
DEVELOPMENTS IN THE DEFENCE "FAMILY": THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ROELF MEYER
AND THE S.A.D.F. GENERAL STAFF.

(A report from the Military Research Group; 20/01/1992)

The appointment of Roelf Meyer as Minister of Defence has elicited various responses from within the S.A.D.F. officer corps. On the one hand it has strengthened the hand of the verligte and constitutionally minded officers within the S.A.D.F. but on the other hand Meyer's strategy has left the S.A.D.F. in a political vacuum. The pros and cons of this process are considered below.

1.) THE APPOINTMENT OF ROELF MEYER; STRENGTHENING THE HAND OF THE VERLIGTES

The appointment of Roelf Meyer has provoked different responses from within the S.A.D.F.'s senior officer corps. It is known that he neither enjoys the confidence nor the support of the P.W. Botha-styled Cold War warriors - notably the Chief-of-the S.A.D.F. (Kat Liebenberg) and the Chief-of-the Army (George Meiring). However, his presence does appear to have strengthened the hand of the constitutionalist/verligte factions within the senior S.A.D.F. officer corps - most notably those officers in the South African Air Force, the South African Navy and the South African Medical Services. This has been testified to at a number of different levels:

1. The constitution of an internal S.A.D.F. Commission of Enquiry to investigate irregularities committed by the Department of Military Intelligence/Special Forces axis. The importance of this enquiry can be judged by the fact that two retired S.A.D.F. generals have been appointed to investigate it.
2. A reshuffle of the executive reaches of the D.M.I. command structure. Included in this reshuffle has been:
 - 2.1. The premature retirement of the Chief-of-Staff Intelligence - General "Witkop" Badenhorst - at the age of 51 (four years prior to the standard retirement date).
 - 2.2. The sidelining of the Deputy Chief-of-Staff Intelligence - General "Joep" Joubert - into the position of Deputy Chief-of-Staff Operations.
 - 2.3. The appointment of a conventional career soldier, LT General C.J. "Stoffel" Van Der Westhuizen (former OC Witwatersrand Command and Deputy Chief of the S.A. Army) as the new Chief-of-Staff Intelligence.

Increasingly it has been the more verligte arms of the S.A.D.F. that have responded in a more positive manner to De Klerk's reforms - notably the Air Force and the Navy. This has been manifested in their broader and bolder demands for slices of the S.A.D.F.'s budgetary cake. It has also been displayed in the manner in which they have begun revising their operational doctrines in the wake of the collapse of the Cold War - provision of emergency relief, humanitarian aid etc. The S.A. Army and the Special Forces have failed to adapt to this role.

2.) THE APPOINTMENT OF MEYER: PROBLEMS WITH POLITICAL LEADERSHIP.

The appointment of Meyer has, however, also precipitated problems regarding the political direction of the S.A.D.F. Despite growing concern within the S.A.D.F.'s senior officer corps over Malan's political profile, Malan's tenure as Minister of Defence at least ensured (in a negative sense) that the Command echelons of the S.A.D.F. were intimately interconnected with the executive reaches of the state and the Federal National Party.

Meyer's strategy vis a vis the S.A.D.F. has been different. His appointment clearly reflected De Klerk's determination to civilianize the Ministry and reduce its capacity to thwart his reform programme. Meyer's political career within the state and National Party has almost entirely been circumscribed by the parameters of the civilian bureaucracy. Apart from a brief period as a national serviceman (during which time he sang in the Air Force choir!) and an interlude as the Deputy minister of Law and Order - during which time he served as the Chairman of the National Joint Management Centre in the State Security Council - Meyer has no experience of matters military.

Meyer apparently believes that a civilian Ministry of Defence in South Africa should reflect the dynamics of normal constitutional patterns elsewhere in Europe - a civilian ministry separate from and dominant over the Command echelons of the armed forces. However, the effect of this strategy has been to deprive the S.A.D.F.'s General Staff of political leadership at a time when it requires it most. The S.A.D.F.'s executive leadership has never really developed an interventionist ethic of its own - it has depended on its close relationship with the National Party, or the dominant factions therein, for its political leadership. In the absence of this political leadership in the current conjuncture the following features are emerging according to strategists close to the S.A.D.F.:

1. There has been a discernible shift to the right in terms of the S.A.D.F.'s *strategic thinking* (not its *political sentiments*). This has been particularly manifest in the structures of the South African Army. The S.A.D.F., or its dominant factions, clearly require some form of political leadership.
2. The lack of political leadership within the S.A.D.F.'s General Staff makes it contested terrain for certain political forces - notably the "securocrat" faction within the National Party under the leadership of

Barend Du Plessis and Magnus Malan and, to a lesser extent, the white right-wing.

COMMENT.

In the absence of the political leadership required to bring the S.A.D.F. within the terrain of the CODESA negotiations it could be possible that either CODESA could fulfill that function (of political leadership) and/or certain verligte factions within the S.A.D.F.'s Command structures. Either way it is imperative that the present S.A.D.F. be left neither politically rudderless (during which time it could develop an interventionist ethic of its own) nor unstructured (during which time adversarial factions can consolidate their positions within the Defence Force and their links with adversarial groupings without the S.A.D.F.).

Compiled by Rocky Williams Tel: (011) 659-1337
(011) 702-2324

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