

DISCUSSION PAPER ON FUTURE MILITARY MANPOWER POLICY  
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This paper is intended to provide a basis for discussion in the ANC on military manpower policy in the post-apartheid society. It outlines the features and problems of current manpower policy, and the advantages and disadvantages of the options for future policy.

The conclusion drawn is that a professional permanent force made up of full-time volunteers is preferable to a conscripted army.

The current system  
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Since the early 1960s the SADF has relied for its manpower on conscripted white men. Until quite recently the total length of compulsory military service was 4 years.

Currently, every young white man is obliged to do one year of National Service on completion of his secondary or tertiary education. He is then liable for a total of one year's service in the Citizen Force, broken up into annual 'camps' of 1-3 months. Older white men are called up for shorter periods into area-based Commando units.

The system of conscription has given rise to a host of problems for the state and the SADF:

- \* thousands of conscripts and their families oppose the call-up for moral, ethical and religious reasons, and because of the disruption to their careers;
- \* this opposition manifests itself in a relatively high level of draft evasion, conscientious objection and emigration from South Africa;
- \* the 'brain drain' and the disruptive effects of white male employees having to do annual camps have had a negative impact on the economy and provoked opposition to conscription from the private sector;
- \* since the early 1980s a war resistance movement has posed a significant challenge to the state and the SADF; and
- \* the morale of SADF troops is adversely affected by the fact that many do not want to be in the army.

Policy options for the post-apartheid society  
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In the post-apartheid society the manpower system of the Defence Force can take one of two forms:

- \* conscription of all national groups, on either a universal or a ballot basis; or
- \* the recruitment of full-time volunteers into a professional permanent force.

In terms of economic, political, strategic and military considerations, the case against conscription is overwhelming.

Political considerations  
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Countries with conscription, whether in the First or Third World, inevitably experience some degree of draft resistance. This resistance is based either on a specific opposition to the policies of the government, or on a universal rejection of the right of any state to compel its youth to do military service.

The resistance undermines both the state and the armed forces. It is invariably greatest in times of war (eg Nicaragua, South Africa and the US), the periods when the state is most in need of broad national support for its policies.

The divisions in South African society would undoubtedly give rise to a high level of opposition to conscription in the future. Sections of the Afrikaans community in particular would bitterly resent being conscripted by a democratic (predominantly black) government.

This opposition would inhibit the new government's attempts to build reconciliation and national unity, and would affect the morale and reliability of its soldiers.

Conscription would also militate against any attempt by the state to embark on a process of 'demilitarising' civilian society.

Economic considerations  
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It is often argued by those who support conscription that the system is less expensive to maintain than a volunteer professional force. The reason for this is that young conscripts, who serve on a part-time basis, can be paid considerably less than full-time professional soldiers.

However this argument does not take into account the indirect costs of conscription: the inefficiencies in the army that result from undertrained and reluctant soldiers; the loss of skilled youth from the economy for long or inconvenient periods of time; and the permanent loss to the country of professionals who emigrate to avoid the call-up.

It is not possible to accurately compare the respective costs of the two systems of manpower. A decisive factor here may be the fact that, for strategic reasons, the new Defence Force will not require a large number of men under arms. A system of conscription would consequently be economically inefficient.

Strategic considerations  
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The apartheid regime necessarily had to conscript white men to ensure sufficient manpower to fulfill its internal and external roles. These roles were so extensive that it would have been impossible to rely on white volunteers alone. The government's racial policies precluded the option of attempting to attract a large enough number of volunteers from all national groups.

In the post-apartheid society there will be considerably less need for a big or medium-sized army. The Lusaka conference on the military proposed that current force levels could be reduced by up to 50%.

At a regional level there will no significant threat to South Africa's territorial integrity. On the contrary, the countries of Southern Africa will welcome the post-apartheid state into their community.

With regard to the internal maintenance of peace and stability, it is a generally accepted international norm that the police, and not the military, are responsible for this function.

The new Defence force is likely to be based on an integration of the SADF, MK and the bantustan armies. It may consequently be the case that there are too many, rather than too few, soldiers. Given the chronic understaffing of the SAP, one partial solution to this problem may be to transfer a certain number of soldiers to the police force.

#### Military-political considerations

It is sometimes argued that conscription is a more democratic system of military manpower than a volunteer professional force. The reasons offered for this are that a conscripted army more accurately reflects the composition of society, and inhibits the armed forces from interfering in government.

This argument is not borne out by the historical experience of South Africa and other countries. Conscripts exert no influence over the role and direction of the modern army in the slightest. The extent to which the military has a political agenda, and acts on it, does not depend at all on its system of manpower.

If the future Defence Force in South Africa is based predominantly on the SADF, particularly with respect to its leadership corps, there is a real risk of political interference in the future. However the solution to this problem is not to be found in military manpower policy.

A professional force has the advantage that its troops can potentially be better trained and more disciplined than conscripts.

#### Conclusion

The arguments against a system of conscription in the future are overwhelming. From the Lusaka conference it appears that at least some senior SADF members support the new Defence Force being made up of full-time professional soldiers.

However even if the new government decides not to apply conscription, there should be a provision on the right of conscientious objection in the new constitution and/or bill of rights.

This provision would stipulate that, in the event of conscription being introduced, conscripts who refuse to render military service on grounds of conscience would be recognised as conscientious objectors and would be entitled to do a non-governmental and non-military form of alternative service.

Finally, it is worth noting that proposals have been made in various quarters for the introduction of a compulsory or volunteer system of civilian national service to involve youth in urgently needed development programmes. Whatever the advantages and disadvantages of a peace corps, it would be disastrous if it were 'militarised' by being linked in any way to the Defence Force.

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