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BUILDING CONFIDENCE BETWEEN THE SADF AND UMKHONTO WE SIZWE  
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Laurie Nathan, December 1991

As political parties across the spectrum enter into formal negotiations, the armed forces that have played a pivotal role in the South African conflict remain at loggerheads, suspicious and fearful of each other.

The simmering tension between the South African Defence Force (SADF) and Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK) in particular has an unsettling and potentially destabilising effect on both the climate and process of negotiations.

This paper considers the potential of 'confidence-building measures' (CBMs) to build trust among the armed forces and bring their relationship into line with the rapprochement that is fast being forged at the political level.

#### Background

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Imagine this: four US army officers arrive at a Soviet military base in Minsk to inspect a military exercise involving 16 000 troops and 425 tanks. The officers are welcomed by two Soviet generals and briefed on the structure and purpose of the exercise. They are permitted access to air and ground transportation to view the manoeuvre, and allowed full use of cameras, binoculars, maps and charts. The officers leave the Soviet Union satisfied that the force levels given in the Soviet's prior notification of the exercise have not been exceeded.

It may be surprising to learn that this event is not fictional. What is even more surprising is that it occurred in August 1987, well before the thaw in the Cold War.

The event was in fact only one example of the 'confidence-building measures' jointly agreed to by Nato and the Warsaw Pact to reduce the risks of armed conflict in Europe arising from misunderstanding or miscalculation.

Since the early 1970s CBMs have been an integral part of arms control and disarmament processes throughout the world. Their purpose is defined by various commentators as follows:

- \* to improve trust or, conversely, to eliminate mistrust and uncertainty among military adversaries;
- \* to make military intentions explicit;

- \* to enhance the predictability of routine military activities, establish limitations on the use of military forces and set up mechanisms designed to alleviate perceived threats; and
- \* to attempt to reduce or eliminate misperceptions about specific military threats and concerns by communicating adequately verifiable evidence of acceptable reliability to the effect that those fears and concerns are groundless.

The best known effort to achieve these aims is the 1986 Agreement of the Stockholm Conference on Confidence- and Security-Building Measures and Disarmament in Europe, endorsed by 35 nations that included the Soviet Union, the United States and most West and East European states. The agreement is credited with having contributed to the creation of more open, co-operative and predictable security environment in Europe.

The signatories agreed to the following CBMs: they would restate their commitment to refrain from the threat or use of force; they would give notice within prescribed time periods of military activities above specified force levels; they would invite other signatories to observe military exercises above specified force levels; and they could undertake challenge, on-site inspections of military activities which might not comply with the Agreement.

#### The South African context

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CBMs have typically been applied between two or more countries whose adversarial relations have assumed military proportions. In such contexts the CMBs generally tend to be attached to a process of arms control or disarmament.

The South African situation, in which previously antagonistic armed forces exist within the same country, is obviously quite different. Nevertheless, it should be possible to design CBMs to meet these circumstances.

To identify first the problems that need to be addressed:

- 1) Although the ANC and the National Party are engaged in negotiations around the establishment of a new constitution and dispensation, there is great suspicion on both sides about the intentions and activities of each other's armed forces.
- 2) This suspicion heightens the uncertainty accompanying the transition from authoritarian rule and is consequently a source of instability.
- 3) There remains a high level of mistrust between the SADF and MK, whose senior officers have not yet had formal contact despite the fact that their political leaders have been talking to each other for close on two years.
- 4) This mistrust and lack of formal contact will make the inevitable integration of armed forces more difficult.

- 5) The on-going tension between the SADF and MK inhibits confidence in the process of transition among certain sections of the population.

In this context, CBMs could be introduced with the following aims:

- 1) to build confidence in the transition process among the leadership and rank-and-file of the SADF and MK, as well as among the broader population;
- 2) to reduce mistrust and build trust between the two armies; and
- 3) to prepare the armed forces for eventual integration.

#### CBMs in South Africa

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CBMs with the above aims could include the following:

- 1) Senior officers from both sides could enter into a process of formal discussion around a mutually agreed agenda and, if necessary, under the chairmanship of an independent facilitator.

The agenda could focus on the mechanics of integration. Alternatively, a less controversial topic - such as the changing regional security situation - could be chosen for the first round of discussions.

- 2) The two armies could introduce 'orientation programmes' to help their members adapt to the new political circumstances in South Africa and prepare them politically and psychologically for integration. Such programmes could be developed jointly or separately.
- 3) The two armies could publically agree to a set of values for the new Defence Force which each has already endorsed in principle. These values include accountability to parliament, allegiance to the constitution, political non-partisanship and adherence to the Geneva Convention.

The armies could then undertake to propagate these values among their rank-and-file.

- 4) The SADF and MK could engage in a process of asking questions about each other's activities, force levels, intentions, training, weaponry, perceptions of the future, etc.

There would be no obligation on either side to answer any question, but any answer given would have to be complete and truthful. As communication improves issues of increasing sensitivity could be broached.

- 5) Military representatives could be invited to visit each

other's bases and inspect each other's facilities.

- 6) The SADF could invite MK members to participate in technical and officer training courses at various military colleges.
- 7) Rank-and-file members could engage in joint cultural or sporting events.

Many, if not all, of these measures may seem extremely difficult to implement in the current atmosphere of mistrust. Yet the point of CBMs is precisely to break down mistrust. Unlike the situation in Europe during the Cold War, where such measures were successfully applied, armed forces in South Africa are no longer antagonists in formal terms and there is a general climate of acceptance of dialogue and negotiations.

Finally, it should be noted that the CBMs described above have been specifically directed at the SADF and MK as the armed forces aligned to the major political adversaries. However, there is no reason why they should not include the homeland forces and, if possible, the armed wings of the PAC and Azapo.

At some point in the future it will also become necessary to consider the application of confidence-building measures between South Africa and its neighboring states.

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A NOTE A TIME AGO.

AND THE OBJECTOR. SOMETHING  
ABOUT MEMBERSHIP.

I WROTE AND ASKED. I DO IT  
AGAIN. HOW CAN I BE A  
MEMBER??

ANNA TÖRNER

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33133 VÄRNAMO

SWEDEN

Anna Torner  
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SWEDEN

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**PUBLISHER:**

*Publisher:- Historical Papers Research Archive*

*Location:- Johannesburg*

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