etc.

b) The identification of Special Forces

personnel whose professionalism may

enable them to continue rendering

their services within a future Special

Forces function. This applies to

personnel from the SADF, MK and

TVBC armies.

c) The investigation of the reintegration of

Special Forces personnel into existing

conventional combat or training units.

The adoption of a more defensive posture

may also impact on handling of

both the SADF's existing light infantry

tradition and its "parabat" (airborne

infantry) component. Special Forces

expertise can certainly be used in this arena.

)k The THIRD PHASE is somewhat more problematic

than the preceding two phases and involves

a national and regional consultation, where we deal with foreign elements.

This phase should be done in as broad and as

consultative a manner possible. The tendency

of the present SADF to act unilaterally must

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stop.

It is instructive to bear in mind that each Special Forces unit requires individual attention. 31 Battalion constitutes some 40% of the Namibian SAN population and consists of a cohesive cultural community. This must apply to other similarly constituted regiments.

CONCLUSION

The restructuring of the Military Intelligence and Special Forces functions in a future Defence Force will require maturity, foresight and professionalism. The history of these structures is problematic and will invariably elicit emotional debate from various quarters. However, the satisfactory resolution of this problem is of immense significance not only to South Africa but also to the region. The creation of a Military Intelligence and Special Forces culture that is legitimate and accountable will allay fears of a return to the old style of soldiering that typified their operations in the past.

THE ISSUE IN ALL THIS IS NOT WHETHER THERE SHOULD BE DM1
AND SPECIAL FORCES BUT HOW THEY SHOULD BE CONSTITUTED,
AND FOR WHAT PURPOSES.