

The emerging South African profile in Africa: Reflections on the significance of South Africa's entrance into peacekeeping

by Theo Neethling

Abstract

Since the political transformation in South Africa in 1994, there has been a steady growth in expectations in Africa and elsewhere regarding South Africa's role as a peacekeeper in African conflicts. With its participation in two peace missions of the United Nations (UN) in Africa, the country now seeks to take up its rightful role in international peacekeeping, both politically and militarily. It can rightly be stated that South Africa's engagement in peacekeeping is of great interest from a foreign policy and security point of view. This paper endeavours to discuss South Africa's emerging profile in Africa. Especially, it attempts to reflect and comment on the significance and importance of the country's contributions to multinational peacekeeping.

1. Introduction

Being committed to regional peace and security, and to the strengthening of regional security arrangements, the South African government has embarked upon a process of planning for eventualities as regards peace missions¹. Against this background the White Paper on South African Participation in International Peace Missions (hereafter White Paper) was compiled by the Department of Foreign Affairs, approved by Cabinet on 21 October 1998 and tabled in Parliament on 24 February 1999. Generally speaking, the White Paper can be regarded as a crucial framework and guideline for South Africa's participation in peace missions. The document has a wide scope and covers not only the philosophical and political aspects of involvement in peace missions, but also the practical aspects of the country's potential contributions. From a foreign policy point of view, the White Paper is certainly a groundbreaking document. It is possibly the most important foreign policy document yet to pass Cabinet, since it forced the South African government to outline its national interests and to define how these interests interfaced with its philosophy on conflict resolution and its general approach towards Africa.

While South Africa is now beyond the point of defining policy guidelines on participation in peace missions, the government has practically moved to involve the South African National Defence Force (SANDF) in international peace missions in two African states. Towards the end of 2000 an announcement was made that South African officers would be deployed as military liaison officers to support the peace process between Ethiopia and Eritrea. A total of seven SANDF officers have since then been deployed to the UN Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea (UNMEE) and another two officers to the Organisation of African Unity Liaison Mission in Ethiopia/Eritrea (OLMEE) (Van der Walt 2001:3).

In an even more significant announcement on 23 March 2001, the South African Minister of Defence, Mr Mosiuoa Lekota, stated that in compliance with the international obligations of the Republic of South Africa towards the UN, South Africa would contribute elements of specialised units to the UN Organisation Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo (MONUC) (Anon. 2001a:1). This announcement was a historical development in the sense that it paved the way for the SANDF's first substantial contribution specifically of a human resources nature to international peace missions. At the time of writing, 96 members of the SANDF have been deployed to the DRC (Democratic Republic of Congo) as staff officers in various specialised roles, such as air cargo handling, air crash rescuing,

medical evacuation, as well as command and support tasks (Van der Walt 2001:9-10).

It should immediately be said that South Africa's contributions to these missions could by no means be considered as big. Furthermore, it has been decided that South Africa will only contribute a number of (unarmed) military observers to UNMEE and a few military liaison officers to OLMEE. Also, at the time of writing no officers have been deployed in combat or peace enforcement roles as far as MONUC is concerned. Yet these developments are of great interest from a South African foreign policy and security point of view. It also coincides with the deployment of between 600 and 700 South African troops in Burundi in October and November 2001 with a view to protecting about 150 Burundian political leaders returning from exile to participate in that country's power-sharing Transitional Government, which was installed on 1 November 2001. The aim of this paper is to reflect and comment on the significance of South Africa's emerging profile in Africa with specific reference to its contributions to the above-mentioned multinational peacekeeping endeavours.

2. Africa's Importance for South Africa

In today's community of nations, South Africa can be regarded as a "middle power". Between Denmark and Indonesia on the one hand and Thailand and Finland on the other, South Africa ranks number 29 in terms of Gross National Product in the international community (Anon. 2001b:364). The country seems to align and present itself as part of that consortium of countries that includes developing states Norway, Canada, Sweden and the Netherlands, and developing countries such as India, Cuba and Brazil (Cilliers 1999a:1). South Africa has certainly shown a remarkable ability to engage in and contribute to multilateralism and middle power diplomacy in recent years. Yet as far as the promotion of security goes, its role and placing in the African context is of particular interest.

The White Paper clearly makes the point that "although South Africa acknowledges its global responsibilities, the prioritisation afforded to Africa in South African foreign policy makes Africa the prime focus for future engagements" (Department of Foreign Affairs 1999:22). This state of affairs is no coincidence since Africa is one of South Africa's largest export markets. Ahwireng-Obeng & McGowan (1998:11) state that

Exports to Africa are sharply different from South Africa's exports to its traditional Triad markets. Unlike South Africa's continuing export of gems, precious metals, minerals and base metals to the North, South Africa's exports to Africa are now the largest destination for value-added goods, taking nearly 30 per cent of total beneficiated exports...in manufacturing and services South Africa's prime growing market is Africa, particularly Southern Africa. Other than tourism and trade in minerals and niche agriculture (wine and fruit) with the North, it is in Africa that South Africa has its strongest competitive advantages.

Apart from its economic interest in Africa, South Africa is also strongly concerned with Africa's well being and future. Analysts often point out that "state collapse" and wars in countries such as Angola and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) have important implications for South Africa. "Without an end to these wars and the establishment of an effective state in countries such as the DRC and Angola, there cannot be stability or democracy, and therefore no sustainable development" (Cilliers 1999a:1).

Within this framework, South Africa's current relations with the rest of the continent are especially

concerned with the African Renaissance vision: Africa's long-awaited upliftment – spiritual, technological, cultural, political and otherwise. It would seem that South Africa – with President Thabo Mbeki clearly at the helm – feels a strong responsibility for realising the African dream. Specifically, the South African President has been an initiator of the New Partnership for Africa's Development Plan (NEPAD) – a blueprint for Africa's future development³. In fact, one may argue that South Africa's relations with the rest of Africa seem to arise from a genuine concern with the future of the continent and its people. According to a 1997 foreign policy discussion document of the African National Congress, South Africa's approach to the rest of the continent is based on the following considerations:

The fact that South Africa is part of the African continent, and that its economic development is linked to what happens on the continent as a whole.

The fact that South Africa has an important role to play in the economic and political revival of the continent.

The fact that the economic development of the African continent as a whole will be a significant step in overcoming the North-South divide (Botha 2000:3-4).

Against this background, it is hardly surprising that South Africa's security interests are strongly attached to that of the rest of the continent and that the country's armed forces have been specifically committed to participation in peace missions on African soil.

3. South Africa's International Profile

Some observers argued in the late-1990s that South Africa's input in the African debate on peacekeeping had been fairly limited owing to the fact that the country was still relatively inexperienced in the field of peacekeeping, and because of a perceived reluctance to deploy troops in conflict situations. For instance, Malan (1998:21) earlier pointed out that

[p]articipation in international peacekeeping is a passport to international respectability and to an authoritative voice in the debate on the future of international conflict management and the reform of intergovernmental organisations such as the United Nations, the Organisation of African Unity and the Southern African Development Community. It is through such participation that countries with far less resources such as Ghana, Senegal, Kenya, Botswana and Zimbabwe enjoy a stronger voice in these debates – despite the considerable insight and analytical capability of South Africans in this arena. However, South Africa has officially declared its commitment to playing a meaningful role in Africa and the rest of the international community, and has even (at least by implication) stated its aspiration to become a permanent member of the Security Council of the UN. In 1998 it was also selected to chair the Non-Aligned Movement for a period of three years and it will become the first chair of the to-be-established African Union in 2002. It is envisaged that the African Union will replace the OAU in 2002. In addition, President Thabo Mbeki has probably been the most prominent African leader to address the G8 summit in Italy in July 2001 on plans for uplifting African countries.

Against this background, it is important to note that the White Paper explicitly states that participation in peace missions is increasingly becoming a prerequisite for international respectability, and for a strong voice in debates on multinational conflict management and on the reform of supra-national organisations. With its contributions to MONUC and UNMEE, South Africa has now clearly shown its commitment to becoming involved in international peacekeeping endeavours. Therefore, it can be stated that South Africa has seemingly realised that lack of participation in international peace

missions will make it extremely difficult to play key roles in the international community, in Africa and in the regional environment especially in the field of peacekeeping.

Having said this, it is important to note that Zimbabwe which has always been considered the powerhouse of peacekeeping training in Southern Africa was formally recognised in 1999 by the Southern African Development Community's (SADC) Inter-State Defence and Security Committee as the location for a Regional Peacekeeping Training Centre. However, the worsening political situation in Zimbabwe has seemingly upset a number of Western stakeholders, with dire consequences particularly for continued Scandinavian engagement with the Centre in Harare.

4. Preserving Regional Peace and Alleviating Human Suffering

Observers in South Africa often argued in the past that South Africa should be an African leader and that inevitable responsibilities and commitments flow from its position of economic and moral strength. It has likewise been said that most Southern African states eagerly look to South Africa for moral and material leadership, and that it is in South Africa's economic interest to do all it can to stabilise the region. South Africa cannot prosper in a sea of African insecurity and instability. In such a situation, the country will suffer as a result of populations fleeing their own desperate countries, and as a result of people trying to survive by trading in drugs, weapons and contraband. Thus, for South Africa, peacekeeping in Africa may be considered as action in direct support of its national security and economic interests (Cilliers & Malan 1996:343).

The political will to commit resources to peace missions depends largely upon the perceived national interest of potential contributors. In this regard, the South African government clearly links peace and stability in Africa and the region to the country's national interest. The official South African response to the above arguments has clearly been outlined in the White Paper. It makes the point that South Africa "has an obvious interest in preserving regional peace and stability in order to promote trade and development, and to avoid the spill-over effects of conflicts in the neighbourhood" (Department of Foreign Affairs 1999:22).

Another important policy document, the South African Defence Review, recognises that problems relating to political conflict in Africa are not confined within national borders. It is specifically mentioned that inter- or intra-state conflicts may arise in Southern Africa and that such conflicts can pose a security threat to regional peace and stability, and thus to South Africa itself as an integral part of the Southern African community. The Defence Review specifically states that conflicts and underdevelopment impact negatively on neighbouring states in the form of a range of non-military threats: environmental destruction; the spread of disease; refugee movements; and cross-border trafficking in drugs, stolen goods and small arms (Department of Defence 1998:18-20).

Thus it may be stated that South Africa's contributions to MONUC and UNMEE are a practical recognition that conflicts in Africa impact negatively on the continent and its people. The contributions also coincide with the African Renaissance vision and the fact that African states have to deal with their own problems at a time when the continent stands at a critical juncture in its history. In this regard, the former Director General of South Africa's Department of Foreign Affairs, Mr Jackie Selebi, earlier explained that "[w]e cannot talk of an African renaissance, or even achieve a better life for

people in South Africa, if around us countries are in conflict) if Africa disintegrates there will be no South Africa. There will be such a movement of people from central and southern Africa into South Africa that our economy will never be able to address the interests of South African people" (Selebi 1998:14). In a somewhat more altruistic tone, the White Paper also declares that it is in the South African national interest to assist peoples who suffer from famine, political repression, natural disasters and the scourge of violent conflict (Department of Foreign Affairs 1999:22). Thus it seems that South Africa's approach to participation in international peace missions not only links peace and stability in Africa and the region to the country's national interests, but also indicates at a more altruistic level that the country is willing to play a role in alleviating the suffering caused among Africans by the scourge of armed conflict.

5. The Need for Multilateral Responses to Crises

The complexity of the new global and regional distribution of power has resulted in a radically altered security paradigm. Recent global developments suggest that there is a growing need for multilateral political-military responses to crises. Today, it is widely accepted that the breakdown of the bipolar Cold War system means that responses to security crises both preventive efforts and beyond have to come from a wider group of nations and organisations than during the Cold War period.

Within the dynamics of the post-Cold War global community, attitudes to strategic geography need to be viewed from a different perspective than before. Coalition operations are now the usual form of military activity: almost every major conflict of the past decades and all peacekeeping missions have involved combined forces. In fact, the unilateral use of force by any state today generally verges on the unthinkable.

Countries are finding that their vital interests and their regional or global responsibilities are not necessarily restricted or confined to their own regions. Rather, their forces may have to be deployed to some distant theatres to participate in operations aimed at regional security or humanitarian intervention. Because the significance of ideologically based bloc politics has waned, countries are more likely to work alongside regional partners to promote common security. In the current multipolar international community, strategic and security planning should proceed from a consideration of the complex set of variables that bind states' vital interests together (Ryan 2000:4-6).

Against this background, it is interesting to note that the White Paper states that the demise of the Cold War and the collapse of the ideological barriers that separated the world have vastly improved the potential of the international community to jointly address threats to common security. It is also mentioned that this situation has particularly resulted in the growing commitment to, and co-operation with regard to, conflict resolution that has emerged in various regional and international forums in recent years (Department of Foreign Affairs 1999:7). Thus it seems that South Africa today realises that it cannot consider strategic and security issues purely by identifying (military) threats. Of even greater significance are global or regional responsibilities and common interests with other countries.

6. Domestic Priorities vs. Regional Challenges

Since South Africa's political transformation in 1994, much time, energy and resources have been

directed towards the transformation of South African society in all its spheres. Likewise, domestic security issues rather than regional security issues normally topped the political agenda since the mid-1990s. Specifically, this concerns the personal security of the citizenry and unsatisfactorily high levels of crime. Furthermore, many ordinary citizens and politicians effectively argued for an emphasis on domestic priorities, such as socio-economic upliftment of the poor; promotion of economic growth; the need for improved education and health systems; disaster management; lack of foreign investment and so forth. However, it can be said that with South Africa's entry into international peace missions, the country is now casting its eyes beyond its northern borders. This implies a realisation that the country also has a role and responsibility towards the rest of the continent.

Thus South Africa's involvement in peace missions in Africa implies that the country has effectively been moving away from an earlier "fortress mentality". This indicates that South Africans have an interest in dealing with matters relating to regional peace and stability. According to Vreÿ & Esterhuysen (2000:11), "South Africa's domestic agenda is (now) set, but has not yet solidified). Subsequently a healthy competition exists between groups arguing for domestic priorities and implicitly, for some degree of isolationism from the region and its insecurities, and those championing the declared views of the government to simultaneously deal with regional matters of security".

However, it needs to be made clear that certain individuals and lobby groups are still vociferously emphasising the fact that domestic socio-economic challenges remain the South African government's main challenge. The following comment or warning to the government by senior journalist Max du Preez (2001:14) bears testimony to this:

President Thabo Mbeki should forgive the working classes and the unemployed if they don't seem too interested in the African Renaissance and the Africa Millennium Recovery Plan right now. He can be assured they will be right behind him supporting these lofty projects as soon as they have jobs and proper homes and water and sanitation). The Mbeki administration should recognise this new critical mass and take it very seriously. Poverty and non-delivery are the issues of the next few years). This comment should certainly be taken seriously. At the same time, it could be argued that South Africa is part of the broader region, and that an isolationist approach on the part of South Africa would be to the country's detriment. Therefore, an "equilibrium between isolationism and regional conflict management" (Vreÿ & Esterhuysen 2000:12) would seem to be the appropriate route in the short to medium term.

7. High International Expectations

South Africa has been identified by many observers as the one state able to help ensure effective peacekeeping in Africa. After the political transformation of South Africa in 1994, there were growing expectations that South Africa would "take up its responsibilities as a potential regional leader and to exert its influence in creating a stable region". Accordingly, "South Africa is (still) experiencing a constant barrage of calls for assistance, intervention and mediation in African crises" (Vreÿ & Esterhuysen 2000:12). This may sound very dramatic, but there can be no doubt that South Africa is often (sometimes rather simplistically) perceived as a regional leader.

Thus it is interesting to note that the White Paper starts with an opening statement to the effect that since 1994, domestic and international expectations regarding South Africa's role as a responsible and

respected member of the international community have steadily grown. "These expectations have included a hope that South Africa will play a leading role in international peace missions" (Department of Foreign Affairs 1999:5). The White Paper also states that South Africa is committed to responsibly fulfilling its obligations under the Charters of the UN and the Organisation of African Unity (OAU), as well as the Southern African Development Community (SADC) Treaty (Department of Foreign Affairs 1999:23). Thus South Africa's decision-makers are fully aware of international expectations that the country will play an increasingly significant political-military role in African peacekeeping, and that it cannot stay aloof from UN peace missions.

There can be no doubt that South Africa will remain subject to multiple pressures to "do something" to help put an end to fighting in conflict-stricken African states. In fact, the former Secretary General of the OAU, Mr Salim Ahmed Salim, made it clear during a visit to South Africa in December 1998 that he had been disappointed by South Africa's reluctance to play a more active role in conflict resolution in Africa (Malan 1999:3). Since the creation of the SANDF in 1994, the South African position on committing forces to peace missions may be described as "cautious". Firstly, the practical difficulties of integrating seven formerly adversarial forces (as a result of the political process) and of training them for peace missions elicited caution on the part of the Department of Defence (Steyn 1997:9). The novelty of such operations is another important aspect upon which the Department of Defence earlier urged caution because peace support tasks were new to South Africa and the SANDF (Department of Defence 1998:22).

Also, it is commonly known that reduced military spending and a dwindling defence budget have been at the centre of significant budgetary changes in South Africa in the past decade. Practically speaking, the SANDF has seen many years of consecutive cuts. The defence budget is presently about 1,7 per cent of the Gross Domestic Product a situation that produces a discrepancy between the peacekeeping requirements emanating from national policy and the capability of the SANDF to meet such requirements (Le Roux 1999:63). This would seem to form an important part of explanations concerning South Africa's preference in the past years for a role of diplomatic peacemaker to that of military peacekeeper. Hence, South Africa's conundrum is that it must sail between the Scylla of national interest and humanitarian concern, and the Charybdis of financial and military prudence (Steyn 1997:8-9). At the same time, the government has firmly declared that as a member of the UN, South Africa must assist the world body in its peacekeeping task especially as the country seems to have aspirations to become a permanent member of the Security Council (Nhlapo 1999:5).

8. Limitations of the UN

Much was expected of the UN in the aftermath of the Cold War in the field of peacekeeping, but the world body proved unable to meet those expectations. Specifically, the UN has proved not to be in a position to deploy robust force postures that are able to conduct peace enforcement operations in acute conflicts. In Africa, the UN's experience in Somalia between 1992 and 1995 and in Rwanda between 1993 and 1996 were glaring examples of the UN's limitations in terms of peacekeeping in complex emergencies. Also, in Angola the UN terminated its involvement in the peace process in February 1999 after years of futile peacekeeping efforts by no less than four peace missions. The termination of the UN's involvement in Angola marked the end of a decade of international military presence in the Angolan civil war, with no definite end in sight to the tragic and devastating conflict that has raged sporadically since the country gained independence in 1975.

The UN's endeavours in the DRC and Sierra Leone have been further proof that the UN is not in a position actually quite unable to respond meaningfully to complex emergencies in Africa. In both cases, the UN was practically impotent in averting conflict or to end the political turmoil. Berman & Sams (2000:379) state that "years after the failure to stop the genocide in Rwanda, insufficient progress has been made to respond appropriately, let alone to prevent, a similar catastrophe". By the same token, it is argued in the Brahimi report⁵ that the UN has repeatedly failed to meet the challenge of peacekeeping, and that "[w]ithout renewed commitment on the part of Member States, significant institutional change and increased financial support, the United Nations will not be capable of executing the critical peacekeeping and peace-building that the Member States assign to it in coming months and years" (Brahimi 2000).

In view of this, an important development in the international community concerns the trend for regions to accept co-responsibility and to share the burden of policing themselves. Practically speaking, this means a dilution of the central role many hoped that the UN would play in peacekeeping challenges worldwide and in Africa in particular. Basically, this trend concerns an approach to building global security on a strategy of co-option and devolution of responsibility from what remains a relatively weak international system of conflict prevention and management (Cilliers 1999b:90).

Against this background (sub)regional role-players in Africa are compelled to play a constructive role in security and peacekeeping. This is, of course, of special significance for South Africa as a subregional power or hegemony. In fact, it is difficult to overstate South Africa's dominant position in much of Africa. See table below for a comparative index (World Bank 2001):



It has already been noted that much is expected of South Africa as a contributor to peace missions on the African continent. Although there are certain practical limits to the ability of South Africa to impact upon the continent, it must be clear that the country is effectively compelled to play an active political-military role with a view to resolving current and future conflicts.

9. African Armed Forces and International Peacekeeping

It is sometimes argued that those countries in Africa with the greatest scope and depth of experience in capacity building for peacekeeping are those which contribute troops to UN missions. Having said that, functionaries in peacekeeping circles often contended in the past years that South Africa has to "catch up" with Botswana, Egypt, Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, Senegal, Zimbabwe and others countries that are all experienced in the field of UN peacekeeping. Likewise, some observers have often said that South Africa lags behind the list of African countries that have subscribed to the UN standby system: Botswana, Chad, Egypt, Ghana, Kenya, Niger, Senegal, Tanzania, Tunisia, Zambia and Zimbabwe (Malan 1998:23).

Considering Africa's international position, it needs to be noted that the increase in troop contributions to the UN system has mainly been the result of developing countries contributing troops to peacekeeping operations. At the beginning of 1991, out of the top ten contributors, only two were

developing countries, namely Ghana and Nepal (UN Department of Public Information 2001b). By 28 February 2001, the overwhelming majority of the top ten contributors of uniformed personnel to UN peacekeeping operations worldwide were developing countries three of them were African states. In this regard, the UN's profile of contributions to UN peacekeeping operations indicates the following as regards the top ten positions (UN Department of Public Information 2001a):



By comparison, contributions from the five permanent members of the UN Security Council were as follows (UN Department of Public Information 2001a):



Interestingly, in 1993, France had been the largest contributor to UN peacekeeping operations with around 6 000 troops, while the United Kingdom's contribution increased fivefold since the end of the Cold War to 3 700 (Kemp 1993:26). In this context, Berman and Sams contend that the five permanent members of the Security Council practically led by the US have become increasingly reluctant to commit their troops or their money to UN peacekeeping efforts, particularly in Africa. "As a result, the international community's peacekeeping goals became decidedly more modest" (Berman & Sams 2000:32).

It is important to note that troop-contributing countries are now insisting that the bigger their contribution, the greater their representation in the UN Department of Peacekeeping should be. It can be argued that South Africa is certainly aware of the fact that a number of African states have actively participated in UN peace missions in the post-Cold War era, and the White Paper states that the country will co-operate with regional partners in enhancing its capacity to participate in international peace missions. Moreover, it has already been pointed out that South Africa realises that lack of participation in international peace missions will make it extremely difficult to play key roles in the international community in general and in Africa in particular.

10. Incremental Entrance into Peacekeeping

South Africa is compelled to play an active political-military role in Africa and the country needs to enter the peacekeeping arena on an incremental scale. Observers often point out that South Africa is entering the peace support domain at a time when "polite peacekeeping" is over. Specifically, this relates to UN deployments where peace settlements have been agreed upon but not implemented. The UN's experience in Sierra Leone in May 2001 is certainly a case in point.

For instance, following on a number of incidents since January 2000, the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) strongly rocked the shaky peace accord in May 2000 by launching attacks on towns and personnel of the UN Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL). After killing Kenyan soldiers (four deaths were later confirmed) in an attack on a UN contingent, the RUF also wounded and captured several other UN soldiers (Anon. 2000a:13). In the course of further events, the rebels eventually captured some 500 UNAMSIL personnel as hostages. Some of them were later released. After two months, in

July 2000, all hostages were released, but only after a rare display of force by the UN. This happened after heavily armed UN soldiers moved into the rebels' main headquarters in the eastern part of the country to save 222 UN peacekeepers that were still being held (Roy-Macaulay 2000). Shortly before, the deteriorating situation in Sierra Leone sparked Britain to send paratroopers, marines, and a variety of warships, helicopters and transport planes to evacuate 500 British citizens, as well as to offer support to UNAMSIL (Anon. 2000b) an offer which certainly kept UNAMSIL from disintegration.

Generally speaking, international reaction on the taking of UNAMSIL personnel as hostages was one of shock and outrage. Critics hammered the UN for its role and profile in Sierra Leone. The New York Times, for example, stated that Sierra Leone demonstrated the danger of sending a weak and inadequately trained peacekeeping force into a country where there was no peace to keep. The paper called upon the UN to quickly reinforce the 8 700 peacekeepers already there and to regain control of an unravelling mission. For the New York Times, the situation in Sierra Leone suggested a need to improve the planning and execution of UN peacekeeping operations to ensure that UN peacekeeping forces do not become casualties in the conflicts they are supposed to help end. "An international force must then be given the financial resources, manpower and disciplined command needed to protect itself and effectively carry out its mandate" (Anon. 2000c).

Considering such challenges to peacekeepers and given South Africa's inexperience in the field of practical peacekeeping, the country has entered the peacekeeping arena only in a support role. However, it is important that in the case of MONUC (in the DRC), South Africa is making contributions in certain technical fields where few African states are able to contribute, and which have been in demand in earlier peace missions in Africa. At the same time, it may be argued that the real test will surely be the deployment of larger numbers of South African peacekeepers in conflict situations. The peacekeeping effort in the DRC remains a risky endeavour and may well lead to the deployment of infantry contingents. Thus the capabilities and preparedness of the South African military to engage in peace missions might be put to the test in the short to medium term if not in the DRC, then probably elsewhere on the continent.

11. Capacity-Building for Peacekeeping

The White Paper states that "the SANDF believes that when it does contribute troops to international peace support operations, its contingents must be well equipped and trained to the highest standards" (Department of Foreign Affairs 1999:26). In order to properly prepare for peace missions, the SANDF has since 1994 begun to address the notion of peace missions and the anticipated role of the South African military in study programmes and exercises at various SANDF training institutions. As far as officer training is concerned, the aim is to provide officers with a theoretical and practical orientation towards the doctrine, planning and command-and-control of peace missions. Selected senior officers and personnel have already received peacekeeping training abroad and visited Bosnia and other places to study peacekeeping activities. Peace support training was likewise started at the lowest level for all new intakes. Other units were also identified for such training. The SA Army Battle School is giving specific attention to training programmes and exercises, especially as regards the tactical level. The SA Army College, with its function of research and development, also gives attention to peace support exercises in both the Junior Command and Staff Duties Course and the Senior Command and Staff Duties Course for army officers⁶.

It is envisaged in the White Paper that continued regional co-operation in the realm of preparation may eventually lead to a joint and combined SADC contribution to a peace mission of the UN or even the OAU (Department of Foreign Affairs 1999:32). In April 1997, the armed forces of eight member states of SADC (including a contingent from the SANDF) participated in Exercise Blue Hungwe, a multinational peace support exercise held in the Nyanga area in Zimbabwe. Blue Hungwe was followed by Exercise Blue Crane held in April 1999 in South Africa at the SA Army Battle School in the Northern Cape Province. The latter involved approximately 4 000 defence force members from SADC countries⁷ and was the biggest peacekeeping exercise thus far on African soil. The SANDF played a major role in Exercise Blue Crane. Not only did the SANDF play host to the event, it also provided the exercise director and control staff.

In this context, it has often been contended in peacekeeping circles in South Africa that a number of South Africans have received ample training for peacekeeping, but that this investment in capacity building may be nullified should participation not result in practical engagement. It has also been argued that South Africa should augment its political role with respect to conflict resolution by providing opportunities to military personnel in missions where South Africa could cut its teeth in practical peacekeeping tasks. This means that officers and officials that have received peacekeeping training should be utilised in positions where they can gain experience and develop relationships with other forces and functionaries.

It has been mentioned that South Africa's contributions to MONUC and UNMEE are relatively small and that no officers are currently deployed in combat or peace enforcement roles. In other words, South Africa's involvement in multinational peace missions is still fairly limited at this point. However, it is certainly significant and will surely increase the country's peacekeeping profile in political and military terms. Furthermore, it may help to ensure that training and capacity building initiatives of the past years are not nullified, but may rather serve as a basis for South Africa's future involvement in peacekeeping on an even broader scale.

12. Conclusion

It is clear that South Africa today sees itself as part of Africa and that the government holds the view that instability and insecurity, especially in Southern Africa, are to the detriment of the country. In other words, from a political, economic and security perspective South Africa regards itself as an integral part of the region and officially holds the view that an approach of isolationism would not be in South Africa's interest. Moreover, as the international community continues to minimise its military involvement on the African continent, the political-military role of South Africa in Southern Africa and further afield is likely to become even more important. In addition, as stability in the region shows few signs of improving, pressures from within the region and elsewhere in the international community for increased South African political-military involvement can be expected.

At this point, however, it should be clear that South Africa is not keen to utilise its military to forcefully address security issues in the region. In fact, it would appear that the Lesotho debacle in 1998 has elicited caution on the part of the South African government to use force as a means of resolving conflicts. Currently, there is no reason to believe that South Africa would – unlike Angola, Namibia and Zimbabwe in the DRC, for instance – deviate from this approach (Vreÿ & Esterhuysen 2000:12). In fact,

the White Paper firmly makes the point that preventive diplomacy, peace building and peace making are the essential pillars of any peace mission, and that conflicts will recur if the underlying causes of crises are allowed to persist (Department of Foreign Affairs 1999:21).

Be that as it may, the South African government seems to accept the fact that Africa stands today at one of the most critical junctures in its history. Given the hegemonic nature of South Africa's position in Africa, the challenge is to be a constructive leader in the region and to respond positively to international or regional requests and expectations for political-military involvement in peacekeeping. In the final instance, South Africa has no choice but to accept participation in peacekeeping as a foreign policy priority, and the country should continue to cautiously and systematically engage in challenges of a peacekeeping nature.

Notes

* Dr Theo Neethling is attached to the School for Security and Africa Studies in the Faculty of Military Science of the University of Stellenbosch. His research is mainly focused on peacekeeping and regional security co-operation in Africa.

1. The notion "peace mission" is used as a generic term to include all political, diplomatic and military activities related to multinational endeavours to prevent or settle disputes in terms of the UN Charter.
2. Europe, North America and Japan.
3. The Millennium African Recovery Programme has been merged with the Omega Plan of Senegalese President Abdoulaye Wade into the New African Initiative in July 2001. In October 2001 the New African Initiative has been revised, further fine-tuned and issued in a framework document, known as the New Partnership for Africa's Development.
4. It is envisaged that the African Union will replace the OAU in 2002.
5. Panel of experts on UN Peace Operations - 2000. The 10-member panel was chaired by Algerian Foreign Minister, Lakhdar Brahimi. It was tasked to assess the future of UN peacekeeping operations.
6. The Senior Command and Staff Duties Course for all SANDF officers is, since February 2002, the responsibility of the SA War College; a newly formed joint training institution on the premises of the SA Army College in Thaba Tshwane. It is expected that the bulk of the SANDF's peacekeeping training for senior officers will be done at the SA War College.
7. The DRC and the Seychelles did not take part in the exercise.

References

- Anon. 2000a. Kenyans angry over deaths of peacekeeper soldiers. Pretoria News, 31 May 2000.
- Anon. 2000b. Opinion. The Times (London), 10 May 2000. Internet site <http://www.the-times.co.uk/news/pages/tim/2000/05/10timopnope01003.html> (10 May 2000).
- Anon. 2000c. The lessons of Sierra Leone. New York Times, 5 May 2000. Internet site <http://www.nytimes.com/yr/mo/day/editorial/05fri2.html> (5 May 2000).
- Anon. 2001a. Deployment of specialised units of the SANDF to the DRC. Department of Defence Bulletin, 27 March 2001.
- Anon. 2001b. The World Competitiveness Yearbook: 2001. Lausanne (Switzerland): Institute for Management Development.

- Ahwireng-Obeng, F. & McGowan, P.J. 1998. Partner or hegemon? South Africa in Africa (part 1). *Journal of Contemporary Africa Studies*, Vol 16, No 1.
- Berman, E.G. & Sams, K.E. 2000. *Peacekeeping in Africa: Capabilities and culpabilities*. Geneva: UN Institute for Disarmament Research and Pretoria: Institute for Security Studies.
- Botha, P du T. 2000. An African Renaissance in the 21st century? *Strategic Review for Southern Africa*, Vol XXII, No 1.
- Brahimi, L. (Panel on UN Peace Operations). 2000. Executive summary. Internet site http://www.un.org/peace/reports/peace_operations/docs/summary.htm (15 September 2000).
- Cilliers, J. 1999a. An emerging South African foreign policy identity. *ISS Papers*. Paper 39, April.
- Cilliers, J. 1999b. Co-option and burden sharing a security recipe for an uncertain world? *Indicator SA*, Vol 16, No 2.
- Cilliers, J. & Malan, M. 1996. From destabilization to peace-keeping: The potential role of South Africa. *Africa Insight*, Vol 26, No 1.
- Department of Defence 1998. *South African Defence Review* (as approved by Parliament, April 1998).
- Department of Foreign Affairs 1999. *White Paper on South African Participation in International Peace Missions*. Government Gazette. 4 October, Notice 2216 of 1999.
- Du Preez, M. 2001. Poverty relief before renaissance. *The Star*, 5 July.
- Kemp, I. 1993. Peacekeeping between the battle lines. *Jane's Defence Weekly*, 13 March.
- Le Roux, L. 1999. Defining defence requirements: Force design considerations for the South African National Defence Force. *African Security Review*, Vol 8, No 5.
- Malan, M. 1998. Keeping the peace in Africa: A renaissance role for South Africa? *Indicator SA*, Vol 15, No 2.
- Malan, M. 1999. "Renaissance peacekeeping" a South African solution to conflict in the DRC. *ISS Papers*. Paper 37, March.
- Nhlapo, W. 1999. South Africa and peacekeeping: A look to the future. Paper presented at a conference, *From peacekeeping to complex emergencies: peace support missions in Africa*. University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, 25 March.
- Roy-Macaulay, C. 2000. Sierra Leone peacekeepers freed. Internet site http://dailynews.yahoo.com/h/ap/20000715/wl/sierra_leone_rescue_mission_12.html (7 July 2000).
- Ryan, A. 2000. From Desert Storm to East Timor: Australia, the Asia-Pacific and "new age" coalition operations. (Australian) Land Warfare Studies Centre. Study Paper no. 302, January.
- Selebi, J. 1998. Interview with Jackie Selebi. *Global Dialogue*, Vol 3.3.
- Steyn, P. 1997. South Africa and peace support operations: Limitations, options and challenges. Paper presented at a conference, *Contemporary Peace Support Operations*. University of South Africa, Pretoria, 5 November.
- UN Department of Public Information (in co-operation with the Department of Peacekeeping Operations). 2001a. Monthly summary of contributors. Internet site <http://www.un.org/Depts/dpko/dpko/contributors/feb.htm> (6 April 2001).
- UN Department of Public Information (Peace and Security Section in co-operation with the Department of Peacekeeping Operations). 2001b. United Nations Peacekeeping from 1991 to 2000. Internet site <http://www.un.org/Depts/dpko/dpko/pub/pko.htm> (2 February 2001).
- Van der Walt, J. 2001. A Joint Operations perspective on SANDF participation in peace support operations, with the central theme: Is the SANDF ready for peacekeeping? Paper presented by Chief of Joint Operations Division Staff, SANDF. University of Pretoria, Pretoria, 13 June.
- Vreÿ, F. & Esterhuysen, A. 2000. South Africa and Southern Africa: Isolationist or regional conflict manager. *Conflict and Development Watch*, Vol 2, No 1.
- World Bank. 2001. GNP per capita Sub-Saharan Africa. Internet site <http://www.worldbank.org/>

depweb/english/modules/economic/gnp/sdatasubs.htm (23 July 2001).