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The South African National Defence Force: Mandate, Capacity and Constraints

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Abstract

The discussion aims at providing a descriptive analysis of the mandate, capacity, and constraints in the practice of South African defence since 1994. The approach will be historical analytical, considering the practice of South African Defence since 1994 with specific reference to each presidential period. In the analysis of the defence function, it is important to also tie the role of defence into the conceptualisation of security by the political elite; whether by default or by implication. The mandate of the SANDF is enshrined and explicitly outlined in the Constitution. Yet, it is open for interpretation by the SANDF. And the interpretation thereof had important implications for the practice of South African defence since 1994. The disequilibrium between structure and strategy is an important framework for understanding the capacity and the constraints in the practice of defence. Underpinning the difficulty of equilibrium in the South African defence policy is the inability to translate defence policy into strategy since 1994; and to align the defence budget, strategy, and structure of the South African military.

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Abel Esterhuysen is a professor in the Department of Strategic Studies in the Faculty of Military Science, Stellenbosch University at the South African Military Academy. Holding a PhD from the University of Stellenbosch, he is also a graduate of the Senior Leadership Programme of the African Center for Strategic Studies in Washington DC; The Summer Programme in Military History at the US Military Academy, West Point; and the Programme on the Analysis of Military Operations and Strategy (SWAMOS) of Columbia University's Saltzman Institute of War and Peace Studies in New York. Before joining academia, he served as an officer in the South African Army. A rated scientist of the South African National Research Foundation, he specialises in South African security and defence, military and strategic theory, and contemporary conflict. His most recent publication is a co-authored book chapter titled 'African Armed Forces and the Need for Security: Making Sense of Realities'.